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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 160.

southern atlantic coast region



RICKY DAVIS

The weather this winter was controlled by the well-publicized El Niño event. The temperatures were average to above average, with most areas reporting fewer below-freezing nights than normal. Ice and snow storms were few and far between. But copious amounts of rainfall more than made up for the lack of the frozen stuff. December was wetter than normal, and January to mid-February was extremely wet, with one rain event after the other coming through the Region.

The weather had several effects on the composition of the bird life in our area. There were, as expected, several lingering species from the fall, and some early spring returnees. When you add in some unexpected rarities, it becomes apparent that this winter was one that had a little bit of everything for the birders in the Region.

Abbreviations: C. Hatt. (Cape Hatteras, NC); E.L.H. (E. L. Huie Land Application Facility, Clayton Co., GA); H.B.S.P. (Huntington Beach State Park, SC); S.S.S. (Savannah Spoil Site, Jasper Co., SC); W.T.P. (Wastewater Treatment Plant).

LOONS TO WOOD STORK

Inland Red-throated Loons are found somewhere in the Region almost every year. This winter, one was on the S. Lake Norman, NC, CBC Dec. 21 (DW et al.) and one was on L. Lanier, Hall, GA Jan. 17 (JS, PBr). Also, the very rare (but regular) Pacific Loon was found at least twice in North Carolina. Singles were at Wrightsville Beach Jan. 3 (DC) and s. Topsail I. Jan. 22 (NM). Even the Com. Loon made news this season, with several high counts noted. Good inland totals included 87 at Roanoke Rapids L., NC, Feb. 1 (RD), and 52 at West Point L., GA, Jan. 1 (JS, CL). And on the coast, in what must have been a remarkable sight, more than 8000 Commons flew N past C. Hatt. point Feb. 1 (HW, JHy et al.).

Horned Grebes were also found in excellent numbers inland, with 165 at Roanoke Rapids L., NC, Feb. 1 (RD) and 246 on West Point L., GA, Jan. 1 (JS, CL). The always noteworthy Red-necked Grebe was found only in North Carolina, with singles at Kerr L., Vance, Dec. 7 (fide TP), Atlantic Beach Dec. 21 (HL), Ocracoke I. Jan. 2 (PS), Jordan L. Jan. 31 (LT), and at Southport Dec. 24–Feb. 10 (BG, m. ob.). Eared Grebes once again were present at

various sites in the Region, with the best count being three at the Goldsboro, NC, WTP Feb. 12 (NM et al.).

A pelagic trip out of Oregon Inlet, NC, Jan. 24 found 74 N. Fulmars (BP et al.), a respectable total. Much more noteworthy was the **Northern Fulmar** found dead on the beach at Kiawah I., SC, Feb. 27 (KH, *vide* WP). The specimen was sent to the Charleston Museum and provided the first documented record for South Carolina. Also of note on the Jan. 24 Oregon Inlet pelagic trip was the 12 Manx Shearwaters, a good one-day total for our Region (BP et al.).

Only one Am. White Pelican was reported in the Carolinas this winter, near H B S.P., SC, Jan. 29 (CBC). The imm. Brown Pelican found at Falls L., NC, during November was last seen Dec. 6 (JSt, JFr). And another inland Brown Pelican was at the Walter F. George Res. Dam, GA, Feb. 28 (MB, AS). Wintering Anhingas made news, with the farthest inland being two on the Raven Rock S.P., NC, CBC Dec. 21 (PH, SH), one at the Sandhills Research Center, Richland, SC, Jan. 26 (LG); and an impressive count of 12 at Augusta, GA, Dec. 27 (AW).

With the warmer weather this season, there were several unusual inland sightings of herons and egrets. A Little Blue Heron was on the Santee N.W.R., SC, CBC Jan. 3 (DF et al.); a Tricolored Heron was at L. Moultrie, Berkeley, SC, Jan. 4 (LG); and a Great Egret was at Pendleton, SC, Dec. 20 (SW et al.). Amazing was the ad. **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** found in Winston-Salem, NC, the first week of January (*vide* RS), which provided not only a first local winter record, but possibly furnished the first inland winter report for the Region! Also noteworthy inland were 12 White Ibises on the Santee N.W.R., SC, CBC Jan. 3 (*vide* LG). Reports of *Plegadis* sp. continued this winter. Fussell observed singles at Beaufort, NC, Dec. 25 and L. Mattamuskeet, NC, Dec. 6, and Davis saw one at Southport, NC, Jan. 4. These were presumed to be Glossies, but the possibility of White-faced remains. From three–five Glossies were at Darien, GA, Dec. 31 and Jan. 24 (MB), and a high count for winter in South Carolina was provided by the 480 Glossies coming into a roost near Bear I. Jan. 29 (WP). Also of note were good counts of wintering Wood Storks, with 12 on the Sapelo I., GA, CBC Jan. 3 and 77 on the St. Catherine's I., GA, CBC Dec. 20 (*vide* AW).

WATERFOWL TO SANDHILL CRANE

Two Fulvous Whistling-Ducks were present at Savannah N.W.R., SC, from late January until the end of the season (MW, v.o.), providing one of the few winter season reports of this species in recent years. Tundra Swans continue to increase in the Carolinas. They were in good supply in e. North Carolina as usual, and a new high count for South Carolina was the 382 found at Pon Pon Plantation, Colleton, Feb. 18 (WP et al.). Always exciting in the Region, Greater White-fronted Geese were found twice. One was at Pea I. N.W.R., NC, Dec. 31 (H&GA, JF) and up to three were present at Santee N.W.R., SC, Jan. 3 until early February (LG, v.o.). A count of four Ross's Geese was had at Pungo N.W.R., NC, Jan. 31 (HW, JHy et al.), once again showing that this refuge is the best place in the Region to see this species. Very rare in the Region was the "hutchinsii" race of Canada Goose found at Pea I. N.W.R., NC, Feb. 1 (HW, JHy et al.). This report was a nice change from the usual Canada Goose news concerning the increasing feral populations. Also of note was the out-of-place Brant seen at L. Mattamuskeet N.W.R., NC, Dec. 12 (SCa).

Continuing the trend of recent annual appearances in the Region, ad. male Cinnamon Teal were found at the Bodie I., NC, Lighthouse Pond Dec. 26 (GL, LG, CE) until late January (m.ob.) and at the S.S.S., SC, Feb. 7–18 (SC, TK). As for numbers of puddle ducks, numbers were good early (December), but by February many had moved out, causing many observers to remark on the lack of waterfowl in their areas. Diving ducks brought out similar observations. Nevertheless, some noteworthy reports included 75 Canvasbacks at L. Seminole, GA, Jan. 24 (GB, OD) and 50+ Greater Scaup at Jekyll I., GA, Dec. 12 (GB, LG, JFl, SR). Common Eiders were found at several locations. Some of the best reports included two on the C. Hatt., NC, CBC Dec. 30 (HL); one that spent the entire winter at Oregon Inlet, NC (DD et al., m.ob.); one at Beaufort Inlet, NC, Jan. 17 (*vide* JF); and one at Jekyll I., GA, Jan. 3–12 (J&MA, BW, v.o.) was very rare for that state. Even rarer was the female **King Eider** well-studied at St. Catherine's I., GA, Dec. 20–21 (BW, TS et al.; JS, CL, AW et al.), one of just a handful found in that state. Oldsquaws were well-reported, with highlights being eight at Sullivan's I., SC, Feb. 28 (MBe); and 4 different sightings in Georgia, including one at Jekyll I. Dec. 12 (GB, LG, JFl, SR), two on the St. Catherine's I. CBC Dec. 20 (BW, AW et

al.), one at L. Lanier Jan. 2–3 (JFl, GB), and one at Sapelo I. Jan. 18 (PJ, DG, J&MA). Numbers of Com. Goldeneye were about average, with the exception being the impressive flock of 41 found at West Point L., GA, Feb. 13 (PHo).

Vulture roosts are commonly reported, but the size of one containing 650 Blacks near Edgefield, SC, Jan. 24 (WP) must have been impressive! Two N. Goshawks were reported; an adult s. of Chapel Hill, NC, Dec. 9 (NH, *vide* HW) and an immature near Conover, NC, Dec. 20 (PMA). Rare were two imm. Golden Eagles at L. Mattamuskeet N.W.R., NC, Dec. 28 (RD, DC) and a sub-adult at Ocmulgee N.M. near Macon, GA, Jan. 15 (MB, AS). Falcon numbers seemed about normal, with the usual scattering of Peregrines and Merlins and the continued low numbers of Am. Kestrels.

The inland Georgia wintering populations of rails at several sites were in reduced numbers, no doubt due to high water levels. The best Virginia Rail count was 13 at the Kennesaw Mt. marsh Dec. 21 (GB et al.). Three was the best count at the n. *Greene* marsh Feb. 28 (PS). Sandhill Cranes seemed to be in a constant state of flux this year in Georgia. Some southbound birds were still noticed in January, but northbound birds were observed as early as late January (m.ob.). There were some excellent counts during the northbound flight period, including 1000 at Cobb, Sumter, GA, Jan. 25 (GB) and 1400–1500 at Grand Bay W.M.A. near Valdosta, GA, Feb. 17 (BBe). Unusual was the presence of three in the Townville, SC, area Dec. 16 (SGa, CB, LG, PWo). The birds, found in late November, remained until at least early January.

PLOVERS TO ALCIDS

Rare in winter, Wilson's Plovers were found twice: two on the Sapelo I., GA, CBC Jan. 3 (AW) and one on the Southport, NC, CBC Jan. 4 (JF). Piping Plovers were found in good numbers at several sites. Eighteen were at Bird Shoal, Beaufort, NC, Dec. 17 & 21 (JF, SC et al.), and 23 were counted at Jekyll I., GA, Jan. 25 (JS, BB). The S.S.S., SC, once again hosted huge numbers of Am. Avocets. Numbers built up throughout the season and peaked at the impressive totals of 1000+ Jan. 17 (DG) and 971 Jan. 29 (SC). This area also had large numbers of Lesser Yellowlegs, with a peak of over 3000 Feb. 25 (SC). These might represent unprecedented winter season numbers for this species in the Region.

Spotted Sandpipers are rare but regular in winter. This year singles were found on



The West Point Lake Dam in Troup County, Georgia, hosted the state's second documented Little Gull on February 9, 1998. There are few inland records of the species anywhere in the Southeast. Photograph/ Jim Flynn

the Morehead City, NC, CBC Dec. 21 (JW, SCo et al., RD); the Rum Cr./Piedmont N.W.R., GA, CBC Dec. 22 (PS et al.); the Spartanburg, SC, CBC Jan. 2 (MC); and the Santee N.W.R., SC, CBC Jan. 3 (*vide* LG). The only Long-billed Curlews were in Georgia, with one on the St. Catherine's I. CBC Dec. 20 (AW) and three on Ossabaw I. Jan. 19 (GB). Some interesting inland sandpipers included two Westerns on the Durham, NC, CBC Dec. 21 (DS); 24 Least in Aiken, SC, Dec. 27 (AW); and two Dunlin on the Rum Cr./Piedmont N.W.R., GA, CBC Dec. 22 (PJ), and one Dunlin that spent the winter at E.L.H, GA (m.ob., *vide* TM). The S.S.S., SC, once again hosted a wintering flock of Stilt Sandpipers, with 35 present Dec. 16 building to 142 by Dec. 29 (SC). This is still the northernmost wintering location on the Atlantic coast that we know of.

This season's only pelagic trip in North Carolina, Jan. 24 out of Oregon Inlet, found one Great Skua. It is becoming apparent that this species is present off that state's coast every winter in small numbers at least. Georgia had its 2nd documented **Little Gull** when a 2nd-winter adult was photographed at West Point L. Dam, Troup, Feb. 9 (JF). This also provided only the 2nd inland record for the Region, the first being an immature at Jordan L., NC, in March 1994. Also very rare was one near Myrtle Beach, SC, Feb. 20 (AK); there are only a handful of records from that state. There was only one Black-headed Gull reported, an adult at H.B.S.P., SC, Jan. 30 (PW, JPe, IP). The gull flock at C. Hatt., NC, again hosted one California Gull (all winter, m.ob.), one Thayer's Gull (Dec. 29, DC),

one-two Iceland Gulls (all winter, m.ob.), up to at least 20 Lesser Black-backed Gulls (all winter, m.ob.), and two Glaucous Gulls (all winter, m.ob.). Iceland Gulls made news elsewhere with an immature at H.B.S.P., SC, Jan. 31 (m.ob.); an ad. "Kumlien's" there Jan. 30 (PW, BM); an immature at Wassaw I., GA, Jan. 19 (SC et al.); and another immature at Jekyll I., GA, Jan. 24 (MW et al.).

Although Lesser Black-backed Gulls are expected at the coast, inland records are still noteworthy. One was on the Wayne, NC, CBC Dec. 20 (*vide* ED) and an amazing count of seven (four adults, three immatures) was had in Raleigh, NC, in February at the new landfill and nearby W.T.P. (RH, JM, HL, DC). Glaucous Gulls also made news, with one inland at Raleigh, NC, Dec. 20 (DC); one at H.B.S.P., SC, Jan. 11-31 (m.ob.); one at Jekyll I., GA, Jan. 3 & 17 (J&MA et al.); and another at Wassaw I., GA, Jan. 19 (SC et al.). Inland Great Black-backed Gulls were far more numerous than in past years. Four were at the n. end of L. Moultrie, *Berkely*, SC, Jan. 29 (WP et al.), and an amazing 19 different individuals were found at the Raleigh, NC, landfill/W.T.P. area during February (RH, JM, HL, DC). One wonders if this is the beginning of a trend as the gull populations continue to increase. Black-legged Kittiwake reports included a good count of 111 on the Oregon Inlet, NC, pelagic trip Jan. 24 (BP et al.); two-three on land at C. Hatt., NC, December-February (v.o.); and one at Murrell's Inlet, SC, Feb. 10 & 15 (AK, JPe, PT, TK). Inland reports of terns are not that unusual, but the count of 150 Forster's Terns at West Point L., GA, Feb. 13 (JS, CL, PHo) is truly astounding.

Only three Razorbills were found on the Oregon Inlet, NC, pelagic trip Jan. 24 (BP et al.), thereby showing how this was not an alcid year. And two murre sp. were seen just offshore of Ft. Fisher, NC, Feb. 14 (NM, RM), providing the only report of this alcid. One wonders what they were doing here in an off-year for alcids.

DOVES TO VIREOS

A White-winged Dove was a good find on the Southport, NC, CBC Jan. 4 (HL), providing the first CBC record for the Carolinas. The spread of Eur. Collared-Dove has continued throughout the Region. A new colony was found in Beaufort, NC, when six were seen Dec. 21 (*vide* JF). Also, counts of 50+ at St. Simon's I., GA, Jan. 24 (MB) and 60 in Bainbridge, GA, Dec. 14 (GB et al.) point out just how successful this species has become.

The very rare **Snowy Owl** was found (and photographed!) on Masonboro I., New Hanover, NC, Feb. 7 (TKa) for an exciting report. This individual was not relocated, continuing the species' frustrating pattern of not staying in an area more than one day! One owl exhibiting unusual behavior was the N. Saw-whet Owl found sitting in a bush all day near a school in Kernersville, NC, Dec. 15 (BC, *vide* RS). This bird was observed by almost the whole student body! Intriguing was the report of a nighthawk sp. at C. Hatt., NC, Feb. 5 (ML). Winter records of nighthawks are extremely unusual and one wonders what species was involved. Winter Whip-poor-will reports included one on the Wilmington, NC, CBC Jan. 3 (GM); one on the Southport, NC, CBC Jan. 4 (HL); and one at Jekyll I., GA, Jan. 3 (J&MA). Another early bird was the *Chaetura* swift seen Feb. 21 flying from the S.S.S., SC, into Georgia (LG et al.). This is over 3 weeks earlier than the earliest known spring arrival dates for both South Carolina and Georgia!

Hummingbirds again were the topic of much debate in the Region. Adult male birds included a Ruby-throated at Morehead City, NC, Dec. 21 (SCo et al., RD) and a Rufous at Sunset Beach, NC, all winter (MM, RSa). Other birds were either females or immatures, naturally the focal point for all the confusion. There were at least eight-nine *Archilochus* in e. North Carolina, with Sargent banding six in the Buxton area alone (all Ruby-throateds). There were at least five *Selasphorus* types in the Charlotte area (three Rufous banded by Sargent), one at Jordan L. Dec. 18 until at least mid-January (JSk, m.ob.), and up to four in coastal areas. It seems apparent that *Selasphorus* types are usually found inland and *Archilochus* types are more coastal. And one *Archilochus* in Raleigh, NC, Feb. 8-10 was felt to be a Black-chinned (JG, SC), although it was a female-plumaged individual. When will an ad. male Black-chinned show up in North Carolina?!

Early swallows included two Purple Martins at Grand Bay W.M.A., GA, Jan. 25 (GB, BBe); and two N. Rough-winged Swallows near Augusta, GA, Jan. 30 (SW, DM) providing a record-early arrival date for Georgia and the Region. Also interesting was the flock of 10,000 Tree Swallows found over the fields near L. Phelps, NC, Jan. 11 (RD). This species is rather local during winter and the numbers can be large, but this flock was truly impressive. A piedmont nesting (young present) of Com. Raven was in downtown Winston-Salem, NC, as noted

Feb. 15 (RB, RS), in an area that has had nesting before. Red-breasted Nuthatches were found scattered across the Region, with some areas reporting good numbers. Although it was one of the better flights in recent years, the numbers were still not as impressive as they used to be.

Sedge Wrens were again found in Georgia at several inland sites. Four were on the Marietta, GA, CBC Dec. 21 (GB, BZ) and three were at the n. *Greene* marsh all winter (PS). Also, two Marsh Wrens on the Savannah R. Site, SC, CBC Dec. 19 (*fide* AW) were noteworthy. This season's only unusual thrush report involved a well-described Wood Thrush on the Spartanburg, SC, CBC Jan. 2 (*fide* LC). As expected during a mild winter, White-eyed Vireos were found more than usual. The best count was 10 found on the Sapelo I., GA, CBC Jan. 3 (*fide* AW), an amazing winter total.

WARBLERS TO FINCHES

Several species of warbler made news. There was an unbelievable three Nashvilles on the L. Mattamuskeet, NC, CBC Dec. 28 (HL, AB, WI), an unprecedented one-day total for the winter in our Region. Single Yellow Warblers were on the Spartanburg, SC, CBC Jan. 2 (*fide* LC) and the L. Mattamuskeet, NC, CBC Dec. 28 (*fide* AB); a male Black-throated Blue Warbler was found at a feeder in Durham, NC, Feb. 14 (*fide* WC); a N. Waterthrush was seen at Pon Pon Plantation, Colleton, SC, Feb. 19 (WP); and a Wilson's Warbler was at L. Mattamuskeet, NC, Dec. 28 (*fide* AB). Two Am. Redstarts were found; one was on the Jordan L., NC, CBC Jan. 4 (JR, LT, CE) and another was found on the Southport, NC, CBC the same day (TP, KH, HWh, TL). These represent only the 2nd and 3rd winter records for North Carolina.

A W. Tanager was at Long Beach, NC, Feb. 26 (MM, CBU). Late buntings included a Blue Grosbeak at Augusta, GA, Dec. 27 (AW et al.); an Indigo Bunting banded at Mayesville, SC, Dec. 5 (EDa); an Indigo Bunting on the Morehead City, NC, CBC Dec. 21 (JW); and in North Carolina, the C. Hatt., Morehead City, and Southport CBCs each had from three–five Painted Buntings reported (HL, JF, RD). The only Dickcissel found was a female at the C. Hatt. Light-house area Feb. 15 (LT, CE).

Always hard to find in winter, Bachman's Sparrows were located on the Savannah R. Site, SC, CBC Dec. 19 (AW), on the Southport, NC, CBC Jan. 4 (SCo), and in *Jasper*, SC, Feb. 21 (LG, MT). An Am. Tree Sparrow

was a good find on the Pee Dee N.W.R., NC, CBC Jan. 3 (*fide* JWa), for the only report received this winter. Noteworthy winter Clay-colored Sparrows included one–two near New Bern, NC, Dec. 11 & 22 (BH, NM, WF); one at Morehead City, NC, Dec. 21 (JW); and one in *Lamar*, GA, Dec. 22 (GB). Lark Sparrows made news with an unprecedented one-day total of five on the Pee Dee N.W.R., NC, CBC Jan. 3 (*fide* JWa). Up to four of these were relocated Jan. 10 (JW). Also, single Lark Sparrows were at Harker's I., NC, Dec. 5 (NM) and Oregon Inlet, NC, Dec. 15 (*fide* TP).

Winter Grasshopper Sparrows included one at New Bern, NC, Dec. 11 & 22 (BH, NM, WF), one on the Greenville, SC, CBC Jan. 3 (*fide* LK), and one was found singing(!) on the Augusta, GA, CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* AW). Henslow's Sparrows were found in all 3 states, with the best reports being one on the Pee Dee N.W.R., NC, CBC Jan. 3 (*fide* JWa); three near Tillman, SC, Jan. 2 and Feb. 15 (TK); and three in Paulk's Pasture, Glynn, GA, Feb. 21 (MC). The only Le Conte's Sparrows found were two in Paulk's Pasture, GA, Feb. 21 (MC). Lincoln's Sparrow reports were way down this winter. One was on the Greenville, SC, CBC Jan. 3 (PW); one was on the Pee Dee N.W.R., NC, CBC Jan. 3 (*fide* JWa); and one was in *Jasper*, SC, Feb. 21 (LG, MT). An ad. male "Oregon" Dark-eyed Junco was found on the Spartanburg, SC, CBC Jan. 3 (*fide* LC), providing a very rare report for the state.

Another rarity on the Pee Dee N.W.R., NC, CBC Jan. 3 was the **Smith's Longspur** (*fide* JWa), the state's 4th. The bird was not relocated, although Wright on Jan. 10 thought a different longspur call was heard. Lapland Longspur reports involved three at Townville, SC, Dec. 20 (LG, PW, SGa, CBe); five at C. Hatt., NC, Jan. 23 (BH, WF, RBo); and one in *Pitt*, NC, Jan. 25 (JW et al.). Snow Buntings were found at Bird Shoal, Beaufort, NC, Dec. 17 & 21 (JF, SCo), and three were at Oregon Inlet, NC, Dec. 15 (*fide* TP). Brewer's Blackbird reports included six on the L. Norman, NC, CBC Dec. 21 (*fide* TP); seven near Allendale, SC, Dec. 7 (RC, CEa); and a good count of 60 in n.e. *Laurens*, GA, Dec. 12 (GB, LG, JFl, SR).

One bird causing confusion this winter was the Baltimore Oriole. During February, single pale females were found at Magnolia Gardens, SC (m.ob.), and at Carrollton, GA (v.o.). Initially the birds were thought to Bullock's Orioles, but after photographs were circulated, it was decided that both birds were very pale Baltimores that lacked certain field marks to make them Bullock's.

Red Crossbills made news with a flock of five on the Raleigh, NC, CBC Dec. 20 (JG et al.) and another at Whispering Pines, NC, Feb. 2 (SCa). And winter finches showed up in very uneven numbers across the Region. Many observers reported small flocks of Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, and Evening Grosbeaks in their neighborhoods, while others did not see any! The best Purple Finch count was 98 in one area near Wilmington, *McCormick*, SC, Dec. 22 (LG). Numbers of siskins and grosbeaks were considerably smaller. The numbers seemed to increase in many areas as spring approached.

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