

General Field Notes

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A Survey of Whistling Swans Along the South Carolina Coast

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South Carolina Bird Life (1970, p. 584) classifies the Whistling Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*), as a "rare winter resident seen mostly along the coast." During the winters of 1976-77 and 1977-78, I had an opportunity to census Whistling Swans by air and ground along the South Carolina coast from Myrtle Beach to Savannah. My surveys showed that Whistling Swans were concentrated at the four major locations given below. Numbers in parentheses indicate the maximum swan population wintering at each location. Huntington Beach State Park (15) and South Island Refuge (28), Georgetown County; Bull's Island (30), Charleston County; and Savannah National Wildlife Refuge (25), Jasper County. Another concentration point often used by swans is Doe Hall Plantation, Charleston County, which has reported up to 30 swans (Chat 36:33). I found a total of 98 swans overwintering along the coast. Little difference was noted in the number of swans between 1977 and 1978, although the population at Savannah National Wildlife Refuge was down in 1978.

It is possible that swans have been overlooked between Charleston and Savannah, where none have been found in apparently suitable habitat. Elsewhere in the state, a few swans have been seen in recent years at Lake Greenwood, Lake Hartwell, the Santee National Wildlife Refuge, and locations in Richland and Barnwell Counties. The state's total wintering swan population could approach 120 birds.

I believe that Whistling Swans are gradually increasing in South Carolina. A review of Christmas bird counts in *The Chat* from 1963 through 1976 showed five counts, all in the 1960s, that reported no swans, but all counts in the 1970s showed swans at one or more sites in South Carolina.

The principal Whistling Swan foods in South Carolina seem to be Widgeon Grass (*Ruppia maritima*) and Muskgrass (*Chara* sp.). Both plants are widely used for waterfowl management in the state.

This survey was made possible by a contract from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the Clemson University Agricultural Experiment Station.

Historical Record of the Swallow-tailed Kite from the South Carolina Mountains

JOHN E. CELY

Several years ago Simpson (Chat 36:69-72, 1972) reviewed the former status of the Swallow-tailed Kite in the southern Appalachians, especially in western North Carolina. Kites were regular late summer visitors in the North Carolina mountains during the 1800s but had almost disappeared by 1900. Simpson attributed this decline to a corresponding shrinkage in the breeding range of Swallow-tailed Kites in the upper Mississippi Valley; he

felt that birds breeding in the upper Midwest were migrating in the fall east and south down through the Appalachian Mountains.

Leverett M. Loomis, a capable ornithologist who worked in the South Carolina piedmont during the late nineteenth century, shed additional light on the occurrence of Swallow-tailed Kites in the southern Appalachians. In his paper "Summer birds of the mountain portions of Pickens County, South Carolina" (Auk 7:30-39, 1890), Loomis noted that Swallow-tailed Kites were "summer visitants in Oolenoy (Pickens County) and other valleys." On 6 August 1889, two kites were shot on Little Eastatooe Creek, 3 miles W of Mount Pinnacle. This locality is about 50 air miles S of the North Carolina mountains where kites were seen in the 1800s.

American Robin Breeding on South Carolina Coast

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Although the American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) breeds from the mountains to Summerville in South Carolina, Sprunt and Chamberlain (South Carolina Bird Life, 1949, p. 402) remark that "As yet, there is no record of its nesting directly on the coastal strip, but it appears to be coming closer steadily." E. Burnham Chamberlain and Webber Mott saw a young bird in Charleston in early July 1957, and Mrs. Paul E. Atwood reported one at Edisto Beach on 3 June 1956 (Supplement, South Carolina Bird Life, 1970, p. 618).

When I moved back to McClellanville in June 1971, I began to notice American Robins along the village streets, and found that residents considered it to be a breeding species. I was not able to locate a nest until 16 July 1977, when I observed an adult and made inquiries in the neighborhood. Henry Lofton pointed out an inaccessible nest about 45 feet up in the "Deer Head Oak." Although the young had fledged, Mr. Lofton assured me that he and his family had watched the adults feeding the nestlings many times during the spring. This pair did not return to the "Deer Head Oak" in 1978, but in August I saw several robins near the McClellanville School. Nelson Taylor, retired Forest Service Ranger and avid birder, told me these birds had been around all summer and that he felt sure they were nesting. He recalled that in 1972 a pair fledged young from a nest in an oak that overhung his kitchen window. He added that on the 1978 Charleston Spring Bird Count he saw a pair of American Robins copulating beside a road in Awendaw, about 15 miles SW of McClellanville. This observation was reported by Perry Nugent (Lesser Squawk 29(6):6).

The American Robin can now be considered a well-established breeding species in the vicinity of McClellanville.

ADDENDUM

On 4 May 1979, Nelson Taylor watched an American Robin fly to its nest about 30 feet high in a pine in his yard at McClellanville. It peered into the nest, then settled down as though to incubate or brood.

Tanagers at Hillsborough, N.C.

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During our first summer here (1957) I was surprised to find that there was an apparent breeding population of Scarlet Tanagers. Over the years the annual banding of Scarlet Tanagers has run about one-fourth the annual banding of Summer Tanagers. Undoubtedly some birds of each species have been migrants rather than local summer residents.

By about 1970 I was quite sure that the number of each species banded was much less than in the early years. One way of looking at this is to compute a moving