

General Field Notes

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Goshawk in Chesterfield County, S.C.

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During 1973, I observed two adult Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) on the Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge approximately 9 miles N of McBee, Chesterfield County, S.C. The first individual was observed for about 3 minutes on 19 November 1973, as it hunted in a scrub oak area adjacent to a large field. Later, another and possibly the same individual was observed for approximately 1 minute on 21 November 1973, as it hunted the edge between a pine stand and a large field. Despite increased effort, I did not see the bird subsequent to 21 November 1973. I am familiar with the Goshawk in northern Minnesota, where I observed it in connection with research on grouse.

[Associate Editor's Note: The Goshawk is presently on the South Carolina Hypothetical List. The original record is based upon a dubious and unconfirmed observation made near Bull's Bay, Charleston County, S.C., in 1905 (*South Carolina Bird Life*, 1970, p. 556). Two additional valid sightings are required to place this species on the official South Carolina list. There are five published records of the Goshawk in North Carolina (*Chat* 39:18).—JRH]

Black Rail and Virginia Rail in Summer in Northwestern South Carolina

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During the spring and summer of 1975, I was surprised to discover the presence of the Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*) and the Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*) in Anderson County, S.C.

Late in the afternoon of 13 May 1975 I was birding in a marsh about 2 miles S of Townville when I heard a *kee-kee-kurr* call nearby. Although I had never seen nor heard a Black Rail before, I immediately recognized the call from having heard it several years ago on the *Field Guide to Western Bird Songs* record. During the next hour I heard the call about 30 times, occasionally as close as 20 feet, but despite considerable search I was unable to obtain even a glimpse of the bird. Because it called often and at many points in the marsh, appearing to mark a territory, I hoped the bird was nesting there. The marsh was fairly extensive, lying next to Little Beaverdam Creek

near its junction with Lake Hartwell. The vegetation ranged from 2-3 feet in height and was quite variable in composition, though juncus (*Juncus effusus*) was the dominant plant where the rail was heard.

On the following evening, Sidney Gauthreaux and Frank Moore accompanied me to the marsh. We immediately heard the rail calling, and Gauthreaux was able to get a good recording of the call on a tape recorder. We played the taped call back to the rail with only fair success. Despite attracting it to within 8 feet of us, we were never able to see it. We returned the next evening (15 May), armed with the tape recorder and new techniques designed to allow us to see a Black Rail. We heard the bird calling, and for over an hour we failed to get a glimpse of it. Finally, as we were walking toward the call, the bird flushed from beneath Moore's feet and flew about 50 yards before dropping into the marsh. Not only did we all record a life bird, but we had visually confirmed a Black Rail in the marsh.

In an attempt to find evidence of breeding, I returned to the marsh on a number of dates following the above sighting. On 20 May I heard the rail on many occasions but never saw it. On 7, 10, and 22 June I neither saw nor heard the rail, and I assumed that it must have finished its calling period, migrated out of the marsh, or have been killed.

Because of the disappointments in June, I was totally unprepared for what was to happen on the morning of 6 July. I was stunned when I flushed an adult Virginia Rail from 1.5-foot high grass-sedge in the marsh. The long, slender bill and dark plumage with considerable rusty-color in the wings were easily seen, and the 8-9-inch length ruled out the possibility of a juvenile King Rail (*Rallus elegans*). I searched the grass in the area where the bird flushed, hoping to uncover a nest. About a minute later and perhaps 25 feet from where the Virginia Rail flushed, an adult Black Rail flushed in front of me and flew about 30 yards before dropping into the marsh. I had an excellent look at it; and I observed the small (but not tiny) size, blackish plumage with white flecks in the wings, short bill, and especially the chestnut patch on the upper back. I did not see or hear any more rails in an extensive search of the marsh. Several other trips to the marsh in July after the above sightings were unsuccessful.

This appears to be the first summer record of the Virginia Rail in South Carolina. It breeds or has been recorded in summer at several locations in eastern North Carolina (Dare and Hyde Counties), according to *Birds of North Carolina*. Two records that perhaps relate to the Townville sighting are a pair of this species and two downy young seen on 14 June 1970 along the Chattahoochee River near Atlanta, Georgia (*Audubon Field Notes* 24:672), and an adult with chicks in the same area on 30 May 1971 (*American Birds* 25:844). Since I never heard Virginia Rails call at Townville, I am inclined to believe that the bird was not breeding; however, the 6 July date seems much too early for the bird to have been a southbound migrant.

The Townville records are the first indication of breeding of Black Rails in northwestern South Carolina, and apparently only one previous record exists for the area. On 2 May 1975 Kerry Reese and Larry Luckett found an injured Black Rail in a Screech Owl (*Otus asio*) nest in a Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) box near Clemson. Gauthreaux and I examined the bird, an adult, before it was collected later in the day. The Black Rail has been found breeding or recorded in summer at several localities in inland North and South Carolina (see *Birds of North Carolina* and *South Carolina Bird Life*), and once near Athens, Georgia (*Georgia Birds*). However, most or all of these records are over 25 years old, and it seems that the species is less numerous as a breeder in the inland parts of the Southeast than it was at the beginning of this century.

ADDENDUM

During the summer of 1976 I made weekly trips to the marsh described above. An adult Virginia Rail was flushed on 27 June, and a different bird, perhaps a juvenile (dark in color without rusty coloration in wings), was flushed on 1 July. No calls of the Virginia Rail were heard, nor did I find any evidence of Black Rails in the marsh

in 1976. These two sightings, plus the record of July 1975, suggest that the Virginia Rail is nesting in this marsh.

Some Noteworthy Fall Migration Records from Franklin County, N.C., Including an Inland Sighting of a Wilson's Plover

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In May of 1975, I began a study of the birds of Franklin County, N.C., using a modified version of the roadside census method and concentrating on the Tar River basin, which cuts across the central part of the county. A preliminary survey of the region revealed no major natural or man-made lakes. Privately owned Lake Sagamore (310 acres) offers the only sizable expanse of open water in the county. All other ponds built for recreational or agricultural purposes appear to be less than 100 acres in area. During the summer of 1975, Moore's Pond (65 acres), located on Little River near the Wake County line, was partially drained for repairs on the dam. A fairly good grassy flat developed here, but throughout the rest of Franklin County fall migrant shorebirds were dependent primarily upon narrow margins of farm ponds, particularly those used for crop irrigation and the watering of cattle. Although scattered sightings of one to six shorebirds, mostly Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*), Solitary Sandpipers (*Tringa solitaria*), and Spotted Sandpipers (*Actitis macularia*), were fairly common, no large flocks were found. Therefore, the occurrence of several noteworthy species during August and September of 1975 was quite surprising.

On 26 August I flushed three Upland Sandpipers (*Bartramia longicauda*) from a dry roadside pasture on the Mort Harris farm located on SR 1001 at Margaret, about 7 miles E of Louisburg. The brownish birds had yellow legs, but their rumps were not white. This immediately eliminated from consideration the several medium-sized yellow-legged shorebirds with which the Upland Sandpiper might be confused. In flight the birds uttered a melodious call consisting of four or five whistled notes. One individual perched briefly on a fence, displaying the typical Upland Sandpiper silhouette. Although the birds flew out of sight before I could study them through the telescope, I am familiar with the species and confident of the identification.

Elsewhere on the Harris farm, I found three American Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis dominica*) on 14 September. The birds were feeding with Killdeer at the edge of a pond and in the adjacent pasture. When the six Killdeer took flight, I noted among them three slightly larger brownish shorebirds having no distinctive field mark such as a wing stripe, white rump, or black axillars. After the birds settled to the ground, I was able to study one of the American Golden Plovers at leisure in bright midday sunlight through a 30X Balscope at a distance of perhaps 100 yards. The bird had a pale golden-brown breast that faded to creamy white at the throat and chin. A creamy stripe separated the black bill and eye from the dark golden-brown crown. I have seen this species once previously in fall on the Outer Banks.

On 30 August I found a Wilson's Plover (*C. wilsonia*) feeding with three Killdeer on a mud bar extending into an irrigation pond on the Wall farm, which is located directly across SR 1106 from Moore's Pond. The site is about 120 miles NW of the nearest beachfront. Field guide in hand and with the late afternoon sun behind me, I was able to study the bird at a distance of about 150 feet through a 30X Balscope. In general appearance the plover was slender, long-legged, and long-billed—not at all like the plump, short-legged, and stubby-billed Semipalmated Plover (*C. semipalmatus*). Slightly smaller than the Killdeer, the plover was about the size of a Spotted Sandpiper, which is what I thought it was at the first distant glance. The plover's mud-brown mantle was a shade lighter than that of the Killdeer. The length and thick-