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## Bird Migration, Weather, and Fallout Including the Migrant Traps of Alabama and Northwest Florida by Robert A. Duncan

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## REVIEWS

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**Bird Migration, Weather, and Fallout including the Migrant Traps of Alabama and Northwest Florida.**—Robert A. Duncan. 1994, second printing 1997. Published by the author, 614 Fairpoint Drive, Gulf Breeze, Florida 32561. 95 pp. \$9.95 paper.—Migration is one of the wonders of the natural world. Although not limited to birds, we often associate the phenomenon with birds due to the highly predictable and conspicuous nature of bird migration. For people worldwide, the arrivals and departures of birds mark the seasons and bring rhythm to human lives. In North America, we are privileged to watch the comings and goings of a wide variety of Nearctic-Neotropical migrants including vireos, wood-warblers, tanagers, buntings, and grosbeaks, many of which are extremely beautiful. Some of the best places to observe these species are along the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean where birds may arrive in spring after long over-water flights or where birds may concentrate in fall prior to their return to tropical wintering grounds. In Florida, we are lucky to have a great many of these migration hot spots and we keenly look forward to spring and fall migration and those days when we hit it just right and find birds dripping from the trees in profusion.

However, “hitting it just right” requires more than just good luck. It requires knowledge of the geography of one’s region, in that birds tend to be concentrated by certain land features and attracted by particular vegetation types. More importantly, it requires an understanding of the weather and how it provokes migration in birds and affects the way those migratory flights manifest themselves. Any numbers of variations are possible. Depending on the weather, there may be no migration. Alternatively, tremendous numbers of birds may migrate, but they might pass by relatively unseen, or they may be constrained by weather and geography so that they concentrate and “fall out” in great numbers where we can enjoy them.

As Duncan points out in this book, huge fallouts are rare events, but you can definitely use a knowledge of weather to ensure that you go birding on the right days and at the right times to maximize the probability of seeing good numbers of migrants. Understanding weather and bird migration is what this book is all about. Duncan has been birding in the Florida Panhandle since 1968, lives in Gulf Breeze, a well-established migrant trap, and is an amateur meteorologist. At the urging of friends and family, he combined his two areas of expertise and more than twenty years of data into a book to aid all birders in understanding the relationship between weather and migration.

While the target audience is *all* birders, it is immediately apparent that this book focuses on trans-Gulf migration in the western Florida Panhandle and closely adjacent Alabama. There is ready applicability of the book’s subject matter to the entire Gulf of Mexico coast, and to a more limited degree to the south Atlantic coast from the Carolinas through Florida. However, I want to stress that there is indeed a great deal of information that will aid all birders in understanding weather and migration using the Gulf coast as an example.

The book starts with a brief chapter on the phenomenon of migration in Nearctic-Neotropical migrant land birds during spring and fall over and around the Gulf, citing many seminal works on the subject, and a short chapter on how adverse weather can contribute to fallouts. Two chapters describe how weather affects each of spring and fall migration. Another chapter discusses weather and vagrancy and is especially specific to the northern Gulf coast. It addresses factors that might bring tropical vagrants, such as Fork-tailed Flycatcher and Yellow-green Vireo, and western vagrants, such as Ash-throated Flycatcher and Vermillion Flycatcher, to the area.

The heart of the book is the chapter entitled, “How to Predict Fallout.” This begins with an explanation of weather resources available to birders and their strong points

and limitations. Then Duncan uses 14 maps to illustrate 12 different weather scenarios, six in each of spring and fall. In each case, he explains what the weather map is telling us and what it means for birding on the day of the observed weather, as well as the day before and the day after. He also provides advice on what weather developments to watch for that may affect the outlook for future birding. This is a very valuable section of the book. The author mixes the good with the bad and makes sure that we understand when it will be great birding as well as when it will be better to pray for a change.

The book includes a guide to migrant traps from Dauphin Island, Alabama east to St. George Island State Park, Florida. Obviously this section is going to be most appreciated by birders actually visiting sites along the northern Gulf. The Florida sites are all treated in B. Pranty's *A Birder's Guide to Florida* (1996. American Birding Association, Colorado Springs, CO.). However, for those specifically hunting migrant land birds, Duncan's site descriptions are very useful. He also provides a map of St. Andrews State Park, lacking in Pranty, and maps that are more detailed than those in Pranty for St. Joseph Peninsula State Park and St. George Island State Park.

The book concludes with a brief chapter on the conservation status of the migrant traps described in the previous section and the importance of maintaining stopover habitat for migrants, a brief glossary of weather terms and symbols, a bar-graph style check-list of some Nearctic-Neotropical migrant land birds in the north Gulf coastal region and a more detailed description of weather resources available to birders. The checklist is slightly out of date compared to the new checklist data presented in *The Birds of Escambia, Santa Rosa and Okaloosa Counties, Florida* (R. A. Duncan and L. R. Duncan. 2000, revised 2nd edition. Published by the authors.), but the information is good enough for predicting when the species listed will occur in the region. Although raptors, hummingbirds, flycatchers, swallows and icterids are all mentioned in the text, they are curiously absent from the checklist. Certainly, the number and quality of weather resources available to the public has grown since 1994, especially on the Internet, and this may be the part of the book that most shows its age.

Despite its regional emphasis, I think this book has a lot to offer birders in other parts of Florida and the United States. For a detailed treatment of migration in general, I would look to other texts such as T. Alerstam's *Bird Migration* (1990. Cambridge University Press, New York, NY) or, for a less technical treatment, P. Kerlinger's *How Birds Migrate* (1995. Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, PA.), but I am not aware of another book that does what Duncan's does: provide multiple concrete examples of weather conditions and their anticipated effect on bird migration and the birds we may observe on the ground. I recommend this book to all birders and professionals with an interest in migration, but will go so far as to say that it is required reading for anyone who wishes to maximize their enjoyment of migration along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.—**George E. Wallace**, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 3911 Highway 2321, Panama City, Florida 32409-1658.