

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.

The Second Record of Lesser Goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*) for North Carolina

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During late winter 2008–2009, an increasing number of American Goldfinches (*Spinus tristis*) had been visiting feeders in my back yard in Beaufort, NC. There had also been an increasing number of Pine Siskins (*Spinus pinus*) with the American Goldfinches, peaking at 10 to 12 birds on the weekend of 28 February–1 March 2009.

On the morning of Monday, 2 March, I was about to leave for work when I had a last look at the American Goldfinch flock to see if there were still some Pine Siskins with them. On looking at the thistle seed feeder, I immediately saw a slightly smaller goldfinch with a black head and back and sulfur yellow under parts. I identified it straight away as a male Lesser Goldfinch (*S. psaltria*).

While the bird remained for the next three days, its arrival at the feeders was unpredictable and often very brief. Fortunately, many birders did manage to see and photograph the bird, thanks to the utility of the carolinabirds listserve.

The bird that was present from 2–4 March was of the black-backed form and appeared to be an adult male, which is even more distinctive and easier to identify than the green-backed forms. The black-backed forms are normally found in the eastern interior portion of their US range, while the green-backed forms are normally found along the West Coast. It appears that the variation across the forms is clinal, and the differences may not support subspecific distinctions (Willoughby 2007).

The bird at my feeders in Beaufort was a classically black-backed form with glossy black head, rear of the ear coverts, back, rump and upper tail coverts. The under parts from the chin to the undertail coverts were bright sulfur yellow, becoming very slightly paler under the tail (Fig. 1). The wings

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were mostly glossy black with obvious white tips to the tertials and greater coverts (Fig. 2) . In flight, the white bases to inner primary and outer secondary remiges were obvious as a small white patch. The tail feathers were also glossy black with white patches on the outer edges at the base. On several occasions the tail shape could be seen clearly enough with a telescope to determine that the bird was an adult, based on the illustrations in Pyle (1997). Interestingly, the bill differed slightly from the illustration in Sibley (2000), having a whitish-gray lower mandible, rather than an all-dark bill. The legs were grayish-pink.



Figure 1. Lesser Goldfinch (right) with American Goldfinch (left), 14 March 2009, Beaufort, NC. Photo by Harry Sell.



Figure 2. Lesser Goldfinch, 14 March 2009, Beaufort, NC. Photo by Harry Sell.

There has been one previous, unconfirmed record of Lesser Goldfinch in the Carolinas: a single bird of the green-backed form reported from Winston-Salem, NC, on 27 September 1985 (Snively 1986). Therefore, this record represents the first record of the black-backed form for the Carolinas and the first confirmed record of the species. The NC Bird Records Committee

(LeGrand et al. 2010) has accepted photographs and a description of this Beaufort individual, and acceptance of photographs elevates the species from the Provisional List to the Official List.

Literature cited

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Nesting of Anhingas (*Anhinga anhinga*) in Scotland County, North Carolina

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Breeding bird surveys from 1985 to 1991 show the summer distribution of the Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*) just reaching into coastal South Carolina (Price 1995), although Pearson (1917) reported that the species' distribution included North Carolina.

Pearson et al. (1942) reported historical breeding records for Anhingas in North Carolina. The first report was in 1898 at Orton Lake in Brunswick County at the very southeastern edge of the state. It wasn't until 1931, 33 years later, that nesting was again reported at the same location. In 1932, a half dozen nesting pairs were reported within a Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) colony at Great Lake in Craven County. In 1935, Anhinga nesting was reported in Beaufort and Bladen counties.

More recently, Potter et al. (2006) wrote that Anhingas breed locally throughout the North Carolina coastal plain, inland approximately to the I-95 corridor near Weldon and southeast of Fayetteville. By 2006, the Anhinga's breeding range had expanded into coastal North Carolina as far north as Halifax County (Enders 2006), and Merrill Lynch reported an attempted nesting from inland Chatham County (Lynch 2006). Davis (2007) reported that nesting activity continues to occur further inland away from the usual coastal plain area.