

General Field Notes

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Wood Storks over Asheville, N.C.

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At noon on a mild and sunny 2 December 1977, Blue Ridge Parkway Ranger Larry Freeman, who had been stationed in the Everglades for several years, asked if I could identify three large white birds circling over the French Broad River. From the office window they looked like herons, but at his urging, and with binoculars, we saw they had black heads and necks and a black-and-white wing pattern. A quick check of a field guide confirmed them to be three Wood Storks (*Mycteria americana*). The birds leisurely circled and soared downstream.

What is particularly interesting about this observation is that it occurred from the seventh floor headquarters office of the Blue Ridge Parkway in downtown Asheville, N.C. A number of different sightings have been made there including migrating monarch butterflies, American Kestrels, Red-tailed Hawks, Broad-wing Hawks, and assorted warblers—but none quite like this one.

[NOTE: Although Wood Storks have been reported from several places in piedmont North Carolina, the above sighting appears to be the first known from our mountains.—JFP]

Swallows Apparently Taking Prey from the Ground

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On 1 May 1978 at 1500, we observed about 300 swallows, mostly Barn Swallows with a lesser number of Tree and Rough-winged Swallows, alternately perching and fluttering over bare agricultural land at the Central Crops Research Station, Clayton, N.C. Some of the birds appeared to be hawking prey in the air, whereas others waddled about pecking at the ground.

Examination of the field revealed a large concentration of small flies. These either crawled over the surface when approached, or less made short, labored flights. The air temperature was in the range of 14 degrees C under an overcast sky. Thus the flies appeared to be partially incapacitated by the low temperature.

Although we were not able to approach near enough to the swallows to confirm that they were feeding on the flies, a few House Sparrows were observed taking the insects. That fact, coupled with the behavior of the swallows, led us to conclude that the flies had attracted the birds. Although the taking of terrestrial prey objects is doubtless exceptional

behavior in swallows, these expert aerialists can, apparently, employ such a strategy profitably when conditions are favorable.

Cerulean Warbler Colony in Graham County, N.C.

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While leading a field trip at the Fontana Village, N.C., Carolina Bird Club meeting on 29 April 1978, Bob Lewis, Lisa Lewis, and I stopped our car to listen for birds along NC 28 several miles E of the village. We immediately heard a singing Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*) in a mature hardwood forest alongside the road at 0700. We returned to the Fontana area in the afternoon and heard three more birds at a location approximately 1.5 miles W of the above site, and perhaps 4 miles E of the village. Two of the latter birds were seen to positively confirm the identification, though we know the song well and knew by that alone that the birds were Ceruleans. The warblers were clearly on territory, as they were singing vigorously, even at 1600 in the afternoon.

On 12 June 1978 I returned to the Fontana region to further study the birds. I drove slowly along the highway from 1030 to 1100 listening for Ceruleans, and I heard four groups of two birds, plus a single bird, for a total of nine. Unlike most warblers, Ceruleans apparently tend to breed within ear range of others of their kind, since at four places two males were singing within hearing range of each other. All nine birds were found along a 3-mile stretch of NC 28, approximately midway between Fontana Village and Tuskegee in northern Graham County. The elevation of this colony is approximately 2300 feet, and the habitat consists of mature and somewhat cove-like hardwoods on a steep mountain-side. This habitat is very similar to that at the Wilkes County, N.C., colony discovered by Merrill Lynch, Edmund LeGrand, and me in June 1972 (Chat 37:83-84).

In addition to the Fontana colony, other known and presumably breeding colonies of Ceruleans in North Carolina have been found along the Roanoke River from Halifax to Williamston (Chat 37:83-84; 39:54) in the coastal plain, and in the mountains in northeastern Wilkes County (Chat 37:83-84), southwestern Polk County (Chat 38:98), and Buncombe County near Reynolds Gap (Chat 39:98). These colonies, plus a few other mountain and upper piedmont reports of single birds, clearly show the localized breeding distribution characteristic of this species throughout its range. In summary, the Cerulean Warbler in North Carolina is a rare and local summer resident at the lower elevations (below 2500 feet) in the mountains, south at least to Graham and Polk counties, and also along the Roanoke River in the coastal plain. There seems to be no evidence that the species presently occurs in the piedmont during the summer. Birders should look for Ceruleans in the mountains in mature and somewhat open hardwoods on steep slopes, particularly in the 2000-2500 foot elevation range. I suspect that the Blue Ridge escarpment that overlooks the piedmont may well contain several additional colonies, besides those in Wilkes and Polk counties.