

## **Fifty Years Ago in *The Chat*—March 1957**

---

With this new regular feature, *The Chat* begins looking back at CBC activities and bird study in the Carolinas as published here 50 years ago.

In Volume 21, Number 1 of *The Chat*, President Fred H. May summarized the recent Myrtle Beach winter meeting with a paragraph that might well be written today, as the club continues to evolve:

One striking thing about the Myrtle Beach meeting was the presence of so many new faces, members who have not been to meetings in years, or perhaps, have never attended one before. It is very encouraging to see more of these inactive members attending meetings and field trips, joining in and taking a more active part in CBC affairs. Also it was regrettable to note the absence of many of the regulars—the old standbys. Even so, there were 108 registered.

An article titled “Summer Notes on Altitudinal Distribution in the Mountains of the Southeastern States in 1956” by Henry M. Stevenson provided an annotated list of species observed during the course of a summer’s field work and the altitudinal limits at which they had been found. Two Traill’s Flycatchers (presumably Willow Flycatchers) heard singing at North Wilkesboro on 13 June at an elevation of 1000 feet were thought to be the first breeding-season record for the state. A singing male Bewick’s Wren was observed “at 4925 feet in the mountains northeast of Roan on June 10.” This sighting was described as “almost the highest summer record known for this species in the East.” “A nest with 5 or 6 young was found near Highlands, where it is rare, June 23, at 3600 feet.”

B. R. Chamberlain summarized the 1956 Christmas count. There were 21 counts in the two Carolinas (compared to today’s 72 counts). Many compilers commented on the lack of winter finches, especially of Purple Finch and Pine Siskin. Chapel Hill had an exceptional 688 meadowlarks. The Charleston count reported a carefully studied Olive-Backed Thrush (Swainson’s Thrush), the first mid-winter report for South Carolina.

In General Field Notes, E. O. Mellinger reported 24 Fulvous Tree-Ducks (Fulvous Whistling-Ducks) in November and December 1956 at Savannah River NWR. Larry Crawford, Jr., reported well over 100 Marsh Wrens at Greensboro on September 29, 1956, along with one Sharp-tailed Sparrow. Mrs. Irwin C. Hoover reported observing Black-necked Stilts with four young in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreation Area, and a photo of one chick was published. This was said to be the first report of breeding in the Hatteras area for about 100 years. Robert A. Norris reported finding two Sprague’s Pipits, one of which he collected, on Nov 1, 1956 in the Savannah River Plant area of Aiken County, South Carolina. This represented the fourth record of the species in the state, 52 years to the day after the third record. More individuals were seen later, until December 17th. Ernest Cutts reported a nest of Blue Grosbeaks near Charleston as being one of few

records for the Low Country. John Trott authored a note on tower fatalities at Chapel Hill. On October 1, 1956 the author and three others

drove to the television tower some six miles west of Chapel Hill to investigate reports of birds colliding with the tower and its lights during the fall migration south...The bodies of birds were scattered so thickly around the base of the tower and an estimated one hundred feet out on all sides, that it was difficult to walk without stepping on them.

Most of the birds had hit the tower on September 28 “when the ceiling was quite low”, forcing birds “to fly at a lower level than they usually do”. Conditions were probably related to the recent passage of the remains of Hurricane Flossy. A sample of 125 individuals was picked up, representing 40 different species. The sample was estimated to be approximately 5% of the total birds dead; thus, it was estimated that approximately 2500 individuals were killed. On October 3 the ceiling was again low, but on the next day few new victims were found, although four additional species were found.