

First Record of Marbled Murrelet in North Carolina

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Around noon on 9 December 1994, I was birding at the Ebenezer Church State Recreation Area on the east side of Jordan Reservoir in Chatham County, NC when I was surprised to find a Marbled Murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) in winter plumage. The bird was observed at a distance of 50 to several hundred meters in the open waters of the lake for the rest of the afternoon. The weather was overcast with light rain and drizzle, mostly later in the day. The wind was calm which made observations at the more extreme distances possible with a smooth water surface. I used 10x binoculars and a 20–60x spotting scope. Also observing the bird later in the day were Derb and Ann Carter, Judy Walker, and Marek Smith.

The following field marks were observed mostly during the early period when the bird was closest to me. The size was slightly smaller than nearby Horned Grebes (*Podiceps auritus*). Its dark bill was held up at a slight angle most of the time. The head, nape, back of neck, and upper body was a dark gray. The dark gray was mottled with lighter patches of gray/white along the lower back, flanks, rump, and base of the tail. The dark tail was also held up at an angle most of the time. The underparts from the throat to the undertail coverts were white. There was a horizontal white stripe plainly visible above the folded wings. The face was dark with the color extending from the gape straight back to the hindneck. The dark on the neck extended in a broad stripe all the way down to a point in front of the wings. There was no obvious eye ring but at the closest distance a faint ghost image of bold eye crescents was visible. The wings were all dark on the upper surface and dusky underneath. The white scapular marks appeared as crescents on the back when the bird stretched its wings. The bird's general shape consisted of a flat head, short to medium length neck, stubby body, and an upturned bill and tail. This appearance was quite distinctive at even the farthest distance.

The identification was made by ruling out other possible species. The small size eliminated loons and large alcids such as Razorbill (*Alca torda*), Guillemots (*Cepphus* sp.), and Murres (*Uria* sp.). The presence of the scapular marks ruled out all other small alcids except Kittlitz's Murrelet (*Brachyramphus brevirostris*). That species was eliminated by the dark on the side of the face being below the eye (above in Kittlitz's) and the bill being relatively long and pointed (short and stubby in Kittlitz's). During the initial observation, subspecific identity was not considered, but later that evening after consultation with others it became apparent that the Murrelet belonged to the Siberian race (*perdix*) and not the nominate North American form from the West Coast. The combination of dark lores at the gape and broad dark nape and hindneck are characteristic of *perdix*. In the nominate form, the lores are usually light and the dark along the hindneck and nape is much reduced giving the effect of a white collar. One mark of *perdix* not obvious was bold white eye crescents. The nominate form lacks these crescents and the Jordan Lake bird did apparently have very faint ones. Further checking revealed that all previous records of Marbled Murrelet in the interior and

eastern portions of North America have turned out to be the *perdix* form and not the nominate West Coast form!

The bird was observed by over 30 people the following day, although viewing conditions were not nearly as good due to wind and rain. The bird was observed diving repeatedly and once surfaced with a small fish. It also flew short distances low over the lake surface and on occasion emerged from under the water in full flight! The Murrelet was seen briefly in flight on the 11th and could not be relocated thereafter. It is of interest that a Marbled Murrelet was found on 19 November 1994 on the coast at Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina. This individual was photographed and in all respects was identical in plumage to the Jordan Lake bird—could it have been the same individual?

The first record in eastern North America was of a specimen from Quebec, Canada in 1979 (David & Gosselin 1980). The first bird identified as *perdix* was a specimen from Mono Lake, California in 1981 (Jehl & Jehl 1981). Since then there have been almost 20 other records, but this is the first report for North Carolina. Being the first report but lacking photographic or specimen evidence, Marbled Murrelet (*perdix*) should be placed on the state's Provisional List.

LITERATURE CITED

- David, N. And M. Gosselin. 1980. Regional reports, Quebec Region. American Birds 34(2):142–143; illustr. p. 137.
Jehl, Daniel R. and Joseph R. Jehl, Jr. 1981. A North American record of the Asiatic Marbled Murrelet. American Birds 35(6):911–912.

