

Causeway, and the bird was about 100 degrees from the sun. Each of us used 7 x 35 binoculars.

Most noticeable field marks were white wing linings and body contrasting strongly with dark flight feathers, with dark head and breast region, and with dark tail. Some white was also present in the face, chin, and throat. Wings were long and slender-appearing for a Buteo, and when the bird was at a good angle, a weak dihedral was apparent in the wings. No banding was apparent in the tail from either above or below, although some faint banding was noticeable on the flight feathers. It is the experience of Tarbet that the banding of the tail is seldom easily seen in Swainson's Hawk, with the tail often presenting a general gray color as in the present case.

We are confident that the bird was a Swainson's Hawk because of wing, body, and head pattern; shape and size; and wing position while soaring. It also matched quite closely the numerous members of this species seen by Tarbet in the West. The bird is rare in North Carolina with only three previous reports (Chat 44:76 and 44:76-78).

Mike Tove, Harry LeGrand, Paul Sykes, and others mentioned the possibility that this bird was part of the small winter population in Florida, despite the fact that most of that population is immatures. We can offer no more likely explanation for the presence of the bird in the Raleigh area and conclude from the failure to locate the bird later that it was migrating.

We thank the following for their consultation in this matter: John Connors, Craig Gorsuch, Bob Hader, Ken Knapp, Harry LeGrand, Paul Sykes, Mike Tove, Bill Wagner, Jeff Walters, and Joe Wonderle.

### **Screech Owl Nest in a Box on the Ground**

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On 13 May 1981, Clemmer found a Screech Owl (*Otus asio*) with two large downy young in a nest box (inside dimensions: 25 x 25 x 56 cm; entrance diameter: 10 cm) that was resting on the ground at the Savannah River Plant, Aiken County, S.C. The site was dominated by 40-year-old Longleaf Pine (*Pinus palustris*), Bluejack Oak (*Quercus cinerea*), and Turkey Oak (*Quercus laevis*) with little ground cover other than pine straw. As a result of forest management activities and the young age of the stand, few trees were large enough to provide nesting cavities for this species, although an identical unoccupied nest box attached at 2 m on a pine was within 100 m of the box on the ground. The bottom of the box on the tree was covered by pine straw; the box on the ground had about 8 cm of wood shavings on the bottom. The birds were not disturbed on 13 May. When the box was checked by Jackson on 27 May, the birds were gone, though one infertile Screech Owl egg was found.

While Screech Owls are well known to accept nest boxes as substitutes for natural nesting cavities (Van Camp 1975, Bent 1938, Alland 1937), they usually

choose nest sites well above the ground. The only similar report we have found was of a nest in a stump; in that case, the bottom of the nest was below ground level (Bent 1938).

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### **First North Carolina Record of a Wheatear**

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About 0800 on 11 October 1981, I saw a small flock of Eastern Bluebirds alight in a Flowering Dogwood tree in the front yard of my home at Franklin, Macon County, N.C. I noticed one of the birds was unusually light colored for a bluebird. With binoculars I observed, from a distance of about 40 feet, that the bird in question was not only a pale brown color on both top and bottom but also did not have the hunched-over look of a bluebird.

It was definitely a bird that I had never seen before. My first view of it, as it perched in the dogwood tree, was a profile, and I noticed a thin bill, possibly even a little thinner than that of the bluebird, as well as a pale brown color on the head, back, underparts, and upper half of the wings. The lower half of the wings was very dark, maybe even black, and what I could see of the rear portion of the tail was black also. The bird was constantly flicking its wings and bobbing up and down, and each time it flicked its wings I could see some white on its rump.

I went outside to get a closer look and was able to approach to less than 20 feet: I was now at about a three-quarter angle to the rear of the bird and for the first time noticed a hint of a pale eye stripe, not quite white. I also noticed the white of the rump was far more extensive than I had thought at first. When the bird became alarmed at my approach and flew, I could see a really tremendous contrast between the bright white of the rump and the black of the tail.

The bird then flew to some power lines, and I went back to the house, hoping it would return. About 15 minutes later I noticed the bird was with a small flock of Song Sparrows. At this time whenever the bird flicked its wings I was able to observe a pattern between the black and white on the tail. The rear portion of the tail, about one-third, was black and then a black stripe, maybe one-third the width of the tail, ran up the tail. The entire rump and rest of the tail were bright