

The weather this winter was considerably wetter and somewhat colder than last year. There was at least one big ice/snow event in each of the three months, with the storm in eastern North Carolina 23 January 2003 causing some mortality, especially in wintering hummingbirds. With the increased rainfall, last year's drought conditions are but a memory in much of the Region. This winter produced some very good birds, such as Georgia's first documented Pacific Loon, a Region-first Slaty-backed Gull in North Carolina, South Carolina's first Lesser Nighthawk, and Georgia's first documented Sage Thrasher.

Abbreviations: B.R.C. (Bird Records Committee); C. Hatt. (Cape Hatteras, Dare, NC); E.L.H. (E. L. Huie Land Application Facility, Clayton, GA); H.B.S.P. (Huntington Beach State Park, SC); Hoop. (Hooper Lane, Henderson, NC); L. Matt. (L. Mattamuskeet, NC); P.I. (Pea I. N.W.R., Dare, NC); S.S.S. (Savannah Spoil Site, Jasper, SC).

LOONS THROUGH WATERFOWL

Inland Red-throated Loons were found in several areas this winter, with the best count being of 3 at L. Juliette, Monroe, GA 1 Dec (TJ). Georgia had its first well-documented Pacific Loon at Plant Wansley, Carroll 19 Dec—mid-Feb (MB; m. ob.). With several previous sight reports for the state, photographs should place the species on the state's official list. The Figure Eight I., NC area again hosted the species, with a peak of 3-4 there 26 Dec (DC). Red-necked Grebes were reported sparingly, mostly in North Carolina, until late in the season, when an obvious influx occurred. The most southerly birds included one on St. Catherine's I., GA 23 Jan (PS, MF) and 2 at Isle of Palms, SC 27 Jan (DFA). In North Carolina, a Western Grebe was located on L. Julian, Buncombe 14-15 Dec (TL, LU; v. o.). Although there are several records for that state, this bird was the first for the mountains.

Seabird news included North Carolina's 3rd winter report of Sooty Shearwater, seen from shore near Nags Head 22 Feb (ED et al.) and Georgia's 10th report of Manx Shearwater, with a good count of 6 off Savannah 21 Feb (GB et al.). Manx Shearwaters were also seen from shore along North Carolina's Outer Banks, with at least four different Feb sightings. American White Pelicans included 24 at L. Matt. 28 Dec (WI) and over 100 in the ACE Basin area of South Carolina (v. o.). Very rare in winter, a Least Bittern was a good find at Savannah N.W.R., SC 18 Jan (SB). Only one Reddish Egret was reported this winter, that being on the Glynn, GA C.B.C. 4 Jan (fide JFI). Green Herons had a notable wintering presence early in the season, with over 20

Southern Atlantic



reports received being received! The best counts included 7 on the Hilton Head I., SC C.B.C. 14 Dec (fide NL) and 6 on the Sun City-Okatie, SC C.B.C. 15 Dec (fide HC). One inland at Jordan L., NC 29 Dec (fide NB) was exceptional.

Greater White-fronted Geese were well reported, with the best counts being 16 at Eufaula N.W.R. GA 26 Jan (GK), 12-16 at Townville, SC from early Jan to late Feb (fide SP, JC et al.), and 14 in Sumter, GA 19 Jan (BD et al.). There was also the usual scattering of Ross's Geese, with the most unusual being 2 at Hoop. 24-25 Jan (WF, RS) and one in Floyd, GA 27 Jan—15 Feb (fide JFI; v. o.). Puddle ducks were uneventful, and only one Eurasian Wigeon was found, that being at L. Matt. 17 Jan (JR et al.). Diving ducks were present in good numbers, highlighted by the excellent count of 179 Greater Scaup on the Southport, NC C.B.C. 5 Jan (DC). Eider reports included up to 2 imm. Kings at Ft. Fisher, NC in early Dec (BS, AWE, v. o.), 5 Commons at Ft. Fisher 5 Jan (RD), and four different sightings of commons on the Outer Banks Jan—Feb (v. o.). A few Harlequin Ducks were found this winter, with 2 females noted at Oregon Inlet, NC 20 Jan (DS et al.). Some noteworthy inland waterfowl included up to 2 White-winged Scoters at Carters L., GA 6 Dec—22 Feb (JG), 2 White-wingeds at L. Crabtree, Wake, NC 25

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Jan—2 Feb (SS, m. ob.), and 4 Long-tailed Ducks at Plant Wansley, GA 27 Jan—8 Feb (fide TM).

HAWKS THROUGH ALCIDS

Rarely observed in our Region, a dark-morph Red-tailed Hawk was well seen near Charlotte, NC 13 Feb (TP). Rough-legged Hawks included singles at Alligator River N.W.R., NC Dec—Jan (v. o.), Max Patch, Haywood, NC 31 Dec—7 Jan (J&WM, BO), Fountain Inn, Greenville, SC 24 Jan (PW), and in Floyd, GA 24 Jan and 9 Feb (DR). Always noteworthy, Golden Eagle reports involved singles at Okfenokee, GA 27 Dec (EH et al.), L. Matt. 17 Jan (KD), near New Bern, NC 18 Jan (KW), near Sparta, NC 23 Jan (HB), and near Charleston, SC 30 Jan (CW). Merlins were reported widely inland this winter, more so than usual. The rarely-seen Yellow Rail was found twice, with one near Permuda I., Onslow, NC 28 Dec (NM)

SA Alcids staged a rather impressive invasion this winter. Razorbills started showing up in North Carolina in mid-Dec and spread to Georgia by February, with 36 off Savannah 21 Feb, the 5th state record (G. Beaton et al.). The largest total reported was of 200 from P.I. 12 Feb (R&PT). Dovekies, normally rare in our Region, started appearing in numbers in February in North Carolina. The best count was of 8 offshore out of Hatteras 15 Feb (BP et al.). The best onshore sightings were of 3 at Rodanthe 6 Feb (JL) and P.I. 8 Feb (NB), but there were many singles seen at other points on the Outer Banks. In South Carolina, where decidedly rarer, a **Dovekie** seen flying into Charleston Harbor 26 Feb (DFA) was the first report for that state in decades. North Carolina's second **Black Guillemot** was described well when seen in the surf at Kill Devil Hills 15 Feb (SBa) but not thereafter. Another second for North Carolina was the **Long-billed Murrelet** found in the surf at Ft. Macon, Atlantic Beach 15 Dec (ED, SF, TW). This bird was well described but also was not relocated after its initial discovery, frustrating many who searched for it later. Inasmuch as an ocean-side Long-billed Murrelet was also noted among the hordes of alcids passing Massachusetts this season, one wonders how many Dovekies are critically identified as such, rather than as "small alcid sp.," when too distant to distinguish aspects of plumage.

and one near L. Matt. 4 Jan (*vide* KD). Also rare in winter, a Purple Gallinule was a good find on Skidaway I., GA 1-2 Jan (RW). Sandhill Cranes migrated through Georgia in higher numbers than usual, with the best one-day count being an impressive 3200 in e. Cobb 13 Dec (BD). They also were found farther e. than usual, with the best total being of 100 near Weaverville, *Buncombe*, NC 16 Feb (NC). This flock easily provided a record count for the Carolinas!

Some noteworthy counts of wintering shorebirds included 19 Wilson's Plovers on the St. Catherine's I., GA C.B.C. 14 Dec (*vide* EU), 18 Piping Plovers on the Morehead City, NC C.B.C. 15 Dec (*vide* JF), 918 American Oystercatchers on the Charleston, SC C.B.C. 5 Jan (*vide* BCh), and 75 American Avocets at L. Matt. 7 Dec (RD). Long-billed Curlews were found mostly in Georgia, at four different sites; and in South Carolina, 2 were on the McClellanville C.B.C. 14 Dec (*vide* PN). Rare inland were one to 2 Marbled Godwits at L. Matt. during Dec (RD) and 3 Western Sandpipers on the Augusta, GA C.B.C. 21 Dec (*vide* AW). A Pectoral Sandpiper at Sullivans I., SC 16 Feb (DFA) was a record-early spring migrant. The count of 937 Red Phalaropes off Savannah, GA 21 Feb (GB et al.) was most impressive. By comparison, only 3 were found off Hatteras, NC 15 Feb (BP et al.), though many were noted later in Mar, both offshore and on.

Great Skua was again found off North Carolina, with 3 seen on the 15 Feb trip out of Hatteras (BP et al.). Always noteworthy, one Franklin's Gull was found, that being an imm. at West Point L., GA 11 Dec (WC). Little Gull reports were down, with only 3 from North Carolina. Only one Black-headed Gull was found, that being at L. Matt. 9 Jan (KD). This winter's California Gulls included ads. at C. Hatt. 17 Feb (JP et al.) and Oregon Inlet, NC 23 Feb (SR et al.). Thayer's Gull reports involved one on the Glynn, GA C.B.C. 4 Jan (*vide* MC) and up to 3 at C. Hatt. 16 Feb (DC, RD, JP). Also at C.

Hatt., an ad. **Slaty-backed Gull** was found 16 Feb (DC, RD, JP). Observed at close range, sitting and in flight, the bird was seen briefly before it flew out over the ocean out of sight. No photographs were taken, and the report is under review by the N.C.B.R.C. Only one Glaucous Gull was reported, that being at Sullivans I., SC 26 Feb (DFA).

DOVES THROUGH WAXWINGS

As Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to increase, Common Ground-Doves continue to be harder to find, a decades-long decline in the case of the latter. Thus encouraging was the report of 40 **Common Ground-Doves** in Sumter, GA 19 Jan (BD et al.). Unusual was a **Long-eared Owl** found injured in Raleigh, NC 8 Jan (*vide* WCo) and taken to a rehabilitation center. A few Northern

Saw-whet Owls were found, including 2 on the C. Hatt. C.B.C. 30 Dec (JF et al., RD) and 3 on Ocracoke I., NC 7-8 Feb (*vide* TP). South Carolina's first and the Region's 2nd **Lesser Nighthawk** was found at Mt. Pleasant 1-2 Jan (DCh, *vide* DF). The bird was seen by Forsythe and a few others as late as 6-7 Jan.

Wintering hummingbirds continued to make news in the Region. Ruby-throateds were more common along the immediate coast than usual, and there were once again too many Rufous Hummingbirds to mention. There were at least 9 Black-chinneds and 10 Calliopes reported! Georgia had its 9th **Allen's Hummingbird**, this time at

Athens 20 Jan (RTr). North Carolina got its 10th species of hummingbird when an imm. male **Allen's Hummingbird** was at a feeder in Manteo 19 Jan and remained on into spring. The bird's identity, however, was not confirmed until it was photographed and banded 11 Mar (SC). There were 3 **Vermilion Flycatchers** in sw. Georgia this winter, with males at Albany 28 Dec (PJ et al.), near Americus 4 Jan (PH), and in *Baker* 5 Jan (JFl, EH). Western Kingbirds made a nice showing in all three states, in each case at or near the coast. A **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** near Kennesaw Mt., GA on the Marietta C.B.C. 22 Dec (KT et al.) provided only the 4th winter report for that state.

Yellow-throated Vireos are extremely rare anywhere in the Region during winter; thus of interest were 2 reported in Georgia, singles at Harris Neck N.W.R. 21 Dec (LC) and Eufaula N.W.R. 26 Jan (GK). The late-Nov invasion of **Cave Swallows** peaked in early Dec. Several in Georgia, including one netted and photographed at Wassaw I. 15 Dec (SCa, PR), provided first documented records for that state. The peak total reported was an amazing 40 at Sunset Beach, NC 2 Dec (RL), and the latest date of occurrence was 19 Jan, when singles

were at H.B.S.P. (PW) and Savannah N.W.R., SC (RC, CE). Georgia had its first well-documented **Sage Thrasher** at the Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center, Newton 19-20 Dec (ph. TK, DV, v. o.). There was one previous sight report for that state, from 1934! Also, a **Sprague's Pipit** was seen and heard briefly but well in Floyd, GA



Though regular in small numbers each year in coastal North Carolina, **Pacific Loon** is rare farther south. This one at Plant Wansley, Georgia provided a first documented state record. Photograph by Dan Vickers.

6 Feb (GB, MD) for about the 9th report for that state. In what must be a record count for the Region, more than 12,000 American Pipits were tallied in one hour as they flew by Ft. Moultrie, SC 23 Jan (ND) during a coastal snow storm. Cedar Waxwings were also found at many coastal sites in amazing numbers. The peak count was of over 5000 along North Carolina's Outer Banks 14-18 Feb (JP, v. o.).

WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

Reports of wintering or lingering warblers were up this season. One of the rarest was the **Tennessee Warbler** in a yard in Marietta,

GA 3 Dec—1 Jan (B&DZ), which provided about the 5th winter record for that state. There were at least six reports of Nashville Warbler, with the best count being of 2 at Ravenel, SC 11 Jan (PN et al.). Northern Parulas also made a nice showing, with at least seven reports, including 2 on the L. Matt. Causeway 28 Dec (JL). Also rare were a Yellow on Skidaway I., GA mid-Feb+ (RW), single Cape Mays at L. Matt. 28 Dec (JL) and Wake Forest, NC early Jan—mid-Feb (*vide* JCo), a Black-throated Blue at L. Matt. 7 Dec—18 Jan (RD, JL, v. o.), a Black-throated Green at Beaufort, NC 19 Jan (TP et al.), and an American Redstart on the Savannah, GA C.B.C. 5 Jan (*vide* SCa). A great find was the Black-throated Gray Warbler seen at L. Norman, NC 5 Jan (TL), providing about the 5th report for that state. The always-noteworthy Audubon's Warbler was seen well at Frisco, NC 19 Jan (BPe), one of only a handful of reports of this w. form the last several years. Northern Waterthrush is almost annual in the Region winter, and the peak count this year was of 3 at the S.S.S. 19 Feb (SCa). There were three Wilson's Warbler reports, about normal; but the seven Yellow-breasted Chat reports were more than normal. Western Tanagers staged a minor invasion, with single birds in Cobb, GA 10 Dec—8 Feb (*vide* JS), the ACE Basin, SC C.B.C. 29 Dec (*vide* PL), the C. Hatt. C.B.C. 30 Dec (RD), at a Summerville, SC feeder 28 Jan—20 Feb (SH, m. ob.), and up to 2 in Morehead City, NC 26 Dec+ (JF).

Sparrow highlights included a Clay-colored on the Morehead City, NC C.B.C. 15 Dec (J&PW), 2 Lark Sparrows on the Wayne, NC C.B.C. 14 Dec (R&PT, RD), and a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow near Hoop. 15 Feb+ (MW, WF, BO). This species is practically unheard of inland during winter. The

best Lapland Longspur report included an impressive flock of 28 at Hoop. 6 Feb (WF, RS), a record-high mountain count. The only Snow Bunting report was of 6 along the Blue Ridge Parkway in Watauga, NC 6 Jan (*vide* WCn). Always noteworthy in winter, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were found in Georgia, with the most interesting report being 3 (one was photographed) on Skidaway I. late Dec—early Jan (RW). In North Carolina, a first-winter male Black-headed Grosbeak was at a feeder in Elizabeth City 8 Feb+ (SRe, m. ob.), providing about the



A Black-headed Grosbeak attending an Elizabeth City, North Carolina feeder 8 February 2003 (here 14 February) through season's end provided the state's tenth record. Photograph by Will Cook.

10th for that state. Rare-in-winter Indigo Buntings included 2 on the Long Cane, SC C.B.C. 21 Dec (SW et al., LG et al.) and one in Randolph, NC 23-29 Dec (JLe). Yellow-headed Blackbirds were found three times, with a female at Pee Dee N.W.R., NC 4 Jan (LF), a male in Monroe, GA 28 Dec (EB), and an imm. at Eufaula N.W.R., GA 12 Jan (WC). Brewer's Blackbird reports were highlighted by some excellent numbers such as 233 in Sumter, GA 19 Jan (BD et al.), 29 on the Clemson, SC C.B.C. 14 Dec (*vide* DL), and 20+ at Pungo, NC 22 Dec (R&SBo). Baltimore Orioles were reported more frequently than usual, with the best counts being 12 on the L. Matt. causeway 28 Dec (JL) and over a dozen at several feeders in the coastal plain of North Carolina. The only Red Crossbill report of note involved 10 at Pine Log W.M.A., GA 2 Feb (B&DZ). Winter finches were relatively scarce once again, with a scattering of Purple Finches, many fewer Pine Siskins, and almost no Evening Grosbeaks. The report of 12 Evening Grosbeaks on the Jordan L., NC C.B.C. was almost unbelievable, as the species has virtually vanished from most parts of the Region in recent years.

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An alcid often numerous off North Carolina's coasts but quite rare farther south, this Razorbill off Savannah, Georgia 21 February 2003 was one of 36 that day, only the state's fifth record! Photograph by Giff Beaton.



A long-distance migrant once unthinkable as a winter lingerer, this Tennessee Warbler at Marietta, Georgia afforded the fifth winter record for the state 3 December 2002 (here 8 December) to 1 January 2003. Photograph by Giff Beaton.

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