

# General Field Notes

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## **An Observation of a Yellow-billed Common Crow**

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At about 1830 on 17 September 1977, while driving south on SC 19 approximately 500 m S of the entrance to the Savannah River Plant in Aiken County, Lohoefer saw on the roadside a crow with a yellow bill. We returned to the area and found the yellow-billed crow and two other crows perched in nearby pines.

Both the upper and lower mandibles of the unusual crow were a uniform shade of yellow (best described as orange-yellow; Smith, *A Naturalist's Color Guide*, The American Museum of Natural History, New York); the bird's legs, eyes, and plumage appeared normally pigmented. As the yellow-billed crow flew, its call identified it as a Common Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*). We did not see the bird on the following day.

The family Corvidae also includes the Black-billed Magpie (*Pica pica*) and Yellow-billed Magpie (*P. nuttalli*), species differentiated by their bill color differences. While our report might draw only casual interest as a sighting of a rare mutant, it may have an evolutionary significance when viewed with bill color differences of these other corvids in mind.

Our work at the Savannah River Plant was supported by a contract to Jackson from the U.S. Energy Research and Development Administration.

## **Canada Geese Wintering in Western North Carolina**

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Accepted July 1976

Western North Carolina is not known for its overwintering population of Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*). However, in 1950, 16 birds appeared on Roundabout Farm along the Yadkin River at Ronda, N.C. The farm, owned by R.T. Chatham, has several small ponds and proved to be attractive to the geese. They have returned each year since 1950, and numbers increased to a high of 450 in 1968 (Table 1). Since that time, numbers have fluctuated but have remained in excess of 200 each winter. The geese are fed and protected by Mr. Chatham and represent an unusual occurrence in western North Carolina.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Date arrived</u>	<u>First to arrive</u>	<u>Total</u>
1950	Oct. 3	5	16
1951	Oct. 1	7	26
1952	Sept. 30	6	75
1953	Sept. 28	5	125
1954	Oct. 1	6	140
1955	Sept. 26	8	200
1956	Sept. 27	6	220
1957	Sept. 27	10	280
1958	Oct. 3	4	300
1959	Oct. 2	6	390
1960	Oct. 1	38	420
1961	Oct. 3	6	408
1962	Oct. 15	10	375
1963	Sept. 30	15	385
1964	Sept. 27	23	365
1965	Sept. 20	7	370
1966	Sept. 13	7	380
1967	Sept. 14	5	342
1968	Oct. 2	8	450
1969	Sept. 10	10	390
1970	Sept. 25	9	366
1971	Sept. 23	9	325
1972	Oct. 2	17	250
1973	Oct. 1	9	210
1974	Sept. 23	16	350
1975	Sept. 28	16	335

Table 1. Wintering Canada Goose numbers at Ronda, N.C.

## American Avocet Breeding at Pea Island, N.C.

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Accepted 10 June 1977

On 18 June 1968, two one-day-old American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*) chicks were found on the mudflat north of North Field at the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge in Dare County, N.C. One chick was studied closely in hand (Fig. 1) but the second chick, about 20 feet away, was unapproachable due to deep water. A very agitated adult avocet was nearby.

Approximately 40 adult and immature avocets were present at Pea Island, and Black-necked Stilts (*Himantopus mexicanus*) were also nesting nearby. Several young stilts had been observed previously. A day-old American Avocet and a day-old Black-necked Stilt have much in common in general appearance, but upon close examination several specific differences are noted:

- (1) Avocet—slightly longer recurving bill.  
Stilt—straighter bill and a more prominent egg tooth.
- (2) Avocet—small black spot of down in front of each eye and at the base (both sides) of the upper mandible.  
Stilt—none.
- (3) Avocet—down on the neck and throat darker, grayish buff.  
Stilt—pale gray down on the throat and neck.
- (4) Avocet—body down darker gray.  
Stilt—body down pale to medium gray.