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Place names that are frequently mentioned, but very long, may be abbreviated in a form such as "C.B.B.T." or "W.P.B.O." Such local abbreviations will be explained in a key at the beginning of the particular regional report in which they are used. Standard abbreviations that are used throughout *Field Notes* are keyed on page 21.

# southern atlantic coast region



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## RICKY DAVIS

The fall season is always one of great contrasts. Birds are found migrating early (during summer) and late (into winter), and their numbers fluctuate during the period (and from year to year).

And the weather is certainly different. This year, August to October was about normal in temperatures, but quite dry. Then from October through November, the precipitation levels rose considerably. Wet weather systems came through the Region one after the other, at about five-day intervals. Some of these were major rain events. One can assume that this increase in storms was most likely related to the major El Niño event that was cranking up in the Pacific this fall.

What this meant to the birds migrating in our Region was that there were some major groundings and some better-than-average numbers of certain species normally found farther to the west. The highlight of the fall, the Region's first Virginia's Warbler, was no doubt caught up in one of these weather systems.

**Abbreviations:** C. Hatt. (Cape Hatteras, NC); C.R.N.R.A. (Chattahoochee River Nat'l Recreation Area, GA); E.L.H. (E. L. Huie Land Application Facility, Clayton Co., GA); H.B.S.P. (Huntington Beach State Park, SC); K.Mt. (Kennesaw Mt. Nat'l Battlefield Park, GA); O.S.F. (Orangeburg, SC, Sod Farm); S.S.S. (Savannah Spoil Site, Jasper Co., SC); W.T.P. (Wastewater Treatment Plant).

## LOONS TO SPOONBILL

Only one inland Red-throated Loon was reported, at Falls L., NC, Nov. 16 (RD), and the numbers of Commons were about average. There was once again a Pacific Loon found, at H.B.S.P., SC, Nov. 11 (JP). This species is reported annually in the Carolinas, but many have not been reviewed by the respective state records committees and therefore all sightings need to be documented. Two Horned Grebes in Augusta, GA, Aug. 30–Sept. 6 (AW) and one at the S.S.S., SC, Aug. 31 (L&CEL) were exceptionally early for the Region. Only one Red-necked Grebe was located, at H.B.S.P., SC, Nov. 18 (JP). Eared Grebes continue to return to the Region each fall. Good numbers included a peak of 16 at the Goldsboro, NC, W.T.P.

Oct. 4 (ED) and seven on a small pond in n e. *Laurens*, GA, Sept. 1 (TP).

There were the usual series of pelagic trips from North Carolina. Some impressive counts included 538 Black-capped Petrels out of Oregon Inlet Aug. 24 (BP et al.); 753 Greater Shearwaters out of Oregon Inlet Aug. 25 and 410 out of Hatteras Nov. 8 (BP et al.); and 69 Leach's and 160 (carefully counted) Band-rumped storm-petrels out of Oregon Inlet Aug. 9 (FONT). The rare but regular Herald (South Trinidad) Petrel was found twice, with singles out of Oregon Inlet, NC, Aug. 11 (FONT) & 31 (BP et al.). A very rare in fall Sooty Shearwater was seen on the Aug. 10 trip out of Oregon Inlet, NC (BP et al.). Observers need to be aware of the possible confusion with Sooties and Heralds during the summer and fall season. Close views are often needed to be certain as to which species is being observed. A "dark-rumped" Leach's Storm-Petrel was found off of Myrtle Beach, SC, Aug. 9 (JP), providing a rare report for that state. A pelagic trip off of St. Simon's I., GA, Oct. 21 furnished 360 Cory's and seven Greater shearwaters (GB, PH, JS, BW).

White-tailed Tropicbirds included up to nine total birds on 6 trips out of Oregon Inlet, NC, during August (BP et al., FONT). Also, one was picked up alive (later died) on the beach at Atlantic Beach, NC, Sept. 20 (*vide* JF), providing a rare specimen. Only one Masked Booby was found, an adult off of Morehead City, NC, Sept. 7 (BC).

American White Pelican reports included one at Pea I., NC, Nov. 26 (SL), a good count of 10 at the S.S.S., SC, Oct. 17 (SC), and three at Walter F. George Res., GA, Nov. 9 (GB et al.). Very unusual and unexpected was the imm. **Brown Pelican** found at Falls L., NC, Nov. 2 (RD), which remained into December (m.ob.). This was one of only a handful of inland records for the state. Also rare inland, a imm. Great Cormorant was found at L. Brandt, *Guilford*, NC, Oct. 22 (HH).

Numbers of wandering herons and egrets seemed to be down at inland sites this year. Reddish Egrets, however, continued to be found throughout the Region as in past years. They were at the usual sites from Sunset Beach, NC, southward. The best totals came from Georgia, where 11 were at the Altamaha R. Estuary Aug. 6 (BW) and five were at Egg I. Bar Sept. 19 (JS, BW). Also, a rarely reported white-morph bird was found at St. Simon's I. Sept. 14 (JS). Roseate Spoonbills were found in the usual Brunswick, GA, area, with one remaining as late as Oct 22 (GB)

## WATERFOWL TO SANDHILL CRANE

Waterfowl numbers seemed to be up somewhat, although arrival in some areas seemed later than normal. Greater White-fronted Goose reports included one near Edenton, NC, in mid-November (v.o.) and an excellent count of 13 at Eufaula N.W.R., GA, Nov. 9 (GB et al.). Snow Geese were found scattered away from the usual North Carolina locations, with the best report being of 10 at Savannah N.W.R., SC, Nov. 25 (SC). The always exciting Ross's Goose was found twice. One was at Pea I., NC, Nov. 8 (LG), and two were very rare away from the coast n. of Greensboro, NC, Nov. 9–18 (BA, m.ob.).

Cinnamon Teal continued to show up in the Region, continuing an annual occurrence for about 4 years running. Single ad. males were found at Augusta, GA, Oct. 2 (AW) and at the S.S.S., SC, Nov. 24 (PRI, *vide* JS). The best place in the Region to find Eur. Wigeon is North Pond, Pea I. N.W.R., NC. This year birds were present from late October onward. The peak count noted was five males Nov. 8 (RD et al.). Common Eiders showed up at several locations in North Carolina, with one imm. male quite early n. of Corolla Oct. 17 (*vide* ML). The summering male Common from Sapelo I., GA, remained until at least Oct. 21 (*vide* TM). A male Harlequin Duck found with Wood Ducks in lower *Richland*, SC, Nov. 22 (HHo) was a true surprise. It is not known if this was an escape from a nearby zoo or a wild bird. There is one previous inland record for the species in the Region, two near Atlanta, GA, in February 1996. Inland scoter reports included five Blacks at Walter F. George Res., GA, Nov. 9 (GB et al.); two White-wingeds on Salem L., *Forsyth*, NC, Nov. 19 (*vide* RS); and one White-winged at E.L.H., GA, Oct. 28–29 (CL).

Out-of-range Swallow-tailed Kites included one n. of Hillsborough, NC, Aug. 3 (HWh) and one near Townville, SC, Aug. 16 (B&BM). And the field in *Tattall*, GA, which hosted a large flock (52) in late July, still had 25 Aug. 19 (RCh). Mississippi Kite reports included two w. of Creswell, *Washington*, NC, on the very late date of Nov. 21 (HW, JH), and two in the Atlanta, GA, area Aug. 10 (JC). Bald Eagles continue to increase in the Region, and one wonders just how far this species' recovery can go. A N. Harrier was considered an extremely early migrant at Sapelo I., GA, Aug. 6 (DC).

By all reports, the Broad-winged Hawk migration was down this fall. The best count received was of 1757 at Tryon, NC,

Sept. 20 (ST et al.). Much smaller numbers were had at other locations. Of interest was the migrating flock of 180 in the Roswell, GA, area on the late date of Oct. 23 (*vide* TM). The falcon migration seemed to be above average this fall, with no less than six each inland Merlin and Peregrine Falcon reports. Peak coastal counts involved 14 Merlins at Moore's Landing, SC, Oct 19 (RC, CE et al.) and 15 Peregrines Sept. 30 in the Nags Head–Roanoke I., NC, area (JF)

Once again, several sites in Georgia hosted good numbers of rails. The n *Greene* marsh had two Blacks Aug. 30 (GB et al.), two Kings in late September (PS), and 17 Virginias and nine Soras Oct 18 (PS). The K.Mt. marsh had smaller numbers of Virginias and Soras (GB). A Sora found in a Morrow, Clayton, GA, parking lot Sept. 23 (*vide* CL) was a surprise. An excellent count of 50 Soras was at Darien, GA, Sept. 27 (PS).

Sandhill Cranes were found in many more locations than usual this fall. In Georgia, where the crane migration normally occurs, numbers were down somewhat. In South Carolina, reports included 2 flocks of four and seven over McClellanville Nov 16 (*vide* DF); three over Hilton Head I. Nov 18 (AK); one at the Santee Delta, *Georgetown*, Nov. 21 (SP); and two at Henry, *Williamsburg* Nov. 22 (JSn). In North Carolina, one was at Pea I. N.W.R. Aug. 24–Sept. 3 (MD, v.o.); two were near Rocky Mount Nov 22 (DL); and two were over Roanoke Rapids L. Nov. 23 (RD).

## PLOVERS TO TERNS

American Golden-Plovers staged one of their best fall migrations this year. Reports came from all 3 states and the birds were found from the coast to the foothills. The best counts included a peak of 11 in n e *Laurens*, GA, Sept. 19 (TP); eight at the O.S.F., SC, Sept. 26 (ST); and six at L. Mattamuskeet, NC, Sept. 6 (J&PW). Semipalmated Plover totals of note included 181 at L. Mattamuskeet, NC, Aug. 30 (RD) and 10 at E.L.H., GA, Sept. 5 (AS, MB). The Upland Sandpiper was noted less frequently and in smaller numbers this fall when compared to previous years. The best count was six at the O.S.F. Aug. 17 (RH), and the latest report involved two at Florence, SC, Sept 7 (SP).

The only Long-billed Curlew reported was from Ossabaw I., GA, Sept. 11 (BW). Hudsonian Godwit numbers were considerably down in North Carolina, with two at Pea I. N.W.R. Aug. 23 (RD) and one there Aug 25 (MC) and Sept 27 (ED). In South

Carolina, where much rarer, this species made news by being found inland at the O S F Sept. 1 (B&BM et al.) & 26 (ST et al.), furnishing about the 2nd and 3rd inland records.

Other noteworthy inland sandpiper reports included a Ruddy Turnstone at E L H., GA, Sept. 27-29 (JG, BHu); two Red Knots at Falls L., NC, Nov. 2 (RD); up to eight Westerns at E.L.H. Aug. 23 (JS); 235 Pectorals at L. Mattamuskeet, NC, Aug. 30 (RD); and six Long-billed Dowitchers in *Laurens*, GA, Oct. 16 (TP). Baird's Sandpiper made news this fall. One was at E L H. Aug. 23-24 (SR, m.ob.); three were at L. Mattamuskeet, NC, Aug. 30 (RD); and an unprecedented count of six was reported at the *Peach*, GA, Super Sod farm Aug. 31 (AS, MB). The only Curlew Sandpiper report came from the North Carolina Outer Banks, as usual, when one was at Pea I N.W.R. Aug. 26 (MC).

Buff-breasted Sandpipers also made a good showing this fall. North Carolina had 3 reports, South Carolina had 6 reports, and Georgia had 5. The best counts included five near Bowman, *Orangeburg*, SC, Oct. 12 (RC, CE) and five in *Bulloch*, GA, Sept. 27-28 (*vide* TM). The always exciting, very rare, and enigmatic Ruff was found at Pea I. N.W.R., NC, Sept. 7 (GBr, *vide* SD) for the only report. An impressive group of Wilson's Phalaropes consisted of up to 37 individuals at the S.S.S., SC, Aug. 31 (L&CEI). This site consistently hosts some of the largest numbers of this species in the Region. Other interesting phalarope sightings involved a Red-necked at Pea I. N.W.R. Aug. 24 (RD) and four Reds at the S.S.S., SC, Sept. 26 (B&BM).

Jaegers were well-reported this season. Offshore trips found excellent numbers, such as the 40+ Pomarines off Hatteras, NC, Nov. 8 (BP et al.) and seven Long-tailed off Oregon Inlet, NC, Aug. 25 (BP et al.). An ad. Long-tailed flew close in by C. Hatt. point along with six Parasitics and three Pomarines Nov. 9 (RD), an impressive onshore movement for the fall. A count of six Pomarines and one Parasitic off St. Simon's I., GA, Oct. 21 (GB et al.) was good for that state. And most unusual of all was the imm. **Pomarine Jaeger** found at Falls L., NC, Nov. 16 (RD), which remained at that lake until at least Nov. 22 (RE, JPi). This individual provided about the 4th non-storm-related inland record for the state. The only S. Polar Skua report was of two out of Oregon Inlet, NC, Aug. 10 (BP et al.)

Gull numbers seemed about normal for

early in the season, with the usual scattering of the less common species. A Bonaparte's Gull was absurdly early at Sapelo I., GA, Aug. 4 (GB et al.); a California Gull returned to C. Hatt., NC, point Nov. 23 (BC); single Icelands were at C. Hatt. Nov. 23 (BC) and Edisto I., SC, Nov. 9 (SG, C&RB); and a Glaucous was at C. Hatt. Nov. 9 (AWH). Lesser Black-backed Gulls continue to frequent the Region in good numbers. This fall five were at Sapelo I., GA, Sept. 21 (MO), an excellent total that early that far south. Inland, an adult was found at Falls L., NC, Nov. 8 (LT). Great Black-backed Gulls were in above-average numbers in Georgia, with 31 at Gould's Inlet Sept. 18 (JS, CL) and 40-50 at Sapelo I. Sept. 21 (MO).

Terns also made news with some excellent totals, such as the 168 Caspians at the S.S.S., SC, Sept. 23 (SC); 200 Commons at Egg I. Bar, GA, Sept. 19 (JS); and 68 Bridleds out of Hatteras, NC, Aug. 23 (BP et al.). The only Arctic Tern was found out of Oregon Inlet, NC, Aug. 10 (BP et al.). This species is much harder to come by (and identify) in the fall than in the spring. Also of note were 11 Bridleds off of St. Simon's I., GA, Oct. 21 (GB et al.); 23 Sooties off of Hatteras Aug. 23; and 23 again off Oregon Inlet Aug. 25 (BP et al.). Black Tern numbers seemed down, with the best count being 45 at L. Mattamuskeet, NC, Aug. 30 (RD).

#### DOVES TO VIREOS

A Rock Dove found off Hatteras, NC, on the Aug. 23 pelagic trip (BP et al.) was surely out of place and unexpected. Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to spread. In Georgia, they have "infiltrated much of the state now" (v.o.), and in South Carolina they are "becoming widespread in the Coastal Plain" (RC). In North Carolina, a new colony has been found in Beaufort, *Carteret*, where up to six have been present for some time (*vide* JF). Also, one was taken to a rehab center in New Bern Nov. 24 (EH); are there more in the New Bern area? Just how far will this species go and how large will its population grow in the next couple of years? The only North Carolina report of Com. Ground-Dove came most unexpectedly from the n. end of Pea I. N.W.R. Sept. 5 (JF, BH). This species is practically gone from North Carolina and is currently declining in much of its range elsewhere in the Region.

Black-billed Cuckoos were found in normal numbers throughout the Region. The only multiple bird sighting was two

near Spartanburg, SC, Sept. 20 (*vide* LC). Any Long-eared Owl reported for our Region is noteworthy, thus of interest was one that flushed from a pine along the entrance road into L. Mattamuskeet N.W.R., NC, Nov. 16 (HW et al.). Three N. Saw-whet Owls were banded during the fall near Halifax, NC (FE), a far cry from the flight of a couple of years ago. There was a rash of late migrating Chimney Swifts. The latest dates reported included one at Macon, GA, Nov. 1 (*vide* PJ) and three on Ocracoke I., NC, Nov. 8 (MT et al.).

*Selasphorus* hummingbirds were in good supply, with birds found in all 3 states. *Archilochus* hummingbirds were also present, adding to the confusion. A trend that seems to be appearing in our Region is that a larger percentage of *Selasphorus* types are found inland while more *Archilochus* types are found along the immediate coast. This seems to contradict the pattern found in the Gulf states.

The only Olive-sided Flycatcher report involved one at the C.R.N.R.A., GA, Sept. 10 (*vide* TM). Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were well reported this fall. There were 6 Georgia and 4 North Carolina reports received. The most impressive count was the three at the Ocmulgee N.M., GA, Sept. 20 (J&MA). Willow Flycatchers, always hard to identify in the fall, were seen and heard at Roanoke I., NC, Sept. 3 (JL) and at Orton, *Brunswick*, NC, Sept. 6 (GM). Western Kingbirds were found 6 times in North Carolina, and once each in South Carolina and Georgia. The most interesting report was of one found inland at Laurinburg, NC, Oct. 29 (BG). The only Gray Kingbirds included one at Hilton Head I., SC, Aug. 28 (*vide* TPi) and three at Sea I., GA, Aug. 31 (LG, JFI, GB, SR). Reports of Scissor-tailed Flycatcher are annual now. This fall one was at Byron, *Peach*, GA, Aug. 4-6 (JHa, v.o.), and one was on Edisto Beach, SC, Sept. 22 (TPi).

Good swallow counts included the 44,500 Tree Swallows at the S.S.S., SC, Oct. 17 (SC) and 400 Banks in *Laurens*, GA, Aug. 9 (TP). A Cliff Swallow at L. Brandt, NC, Nov. 15 (HH et al.) was carefully observed to rule out the just as possible Cave Swallow. Red-breasted Nuthatches started arriving early, with five at Pea I., NC, Sept. 5 (JF, BH); many observers at scattered localities commented that this would be a better year for them. It remained to be seen just how many would spend the winter. According to many observers, the thrush migration seemed down again this fall. Overall this was true, but there were some bright

spots. Peak pre-dawn counts at K.Mt., GA, included six Gray-cheekeds Sept. 18 (JF) and 157 Swainson's Sept. 12 (GB et al.). Two Hermit Thrushes at the Silver Bluff Audubon Sanctuary, Jackson, SC, Sept. 20 (L&CEL) were record-early migrants for that state.

There were 4 reports of the rare-in-fall Warbling Vireo. Single birds were found at Roanoke I., NC, Sept. 5 (JL); K.Mt. Sept. 19 (BHt, GB); C.R.N.R.A. Oct. 4 (AS et al.); and Brunswick, GA, Oct. 20 (CEL). In direct contrast to the Warbling Vireo, reports of Philadelphia Vireo are becoming too numerous to mention! All 3 states had multiple sightings, and the best total was the six seen at the C.R.N.R.A. Oct. 6 (PH). Is this species really increasing or is it just that observer effort and expertise are increasing?

### WARBLERS TO FINCHES

The warbler migration seemed about average, compared to past years. There were some excellent one-day totals reported, such as five Cape Mays at K.Mt. Oct. 18 (GB et al.); 21 Blackburnians at K.Mt. Sept. 26 (PR); 30+ Blackpolls at Rodanthe, NC, Sept. 28 (ED); 16 Ceruleans at K.Mt. Sept. 7 (GB et al.); 44 Am. Redstarts at the C.R.N.R.A. Sept. 27 (*vide* TM); 12 N. Waterthrushes at Andrews I., GA, Aug. 31 (GB et al.); and 16 Hoodeds at the C.R.N.R.A. Oct. 4 (AS et al.). Late warblers included a Tennessee in Cobb, GA, Nov. 3 (KD); a Black-throated Blue at Pea I. N.W.R., NC, Nov. 7 (ST et al.); a Prothonotary at Rodanthe, NC, Sept. 27 (JF, ED et al.); and a N. Waterthrush banded at Butler I., GA, Nov. 1 (DC).

The always exciting Blue-winged X Golden-winged hybrids were found with a "Brewster's" at Carolina Beach S.P., NC, Sept. 5 (J&NM); and "Lawrence's" in Greenville, SC, Aug. 23 (PWo), K.Mt. Sept. 19 (GB, BHt), and Atlanta, GA, Sept. 29 (JC). Nashville Warblers staged an impressive migration in the Region, with at least six-seven different birds noted at K.Mt., GA, (v.o.) and single reports scattered across all 3 states.

Undoubtedly the bird of the season for the entire Region was the **Virginia's Warbler** found at K.Mt. Sept. 17 (PH) and seen by a few other lucky observers until Sept. 19. This individual was a first for the Region and one of only a very few for e. North America! Also probably a first for our Region was the fact that there were as many Mourning Warblers reported as Connecticut Warblers! Connecticut was found at Ft. Caswell, NC, Oct. 4 (NM, v.o.) and

Simpsonville, SC, Oct. 8 (PWo). Mournings (usually the much rarer of the two) were at the Congaree Swamp N.M., SC, Sept. 20 (CE) and Eagle I. near Wilmington, NC, Oct. 4 (BWd et al.).

Three Indigo Buntings were late at the K.Mt. marsh Nov. 3 (GB et al.) and one was banded near Darien, GA, Nov. 1 (DC). Clay-colored Sparrows were not as common this fall as in the past. Singles were at Long Beach, NC, Oct. 2 (L&EP); Ft. Fisher, NC, Nov. 2 (BG); Walter F. George Res., GA, Nov. 9 (GB et al.); n. end of Pea I. N.W.R. Nov. 8-10 (ST, v.o.); and Simpsonville, SC, Nov. 24 (PWo). Lark Sparrows were also less common, with only 3 reports from the North Carolina Outer Banks all fall, one in South Carolina, and one in Georgia. Hard to find sparrows included a Grasshopper in Griffin, GA, Nov. 3 (GB, JF); a Henslow's in Glynn, GA, Nov. 29 (JS, CL); and a Le Conte's at the S.S.S., SC, Nov. 14 & 26 (SC). Lincoln's Sparrow reports were about normal, but there seemed to be more inland reports than coastal this fall—an unusual pattern. All reports were of single birds, with the earliest being one at Falls L., NC, Oct. 12 (RD) and the latest being one at Barton, Allendale, SC, Nov. 27 (LG).

The only Lapland Longspur reports included one-three at H.B.S.P., SC, Nov. 29-30 (LG et al.) and five at C. Hatt., NC, Nov. 28 (KF). A Snow Bunting seen flying off the US 64 bridge over Croatan Sound w. of Roanoke I., NC, Nov. 7 (HL) was truly unusual. Bobolinks begin their southward migration in July and often stretch it out until November. This season one was at the n. end of Pea I., NC, Nov. 8-9 (ST et al.). Yellow-headed Blackbirds are annual during the fall. This year single ad. males were at Long Beach, NC, Sept. 23 (BHs) and Morehead City, NC, Oct. 5 (*vide* JF), while a female was found at Sunset Beach, NC, Sept. 6 (BG). Brewer's Blackbirds are quite local in the Region, and there were only 2 reports. A male was in Townville, SC, Nov. 23 (SG, CB) and an impressive count for so early in the season was the 100 at Augusta, GA, Sept. 6 (AW). The report of a flight of 200 going N at Pea I. N.W.R., NC, Sept. 5 (JF, BH) was quite exceptional. Also exceptional was the report of a Bullock's Oriole in n. Atlanta, GA, Oct. 1 (JC). If accepted, this would be one of only a handful for that state.

Winter finches seemed to be arriving in the Region in better numbers than in past years. Although spotty and localized, reports of Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, and Evening Grosbeaks in small numbers trick-

led in. It remains to be seen if these birds will provide a good winter finch season. Without a doubt, the finch of the fall was the female **White-winged Crossbill** found at the n. end of Pea I., NC, Nov. 8 (JW, JF et al., m.ob.). The bird was feeding heavily on asters and was approachable to within less than 2 feet! There was a birding festival going on and more people saw this bird than any White-winged Crossbill seen previously in the state!

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