

General Field Notes

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Brown-headed Nuthatches Store Pine Seeds

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I observed a Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla*) storing seeds of a Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*) at 1800 on 8 October 1981 at Rockingham, N.C. A nuthatch placed winged pine seeds in bark crevices on the vertical trunk of a 13-m high Loblolly Pine on several occasions and secured the food by pounding it in crevices at heights of 5 to 6.5 m. The bird clung to the pine bark in both vertical and horizontal positions while caching the food. Locally the 1981 Loblolly Pine seed crop was excellent.

I observed another Brown-headed Nuthatch storing seeds of the Longleaf Pine (*P. palustris*) at 1100 on 13 October 1981 at Derby, N.C. The nuthatch extracted a winged seed from a live Longleaf Pine and then flew to a dead 10.7-m pine snag that had some bark attached. The bird secured the pine seed in a bark crevice at 6.7 m by pounding it in from diagonal to vertical positions (tail above head) while clinging to the bark. To maintain its balance, the bird fluttered its wings several times while caching the pine seed. The same bird stored a pine seed in a bark crevice 6.1 m high on the vertical trunk of a 13-m live Longleaf Pine. The nuthatch held a horizontal position while it cached the pine seed, and no wing flicking was observed. The 1981 Longleaf Pine seed crop also was excellent.

On several occasions, I have seen Brown-headed Nuthatches retrieving stored pine seeds. In a Longleaf Pine forest in the Sandhills Game Management Area, Hoffman, N.C., at 1145 on 17 December 1980, a Brown-headed scaled off a piece of pine bark at 6.1 m on the vertical trunk of a 15.3-m tree. The bird briefly probed and extracted a seed without its wing attached. The bird then flew to another Longleaf Pine where it hammered the food. I do not know what animal stored this seed. Again the crop was excellent.

Norris (1958) observed Brown-headed Nuthatches storing single pine seeds on trunks or limbs of pines in Georgia, but provided no further details. He also observed food caching in Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*). Roberts (1979) overlooked this reference in his review of avian food-storing behavior, and listed the Brown-headed Nuthatch as a probable food-storer, presumably based on documented food-storing behavior at the closely related Pygmy Nuthatch (Stallcup 1968). The purpose of this note is to provide the first published descriptions of food-storing behavior in the Brown-headed Nuthatch and to point out an oversight of this behavior in a recent major review of avian food-storing behavior.

LITERATURE CITED

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Status of the Le Conte's Sparrow in the Carolinas

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On 4 December 1982, I flushed a small sparrow on several occasions from a moist grassy field on the edge of Beaverdam Reservoir in northern Wake County, N.C. I tentatively identified the bird as a Le Conte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*) because of its sharp tail, rather low and feeble flight, and overall slimness. It was no larger than the many Savannah Sparrows (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) in the same field. As the bird never perched in sight, and as its flight was always directly away from me, I was unable to obtain any other field marks.

Allen Bryan and I flushed the sparrow in question in the same area on 17 December. It immediately flew to a shrub in a nearby hedgerow and remained in sight there and on several other perches for about 5 minutes. It was, indeed, a Le Conte's Sparrow. The streaks along the side of the breast and belly, thin purplish nape streaks, whitish median stripe through the crown, orange stripe over the eye, absence of a malar stripe, and especially the soft peach-orange color of the underparts and face were clearly seen. Because the streaks on the underparts extended onto the upper breast, nearly meeting along the midline, I suspect that the bird was an immature. The Le Conte's was seen again on 18 December by Derb Center and Wayne and Fran Irvin, in addition to Bryan and me.

This appears to be the third winter record for this species in North Carolina, but the first away from the coast (Fig. 1). The other winter records are two at Bodie Island from 30 December 1974 to 10 January 1975 (Chat 39:10, 42:60) and one near Carolina Beach on 25 January 1981 (Chat 45:83). In South Carolina, there are numerous winter records for the Savannah River Plant, the Charleston area, and the McClellanville area. Other isolated winter records in the latter state are at Chester (South Carolina Bird Life, 1970, p. 529), near Pendleton (Chat 45:83), at Santee National Wildlife Refuge (Chat 39:63), and in the Litchfield Beach - Pawleys Island area (Chat 39:10, 45:83). Le Conte's Sparrow possibly winters regularly north to Santee refuge and Carolina Beach; it certainly is regular (though rare or uncommon) north to the Savannah River Plant and the Santee River delta (see Fig. 1).

I have also shown the published spring and fall records (Fig. 1) for localities outside the regular winter range. The few spring records show no distinct geographical pattern. However, in the fall, the species seems somewhat more likely to occur near the coast than inland.