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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,

almost a wing patch. It was at least a centimeter wide. The bill was stubby, with incompletely crossed mandibles.

Carter and Eastman had the bird under observation for about a minute as it fed at a tube sunflower feeder. Then the bird flew up into a nearby white pine and they lost sight of it. Carter and Eastman immediately identified the bird as a White-winged Crossbill (*Loxia leucoptera*). They saw all of the expected field marks of a juvenile White-winged Crossbill. There were no variations from expected field marks.

After calling several other birders, Carter had to go to work, but Eastman was around long enough to observe the bird again at about 0930 hours for several minutes. During this period of observation Eastman obtained several 35 mm slide pictures (which show "a bird") and also several seconds of HI8 videotape. This HI8 video was dubbed to VHS and submitted to the South Carolina Bird Records Committee. The video is poor, but if it is examined frame by frame it is possible to discern white wing bars and almost crossed mandibles. The bird was silent throughout the period of observation.

The almost crossed mandibles eliminate all non-crossbill finches, with the possible exception of a diseased individual who might have deformed mandibles. Eliminating Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) is a bit more tricky. While it is possible that an immature or female Red Crossbill might have narrow, indistinct wing bars, the bird in question had very broad, bold white wingbars, which eliminate all other species of crossbill.

A mob of birders visited the Carter and Eastman back deck later in the day. A few were lucky enough to be present when the bird returned to the feeder. Tom Hankins, Lex Glover, and Steve Patterson observed the crossbill for about 10 minutes at about 1030 hours. Bob Maxwell and Barbara Maxwell watched it for about 10 minutes at about 1530 hours. This was the last sighting of this bird.

The South Carolina Bird Records Committee has accepted this sighting, based on the video record and observers' notes, as the first confirmed sighting of White-winged Crossbill in South Carolina. The species had been on the Hypothetical List on the basis of an unsubstantiated sighting in the Cape Romain area on 20 December 1947 (Post and Gauthreaux 1989:70).

Literature Cited

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