

Southern Atlantic Coast



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Temperatures this winter were below average early, but gradually settled into normal ranges by the end of January. Precipitation was below average, with rainfall amounts being quite low. After an impressive early snowfall in eastern North Carolina on December 3, what little moisture fell from the skies was generally in the form of rain. By the end of the period, many areas were experiencing very dry conditions. This season's highlights included several unusual-in-winter birds and the amazing hummingbird situation.

Abbreviations: C. Hatt. (Cape Hatteras, NC); E.L.H. (E. L. Huie Land Application Facility, Clayton, GA); H.B.S.P. (Huntington Beach State Park, SC); P.I. (Pea I. N.W.R., NC); S.S.S. (Savannah Spoil Site, Jasper, SC).

Loons Through Sandhill Crane

Noteworthy inland Red-throated Loons involved singles on L. Allatoona, GA 31 Dec–1 Jan (JFL, EH) and in e. *Edgecombe*, NC 25 Feb (RD). Red-necked Grebe, a review species in Georgia, was a very good find at Little St. Simons I. 29 Jan (JFL). Eared Grebes wintered in their usual scattered numbers, with the best

count being 3 at the Goldsboro, NC W.T.P. (ED). A **Western Grebe** made a brief appearance at the Avon, NC pier 19–21 Feb (BH, WF, sev. obs.), providing a rare regional sighting. A Sooty Shearwater was found off of Hatteras, NC, 3 Feb (BP et al.) for one of only a handful of winter reports for the Region. Double-crested Cormorants continue to increase in the Region, as evidenced by the 1,075 tallied on the Jordan Lake, NC C.B.C. 31 Dec (*fide* NB). Very rare during winter, a Least Bittern was a good find at L. Mattamuskeet, NC 9 Dec (BC, GS). The most interesting lingering long-legged waders included a Reddish Egret at Charleston, SC 24 Dec (*fide* EB), a Green Heron at Atlanta, GA 17 Dec (*fide* BB), and a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron on the Piedmont N.W.R./Rum Creek, GA C.B.C. 18 Dec (*fide* TJ). Also the **White-faced Ibis** found at Savannah N.W.R., SC in the fall season, remained throughout the winter, only sporadically being observed.

Fulvous Whistling-Ducks continued to be found after the good flight of the fall season. Eleven were in *Carteret*, NC 14 Dec (*fide* JF), up to seven were at Magnolia Gardens, SC 3–16 Dec (*fide* PN, SCo), and one was at the Goldsboro, NC W.T.P. 1 Dec (JR, FR) until at least 1 Jan (RD). The best Greater White-fronted Goose reports included 26 at Eufaula N.W.R., GA 26 Dec (EH) and 4 at Santee N.W.R., SC 9 Jan (LG). Snow Geese were scattered throughout the Region in small numbers,

and Ross's Geese were found more often than normal, with three Georgia, two South Carolina, and two North Carolina reports. Wilmington's Eurasian Wigeon returned for the 3rd winter in a row (GM, sev. obs.) and remained until spring. Cinnamon Teal is becoming almost annual in the Region. This year males spent the winter at Goldsboro, NC (ED et al., m.ob.) and at Sunset Beach, NC (MM, m.ob.). Another male was at Savannah N.W.R., SC 4–16 Feb (BL, v. ob.). Other puddle ducks were present in average numbers for the most part. Diving ducks also seemed to be in normal numbers. The only Common Eiders found were 9 on the Bodie-Pea I., NC C.B.C. 28 Dec (*fide* PS) and one at Atlantic Beach, NC 22 Feb (JF). Rare in the Region, a Harlequin Duck frequented the Avon and Rodanthe, NC piers from 27 Jan (BC) until at least 25 Feb (JL). Of interest were four different reports of White-winged Scoter and one Black Scoter inland in Georgia this winter. Inland Long-tailed Ducks included 4 at Jordan Lake, NC 7 Jan (RD), one on the Greensboro, NC C.B.C. 16 Dec (*fide* DB), one at Test Point Lake, GA 25–26 Dec (*fide* WC), and another there 28 Dec until at least 24 Feb (*fide* JH, GB et al.). Common Mergansers were widely reported this winter. The best total was the 280 at the usual Phelps Lake, NC area 26 Dec (DC). Quite rare in Georgia, Commons were reported twice, with 2 flying over Grand Bay W.M.A., *Lowndes*, GA 26 Jan (BBc) and one at L. Acworth 24 Dec until at least 14 Jan (BZ et al., BBc).

Very rare in the region, Northern Goshawk was found twice. An imm. was seen on the C. Hatt., NC C.B.C. 27 Jan (DC, WI, KA), and an adult frequented the north end of Roanoke I., NC 5–13 Jan (JL). A dark-morph Red-tailed Hawk, rarely reported in our Region, was closely observed near Crestview, *Baker*, GA 13 Jan (JS, BD, RSm). This winter Georgia had the Rough-legged Hawks. One was at Eufaula N.W.R. 15 Dec (NK et al.), one was near Colbert, *Madison* 10 Feb (PS), and astonishingly 2 were there 18 Feb (J&MP)! Two coastal Golden Eagle reports involved one on the ACE Basin, SC C.B.C. 31 Dec (*fide* PL) and one at the Yawkey Wildlife Center, SC 23 Feb (*fide* GP). Also in the ACE Basin, an ad. **Prairie Falcon** was observed 13 Jan (*fide* DBa). No evidence of captivity was seen, but the probability of it being an escapee cannot be ruled out. The only Yellow Rails reported were three at

Samworth W.M.A., *Georgetown, SC* 29 Dec (LG). Rare, especially away from the immediate coast, was the Black Rail found at the Conway, SC W.T.P. 15–16 Jan (GP, LG). The partial remains of a Purple Gallinule were found at Alligator R. N.W.R., NC in Jan (JL), providing a very rare winter record for that state. The northward migration of Sandhill Cranes moved through Georgia as usual, with the best count being 940 in one flock near the *Pike and Spaulding* line 8 Feb (JFI et al.). Elsewhere 2–3 were in the Murrell's Inlet, SC area 21–26 Jan (JWa et al., GP).

Plovers Through Alcids

Wilson's Plovers continued to winter in small numbers. The best counts included 5 at Charleston, SC 24 Dec (*vide* EB), 3 on Jekyll I., GA 12 Jan (LT), and 3 on Ossabaw I., GA 29 Jan (PS, TE). The best Piping Plover totals reported were the 20 on Shackleford Banks, *Carteret*, NC 8 Feb and 29 on the Portsmouth I CBD 29 Dec (*vide* JF). Long-billed Curlew numbers were up, with excellent totals being 4 on Sapelo I., GA 30 Dec (*vide* AW) and 6 on the McClellanville, SC C.B.C. 16 Dec (*vide* PN). Several very unusual shorebirds reported included a Solitary Sandpiper on the Long Cane, SC C.B.C. 23 Dec (SW), and an inland Sanderling on the Columbia, SC C.B.C. 17 Dec (*vide* RC). Wintering Spotted Sandpipers continued to increase in the Region, with at least 15 reports; the best counts were 22 on the St. Catherine's I., GA C.B.C. 16 Dec (*vide* EU) and 10 on the Hilton Head I., SC C.B.C. 16 Dec (JWi). The wintering Stilt Sandpiper population at the S.S.S. peaked at 131 on 16 Dec (SC) this season. And finally a total of 334 Red Phalaropes was noted on a pelagic trip out of Savannah, GA 2 Dec (GB et al.), a very good count for that state.

Great Skua was again found off North Carolina, with 3 on the Hatteras pelagic trip 18 Feb (BP et al.). Unusual inland gulls included ad. Laughings at L. Allatoona, GA 1 Jan (JFI, EH) and High Point, NC 14 Dec (HH), an ad. Lesser Black-backed at Buford L. Dam, GA 21 Jan (EH et al.), and a Great Black-backed at West Point Lake, GA 5 Jan (*vide* JH). All Little Gulls reports came from North Carolina, as usual, with the best reports being 4 off Hatteras 18 Feb (BP et al.), 3 at Atlantic Beach 22 Feb (JF), and one at Wrightsville Beach 4 Feb (SCP). The C. Hatt. area once again hosted a good diversity of gulls. Highlights this season were a Black-headed 3–4 Feb (ED, DC et al.), up to 2 Californias during the winter (m.ob.), a record one-day total of 3–4 Thayer's 17 Feb (HL et al.), an ad. Iceland 17 Feb (HL et al.), a season-long, tame Glaucous (m.ob.), a Black-



An Ash-throated Flycatcher at Quitman, Brooks County, Georgia, here photographed 18 January, provided the state's first fully documented record of the species. *Photograph by James Flynn, Jr.*

legged Kittiwake 13 Jan (R&PT), and a bewildering assortment of at least 4 different hybrid types 17 Feb (HL et al.). Sandwich Terns lingered more than usual, providing three different reports, with 2 on the Morehead City, NC C.B.C. 17 Dec (MT), 3 on the Hilton Head I., SC C.B.C. 16 Dec (*vide* JWi), and one on the St. Catherine's I., GA C.B.C. 16 Dec (*vide* EU).

In North Carolina, alcids made news this winter. Indicative of the first major flight into the Region since 1994, Razorbills were present in big numbers, with the best total being **830** on the 18 Feb Hatteras pelagic (BP et al.). Also on that trip, 24 **Atlantic Puffins** were found (BP et al.). This was the state's 4th report and easily provided a record count for this far south in the w. Atlantic. North Carolina also got its first documented **Common Murre** when one was found in the surf at C. Hatt. 2–3 Feb (JD, R&PT, m.ob.). Photos, pending acceptance by the N.C. B.R.C., should place this species on the state's official list.

Doves Through Gnatcatcher

Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to increase throughout the Region, so much so that we must now turn to the question of competition with native species. White-winged Doves are also increasing, as evidenced by at least by four different Georgia reports and two North Carolina sightings. In light of all this, the report of 43 Common Ground-Doves on the Macon, GA C.B.C. 16 Dec (*vide* TJ) was

encouraging. Nightjars made news in North Carolina, with Whips being found twice, and a Chuck-will's-widow photographed on the C Hatt. C.B.C. 27 Dec (PS et al.), providing rare documentation of a wintering bird.

The hummingbird picture in the Region continues to amaze! First, the **Green-breasted Mango** from the fall season at Concord, NC was seen until at least 4 Dec. Black-chinned Hummingbirds staged an invasion with banded or photographed (documented!) birds including 4 in North Carolina (SCb), one in South Carolina (SCb), and 3 in Georgia (SC, TJ). **Calliope Hummingbirds** invaded Georgia, with 5 being banded, thus providing documentation for that state's 3rd–7th records (*vide* BBe, TJ, *vide* RTr, FM). Georgia's third **Anna's Hummingbird** (Snellville) and third **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** (L. Acworth) continued from the fall season. Along with the usual smattering of Rufous and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, there were *seven* species reported from the Region this winter!

A **Red-shafted (Northern) Flicker** was present at the Birdsong Nature Center, *Grady*, GA 6 Jan until the end of the period (MB). This is possibly a first for Georgia, as there are only a handful of reports of this form for the entire Region. Reports of winter *Empidonax* flycatchers included a calling Least Flycatcher at Buxton, NC 29 Dec (BP), a silent *Empidonax* at Samworth W.M.A., SC 8 Dec (GP), and another silent bird at Buxton, NC 27 Dec that was



A female Anna's Hummingbird stayed at a Gwinnet County, Georgia feeder for several weeks. Georgia's third, it was captured on film 15 January. Photographed by James Flynn, Jr.

considered a probable Acadian (PS et al.)! North Carolina's 3rd **Vermilion Flycatcher** from the fall at Goldsboro was last seen 2 Dec, right before the unusually heavy early snowfall the next day. Another Vermilion returned to Carter's Pond, Lakeland, Lanier, GA 28 Jan until at least 19 Feb (BBE, MB, sev. obs.) for the 2nd year in a row. Georgia had its 2nd and 3rd reports of **Ash-throated Flycatcher**, with one on the St. Catherine's I. C.B.C. 16 Dec (*fide* AW) and another near Quitman, Brooks 8–20 Jan (DG, DK, JFI, m.ob.). The latter bird was photographed, thus providing the state's first documented record. Western Kingbirds were found in all three states, with six reports

received, four in Georgia, and one each in the other states. In the amazing department, a **Warbling Vireo** was found to be wintering on Roanoke I., NC, this year, an unprecedented occurrence. One was found 12 Dec and seen off-and-on until the spring season (JL, JF). Even more amazing, a second individual was observed briefly 18 Dec! Common Ravens appeared at a new piedmont location in North Carolina when one was in Davidson 14 Dec (JPO); they are already at nearby Winston-Salem and Greensboro. Numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches were down again this winter, with only a few scattered birds reported. Inland wintering Gnatcatchers seemed



This immature male Calliope Hummingbird in Fulton County, Georgia was one of *five* banded in that state and one of at least 19 found far north (and east!) of typical range this winter. This photograph was taken 18 December. Photograph by James Flynn, Jr.

about normal but a total of 7 found on three different C.B.C.s in the Triangle area of North Carolina was noteworthy.

Warblers Through Finches

The only Nashville Warbler reported was near Conway, SC 21 Dec (GP). Rare in winter, Northern Parulas were found at Roanoke I., NC 12–18 Dec (JL), and an impressive count of 3 was made on the C. Hatt., NC C.B.C. 27 Dec (*fide* HL). Other unusual warbler reports included a Magnolia at Savannah N.W.R., SC 20 Jan (MC et al.), a Cape May at Howell Woods, Johnston, NC 28 Feb (JSa), 4 different Black-throated Blues (Durham and Hillsborough, NC, Charleston and Hilton Head I., SC), an American Redstart in Charleston, SC 6 Feb (DF et al.), and a Northern Waterthrush at the S.S.S. 4 Jan (SC) Yellow-throated Warblers were reported seven times, Black-and-whites 16 times, Ovenbird three times, and Yellow-breasted Chat seven times, all indicating a better-than-average year for these lingerers. And finally, Wilson's Warbler staged probably its most impressive winter season ever in the Region. There were no fewer than 6 different birds found in Georgia, and the other states produced 2 each. The best count was of 2 found at Savannah N.W.R., SC 4 Dec (GB, LG et al.). Very rare and unusual in winter, Summer Tanagers were found at N. Myrtle Beach, SC 5–21 Jan (CS, RM) and on St. Catherine's I., GA in mid-Dec (*fide* EU). Western Tanagers were found more than usual this season with 3 each in Georgia and North Carolina.

Clay-colored Sparrow reports were about normal, with the best being at least 5 different birds in Baker, GA during Jan (EH, MB, JFI, RTr, WC). Lark Sparrows included singles in Carteret, NC 20 Jan (JF, JFe), Edgecombe, NC 11 Feb (RD), and on the Albany, GA C.B.C. 30 Dec (*fide* TM). Once again *Ammodramus* sparrows were found at many sites throughout the Region. The best counts received included up to 11 different Grasshopper Sparrows at Alligator R. N.W.R., NC 8–9 Feb (JL), up to 7 Henslow's Sparrows on the Savannah River Site, SC 6–8 Jan (PC), and 19 Le Conte's Sparrows at the S.S.S. 16 Dec & 4 Jan (SC). Also of note were the two Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows found at Augusta, GA 9 Dec (AW et al.), a very rare inland winter occurrence. Lincoln's Sparrows were found in average numbers with the best count being 6 birds at Alligator R. N.W.R., NC 16–17 Jan (JL). Always noteworthy in the Region, an Oregon Junco was at a feeder in Lexington, SC 4 & 11 Feb (MBo, AC). Georgia had three Lapland Longspur reports, including 7–8 near the

Florida



Elbert airport 5 Dec (BDu), 3 at Andrews I., Brunswick 3–5 Dec (BW, sev. obs.), and 2 at E.L.H. 10–12 Dec (EBe, GB et al., AS). Very rare in winter, a Blue Grosbeak was found on the Litchfield-Pawleys I., SC C.B.C. 28 Dec (CH, *fide* JPe). A good winter bunting was the Indigo found on the Macon, GA, C.B.C. 16 Dec (*fide* JA). Dickcissel reports included one at Buxton, NC 27 Dec until at least 14 Jan (PS et al., PM) and one at Conway, SC 18 Jan (GP). Georgia had a lock on Yellow-headed Blackbirds, with 2 in *Baker* 18 Feb (BDu) and up to 3 in *Seminole* 27 Dec–11 Feb (EH, PS, BB, MB et al.). Excellent totals for Brewer's Blackbird were had this year, with up to 150 in *Baker*, GA 13 Jan (JFl, EH, sev. obs.), 200 near Bowman, *Orangeburg*, SC 9 Dec (LG), and nine in *Carteret*, NC 16 & 26 Jan (JF, JFe, sev. obs.). Only one Red Crossbill was found this winter, a male at a feeder in Chapel Hill, NC 31 Jan (DS). And finally, the 6 Evening Grosbeaks reported on the Jordan Lake, NC C.B.C. 31 Dec (*fide* NB) were certainly out of place, since the species was practically absent from the Region the entire winter.

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This season was not as warm as other recent winters. In Orlando, there were seven nights of freezing temperatures or below, and for at least one night, frost warnings extended the entire length of the peninsula. The cold damaged much of the exotic flora in the northern and central regions of the state, but birds remained plentiful in most areas. The Florida peninsula experienced drought, with central Florida recording a 19" rainfall deficit by the end of the period. The falling water levels did not attract the large numbers of wading and water bird species that they did last winter. The abundance of wintering Wilson's Warblers that seemingly "plagued" much of the Southeast included Florida, where unprecedented numbers were reported throughout the state. If accepted by the F.O.S.R.C., three species will be new for Florida's list of verifiable species: Red-necked Grebe (Central Southern Region), Zone-tailed Hawk, and Bullock's Oriole.

Abbreviations: E.N.P. (Everglades National Park), F.O.S.R.C. (Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee), L.A.R.A. (Lake Apopka Restoration Area, *Orange*), P.P.M. (*Polk Phosphate Mines*).

Loons Through Waterfowl

A Pacific Loon was seen off St. George I., *Franklin* 10 Jan (AWK). Red-throated Loons appeared along the Florida coasts in unprecedented numbers, with 4 reported as far south as Canaveral National Seashore, *Volusia* 4 Feb (JP). On the Gulf coast, 12 Red-throateds were at Alligator Point, *Franklin* 14 Feb (DS), and 3 at St. Marks N.W.R., *Wakulla* 23 Feb (PBl) One high report was the 282 seen in 30 min off Talbot Is. S.P., *Duval* 19 Jan (RCI)—a spot always good for this species, but never in this number. Lake Weir, *Marion* hosted 94 Common Loons 17 Jan (ES). At *Polk Phosphate Mines*, 22 Eared Grebes were found 25 Feb (PT, CG), and another was reported at St. Marks N.W.R., 11 & 14 Feb (KA, DS). An *Aechmophorus* sp. at Sanibel I., *Lee* 12–18 Jan, Florida's 3rd to be documented, was considered a Western Grebe by most who saw the bird (Jim Williams, Walt Winton, ph. LA, ph

