

SPRING BIRD COUNT—1977

HARRY E. LeGRAND JR.

The 1977 Spring Bird Count was one of the most disappointing in many years, due primarily to a very poor spring migration in the Carolinas. Perhaps never before have so many people (a record number) invested so much effort (a record) to find so few birds (fewest number of species since 1969). Despite the record 31 count localities, 514 field observers, 213 field parties, and 1755 field-hours, birders recorded only 250 species and 108,141 individuals. Four new localities were represented on the Spring Count: New Hope River, N.C.; Greenwood County, S.C.; Pilot Mountain State Park, N.C.; and Watauga County, N.C.

Charleston, with 161 species, topped all counts in species, but Morehead City (157), Wilmington (156), and Raleigh (152) also broke the 150 species level. However, it was a rough spring for locality counts, as 19 of the 25 localities taking counts in both 1976 and 1977 declined in species in 1977. In fact, these 19 counts averaged 12 species fewer in 1977 than in the previous year. Only 4 of the 25 localities increased in species number.

Unlike in 1976, when rainy weekends hurt many counts, weather for the 1977 Count was generally favorable. Even though 12 counts reported precipitation, this rainfall came primarily as afternoon thundershowers, at a time when bird and birding activities are slack, and not as steady morning or all-day rain.

There were few rarities reported on the 1977 Count, though the *Roseate Tern* at Hilton Head and the *Mississippi Kite* at Roanoke Rapids were exciting finds. Other notable records were *Merlins* at two inland localities, two *American Golden Plovers* at Wilmington, *Willetts* at three inland sites, an unidentified *jaeger* at Morehead City, two singing *Philadelphia Vireos* at Winston-Salem, and a *Brewster's Warbler* hybrid at Raleigh. On the negative side were the failures to tally *Great Black-backed Gulls* or *Pine Siskins* (not really expected this spring), and *Greater Yellowlegs* were recorded from only three inland counts! Especially noteworthy was the very low total of 43 *Ruby-crowned Kinglets*. The severe winter of 1976-77 apparently eliminated much of the wintering population in the Carolinas and farther south, leaving few to be seen on the Count. Undoubtedly the major disappointment of the Count was the overall scarcity of migrants, especially warblers. Many compilers mentioned that the spring migration this year was one of the poorest that they had ever seen.

NOTICE TO COMPILERS AND OBSERVERS

In accordance with the economy measures stated in the Summer *Chat* (41:57), the 1977 Spring Bird Count is being reported in summary form without a table. The table may be published at a later date. At present it is in the files of the CBC Records Committee.

At the Black Mountain CBC meeting 7-9 October 1977, the Executive Board met with Eloise Potter and Harry E. LeGrand Jr. to discuss the future of the bird counts. The Board voted to support continued publication of the count tables. John O. Fussell III volunteered to compile the count tables, and LeGrand indicated willingness to edit the bird counts even if they do not appear in *Chat*. President Barbara Lee appointed a committee consisting of Walter Holland, Fran Baldwin, and Ramona Snavelly to investigate printing costs. Tentative plans call for typing camera-ready copy, printing on inexpensive paper, and mailing as a supplement to *The Chat*.

Christmas Bird Count forms have been distributed to compilers, who are requested to return completed reports to Eloise Potter as usual. We regret the confusion and hope our long-suffering compilers will bear with us while we try to decide what course of action will be best for the future of CBC.

Christmas Bird Count dates: 17 December 1977 - 2 January 1978.

COMPILERS' COMMENTS

COAST

MOREHEAD CITY, N.C.: Center unchanged. 23 April. 0400-1900. 157 species; 8017 individuals; 15 observers in 8 parties plus 3 yard observers; 72 field-hours; 27 field-miles by foot; 140 field-miles by car.—The four *Anhingas* (Compiler, Kevin Hints) were seen in flight near Walkers Mill Pond and might possibly be breeding there. Robert Hader saw the *jaeger* (sp?) in flight at Fort Macon State Park; thought to be a Parasitic. All five *Yellow-crowned Night Herons* were adults. No longer unusual in the area are *Black Rail*, heard by the Compiler at North River, and the *White-rumped Sandpiper* and *Long-billed Dowitcher*.—JOHN O. FUSSELL III, P.O. Box 520, Morehead City, N.C. 28557.

WILMINGTON, N.C.: Center unchanged. 23 April. 0500-1700. 156 species; 8497 individuals; 22 observers in 8 parties; 72 field-hours; 21 field-miles by foot; 315 field-miles by car.—Dot Earle found the two winter-plumaged *American Golden Plovers*, in direct comparison with six Black-bellied Plovers, in the grass of the Saline Plant yard. One bird was seen by numerous observers the following 2 days. Unusual count period sightings were a *Swallow-tailed Kite* (John Hardwick, 25 April), *Mississippi Kite* (Ricky Davis, no date given), and *Broad-winged Hawk* (Kitty Kosh, 24 April).—FRANCES NEEDHAM, Box 8207, Wrightsville Beach, N.C. 28480.

CHARLESTON, S.C.: Center unchanged. 1 May. 0530-2030. 161 species; 9100 individuals; 33 observers in 9 parties; 76 field-hours; 58 field-miles by foot; 170 field-miles by car.—The male *Cape May Warbler* was observed by Dennis Forsythe and David Chamberlain.—JULIAN R. HARRISON, Biology Department, College of Charleston, Charleston, S.C. 29401.

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C.: Center unchanged. 21 April. 0530-2100. 115 species; 3057 individuals; 13 observers in 6 parties plus 5 yard observers; 45 field-hours; 17 field-miles by foot; 91 field-miles by car.—The *Roseate Tern* (Donald and Louise LaCoss, Helene Parry, Bill Starr) was resting next to a Common Tern and other gulls and terns on the beach near Singleton's Beach. It was seen through a scope within 35 feet and had paler wingtips and a longer tail than the Common; the bill was almost entirely black.—NANCY CATHCART, P.O. Box 470, Bluffton, S.C. 29910.

COASTAL PLAIN

BEAUFORT COUNTY, N.C.: Center unchanged. 8 May. 0500-2000. 99 species; 2591 individuals; 12 observers in 6 parties plus 2 yard observers; 46 field-hours; 14 field-miles by foot; 162 field-miles by car.—Hugh and Elizabeth Sterling had seen the two *Merlins* in the same area for several days before the count.—GERALDINE COX, Route 1, Box 151A, Merritt, N.C. 28556.

PAMLICO COUNTY, N.C.: Center unchanged. 1 May. 0500-1930. 84 species; 2039 individuals; 5 observers in 3 parties; 35 field-hours; 13 field-miles by foot; 175 field-miles by car.—GERALDINE COX, address as above.

DILLON COUNTY, S.C.: Center unchanged. 1 May. 0700-2000. 65 species; 1163 individuals; 3 observers in 2 parties plus 2 yard observers; 17 field-hours; 4 field-miles by foot; 80 field-miles by car.—*Scarlet Tanager* (Compiler) was seen for the second consecutive year.—JOHN H. WILSON, Box 535, Dillon, S.C. 29536.

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C.: Center unchanged. 1 May. 0500-2100. 121 species; 2224 individuals; 10 observers in 3 parties plus 3 yard observers; 21 field-hours; 16 field-miles by

foot; 65 field-miles by car.—Female *Hooded Merganser* (Compiler, M.E. Whitfield) was seen at the Becker Sand and Gravel Company. These observers found the *Red-cockaded Woodpeckers* and *Bachman's Sparrows* at Fort Bragg in the vicinity of McArthur Road. The Compiler had three *Yellow-crowned Night Herons*, a *Common Gallinule*, and a *Blue-winged Warbler* during count period at the gravel company. The Compiler and J.B. Crutchfield saw a *Double-crested Cormorant* at the gravel company, and Brad Thomason had three *Upland Sandpipers* near River Road, all during the count period.—PHILIP J. CRUTCHFIELD, 901 Montclair Road, Fayetteville, N.C. 28304.

SOUTHERN PINES, N.C.: Center unchanged. 5 May. 0500-2015. 103 species; 1119 individuals; 2 observers in 2 parties plus 7 yard observers; 20 field-hours; 10 field-miles by foot; 112 field-miles by car.—This was the latest date ever for a spring count, and the only unusual birds were late waterfowl.—J.H. CARTER III, P.O. Box 891, Southern Pines, N.C. 28387.

COLUMBIA, S.C.: Center unchanged. 23 April. 0000-1700. 110 species; 4609 individuals; 20 observers in 5 parties; 62 field-hours; 35 field-miles by foot; 135 field-miles by car.—*Fish Crows* were noteworthy.—GILBERT J. BRISTOW, 2921 Blossom Street, Columbia, S.C. 29205.

ROANOKE RAPIDS, N.C.: Center unchanged. 14 May. 0600-2100. 119 species; 3125 individuals; 6 observers in 4 parties; 32 field-hours; 22 field-miles by foot; 75 field-miles by car.—The ten *Double-crested Cormorants* were seen by the Compiler, Eloise Potter, Libbus Carter, and Ricky Davis at Roanoke Rapids Lake. Davis and the Compiler found the *Cattle Egret*, the first for the spring count, at the Johnston Farm. Seven broods of *Wood Duck* ducklings comprised 58 of the 82 birds on the count. Potter, Kevin Hints, and Mark Hints saw the adult *Mississippi Kite* as it was perched in a tree along the Roanoke River at the Johnston Farm. The grayish breast, dark tail, and dark gray back were noted. The *Bald Eagle* was seen in silhouette at Roanoke Rapids Lake at sunset by the Compiler, Potter, and Davis; it was believed to be the same immature that the Compiler saw at this location 2 days prior to count day. The three *Caspian Terns* were seen flying over Mush Island by Carter and the Compiler. One of the two *Cliff Swallows* at the NC 48 bridge over the Roanoke River appeared to be building a nest underneath the bridge in the midst of a large Barn Swallow colony. [Thorough details.—HL]—J. MERRILL LYNCH, 539 Henry Street, Roanoke Rapids, N. C. 27870.

PIEDMONT

VANCE COUNTY, N.C.: Center unchanged. 23 April. 0345-15:00. 85 species; 2367 individuals; 11 observers in 2 parties plus 14 yard observers; 48 field-hours; 25 field-miles by foot; 90 field-miles by car.—NEITA ALLEN, 152 Lakeview Drive, Henderson, N.C. 27536.

RALEIGH, N.C.: Center unchanged. 7 May. 0430-2000. 152 species; 10,640 individuals; 37 observers in 22 parties; 160 field-hours; 110 field-miles by foot; 165 field-miles by car.—David Whitehurst observed the *Merlin* in flight near the Hillsborough Street overpass on the Beltline; it was gray in color with black and white tail bands, falcon-shaped, and larger than an American Kestrel. The immature *Yellow-crowned Night Heron* (Compiler) was carefully studied at Boneyard Lake, and the *Caspian Tern* (Ricky Davis, Eloise Potter) was heard and seen in flight along the Neuse River. The *Black-billed Cuckoo* was a window casualty at a suburban residence the morning after the count. Jim Mulholland saw the *Warbling Vireo* in low oaks along Lake Dam Road; marks noted were the vireo bill, faint line over the eye, lack of conspicuous wing bars, and the vireo shape and actions. The bird did not call. The *Brewster's Warbler* was seen by Mary Weber in a shrubby area with tall grasses near Lynn Road. The top half of its head was yellow, it had a black eye line and white wing bars, and essentially completely white underparts. [An

excellent description, including colored sketches, was provided for the warbler.—HL] Single *Nashville Warblers* were found by Jane Mullen at Lassiter's Mill and by Whitehurst at Yates Mill Pond. [A neat report with good details.—HL]—R.J. HADER, 3313 Cheswick Drive, Raleigh, N.C. 27609.

DURHAM, N.C.: Center unchanged. 23 April. 0430-1900. 106 species; 4412 individuals; 32 observers in 13 parties plus 2 yard observers; 90 field-hours; 73 field-miles by foot; 274 field-miles by car.—A *Canada Goose* (John and Nancy Spahr) was unusually late. Three *Upland Sandpipers* were seen by Owen and Pat McConnell in an extensive, freshly harrowed field; the birds were still present the following day. John Horn discovered the *Long-billed Marsh Wren* in a roadside hedgerow at daybreak; the streaks on the back were seen well. *Brown Creeper* (Horn) was late at the Duke Forest on 26 April. *Grasshopper Sparrows* and *White-crowned Sparrows* were surprisingly numerous. [Excellent details for all rarities.—HL]—JOHN HORN, Department of Botany, and MARK HUFF, School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, both of Duke University, Durham, N.C. 27706.

NEW HOPE RIVER, N.C.: Center at crossing of New Hope River and Chatham County SR 1700 (Johnson's Bridge). 8 May. 0515-1930. 104 species; 2350 individuals; 24 observers in 11 parties; 60 field-hours; 37 field-miles by foot; 175 field-miles by car.—Bob Deyle flushed the *Sora* and *Long-billed Marsh Wren* from a marsh at Seaforth. The Compiler saw the *Willet* the day before the count at Seaforth Lake; bold white wing markings and distinctive call easily identified the species. The singing *Least Flycatcher* was seen by John Horn, Lance Peacock, and Chuck Roe. [Good details.—HL]—BARBARA ROTH, 7 Lone Pine Road, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514

CHAPEL HILL, N.C.: Center unchanged. 1 May. 0400-2030. 122 species; 9138 individuals; 65 observers in 22 parties plus 7 yard observers; 224 field-hours; 122 field-miles by foot; 365 field-miles by car.—*Yellow-crowned Night Heron* (W.H. Wagner) was seen on 27 April, and a *Chuck-will's-widow* (Gertrude London) was heard on 2 May. Mrs. Paul Payne saw the *Swainson's Warbler* along New Hope Creek near Erwin Road on 3 May; rusty cap, white line over the eye, dark eye streak, buffy underparts, and lack of wing bars used to identify the bird. Five birders observed the singing male *Nashville Warbler* in willows at the Hogan Farm on count day. [Good details.—HL]—ERIC L. GARNER, 3519 Racine Street, Durham, N.C. 27707.

GREENSBORO, N.C.: Center unchanged. 7 May. 0530-1900. 119 species; 4928 individuals; 24 observers in 8 parties; 74 field-hours; 18 field-miles by foot; 267 field-miles by car.—The *Horned Grebe* (George Smith, Tom Street, Ed Blitch) was late for the area. Smith also saw the *Caspian Tern*, noting the large and red bill. Street observed the *Double-crested Cormorant*.—DONALD ALLEN, 2611 David Caldwell Drive, Greensboro, N.C. 27408.

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.: Center unchanged. 7 May. 0300-1730. 138 species; 5316 individuals; 37 observers in 12 parties plus 2 yard observers; 126 field-hours; 37 field-miles by foot; 40 field-miles by car.—Adult *Little Blue Heron* (Bob Witherington et al.) was seen at Reynolda on 1 May, and two *American Bitterns* were seen there daily from 8 April to 2 May by John Carter and others. The *Cattle Egret* was seen on 30 April by Frederick Probst et al. at the Sewage Treatment Plant. Jim and Pat Culbertson et al. saw the two *Willow Flycatchers* at Washington Park on 14 May, carefully noting the "fitz-bew" song. *Least Flycatcher* (Charles Frost) was observed singing at Reynolda on 14 May. Singing *Philadelphia Vireos* were found on count day by Pat Culbertson and party at Reynolda and by the Compilers at Silas Creek; black eye line from bill through the eye and yellow breast were seen on both birds. The Compilers also found a singing *Warbling Vireo* at Silas Creek, and another singing bird was seen by Zach Bynum and Royce Weatherly at Washington Park. A *Lincoln's Sparrow* was observed by Kevin Hints at Silas Creek on 12

May; field marks noted were cream-colored breast with fine streakings, faint eye ring, and a slightly raised crest, as well as the very secretive behavior characteristics of this species. *Eastern Kingbirds* and *Orchard Orioles* were in unusual numbers this spring. [Excellent details.—HL]—RAMONA R. SNAVELY, 115 Plymouth Avenue, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27104, and FRAN M. BALDWIN, 1030 Englewood Drive, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27106.

STANLY COUNTY, N.C.: Center unchanged. 14 May. 0600-2200. 102 species; 2741 individuals; 14 observers in 7 parties plus 13 yard observers; 45 field-hours; 18 field-miles by foot; 95 field-miles by car.—The Albemarle City Lake was quite low this spring, attracting several species of shorebirds unusual for this area. Three *Semipalmated Plovers* were there on 17 May (Compiler, Lida Burney), and two *dowitchers* (sp?) were seen by John and Vivian Whitlock there on count day. The dowitchers had a stocky body, short legs, white rump patch, and long bill; and their characteristic feeding behavior was also mentioned. [The Compiler stated that the birds were probably Short-billed, and the late date of this sighting (14 May) strongly suggests this species. Observers who find inland dowitchers should make all attempts to flush the birds and record the characteristic call notes ("keet" or "peep" calls of the Long-billed and the "tu-tu-tu" calls of the Short-billed), since inland records of dowitchers, especially the Long-billed, are rather scarce.—HL] A *Willet* was seen on a farm pond west of Albemarle by John and Vivian Whitlock; black-and-white wing pattern, long bill, gray back, and call were noted. Ten *Cliff Swallows* were seen at the Falls Dam by the Compiler and Jack Greene. This is the first record at this location, though a colony has existed at the nearby High Rock Dam for several years.—DAVID A. BURNEY, Route 1, Box 630, New London, N.C. 28127.

IREDELL COUNTY, N.C.: Center unchanged. 14 May. 0700-1830. 101 species; 2718 individuals; 13 observers in 4 parties plus 2 yard observers; 35 field-hours; 22 field-miles by foot; 146 field-miles by car.—The warbler totals were unusually low, due primarily to the lateness of the count date.—SAMUEL A. CATHEY, 130 Park Street, Statesville, N.C. 28677.

CHARLOTTE, N.C.: Center unchanged. 7 May. 0400-2000. 107 species; 3846 individuals; 16 observers in 6 parties plus 1 yard observer; 47 field-hours; 21 field-miles by foot; 157 field-miles by car.—Noteworthy species were *Pileated Woodpecker* (Compiler), singing *Least Flycatcher* (Jack Hamilton), and calling *Fish Crows* (Dick Brown).—DANIEL E. READ JR., 1101 Rosewood Circle, Charlotte, N.C. 28211.

GREENWOOD COUNTY, S.C.: Center at intersection of routes 246 and 34 in Ninety Six. 1 May. 0500-1930. 99 species; 1384 individuals; 2 observers in 2 parties; 21 field-hours; 5 field-miles by foot; 230 field-miles by car.—Two to three *Double-crested Cormorants* have been seen regularly at Lake Greenwood since 17 March. Three of the four *Common Loons* were in breeding plumage; all the *Red-breasted Mergansers* were females. The Compiler identified two female *Greater Scaups* from a flock of 13 Lesser Scaups on the lake on 28 April. The rounded, almost flat heads, and the thicker and more massive heads and necks were compared to those of the Lesser Scaups; observer is very familiar with both species. *Bachman's Sparrow* (Compiler) was seen and heard singing in an overgrown field that appeared to have been clear-cut within the last 10 years. The tern was thought to be a Forster's.—BOB LEWIS, 308 E. Creswell Avenue, Greenwood, S.C. 29646.

GREENVILLE, S.C.: Center unchanged. 7 May. 0700-1600. 61 species; 789 individuals; 6 observers in 3 parties plus 2 yard observers; 9 field-hours [A comparatively poor effort.—HL]; 10 field-miles by foot; 35 field-miles by car.—ROSA LEE HARDIN, Star Route, Cleveland, S.C. 29635.

CLEMSON, S.C.: Center unchanged from previous spring counts. 7 May. 0500-1830. 125 species; 3097 individuals; 6 observers in 4 parties; 37 field-hours; 16 field-miles by foot;

228 field-miles by car.—The only bright spot on the count was lingering waterfowl—a *Pied-billed Grebe* (Sidney Gauthreaux), two *Black Ducks* (Gauthreaux), an *American Wigeon* (Bob and Lisa Lewis), and a bizarre female diving duck (*Aythya* sp?). The latter bird was dark brown in color with a pale eye ring, very long black bill, and grayish wing stripe. Studied by all count participants at extremely close range at a farm pond, the bird was believed to be a mutant or hybrid Redhead.—HARRY E. LeGRAND JR., Department of Zoology, Clemson University, Clemson, S.C. 29631.

PILOT MOUNTAIN STATE PARK, N.C.: Center at parking lot at Pilot Mountain. 3 May. 0500-1730. 69 species; 388 individuals; 5 observers in 2 parties; 50 field-hours; 23 field-miles by foot; 48 field-miles by car.—Two *Marsh Hawks* and a *Red-breasted Nuthatch* were rather late.—E. WAYNE IRVIN, 1510 Lynwood Avenue, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27104.

ELKIN-RONDA, N.C.: Center unchanged. 7 May. 0600-2300. 77 species; 723 individuals; 7 observers in 4 parties plus 3 yard observers; 45 field-hours; 16 field-miles by foot; 85 field-miles by car.—LIN HENDREN, P.O. Box 148, Elkin, N.C. 28621.

CALDWELL COUNTY, N.C.: Center unchanged. 9 May. 0630-1930. 68 species; 1145 individuals; 13 observers in 7 parties plus 9 yard observers; 63 field-hours; 17 field-miles by foot; 55 field-miles by car.—HELEN E. MYERS, 310 Beall Street NW, Lenoir, N.C. 28645.

MOUNTAINS

BREVARD, N.C.: Center unchanged. 7 May. 0700-2000. 98 species; 2845 individuals; 26 observers in 10 parties plus 10 yard observers; 49 field-hours; 24 field-miles by foot; 130 field-miles by car.—The female *Red-breasted Merganser* (Compiler, Susan Holland) was seen on the lake at Camp Straus, and the same observers found the *Least Sandpiper* in a channel at the Brevard airport. [Many compilers submitted details for Least Sandpipers at inland localities. This species is by no means a rare bird in spring and fall at these places; in fact, observers should be able to find them in their area every spring around farm ponds and lake margins.—HL]—WALTER C. HOLLAND JR., 290 Maple Street, Brevard, N.C. 28712.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY, N.C.: Center unchanged. 30 April. 0630-2100. 92 species; 2816 individuals; 12 observers in 6 parties plus 1 yard observer; 48 field-hours; 14 field-miles by foot; 167 field-miles by car.—JAMES R. WARNER, Route 2, Box 1133, Asheville, N.C. 28805.

GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN, N.C.: Center not chosen. [Please choose one, and stick to that circle; birders on this count in the past seem to have restricted themselves to the mountain and golf course and haven't made full use of the 15-mile diameter circle.—HL] 3 May. 0600-1900. 66 species; 866 individuals; 2 observers in 2 parties; 11 field-hours; 5 field-miles by foot; 19 field-miles by car.—An *Eastern Kingbird* on count day and nine *Ring-billed Gulls* at the golf course on 2 May were unusual for the area. *Carolina Wrens* seemed very scarce and may be in trouble because of the severe winter.—MARGERY PLYMIRE, Box 306, Linville, N.C. 28646.

WATAUGA COUNTY, N.C.: Center at Appalachian Christian Adventist Conference Grounds. [Near which town?—HL] 30 April. 0900-1200 (count terminated early because of dense fog). 21 species; 91 individuals; 20 observers in 5 parties; 15 field-hours; 14 field-miles by foot; 4 field-miles by car.—Dense fog made counting very difficult.—HELEN E. MYERS, 310 Beall Street NW, Lenoir, N.C. 28645.