

Red-billed Tropicbird Salvaged in South Carolina: First Specimen for State

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The Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*) is a pantropical species, which in the western Atlantic breeds only as far north as Culebra and Vieques, off the east coast of Puerto Rico (American Ornithologists' Union 1998). It has rarely been recorded on the north Atlantic coast. The first specimen for the continental eastern North America was collected on 10 June 1963 at Jamaica Bay, New York (Bull 1964). In the next 30 years, an additional five specimens were taken, one from Rhode Island, two from Florida, and two (plus a photograph) from North Carolina (Lee *et al.* 1981; Stevenson and Anderson 1994). In addition, eight unpublished Florida sightings are mentioned by Robertson and Woolfenden (1992), although Stevenson and Anderson (1994) apparently accept only one sight report from Florida. One unpublished 1988 sighting exists for South Carolina (see below).

On 14 October 1995, Alice Hope found a live Red-billed Tropicbird on the front beach at Folly Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. She took the bird to the Sea Island Vet Clinic, where it died the next day.

The bird was prepared as a study skin (ChM 96.16.006), with the left wing detached and extended. It is an adult male (testes size, left: 6.5 x 5.9 mm; right: 4.6 x 4.6 mm). In the fresh specimen, the base of the mandible was salmon (color 106 of Smithe), grading into geranium (12) distally; the remainder of the culmen was spectrum red (11). A red bill is characteristic of adult *aethereus*. It was very emaciated (mass, 402 g), and had no subcutaneous fat. Apparently, it had been unable to fly due to an injury of the right wing.

The measurements of the fresh carcass were as follows: wing length (flat): 302 mm; wing span: 99.5 cm; total length, including streamers: 63.2 cm; length

of longest streamer: 30.9 cm; culmen from base of skull: 59.9 mm; depth: 22.5 mm; width: 17.5 mm.

The bird had a light molt on the upper breast and lower flanks. Some secondaries and tertials were coming in. The tail was undergoing an asymmetric molt. Rectrix right 1 was fully grown and in sheath; right 2 was 1/10 grown, also in sheath. Rectrix left 5 was fully grown, but also in sheath.

A previous report of the Red-billed Tropicbird exists for South Carolina. One was photographed by Scott 93 km SSE of Charleston (water depth, 46 m) on 19 May 1988. The photographs taken by Scott in 1988 were inadvertently misplaced by a researcher to whom they had been submitted for verification. Fortunately, Forsythe and Worthington had examined the photograph and verified the identification.

The specimen described here therefore constitutes the only documented report for South Carolina and is the eighth or ninth (pending retrieval of the misplaced 1988 photographs) record for eastern continental North America. The range of dates of verified occurrence on the Atlantic coast is now 6 May to 14 October. Interestingly, the other six birds which were sexed were all females. This appears to be the first male specimen collected on the east coast.

Despite the paucity of records for the Red-billed Tropicbird on the Atlantic coast, Lee *et al.* (1981) suggest that it may occur more frequently than generally realized. Recent research (Lee and Booth 1979; Haney 1986a, b; Lee 1986) demonstrates that seabirds congregate at nutrient-rich upwellings associated with Gulf Stream fronts and eddies, usually 100 to 200 km offshore. Lee *et al.* (1981) attribute the supposed rarity of this species to the difficulty of reaching the offshore habitats where it normally occurs.

Acknowledgments

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White-winged Crossbill Observed in Richland County, South Carolina: First Record for South Carolina

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On the morning of 3 April 1996, at about 0820 hours, Carter and Eastman noticed an unusual finch at one of their backyard feeders, about 6 meters from their house, which is in a residential neighborhood of the city of Columbia, Richland County, South Carolina. The bird was about the size of a nearby female Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*) and slightly larger than nearby House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) and American Goldfinches (*Carduelis tristis*). The bird was feeding on sunflower seeds. The bird was generally a light brown in color, with a hint of yellow brown underneath. It had faint streaking (darker brown) both above and below. There was an indistinct broad eyeline above the eye, lighter brown in color. The most striking plumage feature was the presence of two very bold wing bars. The upper wing bar was quite broad,