



NORTH ALABAMA BIRDWATCHERS SOCIETY

SCHEDULE AND DESCRIPTION OF TRIPS, 2017-18



VOLUME 41

Ken Ward, President

OUR 41th SEASON

Rufina Ward, Editor

Hi All ☺. For those of you new to us, the North Alabama Birdwatchers Society (NABS) is an informal group that focuses on birding in northern Alabama. We have been around since 1976 and are the only birding group in our area to offer a set of regularly scheduled trips each year. We visit a variety of areas across this part of the state, most of which are included on the North Alabama Birding Trail (NABT; www.northalabamabirdingtrail.com). Each summer, NABS trip leaders get together and come up with a schedule like you see here, which we then post on our website (www.northalbirding.com) and send out by email to our members. NABS is open to everyone, including beginners, and especially young folks with an interest in birds; there are no membership dues. If you show up for an outing, you can consider yourself a member.

Our ultimate goal for any NABS outing is to give everyone an opportunity to observe (and hopefully hear) every bird species we encounter. That seldom happens, but we usually get pretty close. Our rules of etiquette are few but the ones we do have are important:

1. Be reasonably restrained, as to making noise (no dogs or unruly children);
2. While cameras are most welcome, please don't let pic-taking disrupt the birding (see ultimate goal above);
3. Don't get out in front of the group (flushing the birds before others can see them is not very nice);
4. Be reasonably constrained in the use of birdsong apps, pishing, etc. to attract birds, especially breeders;
5. Above all, follow the guidance of the trip leader.

By birding with NABS, you'll have the opportunity to go out with experienced people who are familiar with the places we visit and who love to share their knowledge. NABS can also provide greater access to certain areas where it's restricted, e.g., driving behind locked refuge gates at Wheeler NWR or visiting the privately-owned Jones' 'Hawk Farm'.

Although the focus is on birds, NABS outings also offer opportunities to become more generally familiar with many of the beautiful and diverse natural areas characteristic of northern Alabama. The places we'll visit provide excellent opportunities to observe, study and appreciate a variety of flora and fauna, including wildflowers, trees, insects, reptiles/amphibians and mammals. Some NABS regulars have considerable knowledge of these other groups and would be glad to answer questions and provide information during trips.

Most of our trips are on Saturdays, although we have a few Sunday outings during the spring, when migration is in full swing. **Please note that we've decided to change the meeting time for some of our trips: Aug-Oct and late March-May will meet at our usual 7 am, while Nov-early March trips will meet at 8 am.** Half-day trips are the norm, although some may include extended birding into the afternoon, for those interested. Please note that, although it's usually easy to leave early, there are a few trips behind locked gates that involve a 2- to 3-hour time commitment (see Wheeler NWR trip descriptions). Bring your binoculars, spotting scopes, field guides, refreshments, bug repellent and rain gear. We seldom officially cancel trips; if the weather is bad (heavy rain) or dangerous (icy roads, severe storms) enough to warrant cancellation, we will send out an email notice.

If we don't already have your email address, please consider sending it to us to add to the NABS mailing list. We can then email you this schedule, as well as trip reminders, and a few other items of interest. In addition, a copy of the schedule will appear on the NABS (www.northalbirding.com) website.

Send your comments, questions and suggestions to Rufina or Ken Ward (256-837-5646; phinken@wowway.com).

Below are descriptions of the trips scheduled for this season, with directions, GPS Coordinates (for most of the trips), trip leaders and contact numbers. We have also included some "Events of Interest" for nature lovers. Thanks for your support and we look forward to seeing you this season!

2017-2018 NABS SCHEDULE AND DESCRIPTION OF TRIPS

1. Leighton Area Shorebird Trip, Wheeler Dam (NABT #2, 4, 5) – 2 September, 2017 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am

We will explore the Leighton area and swing by Wheeler Dam on this trip. We'll be looking primarily for shorebird migrants, whose movement through our area should be peaking; our success will depend largely on water levels. We should pick up some neo-tropical songbird migrants as well. We'll meet at the Ingalls Boat Harbor Pavilion in Decatur: cross the river bridge and take the first right onto Alt 72/20 (Wilson St.). In 1-2 miles, turn right on Neher St., follow to pavilion parking lot. - **John Ehinger, Leader (256-536-2716; johnehinger@yahoo.com)**

2. Indian Creek Greenway – 16 September, 2017 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am

Indian Creek Greenway has been an interesting late spring migration spot for NABS the last few years. Our fall trip can also be productive, yielding a nice variety of songbird migrants, not to mention being a pretty place to bird. We'll be meeting at the greenway trailhead on Old Madison Pike, a bit east of its intersection with Slaughter Road. The new parking lot is nice, just east of the bridge on the north side of the road (34.709083 -86.701369). – **Ken Ward, Leader (256-837-5646, phinken@wowway.com)**

3. Swan Creek Wildlife Management Area (NABT #21) – 23 September, 2017 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am

This trip targets neotropical songbird migrants and shorebirds (depending on water levels), either breeding residents heading south or transients passing through from the north, mostly on their way to Central and South America. As many or more birds actually pass through our area in the fall than in spring, but the migration period is longer and a defined peak is hard to pinpoint. We will meet at the southernmost parking lot of Calhoun Community College (northeast corner of Highway 31 and Airport/Sandy Road). Turn right at the first traffic light past the Subway, if headed north on Highway 31. - **Milton Harris, Leader (256-679-7501; miltonh70@gmail.com)**

4. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Fall Migration Count (NABT) –30 September, 2017 (SATURDAY) 5:00-6:00 am (meeting time varies by count group)

The format for this count is similar to that used for Audubon Christmas Counts (see trip #12) – identify and count all birds seen or heard from dawn to late afternoon/dusk; different groups bird different parts of the refuge and nearby areas. This count is always scheduled during the peak fall migration period. Birders of all skill levels are welcome; we need all the eyes and ears we can get! We'll regroup at the Wheeler NWR Interpretive Nature (Visitor) Center (34.547406 -86.951136) around **6 pm** for compilation (see trip # 12 for directions). Since we won't have a single gathering spot or time for folks to meet and join a group, new participants should contact Dwight Cooley, the count leader– **Dwight Cooley, Leader (256-565-6239; sabrewing@earthlink.net)**

5. Monte Sano State Park (NABT #29) 7 October, 2017 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am

We will be looking again for fall migrants, especially warblers; Monte Sano is one of the better birding spots in the state during migration. Take Monte Sano Boulevard off Governors Drive at the top of the mountain and follow the signs to the park; once there, go in the direction of headquarters and park at the Camp Store, in the gravel, if possible. PLEASE NOTE THAT THE BIRDING IS SOMETIMES BETTER EARLIER; FEEL FREE TO COME UP BETWEEN 6 AND 6:30 IF YOU LIKE, AS SOME OF US WILL PROBABLY ALREADY BE AT THE OVERLOOK (34.745325 -86.511672). – **Milton Harris, Leader (256-679-7501; miltonh70@gmail.com)**

EVENT OF INTEREST: 14th Annual John L. Borom Alabama Coastal Birdfest
(<http://www.alabamacoastalbirdfest.com/>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AlabamaCoastalBirdFest/>), 4-7 October, 2017; registration opens mid-August.

6. Wheeler NWR (NABT #20), “The Big Sit” – 15 October, 2017 (SUNDAY) 4:00 am until dusk

“THE BIG SIT!” is an annual, international, non-competitive birding event hosted by Bird Watcher's Digest and founded by the New Haven (CT) Bird Club. The National Wildlife Refuge System has adopted it as an activity for National Wildlife Refuge Week. We'll count from a 17-foot diameter circle, set up chairs, scopes and binoculars, and identify as many birds as we can. We'll count from the west end of White Springs Dike. Access to the White Springs site will be through the second Refuge gate east of Day Park, **NOT** the one directly across from the Park. Because you can only access the gate from Alabama 20 east, anyone coming from the east or north should travel to the Decatur Boat Harbor and turn back north on U.S. 31/Alabama 20, taking Alabama 20 to the gate. The gate will be closed, but unlocked. After carefully exiting from Alabama 20 (near the overpass), just open the gate, drive through, close the gate behind you, and

follow the dike road to the site. Although we'll start at 4:00 am, participants can show up and leave at any time (34.623178 -86.951292). – **Dwight Cooley, Leader (256-565-6239; sabrewing@earthlink.net)**

EVENT OF INTEREST: Alabama Ornithological Society Fall Meeting, Dauphin Island – 13-15 October, 2017 (Ken Ward, 256-837-5646; phinken@wowway.com)

7. Wheeler NWR – Beaverdam Peninsula Tower/Limestone Bay/Arrowhead Landing/White Springs Dike (NABT #20, 23, 24) – 4 November, 2017 (SATURDAY) 8:00 am (NOTE LATER MEETING TIME)

This traditional NABS route is one of the best we have for productive late fall/winter birding and among the best places in the state to get great looks at a variety of waterfowl, which should just be arriving to overwinter. Birding with a group like NABS provides an opportunity to drive behind locked gates (provided we have at least eight people!), thus gaining access to the best areas to see lots of ducks and geese. We'll be birding by car to cover the necessary area, but there will be plenty of stops and opportunities to walk around and enjoy the refuge. In addition to waterfowl, we'll be looking for Sandhill Cranes, White Pelicans, late shorebird migrants, raptors and returning winter-resident songbirds. We'll be behind locked gates for 2-3 hours and should be done around lunchtime, when we'll likely head to Apple Lane Farms to eat, for those interested. Take the Mooresville exit off I-565, go south towards Mooresville and meet at the parking area near where it intersects with old Highway 20 (34.627442 -86.880186). – **Harry Dean, Leader (256-461-0626; hdean@hiwaay.net)**

8. Wheeler NWR - Visitor Center and Garth Slough (NABT #16) – 11 November, 2017 (SATURDAY) 8:00 am (NOTE LATER MEETING TIME)

We'll first spend some time around the Visitor's Center, including especially the wildlife observation building. There should be considerable numbers of Sandhill Cranes in the fields beyond the observation pond and it's also possible to see a Whooping Crane or two, if some are in the area. We'll then head to Garth Slough on the Refuge and bird along the Tennessee River and slough, looking for passing waterfowl, cranes, gulls and eagles, songbirds, raptors and possibly some shorebirds, depending on water levels. Overwintering sparrows should be around in numbers and we should see a good variety, including Song, Swamp, White-throated, Fox, perhaps White-crowned, and, possibly, Lincoln's. We'll meet at the Wheeler NWR Interpretive Nature (Visitor) Center off Hwy 67. From I-65, take exit 334 and head toward Decatur; after crossing the water, the road to the Visitor Center will be on the left (34.547406 -86.951136). – **Dwight Cooley, Leader (256-565-6239; sabrewing@earthlink.net)**

9. Wheeler NWR - Penny Bottoms/Blackwell Swamp/Rockhouse/Buckeye (NABT #26) – 18 November, 2017 (SATURDAY) 8:00 am (NOTE LATER MEETING TIME)

Attendees will get to see another interesting part of the refuge on this trip. This area runs parallel to the Tennessee River and should yield a nice variety of songbirds, raptors, waterfowl and other species. Take the Mooresville exit off I-565, go south on Mooresville Road and meet at the parking area near where it intersects with old Highway 20 (34.627442 -86.880186). – **Dick Bruer, Leader (256-772-0411; dick.bruer@gmail.com)**

10. Wheeler NWR - Beaverdam Peninsula Tower/Limestone Bay/Arrowhead Landing/White Springs Dike (NABT #20, 23, 24) - 2 December, 2017 (SATURDAY) 8:00 am (NOTE LATER MEETING TIME)

Our second trip to the White Springs Dike area should be productive. Waterfowl variety and numbers will likely be impressive and most or all winter-resident songbird species will be around. We'll head first to the goose tower observation platform, then bird nearby Beaverdam Peninsula, which is the best place on the refuge to get good looks at thousands of overwintering geese. We should see Canada, Snow and White-fronted, perhaps Ross's and, possibly, Cackling Goose. This is also a good area to observe Sandhill Cranes (a whooper or two are possible). Then we'll head to White Springs Dike along our regular route, where we'll be behind locked gates for 2-3 hours. We should be done by lunch; Apple Lane Farms, anyone? Take the Mooresville exit off I-565, go south on Mooresville Road and meet at the parking area near where it intersects with old Highway 20 (34.627442 -86.880186). – **Ken Ward, Leader (256-837-5646; phinken@wowway.com)**

11. Swan Creek Wildlife Management Area (NABT #21) – 9 December, 2017 (SATURDAY) 8:00 am (NOTE LATER MEETING TIME)

This trip will give us a chance to visit one of the most productive segments of the Wheeler NWR Christmas Count circle. There is active duck hunting at Swan Creek and this drives away most of the waterfowl. However, the area has lots of other birds. One area of interest is the set of fields on the north edge of the management area (behind the old warehouse). This spot usually has a number of sparrows, often including White-Crowned and, occasionally, LeConte's. Unless it rains

heavily, we can expect to have some exposed mud flats where we could pick up some shorebirds and Lapland Longspurs. Other species we might encounter include Marsh Wren, Orange-Crowned Warbler, Palm Warbler and Common Yellowthroat, all uncommon to rare species this time of year in our area. We will meet at the southernmost parking lot of Calhoun Community College (northeast corner of Highway 31 and Airport/Sandy road). Turn right at the first traffic light past the Subway, if headed north on Highway 31. - **Milton Harris, Leader (256-679-7501; miltonh70@gmail.com)**

12. Wheeler NWR Audubon Christmas Bird Count (NABT) - 16 December, 2017 (SATURDAY) 5:30 am

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is the oldest and largest citizen science event in the world. For over a hundred years, people have gathered during the winter holiday season to identify and count birds. In the process, they have created a vast pool of bird data that is a valuable source of information on the status and distribution of early winter bird populations. Parties of birders are assigned to different parts of a count circle, 15 miles in diameter, to identify and count all birds seen or heard from dawn to dusk. There are currently 10 active count circles in Alabama and over 2000 nationwide. Wheeler is one of the more productive inland count areas around, usually yielding 115-120 species, and always including some unusual birds. **Birders of all skill levels are welcome and needed; we go in all types of weather.** To join a party, meet at the Wheeler NWR Interpretive Nature (Visitor) Center, south off Hwy 67, east of Decatur. From I-65 take exit 334 and head toward Decatur; after crossing the water, the road to the Visitor Center will be on the left. We'll regroup there at sundown for the tally (compilation), which is a lot of fun. Bring binoculars, a spotting scope, if you have one, and lunch. (34.547406 -86.951136). - **Dwight Cooley, Leader (256-565-6239; sabrewing@earthlink.net)**

13. Cullman Audubon Christmas Bird Count - 17 December, 2017 (SUNDAY) 6:30 am

Another Christmas Count that sometimes gets overlooked in northern Alabama is held in the Cullman area. Counters meet at Culpepper Real Estate (601 7th Ave SW, Cullman, AL 35055, close to the Post Office) to assign areas to be covered. This count is frequently short-handed, so we hope some of you will consider helping out. Those who want to help for part of the day (morning or afternoon) can also participate. We will re-meet for compilation at 5:00 pm at Karma's Coffee House (103 1st Ave NE, Cullman, AL 35055). - **Vince Meleski, Leader (256-739-4589; vmeleski@charter.net)**

14. Guntersville Area Audubon Christmas Bird Count (NABT) - 26 December, 2017 (MONDAY) 5:00-6:00 am (meeting time varies by count group)

This Count, in another well-known birding area in northern Alabama, yields a wide variety of songbird, raptor and waterfowl species. The format is the same as that of the Wheeler Count. Unlike the Wheeler Christmas Count, there is no single gathering spot for folks to meet and join a group. For this reason, please contact Linda Reynolds if you are interested in joining one of the eight parties of counters; meeting times for different parties may vary. The meeting spot for compilation is the Guntersville Public Library. Look for the sign along Hwy 431 in Guntersville, to your right, if coming from the direction of Huntsville. - **Linda Reynolds, Leader (256-582-2970; rreynolds2970@charter.net)**

15. Wheeler NWR -Beaverdam Peninsula Tower/Limestone Bay/Arrowhead Landing/White Springs Dike (NABT #20, 23, 24) - 6 January, 2018 (SATURDAY) 8:00 am (NOTE LATER MEETING TIME)

Join us for another trip to one of our favorite birding areas, as we look for waterfowl, raptors, cranes, a variety of songbirds, etc. Expect to be behind locked refuge gates for 2-3 hours, afterwards lunching at Apple Lane Farms, for those interested. Take the Mooresville exit off I-565, go south on Mooresville Road and meet at the parking area near where it intersects with old Highway 20 (34.627442 -86.880186). - **Dick Bruer, Leader (256-772-0411; dick.bruer@gmail.com)**

16. Guntersville Dam North/Hawk Farm (NABT #37) - 13 January, 2017 (SATURDAY) 8:00 am (NOTE LATER MEETING TIME)

This trip highlights one of the areas birded during the Guntersville Christmas Count. We'll visit the north side of the dam and nearby fields, including the well-known and privately owned "hawk farm". The hawk farm is ordinarily closed to the public but permission is granted to bird there during the Christmas Count and on this trip. The dam area and farm are both excellent for raptors. There are always bald eagles around, and usually a nesting pair whose nest may be visible near the dam. We should also get good looks at both types of vultures, Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks, Kestrels, Harriers, etc. If we are lucky, we may pick up one or two unusual species that have been seen irregularly over the years, e.g., Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Rough-legged Hawk, or Golden Eagle. Songbird variety is also very good in this area. Meet at the north end of Guntersville Dam, off Hwy 431, at the pavilion parking lot on the left, as you enter the dam facility. **WE'LL ALL NEED TO BE TOGETHER TO VISIT THE FARM AND ARE NOT ALLOWED BEYOND THE STABLE AREA AT THE TOP OF THE HILL.** - **Ken Ward, Leader (256-837-5646; phinken@wowway.com)**

EVENT OF INTEREST: Huntsville & Decatur Festival of the Cranes, 13-14 January, 2018, Wheeler NWR Interpretive Nature (Visitor) Center (<http://www.friendsofwheelerrefuge.org>)

17. Town Creek Embayment, Wheeler Dam, Joe Wheeler State Park (NABT #2, 3, 4) – 20 January, 2018 (SATURDAY) 8:00 am (NOTE LATER MEETING TIME)

This trip primarily targets waterfowl and other water birds, but also includes some productive songbird areas, especially in the state park. We'll meet at the WalMart parking lot off Hwy 72 W in Athens (34.786933 -86.958486). - **Dick Bruer and Harry Dean, Leaders (256-461-0626; hdean@hiwaay.net)**

EVENT OF INTEREST: Winter Meeting, Alabama Ornithological Society, 26-28 January, 2018 (location TBA) Ken Ward, 256-837-5646; phinken@wowway.com

18. Guntersville Waterfront/Peninsula, Guntersville Dam South (NABT #35, 36) – 3 February, 2018 (SATURDAY) 8:00 am (NOTE LATER MEETING TIME)

This trip starts on Sunset Parkway along the west side of Guntersville. We should see a great variety of ducks, many loons and grebes, possibly some odd terns and gulls, eagles, etc. Meet in Guntersville at the Chamber of Commerce parking lot on the south end of the Hwy 431 bridge. From there, we'll go west on the Lake Loop Road and bird the waterfront. The tour will then go south and across the Hwy 69 Causeway to the south end of Guntersville Dam (34.363686 -86.29116). – **Bill McAllister, Leader (256-534-8354; billmcallister94@gmail.com)**

19. Mallard-Fox Creek Wildlife Management Area/Wheeler Dam (NABT #1, 2) – 10 February, 2018 (SATURDAY) 8:00 am (NOTE LATER MEETING TIME)

We'll start with the Mallard-Fox Creek WMA and work our way west, searching for water birds, sparrows and other winter residents or early migrants. Mid- to late-February is a transition period for waterfowl and other birds, and weather will play a key role in what we see. We'll meet at the Ingalls Boat Harbor Pavilion in Decatur: cross the river bridge and take the first right onto Alt 72/20 (Wilson St.), follow a mile or two and turn right on Neher St., follow to pavilion parking lot. – **Dwight Cooley, Leader (256-565-6239; sabrewing@earthlink.net)**

20. Wheeler NWR-Beaverdam Peninsula Tower/Limestone Bay/Arrowhead Landing/White Springs Dike (NABT #20, 23, 24) - 3 March, 2018 (SATURDAY) 8:00 am (NOTE LATER MEETING TIME)

Our final trip to White Springs Dike for the year is in its second year, at a time when we are usually taking a break, as waterfowl start moving out of the area, and prior to spring migration. Last year's trip was great, with good numbers of several duck species, including especially Blue- and Green-winged Teal, Shoveler and Gadwall. However the big find was a beautiful and rare male Cinnamon Teal, which hung around in the marsh area near the Decatur end of the Dike on into mid-March., to the delight of birders and photographers alike. Take the Mooresville exit off I-565, go south on Mooresville Road and meet at the parking area near where it intersects with old Highway 20 (34.627442 -86.880186). – **Ken Ward, Leader (256-837-5646; phinken@wowway.com)**

21. Monte Sano State Park (NABT #29) – 31 March, 2018 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am

On this trip, we hope to catch some early spring migrants, especially Louisiana Waterthrush. To get to our meeting spot, take Monte Sano Boulevard off Governors Drive at the top of the mountain and follow the signs to the park; once there, go in the direction of headquarters and park at the Camp Store, in the gravel, if possible. (34.745325 -86.511672). – **John Ehinger, Leader (256-536-2716; johnehinger@yahoo.com)**

22. Hays Nature Preserve/Goldsmith-Schiffman Sanctuary (NABT #30) – 7 April, 2018 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am

NABS has birded both areas regularly, especially Hays; there should be a few migrants present, especially neotropical songbirds. Meet at Hays which, from Huntsville, is about a mile past the Publix shopping center near Hampton Cove on Hwy 431, on the left just past the Taylor Lane light (there is a sign). Follow the road to the parking area on the right (34.644106 -86.466389). – **Bill McAllister, Leader (256-534-8354; billmcallister94@gmail.com)**

23. Monte Sano State Park (NABT #29) – 14 April, 2018 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am

Join us for a nice morning of birding as trees start to leaf out on Monte Sano. Monte Sano State Park is one of the best known and most productive spots in the state for neotropical migration birding; we are still 10-14 days from migration peak, but there should be some nice birds up there, including some of our returning resident warblers, tanagers, perhaps some orioles, vireos, etc. To get to our meeting spot, take Monte Sano Boulevard off Governors Drive at the top of the mountain and follow the signs to the park; once there, go in the direction of headquarters and park at the Camp Store, in the gravel, if possible. PLEASE NOTE THAT THE BIRDING IS SOMETIMES BETTER EARLIER; FEEL FREE TO

COME UP BETWEEN 6 AND 6:30 IF YOU LIKE, AS SOME OF US WILL PROBABLY ALREADY BE AT THE OVERLOOK (34.745325 -86.511672). – **Milton Harris, Leader (256-679-7501; miltonh70@gmail.com)**

24. Blackwell Swamp (NABT #26) – 15 April, 2018 (SUNDAY) 7:00 am

This area has been getting more attention lately as a prime birding spot. There is flooded woodland and marsh habitat here, which can be explored by car, on foot or by canoe. A variety of wetland species may be present, including Great Blue Heron, Great Egret and Green Heron, and perhaps some other less common species, such as Snowy Egret or Little Blue Heron. Common Gallinule and Anhinga are rarely found here and you might get a glimpse at an alligator ☺. There should be a few migrants around by this time, including such returning breeders as Prothonotary Warbler and Common Yellowthroat. This is also good woodpecker habitat, especially for Pileated and Red-headed. To get to our meeting place, take County Line Rd south off I-565, head south 5.5 miles and turn left on Jolly B Rd; there is a white 2-story house, with a rail fence, on the left just before the turn. From here it's about a mile to a gravel parking area on the right. We'll explore several areas, including a tree-lined refuge road near the parking area (good for songbirds), other wooded spots and several viewing areas on both west and east sides of the swamp (time permitting). - **Jane Allen, Leader (314-540-5665; allen.janec2@gmail.com)**

EVENT OF INTEREST: Earth Day Festivities, Hays Preserve, 21 April, 2018 [Birding Hike at 8 am, John Ehinger, Leader (256-536-2716; johnehinger@yahoo.com)]

EVENT OF INTEREST: Alabama Ornithological Society Spring Meeting, Dauphin Island – 20-22 April, 2018 (Ken Ward, 256-837-5646; phinken@wowway.com)

25. Wheeler NWR Spring Migration Count (NABT) – 28 April, 2018 (SATURDAY) 5:00-6:00 am (meeting time varies by count group)

The format for this count is similar to Christmas Counts – identify and count all birds seen or heard from dawn to late afternoon/dusk; different groups bird different parts of the refuge and nearby areas. Birders of all skill levels are welcome and needed. We'll regroup at the Wheeler NWR Interpretive Nature (Visitor) Center (34.547406 -86.951136) around 6:00 pm for compilation (see trip #12 for directions). Since we won't have a single gathering spot for folks to meet and join a group, new participants should contact Dwight Cooley. – **Dwight Cooley, Leader (256-565-6239; sabrewing@earthlink.net)**

26. Monte Sano State Park (NABT #29) – 29 April, 2018 (SUNDAY) 7:00 am

Join us near migration peak as we bird one of the best spots in the state for spring migration. The Park can be filled with birds this time of year, including an impressive variety of beautiful warblers in breeding plumage, all thrush species we can see in this area, orioles, grosbeaks, both species of tanagers, 4-5 species of vireos, etc. The birds are often relatively easy to see, too; several hotspots near our meeting spot are easy to find, including the overlooks, camp store, Japanese Garden, planetarium, cyclists' and hikers' parking lots, etc., not to mention numerous accessible trails. You are also encouraged to visit the park at other times during late April-early May, especially after a weather front has passed through, which will often concentrate the migrants. There are almost always a few birders around the hotspots early mornings during this period. To get to our meeting spot, take Monte Sano Boulevard off Governors Drive at the top of the mountain and follow the signs to the park; once there, go in the direction of headquarters and park at the Camp Store, in the gravel, if possible. PLEASE NOTE THAT THE BIRDING IS SOMETIMES BETTER EARLIER; FEEL FREE TO COME UP BETWEEN 6:00 AND 6:30 IF YOU LIKE, AS SOME OF US WILL PROBABLY ALREADY BE AT THE OVERLOOK (34.745325 -86.511672). – **Harry Dean, Leader (256-461-0626; hdean@hiwaay.net)**

27. Winfred Thomas Agricultural Research Station (WTARS, NABT #27) - 5 May, 2018 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am

WTARS is Alabama A&M University's research farm; it is a 970-acre property with lots of open grassland and pasture areas, plus small patches of forest. It is one of the best places in the state to observe open country birds and always makes for a great trip (our most popular). Species we'll likely encounter include Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (breeding and probably nesting by this time), Grasshopper Sparrow, Dickcissel, Lark Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, Eastern Kingbird, several swallow species, Bobolink, Horned Lark, Loggerhead Shrike, etc. From Huntsville, take Hwy 431 north and just past Meridianville Middle School, turn right on Walker Lane (light), then take the first right onto the farm; park at the first building on the right (34.900839 -86.560256). – **Ken Ward, Leader (256-837-5646; phinken@wowway.com)**

28. William B. Bankhead National Forest (NABT #14) – 6 May, 2018 (SUNDAY) 7:00 am

Bankhead National Forest (BNF) in northwestern Alabama is 180,000 acres of mesic hardwood, mixed pine-hardwood, shortleaf pine, oak-hickory, hemlock-white pine and mountain longleaf pine forest, with many limestone bluffs, swift flowing streams and waterfalls; the 26,000-acre Sipsey Wilderness is also found here. Migration birding this time of year is usually quite productive in BNF and we've had some great trips there the past few years. We'll meet at Site 14 of the North Alabama Birding Trail (Central Firetower). From Huntsville, take I-565/Hwy 20 to Decatur, then AL Hwy 24 west toward Moulton. From the intersection of Hwy 24 and AL Hwy 33 near Moulton, head south on Hwy 33 for 11.4 miles into BNF. The orientation kiosk is located near the firetower on the left side of the road. From there, we will go south a short distance and spend most of our time birding along the Northwest Road, a beautiful setting with a wide range of forest habitat types varying in age, composition, and management (bordering the Sipsey Wilderness). Other areas we may visit include Brushy Lake Recreational Area, Sipsey River Picnic grounds, Borden Creek trailhead and, possibly, Walston Ridge Road. You are encouraged to visit the BNF website for more information on birding opportunities there. From west Huntsville/Madison to the meeting place is about an hour-long drive, via Decatur (34.3452, -87.3393). – **Ken Ward, Leader (256-837-5646; phinken@wowway.com)**

29. Leighton Area, Town Creek (NABT #4, 5) - 12 May, 2018 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am

We will explore the Leighton area and Town Creek, targeting shorebird migrants, whose movement through our area should be strong at this time of year. Our success will depend largely on water levels and weather. We'll meet at the Ingalls Boat Harbor Pavilion in Decatur: cross the river bridge and take the first right onto Alt 72/20 (Wilson St.) (see trip #1). In 1-2 miles, turn right on Neher St., follow to pavilion parking lot. – **Harry Dean and Dick Bruer, Leaders (256-461-0626; hdean@hiwaay.net)**

30. Indian Creek Greenway – 13 May, 2018 (SUNDAY) 7:00 am

The Indian Creek Greenway is a pleasant place to bird, with opportunities to get good looks at migrants. The major reason this trip was planned a few years back was to look for Mourning Warblers. This species is a secretive late spring migrant through this area that is rarely seen. We have had good trips here the past 4-5 years, e.g., Mourning, Wilson and Canada Warblers, Warbling Vireo, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Black-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-crowned Night Heron and a variety of other species. We'll be meeting at the greenway trailhead on Old Madison Pike, a bit east of its intersection with Slaughter Road. The new parking lot is nice, just east of the bridge on the north side of the road (34.709083 -86.701369). – **Ken Ward, Leader (256-837-5646; phinken@wowway.com)**