

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 a Scott's Oriole (*Icterus parisorum*) for South Carolina

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On December 16, 2015, Bunny Goree, an artist and a close friend, found an unusual looking oriole coming to her feeder in Six Mile, South Carolina. It was unlike either of the other orioles, Baltimore (*Icterus galbula*) or Orchard (*Icterus spurius*), she had previously seen. She tried to contact me on December 21, but due to the Christmas holidays was unable to get me until December 28. The bird had since left, but she had taken some fuzzy photos with her iPhone on December 21 that she shared with me. She suspected this was possibly a Scott's Oriole and wanted help confirming her identification.

Ms. Goree had also sent the photos to Phillip Unitt, Curator, Department of Birds and Mammals at San Diego Natural History Museum. Unitt thought that it could possibly be a Scott's Oriole (*Icterus parisorum*) but could not confirm due to the lack of clarity in the pictures. Ms. Goree and I discussed the possibility of this being a Baltimore, Orchard, or Audubon's Oriole (*Icterus graduacauda*) over the phone. However, based on her excellent and detailed descriptions/observations, consultations with the Sibley Guide (Sibley 2000), and discussions about size, shape, and field marks, I concurred with her assessment that this bird was probably a Scott's Oriole, a very unusual sighting in the Carolinas. However, a more definitive identification was needed. This was citizen science at work and Ms. Goree deserves great credit for her excellent observations and persistence.

The bird reappeared on her property on January 1, 2016, at which point Ms. Goree contacted me and I went to Six Mile to see the bird. The bird appeared at her suet feeder at 1:00 pm and remained for over 1.5 hrs. I was located at a distance of approximately 15 ft from the feeder for most of the time the bird was there. I had the opportunity to photograph it (Figures 1 and 2) and clearly identify markings that established it as an adult male Scott's Oriole. The three candidate birds (Audubon's, Baltimore, and Orchard) were firmly ruled out based on the following: It was medium sized, broad-necked bird, larger than an Orchard Oriole with a black beak finely pointed at the end, typical of the

Icterus genus. It had a black head, throat, and chest, with a mottled black and yellow back (a bit unusual) that Ms. Goree describes as a 'brocade'.



Figure 1. Scott's Oriole at feeder - Six Mile, South Carolina. Photograph by Imtiaz Haque.



Figure 2. Scott's Oriole at feeder - showing undertail markings. Photograph by Imtiaz Haque.

The rest of the body was lemon yellow including the under-tail coverts. The wings were black with a white wing bar and a yellow upper epaulet. The outer tail feathers were yellow at the base for half their length and black for the other half. A male Audubon's Oriole has a yellow back and a black tail. A male Baltimore Oriole has a flame orange chest. Females and immature male Baltimore Orioles have yellow-orange breasts, grayish on the head and back, and two bold white wing bars. Adult Orchard Oriole males are black above and reddish-chestnut below. They have a black head and throat. Females are greenish yellow with two white wing bars and no black. Immature males look like females, but have black around the bill and throat.

I contacted Dr. Christopher E. Hill, Biology Department, Coastal Carolina University and chair of the South Carolina Bird Records Committee on January 1, 2016 and submitted photographs of the bird. He concurred with our conclusions based on the photographs I submitted. I also spoke with Dr. Drew Lanham, Professor of Ornithology at Clemson University who was very enthusiastic about the sighting. A record of this sighting was submitted to *ebird.org* and accepted. A report was submitted to the South Carolina Bird Records Committee and was accepted (Record # 2016-001). News of the sighting was made available to the birding community through social media and email, with permission from the homeowner. Ms. Goree was very gracious about opening up her home to birders. Since that time, 55 birders from South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina have seen the bird. The bird was seen every day till January 7 and then sporadically until January 14 at which point it left. The bird was seen again on February 14 and 15 and was not seen since.

The Scott's Oriole is a fairly common and widespread breeding bird in arid lands. It breeds in scattered locations across the southern half of California, Nevada, Utah, western Colorado, southwest Wyoming, Arizona, western and southern New Mexico and trans-Pecos Texas, extending to central Texas and then south into Mexico. Almost all U.S. breeders winter in Mexico but a few are found in southern California (Dunne 2006). Records of Scott's Oriole sightings in the Eastern United States are very sparse. Records exist for Georgia (Boehm and Boehm 2002), Kentucky (Palmer-Ball 2007), Pennsylvania (Johnson 2007), New York (Wilson et al. 2009), and North Carolina (LeGrand et al. 2009). There is no prior record of this species in South Carolina.

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