

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*.

First Record of Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*) for North Carolina

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On 10 April 2009, Keith Rogers, a local NC Wildlife Resources Commission enforcement officer, picked up a dead bird of prey in the Crusoe Island community in Columbus County, NC, near the dead end of Crusoe Island Road (SR 1930), adjacent to the Waccamaw River and 4.2 miles southwest of Lake Waccamaw. The bird had been found by a local resident, Greg Clewis, while he was mowing in a small, private cemetery located at 34°12' 25.21" N, 78° 33' 24.86" W. Clewis did not recognize the bird and noted that each leg was banded. He contacted Rogers, who picked up the carcass later in the day and, with the aid of a field guide, identified it as a Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*).

Rogers (pers. comm.) found the bird to be recently dead, but emaciated and in poor health. Because the Snail Kite is an endangered species, Rogers reported the find to Sandra Allred of the US Fish and Wildlife Service and turned the specimen over to her early the following week. John Hammond, also with the Service, sent several photographs of the specimen to LeGrand. The photos (Figs. 1 and 2) show the very strongly hooked black bill, the orange-red cere, and solid dark and unstreaked plumage, broken only by the white upper-tail/rump and white tail tip. After being processed by the Service, the specimen was released to the NC State Museum of Natural Sciences for preservation in the bird collection.

Ryan Bakelaar, MD, who is affiliated with the Museum, prepared the study skin (NCSM 23161) and conducted a necropsy. His report to Allred stated that the kite appeared to be an adult male, in very good plumage and without any trauma, but emaciated with a very protuberant keel. It weighed 265.6 grams at preparation. It had a US Fish and Wildlife Service band on its left leg (#936-24314) and another band on its right leg (letters M over X

repeated four times). The Bird Banding Lab website indicated that the kite was banded in Florida (no locality given) on 16 March 1997. An earlier report (Southern 2009) stated that “the bird is twelve years old.” Because the age of the bird at banding was not reported on the website, the kite was a minimum of twelve years old but could have been many years older if banded as an adult.

Although it has a wide neotropical distribution, in North America the Snail Kite is essentially restricted to the southern half of Florida. However, this remarkable North Carolina record comes less than two years after the occurrence of an adult male seen and photographed in Clarendon County, SC, from 14 May to mid-June 2007 (Slyce et al. 2009). An unconfirmed report from Georgia of one or two birds in 1973 (Sykes 1984) lacks sufficient details for provisional status on the Georgia state list (Beaton et al. 2003).

The photos of the North Carolina bird were accepted by the NC Bird Records Committee (LeGrand et al. 2010) in lieu of viewing of the study skin at the Museum. Acceptance of the photos and the specimen’s provenance (i.e., a lack of any questionable-origin votes) places the species directly onto the state’s Official List and establishes the northernmost record for this species.



Figure 1. Snail Kite found at Crusoe Island, Columbus County, on 10 April 2009. Photo by John Hammond and Sandra Allred/USFWS.



Figure 2. Closeup of Snail Kite specimen showing hooked bill. Photo by John Hammond and Sandra Allred/USFWS.

Literature Cited

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