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## **First South Carolina Specimens of the Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*)**

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The Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*) is a pelagic warm-water species rarely seen near shore (Clapp et al. 1982). On the North American Atlantic coast, seabirds such as boobies are most often found in productive feeding areas far from land. For example, in the South Atlantic Bight, between Cape Hatteras and the Florida peninsula, seabirds aggregate around *Sargassum* reefs associated with the Gulf Stream, which often meanders as far as 100 km from shore (Haney 1986a). Through 2002, only about five credible reports existed for the Masked Booby in South Carolina. The two Masked Boobies reported here constitute the first South Carolina specimens.

The first state specimen of the Masked Booby, a first-year female, was salvaged on 10 August 2003, Folly Beach, Charleston County. An unknown tourist delivered it to Sea Island Veterinary Clinic, where it died. Its physical characteristics were as follows: mass: 965 g; wing: 40 cm (chord), 41.3 cm (flat); span: 157 cm; total length: 76.5 cm. It was not molting. Its stomach was empty. It was prepared as a standard study skin, with the left wing detached and extended. (Charleston Museum 2003.27.071).

I salvaged the second state specimen, which was a subadult female (Fig.1), on the front beach of Sullivan's Island, Charleston County, 11 August 2003 at 20:30 h. The bird was able to walk, but not fly. It died in captivity one day later. Its measurements were: mass: 1126 g; wing: 39.0 (chord); 40.8 cm (flat); wing span: 155 cm; total length: 75.5 cm; tail 14.5 cm. The plumage was worn, with new rectrices emerging. It had no body molt, although wing molt was present. The stomach was empty. The specimen was prepared as a "schmoo" (skull retained with skeleton), and the right wing was detached and spread. (ChM 2003.27.072).



Figure 1. Subadult female Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*), Sullivan's Island, Charleston County, South Carolina, 11 August 2003.

The beaching of these two individuals on the opposite shores of Charleston Harbor, 14 km apart, and within two days of each other, is a highly improbable event, especially as weather patterns were normal at the time. The specimens reported here are the first for South Carolina. They also constitute the second and third verified reports for the state. The first verified report was that of an individual photographed offshore 113 miles east of Hilton Head Island on 14 July 1983 (Lee and Haney 1984).

At least five sightings have been made of this species in South Carolina. The first was made by A. Sprunt, Jr, who reported seeing two on 23 January 1937 at Folly Beach. This observation was not published until 12 years later, and lacked details (Sprunt and Chamberlain 1949). This would be the only mid-winter record for the Atlantic Coast north of central Florida (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The two birds that Sprunt sighted were probably Northern Gannets, *Sula bassanus* (McNair and Post 1993).

The four additional South Carolina reports, which all appear to be credible, are: 1) One seen off Charleston, 23 September 1984 (*in* LeGrand 1985). 2) One seen following a shrimp boat off Litchfield Beach, Georgetown County, 21 Nov 1998 (*in* Davis 1999). 3) One reported off Charleston, 16 May 1992 (LeGrand 1993). 4) An adult reported 29 km off Winyah Bay, Georgetown County, on 4 July 2002 (Sutton and Allen 2003).

Lee (1995) reviewed the status of the species in North Carolina. Its occurrence in that state is supported by two specimens, collected on 14 August 1984 (Lee 1995) and at least two photographs (Parnell 1984,

LeGrand 1992). The first verified North Carolina report was obtained in 1981 (Davis and Needham 1983) and a photograph was published by Parnell (1984). In contrast to South Carolina, a large number of sight reports exist for North Carolina. For example, Avendex (2003) lists 31 sightings involving at least 36 individuals between 1966 and 2000. The first North Carolina sight report, made in 1966, appears to be the only one for which details have been published (Holmes 1966).

Georgia has seven accepted Masked Booby reports (Beaton et al. 2003). These include two birds photographed while they perched on a transmitter platform 125 km off the coast of Savannah, 14 November 1993 (Moore 1994; Beaton et al. 2003). In addition, there is a report of a bird found dead, but not salvaged, from Cumberland Island, 2 February 1986 (Brisse 1986). This is now believed to be a Northern Gannet (G. Beaton pers. comm.).

Once considered accidental in South Carolina (Sprunt and Chamberlain 1949) or, more likely, hypothetical (McNair and Post 1993), the reports that have accumulated since 1984 warrant revising the Masked Booby's status in South Carolina to that of a very rare visitor. The gradual accumulation of reports confirms Lee and Haney's (1984) contention that the northward postbreeding dispersal of Masked Boobies is a normal, though rare, event. As the species no longer breeds in the Bahamas, and is rare in the Caribbean (Lee and Haney 1984), its changed status is undoubtedly related to increased fieldwork by ornithologists.

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## **A 1971 Limpkin Record from the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, SC**

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Until 2001, the Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*) was classified as a casual visitor to South Carolina, with only three records, all based on specimens (Post and Gauthreaux, *Status and Distribution of South Carolina Birds*, 1989). During 2001 and 2002, however, six additional reports were made (reviewed by Cely et al. *Chat* 67:56–58, 2003). This note provides written details and photographic documentation for an unpublished record from the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, Jasper County, SC.

At 08:00 h on 18 April 1971, Metz found a Limpkin feeding within impoundment number 12 at the Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive on the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge. The bird was feeding within 20 m of the interior bank of the dike. Metz met Jean and John Thomas along the wildlife drive and showed them the Limpkin. John Thomas photographed the bird (Fig. 1). Metz was unable to locate the Limpkin subsequently. Coincidentally, this bird was within 0.5 km of a Limpkin that Giff Beaton photographed 30 years later (Cely et al., op. cit.).