



# NORTH ALABAMA BIRDWATCHERS SOCIETY

## SCHEDULE AND DESCRIPTION OF TRIPS, 2009-2010



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Kenneth Ward, President

OUR 33rd SEASON

Rufina Ward, Editor

Greetings from NABS central! For those of you new to us, the North Alabama Birdwatchers Society (NABS) is truly a birding group for everyone, from beginners to experts. We schedule outings to a variety of areas across northern Alabama, most of which are included on the North Alabama Birding Trail (NABT). 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 also provides greater access to certain natural areas where birding by car is restricted to groups.

Although the focus is on birds, NABS outings also offer opportunities to become more generally familiar with many of the beautiful and diverse natural habitats 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.

Our regular meeting time is Saturday, 7:00 am for most trips, although we have a few Sunday outings and a couple of late-morning meeting times planned this year. Half-day trips are the norm, although some will include extended birding into the afternoon for those interested. Please note that, although it's easy to leave early for most of our outings, there are a few trips behind locked gates that involve a minimum 2-3 hour time commitment (see Wheeler NWR trip descriptions). Bring your binoculars, spotting scopes, field guides, refreshments, bug repellent and rain gear; in light rain we go, in heavy rain we cancel.

Send your comments, questions and suggestions to Rufina or Ken Ward, 1689 Longleaf Drive, Huntsville, AL 35806 (256-837-5646; [bustmilo@knology.net](mailto:bustmilo@knology.net)). Our dues are \$2 per year, which we prefer in cash when you attend a trip. NABS does not have a bank account and our major expense involves getting newsletters to those without email. We can provide receipts and do keep a record of dues paid.

**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, species lists and a few other items of interest. In addition, there will be a copy of the schedule on the Tennessee Valley Audubon Society website ([www.tvas.org](http://www.tvas.org)). **We should mention too that NABS now has its own website ([www.northalbirding.com](http://www.northalbirding.com));** Beth Wood and Neill Cowles are the webmasters. It's still being worked on, so suggestions are most welcome.

Below are descriptions of the trips scheduled for this season, with directions, 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!

### 2009-2010 NABS SCHEDULE AND DESCRIPTION OF TRIPS

#### **1. Leighton Area Shorebird Trip (NABT) – 29 August, 2009 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

We will explore the Leighton area, targeting shorebird migrants, whose movement through our area should be peaking; our success will depend largely on water levels. We should pick up some neotropical songbird migrants as well. We'll meet at the west parking lot (next to the street) of the Holiday Inn in Decatur, near the river bridge. **John Ehinger, Leader (256-536-2716)**

#### **2. Wheeler NWR – White Springs Dike (NABT) – 19 September, 2009 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

This trip targets neotropical songbird migrants either leaving the area or passing through from the north on their way to Central and South America. More birds actually pass through our area during the fall than in spring, but the migration period is longer and a defined peak is hard to pinpoint. Still, late September is considered prime time for fall migration birding around here. We should see a good variety of songbirds and perhaps some shorebirds, depending on water levels. White Springs Dike is an excellent birding area that we will visit several more times during late fall and winter. Plan to spend 2-3 hours birding behind locked gates. Take the Mooresville exit off I-565, go south on Mooresville Road a short distance and meet at the parking area near the intersection with old Highway 20. - **Ken Ward, Leader (256-837-5646)**

### **3. Guntersville State Park and Area (NABT) – 26 September, 2009 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

We'll bird primarily in Guntersville State Park, in particular along and near the Seale Trail which is close to the campgrounds. This area is often excellent for fall migrants; the habitat is varied and food is plentiful. We'll meet at the entrance to the park (the state park superintendent's office) on Hwy 227, on the right just past the Short Creek Bridge. - **Dick and Linda Reynolds, Leaders (256-582-2970)**

### **4. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (NABT) Fall Migration Count – 3 October, 2009 (SATURDAY) 5:30 am**

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 relatively new and 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 Interpretive Center around 6 pm for compilation. Since there is no longer a single gathering spot for folks to meet and join a group, new participants should contact Dwight Cooley. – **Dwight Cooley, Leader (256-353-7243)**

***EVENT OF INTEREST: Alabama Ornithological Society Fall Meeting, Dauphin Island – 9-11 October 2009 (Linda Reynolds, 256-582-2970)***

### **5. Monte Sano State Park (NABT), Huntsville – 10 October 2009 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

We will be looking again for fall migrants, especially warblers; Monte Sano Mountain is one of the better birding spots in the state during migration. To get to the park, take Monte Sano Blvd to Nolen and follow the signs; we'll meet at the camp store parking lot, across the street from park headquarters (park in the graveled area if there is room). - **Milton Harris, Leader (256-533-0529)**

### **6. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, The Big Sit - 11 October 2009 (SUNDAY) 4:00 am until dusk**

THE BIG SIT! is an annual, international, noncompetitive 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. The idea is simple – we'll count from a 17 foot-diameter circle, set up chairs, scopes and binoculars, and identify as many birds as we can. This is our third year and we will count from a point near the west end of White Springs Dike. Access to the 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, 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 am, participants can show up and leave at any time. – **Dwight Cooley, Leader (256-353-7243)**

***EVENT OF INTEREST: Coastal Birdfest, Fairhope – 16-19 October, 2009 (Linda Reynolds, 256-582-2970)***

### **7. Monte Sano SP, 17 October 2009 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

Join us for our final fall trip to Monte Sano; there should still be migrants moving through, as well as more returning winter residents. We'll meet at the camp store across the street from park headquarters. - **Bill McAllister, Leader (256-534-8354)**

### **8. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge – Penny Bottoms/Rockhouse area – 7 November 2009 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

Wheeler NWR is among the best places in Alabama 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 will also be looking for Sandhill Cranes and late shorebird migrants. We'll be behind locked gates 2-3 hours for a portion of this trip. 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. – **Harry Dean, Leader (256-461-0626)**

### **9. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge - White Springs Dike (NABT) - 14 November 2009 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

We'll head to Wheeler NWR again to look for waterfowl and a variety of other birds. This is the first of 3 planned late fall/winter trips to the White Springs Dike area, one of the best birding spots in Alabama. First, we'll check out the "goose tower" observation platform to look for Sandhill Cranes and geese, then go behind locked refuge gates and bird along the dike road. Once we are behind the gates, we'll be there for at least 2-3 hours, so plan to be with us until around lunch. In addition to waterfowl, this area is also excellent for songbirds, raptors and a variety of other species. We'll

meet in Mooresville, where Mooresville Road and Old Hwy 20 intersect (see detailed directions under trip #2). – **Dick Bruer, Leader (256-772-0411)**

**10. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge – Garth Slough, 5 December 2009 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

This is a new trip for us to a well known part of the refuge that gets birded during the Christmas Count. We'll start along the Tennessee River looking for passing waterfowl, gulls and eagles, then bird hardwoods and fields along the slough for wintering landbirds. Wintering sparrows should be around in numbers and we should see a good variety, including Fox, Song, Swamp, White-crowned and Lincoln's, if we're lucky. We should see a good variety of other songbirds, waterfowl, hawks, sandhill cranes and a few shorebirds, depending on water levels in Garth Slough. We'll meet at Hardee's just west of I-65 exit 334 in Priceville. **Dwight Cooley, Leader (256-353-7243)**

**11. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge – White Springs Dike - 12 December 2009 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am.**

Our second trip to the White Springs Dike area should be productive. Waterfowl variety and numbers will likely be impressive, and all of the winter resident songbird species will be around. We'll be behind locked gates for 2-3 hours. Meet in Mooresville, intersection of Mooresville Road and Old Hwy 20. – **Milton Harris, Leader (256-533-0529)**

**12. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Audubon Christmas Bird Count -19 December 2009 (SATURDAY) 5:00 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 15 mile-radius count circle to identify and count all birds seen or heard from dawn to dusk. There are currently 12 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 Wildlife Refuge Interpretive Nature Center south off Hwy 67, east of Decatur. 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, plus \$5.00 participation fee. – **Dwight Cooley, Leader (256-353-7243)**

**13. Guntersville Audubon Christmas Bird Count (NABT) - 26 December 2009 (SATURDAY) 5-6:00 am**

This is a second chance to support a Christmas Count, to another well known birding area that yields a wide variety of songbird, raptor and waterfowl species. The format is the same as the Wheeler Count, i.e. all day, \$5.00 cost. The compilation will be held at Dick and Linda Reynolds' house in Guntersville; everyone is welcome. 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 if you are interested in joining one of the eight parties of counters; meeting times for different parties may vary. – **Linda Reynolds, Leader (256-582-2970)**

**14. Guntersville Dam/Hawk Farm (NABT) - 2 January 2010 (SATURDAY) 11:00 am**

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, including a pair that have been nesting near the dam for several years. We should get good looks at several species, including both types of vultures, Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks, Kestrels and Harriers, and perhaps an Osprey or Short-eared Owl (on the farm; we had them last year). 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 northern end of Guntersville Dam, off Hwy 431, at the pavilion parking lot on the left as you enter the dam facility. NOTE THAT THE MEETING TIME FOR THIS TRIP IS LATE MORNING; BRING YOUR LUNCH AND WE'LL PICNIC. – **Dick Reynolds, Leader (256-582-2970)**

**15. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (NABT) – White Springs Dike – 9 January 2010 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

Join us for our final trip to the White Springs area, as we look for overwintering waterfowl, hawks, Sandhill Cranes, etc. Expect to be behind locked refuge gates for 2-3 hours. We'll finish up looking for White-crowned Sparrows at a couple of spots, then lunch at Apple Lane Farms. Meet in Mooresville, intersection of Mooresville Road and Old Hwy 20. – **Dick Bruer, Leader (256-772-0411)**

**16. Town Creek Embayment, Wheeler Dam, Wheeler SP (NABT) – 16 January 2010 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

This trip primarily targets waterfowl and other waterbirds, but also includes some productive songbird areas, especially in the state park. We'll meet at the west parking lot (next to the street) of the Holiday Inn in Decatur, near the river bridge. - **Linda and Dick Reynolds Leaders (256-582-2970)**

***EVENT OF INTEREST: Winter Meeting, Alabama Ornithological Society, (Location To Be Announced) – 22-24 January 2010 (Linda Reynolds, 256-582-2970)***

**17. Guntersville City Waterfront/Guntersville Dam Southside (NABT) – 30 January 2010 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

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 to the Kiwanis Club parking lot. The tour will then go south and across the Hwy 69 Causeway to the south end of Guntersville Dam. – **Bill McAllister, Leader (256-534-8354)**

**18. Mallard Fox Creek WMA/Wilson Dam/Key Cave NWR (NABT) – 6 February 2010 (SATURDAY) 11 am**

We'll start with the Mallard-Fox Creek Wildlife Management Area and work our way west, including Wilson Dam and Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge, where we'll look for Short-eared Owls at dusk. 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 west parking lot (next to the street) of the Holiday Inn in Decatur, near the river bridge. NOTE THAT THE MEETING TIME FOR THIS TRIP IS LATE MORNING; WE'LL STOP ALONG THE WAY FOR A BARBEQUE LUNCH. – **Dwight Cooley, Leader (256-353-7243)**

**19. Guntersville Waterfront Trip – 13 February 2010 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

We'll head to Guntersville again to look for waterfowl, raptors and songbirds. This area is an exciting place to be for birders in February; it's not unusual to have a couple of odd species around and there should be a variety of diving ducks, some in large numbers. Meet in Guntersville at the Chamber of Commerce parking lot on the south end of the Hwy 431 bridge. – **Dick and Linda Reynolds, Leaders (256-582-2970)**

**20. Talladega National Forest, Talladega Division – 20 February 2010 (SATURDAY) 8:00 am**

This is one of our best trips. We should get good looks at Red Crossbills (one of the few places in Alabama where you can see them), Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (an endangered species) and probably Bachman's Sparrows. Take Hwy 431 through Anniston to Oxford, then take I-20 east. We'll meet at Hardee's located near the Heflin exit off I-20. Please note that the Hardee's meeting place is a 2-2 ½ hour drive from Huntsville. We'll eat barbeque afterwards, if you are so inclined. – **Dick and Linda Reynolds, Leaders (256-582-2970)**

**21. Monte Sano State Park – 27 March 2010 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

On this trip we hope to catch some early spring migrants, especially Louisiana Waterthrush. We will meet at the camp store parking lot, across the street from park headquarters. – **John Ehinger, Leader (256-536-2716)**

**22. Madison County Lake (NABT) – 10 April 2010 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

Madison County Lake is a spring-fed public fishing lake managed by the state. It is a good area for waterfowl, wading birds, swallows and Ospreys, plus there should be several species of songbird migrants in the area. Meet at the Madison County High School parking lot just west of Gurley on Hwy 72. – **John Ehinger, Leader (256-536-2716)**

**23. Hays Nature Preserve, Earth Day Birding Hike - 17 April 2010 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

This trip covers a variety of habitats, particularly bottomland/wetland hardwood forest; there should be a good variety of migrants around. At 7:30 we will join the birding hike that has been a part of the Hays Earth Day festivities for several years. **This outing will provide an especially good opportunity for beginners to interact with experienced birders.** Afterwards, we'll head over to the nearby Goldsmith/Schiffman Preserve to see what we can find. To get to Hays from Huntsville, take Hwy 431 (Governor's Drive) south to its intersection with Sutton Road. From there, the entrance gate to the Hays Preserve is about a mile farther south, on the east (left) side of the highway; follow the entrance road to the parking lot on the right. – **John Ehinger, leader (256-536-2716)**

**\*W.B. Bankhead National Forest (Tentative) – 18 April 2010 (SUNDAY); meeting place and time TBA**

The William B. Bankhead National Forest 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, through which flows Alabama's only nationally designated Wild and Scenic River, the Sipsey. The 26,000 acre Sipsey Wilderness, the second largest wilderness area east of the Mississippi, is also found here. Bankhead is considered an important block of habitat for forest interior birds, especially neotropical migrants, several species of which are in decline. Both Cerulean and Swainson's Warblers breed here, as well as Prairie, Yellow-throated, Blue-Winged, Hooded, Black-Throated Green and several other warbler species (I have heard more breeding warbler species here than anywhere else I have been in Alabama). We have had a few NABS trips there over the years, but it's a long trip and the birds, though often plentiful, can be hard to see in the tall treetops. Still, it's one of the nicer natural places you can be in northern Alabama in April and we wanted to offer an opportunity for a trip there this season. We'll keep it tentative for now but may take a trip there on the 18<sup>th</sup> (our only open date at a good time) if the weather looks good and there is enough interest. We'll keep you posted and let us hear from you.

**EVENT OF INTEREST: Earth Day Festivities, Hays Preserve – 17 April 2010, including a birding hike at 7:30 am (Susan Weber, 256-427-5116)**

**EVENT OF INTEREST: Alabama Ornithological Society Spring Meeting, Dauphin Island – 16-18 April 2010 (Linda Reynolds, 256-582-2970)**

**24. Guntersville State Park (NABT) – 24 April 2010 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

Join us for a migration trip in the park and nearby areas, in particular along and near the Seale Trail, which is close to the campgrounds. We will be nearing migration peak, so should have a productive day; the habitat is varied and food is plentiful. We'll meet at the entrance to the park (the state park superintendent's office) on Hwy 227, on the right just past the Short Creek Bridge. – **Dick and Linda Reynolds, Leaders (256-582-2970)**

**25. Monte Sano State Park/Land Trust Parking Lot – 25 April 2010 (SUNDAY) 7:00 am**

Join us for some great birding on Monte Sano as we approach migration peak, including the Land Trust parking lot off Bankhead Parkway. Monte Sano can be truly amazing this time of year, with a large variety of warblers, along with many good looks at tanagers, orioles, grosbeaks and vireos. We'll meet in the park at the camp store parking lot, across from park headquarters. – **Bill McAllister, Leader (256-461-0626)**

**26. Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, Spring Migration Count – 1 May 2010 (SATURDAY) 5:30 am**

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 Interpretive Center around 6 pm for compilation. If you are interested in joining a party, contact Dwight Cooley. – **Dwight Cooley, Leader (256-353-7243)**

**27. Alabama A&M University Research Farm (NABT)/Wade Mountain – 2 May 2010 (SUNDAY) 7:00 am**

The Winfred Thomas Agricultural Research Station (WTARS) is a 900-acre farm 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. There are breeding Scissor-tailed Flycatchers here, lots of Grasshopper Sparrows and Dickcissels, usually Bobolinks and Lark Sparrows, possibly Loggerhead Shrikes, etc. From Huntsville, take Hwy 431 north past Meridianville, turn right on Walker Lane, then right again onto the farm. Park at the first building on the right. After birding at the farm, we will head back to Huntsville and make a stop at the Wade Mountain Nature Preserve to look for Prairie Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chats and woodland warblers. From WTARS, take 231/431 south back to Huntsville, turn right on Hollow Road (across from Bennett's Nursery), right again at Spragins Hollow road (sign) and follow to the preserve parking lot. – **Rufina Ward, Leader (256-837-5646)**

**28. Monte Sano State Park Late Migration Trip – 8 May 2010 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

This is our latest trip to Monte Sano and a little past migration peak, but there should still be some nice birds passing through, not to mention a variety of tanager, oriole, vireo and warbler species that return here to breed. We'll meet at the camp store parking lot, across the street from park headquarters– **Ken Ward, Leader (256-837-5646)**

**29. Indian Creek Greenway – 9 May 2010 (SUNDAY) 7:00 am**

The 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 2-3 years with Mourning, Wilson and Canada Warblers, Warbling Vireo, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, many Magnolia Warblers and a variety of other species. Meet at the Greenway parking lot at the head of the trail on Old Madison Pike. – **Ken Ward, Leader (256-837-5646)**

**30. Leighton Area, Town Creek, TVA Forest - 15 May 2010 (SATURDAY) 7:00 am**

This is a new trip; 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. If we can get to the TVA forest area early enough, we will pick up some warblers and probably some open country birds, such as Dickcissel. Meet at the west parking lot (next to the street) of the Holiday Inn in Decatur, near the river bridge. **Milton Harris, Leader (256-533-0529)**