

Red Crossbill Nesting at Caesar's Head, S.C.

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On 28 June 1988 I saw six Red Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra*) feeding on White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) seeds in the vicinity of the Caesar's Head State park headquarters in Greenville County, South Carolina. Crossbills remained in the area throughout July and August and were seen in other nearby locations also. A pair of Red Crossbills frequented the upper end of Jones Gap, near Caesar's Head, during August. A small flock was also present at the Caesar's Head Community, near Caesar's Head. In both locations, stands of either White Pine or Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) were present. These sightings represent an invasion of Red Crossbills into the mountains of northern Greenville County, and possibly elsewhere.

On 14 July, I saw a female Red Crossbill breaking off twigs from a Virginia Pine (*Pinus virginiana*). I found the nest in an outer branch of a mature White Pine. The nest was about 21 m above ground. It was well-hidden in thick foliage, about 2.5 m from the main trunk. The nest tree was at the edge of a mixed pine-hardwood stand, and was 6 m from a brushy powerline clearing near the state park headquarters. The elevation at this point is about 376 m. The tree was about 15m from U.S. Highway 276 and 1 m from a dirt driveway. The dominant canopy trees included White Pine, Tulip Poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), Black Tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*), Virginia Pine and Northern Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*). The understory was relatively open, and consisted of American Holly (*Ilex opaca*), Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), Carolina Silverbell (*Halesia carolina*), Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*), Black Locust and Black Tupelo. Ground cover had recently been cleared. The bordering powerline clearing grew thick with Blackberry (*Rubus sp.*), Jewel Weed (*Impatiens capensis*) and various saplings, including Tulip Poplar and Red Maple.

I saw nest construction by the female on eleven days. The male accompanied the female on numerous occasions, but was not observed to assist in nest-building. Pine branches, shredded bark, grasses and unidentified plant materials were used for the nest. The male frequently perched in the top branch of the nest tree while the female constructed the nest. On 7 August, I saw the male at the nest for the first time. The male and female were both at the nest on August 20, and were both apparently feeding young. On 26 August, I found a live nestling at the base of the nest tree. The nestling's body was well feathered and the wing feathers were developed. This bird died on 29 August, and is now in the Clemson University Vertebrate Collections (CUSC # 2330).

Between 26 August and 30 August, both adults visited the nest. Once, the male picked small arthropods from the needle bracts. However, the seeds from White Pine appeared to be the main food, and White Pines in this area produced an abundant seed crop this summer.

At the time of the crossbill nesting, a pair of American Goldfinches (*Carduelis tristis*) nested in the same tree, about 3 m away. On several occasions, the female goldfinch harassed the female crossbill while the crossbill was nestbuilding. Once, I saw the male crossbill chase the male goldfinch from the crossbill's main perch. However, these minor conflicts did not deter either species from nesting. The male crossbill frequently sang prior to and during nest construction, but singing soon declined afterwards.

Until now, the Red Crossbill was classified as a casual visitor during the breeding season in northwestern South Carolina (Post and Gauthreaux, Contrib. Charleston Mus. 18, 1988), and has bred near Boone, N.C. in 1981 (Haggerty, Chat 46:83-86, 1982). This breeding record at Caesar's Head State Park is the first for South Carolina.

I thank Sid Gauthreaux for his assistance and helpful advice with this manuscript.

First Sighting Of The Little Gull From South Carolina Waters

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On 14 March 1987 on pelegic trip aboard the Carolina Clipper I sighted an adult winter-plumage Little Gull (*Larus minutus*). The boat was headed to the Gulf Stream from Charleston and we were about 40 km offshore when I saw the bird. The weather was clear and the seas were calm. The Little Gull was flying with two Bonaparte's Gulls (*L. philadelphia*). The three birds were sighted off the starboard quarter and crossed astern about 100 m. The bird was easily identified as it had dark wing linings, rounded wing tips, and was obviously smaller than the Bonaparte's Gulls accompanying it. There is no possibility of confusing *Larus minutus* in adult plumage with any other bird. Robin Carter and Sidney Gauthreaux also saw the bird. I might add that I have seen several Little Gulls in Massachusetts and on the south shore of Lake Erie, so it is a bird with which I have had some experience.

S.C. Editor's Note: The Little Gull was added to the North Carolina hypothetical list with the publication of the sighting of an individual at Roanoke Rapids in 1971 (Chat 36:30, 1972). With the publication of this record, the species may now be placed on the South Carolina Provisional list (1-4 published sightings, but no material documentation).