

General Field Notes

General Field Notes briefly report such items as rare sightings, unusual behaviors, significant nesting records, or summaries of such items.

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.

Four New Reports of the Brown Noddy from South Carolina Waters, Including a Spring Record

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In South Carolina the Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*) was formerly classified as a casual visitor that occurred offshore in late summer or autumn, usually in periods of normal weather. Onshore it was a very rare, usually storm-driven vagrant (Post and Gauthreaux 1989, Post et al. 2004). Prior to 2005, South Carolina had four Brown Noddy specimens and seven acceptable sight reports (Post et al. 2004). Observations made in waters off South Carolina during spring and early summer of 2005 and early summer of 2006 indicate that Brown Noddies occur more frequently than previously believed.

On 28 May 2005 members of a pelagic birding trip that I led encountered an adult Brown Noddy 108 km (67.3 mi) southeast of Fort Sumter along the western edge of the Gulf Stream. The noddy was first sighted at N32° 02' 24.2", W79° 04' 37.1". The noddy was patrolling an extremely large Sargassum weed line whose length was measured in miles. Water depth at this location was 442 m (1450 ft) and water temperature was 26° C (81° F). Other birds in the immediate vicinity were Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*), Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*) and Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*). The observers were N. Dias, L. Glover, C. Snook, C. Feeney, S. Compton, J. B. Hines and W. Hemby. In addition, the noddy was photographed by Compton and Feeney, and these two photographs constitute the fifth material documentation for South Carolina.

On 13 August 2005 during another pelagic birding trip, I encountered an immature Brown Noddy 72.5 km (45 mi) SE of Charleston over 30 m (140 ft) depths, where a ledge drops to 61 m (200 ft) depths. The coordinates for this location are N32° 16' 57.1", W79° 06' 57.9". The bird was in the presence of Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) and Bridled Terns (*Onychoprion anaethetus*). Other observers were L. Glover, S. Calver, C. Snook, J. B. Hines and C. Feeney.

On 17 September 2005, a pelagic birding group composed of N. Dias, J. Sewell, D. Vickers, C. Feeney, J. B. Hines and A. Mercer encountered an immature Brown Noddy 90 km (56 mi) southeast of the Charleston jetties and 141 km (88 mi) east of extreme northern Tybee Island, Georgia. The bird was over water 76 m (250 ft) deep, with a flock of four Cory's Shearwaters, two adult Sooty Terns (*Onychoprion fuscatus*), three immature Sooty Terns and five Bridled Terns. The flock was first sighted in Georgia waters at N32° 00' 45.4", W79° 19' 54.1". The birds were following a school of fish, probably Little Tunny (*Euthynnus alletteratus*), that was driving baitfish to the surface. We lost contact with the flock while on a northeast heading through South Carolina waters (N32° 02' 59.5", W79° 18' 58.1"). The bird flock was followed for about 4 km (2.5 mi).

On 5 August 2006 while on a pelagic sportfishing expedition, I encountered an adult Brown Noddy at N32° 02' 33.9", W78° 48' 02.3", which was 122 km (76 mi) southeast of the Charleston jetties. The noddy was patrolling a Sargassum weed line between the edge of the Gulf Stream and a significant deep-water upwelling. This location is at the southeast end of a 15 km-long sea valley, whose other end lies near the seafloor depression known as the "380 Hole". I obtained a mini-DV format videotape of this bird. This appears to be the sixth material documentation for its occurrence in South Carolina. A (converted) Internet mpeg video file and a frame grab still image may be viewed at the following web address:

<http://www.crbo.net/August06Noddy.html>

These reports indicate that the Brown Noddy occurs off South Carolina as early as late May. Although most sightings still occur in August–September, they are taking place more often than thought previously. I recommend that their offshore status be changed from "casual visitor" to "rare visitor during summer and autumn". Considering that they are still very rarely seen near land, their status there should remain "very rare, usually storm-driven onshore vagrant".

Literature Cited

- Post, W., D. Corkern and I. Pitts, Jr. 2004. A recent South Carolina specimen of the Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*), and a review of the species' regional status. *Chat* 68:161-166.
- Post, W. and S. A. Gauthreaux. 1988 Status and Distribution of South Carolina Birds. Contributions from the Charleston Museum XVIII.