

## General Field Notes

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*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.*

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### First Record of MacGillivray's Warbler for South Carolina

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Received 01 May 2014, accepted 06 June 2014

On 18 October 2013, I captured and banded a MacGillivray's Warbler (*Geothlypis tolmiei*) on Kiawah Island, South Carolina. The bird was captured in a mist net as part of an ongoing study monitoring songbird migration during fall at the Kiawah Island Banding Station. Fall migration banding has occurred on Kiawah Island since 2009. Twenty permanent 12-m mist nets are operated daily from 15 August through 30 November. The nets are placed in maritime scrub-shrub and maritime grassland on the west end of Kiawah Island – commonly referred to as Captain Sam's Spit. Nets are opened approximately 30 min before sunrise and remain open for 5-6 hours, weather permitting.

The MacGillivray's Warbler was captured at approximately 0850 EST in net #3, which is located on an old dune ridge. Vegetation surrounding the net consists primarily of wax myrtles (*Morella cerifera*) from 7-15ft in height. In addition, a dense thicket of *Smilax* spp. is found at one end of the net. The bird was placed in a cloth bag and brought back to the banding table at around 0900 EST.

#### Description of the Bird

When I took the bird out of the bag, my initial thought was Mourning Warbler (*G. philadelphia*) but after examining the bird more carefully it became apparent that it was a MacGillivray's Warbler (Fig. 1). The coloration of the back, wings, and tail were olive green. There were no wing bars present. The bird had a distinct grayish-brown hood that extended down to the upper breast. The throat was dingy white and contrasted with the rest of the hood.

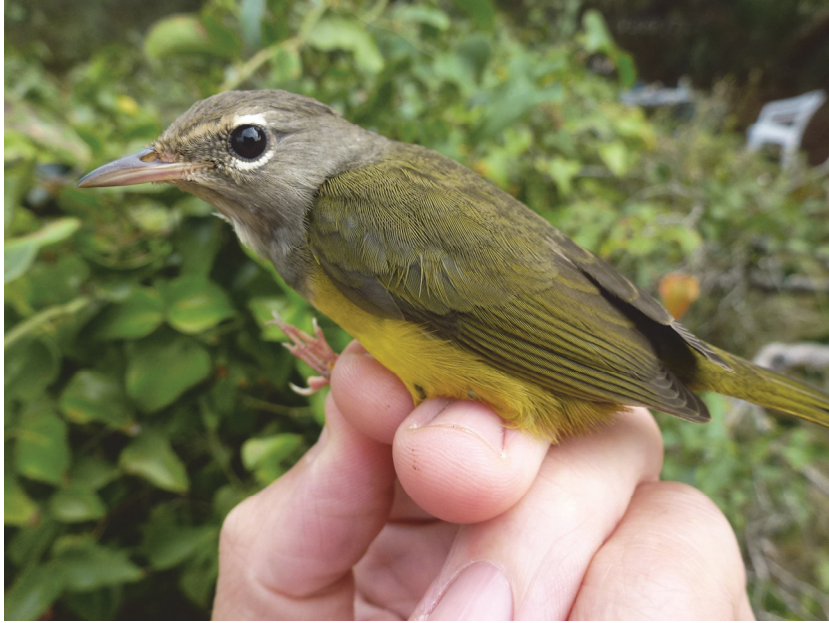


Figure 1. MacGillivray's Warbler captured and banded on Kiawah Island, SC on 18 October 2013.

The lower breast, belly, and undertail coverts were yellow. There were broad white eye arcs above and below the eye. The arcs extended behind the eye but did not connect. The arcs did not extend in front of the eye. The upper mandible was dark gray from tip to nares. The lower mandible was gray at the tip and almost pinkish at the base. The legs were pinkish.

The bird had a molt limit within the alula feathers (A1 had been replaced, with A2 and A3 not having been replaced) and the skull was not completely ossified, which indicated a hatch-year bird. The sex is most likely a female based on the lack of black feathers in the throat and upper breast. However, some hatch-year males can lack black in those areas and caution is advised in sexing individuals based using that criterion alone (Pyle 1997). A small amount of subcutaneous fat was recorded in the furcular region (fat score = 1). Morphological measurements were: wing chord, 57.0 mm; flattened wing, 59.0 mm; tail length, 48.0 mm; mass, 10.5 g.

### **Identification**

**Presence of eye arcs.** This individual exhibited very distinctive white eye arcs (Fig. 2). The arc above the eye was wider than the arc below and abruptly stopped before wrapping around the front of the eye. A close-up of the eye arcs show that the eye arc below the eye does extend behind the eye a small



Figure 2. Close-up of the head showing the bold white eye arcs.

amount before fading into the coloration of the hood. Both Mourning Warblers and Connecticut Warblers (*Oporornis agilis*) can exhibit white eye arcs but neither will be as bold or abruptly broken as this bird, especially for a hatch-year bird (Pyle 1997, Dunn and Garrett 1997).

**Presence of whitish throat and complete grayish hood.** Most hatch-year Mourning Warblers exhibit a yellow or yellow-buff throat (Dunn and Garrett 1997). This individual exhibited a dingy white to grayish throat as described in Pyle (1997) for MacGillivray's Warbler. Additionally, hatch-year Mourning Warblers usually have an interrupted (or broken) breast band with yellow extending up from the breast and into the throat region (Pyle 1997, Dunn and Garrett 1997). This individual had a complete grayish breast band which is more consistent with MacGillivray's Warbler (Fig. 3).

**Undertail coverts cover roughly half of the tail.** MacGillivray's Warblers typically have a longer tail extension beyond the undertail coverts than Mourning and Connecticut Warblers (Dunn and Garrett 1997). The tail extension averages 22 mm in MacGillivray's Warbler and 15mm in Mourning Warblers (Dunn and Garrett 1997). Although I did not measure this character at the time of banding, Figure 4 shows that the undertail coverts cover roughly half of the tail. Mourning and Connecticut Warblers have much shorter tail extensions in which the undertail coverts would typically cover at least 2/3 of the tail.



Figure 3. Dingy white throat and complete grayish hood of a MacGillivray's Warbler.



Figure 4. Long tail extension. Undertail coverts roughly  $\frac{1}{2}$  the length of the tail.

## **Conclusion**

The photos and descriptions noted above describe South Carolina's first MacGillivray's Warbler well. Of the two similar species, Connecticut Warbler can be ruled out based on size alone. The mean wing chord measurement from 247 immature Connecticut Warblers banded at Powdermill Nature Reserve was 68.8 mm with a range of 65.0 – 72.5mm (Mulvihill et al. 2004). The MacGillivray's Warbler had a wing chord measurement of 57.0 mm which is substantially smaller. MacGillivray's and Mourning Warblers are similar in size, thus making it more difficult to separate based on measurements. However, the bold eye arcs, lack of yellow in the throat, and relatively long tail extension should eliminate Mourning Warbler.

Based on the above diagnostic photos and description, the South Carolina Bird Records Committee accepted this record as the first MacGillivray's Warbler in South Carolina (Hill et al. 2014). There have been several MacGillivray's Warblers documented in the southeast over the past 20 years. Georgia has at least three records including a bird banded at Jekyll Island in 1987 (Leake 1994). North Carolina also has three records with the first occurring in 1998 (Davis and Fussell 2001) and the latest occurring during the fall of 2010. Several documented MacGillivray's Warblers have also been reported from Maine, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Alabama.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the Town of Kiawah Island and the Kiawah Island Conservancy for providing financial support for the Kiawah Island Banding Station. I would also like to thank Kiawah Development Partners for allowing access to their property to band birds. I thank Mattie VandenBoom, Claire Stuyck, Josh Lefever, and Vicki Morgan for all their hard work for very little pay. I thank Chris Hill for improving an earlier draft of this manuscript.

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## **Fifty Years Ago in *The Chat* – September 1964**

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The September 1964 issue of *The Chat* featured the first full-color photograph and cover in the history of the publication. The photograph was of an adult White Ibis in flight, set against a sky blue background. Jack Potter photographed the bird in June 1963 at Battery Island, the first documented nesting site in the state. The publication of this “expensive process color cover” was made possible by Theo. B. Davis Sons printing company and was printed using a four-color offset printer on special paper donated by the Snyder Paper Company.

Eloise Potter provided a six page account of a bird species new to North Carolina: the House Finch. She gave a brief historical summary of the illegal sale of these western birds in eastern pet stores, where they were sold as “Hollywood Finches”, and she described their release, establishment and range expansion along the east coast. Ms. Potter provided an illustrated explanation of the identification of the House Finch and how to distinguish it from a Purple Finch. She also summarized the first confirmed sighting and collection of a House Finch in the state, from her own yard in Zebulon, during the winter of 1962-1963. This specimen is preserved in the collection at the North Carolina State Museum.

Rhett Chamberlain provided two articles for this issue. The first was a summary of the “invasion” of Evening Grosbeaks in the Carolinas during the winter of 1963-1964. Thirty observers submitted reports from both Carolinas documenting an incursion of “moderate proportions” which included some band recovery data as well. A Grosbeak found in Washington, NC had been banded in Ohio, one found in Springfield SC had been banded in Vermont, and one found in Whiteville, NC had been banded in Wisconsin. Each banded bird was five years old. Chamberlain’s second article summarized the wintering finches of 1963-1964. It included details on Pine Siskins, Red and White-winged Crossbills, Purple Finches as well as a sight report from South Carolina of a Pine Grosbeak and a sight report of a Common Redpoll in Charlotte.

A special note on Paul Sykes was included in this issue. Sykes had been a regular contributor to *The Chat*, had just finished a three-year tour in the US Navy, and was newly enrolled in graduate school at NC State where he planned to study landbird migration along the Outer Banks. Sykes, who is well known to many birders in Virginia and the Carolinas, went on to complete a distinguished career with the US Fish & Wildlife Service and to become the first person ever to participate in over 400 Christmas Bird Counts.