

First South Carolina Sight Record of the Lesser Black-backed Gull

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On 16 September 1976, I observed a single adult Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) on a sanitary landfill near Spruill Avenue, Charleston Heights, Charleston County, S.C. The bird was feeding in association with Laughing Gulls (*L. atricilla*), Ring-billed Gulls (*L. delawarensis*), and Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*). I approached to within 30 m of the bird and observed it in good light with 7 x 35 wide-angle binoculars from 1530 to 1600 hours. It was slightly smaller than a Herring Gull and had a sooty-black back similar to that of an adult Great Black-backed Gull (*L. marinus*). The bill and legs were bright yellow, and there was red spot on the upper mandible. When the gull flew, it dangled its legs downward revealing their bright yellow color.

I left the landfill and returned at 1635 hours prepared to collect the bird. However, as I stepped onto the site, it and all of the other birds left and did not return. On 17 September, Pete Laurie and I independently searched all landfills in the Charleston area (see Chat 37:57-62 for details of geographic locations), but we failed to find the bird again.

This observation is the first record of the Lesser Black-backed for South Carolina. Unfortunately, the photographs I took of the bird were inadequate for confirmation of the sight record (S.A. Gauthreaux Jr. and H.E. LeGrand Jr., pers. comm.). Consequently, this species must be placed on the hypothetical list until additional records are available.

The appearance of this species in South Carolina is not unexpected as it has been recorded regularly in winter since 1975 from North Carolina (Am. Birds 31:163-166) and Florida (Am. Birds 31:166-169). I predict that it will become a regular but rare winter visitor in the future, just as the Great Black-backed Gull has become since the 1950s (South Carolina Bird Life, 1970, p. 604).

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Owl Census at Columbia, S.C.

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During the early months of 1978, Charles Whitney and I conducted an informal survey of owl populations within the area covered annually during the Columbia, S.C., Christmas Bird Count. Using taped calls and hooted imitations to attract the birds, we worked approximately 30% of the count circle during our survey. Our searching was done for the most part along quiet back roads and woods trails, away from residential areas, and was always begun shortly after dark on calm evenings. The results of our field work are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Results of an owl census made in the vicinity of Columbia, S.C., January through March 1978. Habitat abbreviations: F for farmland, fields, and adjacent woodland margins, H for hardwoods, P for mature pinewoods, YP for young pinewoods, M for mixed pine/hardwoods, and R for residential neighborhoods.

| Date | Hours Afield | Owls Total/Seen | Great- horned | Barred | Screech | Short- eared | Habitat |
|---------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|--------|---------|-----------------|---------|
| 28 Jan. | 2.25 | 13/3 | — | 5 | 7 | 1 | F,H,M |
| 29 Jan. | 4.0 | 17/3 | — | 12 | 5 | — | H,M |
| 2 Feb. | .25 | 4/1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | — | M,P, |
| 24 Feb. | 2.75 | 27/4 | — | 24 | 3 | — | F,H,M |
| 6 Mar. | 2.0 | 13/1 | 2 | 1 | 10 | — | M,P,R |
| 10 Mar. | 2.25 | 22/6 | 2 | 1 | 19 | — | M,Y,P |
| 21 Mar. | 3.5 | 15/2 | 2 | 2 | 11 | — | M,R |
| 22 Mar. | 3.0 | 15/3 | — | 12 | 3 | — | F,M,P |
| 29 Mar. | .25 | 3/1 | — | 3 | — | — | H |
| Totals | 20.25 | 129/24 | 7 | 62 | 59 | 1 | |

During the course of this study, we gradually became familiar with the habitat requirements of the commoner owls in the Columbia area. The Screech Owl (*Otus asio*) was found to occur abundantly in extensive tracts of young pine, such as are present on parts of Fort Jackson Military Reservation. We also found this bird to be quite common in residential woodlots and in mixed woods along the edge of farmland. In riverbottom woods and in dark, swampy situations, the Barred Owl (*Strix varia*) populations are very large indeed, and in these habitats we found this highly vociferous and animated bird to be the only owl species present. Barred Owls were also noted commonly in drier areas of mature pines. In regard to the Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*), we expected to record this bird in a variety of habitats; however, it could only be located in the vicinity of small lakes or ponds with adjacent stands of tall pines.

The range of responses of owls to recorded owl calls was considerable. The Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) and Great Horned Owl made no response that we could discern. Screech Owls were generally cooperative and answered the recordings well. Most surprising was the Barred Owl, which not only readily responded to its own calls but also seemed to answer the calls of the Great Horned Owl and Screech Owl on several occasions.

Of six Screech Owls seen well enough to distinguish color, five were gray and one was reddish-brown. The reddish-brown bird was seen in company with one of the gray-phase owls, the two apparently a mated pair.

Audubon's Warbler: Second North Carolina Record

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At 1645 on 3 February 1980 the alarm notes of a Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) attracted a flock of small passerines, including two Yellow-rumped Warblers (*Dendroica coronata*), to the area of my feeding station in the Glendale Heights section of Durham, N.C. My wife Lois remarked upon the brilliant plumage of one of the warblers. Examining the bird with 7 x 50 binoculars at 20 m, we identified it as an