

Southern Atlantic

Temperatures were generally average this spring, although somewhat on the cool side. Precipitation was another story, however, with rainfall being above average, especially in April and May, a product of the alignment of the jet stream with the Eastern Seaboard. The resulting cool, wet weather had obvious impacts not only on the observed migration but also on early nesting birds. Most observers, those especially along the immediate coast, considered this to be one of the poorest migrations in years. Nevertheless, highlights this spring included the Region's first Clark's Grebe, some excellent pelagic trips, and a continuation of the winter acid invasion.

Abbreviations: B.R.C. (Bird Records Committee); 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); Hoop. (Hooper Lane, Henderson, NC); K. Mt. (Kennesaw Mt. National Battlefield Park, GA); P.I. (Pea I. N.W.R., NC); S.S.S. (Savannah Spoil Site, Jasper, SC).

LOONS THROUGH WATERFOWL

Noteworthy inland Red-throated Loons included 2 on a lake in s. Durham, NC 13 May (JSu) and one on L. Keowee, Pickens, SC 26 Apr (SP et al.). The wintering Pacific Loons at Figure Eight I., NC were last seen 29–30 Mar (DC, ML). Also of note was a possible record-high count for the North Carolina mountains of 144 Common Loons on L. Julian, Buncombe 11 Apr (WF).

The late-winter influx of Red-necked Grebes continued this spring. Most birds were along the North Carolina coast, as expected, but the farthest s. was at Port Royal, Beaufort, SC 9 Mar (RC, CE). The farthest inland involved 2 on L. Hickory, Catawba, NC 7 Mar (DM). A Regional first was provided by the Clark's Grebe first found in the surf just n. of C. Hatt. 15 Mar (RD, DC, HL, WI, BC) and again to the sw. near Hatteras, NC 19 Mar (R&P, JL). Video footage should make this the 2nd documented Clark's for the East Coast after one (probably the same individual) was photographed at Ft. Story, VA 31 Dec 2002 and 1 Jan 2003. It is typical for piscivorous birds (Northern Gannets, Double-crested Cormorants, gulls, Red-breasted Mergansers, etc.) that gather in the mouth of Chesapeake Bay in November and December to move southward with the Labrador Current to winter around the Outer Banks and associated sounds, where assemblages may number in the hundreds of thousands. In this context, the grebe's late-winter appearance here makes sense.

Seabirds in North Carolina made news this spring. The gadfly petrels put on a show, with a total of 5 Herald Petrels on three trips,



single Fea's Petrels on four trips, and a Bermuda Petrel on one excursion, 24 May out of Manteo (BP, MT et al.). That 24 May trip had all four of the documented western North Atlantic *Pterodroma* Shearwater and storm-petrel numbers were generally considered to be average, but their arrivals were earlier than average, and species diversity on most trips was high, owing to the sustained easterly winds.

Tropicbirds were much in evidence this spring. Unexpected inshore and rather early was an ad. White-tailed in the bight at C. Lookout 22 Mar (R&S, BT et al.); more expected was the imm. off Hatteras 24 May (BP et al.). The greatest invasion of Red-billed Tropicbirds on record off North Carolina commenced with singles off Manteo 24 May (MT et al.) and Hatteras 25 May (BP et al.), and 2 off Manteo 27 May (BP et al.)! Many more of the "barred" tropicbirds were reported by fishing boats all spring and through the early summer, and additional reports of this species will follow in the summer report. The rare Brown Booby was reported once, an imm. found sick on the beach at Ocracoke, NC 11 May (EHa). Northern Gannets migrated in strong numbers much later than usual, with 595 off Manteo (BP et al.) and 800+ from shore along the Outer Banks (PS), both 23 May.

Inland American White Pelicans were

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found more often than usual, with one at West Point L., GA 28 Mar–12 Apr (EW, JG), 3 at Carter's L., GA 14 Apr (RWa), 3 over L. Murray, SC 12 Apr (MTu), one at L. Junaluska, NC 17–24 May (PSu, BO, v. o.), and 10 over L. Hickory, NC 14 May (DM et al.). The only inland Brown Pelican reported was at L. Oconee, Greene, GA 27 Apr (MF). This spring's Magnificent Frigatebirds included an ad. female heading n. at Myrtle Beach, SC 15 Mar (RL) and a very unexpected inland subad. male seen along I-75 near L. Allatoona, Bartow, GA 12 Apr (JG). There were no obvious storms preceding this inland sighting! Long-legged waders were found sparingly at inland sites this spring. Along the coast, nesting was hampered somewhat by the cool, wet weather. Locally rare was the Roseate Spoonbill found at H.B.S.P. 22–23 Apr (SR, RL). Inland Wood Storks were good finds along the Waccamaw R., Columbus, NC 10 May (HL) and near

SA The most noteworthy of all offshore records this year was one that almost "got away"—an apparent **European Storm-Petrel** (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) photographed by Patteson while photographing Band-rumped Storm-

Petrels on 27 May off Oregon Inlet. The bird was apparently noticed by one observer on board that day, but it was not seen by other birders or guides on board—and was "formally" discovered only when Patteson noticed it in his downloaded digital images from that day. By looking at the time stamp on the image (1:45 p.m.), Patteson was able to pinpoint its location at sea to 78.5 km se. of Oregon Inlet, *Dare*. This report, pending acceptance by the North Carolina B.R.C., would provide the second documented occurrence for the North Atlantic; the first was a bird captured at Sable I., NS 10 Aug 1970.



The very definition of a "lucky shot," this European Storm-Petrel was snapped while the photographer was working on Band-rumped Storm-Petrels following the *Country Girl* off Oregon Inlet, Dare County, North Carolina 27 May 2003. Digital photograph by J. Brian Patteson.

Smithfield, NC 9 May (CS, BPg).

Rare were 8 Fulvous Whistling-Ducks at H.B.S.P. 30 Apr–3 May (P&STu, RL, v. o.). Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were found at several sites, including one at the S.S.S. 10–11 May (SC), 23 at Tifton, GA 23 May (*fide* TM), and 5 at Andrews I., GA 31 May (BZ et al.). These, viewed in context with several sightings from other regions to our n. as far as Québec, would seem to suggest naturally-occurring wandering birds, probably from the Florida population. Somewhat late were the Greater White-fronted Goose seen near Eufaula N.W.R., GA 27 Apr (WC) and the Ross's Goose in Floyd, GA 24 Apr (MD). The presence of several juv. Blue-winged Teal at Harris Neck N.W.R., GA 30 May indicated breeding, a rare event in that state (DCo). Also noteworthy was the Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal at C. Hatt. 15 Mar (BC et al.). Lingering waterfowl of note included 20 Ring-necked Ducks at Roanoke Rapids L., NC 25 May (RD), a Greater Scaup at the S.S.S. 25 May (SC), a Long-tailed Duck at Murrell's Inlet, SC 28 Apr (RL), and a Common Merganser at Chapel Hill, NC 4 May (*fide* WCo). Noteworthy inland reports included 8 Surf Scoters at Carter's L., GA 13 Apr (JG) and a male Common Merganser flying over Valdosta, GA 18 Apr (BB).

HAWKS THROUGH ALCIDS

The first returning Swallow-tailed Kite was in Camden, GA 4 Mar (*fide* EW), and locally rare inland for North Carolina were 2 at Howell Woods, Johnston 3 May (JR et al.). The presence of up to 4 in one area along the Cape Fear R. near Riegel-

wood, Columbus, NC during all of May was interesting (*fide* SCo), as there are no confirmed nesting records for that state. Mississippi Kite reports were highlighted by one in Laurens, GA 27 Mar, providing a new early spring-arrival date by about two weeks (GB, TP). An imm. Swainson's Hawk at Alligator River N.W.R., NC 23–28 Mar (MT, v. o.) was a good find. This bird, about the 7th reported in North Carolina, was the first to be observed for more than one day and by multiple observers. Always noteworthy in our Region, Golden Eagles included one imm. at Congaree Bluffs, SC 9 Mar (MTu), an ad. at Griffin, Spalding, GA 18–19 Mar (EB), and 3 (2 ads., one imm.) over Bakers Mt. Park, sw. Catawba, NC 10 May (DM et al.). Inland Merlin reports were about average, with the peak count being just 2 in n. Greene, GA 9 Mar (PS).



Hudsonian Godwits are very rare spring transients in the Southern Atlantic Region, with very little photographic documentation for the Carolinas. This individual was at the Savannah Spoil Site, Jasper County, South Carolina 19 to 20 (here) May 2003. Photograph by Steve Calver.

A rare inland sighting of Black Rail came from Happy Valley, NC 22 Apr (DM). This species has been found increasingly infrequently away from the usual coastal localities. Two Common Moorhens and an American Coot were an unusual sight in flooded farm fields in Tyrell, NC 20 May (CB, ESB et al.). A Limpkin was found dead on US-17 at Green Pond, SC 11 May (DCh), representing the first specimen (*Charleston Museum) for that state since 1904. Noteworthy Sandhill Crane reports involved 4 over Hoop. 14 Mar (WF), one near Brevard, NC 10 May (BMc), and one at Blackbeard I., GA 17 May (PS et al.). Of interest was the Whooping Crane seen in Wilkes, NC in mid-Apr (*fide* HL). There are no historical documented records of this species in the state, and this bird was obviously from the Wisconsin/Florida migratory reintroduction program.

Very high water levels affected the observed shorebird migration, especially inland. Some peak counts included 30+ Black-bellied Plovers at the Bucksport, SC Sod Farm 15 Mar (GP), 7 American Golden-Plovers in Bartow, GA 30 Mar (BD et al.), 14 Willets in Murray, GA (JSp), 325 Pectoral Sandpipers in Bartow, GA 23 Mar (BD et al.), and up to 6 Dunlin at Hoop. 7–8 Apr (WF, RS). Two Black-necked Stilts on Little St. Simons I., GA 7–8 Mar (BN) provided a new early-arrival date for that state by more than a week. The Upland Sandpiper migration this spring was about average, with the best counts being 8 at the E. Georgia Sod Farm, Bulloch 18 Apr (TK) and 5 at the Cherry Hospital fields, Wayne, NC 19 Apr (ED et al.). Long-billed Curlew reports involved singles at Sapelo I., GA 11 Mar (DCo), Jekyll I., GA 19 Apr (BBr et al.), and Pawley's I., SC 1 May (JP). Hudsonian Godwit is a very rare spring transient in the Region, thus noteworthy were singles at P.I. 15 May (H&NM) and at the S.S.S. 19–20 May (PS, SC). Unusual for the mountains was the report of up to 20 Ruddy Turnstones at L. Osceola, Hendersonville, NC during mid-May (*fide* RS, WF). Definite counts of turnstones included 6 there on 20 May (RS, v. o.) and 9 at Hoop. 22 May (DS). A Baird's Sandpiper in Bartow, GA 27 Apr (BD et al.) was a good find for that rare spring transient. Onshore Red-necked Phalaropes included one at P.I. 19 May (ESB et al.) and a peak of 7 at the S.S.S. 19 May (PS). The Red Phalarope is much rarer onshore than the previous species, especially in spring. Two were quite unexpected inland in n. North Carolina, where single basic-plumaged birds were found 19 Apr on



The fallout in May 2003 of phalaropes in the mid-Atlantic states included this alternate-plumaged Red Phalarope at Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, Dare County, North Carolina on 18 May. The plumage is very rarely seen in the Carolinas. Digital photograph by Chris Benesh.

Roanoke Rapids L. and nearby L. Gaston (RD). An oiled, alternate-plumaged female was seen at P.I. 19 May (MAL, ph. CB, ESB, BP et al.). Individuals in this plumage are almost never seen in the Region.

Only one South Polar Skua was reported, off Manteo, NC 23 May (BP et al.). Jaegers, however, were more obvious. Highlights included 30+ Pomarines off Hatteras, NC 18 Apr (BP), 9 Pomarines off Murrell's Inlet, SC 21 Apr (JP), a Parasitic at H.B.S.P. 14 Mar (MTu), single Long-taileds off Hatteras 25 May and Manteo 30 May (BP et al.), and a Long-tailed flying over Cape Point, Buxton 26 May (HL, DC), the latter a classic location and date.

Gull reports were somewhat lackluster this spring. The best involved 3 Laughing Gulls inland at L. Crabtree, Wake, NC (J&KB), up to 4 Little Gulls at Atlantic Beach, NC 13 Mar (JF), and a first-winter Black-headed Gull at C. Lookout, NC 13–21 Apr (JF et al., R&SB, WFu). Noteworthy inland tern reports included 58 Caspians, 3 Commons, and 51 Forster's between Roanoke Rapids L. and L. Gaston, NC 19 Apr (RD), 7 Forster's at L. Julian, NC 18 Apr (ST), and one Black at Phinizy Swamp, Augusta, GA 23 May (fide TM). Very rarely noted on pelagic trips off North Carolina, Roseate Terns were a surprise this spring. Singles were off Hatteras 24 & 25 May (BP et al.), and 2 were off Manteo 25 May (MT et al.). Arctic Terns had a better showing offshore this spring than in the past several years. They were seen off both Manteo and Hatteras, with the peak count being 12 off Hatteras 24 May (BP et al.). Pelagic tern numbers were also way up this spring. The peak Bridled Tern count was 83 off Manteo 24 May (MT et al.), and the peak Sooty Tern count was 56 off Hatteras, also 24 May (BP et al.). Four Sooty Terns were good finds off Savannah, GA 30 May (RW et al.).

Alcids continued their invasion that had begun during the winter season. In North Carolina, Dovekie sightings included singles at Ft. Macon 9 Mar (JF, BH, JFe) and 13 Mar (KVH), n. of Cape Point 15 Mar (DC, HL, RD, BC, WI), and at Wrightsville Beach 29 Mar (SCo) and 3 Apr (J&KB). There were at least 2 Thick-billed Murres found, with one photographed at Ft. Macon 11–16 Mar (SPi, JR, m. ob.) and one at Wrightsville Beach 29 Mar (SCo) and 5 Apr (M&LS). There were at least 25 reports received of Razorbill! The highest counts were of 100+ from P.I. 26 Mar (JL) and 70 in the Atlantic Beach area 9 Mar (JF et al.). Farther

s., good counts included 36 at Figure Eight I. 29–30 Mar (DC, ML) and 12 at H.B.S.P. 12 Apr (fide TPI). The latest reports were of 3 at Wrightsville Beach 14 Apr (DK) and a weak bird (taken to a shelter) at Atlantic Beach 21 Apr (fide JF).

CUCKOOS THROUGH WAXWINGS

Black-billed Cuckoo reports were about average, with most reports coming from the mountains or immediate coast, the normal pattern for this species. The Long-eared Owl captured in Raleigh, NC during the winter season was subsequently rehabilitated at the Carolina Raptor Center and then released back in Raleigh 5 Mar (BOL). If the estimate was relatively accurate, the 4000+ Chimney Swifts seen at the Vienna School, Winston-Salem, NC 14 May (fide RSn) must have been a truly amazing

sight. Large concentrations of this species are more normal during the fall migration. An ad. male Ruby-throated Hummingbird, presumed to be a returning migrant, was very early at N. Myrtle Beach, SC 6 Mar (GP). Black-chinned Hummingbird reports included an ad. male at a feeder in Manteo, NC 27–28 Mar (JL), an imm. male at a feeder in Morehead City, NC for two weeks in Mar (fide JF), and the wintering ad. male at Sunset Beach, NC, last seen 4 Mar (MM). The imm. male Allen's Hummingbird present at Manteo, NC during the winter season was last observed 29 Mar (EK).

Georgia had the only Olive-sided Flycatchers, with singles at K. Mt. 4 May (BZ) and South Peachtree Creek Nature Pres., DeKalb 26 May (A&LH). An Eastern Wood-pewee at the E.L.H. 22 Mar (JS, CL) missed the record early-arrival date for that state by just two days. Noteworthy *Empidonax*



Vermilion Flycatchers are extremely rare in the Southern Atlantic Region in spring, and this female at the Savannah Spoil Site, South Carolina 2 April 2003 provided only the second documented spring sighting for that state. Photograph by Steve Calver.

reports included Willow Flycatchers at Beidler Forest, SC 26 Apr (RL), Caw Caw Park, Ravenel, SC 26 Apr (PN et al.), and Macon, GA 17 May (TI), and a Least at Chapel Hill, NC 12 May (WCo). A female Vermilion Flycatcher was photographed at the S.S.S. 2 Apr (SC), providing one of the very few spring records for the Region. Very early was the Eastern Kingbird in Grady, GA 22 Mar (MB), missing the record-early date for Georgia by a week. Gray Kingbirds are quite noteworthy away from the s.-coastal section of Georgia. This spring, singles were at Pawley's I., SC 30 Apr–6 May (RL, MM, v. o.), Wrightsville Beach, NC 31 May (PC), and at C. Lookout, NC 26 May (JF et al.). This spring's Scissor-tailed Flycatchers included one back at the



Part of the large alcid invasion of winter 2002–2003 that continued into the spring, this Thick-billed Murre provided many opportunities for close-up observation during its stay in the Fort Macon, North Carolina area 11–16 March (here 14 March) 2003. Photograph by Will Cook.

Monroe, NC breeding site 7 May (AO), 2 back at the McDonough, GA breeding site 2 May (JFI et al.), and one near Morven, Brooks, GA 26 May (J&MA).

Vireo reports of note included an early Yellow-throated in Elbert, GA 17 Mar (JFI, EH), a Warbling along Mid Pines Rd, Raleigh, NC 10 May (JC), and an early Red-eyed in Chattahoochee, GA 21 Mar (WC). Swallow reports were uneventful, although a Barn at Eufaula N.W.R., GA 1 Mar (WC) set the new early-arrival date for that state by one day. Nuthatches and kinglets were underreported, although wren reports were about average. The thrush migration was described as very poor this spring across the entire Region. The best pre-dawn count received was of 106 Swainson's at K. Mt. 3 May (BZ). Numbers of Veeries and Gray-cheekeds were down also, especially in the e. portions of the Region. Extremely early Wood Thrush sightings included one heard in Orange, NC 9 Mar (MSw) and one seen in Jackson Park, Hendersonville, NC 21 Mar (DS). First noted in the winter, Cedar Waxwings continued to be present in very high numbers along North Carolina's Outer Banks, with a count of 2400 near Salvo 9 Mar (BPe).

WARBLERS THROUGH COWBIRDS

Warbler reports were about average when compared to the past several years. Some early dates of note included a Blue-winged n. of Charleston, SC 11 Apr (B&BM), a Prairie at the E.L.H. 16 Mar (JS, CL), 5 Prothonotaries at Beidler Forest, SC 23 Mar (JW et al.), a Worm-eating in Rome, GA 3 Apr (MD), an Ovenbird at Lake Park, GA 14 Mar (BB), and a Northern Waterthrush in Greene, GA 22 Mar (BDu). Some excellent one-day counts were reported from K. Mt., with 8 Tennessees, 6 Nashvilles, 36 Black-throated Greens, and 23 Ceruleans 27 Apr (BZ, GB et al.), plus 14 Blackburnians there 4 May (GB et al.). A singing male Magnolia was at Beacon Heights, along the Blue Ridge Parkway, Avery, NC 25-28 May (CW). A Cape May at a feeder in Conway, SC 1 Mar (GP) was most likely a wintering bird and not an early migrant. Unusual but not unprecedented was the Blackburnian that landed on the boat off Hatteras, NC 25 May (BP et al.). The bird was caught, brought back to land, and released! A Kirtland's Warbler was heard at close range near Zebulon, NC 18 May (EP). Although the bird was never observed, the song was heard well. Northern Waterthrushes have been known to mimic this species' song however, and it would be ideal if such reports carried documentation, whether audiotape, photographic, or other. Of interest, this was the 2nd report from that locality, the first one having been seen 23 Apr 1999. Far w. Virginia has had recent

spring reports from Wise County on 7 May 1994, 10 May 1995, 8 May 2000 (2 birds), and 11 May 2000, with all birds being either heard only or seen fleetingly (Peake, R. 2001. The Kirtland's Warbler as a spring migrant in Virginia. *Raven* 72: 60-62). The species appears to be quite shy on migration.

Very rare for the coast was the Cerulean Warbler found at Myrtle Beach S. P., SC 4 May (RC, DF). Also very rare (locally) was the Louisiana Waterthrush on Roanoke I., NC 6 May (JL). This species does not nest there, and is usually finished migrating by mid-Apr! Connecticut Warblers were reported more often than usual, with singles at Jackson Park, Hendersonville, NC 10 (HN, RS, WF) & 20 May (WF et al.), the Savannah River Site, SC 13 May (*vide* PCh), at S. Peachtree Creek Nature Preserve, DeKalb, GA 7 (A&LH) & 24 May (*vide* CL), and K. Mt. 9 May (BZ et al.), 16 May (GB et al.), and 24-25 May (*vide* BZ). Also locally rare was a Canada along the coast at Tybee I., GA 2 May (DCl). Western Tanagers continued from the winter season. The wintering female at Morehead City, NC was last seen 10 Mar (JF). Others found this spring were males at Lexington, SC in early Apr (*vide* RC) and at Wentworth, Rockingham, NC 18-21 Apr (KY).

Clay-colored Sparrows are quite rare in the Region in spring; notable were 2 at Rocky Mount, Edgecombe, NC 2 Mar (RD) and one at Fletcher, NC 27 Apr (JSm). This spring's Lark Sparrows included the 2 wintering at the Cherry Hospital fields, Wayne, NC, last seen 8 Mar (ED), and one at Kennesaw, GA 7-10 Apr (*vide* KT; BZ). Henslow's Sparrows were good finds near Cashiers, NC 5 Apr (ND) and at Butler Farm Rd., Henderson, NC 24 Apr-early May (MW, v. o.). Also very rare inland in spring, and seemingly out of place, was the Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow at Hoop. 1-15 Mar (MW, v. o.); this species has been found inland to our n. in spring, apparently migrants en route to the continent's center. Another locally-rare spring migrant was the Lincoln's Sparrow in a yard in Winston-Salem, NC 2 May (DD et al.). Late sparrows included White-throats at York, SC (BHi) and Watkinsville, GA (PS), both 27 May, and 2 Dark-eyed Juncos at Marietta, GA 3 May (BZ). Spring Lapland Longspurs included a peak of 10 at Hoop. 7 Mar (WF) and one near St. Matthews, SC 8 Mar (RC).

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were widely reported as being more common than usual across the Region. Many reported "flocks" at feeders! The imm. male Black-headed Grosbeak from the winter at Elizabeth City, NC was last seen 22 Apr (DR) and was in "fine" plumage. South Carolina had a Lazuli Bunting, an imm. male present at a Walter-

boro feeder 30 Mar-9 Apr (MDo, v. o.). This was about the 2nd report for that state, the first having been photographed at Westminster, Oconee 7 Mar 1981. Dickcissel reports were down this spring; the best count was of 3 at the Cherry Hospital fields, Wayne, NC 17 May+ (ED). A count of 250 Brewer's Blackbirds in a field in Baker, GA 11 Apr (MB) was an excellent total for so late in the season. And finally, the only Shiny Cowbirds found this season were a male and 2 females at the S.S.S. 19 May (PS).

Corrigendum: Fall 2002: The Varied Thrush reported from James I., SC was actually the 3rd for the state, not the first. The first was photographed at Edisto I. Oct 1993, and the other was at Spartanburg Dec 1993.

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