

General Field Notes

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First South Carolina Record of Harcourt's Storm-Petrel

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Late in the afternoon of 20 June 1972, I observed a petrel on a freshwater pond at my home 5 miles S of McClellanville, Charleston County, S.C. The pond is separated from salt marsh by a narrow dike. The petrel appeared to be exhausted by the winds of tropical storm Agnes, still blowing. The bird was photographed, then picked up alive, but died in a few hours.

At first I thought the bird to be the British Storm-Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*), as the tail did not appear to be slightly forked, a characteristic of the similar Harcourt's. However, both Drs. Alexander Wetmore (U.S. National Museum) and Oliver L. Austin Jr. (Florida State Museum) have identified the specimen as Harcourt's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*). This is the first record of this species for South Carolina and the second record for the Southern Atlantic Coast Region. A single Harcourt's Storm-Petrel was observed at Atlantic Beach, N.C., on 22 June 1972 (*American Birds*, 26:844). This bird was also blown ashore by tropical storm Agnes.

The specimen was contributed to the Charleston Museum, and it was prepared as a study skin (Ch.M. No. 72.37) by Dennis M. Forsythe, Citadel Biology Department. It is a male with the following measurements (in mm): total length 176, wing 147, tail 75, tarsus 21, and bill (from feathers) 16. Its weight was 34 grams, the stomach was empty, and there was no fat.

Escaped Caracara in Northeastern North Carolina

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On 31 May 1972 at Shawboro in Currituck County in northeastern North Carolina Mrs. Aycock and I saw a Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*). Evelyn Griffin reported its presence to us on 30 May, and early on 31 May we located the bird perched on a mailbox in a yard in Shawboro. We were able to approach to within 15 feet of the bird and studied it from every angle in good light. All field marks including the presence of the carmine color at the base of the bill, the black cap, and the mottled breast were noted. The bird appeared somewhat sluggish and walked rather than hopped. Its stance was upright. It was capable of flight.

Caracara
at Shawboro, N. C.
(Photo by
T. M. Gregory)



I attempted to have photographs made, but the bird was not present when the photographer visited the site. I discovered later that Thomas Michael Gregory photographed the bird sometime during the week of 29 May 1972. One of his photographs has been submitted with this article.

In an attempt to find out if the bird was an escape I wrote a letter to the editor of the Norfolk *Virginian Pilot*. The letter appeared on 8 September 1972, and the following day an editorial feature appeared commenting on the presence of the bird. There has been no response to this inquiry.

[Dept. Ed. — A discussion between Robert P. Teulings and Mitchel A. Byrd of the Biology Department of William and Mary University at the meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society and the Carolina Bird Club at Chapel Hill during the spring of 1973 provided the first clue that the Shawboro Caracara might be an escaped bird. After Dr. Teulings relayed the message to me, a further check with Dr. Byrd resulted in his making inquiry in Norfolk. It was learned that indeed a Caracara did escape from the Norfolk Zoo in early May of 1972. In fact a second Caracara also escaped in July of 1972. Thus the late May sighting discussed above was almost certainly the bird that left the Norfolk Zoo early in May. This bird then does not represent a new species for the North Carolina list.

[This detailed editorial discussion is designed to indicate how difficult it is to obtain accurate reports from owners when exotic birds escape. Note that Mr. Aycock actually had a letter of inquiry in a Norfolk newspaper but received no confirmation of the escape. His experience further points out the need for extreme care in dealing with such records on the part of both the reporter and the editor. We appreciate Mr. Aycock's careful reporting of the sighting and Dr. Byrd's cooperation in ascertaining the dates of the Caracara escapes.]

An Instance of Purple Sandpiper Feeding Away from Rock Jetties in North Carolina

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13 March 1973

On 11 March 1973, while birding at Bird Shoal, opposite Beaufort, N.C., I discovered a Purple Sandpiper (*Erolia maritima*). I watched in amazement as it fed with Short-billed Dowitchers (*Limnodromus griseus*) and Dunlins (*Erolia alpina*) on a section of the shoal where sand flats predominate. There are no rock jetties within 1 mile of the location of this sighting. The Purple Sandpiper fed by both probing and picking. I approached to