

FROM THE FIELD

DECEMBER 2008 - FEBRUARY 2009

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.

Another ornithologically interesting year came to an end, with a total of 350 species recorded around the state of Georgia in 2008. Warmer and slightly wetter than average weather in December and early January continued to shrink the pocket of persistent drought in the northeastern corner of the state. Arctic air masses plunged deep into the Southeast once in January and twice in February, producing record low temperatures in many areas and a few snow events. Interestingly, a wave of record-breaking warm weather dominated the period between the 2 February cold snaps. February also ushered in a return to exceptionally dry conditions, with less than 50% of normal precipitation falling across much of the state. Several notable rarities were uncovered in Georgia this winter, some found on Christmas Bird Counts. These included a Harlequin Duck and a Yellow Rail on the coast, and 2 inland Nelson's Sparrows - possibly the first well-documented winter records of the species from the North American interior; it was a noteworthy season for several other *Ammodramus* sparrows as well. The wealth of data from field birders and feeder watchers, along with Christmas Bird Count data, suggest that this season's irruption of Pine Siskins was one of the largest on record in the Southeast.

Abbreviations: AB:63 - American Birds 109th Christmas Bird Count, Volume 63; ACOGB - Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds, 2003, Beaton, G. et al., GOS Occ. Publ. No. 14; AIC - Andrews Island Causeway, Glynn Co.; AWMA - Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area, McIntosh Co.; BUENWR - Bradley Unit of the Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge, Stewart Co.; CBC - Christmas Bird Count; CINS - Cumberland Island National Seashore, Camden Co.; CLRL - Carter's Lake Re-regulation Lake area, Murray 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.; HP - Henderson Park, DeKalb Co.; JIBS - Jekyll Island Banding Station, Glynn Co.; LSSI - Little St. Simons Island, Glynn Co.; LWFG - Lake Walter F. George, Clay Co.; MBBP - Merry Brothers Brickyard Ponds, Richmond Co.; m. ob. - multiple

observers; MSS - Marshallville Super Sod Farm, Macon Co.; MWS - Mid-winter Waterbird Survey of the Georgia coast, 16 Jan; NAB - North American Birds (journal of the American Birding Association); NWR - National Wildlife Refuge; OM - Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center, Muscogee Co.; PCR - Pine Chapel Rd, Gordon Co.; PSNP - Phinizy Swamp Nature Park, Richmond Co.; Region - when capitalized, refers to Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina; SCI - St. Catherine's Island, Liberty Co.; SP - State Park; SSI - St. Simons Island, Glynn 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> GCRC activity, including the status of reports listed as "pending" as of press time, may be viewed at the following link: <http://www.gos.org/checklists/gcrc-activity.html>

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK - A flock of 62 was the maximum at AWMA on 27 December (Karen and Luke Theodorou), among several reports of high numbers at the same location.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE - Among several reports, the high count was 17 in Murray Co. on 8 January (Max Medley).

SNOW GOOSE - Among 19 reports was a high count of 21 on Mashburn Rd, Gordon Co., on 4 January (Max Medley).

ROSS'S GOOSE - One with neck and leg bands was at ELHLAF from 20-31 January (Carol Lambert, m. ob.; pending, GCRC 2010-10), and 2 were reported in Savannah from 23-28 January (Steve Fox; pending, GCRC 2010-08). Possible Snow X Ross's hybrids were reported at West Point dam on 3 December (Walt Chambers); in Seminole Co. on 6 December (Jim Flynn, Earl Horn); and in Richmond Hill on 16 December (Steve Fox).



Ross's Goose, Clayton Co., 22 January, by Darlene Moore

CAACKLING GOOSE - Six were picked out of a line-up of hundreds of Canada Geese at Crawfish

Springs Pond, Walker Co., 6 December - 12 January (Dan Jacobson et al., m. ob.; pending, GCRC 2009-19; *photo* NAB Vol. 63, p. 242).



Cackling Goose, Walker Co., 14 December, by Rachel Cass

MOTTLED DUCK - A new CBC state high count of 97 was established this season.

CINNAMON TEAL - Two males made a brief appearance at AWMA on 24 February (Vernon Laux, Jeff Sewell; pending, GCRC 2010-04).

RING-NECKED DUCK - This species was present in very high numbers: 12,612 set a record state-wide CBC total.

HARLEQUIN DUCK - One found in the Barbour Island River, McIntosh Co., on 19 December provided the state's fifth record and was a CBC first (Warren Harrington; accepted, GCRC 2008-41; *photo* NAB Vol. 63, p. 242).

Harlequin Duck, McIntosh Co., 19 December, by Warren Harrington



WHITE-WINGED SCOTER - One or 2 were inland at MBBP 30 January - 15 February (Mark Freeman, Carole Ludwig, m. ob.).

LONG-TAILED DUCK - Especially notable inland, up to 6 were present in the Augusta area 10 January - 15 February (Lois Stacey et al., m. ob.).



Long-tailed Duck, Richmond Co., 15 February, by Dan Vickers

COMMON GOLDENEYE - Remarkably, a male returned for the eighth consecutive year to a tiny lagoon on Skidaway Island on 6 December (Beth Roth).

RED-THROATED LOON - Inland birds included one at Clarks Hill Lake on 3 December (Eric Beohm) and one at CLRL from 22-23 January (Johnny Parks, Steve Mammoser, m. ob.); an excellent count of 16 was reported at Gould's

Inlet, SSI, on 2 February (Nathan Farnau).

RED-NECKED GREBE - One was a rare find in Brunswick on 30 December (Gene Keferl).

MANX SHEARWATER - One was photographed by biologists monitoring

Right Whales 4 miles off Cumberland Island on 10 January (Clay George; pending, GCRC 2010-06), and 2 were spotted off Tybee Island on 19 January (Gene Keferl et al.).



Manx Shearwater, pelagic waters off Cumberland Island, 10 January, by Clay George

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN - A rare inland find was a bird on Lake Blalock, Clayton Co., from 3-7 December (Paul Kerr, fide Carol Lambert).

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT - A deceased bird found on Lake Seminole on 15 February (Charlie Muise) had been banded in Ontario, Canada, on 25 June 2001.

GREAT CORMORANT - A bird that appeared at LWFG in the fall was present throughout the period (m. ob.; accepted, GCRC 2008-33A/B).

SNOWY EGRET - An impressive 2196 established a new state CBC high count.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON - A juvenile seen in Cobb Co. on 19 January was a very unusual inland winter find (Chris Lambrecht).

ROSEATE SPOONBILL - A species that is still rarely seen in winter but might be increasing, one was observed at Jekyll Island from 18 December - 29 January (Lydia Thompson).

BALD EAGLE - Continuing an increasing trend, 95 represented a new CBC high count.

RED-TAILED HAWK - A rare winter visitor, an individual resembling the pale "Kridler's" form was photographed in Sumter Co. on 9 January (Dave Catron).

GOLDEN EAGLE - A subadult was seen at the semi-annual wintering site at the Charlton Co. landfill on 17 January (Jim Flynn, Earl Horn).

YELLOW RAIL - One was flushed on the SCI CBC on 14 December (Brad Winn et al.; pending, GCRC 2010-13), furnishing the state's first CBC record.

WILSON'S PLOVER - Formerly considered rare in winter north of Florida, numbers on the MWS increased for the fourth year in a row, with 70 recorded this year. Notably, biologists indicate that while the species is more numerous in some winters than in others, the data do not indicate a trend at this time (Brad Winn, pers. comm.).

PIPING PLOVER - The highest count was 42 on CINS during the MWS.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER - At least one wintered at CSU 12 January - 23 February (Nathan Farnau, m. ob.).

MARBLED GODWIT - Biologists outfitted 6 birds with satellite transmitters

on LSSI from 20 November to 3 December, allowing them to track migratory movements and establish connectivity between breeding grounds in the northern reaches of the continent, and wintering sites on the southeastern Atlantic coast (Brad Winn et al.).

RED KNOT - Outstanding were 1449 tallied at CINS during the MWS, which included a new overall high count of 1748 for the coast; perhaps this partially explains lower than average CBC numbers elsewhere in the Region?

DUNLIN - An impressive 21,557 easily established a new CBC state high count.

RED PHALAROPE - A count of 33 off SCI on 14 December (Bill Lotz, Clay George) represented only the second CBC record - a likely reflection of little or no offshore coverage, rather than actual scarcity.

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE - An adult observed off Tybee Island on 16 January (Malcolm Hodges et al.) was a welcome sight for birders participating in a rough pelagic field trip.



Black-legged Kittiwake, pelagic waters off Tybee Island, 16 January, by Dan Vickers

ICELAND GULL - One that appeared sporadically at Lake Lanier 25 January - 1 February (Karen and Luke Theodorou, m. ob.; pending, GCRC 2009-07; *photo* NAB Vol. 63, p. 243) represented the second well-documented inland record for the state and only the ninth overall.

Iceland Gull, Lake Lanier, 25 January, by Luke Theodorou



RAZORBILL - Biologists monitoring whales spotted scattered groups of up to 10, including 2 off Jekyll Island on 9 February (Clay George; pending, GCRC 2010-07). Once considered accidental in the state, this species is likely a rare annual but erratic visitor to Georgia offshore waters. This assertion is supported by at least 10+ independent reports of the species since 2002 (many including photographs). Sightings nearly always occur between mid-January and the end of February, with the highest counts occurring in mid-February.



Razorbills, pelagic waters off Jekyll Island, 9 February, by Clay George

WHITE-WINGED DOVE - Two were recorded on the SCI CBC on 14 December (fide Dan Vickers) for the sixth state CBC record.

SHORT-EARED OWL - A regular but very local wintering species, a high count of 3 or 4 was reported from the annual site in Sumter Co. on 2 January (Patty McLean et al.).

NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL - One was banded in Lamar Co. on 3 December (Charlie Muise; accepted, GCRC 2008-39), exactly one year and one day after a capture at the same site. Despite no indication of a widespread irruption this winter, these 2 records, coupled with considerable capture success at a banding station in Alabama, continue to suggest a more regular winter presence in the South than previously suspected (Scott Weidensaul, pers. comm.). In fall 2009, 200 southbound Northern Saw-whet Owls captured in Pennsylvania were outfitted with geolocator devices in an effort to gain a better understanding of the species' movements and distribution (Weidensaul, pers. comm.).

Northern Saw-Whet Owl, Lamar Co., 3 December 2008, by Tracey Muise

