

Massive Flight of Tree Swallows During Fall Migration on the South Carolina Coast

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Sally McNair and I saw a massive flight of migrating Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) on 14 October 1985 at Buck Hall Campground near Awendaw, Charleston County, S.C. The campground is situated directly on the Intracoastal Waterway and overlooks extensive saltwater marshes seaward for about 2 km. From 0715 to 0845 EST, we watched a continual stream of Tree Swallows migrating southwest along the coast, flying up to 30 m over the salt-marsh grasses. No swallows were seen migrating overland more than 30 m from the coast at the Intracoastal Waterway. My estimate of the number of Tree Swallows for this 1.5-hour period is at least 450,000 (5,000 birds per minute). The swallows called throughout their migratory flight, and we heard them in our tents at least 15 minutes before 0715. The massive flight ended abruptly at 0845.

At 0915, we watched migrating Tree Swallows from US 17 between the North and South Santee Rivers, north of Buck Hall Campground. Most of the swallows were seen at a great distance on the seaward side of the highway, migrating southwest along the coast. At least 5,000 swallows migrated inland and flew northwest up the Santee River marshes north of the highway until the swallows were lost from sight. This flight ended abruptly at 0920.

From 1030 to 1045, we watched 3,000 Tree Swallows (200 birds/min.) migrate southwest at the southern tip of Pawley's Island, about 45 km N of the Santee River marshes. No Tree Swallows were seen afterwards at nearby Huntington Beach State Park.

Thus, I estimate we saw at least 475,000 Tree Swallows migrating on or near the South Carolina coast in distinct movements from shortly after daybreak to 1045; most of these swallows were seen in one massive movement at Buck Hall Campground. Tree Swallow migration may be concentrated at this site because the salt marshes are relatively narrow here and they abut the Intracoastal Waterway, which does not have marshes on the landward side of it. Bulls Bay lies just beyond these narrow coastal marshes to the south where the bay forms a gentle ellipse on the landward side; seaward, 8 km of open water separates the southwest tip of Raccoon Key from Northeast Point of Bulls Island. I do not know whether Tree Swallows migrate over this open water or follow the salt marshes and adjacent coast. Many swallows feed on flying insects over the salt marshes while migrating, however, and this primarily diurnal migrant may need to forage extensively during migration.

We saw few Tree Swallows on 12 and 13 October at Huntington Beach State Park. One flock of about 3,500 stayed all day at the park on 12 October. Only about 400 Tree Swallows were seen to migrate south on 13 October. Thus, the massive flight of 14 October at Buck Hall Campground almost certainly originated from areas farther north. Flights of other insectivorous passerines, especially the parulids, were poor from 12 to 14 October. Both 12 and 13 October were overcast days with moderate temperatures (64-80 °F) and brisk northeast winds (10-15 knots), shifting

to the north during the early afternoon of the thirteenth. The sky was clear the morning of 14 October, with low winds (<5 knots) from the north-northwest and mild temperatures (64-86 °F). Thus, the weather that may have precipitated the massive Tree Swallow flight was a mild high-pressure frontal system that moved into coastal South Carolina from the afternoon of 13 October through the early morning of 14 October.

Heavy flights of Tree Swallows have been reported before from coastal South Carolina in early October, which is the peak of migration. Several individual flocks of 10,000+ have been seen, 24 km S of Georgetown and near Savannah in South Carolina (Chat 6:80, 24:29), but these counts pale in comparison to 100,000+ Tree Swallows P. Laurie and P. Nugent reported at Capers Island on 11 October 1975 (Amer. Birds 30:53), 250,000+ Tree Swallows P. Nugent and party reported at Huntington Beach State Park on 9 October 1983 (Chat 48:59), and the even more massive flight reported here.

Second Record of Say's Phoebe for North Carolina

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On Saturday, 7 December 1985, Clyde Adkins reported a Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*) about 4 miles W of Lillington, Harnett County, N.C., at an abandoned quarry. He reported the sighting to Dick Brown at the Carolina Raptor Center, and Brown immediately placed the report on the CBC Rare Bird Alert. John Fussell notified me of this report and asked me to visit the site to see if the bird was still present.

I arrived at the quarry in midafternoon on 11 December. I spent an hour searching in vain for the phoebe to the south of the SR 1257-1258 intersection, where the bird had been seen on 7 December. I then walked northeast along a dirt road and railroad track for 1/2 mile to a cluster of abandoned buildings and old oil drums at another part of the quarry. A flock of Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) was present and perched on telephone wires around the buildings, and the Say's Phoebe was with this flock. I watched the phoebe for 15 to 20 minutes as it perched on wires, drums, and the buildings. I was able to approach within 100 feet of the bird to see the plain brown upperparts, head, and upper breast, the rusty lower breast and belly, and the rather large black tail. The bird wagged the tail frequently. Though there was no Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) in the vicinity for comparison, the Say's seemed to be slightly larger than an Eastern Phoebe, with a definitely longer and wider tail.

At least six birders, including Fussell, saw the Say's Phoebe on 12 December in the vicinity of the abandoned buildings. Ricky Davis was able to compare the Say's with an Eastern Phoebe that was nearby, noticing the slightly larger size of the Say's. On that day the bird was more elusive than on the previous day, and David Wright was able to photograph the bird only at a rather far distance. The color prints were examined by the North Carolina Bird Records Committee in November 1986; however, the committee decided that the photos were not of sufficient clarity to