

General Field Notes

DAVID S. LEE, Department Editor
North Carolina State Museum, P.O. Box 27647
Raleigh, N.C. 27611

JULIAN R. HARRISON, Associate Editor
Department of Biology, The College of Charleston, Charleston, S.C. 29401

Bill-vibrating Feeding Behavior in the Snowy Egret

ELOISE F. POTTER
Route 3, Box 114 AA
Zebulon, N.C. 27597

About 0700 on 18 August 1981 I noticed unusual feeding behavior in a Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) at North Pond in the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, Dare County, N.C. The bird was standing in water that reached the feathered portion of the legs. Its body and lower neck were held parallel to the surface of the water and just barely above it. The upper neck arched to permit immersion of the tip of the bill in the water. The bird opened and closed the bill almost imperceptibly at a very rapid rate. This caused visible turbulence in the water at the point of immersion. Occasionally the heron assumed an upright posture and took a few steps before crouching and again vibrating the bill in the water. Twice the bird moved forward very slowly without removing the bill from the water or ceasing the vibrations. The behavior continued for about 15 minutes after I first noticed the bird. The egret then left the water and stood on a nearby island. Although the Snowy Egret is generally a very active bird while feeding, this one appeared to be using the bill vibrations as a variation on the crouched stand-and-wait technique regularly employed by the Green Heron (*Butorides striatus*).

Kushlan (Auk 93:86-94) summarizes 28 feeding behaviors recorded for one or more of the North American herons. He lists three species reported as having used bill-vibrating to create a disturbance that attracts prey: Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), and Snowy Egret. James F. Parnell (pers. comm.) says that he has seen bill vibrations employed on several occasions by Black-crowned Night-Herons feeding in floating mats of algae. Perhaps the technique is not as uncommon as the few published reports suggest.

A Bird List for Caldwell County, N.C., in Late May

JOHN SNEEDEN
6305 Gadwall Court
Wilmington, N.C. 28403

On 30 May 1981 I spent several hours watching birds near Hudson, Whitnel, and Lenoir in south-central Caldwell County, N.C. Elevations here range from 950 feet (Hudson) to 1182 feet (Lenoir), and the habitat is primarily rolling hills forested by Pitch Pine (*Pinus rigada*).

Forty avian species were recorded, and of these the 30 that showed territorial behavior are followed by an asterisk (*): Sharp-shinned Hawk 1, Cooper's Hawk 2*,

Mourning Dove 10*, Chimney Swift 3, Common Flicker 2*, Downy Woodpecker 2*, Great Crested Flycatcher 3*, Eastern Wood Pewee 1*, Barn Swallow 8, Blue Jay 10+*, Carolina Chickadee 5*, Tufted Titmouse 3*, White-breasted Nuthatch 1*, Brown-headed Nuthatch 5*, House Wren 2*, Carolina Wren 2*, Mockingbird 7*, Gray Catbird 2*, Brown Thrasher 3*, American Robin 15+*, Wood Thrush 3*, Veery 1, Eastern Bluebird 8*, Golden-crowned Kinglet 1, Cedar Waxwing 4, Black-and-white Warbler 3*, Yellow Warbler 1, Pine Warbler 2*, Ovenbird 6*, Eastern Meadowlark 10+*, Orchard Oriole 2*, Common Grackle 25+*, Brown-headed Cowbird 5+, Scarlet Tanager 2*, Cardinal 15*, Indigo Bunting 1*, Rufous-sided Towhee 8*, Dark-eyed Junco 4, Grasshopper Sparrow 1 (heard only), and Song Sparrow 20+*.

Unfortunately, the brevity of my stay precluded searching for nests. Nevertheless, several of the occurrences warrant further comment. I found the Cooper's Hawks at Lenoir occupying a 5-mile stretch of lowland between two mountains, one of which has a forest station and hang-gliding point at the summit. The Pine Warblers were between Hickory (Catawba County) and Hudson along US 321-A (ca. 925 feet), and the Brown-headed Nuthatches were along US 321 in a grove of pines near a pottery shop on the way to Lenoir (ca. 1050 feet). Brown-headed Nuthatches were first reported nesting in Caldwell County in 1974 (Chat 38:66). The Orchard Orioles were at the same location as the nuthatches but on the other side of the road in deciduous shade trees. The Veery, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Dark-eyed Juncos were undoubtedly late transients at the elevations covered.

A Winter Bird Survey of Graham County, N.C.

JIM McCONNELL

Box E-802, Earlham College
Richmond, Indiana 47374

Early ornithological explorations of the North Carolina mountain region such as those conducted by William Brewster (1886) completely bypassed Graham County. It was not until 1944-1946 that Ganier, conducting research mainly at high-altitude (4000 to 5472 feet) sites, described the summer birds of the Unicoi Mountains, which constitute the western edge of the county (Ganier and Clebsch 1944, 1946). More recently (from 1968 to 1978), five breeding bird surveys have been conducted around the Fontana Village area by Mary Enloe, John Wright, and Harry E. LeGrand Jr. Additionally, several bird sightings have appeared in *The Chat*, representing observations made from the months of April through September. No published distributional records have appeared for the months from October to March.

Graham County has eight mountaintops rising above 4900 feet. Four major lakes are either partially or wholly within the county: Lake Santeetlah, Fontana Lake, Cheoah Lake, and Calderwood Lake. Of these, Santeetlah is the highest with an average surface elevation of 1920 feet, and Calderwood is lowest at 1080 feet. The proximity of these lakes to the Tennessee Valley suggests the possibility of wintering water birds straying from that prime waterfowl habitat.

From 29 through 31 December 1980, Owen McConnell and I surveyed winter birds in Graham County. We covered most of the county, including the high peaks of Hooper Bald, Oak Knob, and Big Huckleberry Knob in the western Unicoi Mountains; the length of Big Santeetlah Creek; the area surrounding Santeetlah Lake in the center of the county; Joyce Kilmer Memorial; Maple Springs Observation Point; the valleys of Cochran, Yellow, and Sweetwater Creeks; NC 28 from Stecoah to Fontana; US 129 from Robbinsville to Tapoco; Calderwood, Cheoah, and Fontana Lakes along the northern county boundary; and a portion of the Appalachian Trail in the Yellow Creek Mountains. Although light snow fell on the night of 30 December, the weather was