

# General Field Notes

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## Peregrine Falcons and Boats: An Example of Symbiosis?

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25 September 1978

Symbiosis, which means living together, is used to describe pairs of organisms that live in harmony. Commensalism is a type of symbiosis in which one organism benefits from the presence of another while the latter is unaffected (E.R. Pianka, *Evolutionary Ecology*, Harper and Row, 1974). If the definition is altered to include an inanimate object, then this form of symbiosis has occurred at Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, S.C.

Sprunt and Chamberlain (*South Carolina Bird Life*, 1970) include a report by Cape Romain personnel stating that the Peregrine Falcon "sometimes deliberately follows a patrol boat in the waterways of the marshes, and when grebes or ducks are flushed ahead of the boat, the Duck Hawk swoops upon them with astonishing swiftness." This feeding tactic has been reported at Cape Romain recently.

On four occasions between 26 September 1976 and 14 March 1977, a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) followed a refuge boat through the marshes and attacked Horned Grebes (*Podiceps auritus*). The attacks were made as the grebes taxied on the water. Only one attack was successful, but the falcon dropped or released the grebe after lifting it about 20 feet above the water. No attempt was made to recapture the grebe. It is not known whether these attacks were made by the same Peregrine or by different ones.

I thank the manager at Cape Romain NWR for allowing the use of an unpublished report on the Peregrine Falcon.

## Killdeer with Young in Charleston, S.C.

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31 August 1978

On 14 July 1978, in a grassy lot off Lockwood Boulevard in Charleston, S.C., I saw a Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) that on 17 July proved to be one of a mated pair with two downy young. The 2 to 3 acre lot is less than 100 yards from the Ashley River and is bordered on one side by marsh and on the other by the heavily traveled boulevard.

At my approach, both adults immediately arose: one circling and flying about in its characteristic rapid and erratic flight pattern, the other running to a rock-covered, exposed area, feigning injury as nesting birds of this species often do. The two young scurried into the high grass and did not take flight. I did not see the young after 17 July, but at least one adult was present as late as 5 August.

Wayne (*Birds of South Carolina*, 1910, p. 59) says that the Killdeer is a winter resident in the low country of South Carolina from July to April, but does not breed, "preferring" the

upper part of the state. However, Sprunt and Chamberlain (South Carolina Bird Life, 1949, p. 215) state that the species does breed on the coast and list records from Beaufort and Charleston Counties. Burton (Supplement, South Carolina Bird Life, 1970, p. 598) provides additional nesting records for Berkeley and Dorchester Counties. He also states that nests containing eggs have been found as early as 14 March and as late as 9 July. This is supported by the two young I observed on 15 July.

## Nocturnal Feeding of Gulls at a Lighted Pier

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20 December 1978

On 4 December 1978, a flock of 1500 to 2000 gulls was observed from 2030 until 2230 off the end of the Crystal Fishing Pier at Wrightsville Beach, N.C. There were no fishermen on the pier, but the spotlight that illuminates the ocean at the end of the pier was turned on. This was the second day that 30-knot southwesterly winds had been blowing. The birds were feeding on small bait fish while hovering above the water at the end of the pier, and dropping back to rest on the surface of the water after feeding. The flock was composed mainly of Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) with Ring-billed (*L. delawarensis*) and an occasional Herring (*L. argentatus*) and Great Black-backed (*L. marinus*) present. One Royal Tern (*Sterna maxima*) was seen. Two additional small groups of 25 to 100 birds were also feeding beside the pier. At 2330 there were still about 1000 birds present, the majority of which were resting on the surface of the water.

These species are generally considered to be diurnal feeders. We have seen no other instance of the nocturnal attraction of such large numbers of gulls to feed on the schools of small fish regularly encountered adjacent to lighted piers along the North Carolina coast.

## Franklin's Gull in Greenwood County, S.C.

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11 April 1978

In the late afternoon of 2 April 1978, I was following my usual birding route along Lake Greenwood in Greenwood State Park, Greenwood County, S.C. It had been the hottest day of the year to date, with a high temperature of 82 degrees F, following a week-long period of unusually warm and dry weather. The sky was cloudless and there was still plenty of light available, even though it was only a half hour before sunset.

Looking north from the camping area, I saw a flock of approximately 350 gulls resting about 100 to 150 yards off shore. This is an unusually large number for April. The flock consisted of several Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*); roughly 310 Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*); 35 Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*), many of which had almost completely black hoods; and one other gull.

The bird was intermediate in size between the Bonaparte's and the Ring-billeds, but closer to the Bonaparte's. The bill, too, was intermediate: shaped more like the Ring-billed's, but distinctly smaller relative to the size of the head. The blackish-red bill was, therefore, too slight to be that of a Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*). The black hood of the breeding plumage was complete. An almost complete white eye ring was very noticeable. The mantle was dark gray, much darker than that of either the Bonaparte's or the Ring-billed's. Separating the mantle color from the black wing tips was a broad band of white.

I saw the pattern of the opened wings briefly on three occasions, once when the bird stretched its wings and twice when it (and the rest of the flock) took flight. From above the