

# General Field Notes

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## Observations of Water Birds on Lake Murray, S.C.

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Greenwood, S.C.

13 June 1978

Lake Murray, one of the larger man-made lakes in South Carolina, lies predominantly in Lexington County, roughly 20 miles W of Columbia. Table 1 summarizes the 11 field trips

TABLE 1. Observations of wintering water birds  
 at Lake Murray, S.C., 1977 and 1978.

Species	1977 8 Jan.	23 Oct.	6 Nov.	20 Nov.	25 Nov.	1978 21 Jan.	23 Jan.	5 Feb.	27 Feb.	9 Apr.	12 Apr.
Common Loon .....	21	43	9	7	7	30	3	20	1	20	15
Horned Grebe .....	1457	12	42	146	25	1250	700	1350	11	2	--
Pied-bill. Grebe .	7	1	--	--	--	4	--	2	--	--	--
Mallard .....	160	25	20	--	--	6	1	10	6	5	6
Black Duck .....	10	6	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Gadwall .....	--	2	--	--	--	25	2	--	--	--	--
Blue-winged Teal .	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2
American Wigeon ..	--	15	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	20
N. Shoveler .....	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2	--
Redhead .....	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	30	--	--
Scaup (sp. ?) ....	--	110	1	300	--	15	300	300	600	60	50
Com. Goldeneye ...	--	--	--	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	--
Bufflehead .....	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2	4	--	--
Hooded Merganser .	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	15	--	--	5
Red-br. Merg. ....	53	--	--	--	--	--	94	80	2	--	--
Duck (sp. ?) .....	--	100	--	--	30	100	--	--	--	--	400
American Coot ....	14	7	--	--	--	1	2	4	9	400	--
Herring Gull .....	--	--	3	--	--	20	--	10	10	--	--
Ring-billed Gull .	85	15	20	--	--	1000	300	200	100	50	--
Bonaparte's Gull .	20	4	--	--	--	--	150	200	--	--	--
Gull (sp. ?) .....	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	60

I made to this lake during 1977 and 1978.

The best observation point for birding is reached by driving north on Shore Road from SC 378 for about 6 miles until the road ends. One is then at the end of a long peninsula jutting into the lake. From here it is possible to scan over several square miles of water to the east and south. In dealing with such large distances, it is essential to have a powerful telescope and good viewing conditions (i.e. water temperature approximately equal to air temperature). Another good lookout is the dam forming the Lake on SC 6.

The most notable feature of the table is the enormous number of Horned Grebes that wintered on Lake Murray in 1977 and 1978. Such numbers are unprecedented at an inland location in the Carolinas, if not for the continent. The numbers recorded for Common Loon, Red-breasted Merganser, and scaup are also unusually high, at least by comparison with the accounts given by Sprunt and Chamberlain in *South Carolina Bird Life* (1970). Because of the great distances involved. I have listed all scaup under the heading "Scaup (sp. ?)." There is little or no doubt, however, that the vast majority of these birds were Lessers.

Not included in the table are two birds seen indistinctly at a great distance on 21 January 1978. They are thought to have been Western Grebes, but viewing conditions made a positive identification impossible.

It should be noted that the winters of 1977 and 1978 were unusually severe. I was accompanied on several of these trips by my wife Lisa, and once by Brian Cassie.

## White-tailed Kite in South Carolina Piedmont

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9 January 1979

On 4 July 1978 I attended a picnic near the intersection of SC 72 and Coronaca Creek, in Greenwood County, S.C., about 6 miles NE of the city of Greenwood. The temperature was in the 90s that afternoon with little or no wind and a clear sky. I was in the backyard of a home surrounded by forested country broken occasionally by fields and the highway. Along with the expected species of passerines, I noted a number of Fish Crows in the area.

Around 1500 I was attracted by movement in the sky. From behind some trees in the distance I saw a large bird flying, pursued by three crows (apparently Fish Crows). Astonishingly, the bird looked pure white, and my first thought was of an egret. Many seconds passed before I was able to obtain a pair of binoculars from my car. I relocated the bird, which had been flying steadily, and observed it with binoculars for 2 to 3 seconds. It was about 70 to 100 m away.

The entire body and under surface of the tail were pure white. The bird was a little larger than the pursuing crows, especially in wingspread. In the brief time that I looked at it, two features attracted my attention: the whiteness of the body, head, and tail, and the head itself, which had a beautiful, well-defined, tear-shaped black mark around the eye. There was some black on the under surface of the wings, which were white otherwise. The bird flew by flapping two or three times and then gliding, in the style of an accipiter, but with slower wingbeats. The bird was undoubtedly a White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*).

This Western species, of Southern California and Texas, formerly occurred in South Carolina. In the 1830s, Audubon and his contemporaries recorded the bird several times in the Charleston area and located a nest there (*South Carolina Bird Life*, 1970, p. 152). In the last 50 years, however, there have been only two recorded observations in South Carolina, both made by Douglas Wade in the early 1950s within 10 miles of Clemson (Chat 17:70). In North Carolina, the most recent record of the bird is from the Wilmington area in January of 1957 (Chat 21:70).

Adding significance to the Greenwood observation is the fact that the White-tailed Kite has, in recent years, been undergoing a population explosion and may be extending its range (*American Birds* 32:972). The re-establishment of the species in South Carolina is, therefore, an exciting possibility.

[NOTE: In recent years an albinistic Red-tailed Hawk (Chat 43:31) has frequented the