

General Field Notes

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Green-backed Heron Spends Two Consecutive Winters on Pond in Northwestern South Carolina

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On 3 January 1981 Dan Pettigrew and I saw an immature Green-backed Heron (*Butorides striatus*) on a farm pond 1 mile E of Pendleton, S.C., during the Clemson, S.C., Christmas Bird Count (Amer. Birds 35:502, Chat 45:78). The bird was seen several times later in the 1981 winter season by other observers. The following winter a mature Green-backed Heron was seen on 29 January by Carl Helms, the Clemson University Ornithology class, and me on the same farm pond east of Pendleton, and I sighted the bird again a week later. However, it was not seen in the 1982-1983 winter season.

Sprunt and Chamberlain (1970) state that a few Green-backed Herons spend the winter in the coastal areas of South Carolina, but they consider the species uncommon at this time of year. There is no mention of any inland winter records for the state. Potter et al. (1980) also state that this bird's winter range is restricted to coastal South Carolina. Lowery (1974) notes that the Green-backed Heron is rare even as far south as Louisiana after mid-November. The only winter record of a Green-backed Heron reported in *The Chat* during the 1970s was one seen at Raleigh, N.C., on 6 December 1977 (Chat 42:61), but in December 1982 stragglers were noted in North Carolina at Fayetteville, Chapel Hill, Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge, and Hatteras (Chat 47:76).

The pond on which the Green-backed Heron was sighted covers approximately 2 ha. A fairly large Beaver impoundment lies directly behind the pond's dam, offering more suitable habitat for the bird. This pond, in the piedmont at 275 m elevation, was drained in the mid-to-late 1970s. Although it was not restocked, it does have many small bream as an excellent food source for the bird. Nearby are at least three other farm ponds that could provide additional feeding habitat.

Green-backed Herons may have bred on this farm pond in 1981 and 1982, as evidenced by the sightings of both mature and immature birds during the course of those breeding seasons. However, no nests were found either summer.

These facts and observations bring to mind some important questions concerning the biology and winter strategy of the bird(s). Foremost, was the immature bird sighted

in 1981 the same bird that overwintered in 1982? And if so, was this bird a male? The importance here is that males overwintering on their breeding grounds have the opportunity to establish breeding territories in optimal habitats before other males arrive from their wintering areas. Also, an overwintering bird would not have to expend energy to make the long migration to and from Central and South America as do most other Green-backed Herons. On the other hand, such a bird is taking the chance that its food source may become impossible to reach if ice forms on the pond. Unfortunately, these questions cannot be answered with the information at hand. When similar occurrences of birds overwintering out of their range are detected in the future, it would be interesting to catch, age, sex, and color band the bird so as to answer some of these questions.

LITERATURE CITED

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A 1977 Record of a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck from Lee County, S.C., Comes to Light

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A report on a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) collected in North Carolina in 1968 (Chat 45:41-42) reminded me of a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck wing from South Carolina that I examined several years ago. Since 1961 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has conducted an annual nationwide survey, in which selected waterfowl hunters are asked to send in one wing from each duck they shoot during a season. From such wings, biologists are able to estimate the species, age, and sex compositions of the harvest. In early 1977 I examined the wing of a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, apparently an adult, which was shot near Manville, Lee County, S.C., on 20 January 1977 by R.E. Kuhne of Columbia. The sex of the bird could not be determined with certainty from the wing. The habitat was a small farm pond surrounded by gums. The bird was alone, but Dr. Kuhne also found Wood Ducks (*Aix sponsa*) on the pond.

The wing was retained for the Service's collection as an oddity. As is the case with most such extralimital records of waterfowl, it was assumed to have escaped from captivity, and no thought was given to reporting it in ornithological circles until I saw the article on the North Carolina bird. As a result, I prepared this report and forwarded the wing to the Charleston Museum for inclusion in the state collection. William Post informs me that this is the first specimen record of this species for South Carolina (CM 1983.155), and that the species will now be added to the state list in Provisional II category (specimen, but possibly of an escaped captive).