

southern atlantic coast region



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Once again, the Region experienced a “global warming” kind of winter. Temperatures were above average throughout the period with the first half of December having record warmth. The only Region wide cold snap didn’t set in until the middle of February. Needless to say, frozen precipitation was not a factor for the birds (or birders) in most of the Region. And as one would expect, there was an abundance of lingering late-fall birds; check out some of the warblers reported! One disturbing event occurred this season—hundreds of oiled waterbirds (mostly Common Loons) washed up on the beaches of the upper South Carolina and lower North Carolina coasts in January. The Region has been relatively lucky, with few instances such as this. The cause of this spill was traced to a passing ship’s illegal “bilge dumping.” One shudders to think what could happen if oil drilling becomes prevalent off our beaches

Abbreviations: B.R.C. (*Bird Records Committee*); C. Hatt. (*Cape Hatteras, NC*); E.L.H. (*E. L. Huie Land Application Facility, Clayton Co., GA*); H.B.S.P. (*Huntington Beach S.P., SC*); L.M. (*Lake Mattamuskeet, NC*); P.I. (*Pea Island N.W.R., NC*); S.S.S. (*Savannah Spoil Site, Jasper Co., SC*); W.M.A. (*Wildlife Management Area*); W.T.P. (*Wastewater Treatment Plant*).

LOONS THROUGH WOOD STORK

Inland Red-throated Loons were found only in Georgia with singles at L. Juliette Dec. 6 & 21 (*vide TJ*) and West Point L. Dec. 14 (GB, KD). This season’s Pacific Loon reports involved one in Croatan Sound,

Roanoke I., NC, Dec. 12 (DD, et al.) and one still at Figure Eight I., NC, Dec. 20 (DC). Red-necked Grebes were found sparingly, the best count being three at H.B.S.P., SC, Jan. 10 (TK). Eared Grebes continue to winter in the Region at several locations. The highest totals reported were 12 at the S.S.S. Dec. 10 (SC) and nine at L. Lanier, GA, Dec. 5 (*vide TM*).

Interesting seabirds included a beached specimen of Cory’s Shearwater at H.B.S.P. Dec. 10 (JP), a rare-in-winter Sooty Shearwater off Oregon Inlet, NC, Jan. 30 (BP et al.), and an unidentified storm-petrel off of Savannah, GA, Feb. 21 (GB et al.). There were only about 4 Am. White Pelican reports received, but one was at L. Walter F. George, GA, Jan. 24 (*vide TM*), providing a rare inland sighting. Extremely late **Magnificent Frigatebirds** were found in North Carolina with a female at New River Inlet Dec. 3 (BG) and a male inland near Goldsboro Dec. 9 (MS). These provided about the 3rd or 4th winter reports for the state. Long-legged waders lingered in good numbers, some of the better reports including two Least Bitterns at Buxton, NC, Jan. 4 (ML, EF); one Reddish Egret at H.B.S.P. Dec. 5–6 (JP, RC, CE et al.); two Reddish Egrets on the *Glynn*, GA, CBC Jan. 2 (*vide TM*); three Reddish Egrets on the Southport, NC, CBC Jan. 3 (JF et al.); 30 Cattle Egrets at Alligator River N.W.R., NC, Dec. 28 (RD); an imm. Yellow-Crowned Night-Heron at Ft. Fisher, NC, Dec. 12 (BGE); and two Glossy Ibis near Beaufort, NC, during the first half of January (RB, JF, SA).

One of the latest dates ever for Roseate Spoonbill was provided by one quite a distance away from the usual Brunswick area on Skidaway I., GA, Dec. 28 (*vide TM*). Wood Storks seem to be lingering later each year with one on the Litchfield–Pawley’s I., SC, CBC Dec. 30 (LG), one on the Albany, GA, CBC Dec. 26 (*vide TM*), and an impressive 17 in *Grady*, GA, Dec. 17 (GM et al.).

WATERFOWL

THROUGH SANDHILL CRANE

A Black-bellied Whistling-Duck found at Wanchese, NC, late December to February (m.ob.) was first thought to be a wild, wan-

dering bird in light of the recently expanding Florida populations. Diligent searching, however, turned up evidence that a local hunt club had lost several of these ducks! It is practically impossible to prove the wildness in any extralimital waterfowl although escaped birds can often be determined. Greater White-fronted Geese continued to increase from the fall season. Noteworthy totals included 23 at Eufaula N.W.R., GA, Feb. 26 (*vide JH*), four–six at Santee N.W.R., SC, all winter (VA, LG, m.ob.), six near L.M. Dec. 13 (DD), and four in Albany, GA, Dec. 26 (*vide TM*). Reports came from at least 6 other sites, indicating a major winter influx. There was probably a record number of Ross’s Goose reports this winter. An amazing count of nine was made on the L.M. CBC Dec. 27 (*vide AB*), four were present near Pontiac, *Richland*, SC, Jan. 5 through the period (LG, m.ob.), two were on the Bodie–Pea Is., NC, CBC Dec. 29 (*vide PS*), two were near Commerce, *Madison*, GA, Feb. 17–18 (EH, GB et al.), and two were at Pungo N.W.R., NC, Jan. 30 (HW et al.). A very small Canada Goose at Pungo N.W.R. Jan. 30 was determined to be the race *hutchinsii* (HW et al.), extremely unusual in our Region.

A male Eur. Wigeon at Augusta, GA, Dec. 26 through January (VW, CZ, m.ob.) provided the first report for that state since 1975! Other male Eurasians included one at L.M. Dec. 27 (RD, DC), one in the Bodie–Pea Is. area during January (BC, JF et al., m.ob.), and one at Greenfield L., Wilmington, NC, Jan. 31 through February (*vide ED*, v.o.). Of interest was the count of 11 Mottled Ducks on the Litchfield–Pawley’s I., SC, CBC Dec. 30 (*vide JP*). Since this species continues to do well in a few established coastal areas of Georgia and South Carolina, observers in North Carolina need to be on the lookout for it. Noteworthy, especially away from the coast, was a “Eurasian” Green-winged Teal at Greenview Pond, *Wake*, NC, Jan. 10 (RD).

Numbers of the regular puddle ducks seemed about average Regionwide while diving ducks seemed to be present in slightly better-than-average numbers. The only eider reports included three Commons at

Southern Shores, NC, Jan. 30 (RD) and a very rare female King at Jekyll I., GA, Dec. 11 (LT, LD). Only one Harlequin Duck showed up, a female at Wrightsville Beach, NC, Jan. 2 (RD). Inland scoters included Surfs at Falls L., NC, Jan. 2 (CEL, GBr), Winston-Salem, NC, Jan. 2-4 (RHo), and Richland, SC, Jan. 10 (RC, CE), and a Black at E.L.H. Feb. 28 (MB). Oldsquaw made news with inland reports, including one-two at Augusta, GA, Jan. 9-Feb. 13 (SW, JFl et al., m.ob.), one at L. Oliphant, Chester, SC, Jan. 10-13 (MT, LG), and a good count of nine at Jordan L., NC, Jan. 10 (RD, WC). A male Com. Merganser was observed at Eufaula N.W.R., GA, Dec. 26 (*vide* JFl), not only rare for that state but also very far south.

Following last fall's dark-morph Red-tailed Hawk in South Carolina, one was observed in e. Crawford, GA, Feb. 13 (GB). Is there a pattern starting to develop with western Red-tails showing up in the Region? The season's only reported Rough-legged Hawk was at Alligator River N.W.R., NC, Jan. 29 until at least Feb. 19 (ST et al., MM, m.ob.). Golden Eagle reports were way up with individuals being found in all 3 states. The most unusual were one near Dover, Craven, NC, Feb. 22 (LC), an adult near Fayetteville, NC, in early February (*vide* HB), an adult at the Savannah N.W.R., SC, Jan. 3 (RC, CE), an immature at L. Juliette, GA, Jan. 1 & 3 (*vide* TM), and an immature in the Okefenokee Swamp, GA, Jan. 7 (*vide* SWi).

Winter reports of Purple Gallinule are always unusual; this year two were found, an adult in Georgetown, SC, Feb. 21 (DF et al.), and an immature way n. at Nags Head, NC, Dec. 29-30 (CG, m.ob.). The only Sandhill Crane found outside of the normal Georgia migration corridor was in a field in Madison, SC, Feb. 27 (*vide* JP).

PLOVERS THROUGH ALCIDS

Wilson's Plovers lingered in good numbers, the best counts coming from Georgia with 14 on Ossabaw I. Jan. 22 (JFl), 12 at Jekyll I. Dec. 13 (GB et al.), and 11 on the St. Catherine's I., GA, CBC Dec. 19 (*vide* EU). Piping Plover numbers seemed about average throughout the Region. Five wintering Spotted Sandpiper reports, three in Georgia and one each in the Carolinas, were average. Apart from one Long-billed Curlew on the Wilmington, NC, CBC Jan. 2 (JB), all others were found in Georgia. Excellent counts included five on the St. Catherine's I. CBC Dec. 19 (*vide* AW) and three on Ossabaw I. Jan. 22 (JFl). A Pectoral Sandpiper observed

at St. Mary's, GA, Dec. 19 (Swi) was obviously a late fall migrant. The wintering Stilt Sandpipers at the S.S.S., SC, site were present all season, with the peak being 20 Dec. 1 and with 13 still present Feb. 9 (SC). A new area upstream at Onslow I., GA, also had Stilt Sandpipers with 39 Jan. 21 (GB et al.). With these locations being the most northerly known wintering sites for the species, continued monitoring is important. A flock of seven Short-billed Dowitchers wintered inland at Macon, GA (GB et al.), a most unusual occurrence in the Region.

Great Skua was once again found off the North Carolina coast with three off Hatteras Feb. 13 (BP et al.). Laughing Gulls often linger into winter during mild seasons, and this year was no different. One was rare inland on the Falls L., NC, CBC Jan. 2 (*vide* WC), but almost unbelievable was the flock of 540 in a field near Scotland Neck, NC, Dec. 12 (RD). Very rare in winter, a first-year **Franklin's Gull** was found on the L. Norman, NC, CBC Dec. 20 (DW et al.). No doubt this bird was a part of the large number of storm-blown fall migrants found in the East during November. The only Little Gull report was, surprisingly, in Georgia where an immature was at the Altamaha R. Estuary Dec. 2 (GB et al.), providing one of only a handful of reports for that state. Black-headed Gulls were found twice, one at Pine Knoll Shores, NC, Dec. 10 (*vide* JF) and another, possibly the same individual, nearby at the Morehead City W.T.P. Jan. 17-22 (JF). Once again the C. Hatt. area hosted several gull species. The now-regular gulls included one-two Californias Dec. 26-Feb. 14 (ED, m.ob.),

one ad. Thayer's Dec. 30-Jan. 30 (*vide* HL, v.o.), two Icelands Dec. 26-Jan. 31 (ED, BC, m.ob.), two Glaucous all season (m.ob.), and the usual bunches of Lesser Black-backed (m.ob.). Elsewhere, gulls of interest included an Iceland on the Southport, NC, CBC Jan. 3 (DC), a Lesser Black-backed at West Point L. Dam, GA, Dec. 30 (GB et al.), a Glaucous at the same area Jan. 16 and Feb. 6 (JFl), and a Glaucous on Cumberland I., GA, Dec. 19 (SWi).

Of interest in the Jekyll I., GA, area were two different imm. Thayer's types in late January (PS, GB et al., v.o.). Mass confusion reigned over the identity of these birds. As yet, there are no confirmed Georgia records. Totally unexpected, an imm. **Bridled Tern** was found dead at the base of a building at Pawley's I., SC, Jan. 18 (LG et al.). Winter records of this species are practically non-existent in the Region. Inexplicably, two Black Skimmers were far inland at the Cherry Hospital, Wayne, NC, Dec. 24 (ED), providing the first truly inland winter report for the state. The only Razorbills reported all season were two flying S off the beach at Corolla, NC, Jan. 30 (RD). North Carolina's 3rd report of **Atlantic Puffin** involved two seen on the water and in flight off Oregon Inlet Jan. 30 (BP et al.).

DOVES THROUGH THRUSHES

Eurasian Collared-Dove continues to increase in the Region. The most northerly known outpost is the Beaufort, NC, area where at least six are still present (JF), and the largest count so far was 213 on the Glynn, GA, CBC Jan. 2 (*vide* TM). White-winged Doves also seem to be infiltrating the Region with the Beaufort, NC, birds



Winter records of Bridled Terns are practically nonexistent in the Region, making this individual, found dead at Pawley's Island, South Carolina, January 18, 1999, noteworthy. Photograph/Lex Glover

numbering three (*vide* JF), one at Columbia, SC, Dec. 20 (JE), one on the Litchfield-Pawley's I., SC, CBC Dec. 30 (LG), one at Folly Beach, SC, Jan. 22 (LG), and two on St Catherine's I., GA, Dec. 20 (JS, CL). A nighthawk found injured (later died) on a road near Newport, Carteret, NC, Dec. 9 (*vide* JF) was identified as the region's first **Lesser Nighthawk**. The specimen, now in the collection of the state museum, appears to be an ad. male (SC).

Wintering hummingbirds in the Region continue to amaze. This winter no fewer than 75 *Archilochus* and 25 *Selasphorus* reports came from the Carolinas alone. Georgia also had many reports of both groups. It is becoming apparent that a large percentage of *Archilochus* hummers ends up along the coast while *Selasphorus* hummers seem spread out between coastal and inland sites. The Charlotte, NC, Anna's Hummingbird remained throughout the winter and by Mar. 1 (the last day present) had acquired much of its head and gorget colors (JWa). A male Vermilion Flycatcher found at Okefenokee N.W.R. Feb. 12 was relocated 4-5 mi away Feb. 23 (*vide* TM). It has been many years since the last report for the state, and unfortunately the news of this bird did not spread for others to see it. Always noteworthy for the winter season, W Kingbirds were found at Ft. Pulaski, GA, Dec 1 (MBe) and Ft. Fisher, NC, Dec. 9 (KW) White-eyed Vireos were more prevalent than usual this winter with at least 5 North Carolina, 3 South Carolina, 3 Georgia reports. Much more unusual were the two **Yellow-throated Vireos**, one on the Durham, NC, CBC Dec. 20 (OM) and one on the Glynn, GA, CBC Jan. 2 (*vide* MC) Numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches were once again low with many observers reporting none for the entire period. And, as if to prove a point about the warm winter, in Charlotte, NC, a pair of Am. Robins built a nest in late January, laid 3 eggs in early February, and incubated them for 3 weeks before abandoning the effort (*vide* BHi)

WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

Lingering warblers made news. In the L. M. area alone at least 13 species were reported. On the CBC there Dec. 27, 11 species were found, including Nashville, N. Parula, Yellow, Yellow-throated, and multiple Black-and-whites (*vide* AB). On Dec. 28, a Wilson's was found (JF), and on Jan. 31 an unprecedented winter **Black-throated Green Warbler** was observed at close range (KF et al) Other amazing finds were a

Chestnut-sided Warbler on the Raleigh, NC, CBC Dec. 19 (JG, *vide* SCA), a Black-throated Blue at Southern Pines, NC, Dec. 2 (DB), another Black-throated Blue on the Glynn, GA, CBC Jan. 2 (*vide* MC), and a **Blackpoll Warbler** (male in alternate plumage!) well described on the Rocky R., SC, CBC Dec. 22 (SP). The Black-throated Green, Chestnut-sided, and Blackpoll provided the first-ever winter records, and the Blackpoll constituted one of very few winter sightings ever for North America!

Winter tanagers always cause excitement; thus, of interest were two Westerns, one at Bellville, Evans, GA, Dec. 2 until at least Feb. 2 (MBL, m.ob.) and another at Greenville, NC, Jan. 16 until the end of the period (KH, m.ob.). Even rarer was a **Summer Tanager** reported from Warner Robins, GA, Feb. 8 (*vide* TM). Sparrow numbers seemed up over most of the Region. Clay-colored Sparrows were found on Cumberland I., GA, Dec. 13 (SWi), on the Wayne, NC, CBC Dec. 19 (RD), on the Morehead City, NC, CBC Dec. 20 (JW), and on the New Bern, NC, CBC Dec. 21 (JW). Lark Sparrow was found only once, an individual at Ocracoke, NC, Jan. 1-2 (HB). Grasshopper Sparrow reports included singles at the S.S.S. Dec. 24 (SC), on the Santee N.W.R., SC, CBC Jan. 2 (*vide* LG), and on the Wilmington, NC, CBC Jan. 2 (GM). Other good sparrow reports included five Henslow's on the St. Catherine's I., GA, CBC Dec. 19 (*vide* AW), a total of 15 Le Conte's at Eufaula N.W.R., GA, Dec. 19 (MB et al., v.o.), and a **Harris's Sparrow** at the Chattahoochee Nature Center, Roswell, GA, Feb. 6 through the period (MW, m.ob.). This bird was possibly present as early as December when a visiting British birder reported one there, but it was not found again until January.

Lapland Longspurs were about normal in occurrence with the best count up to eight on the Litchfield-Pawley's I., SC, CBC Dec. 30 (*vide* JP). Also at H.B.S.P., a **Smith's Longspur** was located with some Laplands at the jetty Jan. 10 (TK) and was seen until at least Feb. 10 by many. This bird represented the state's 2nd record, the first occurring in 1889! Snow Bunting reports were about average with a best count of 25 at the n. end of P.I. Feb. 13 (BGe).

Of interest were a late Rose-breasted Grosbeak at a feeder in Gastonia, NC, Dec. 5-6 (STr) and an early Indigo Bunting in McIntosh, GA, Feb. 25 (*vide* DCo). Coastal reports of wintering Painted Buntings are not too unusual any more, but inland winter sightings are quite rare This winter a

male was at feeder in Benson, NC, Dec 14-18 (DSh), and another male was at a feeder in Edenton, NC, Jan. 29 to early February (*vide* PT). The now annual Yellow-headed Blackbird was found twice in North Carolina with two males on the n. side of L.M. Dec. 13 (DD) and a female e. of Creswell, Washington, Dec. 31 (RD). Also of note was count of 48 Brewer's Blackbirds on the Santee N.W.R., SC, CBC Jan. 2 (*vide* LG), one of the best totals for that species in the Carolinas. A male Shiny Cowbird was at a Brunswick, GA, feeder Jan. 24 until Jan 29, when it was observed being caught by an *Accipiter* (EK, m.ob.)! Finches were definitely in short supply. Purple Finches were present in small numbers, Pine Siskins were in even smaller numbers, and Evening Grosbeak reports totaled 5 across the Region.

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