

Spring Record of Saw-whet Owl From North Carolina Piedmont

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The Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) is a fairly common summer resident of the Canadian zone forests of the southern Appalachians were Simpson (*Chat*, 36:39-47) has found the species calling from 11 April through 13 June. On 7 April 1972 at 7:50 PM I heard a Saw-whet calling for several minutes from a mixed (mainly pine) woods 2 miles NE of Raleigh, Wake County, N. C. The wind was calm, and the air temperature was 74 F; but a cold front was approaching, and rain was imminent. Rain showers began shortly after 8:00 PM and continued until well after the frontal passage at about 10:00 PM. The low temperature on 8 April was 32 F and the high only 43 F. The next night the temperature dropped to 23 F. Subsequent attempts to locate the owl were unsuccessful. While there are several fall and winter sightings of the Saw-whet Owl in Wake County, I am not aware of any previous spring records for the Raleigh area or of any other call-record for the eastern part of the state.

Winter Records of the Brown-headed Nuthatch In the Southern Appalachian Mountains

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According to Pearson, Brimley, and Brimley (1942) the Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla*) is limited in its distribution to the region "east of the mountains" in North Carolina, with no records west of Burke County. In a previous paper, however, I have noted (Simpson, 1969) that John S. Cairns observed and collected specimens of this species near Weaverville, Buncombe County, N. C., in the late autumn and winter of 1893-1894 and obtained a nest with eggs during the summer of 1894. Following these observations, there have been no subsequent records of the species from the Appalachian Mountain region, in spite of extensive field work in the area by amateur and professional ornithologists. Thomas D. Burleigh, for example, conducted full-time field work throughout Buncombe County from 1930 to 1934; and he informs me (pers. com.) that he never observed the species during that period.

Within the past two years, however, the bird has been noted in Buncombe County, N. C., on a number of occasions during the winter season. The first observation came on 13 February 1970, when I found two Brown-headed Nuthatches in company with a flock of Carolina Chickadees (*Parus carolinensis*) and Tufted Titmice (*Parus bicolor*) in a mixed pine-hardwood forest bordering the French Broad River near the Bent Creek Experiment Station (elevation 2,100 feet) on NC. 191 south of Asheville. Subsequently, Donald H. Defoe (pers. com.) observed a single Brown-headed Nuthatch at a suet feeder at Candler, N. C. (elevation 2,100 feet) on 7 and 8 March 1970. More recently, Roland L. Sargent (pers. com.) reported an influx of the birds into the pine woods bordering Lake Julian (elevation 2,200 feet) south of Asheville, with four birds seen on 5 November, three on 11 November, five on 21 November, and five on 29 December, all during 1971.

All of these records have been confined to the lower elevations of Buncombe County along the extensive, broad flood plain and valley of the French Broad River and its tributaries; and there is no evidence to suggest its occurrence in the high mountain ranges surrounding the interior valleys.

The Brown-headed Nuthatch is a fairly common permanent resident in the piedmont of North and South Carolina and Georgia at elevations up to approximately 1,000 feet; but the Blue Ridge Mountains apparently serve as a very efficient barrier to the westward or northward extension of the species into the interior river basins of the southern

Appalachian Mountains. Apparently, however, individuals of the species do on occasions cross the Blue Ridge, presumably from the piedmont population immediately to the east and south. The present records and those by Cairns in 1893-1894 indicate that these invasions occur during the winter months, possibly in response to population pressures and inadequate food supply in the piedmont. Interestingly, the first record of the species for the state of Tennessee came at Collegedale, where Basham (1969) noted the birds present from 14 December 1969 to 4 May 1970; and it was during this same winter season that my observation of the bird at Bent Creek marked the first record of the species from the southern Appalachians since 1894. This coincidence of dates suggests that sporadic winter movements of the species to the north and west may be responsible for the occurrence of the bird in the interior river valleys of the Appalachian Mountains. Furthermore, John Cairns' observations in the 1890s indicated that these invading birds lingered in the area and nested during the following breeding season. Unfortunately, Cairns' death in 1895 precluded any further notes on the fate of this population; but their subsequent absence from the region suggests that ecological conditions were not favorable to their perpetuation in the interior basins, which are over 1,000 feet higher than the piedmont plateau to the east of the Blue Ridge escarpment. Nevertheless, the recent winter records of the species in Buncombe County should alert local observers to the possibility of additional sightings and subsequent nesting in the extensive pine forests of the French Broad River valley and its tributaries.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Painted Bunting at Clinton, S. C.

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During a 3-week period in the spring of 1972 a male Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) visited a feeding station in Clinton, S. C., on at least four occasions. The observation distance, 4 feet, allowed positive identification on all sightings, which were on 16, 25, and 26 April and 8 May. On 26 April Jane P. Holt, Biology Department, Presbyterian College, and Mrs. Ira D. Holt of Clinton verified our identification.

The presence of a Painted Bunting in piedmont South Carolina, approximately 65 miles NW of Columbia, is unusual. Sprunt and Chamberlain (*South Carolina Bird Life*, 1970) note that the species rarely penetrates beyond the fall line. The lack of nesting activities and the absence of a female suggest that the sightings were of a transient individual.

[The spring bird count for Stanly County, N. C., (*Chat*, 35:82) records the presence of a pair of Painted Buntings in piedmont North Carolina on 24 April 1971.—JRH]