



Figure 1. Swallow-tailed Kite adult feeding young 6 Aug 2008. Photo by David Jones

## **Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*) on Lake Hickory**

**Dwayne Martin**

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On September 30, 2003 at 18:30, while scanning parts of lower Lake Hickory from Dusty Ridge Access area in Alexander County, North Carolina, I found a gull on the lake. This seemed unusual at first because gulls are not normally there that early in the year. The gull was approximately 300 yards out sitting on the open water nearer to the Catawba County side of the lake. I set up my scope (Leica 77) on the gull. The first thing I noticed was the brown color around the neck that extended to the back and wings of the gull. It appeared to be a small gull. I had an idea of what the gull was, but I wanted to get a few more markings. Soon a boat passed near the gull and it took flight. It flew very much like a tern—bouncy in flight. As the gull flew it came somewhat closer and then banked, showing its back and tail. The tail was forked and the back had the “V” pattern of a Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*). The bird was a juvenile because of the brown coloration. The brown coloration started at the point of the mid-wing and extended down to the tail and back up to the mid-wing on the other side and covered the whole back. The Sabine's Gull flew around for a few more minutes and then landed back on the water near the original spot at which it was found.

I called Lori Martin to come help confirm the sighting. It stayed in the same general spot until she arrived. She also agreed as to the identification of the gull. Word of the gull was put on the Carolinabirds e-mail list. Over the next seven days over 60 birders saw the gull. The gull was photographed from a boat by Dwayne Martin and Wayne Forsythe on October 7, 2003, the last day the gull was seen.



Figure 1. Sabine's Gull, 7 October 2003, Lake Hickory. Photo by Wayne Forsythe.

## **Fifty Years Ago in *The Chat*—March 1959**

The March 1959 issue of *The Chat* was the first under the editorship of Charles H. Blake, of Hillsborough, NC, replacing Kay Sisson of Columbia, SC. B. R. Chamberlain reviewed the 1958 Christmas Bird Count in the Carolinas, noting that except for the count of about a half million roosting blackbirds and starlings at Greensboro, the total count of individuals was little better than two-thirds of the previous year's count. The species total was 169; the 1957 count had had 183 species. The difference was attributed to poor birding weather and slightly decreased participation. Eastern Phoebe showed a marked decline from the previous year, from 175 to 47. Eastern Bluebirds declined from 1450 to 961; over one-third of the 1958 bluebirds were on the Greensboro count. The Charlotte, NC count summary noted that "Cover and food content of open water areas greatly reduced by continuing development." In General Field Notes, a report on wildfowl wintering at Mattamuskeet listed Canada Goose as by far the most abundant species, while Tundra Swan (then called Whistling Swan) was one of the least abundant. A sight record of Lark Bunting near Fayetteville, NC, on 7 July 1958 was reported.— *Kent Fiala, editor*