

Range Extension of the Brown-headed Nuthatch in Western North Carolina

GAIL T. WHITEHURST
52 Lakeshore Drive
Asheville, N.C. 28804

Historically, records of occurrence of the Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla*) in western North Carolina are sparse. Pearson, Brimley, and Brimley (1942) state that this species occurs "east of the mountains." Simpson (1969) reveals a noteworthy breeding record by John S. Cairns for 1894. The site near Weaverville was apparently the basin of the French Broad River in Buncombe County. The circumstances suggest a minor invasion by this species, but the death of Cairns in mid-1895 terminated further collection of data on the avifauna of western North Carolina for years to come. Potter, Parnell, and Teulings (1980) make mention of a possible western breeding range extension based on recent reports.

In 1972, a pair of Brown-headed Nuthatches was seen during the breeding season in Buncombe County (Chat 36:86). A pair nested in the western piedmont in Lenoir, Caldwell County, in 1974 (Chat 38:66). Western North Carolina winter observations became more common with Buncombe County sightings for 1981 along Bent Creek (Chat 45:82). In west Asheville, Bill Duyck reported this species at his feeder in 1981 (Chat 46:53), 1982 (Chat 46:121), and 1983 (Chat 47:110). Additionally, Ruth and Jerry Young found this nuthatch on the campus of UNC-Asheville during the winter of 1983-1984 (Chat 48:81). Curiously, there were no sightings of this species reported during the winter of 1984-1985 by Duyck or the Youngs. On 20 May 1985 I observed two adult Brown-headed Nuthatches feeding two fledged young in Buncombe County. The site is in north Asheville, near Beaver Lake and the UNC-Asheville campus. This represents the first confirmed breeding by the Brown-headed Nuthatch this far west in North Carolina during the present century. As pointed out by Simpson, this nuthatch might be expected along the valley of the French Broad River and its tributaries as well as in other low-elevation regions west of the Eastern Continental Divide.

LITERATURE CITED

- Pearson, T.G., C.S. Brimley, and H.H. Brimley. 1942. *Birds of North Carolina*. N.C. Dept. Agric., Raleigh.
- Potter, E.F., J.F. Parnell, and R.P. Teulings. 1980. *Birds of the Carolinas*. Univ. North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.
- Simpson, M.B., Jr. 1969. Nesting of the Brown-headed Nuthatch in the southern Appalachians. *Chat* 33:103-104.

[For an additional sighting of the Brown-headed Nuthatch in Buncombe County, N.C., during the spring of 1985, see *Chat* 49:104.—ED.]