

General Field Notes

Will Cook
North Carolina Editor
P. O. Box 3066
Durham, NC 27715
cwcook@duke.edu

William Post
South Carolina Editor
Charleston Museum
360 Meeting Street
Charleston, SC 29403
grackler@aol.com

General Field Notes briefly report such items as rare sightings, unusual behaviors, or significant nesting records; or summaries of such items. Submit manuscripts to the appropriate state editor.

First, second, or third sightings of species in either state must be submitted to the appropriate Bird Records Committee prior to publication in The Chat.

A Recent South Carolina Specimen of the Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*), and a Review of the Species' Regional Status

Will Post¹, Doug Corkern², and Irvin Pitts, Jr.³

¹ Charleston Museum, 360 Meeting Street, Charleston, SC 29403

² 40 Lawrence Street, Bluffton, SC 29910

³ 1156 Old Orangeburg Road, Lexington, SC 29073

The Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*) breeds in the tropics and subtropics as far north as the northern Bahamas and the Dry Tortugas, Florida. In winter it stays in warm tropical or subtropical waters, usually within 100 km of nesting colonies (Chardine and Morris 1996). It is very rare in summer and autumn on the South Carolina coast, and most occurrences have been associated with tropical storms. The purpose of this paper is to report the first South Carolina specimen in 55 years and to review the current status of the species in the state.

On 7 September 2004, a Brown Noddy landed in the yard of Joan and Doug Corkern in a heavily wooded section of the historic area of Bluffton, Beaufort County. Its appearance coincided with the passage of Hurricane Frances, which came from the SSW, after passing over the Florida peninsula. The bird apparently was attracted to a 35 x 40 m open area, which consisted

of a swimming pool surrounded by lawns. It rested near the edge of the pool and flew up when Corkern tried to catch it. It then flew into a nearby wooded area, where Corkern found it dead the following morning.

The noddy was a male (left testis: 3.2 x 1.4 mm; right: 3.1 x 1.3 mm). It was in unworn Basic I plumage and its molt was completed, meaning that it was at least 11 months old (Chardine and Morris 1996). A bursa of Fabricius was not present. The bird had only a slight amount of subcutaneous fat in the lower abdomen. Its mass was 100.4 g. The normal range for males of this species is 151 to 221 g (Chardine and Morris 1996). Other measurements (mm) were: length of flattened wing: 261; wing span: 372; tail: 137; exposed culmen: length: 43.0, depth: 10.0, width: 9.4. The salt glands were not highly vascularized, and the left gland measured 13.2 mm x 5.0 mm. The specimen was prepared as a study skin, with right wing detached and spread. The partial skeleton and a tissue sample were also preserved (ChM 2005.2.001).

Table 1. Records of the Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*) in South Carolina and adjacent waters.

| Date | Location | Number | Observer | Reference |
|-------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 29-Jul-1926 | Myrtle Beach (Horry Co.) | one collected (locality unknown) | T. M. Evans | Wayne and Sherman 1927 |
| 19-Sep-1926 | Bull Island (Charleston Co.) | “several dead... and a few living” | E. M. Moore | Sprunt and Chamberlain 1949 |
| 18-Sep-1928 | Porcher’s Bluff (Charleston Co.) | one, released | B. R. Chamberlain | Sprunt and Chamberlain 1949 |
| 16-Jun-1929 | Charleston Harbor | three | A. D. Cruickshank | Sprunt 1935 |
| 14-Aug-1939 | Isle of Palms (Charleston Co.) | one, collected (ChM 39.204) | J. A. Bruce | Bruce 1941 |
| 9-Aug-1948 | Pawley’s Island (Georgetown Co.) | three | G. W. Sciple | Sciple 1951 |
| 28-Aug-1949 | Offshore Isle of Palms | one | G. B. Rabb et al. | Sprunt and Chamberlain 1949 |
| 8-Sep-1950 | Isle of Palms | one, collected (ChM 50.147) | E. M. Burton | Burton 1970 |
| 11-Oct-1983 | 75 km E of Charleston | one | J. C. Haney | Haney 1986 |
| 28-Aug-1988 | Folly Island (Charleston Co.) | one | D. and P. Frey | LeGrand 1989 |
| 8-Sep-2004 | Bluffton (Beaufort Co.) | one, salvaged (ChM 2005.2.001) | D.Corkern | Present report |

History of Occurrences in South Carolina

With this report, South Carolina now has four specimens (three currently preserved) and seven sight reports, spanning the seasonal period of 16 June to 11 October (Table 1). All the collected specimens were found alive, stranded after the passage of hurricanes. The first record for South Carolina was based on a bird collected on 29 July 1926 at Myrtle Beach by County Agent T. M. Evans (Wayne and Sherman 1927). The specimen was given to Franklin Sherman of Clemson College, but cannot be located (S. A. Miller, pers. comm.). This first state record was related to the passage of a hurricane that reached the coast on 26 July 1926. This storm also resulted in the appearance of the state's first White-tailed Tropicbird, *Phaethon lepturus* (Wayne and Sherman 1927), as well as the second and third records, respectively, of the Sooty Tern, *Sterna fuscata*, and Bridled Tern, *Sterna anaethetus* (Dingle 1927).

In addition to the four specimen records (Table 1), details have been published, or are on file at public institutions, for seven sight reports:

1) Following a storm, "several dead birds and a few living ones" were found on Bull Island on 19 September 1926 by E. M. Moore (*in* Sprunt and Chamberlain 1949). This report is not cited in Sprunt and Chamberlain (1931), and no further information is on file in the Charleston Museum.

2) One was picked up by B. R. Chamberlain on 18 September 1928, at Porcher's Bluff, Mt. Pleasant. It was released after 8 hr (Sprunt and Chamberlain 1949).

3) Three were sitting together on a piece of driftwood at the entrance to Charleston Harbor on 16 June 1929 and were seen by A. D. Cruickshank, who was outbound on a steamship (Sprunt 1935). Brown Noddies are rarely seen from land during calm weather, and the sighting is anomalous in that it occurred during the nesting season, when most Brown Noddies should be on their breeding grounds on the southern Florida Keys and southward. This sighting was not reported by Sprunt and Chamberlain (1931), and apparently was communicated to Sprunt (1935) 4–5 years after the fact. However, the observer, Allen D. Cruickshank, was a reliable, well-known ornithologist, and the report was accepted by Sprunt and Chamberlain (1949).

4) Three were seen on 9 August 1948 on Pawley's Island (Sciple 1951). This report is unusual for the number seen, as well as the fact that their occurrence did not appear to be related to stormy weather. But the observer, George W. Sciple, had extensive experience with the species, published details of his sighting, and was known to be a reliable field ornithologist (Burleigh 1958).

5) One was seen off the Isle of Palms on 28 August 1949 by G. B. Rabb, J. E. Mosimann, and T. M. Uzzell, Jr. This report was first cited in Sprunt and Chamberlain (1949, addendum), who incorrectly stated that it was the fifth state record.

6) One was observed by Chris Haney (1986) 75 km east of Charleston on 11 October 1983, over water 31 m deep.

7) One was reported seen on 28 August 1988 on Folly Island during Tropical Storm Chris. No details are available, but the bird was seen at close range sitting and flying, and the report was accepted by LeGrand (1989).

A report of one on Port Royal Sound near Hilton Head Island was cited by LeGrand (1982a) but apparently not subsequently accepted (LeGrand 1982b), probably because the observer provided no details and could only identify the bird as *Anous* sp.

History of Occurrence in Adjacent States

In North Carolina, Lee (1995) referred to the species' occurrence during normal weather as accidental. Although it was first reported in 1945 (Appleberry 1951), no confirmed reports were available until 1979. In that year, as many as 18 were reported on the North Carolina coast after the passage of Hurricane David on 4–5 September (Fussell and Allen-Grimes 1980). These included three specimens, the first ones for the state (NCSM 7319, 7320, 7321). Only one inland report is available for North Carolina: three were seen at Lake Norman on 23 September 1989, after the passage of Hurricane Hugo (D. Wright *in* LeGrand 1990). Other than the relatively large numbers seen in North Carolina after Hurricane David in 1979, the Brown Noddy has been seen about as often in each of the two Carolinas. For example, Avendex (2004) lists 11 and 13 reports for South and North Carolina, respectively. For the two states combined, 78% of the 24 sightings took place during July–August.

In Georgia, Beaton et al. (2003) classified the species as “accidental” both offshore (two sight reports) and onshore (five reports, including two specimens). The first Georgia specimen was collected on 1 October 1950 by Ivan Tomkins (1950). It was mummified, and had been dead “some weeks”. A second specimen was found stranded on 22 June 1988 on Cumberland Island but it was not salvaged or photographed (Laura Feakes *in* Sewell 1996). A third bird was collected on Cumberland Island on 9 September 1965 (Beaton et al. 2003). A fourth Brown Noddy was found in Georgia in early September 2004 on the Jekyll Island Causeway (“Winging It” 16:10, 2004). The one inland (non-coastal) report from Georgia, 28 August 1949, Milledgeville, is not supported by details (Beaton et al. 2003).

Since about 1970 there has been a significant increase in pelagic birding, but still the Brown Noddy is rarely seen off the southeastern coast during periods of calm weather. For example, Haney (1983, 1986) conducted extensive surveys off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina in 1982–1985, and he recorded only one Brown Noddy (Table 1).

In summary, the status of the Brown Noddy in South Carolina has not changed much since 1988. Post and Gauthreaux (1989) state that it is a “very rare fall visitor on the coast, usually after tropical storms”. They mention nine records, two less than cited in this report. The Brown Noddy may now be classified as a very rare, usually storm-driven, onshore vagrant occurring from 29 July to 19 September. Offshore, and during periods of normal weather, it is a casual visitor (two reports, 16 June and 11 October).

Literature cited

- Appleberry, E. L. 1951. Noddy Tern seen in Brunswick County, N.C. *Chat* 15:33.
- Avendex. 2004. Redshank Software. Version 1.1.
- Beaton, G., P. W. Sykes, Jr., and J. W. Parrish, Jr. 2003. Annotated checklist of Georgia birds. Occasional Publication of the Georgia Ornithological Society 14.
- Bruce, J. A. 1941. Maritime birds occurring with summer storms near Charleston in 1939. *Auk* 58:268–270.
- Burleigh, T. D. 1958. *Georgia Birds*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma.
- Burton, E. M. 1970. Supplement to South Carolina Birdlife. University of South Carolina Press, Columbia.
- Chardine, J. W., and R. W. Morris. 1996. Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 220 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and the American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.
- Dingle, E. S. 1927. Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*) and Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaetheta*) on the South Carolina coast. *Auk* 54:93.
- Fussell, J. O. III, and A. Allen-Grimes. 1980. Bird sightings associated with Hurricane David. *Chat* 44:89–100.
- Haney, J. C. 1983. Previously unrecorded and hypothetical species of seabirds on the continental shelf of Georgia. *Oriole* 48:21–32.
- Haney, J. C. 1986. Records of seabirds from South Carolina offshore waters. *Chat* 50:44–46.
- Lee, D. S. 1995. Marine birds off the coast of North Carolina. *Chat* 59:113–171.
- LeGrand, H. E., Jr. 1982a. Briefs for the files. *Chat* 46:51.
- LeGrand, H. E., Jr. 1982b. Southern Atlantic coast region. *American Birds* 36:965–967.
- LeGrand, H. E., Jr. 1989. Southern Atlantic coast region. *American Birds* 43:299–303.
- LeGrand, H. E., Jr. 1990. Bird sightings in the Carolinas associated with Hurricane Hugo. *Chat* 54:73–78.
- Post, W., and S. A. Gauthreaux. 1989. Status and distribution of South Carolina birds. Contributions from the Charleston Museum XVIII.
- Sciple, G. W. 1951. Noddy Terns observed at Pawley's Island, S.C. *Chat* 15:33.
- Sewell, J. 1996. From the field. *Oriole* 61:12–28.
- Sprunt, A., Jr. 1935. The Noddy at Charleston, South Carolina. *Auk* 52:309.
- Sprunt, A., Jr., and E. B. Chamberlain. 1931. Second supplement to Arthur T. Wayne's *Birds of South Carolina*. Contributions from the Charleston Museum VI.
- Sprunt, A., Jr., and E. B. Chamberlain. 1949. *South Carolina Bird Life*. Contributions from the Charleston Museum XI.

Tomkins, I. R. 1950. Unusual bird records after the Labor Day storm. *Oriole* 15:39–40.

Wayne, A. T., and F. Sherman. 1927. Two birds new to the fauna of South Carolina. *Auk* 49:94.

CBC Web Site
www.carolinabirdclub.org
