

FROM THE FIELD

JUNE - JULY 2008

Note: The appearance of observations in this section does not suggest verification or acceptance of a record. Observations of Review Species need to be documented and a rare bird report submitted to the Georgia Checklist and Records Committee (GCRC) for consideration.

A relatively wet spring season provided temporary relief from the long-term drought in the Southeast, with only about one-third of Georgia experiencing unusually dry conditions in early June. However, drier and hotter-than-average conditions prevailed for the rest of the summer season. Moderate to exceptional drought conditions affected most of the state by mid-July, especially in the Northeast. The coast was less affected by drought conditions. The drought did not appear to impact the majority of nesting species, except those which lost a water source or whose breeding habitat essentially evaporated (such as rails and waders). A seabirding expedition in mid-June returned valuable and interesting data about Georgia's pelagic species. There were both successes and challenges reported by biologists monitoring colonial nesting birds on the coast. The successes included the great news that a new 14-acre dredge spoil island created for nesting birds in Glynn Co. hosted all 3 target species (Least Tern, Gull-billed Tern, and Black Skimmer). Georgia's first summer record of Broad-billed Hummingbird was provided by a beautiful adult male that appeared in Americus in late July, and a "Great White Heron" made a very rare appearance in metro Atlanta in June.

Abbreviations: ACOGB - Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds, 2003, Beaton, G. et al., GOS Occ. Publ. No. 14; AWMA - Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area, McIntosh Co.; BUENWR - the Bradley Unit of the Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge, Stewart Co.; CRNRA - Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area; CSU - Cochran Shoals Unit of the CRNRA, Cobb Co.; ELHLAF - E.L. Huie Land Application Facility, Clayton Co.; LSSI - Little St. Simons Island, Glynn Co.; LWFG - Lake Walter F. George, Clay Co.; m. ob. - multiple observers; NWR - National Wildlife Refuge; PSNP - Phinizy Swamp Nature Park, Richmond Co.; SCI - St. Catherine's Island, Liberty Co.; v. ob. - various observers; WMA - Wildlife Management Area

Note: Species that appear in a **bold-faced font** represent those that were considered “review” species by the GCRC during the year of the sighting. This list changes from year to year. The current review list may be viewed at the following link: <http://www.gos.org/checklists/reportables.html>

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING DUCK - On 21 June, 2 adult birds were seen in Savannah, Chatham Co., which is a new location for the species (James Pagan). On 24 June, 2 were reported from PSNP for a rare inland record (Ruth Mead). On 2 July, 9 were observed at AWMA (Brenda Brannen, Sandy Beasley), an established breeding location for the species. Back at PSNP, 2 were observed on 13 July (Lois Stacey), while 3 were present at the same location on 19 July (James Keener).

MOTTLED DUCK - Among several reports was a good count of 11 birds on 2 July at AWMA (Brenda Brannen, Sandy Beasley).

HOODED MERGANSER - A rare and local breeding bird in the state, a female was seen with 3 young on private property in Cobb Co. on or about 15 June (David Hedeon).

NORTHERN BOBWHITE - Among several sightings was a nice report of 2 birds present for the first time in years at ELHLAF on 7 June (Carol Lambert).

COMMON LOON - A few birds are known to linger in the Southeast each summer, but a report on 13 July of an apparently healthy bird being present continuously for 12 months at Long Pond, Lowndes Co., was particularly notable (Julius Ariail).

PIED-BILLED GREBE - This species was observed at ELHLAF throughout the summer (Carol Lambert); a rare breeder away from the Coastal Plain, up to 8 pairs nested at this location. Three birds were seen at PSNP on 12 July (James Neves, Joel McNeal).

BLACK-CAPPED PETREL - A good count of 41 birds was made on a pelagic trip from Charleston, South Carolina, into Georgia waters on 18 June (Nathan Dias et al.).

CORY’S SHEARWATER - Ten birds were seen on the pelagic trip on 18 June (Nathan Dias et al.).



GREATER SHEARWATER - A count of 17 birds was recorded on the pelagic trip on 18 June (Nathan Dias et al.).

**Greater Shearwater, Atlantic Ocean, 18 June,
by Dan Vickers**

AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER - Eight birds were seen on the pelagic trip on 18 June (Nathan Dias et al.).

WILSON'S STORM-PETREL - A count of 14 birds was made on 18 June pelagic trip (Nathan Dias et al.).

BAND-RUMPED STORM-PETREL - At least one bird was reported from the pelagic trip on 18 June (Nathan Dias et al.; accepted, GCRC 2008-32).

NORTHERN GANNET - A juvenile bird observed at St. Andrews Sound on 26 June was very unusual (Terry Moore). While this likely represents a very late lingering bird and not a summering attempt, it is quite significant in that it establishes a new state late date by nearly a month.

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN - Six birds were seen in the Jekyll River, Glynn Co., on 20 June (Lydia Thompson). Three birds seen at Lake Collins, Sumter Co., on 3 July provided a very rare summer inland record (fide Phil Hardy).

BROWN PELICAN - A single bird was seen at LWFG on 29 June for an unusual inland record (Walt Chambers). Breeding pairs of this species were down from 4000 in recent years to 800 at Little Egg Island Bar, Glynn Co., while 600 pairs nested at the Satilla River Marsh Island, Camden Co. (Brad Winn). Recent declines of nesting pairs of Brown Pelicans have also been recorded in North and South Carolina, suggesting that "it may not be the result of local habitat changes or disturbances, but rather the consequence of a larger scale issue such as changes in food resources" (Susan Cameron).

ANHINGA - This species is becoming more common farther inland as its range expands to the north and west along river basins. Two birds were found in Dooly Co. on 15 June (Jim Flynn). A single bird was present from 11-22 July at the Reeves wetland, Henry Co. (Paul Raney, v. ob.).

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD - Single birds were seen at St. Andrews Sound on 25 June (Cheryl and Panos Kanés), and at St. Simons Island on 25 July (Brad Winn).

AMERICAN BITTERN - This species is a rare summering bird in the Coastal Plain, thus a single bird calling in the lower Piedmont in Meriwether Co. on 26 July was notable (Charlie Muisse). While this may represent a true summer record, it may also be a very early wintering bird, in which case it would establish a new state early date by 11 days.

GREAT BLUE HERON - A single bird showed up at the Mercer Wetlands, Dekalb Co. on 22 June for a very rare record of the "Great White Heron" (*Ardea herodias occidentalis*) (Hugh Garrett, m. ob.). This form is a color morph of the Great Blue Heron, and is commonly found only in south Florida. The bird was



present at this location as late as 29 June, and provided Atlanta area birders with a rare opportunity to study its field marks versus the superficially similar Great Egret, as several individuals of that species were also present.

“Great White Heron” *Ardea herodias occidentalis*, DeKalb Co., 23 June, by Darlene Moore

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON - There were several inland sightings of this species, whose breeding range appears to be gaining a stronger foothold in the Piedmont. One was seen on 21 June at Arrowhead Wildlife Education Center, Floyd Co. (Max Medley). On 24 June, 2 adults and a juvenile were seen at the Mercer Wetlands, DeKalb Co. (Patty McLean). On 25 June, a single adult bird was seen at CSU (Mark Davis). On 3 July, one was found at the McIntosh Reserve, Carroll Co. (Patty McLean, Kathy Miller).

GLOSSY IBIS - On 19 June, a count of 10 birds was reported from Jekyll Island (Lydia Thompson). A good count of 30 was made at AWMA on 2 July (Brenda Brannen, Sandy Beasley).

ROSEATE SPOONBILL - Among several reports was a good count of 22 at a roost in Glynn Co. on 1 June (Joel McNeal). A noteworthy inland sighting was one juvenile bird at Ocmulgee National Monument, Bibb Co., on 5 July (Anne Davis). Biologists have observed pairs of Roseate Spoonbills in a wading bird colony in Wolf Island National Wildlife Refuge and speculate that breeding may occur in the state in the near future (Brad Winn).

WOOD STORK - This species continues its recovery from devastating historic lows in the late 1970s, and is expanding its range northward. A record 510 pairs nested at Harris Neck, McIntosh Co. (Brad Winn). Though a number of former breeding sites in Georgia were dry due to the drought and did not host nesting birds this year, a July report from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources contained exciting news that a record 2255 nests were detected at 24 colonies across South Georgia during extensive aerial surveys in May.

SWALLOW-TAILED KITE - Single birds were reported over the Okefenokee Swamp on 1 June (Joel McNeal) and over Dyar Pasture, Greene Co., on 24 July (Hugh Garrett).

MISSISSIPPI KITE - Among several reports was a good count of 15 at PSNP on 24 July (Chris Feeney).

NORTHERN HARRIER - A rare summer record was a single bird seen in Lamar Co. on 21 July (Jim Ozier).

BLACK RAIL - Only 2 birds were confirmed to have spent the summer in a marsh in northern Greene Co. (Paul Sykes). This annual nesting site has hosted several pairs in the past, but severe drought conditions are the likely cause of a recent decline.

PURPLE GALLINULE - On 29 June, one was seen at BUENWR (Walt Chambers).

COMMON MOORHEN - A rare breeder in the Piedmont, families were observed at ELHLAF during the month of June (Carol Lambert).

AMERICAN COOT - Families were observed at ELHLAF in June, indicating that nesting took place at that location (Carol Lambert). Although a rare breeder on the coast, the species was reported on several occasions at AWMA, including a high count of 10 on 2 July (Brenda Brannen, Sandy Beasley). However, no direct evidence of nesting was observed.

SANDHILL CRANE - Very unusual in summer aside from permanent residents in the extreme southeast corner of the state, an injured bird was present in Gwinnett Co. from 9-15 July (Steve Slayton).



Sandhill Crane, Gwinnett Co., 10 July, by Steve Slayton

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER - This shy and retiring species is highly sensitive to and intolerant of human disturbance. This can be a problem since it nests directly on the ground on oyster bars, mud flats, and beaches – sites that are quite popular with *Homo sapiens*. After high water destroyed many early nesting attempts in April and May, this species successfully nested in June, and healthy young were seen at several locations by early July (Brad Winn).

BLACK-NECKED STILT - A locally common breeding bird, a good count of 35 was recorded at AWMA on 2 July (Brenda Brannen, Sandy Beasley).

UPLAND SANDPIPER - The first report of this migrant was a single bird at the sod farm in Bostwick, Morgan Co., on 23 July (Mark McShane). Another was at the same location on 30 July (Hugh Garrett), and 2 were present the next day (Bill and Karla O'Grady).

WHIMBREL - Four birds were relatively early at SCI on 11 July (Paul Sykes).

MARBLED GODWIT - Two were found on Jekyll Island on 27 June (Peggy and Terry Moore). Though considered rare, a few juveniles do summer annually on the coast.

RED KNOT - Five birds were seen on Tybee Island on 4 June (Diana Churchill).

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER - Three birds were at ELHLAF on 2 June (Mark McShane, Bob Cheek), while another group of 3 was at Carter's Lake, Murray Co., on the same day (Max Medley).

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL - This species has been expanding its range southward for decades, a potential problem due to its status as a major predator of colonial nesting birds. A single bird was reported from Jekyll Island on 5 June (Trey McCuen).

LEAST TERN - This is one of several colonial ground-nesting species that is in decline due to human disturbance on beaches during the nesting season. Thus, biologists were excited to find that up to 30 pairs nested on a new dredge spoil island in Glynn Co., which was created to provide breeding habitat for this and other species (Brad Winn). Up to 25 pairs nested at SCI for the third consecutive year (Brad Winn).

GULL-BILLED TERN - As many as 15 pairs nested on the new dredge spoil island in Glynn Co. (Brad Winn). Up to 10 pairs nested at SCI for the first time since the early 1990s (Brad Winn).

ROYAL TERN - Pairs of nesting birds counted on Little Egg Island Bar, Glynn Co., were down from a recent historic high of 9000 to only 1000 (Brad Winn). Notably, the species has apparently shifted its primary colonial nesting area to Tomkins Island on the Savannah River in South Carolina; the remaining Georgia colony had good fledging success.

BLACK SKIMMER - This species nested at SCI for the first time in over 15 years (20 pairs), while as many as 60 pairs nested on the new dredge spoil island in Glynn Co. (Brad Winn). Another large colony of around 60 pairs attempted to nest for the second year on LSSI, but was wiped out by raccoons; what may have been this same group also staged a late season nesting attempt on Wolf Island Bar, only to be thwarted by torrential rains (Brad Winn).

BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD - An adult male appeared at a feeder in Americus, Sumter Co., from 24-28 July (Phil Hardy; pending, GCRC 2008-42).

This represented only the third record overall for the state and was the first for summer.



**Broad-billed Hummingbird, Sumter Co., 26 July,
by Dan Vickers**

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD - In an event as dramatic as it was scientifically significant, a bird banded on its wintering grounds in Costa Rica in January 2008 by the Hilton Pond Center

(a South Carolina research group) was found mired in spider webs and dust in an auto repair shop in Baxley, Appling Co., on 20 June (Bill Hilton and Bob Sargent, AL). Luckily, the employee who found it noticed the tiny silver band and contacted a local rehabber; sadly, the bird later perished. This bird was the first of its species, and perhaps of any hummingbird species, to be banded on its wintering grounds in the tropics and then encountered later within its North American breeding range (Bill Hilton).

LEAST FLYCATCHER - A single bird was found on Bald Mountain Rd, Rabun Co., on 5 June (Pierre Howard), and a pair was at the same location on 28 June (Ken Blankenship et al.).

WILLOW FLYCATCHER - A pair was present at the annual nesting site on Butternut Creek in Blairsville on 10 June (Ann Stewart et al.).

GRAY KINGBIRD - Three birds were at the regular site at the Convention Center on Jekyll Island on 1 June (Joel McNeal) and 24 July (Steve Parrish). This strictly coastal summer resident, which is more common farther south in Florida, is a historically local breeding bird in Georgia. Its numbers seem to be increasing in recent years, and its range may be expanding northward. Nesting has been documented as far north as Savannah, Chatham Co., in Georgia, and historically it has also been observed nesting (rarely) in coastal South Carolina. Any time birders are on the coast from mid-spring through fall, they should keep a wary eye peeled for birds fly-catching from wires in developed, open areas near mature oak trees, usually featuring lots of concrete or asphalt (parks, streets, and parking lots). This species exhibits strong site fidelity for nesting, and appears to prefer oaks for nesting substrate whenever it is found north of its primary strongholds in south Florida, where it nests primarily in mangroves. Pairs will nest in the same oak tree or clump of trees for many years consecutively. Thus, when pairs are found at new sites in Georgia, these locations should always be checked in subsequent years. It is quite possible that the species is more common in the state than currently understood, and may often be overlooked; more fieldwork is needed.

COMMON RAVEN - A single bird was reported from Brasstown Bald on 8 June (Stan Chapman, Al Mercer). At the same location that day, 2 birds were observed capturing and eating dragonflies in mid-air (Ann Stewart et al.).

HORNED LARK - On 17 June, a good summer count of 19 birds was made along Old National Hwy, Dooly Co. (Jim Flynn). This species nested at the Bostwick Sod Farm, Morgan Co., where adults and juveniles were observed on 23 July (Mark McShane, Jim Hanna).

BANK SWALLOW - A single bird was observed in Greene Co. on 20 July (Paul Sykes).

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH - Once thought to be a rare breeding bird in the state, this species is a permanent resident in the Blue Ridge, and may be considered uncommon there in areas of mature hemlocks and white pines. An active nest with young was observed in Fannin Co. on 7 June (fide Becky Yannayon), a single bird was in Union Co. on 11 June (Stan Chapman), and 3 birds were in Rabun Co. on 28 June (Ken Blankenship et al.).

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET - On 28 June, a single bird was singing vigorously in Rabun Co., for a very rare summer record (Ken Blankenship et al.). This species has been found in the state in summer at high elevations in mature coniferous forest on very few occasions in the past; breeding is suspected, but is yet to be documented. Notably, nesting has been confirmed in adjacent areas of North and South Carolina in similar habitat.

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER - A good count of 65 was made in Greene Co. on 6 July (Paul Sykes).

CERULEAN WARBLER - Two birds were found on Gumlog Gap Rd on 9 June (Nedra Sekera et al.), while at least one bird was detected by biologists during a survey in an area of nesting habitat inadvertently created by arsonist fires 10-12 years ago near Columbia Mountain, Lumpkin Co., on 5 June (Tim Keyes et al.).

OVENBIRD - A well-established breeding population of at least 20 birds was discovered somewhat south of the typical breeding range of this species at Little Mulberry Park, Gwinnett Co., in the Piedmont, between 4-11 June (Brandon Best). On 25 June, at least 5 birds were found even further south at Franklin Delano Roosevelt State Park, Harris Co. (Phil Delestrez, Nathan Klaus). This area features higher elevations associated with Pine Mountain Ridge, and several species which are more commonly associated with the mountains were observed here during the nesting season (see species accounts below). More fieldwork is needed, as there may be disjunct breeding populations of these species in the area.

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER - One bird was found on 25 June at Franklin Delano Roosevelt State Park, Harris Co. (Nathan Klaus). Any observations of this species at this location during nesting season should be reported.

CANADA WARBLER - A male and female were seen behaving as a pair near the summit of Tray Mountain on 5 June (Dot Freeman, Betty Belanger), and 3 birds were found at the same location on 14 July (Ken Blankenship, Nathan Farnau). On 9 June, 6 birds were seen at Brasstown Bald (Johnnie Greene).

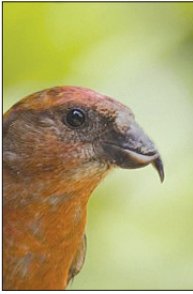
DICKCISSEL - A productive season for this erratic Georgia breeding bird continued into the summer. On 2 June, a bird was reported from Jasper Co.

(Tim Keyes), which was re-located on 10 June (Jim Flynn). On 3 June, a bird was reported from southwest Fulton Co. (fide Jeff Sewell). On 8 June, a singing male was found in Dooly Co. (Charlie Muise), while on the same day a good count of 7 birds was made on Cobb Cheek Rd, Sumter Co., in the lower Coastal Plain (Phil Hardy).

SCARLET TANAGER - This species was found in a few interesting locations south of its typical breeding range in the mountains. On 7 June, a male displaying possible food delivering behavior was observed on private property in Gwinnett Co. (Joel Hitt). On 19 June, 2 birds were found at the Island Ford Unit of the CRNRA, Fulton Co. (Ken Blankenship). On 25 June, 4 birds were found at Franklin Delano Roosevelt State Park, Harris Co. (Phil Delestrez, Nathan Klaus). On 29 June, a male was seen at Little Mulberry Park, Gwinnett Co. (Patty McLean), and the following day up to 4 males were heard singing there. On 1 July, 5 birds were seen at the Gold Branch Unit of the CRNRA, Cobb Co., including some exhibiting food delivering behavior (Ken Blankenship). Finally, a pair was found at the Jones Bridge Unit of the CRNRA on 3 July (Ken Blankenship).

BALTIMORE ORIOLE - Very interesting observations of a female and a male behaving territorially at Lake Olmstead Park, Richmond Co., were made on 6-7 June (Charles Scarborough). This species once bred more commonly in the state, but the only reliable summer location for many years has been at Central City Park in Macon, Bibb Co.

RED CROSSBILL - Continuing a trend that started in winter, numerous reports of this nomadic species continued through the summer season. On 1 June, a single male visited feeders in Union Co. (Bob Withers), while several continued sporadically at a residence in Fannin Co. into early June (Lisa Finnicum). On 21 June, a single bird visited feeders at a residence in Suches, Union Co., which had hosted a pair earlier in the month (Betty Belanger). A flock of at least 11 birds was first detected in cone-laden white pines, and was later found to be visiting feeders at a residence in Rabun Co. on 22 June (Ken Blankenship et al.); this flock was re-located by m. ob. as late as 27 July, with as many as 14 seen on 4 July (Mark McShane, Bob Cheek). Juveniles were reported in this flock on several occasions, as well as a nearly flightless fledgling, providing strong evidence that the birds nested nearby. On 19 July, 3 males were found consuming grit, and on the same day a single bird was found at a separate location, both in Rabun Co. (Jim Flynn, Earl Horn). A flock of up to 7 birds, first noted in late spring, was present throughout the summer at a cabin on Tray Mountain, White Co. (John McClatchey).



Red Crossbill, Rabun Co., 6 July, by Darlene Moore

PINE SISKIN - A single bird was seen at feeders at a residence in northwest Rabun Co. on 4 July (Mark McShane, Bob Cheek). On 19 July, one was found in north-central Rabun Co. (Jim Flynn, Earl Horn). Normally associated with winter irruptions in Georgia, this species may be breeding in the mountains, but is yet to be documented.

Detecting breeding in the state is complicated by the fact that this is normally an early nesting species; birds detected in the mountains during a possible breeding window from late March through mid-May could simply represent lingering winter visitors; more fieldwork is needed.

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