

2014 Annual Report of the South Carolina Bird Records Committee

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In 2014, the South Carolina Bird Records Committee (SCBRC) took action on 34 new reports of which 28 were accepted, 5 not accepted and 1 recommended for outside review. We also voted a second and final time on 2 reports for which the original votes had been inconclusive and we had obtained comment by outside experts. Those two reports were not accepted in the second vote. There was one additional report that was withdrawn by the submitter before a vote. The committee also clarified the status of two seabirds with published reports suggesting South Carolina occurrence, and the committee voted on a definition of South Carolina offshore waters.

The 2014 submissions added two species to South Carolina's Main Species List, Fea's Petrel and Crested Caracara. The 2014 submissions also moved three species, Harlequin Duck, Little Gull and Alder Flycatcher, from the Provisional 1 section of the state list (accepted, but without physical evidence such as a specimen, photo or sound recording) to the Definitive List, based on photographs for the first two species and a definitive sound recording for the third. Barolo Shearwater (formerly appearing on the state list as Little Shearwater) was removed from the list as the specimen on which the record was based proved to be a misidentified Audubon's Shearwater. The Main Species list is thus brought to 430 species. The most recent version of the list is available online at <http://carolinabirdclub.org/brc>.

In 2014, we changed from numbering incoming reports by month and year of submission, and began simply numbering them by year of submission and order of receipt (2014-001, 2014-002 etc.). We also began posting reports on line, voting more frequently, and posting the results of each vote quickly at the "Recent and Current Reports to the South Carolina Bird Records Committee" page (see link at <http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/brc/>). Committee membership was unchanged from 2013.

The following report details actions taken by the SC Bird Records Committee in 2014.

Pelagic Boundaries

The SCBRC voted to adopt the “closest point of land” or CPOL standard to determine what ocean waters are considered within our purview. Specifically, we recognize birds seen inside the 200 mile federal economic exclusion zone, and closer to SC land than to land of any other state, as being in South Carolina waters. Georgia to our south adopted CPOL in 2012 (Beaton et al. 2012) so we are in agreement with them. The North Carolina BRC has not yet adopted a particular definition (T. Piephoff, pers. comm.).

Compared to some past systems (like extending state borders due east into the ocean) the CPOL criterion generally allocates more area to states with convex coastlines like Massachusetts and North Carolina and less to those with concave coastlines like Georgia and Delaware. For South Carolina, this means that boundaries of our offshore waters extend generally southeast rather than east (Fig.1). A more thorough discussion of offshore boundaries can be found in Beaton et al. (2012).

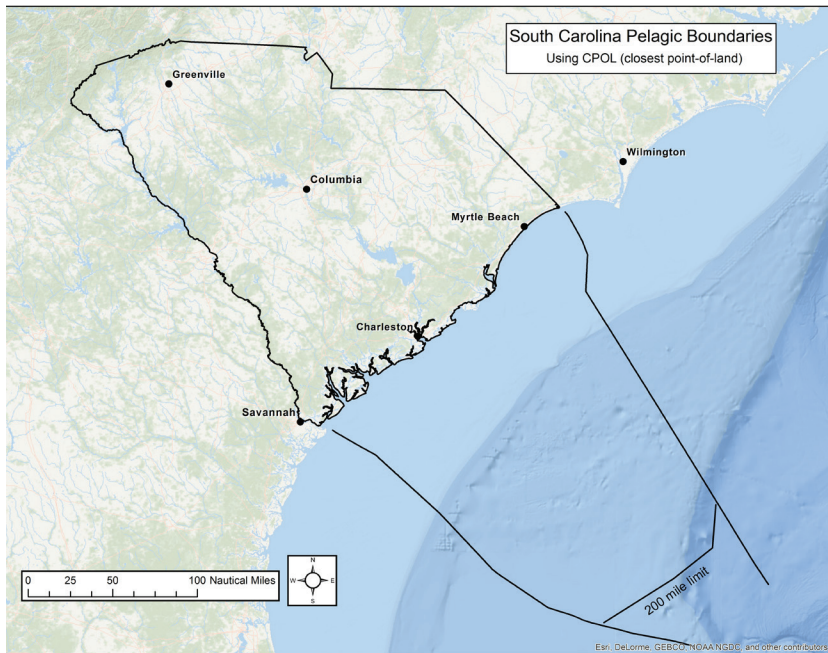


Figure 1. Adopted South Carolina Pelagic Boundaries.

Clarification of status of published report - Bermuda Petrel

A recently published update of the status of Bermuda Petrel (Maderos et al. 2013), mentioned a 1975 sighting in SC waters (Wingate et al. 1998). Ned Brinkley kindly supplied the committee with a scan of the 1998 article by Wingate and others. Correspondence between CH and Todd Hass, one of the original observers, established the location of that sighting as 32.66° N, 75.87° W. That location is approximately 170 miles from the nearest part of South Carolina, but only 135 miles from Cape Lookout, North Carolina, so the report is from what we now consider North Carolina waters. South Carolina is still without a confirmed record of Bermuda Petrel.

Clarification of status of historical report - Little Shearwater/Barolo Shearwater

The committee voted to remove Barolo Shearwater (formerly on the list as Little Shearwater) from the South Carolina list. The species was published in Post and Gauthreaux (1989) due to an 1883 specimen with location listed as Sullivan's Island, Charleston County, SC. That specimen is extant, housed at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, MCZ #220051. The specimen was reidentified by Steve Howell as an Audubon's Shearwater (Howell 2012). This re-identification was confirmed to the satisfaction of the committee during correspondence with Howell and MCZ collection manager Jeremiah Trimble.

Accepted reports

Brant (*Branta bernicla*) (2014-014) This report from Jim Jordan included excellent photographs of a Brant seen on 19 December 2006 from Kiawah Island. Brant are rare winter visitors to South Carolina.

Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) (2014-015) and (2014-016) Aaron Given submitted reports of two different European Wigeons, each documented by descriptions and definitive photos. The first report was of a male at Donnelly Wildlife Management Area, Colleton County, on 17 February 2014. The second was of another male at Santee Coastal Reserve, Charleston County, on 25 February 2013. European Wigeon are rare visitors to the South Carolina coast, and casual inland (Post and Gauthreaux 1989).

Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) (2014-013) Ritch Lilly photographed a drake Harlequin Duck at the Second Avenue Pier in Myrtle Beach, Horry County on 13 February 2005, and shared the photos with the committee. The bird was seen on multiple occasions that winter. These photos provide the first physical evidence of the species in South Carolina and move Harlequin Duck to the definitive list. Post and Gauthreaux (1989) list seven reports through 1986 and McNair and Post (1993) add another 9 reports, but this was the first of Harlequin Duck voted on by the bird records committee.

White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*) (2014-021) and (2014-22) The upstate experienced an influx of unusual waterbirds in the winter of 2013-14. Derek Aldrich submitted written descriptions to document two different White-winged Scoters, a female at Lake Robinson in Greer from 14 to 22 January 2014, and a male at the same location on 19 February 2014.

Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*) (2014-025) Aaron Given submitted an excellent description and diagnostic photo of a Red-necked Grebe seen by many observers at Kiawah Island between 4 and 8 Feb. 2014.

Fea's Petrel (*Pterodroma feae*) (2014-034) Keith McCullough submitted a description, with accompanying photographs by Steve Compton, showing a bird seen about 85 miles off Charleston at 31.6374° N, -79.2169° W on 10 June 2013. The photographs are sufficiently detailed to eliminate other candidate species to the committee's satisfaction. This report therefore adds Fea's Petrel to South Carolina's definitive list.

American White Pelican (*Pelicanus erythrorhynchos*) (2014-023) The committee accepted a written description by Derek Aldrich of a bird seen at Lake Conestee Nature Park in Greenville County from 21-24 November 2013. White Pelicans are casual inland in South Carolina, with Post and Gauthreaux listing only five previous records.

Snowy Plover (*Charadrius nivosus*) (2014-018), (2014-019), and (2014-020) Aaron Given submitted descriptions and definitive photographs to document three sightings of Snowy Plovers, all at Kiawah Island. These sightings happened in the winter of 2008-2009 (27 February to 20 March), the winter of 2009-2010 (15 December to 27 January) and on 10 August 2010. The first record of Snowy Plover for South Carolina was in 1992 at North Island (McNair and Post 1993; Carter and Worthington 1994). The three sightings at Kiawah constitute the second, third and fourth accepted reports of the species. A further report to the committee on a bird seen at south Litchfield Beach was said to have been sent for outside review (Glover et al. 2002), but there is no record of a final resolution of that report.

Ruff (*Calidris pugnax*) (2014-030) Brian Penney submitted a good description and diagnostic photographs of a Ruff observed at Bear Island WMA, Colleton County, on 22 March 2014. There are at least 9 previous accepted reports of this species in South Carolina (McNair and Post 1993; Worthington 1993; Worthington et al. 1997; Slyce et al. 2009). The committee is aware of other unpublished reports of this rare species in recent years and encourages observers to submit further sightings.

Dovekie (*Alle alle*) (2014-026) Aaron Given submitted a description and diagnostic photographs of a Dovekie picked up alive but emaciated on 9 March 2011 at Kiawah Island, and which died soon thereafter. The committee has accepted 7 Dovekie reports in the last 9 years, and Post and Gauthreaux (1989) list 14 others.

Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) (2014-004, 2014-

005) Paul Serridge and Chris Hill independently submitted reports of a bird photographed at the Conway Wastewater Treatment Plant, Horry County, on 9 January 2014 (also seen for several weeks following that date). This is apparently the fourth well-substantiated report of the species (Post and Gauthreaux 1989; McNair and Post 1993; Pitts et al. 2012). As with Ruff, the committee is aware of further unpublished reports of the species and encourages further submissions.

Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*) (2014-007) A photograph of a bird at Huntington Beach State Park by visiting birder Dave Russell, taken on 13 October 2007, was submitted on Russell's behalf by Chris Hill. Although the photo is blurry, it is definitive and adds Little Gull to the definitive list. Prior to this report, the committee had accepted two sight reports and Post and Gauthreaux (1989) accepted one other.

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*) (2014-002) Reported by Chris Hill from the Horry County Landfill, with photograph from 6 January 2014. This species, while not recorded every year, has been found with some regularity at this site in recent years.

Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*) (2014-035) An injured bird was picked up on 9 December 2014 in Columbia and taken to the Carolina Wildlife Center, where it was photographed and treated. McNair and Post (1993) say "only four reports since a verified record from York Co. in 1954," and there is one accepted record of a calling bird on a Christmas Bird Count (Worthington et al. 1997).

Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) (2015-001) During a vulture feeding and observation program at the Center for Birds of Prey in Awendaw, this bird appeared and was seen and photographed by the participants. Keith McCullough submitted a report with definitive photographs and an excellent description of the bird's appearance and behavior. Crested Caracara has been on the South Carolina Provisional II list (which covers published records of uncertain provenance) based on two sight records from 1 May 1943 and 26 November 1977. However, in the last decade, extralimital and apparently wild vagrant Crested Caracaras have turned up from Washington, Oregon and California on the west coast to the northern tier of states in the east and into Atlantic Canada (though, until recently, less often in the southeast). The Awendaw bird, with no visible tags or markings, was considered by the committee to have been a wild bird.

Alder Flycatcher (*Empidonax alnorum*) (2014-031) Linda Montgomery submitted a description with an accompanying sound recording of a singing bird seen and heard on 17 and 18 May 2014 at the Clemson Aquaculture Facility in Pickens County. Three previous accepted records, some with photographs (Pitts et al. 2012; Hill et al. 2014), left this species on the Provisional I list due to the difficulty of conclusive species identification from a photograph. This recording now moves Alder Flycatcher to the Definitive List.

Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) (2014-029) Visiting out-of-state birder Carl Engstrom obtained and submitted identifiable photographs of a bird at Savannah NWR, seen there from 9-14 March 2014. This is the sixth accepted record of the species for South Carolina.

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) (2014-011) Diane Rand submitted excellent photographs of a bird that frequented a feeder in Okatie from 13 January to 5 February 2014.

American Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*) (2014-010) KC Foggin shared a photograph from 16 February 2008 of an American Tree Sparrow that visited her feeder in Socastee, Horry County, that winter. American Tree Sparrow is a rare winter visitor in South Carolina.

Non-accepted reports

White-crowned Pigeon (2014-008) Along with the reports of Crested Caracara above and Black-billed Magpie below, this report of White-crowned Pigeon, from 26 January 2014 at Bulls Island, occasioned extensive discussion and comment by the committee. The written report described brief binocular and scope views of a perched bird, and included comments from three observers present. The well-presented account included several field marks consistent with the identification of White-crowned Pigeon. On the other hand, domestic and feral Rock Pigeons are known to occur at Bulls Island and are hugely variable, and White-crowned Pigeons are not a species with a documented pattern of long distance vagrancy. The vote by the committee was 4 to accept, 5 not to accept (insufficiently documented).

Northern Goshawk (10-13-19) This written report of a sighting from Folly Beach, Charleston County, on 26 October 2013, received a split vote last year, and was therefore sent to outside experts for comment, after which it received a second vote from the committee. In the second vote the committee voted unanimously that the report was insufficiently documented to accept.

Black-billed Magpie (2014-028) This report with excellent photographs came from Beaufort County, 13 March 2014. This report presented both identification questions (Black-billed Magpie vs European Magpie) and obvious issues of provenance, since Magpies are kept as pets in many places and could conceivably benefit from ship-assisted travelling. The report received two ID votes (insufficient documentation to certainly establish which species was involved) 6 votes for QO (questionable origin) and one for NE (introduced, not established).

Townsend's Warbler (2014-006) This report was a written description of a very brief view of a warbler on Bulls Island on 5 January 2014. The report received one vote in favor, 8 against acceptance (seven "insufficiently documented," two "misidentified"). While some points of the description

supported Townsend's Warbler, the very brief sighting was not considered sufficient to eliminate Black-throated Green Warbler by some, and not sufficient to establish the occurrence of Townsend's Warbler in the state by most.

Common Redpoll (2014-009) This report from a feeder in Horry County was not accepted as the committee members felt other possible species were not conclusively eliminated.

Northern Goshawk (2014-033). This report of a sighting in Beaufort on 7 August 2014, which included a blurry photograph, was judged insufficiently documented, as it failed to eliminate other more common species.

Clarification of status of two historical reports

Bermuda Petrel (no record number – evaluation of published report).

Little/Barolo Shearwater (no record number – deletion from South Carolina list based on reevaluation of historical record)

Unresolved reports

Certain split votes, according to committee bylaws, require the soliciting of input from outside reviewers, followed by a re-vote by the committee. The following reports are awaiting outside review.

Red-necked Grebe (2014-024)

Acknowledgements

The committee thanks all the observers who submitted reports. Your actions increase our understanding of bird occurrence in the state. We thank Steve Mlodinow and Dennis Paulson for comments on unresolved reports from previous years, Steve Howell and Jeremiah Trimble for forwarding details about the misidentified shearwater specimen, and Ned Brinkley and Todd Hass for their help with the 1975 Bermuda Petrel sighting.

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