

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

within 20 feet of it, and I noticed that it seemed shyer than Purple Sandpipers I have observed on rock jetties. I watched it for at least 15 minutes.

At the time of the sighting, the wind was from the SW at approximately 10 mph. When the bird was first sighted, visibility was restricted to about 100 feet due to heavy fog. After 15 minutes, the fog was dissipating rapidly, and visibility was over 1 mile. The tide was falling very rapidly.

In winter, Purple Sandpipers are largely restricted to rocky seashores and rock jetties (Peterson, *A Field Guide to the Birds*, 1947). In North Carolina, I know of only one instance when this species has been seen away from a rock jetty or similar structure. On 31 December 1967, Micou Browne (pers. com.) observed a Purple Sandpiper at Oregon Inlet.

During this winter (1972-1973), I occasionally found a Purple Sandpiper at the Ft. Macon jetties or at the Radio Island jetty. However, it was often absent from these localities for several days at a time. It is likely that the Purple Sandpiper found at Bird Shoal was this same bird, and it is possible that it had been feeding on Bird Shoal regularly during the winter. (There are no other major jetties at the inlet or on the nearby ocean front).

The Purple Sandpiper at Ft. Macon was often seen feeding in close association with Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) and/or Sanderlings (*Crocethia alba*), both of which feed and roost at Bird Shoal. It was probably the close association with these species that led to the Purple Sandpiper's "learning" to use Bird Shoal. It is notable that on 28 January 1973, I saw "the" Purple Sandpiper feeding on a concrete ramp at Radio Island (next to the rock jetty) with Ruddy Turnstones.

## A Black-headed Gull at Pea Island N.W.R.

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24 April 1973

At approximately 10:30 on 23 April 1973 while returning to Raleigh from Hatteras, N.C., I stopped at Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge to scan some flocks of shorebirds. The refuge manager, John Williamson, who was parked nearby, approached me and asked my assistance in identifying a gull that was feeding alone on a nearby mudflat. He indicated that a Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) had been reported to him earlier in the day and he was attempting to verify the report. I studied the bird at a range of approximately 25 yards through a 15-40X scope and noted immature plumage, with the small black spot behind the eye. However, adult (red) coloration was noted on legs and bill with the bill appearing entirely red except for a dark tip. I flushed the bird at close range (15 yards) and observed the wing pattern with 7X binoculars as it flew a short distance. The upper wing surface and back coloration matched the description shown in *Birds of North America* (Robbins et al., 1966), which was in hand. The black edging of the primaries was a thin line, unlike the more conspicuous black edging of the Bonaparte's Gull. Furthermore, there was very little contrast between the front white wing patches and the grayer area of wing and back, also unlike Bonaparte's Gull. At this point the identification of the bird as a Black-headed Gull was assured by the combination of distinct wing pattern and red bill. The similar Bonaparte's Gull has a black bill. No Bonaparte's Gulls had been seen in the area on the day in question or for the two previous days.

Of further interest was the feeding behavior of this gull, which I observed and would describe as a regular splashing with the feet in a small pool of water, followed by probing with the bill. Upon later referring to *Handbook of British Birds*, (Witherby et al., 1941) I found that "Trampling on wet mud or sand or in shallow water to bring up worms is a regular habit" of the Black-headed Gull. This feeding behavior, which I had never seen before, further assured the identification.