The Chat

Vol. 83 Summer 2019 No. 3

Carolina Bird Club
www.carolinabirdclub.org

The Quarterly Bulletin of the Carolina Bird Club, Inc.
The Ornithological Society of the Carolinas

THE CHAT

ISSN No. 0009-1987

Quarterly Bulletin of Carolina Bird Club, Inc.

1909 Lakepark Drive, Raleigh NC 27612

Vol. 83 **Summer 2019** **No. 3**

General Field Notes Editors
North Carolina **Christina Harvey**
South Carolina **William Post**

Briefs for the Files **Josh Southern**

Editor **Steve Shultz**
2404 Bristers Spring Way
Apex, NC 27523
chat@carolinabirdclub.org

THE CHAT is published quarterly by the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., 9 Quincy Place, Pinehurst NC 28374. Subscription price $30 per year.

Articles

Reports

Briefs for the Files

Birders' Book Review

Cover: Limpkin, 22 May 2019, Mecklenburg County, NC
Photo by Rob Van Epps

House Wren Breeding Range Expansion in the Piedmont of the Upper Pee Dee Region of the Carolinas

Douglas B. McNair
35 Rowell Road, Wellfleet, MA 02667
dbmcnair@gmail.com

Abstract

The House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) has slowly expanded its breeding range to the upper Pee Dee region of the Carolinas within the last 25-30 years. The current range front in the Piedmont now extends from northwest Chesterfield County in South Carolina (SC) to Anson and Montgomery counties in North Carolina (NC) and eastward to the fall line at Rockingham, Richmond County, NC, where breeding was confirmed in 2017. Within this occupied area, House Wrens breed in residential areas of nearly all towns with a human population of ≥850 persons.

The direction of recent range expansion to Rockingham is most consistent with movement from the Piedmont (i.e., from the west-northwest), although movement from the Sandhills (i.e., from the northeast) cannot be ruled out. The current breeding distribution of House Wren in the upper Pee Dee region of the Carolinas exhibits aspects of both stepwise movements and leap-frog range expansion.

Introduction

Most range expansions by avian species within southeastern North America are closely associated with altered habitats (Greenlaw et al. 2014), including habitats modified by anthropogenic activities in the upper Pee Dee region of the Carolinas (McNair 2013, McNair 2016, McNair 2017). In North Carolina, the House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) was scarce as a breeder in the Coastal Plain until the 1970s (LeGrand et al. 2018).

Odum and associates investigated the breeding expansion of House Wren in southeastern North America (Odum and Burleigh 1946, Odum and Johnston 1951, Odum et al. 1993). The initial breeding range expansion into North Carolina to the Piedmont occurred in the 1920s to the early 1930s (Odum and Burleigh 1946, Odum and Johnston 1951, Seriff 2018). House Wrens also expanded their breeding range from Virginia into the extreme eastern Coastal Plain south to Beaufort, NC (Burleigh 1937).

House Wrens continued their breeding range expansion in a series of sequential steps to the Piedmont of South Carolina, and then Georgia, reaching Athens in 1950 (Odum and Johnston 1951). This physiographic province ends in eastern Alabama, where breeding has only been confirmed at one site within the Auburn-Opelika metropolitan statistical area in 2000 (Haggerty 2009, Hill 2018). Breeding House Wrens have not reached the Coastal Plain of South Carolina or Georgia, except at isolated sites in a few of the largest cities along the fall line at Columbia, Augusta, and Macon (Cely 2003a, Waters and Belger 2002, Schneider 2013). In the southeastern plains of Alabama, House Wrens have apparently nested at only one very isolated site in 2005 at Lake Dannelly, a rural area along the Alabama River in 2005 (Haggerty 2009).

In North Carolina, House Wrens still occur along or near the coast, with a spotty distribution in the northern half of the Coastal Plain. In the southern Coastal Plain of North Carolina, a wide gap in breeding distribution still exists between birds that nest in non-anthropogenic habitats (i.e., recently burned pocosins) in the lower Coastal Plain and in anthropogenic habitats (i.e., cities and towns where nest boxes have become more widely available) along the fringe of the upper Coastal Plain in the Sandhills subregion (LeGrand et al. 2018; McNair and Stanback in press).

The breeding range of the House Wren in the northern Piedmont of North Carolina had spread eastward to the fall line by the 1960s and 1970s (Hader 1969, LeGrand et al. 2018). Breeding in Raleigh was first documented in 1924 (Pearson 1934) and likely began in Chapel Hill during 1933-1935, where they are now well-established (Odum et al. 1935, Hader 1969, Mason et al. 2007).

In the southern North Carolina Piedmont, House Wrens were first reported during the breeding season at Davidson in 1928 (Pearson 1934, Seriff 2018) and first nested at Charlotte and New London (Stanly County) in 1933 and 1943 (Clarkson 1940, Trott 1943, Seriff 2018), respectively. Further east, however, Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data (three routes: Biscoe, Wilgrove, and Uwharrie National Forest, the latter route now inactive) yielded records beginning in the early 1990s, although these routes did not commence until then (Sauer et al. 2017). LeGrand et al. (2018) and Seriff (2018) stated that House Wrens bred across the entire North Carolina Piedmont, but that confirmed nest records were lacking from Anson, Montgomery, and Richmond counties (LeGrand and Seriff, pers. comm.). Breeding House Wrens from the eastern Piedmont of South Carolina in the upper Pee Dee region are unknown (Post and Gauthreaux 1989, McNair and Post 1993, Cely 2003b).

The purpose of this study was to document the breeding status of House Wrens in the Piedmont of the upper Pee Dee region of the Carolinas and their pattern of spread in anthropogenic environments. In this paper, I document their breeding status within a portion of a six-county area of the upper Pee Dee region. This includes unpublished breeding evidence of House Wrens from several towns in Anson and Montgomery counties, NC, in 1994 and establishment of a breeding population in 2017-2018 at Rockingham, NC, the largest city along the fall line in close proximity (18 km) to the South Carolina state line.

Using 2018 data, I address one question: Is the current breeding distribution in the study area more consistent with a leap-frog (Odum and Burleigh 1946, Odum and Johnston 1951, Odum et al. 1993) or a step-wise range expansion? This requires me to determine whether the presence of breeding House Wrens in cities and towns at the edge of the species' range is related to the local size or density of the human population and how this may influence the direction and rate of the current range expansion.

Field Site Description

The upper Pee Dee region as defined herein includes six counties or portions thereof in two states, and a total of 29 cities and towns ranging in human population size from 110 in McFarlan, NC to 9080 in Rockingham, NC (Table 1). The number of housing units is typically a better measure of urbanization than population censuses (Brown et al. 2005), and data for each variable are available down to the level of cities and towns (U.S.

Census Bureau 2017). However, in this study both variables are strongly correlated for the above-mentioned 29 cities and towns (Spearman's r = 0.96, P< 0.0001), although Polkton (Anson County, NC) and Wallace (Marlboro County, SC) have disproportionately low numbers of housing units compared to their populations. Nonetheless, I used population census data as the measure of urbanization for locations in the upper Pee Dee region because of its greater familiarity to most people.

Table 1. Population Size of 29 Cities and Towns Sampled for House Wrens. Towns and cities are within a six-county area near and at the edge of their breeding range in the Upper Pee Dee Region of the Carolinas. Cities and towns are listed in order by physiographic province, state, and county

Physiographic Province	State	County	City or Town	Population Size[a]
Piedmont	NC	Montgomery	Troy	3,414
Piedmont	NC	Montgomery	Star	868
Piedmont	NC	Montgomery	Biscoe	1,679
Piedmont	NC	Montgomery	Mount Gilead	1,171
Piedmont	NC	Anson	Peachland	411
Piedmont	NC	Anson	Polkton	3,444
Piedmont	NC	Anson	Ansonville	591
Piedmont	NC	Anson	Wadesboro	5,467
Piedmont	NC	Anson	Lilesville	501
Piedmont	NC	Moore	Robbins	1,180
Piedmont	SC	Chesterfield	Pageland	2,704
Piedmont	SC	Chesterfield	Jefferson	742
Piedmont	SC	Chesterfield	Mount Croghan	194
Piedmont	SC	Chesterfield	Ruby	351
Piedmont	SC	Chesterfield	Chesterfield	1,452
Fall Line	NC	Montgomery	Candor	832
Fall Line	NC	Anson	Morven	460
Fall Line	NC	Anson	McFarlan	110
Fall Line	NC	Richmond	Cordova	1,775[b]
Fall Line	NC	Richmond	Rockingham	9,080
Fall Line	SC	Marlboro	Wallace	2,606[c]
Fall Line	SC	Chesterfield	Cheraw	5,780
Sandhills	NC	Moore	Carthage	2,438
Sandhills	NC	Richmond	Norman	132
Sandhills	NC	Richmond	Ellerbe	986
Sandhills	NC	Richmond	Hoffman	560
Sandhills	NC	Richmond	East Rockingham	3,885[b]
Sandhills	NC	Richmond	Dobbins Heights	822
Sandhills	NC	Richmond	Hamlet	6,391

[a] *U.S. Census Bureau (2017): Resident population estimate of 1 July 2016.*
[b] *U.S. Census Bureau (2017): Resident census of 1 April 2010—Census-designated places (CDP).*
[c] *U.S. Census Bureau (2017): Resident census of 1 April 2000—CDP and unincorporated community.*

Survey Effort

Rockingham—I surveyed Rockingham, NC for breeding House Wrens on five dates from 28 April to 29 May 2017. I returned to Rockingham on 28 and 30 October 2017 to examine contents of nest boxes. If the nest box was accessible, I could determine whether a male was paired by the presence of a distinct and lined nest cup, which is constructed solely by the female (Kennedy and White 1992, Alworth and Schieber 2000, Johnson 2014).

Based on the area occupied by wrens in 2017, I surveyed a larger study area (316 ha) in a residential section of Rockingham in 2018 in which I anticipated House Wrens may be present. I surveyed the study area weekly between 06:30 DST and 09:45 DST from 6 May to 17 June, by driving slowly (6-20 km/hr) with the windows down, stopping frequently, and occasionally walking, listening for singing males. Median survey time was 140 minutes (Q1-Q3 = 130-158 min, min-max = 90-185 min, n = 7).

All cities and towns—In 2018, I surveyed singing male House Wrens at the aforementioned 29 cities and towns twice each from mid-April to early May and recorded whether potential breeding birds were present or absent. This includes other areas of Rockingham outside the above study area. Territorial male House Wrens in the central Piedmont of North Carolina may begin singing in early April and start nest-building in early to mid-April (Stanback et al. 2013; Stanback 2018), although some males may not establish territories and begin singing until mid-May.

I visited each city and town again twice each from mid-May to early June to record whether breeding House Wrens were present or absent. Five cities and towns in Richmond County (Cordova, East Rockingham, Ellerbe, Hamlet, Rockingham) received more frequent surveys. In addition, I twice surveyed portions of Florence, located in the middle Coastal Plain of South Carolina. With a population of 38,288 (U.S. Census Bureau 2017), Florence is the largest city within the Pee Dee region.

Generally, I drove slowly (10-20 km/hr, when possible) through each town searching for House Wrens, supplemented by walking in residential areas with the most favorable habitat (semi-open shrubby vegetation with nest boxes). Surveys occurred during all daylight hours because male House Wrens are voluble all day (Johnson 2014), although most surveys occurred during morning. I made no adjustments for differences in detectability for time of day. Surveys took longest in the largest cities and the time of each survey was recorded to the nearest five minutes. Total survey time was 85.2 hours (median = 35 min; Q1-Q3 = 20-55 min, min-max = 10-180 min, n = 112).

House Wrens were recorded as present after early May if males sang at the same sites in the same town over a period of at least 10 days. I expected males to be more numerous than females at or near the breeding range front (Summerour 1986, Odum et al. 1993, Stanback et al. 2013; McNair, this study). Since unmated males may build dummy nests, the presence of singing males without additional evidence does not constitute evidence of breeding. Nonetheless, I did conclude that breeding occurred if I detected at least four to five singing males within a town since I presumed at least one of these males would be paired with a female (Odum et al. 1993; this study). I did record any additional breeding evidence (e.g., females present, adults delivering food to young in nest boxes), although this was not the focus of these surveys.

Results

Rockingham 2017

A small breeding population was present in Rockingham, Richmond County, NC. I discovered six House Wren territories and confirmed breeding at two of the four sites where I was able to examine all nest boxes (Table 2). All sites were located in one neighborhood of Rockingham, but only two territories were contiguous. All six territories contained nest boxes (and five of six territories contained bird feeders).

Table 2. Six House Wren territories with single singing males in Rockingham, Richmond County, North Carolina in 2017.

Site Number	Search Effort	Female Detected	Other Breeding Evidence	Breeding Confirmed
1	Incomplete (back yard inaccessible in autumn)	no	3 dummy nests	No
2	Incomplete (2 nest box contents inaccessible)	no	2 dummy nests	No
3	Complete	no	2 dummy nests	No
4	Complete	no	1 dummy nest, 1 complete nest	Yes
5	Complete	no	1 dummy nest, 1 complete nest with 1 infertile egg	Yes
6	Complete	no	1 dummy nest	No

Rockingham 2018

One to three singing male House Wrens were present in Rockingham from 15-29 April during late morning and afternoon surveys conducted within the area originally surveyed in 2017. In the expanded study area of 2018, from 20-25 singing males (0.06-0.08/ha or 1 male per 12.64-15.8 ha) were present each week from 6 May to 17 June. Many territories were contiguous. The daily maximum number of singing males detected was 33 on 20 May, when some areas peripheral to the study area were also covered, almost reaching Roberdel, a suburb of Rockingham.

All Cities and Towns 1994

During complete surveys on 14 May in Montgomery County, 17 singing male House Wrens (two active nests examined) were present at Troy and seven singing males (one active nest) were present at Mt. Gilead. G.W. Kelly (Mt. Gilead) informed me that House Wrens had been breeding at nest boxes in his yard since at least 1992. At Wadesboro, Anson County, two singing male House Wrens were present on 15 June 1994.

All Cities and Towns 2018

House Wrens were present at seven cities and towns in 2018, six of them in the Piedmont and the other along the fall line at Rockingham (Figure 1). On 27 April, breeding was confirmed (by examination of complete old nests from 2017) at Wadesboro, Anson County, NC, and on 28 April at Pageland, Chesterfield County, SC. Single singing males visited Lilesville, Anson County, on 27 April and Candor, Montgomery County, from 1-4 May but did not remain.

House Wrens were absent south of an approximate line extending from Pageland in northwestern Chesterfield County, SC, to Wadesboro in Anson County, NC, then east to Rockingham. This absence includes the nearest and largest cities and towns in South Carolina (Chesterfield in the Piedmont; Cheraw and Wallace along the fall line) and North Carolina (Hamlet in the Sandhills).

The smallest town occupied by House Wrens was Star in northeastern Montgomery County, NC where nine singing males were present on 4 May and thereafter. However, Robbins, the larger more easterly town in the Piedmont of northern Moore County, NC, was not occupied. Within the area encompassed by the seven occupied cities and towns, the only town larger than Star without House Wrens was Polkton in Anson County. House Wrens were absent from 22 cities and towns, including Hamlet, the largest of all seven localities in the Sandhills, just 8 km east of Rockingham. House Wrens were also absent from Florence, SC.

Discussion

This study confirms that House Wrens have expanded their breeding range across almost the entire Piedmont within the upper Pee Dee region of the Carolinas. My observations suggest that House Wrens have nested for at least 24 years in the southeastern Piedmont of North Carolina at Mount Gilead and Troy (Montgomery County) and Wadesboro (Anson County). At some point, House Wrens also extended their breeding range in the Piedmont of South Carolina to Pageland, Chesterfield County (Post and Gauthreaux 1989, McNair and Post 1993). This particular breeding site could have been overlooked before, because coverage and effort were deficient during the South Carolina atlas in the upper Pee Dee region (Cely 2003b).

In the Piedmont of Richmond County, NC, where breeding House Wrens were absent, LeGrand et al. (2018) suggested that the House Wren is an uncommon summer resident. No towns are located in that section of the county, however, where House Wrens do not breed in non-anthropogenic habitat (McNair, pers. obsv.).

House Wrens also do not nest in the Piedmont of Moore County where only one town is present (Robbins), even though this study documents new evidence that House Wrens now breed in Star, a smaller town further to the west in the Piedmont of northeastern Montgomery County.

House Wren
(Troglodytes aedon)
Photo by John Ennis

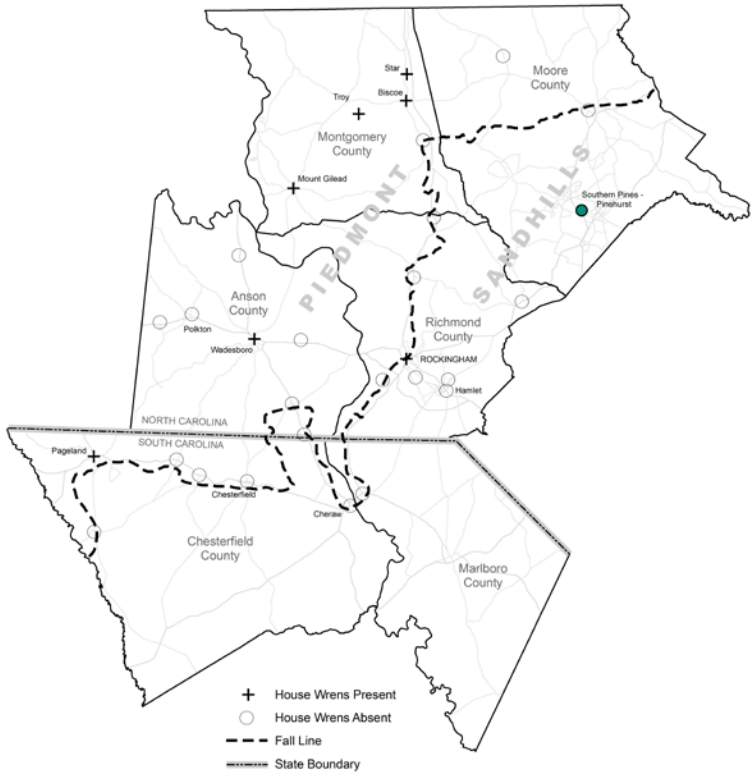


Figure 1. The breeding distribution of House Wrens in 29 cities and towns within six counties of the upper Pee Dee region of the Carolinas.

The House Wren, a short-distance migrant to the upper Pee Dee region of the Carolinas (Johnson 2014), has a different migration strategy compared to the Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*), a partial migrant (McNair 2016) and Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota),* a long-distance migrant (McNair 2013). The latter two species have had an apparent density-dependent manner of dispersal to this region.

In contrast to the dispersal patterns of these two species, I do not assume that dispersal and expansion of adult House Wrens or their progeny to the upper Pee Dee region has only occurred via short-distance movements of birds from populations on the southern end of their range. Individual House Wrens may arrive near or at the breeding range expansion front in the upper Pee Dee region of the Carolinas. But without marked birds or other direct evidence, the pattern of movement and range expansion and consolidation is conjectural. In the sections below, I present my interpretations based on the best available evidence.

Range Expansion Direction

The only town where House Wrens breed in Richmond County, NC, is one section of Rockingham, along the fall line. Gaps between Rockingham and the nearest North Carolina breeding populations in the Piedmont are 27 km from Wadesboro and 40 km from Mount Gilead and 45 km from the Southern Pines-Pinehurst micropolitan statistical area in the Sandhills (McNair and Stanback in press). These breeding populations in the Piedmont were established before and are closer to Rockingham than breeding populations in the Sandhills. Therefore, it is probable that the direction of range expansion to Rockingham is most consistent with movement from the Piedmont (i.e., from the west-northwest), although movement from the Sandhills (i.e., from the northeast) cannot be ruled out.

Regardless, at their current range front, the pattern of population establishment of House Wrens at Rockingham has been similar to breeding populations at the Southern Pines-Pinehurst area (McNair and Stanback in press), that is, a small population in its first year rapidly expanded in its second year, albeit nine years later at Rockingham.

Range Expansion Rate

Using closest distance measurements (Google Earth Pro 7.3.1), from the initial establishment of House Wren breeding populations in the Piedmont cities of North Carolina in the 1920s to early 1930s (Pearson 1934, Odum and Johnston 1951), it took 84 years for the breeding range to expand from Raleigh ~100 km southwest to the Southern Pines-Pinehurst area. It took 95 years for the range to expand ~105 km from Salisbury southeast to Rockingham. As such, estimated mean rates of expansion are 1.1-1.2 km/yr. This is slower than the rate at which Eastern Phoebes and Cliff Swallows have expanded their breeding range south into the Pee Dee region of South Carolina in recent years (McNair 2013, McNair 2016, McNair 2017).

House Wrens, like Eastern Phoebes and Cliff Swallows, rely on anthropogenic structures for their nest sites in this region. The rate of expansion to reach Rockingham or the Southern Pines-Pinehurst area has been about 14 times slower compared to the 17 years (from 1933 to 1950) it took for House Wrens to expand their range ~271 km from Charlotte, NC, southwest to Athens, Georgia (Odum and Burleigh 1946, Odum and Johnston 1951, Odum et al. 1993), an estimated mean rate of expansion of 15.9 km/yr.

Leap-frog or Step-wise Range Expansion

Odum and Johnston (1951; see Fig. 1 therein) postulated that the breeding range expansion of House Wrens exhibited the leap-frog pattern, in which large gaps occur between establishment of breeding sites at cities and towns near or at the breeding range front before any backfilling may occur at smaller settlements. Thus, cities and towns constitute primary habitat, with cities occupied before towns, while semi-rural anthropogenic environments such as farmyards feature secondary habitats which are filled later. Kennedy and White (2013) suggested that developed areas with abundant nest boxes may be the source of House Wren emigrants to surrounding rural areas.

Where historical information is available from the Carolinas west to Alabama, House Wrens appear to have first occupied the largest metropolitan areas, and then smaller towns, followed by colonization in semi-rural areas such as the now fairly widespread

populations in exurbs and around farmyards near Charlotte and Davidson, NC (LeGrand et al. 2018, Seriff 2018; Stanback 2018). However, available evidence is not fully convincing because observations may be confounded by the geographic bias of greater observer effort in larger cities and towns (Brimley 1939, LeGrand 1975, Keyes 2010).

In the upper Pee Dee region of the Carolinas, breeding House Wrens have occupied partly open residential areas of cities and towns with a minimum human population size of ~850 individuals, with the exception of Polkton in Anson County, NC. Polkton has a disproportionately low number of houses compared to its population, although its population is larger than five of the seven towns occupied by House Wrens in this study. However, the size of its commercial district is smaller than the smallest town (Star) occupied by breeding House Wrens (McNair, pers. obsv.) even though its population is four times larger. This suggests that the size of a town's commercial district embedded in surrounding residential areas may be an important cue for potential settlement of breeding House Wrens.

Confirmed breeding records of House Wrens from rural areas of south-central North Carolina are still unknown. Thus, the leap-frog pattern of range expansion (Johnston and Odum 1951) appears to be more strongly supported than the step-wise pattern along the current range front of south-central North Carolina, although the slow rate, narrow gaps between occupied cities and towns, long-term site-occupancy at several sites, and non-simultaneous colonization makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish between leap-frog and step-wise processes.

The future expansion of the House Wren breeding range front in the upper Pee Dee region of the Carolinas will probably occur in Chesterfield and Cheraw, Chesterfield County, SC, and Hamlet, Richmond County, NC. The gaps between these three unoccupied towns and the nearest towns occupied by House Wrens (Pageland, Wadesboro, Rockingham) are narrow, but I expect colonization will not be simultaneous and it is difficult to predict how soon. Firm population estimates derived via 2018 surveys are available from Rockingham, NC, and from five golf courses at Pinehurst, NC (McNair and Stanback in press). Suitable House Wren habitat and nest strata at these sites are not saturated. In contrast, firm population estimates are unavailable from other occupied sites.

Further south, at large isolated cities, we also lack population estimates for the Auburn-Opelika metropolitan statistical area, Alabama (Haggerty 2009), Macon and Augusta in Georgia (Waters and Belger 2002, Schneider 2013), and Columbia, SC (Cely 2003a) where wide gaps exist between them and the nearest confirmed breeding sites. Confirmed breeding records at three of these four cities were documented in 2000 and 2003, but not thereafter (Breeding-season records of single singing males were present at Auburn each year from 2016-2018; Hill 2018). In contrast, House Wrens were confirmed breeding at Macon in three different years (2004, 2005, 2010; Schneider 2013). As such, House Wrens have not persisted and established themselves at three of these four large cities (or the isolated rural site in the Coastal Plain of Alabama; Haggerty 2009) even though their scale and habitat stability are otherwise highly favorable for long-term site occupancy. This inconsistency of long-term site occupancy along what is largely the former range front weakens the theoretical leap-frog pattern of range expansion for the House Wren in southeastern North America.

Acknowledgments

I thank T.M. Haggerty, G.E. Hill, and M.T. Stanback for sharing information, H.L. Burgess, M.U. Deane, J.W. Langley (deceased), W.C. Thomas, and A.B. Webb for allowing me to inspect their nest boxes in Rockingham, B. Norling for production of figure one, L.S. Johnson, K.E. Miller, and M.T. Stanback for reviewing a penultimate version of the manuscript, and two anonymous individuals for reviewing the submitted manuscript.

Literature Cited

Alworth, T., and I.B.R. Schieber. 2000. Nest building in House Wrens (*Troglodytes aedon*): A reexamination of male and female roles. Journal of Field Ornithology 71:409-414.

Brimley, C.S. 1939. More gaps in our knowledge of North Carolina birds. Chat 3:85-89.

Brown, D.G., K.M. Johnson, T.R. Loveland, and D.M. Theobald. 2005. Rural land-use trends in the conterminous United States, 1950-2000. Ecological Applications 15:1851-1863.

Burleigh, T.D. 1937. Bird life on the North Carolina coast. Auk 54:452-460.

Cely, J. 2003a. House Wrens nesting in Columbia, South Carolina. Chat 67:143-145.

Cely, J.E. 2003b. The South Carolina breeding bird atlas 1988-1995. South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Columbia, SC. 305 pp.

Clarkson, E.B. 1940. Notes on the birds of Charlotte. Chat 4:59.

Greenlaw, J.S., B. Pranty, and R. Bowman. 2014. The Robertson and Woolfenden Florida Bird Species: An Annotated List. FOS Special Publication 8. Florida Ornithological Society, Gainesville, FL. 435 pp.

Hader, R.J. 1969. Species list of birds of Wake County, North Carolina. Chat 33:53-71.

Haggerty, T.M. (Editor). 2009. Alabama breeding bird atlas project 2000-2006. Alabama Ornithological Society. Available online at: http://www.una.edu/faculty/thaggerty/BBA%20Homepage.htm.

Hill, G. E. 2018. Unpublished data. Personal communication to the author. Department of Biological Sciences, Auburn University, AL.

Johnson, L.S. 2014. House Wren (Troglodytes aedon). In The Birds of North America (P.G. Rodewald, Ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY. Available online at: https://birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/species/houwre. DOI:10.2173/bna.380. Accessed February 2018.

Kennedy, E.D., and D.W. White. 1992. Nest building in House Wrens. Journal of Field Ornithology 63:35-42.

Kennedy, E.D., and D.W. White. 2013. Bewick's Wren (Thryomanes bewickii), version 2.0. In The Birds of North America (P.G. Rodewald, Ed.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY. Available online at: https://birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/species/bewwre. DOI:10.2173/bna.315. Accessed March 2018.

Keyes, T.S. 2010. Pages 292-293 in The Breeding Bird Atlas of Georgia (T.M. Schneider, G. Beaton, T.S. Keyes, and N.A. Klaus, Editors). University of Georgia Press, Athens, GA. 520 pp.

LeGrand, H.E., Jr. 1975. Distribution and abundance of the wood warblers in North Carolina during the spring, nesting, and fall seasons. Chat 39:45-54.

LeGrand, H., J. Haire, N. Swick, and T. Howard. 2018. Birds of North Carolina: Their distribution and abundance. Available online at: https://ncbirds.carolinabirdclub.org. Accessed February 2018.

Mason, J., C. Moorman, G. Hess, and K. Sinclair. 2007. Designing suburban greenways to provide habitat for forest-breeding birds. Landscape and Urban Planning 80:153-164.

McNair, D.B. 2013. Cliff Swallow breeding range expansion along the Great Pee Dee River corridor in the Carolinas. Southeastern Naturalist 12:500-513.

McNair, D.B. 2016. Population status of the Eastern Phoebe in south-central North Carolina: Breeding increase at water-based anthropogenic sites congruent with Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and Christmas Bird Count (CBC) data. Southeastern Naturalist 15:299-314.

McNair, D.B. 2017. Eastern Phoebe breeding-range expansion into the Pee Dee region of South Carolina. Southeastern Naturalist 16:516-528.

McNair, D.B., and W. Post. 1993. Supplement to Status and Distribution of South Carolina Birds. Charleston Museum Ornithological Contribution No. 8. Charleston, SC. 49 pp.

McNair, D.B., and M.T. Stanback. In press. House Wren breeding status in the Sandhills of Moore County, North Carolina: Has the range expansion persisted? Chat.

Odum, E.P., O.S. Allen III, and H.R. Pulliam. 1993. Southward extension of breeding ranges of passerine birds in the Georgia Piedmont in relation to the reversed latitudinal gradient. Georgia Journal of Science 51:131-140.

Odum, E.P., and T.D. Burleigh. 1946. Southward invasion in Georgia. Auk 63:388-401.

Odum, E.P., and D.W. Johnston. 1951. The House Wren breeding in Georgia: An analysis of a range extension. Auk 8:357-366.

Odum, E.P., E. Taylor, C. Coker, and A. Breckenridge. 1935. The birds of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Journal of the Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society 51:312-340.

Pearson, T.G. 1934. Eastern House Wren (Troglodytes aedon aedon) breeding in North Carolina. Auk 51:87-88.

Post, W., and S.A. Gauthreaux, Jr. 1989. Status and Distribution of South Carolina Birds. Contributions from the Charleston Museum No. 18. 83 pp.

Sauer, J.R., D.K. Niven, J.E. Hines, D.J. Ziolkowski, Jr., K.L. Pardieck, J.E. Fallon, and W.A. Link. 2017. The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analyses 1966-2015. Version 2.07.2017 USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD. Available online at: https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/bbs.html. Accessed February 2018.

Schneider, T.M. 2013. House Wren nesting in Macon. Oriole 78:15-17.

Seriff, D.W. 2018. Birds of the central Carolinas. Mecklenburg Audubon Society, Charlotte, NC. 591 pp.

Stanback, M.T. 2018. Unpublished data. Personal communication to the author. Department of Biological Sciences, Davidson College, NC.

Stanback, M.T., J.E. Bartholomew, L.M. Bergner, E.L. Cline, P.I. Helms, P.G. McGovern, D.M. Millican, and J.E. Roth. 2013. House Wrens alter nest architecture to compensate for cavity vulnerability. Wilson Journal of Ornithology 125:174-178.

Summerour, B. 1986. Observations on the Nesting of House Wrens, Troglodytes aedon, in Jacksonville, Alabama. Alabama Birdlife 33:3-13.

Trott, J., Jr. 1943. Field notes and news. New London, N.C. (Stanly County). Chat 7:45.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2017. Available online at: https://www.census.gov/. Accessed December 2017.

Waters, A., and C. Belger. 2002. House Wren nests at the Fall Line. Oriole 67:9.

2018 Annual Report of the South Carolina Bird Records Committee

Aaron Given[1], Chair, Giff Beaton, Jeff Click, Lex Glover, Simon Harvey, Chris Hill, Keith McCullough, Irvin Pitts, Steve Wagner
[1]*4475 Betsy Kerrison, Kiawah Island, SC 29455*
agiven@kiawahisland.org

In 2018, the South Carolina Bird Records Committee acted on 48 new reports, of which 40 were accepted, three were not accepted, and five left unresolved.

The accepted records detailed below add two species to South Carolina's Main List: Tufted Duck and Tropical Kingbird. The Main List now includes 439 species. Say's Phoebe has been elevated from the Provisional I list to the Definitive list based on photographs obtained of a bird in the upstate in April. Tropical/Couch's Kingbird will be dropped from the Hypothetical List.

The annual meeting of the SCBRC was held on 1 December 2018 at Caw Caw Interpretive Center in Ravenel. The meeting was attended by Jeff Click, Aaron Given, Keith McCullough, Irvin Pitts, Will Post, and Steve Wagner. Aaron Given was reelected as Chair. Lex Glover agreed to another term as Secretary. Jeff Click and Chris Hill were reelected to the Nomination Committee.

The Committee agreed to remove Limpkin, Ruff, American White Pelican (inland), and Roseate Spoonbill (inland) from the review list citing over 10 records in recent history. Limpkin and Ruff are becoming almost annual in South Carolina with sometimes multiple individuals in one year. American White Pelicans and Roseate Spoonbills away from the coast are now frequent enough to merit delisting.

In 2017, the Committee discussed creating a potential "auto-accept" policy of eBird reports of certain species (Given et al. 2018). Because the current workload for the committee is not excessive, the Committee decided to not institute the "auto-accept" policy of eBird reports at this time.

Membership change in 2018: Addition of Irvin Pitts, Will Post moving from voting member to Advisory member.

ACCEPTED REPORTS

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*). 2018-017. Accept (9-0). Richard Hayes submitted a written report of a Tufted Duck on Bulls Island (Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge) in Charleston County on 17 February 2018. The bird was originally found and photographed by David McLean and David Youngblood on 2 February 2018. This report represents the first record of Tufted Duck in South Carolina.

King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*). 2018-002. Accept (9-0). Chris Hill submitted a written report of two King Eiders that had been harvested by a hunter (RB Morris) in the ocean off Georgetown County on 23 November 2017. A photo of two female King Eiders was provided by Morris.

King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*). 2018-003. Accept (9-0). Jack Rogers and Chris Hill submitted separate reports of a King Eider at the 2nd Avenue Pier in Myrtle Beach (Horry Co.). The bird was originally reported by Ritch Lilly on 7 January 2018 from the same location.

King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*). 2018-026. Accept (9-0). The Committee voted on an eBird report from Jim Buxton who photographed a King Eider near Sullivan's Island (Charleston Co.) on 9 May 2018. The bird was relocated by many birders until the end of June between Ft. Moultrie and Pitt Street Causeway.

Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*). 2018-001. Accept (9-0). Jack Rogers submitted a written report along with three photos of a Harlequin Duck at Huntington Beach State Park (Georgetown Co.) on 8 January 2018. This bird was originally photographed by Ritch Lilly on 7 January 2018.

Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*). 2018-043. Accept (9-0). Carl Miller submitted a written report of a Common Merganser at James Island County Park (Charleston Co.) on 15 December 2018. This individual hung out in the main pond by the entrance of the park all winter being seen and photographed by many birders.

Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*). 2018-045. Accept (9-0). Shawn Smolen-Morton submitted a written report along with photographs of a Common Merganser seen in a residential area of Florence (Florence Co.) on 6 December 2018. This individual was seen on Forest Lake all winter and into early spring.

Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*). 2018-015. Accept (9-0). Christopher Clack submitted a written report along with a photograph of a Red-necked Grebe at Huntington Beach State Park (Georgetown Co.) on 25 January 2018.

Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*). 2018-023. Accept (9-0). Barry Scully submitted a written report of a Limpkin that he photographed at Lake Marion (Sumter Co.) on 1 April 2018.

Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*). 2018-028. Accept (9-0). The Committee voted on an eBird report from John Grego who photographed a Limpkin at Congaree National Park (Richland Co.) on 12 July 2018.

Limpkin (*Aramus guarauna*). 2018-029. Accept (9-0). Allison Leigh submitted a written report along with 3 photographs of a Limpkin at Savannah National Wildlife Refuge (Jasper Co.) on 20 July 2018.

Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*). 2018-006. Accept (9-0). The Committee voted on an eBird report from Roger Smith who photographed a Hudsonian Godwit at Orangeburg Sod Farms (Orangeburg Co.) on 9 August 2017.

Ruff (*Calidris pugnax*). 2018-007. Accept (9-0). The Committee voted on an eBird report from Craig Watson and Pam Ford who photographed a Ruff at Santee Coastal Reserve (Charleston Co.) on 17 March 2018.

Ruff (*Calidris pugnax*). 2018-018. Accept (9-0). Andrew Theus submitted a written report along with a photograph of a Ruff found near Hardeeville (Jasper Co.) on 19 February 2018.

Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*). 2018-038. Accept (9-0). Aaron Given submitted a written report along with a series of photographs from a specimen collected from Kiawah Island (Charleston Co.) on 8 September 2018. The bird was alive found by a beachgoer and brought to the Nature Center on Kiawah but the bird died shortly after its arrival.

Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*). 2018-039. Accept (9-0). Ritch Lilly submitted a written report of a Black-headed Gull at the Georgetown Wastewater Treatment Plant (Georgetown Co.) on 22 November 2018. The bird was seen and photographed by many birders until late January 2019.

Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*). 2018-040. Accept (9-0). Carl Miller submitted a written report of a Black-headed Gull that he photographed at Bear Island National Wildlife Refuge (Colleton Co.) on 30 December 2018.

Franklin's Gull (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*). 2018-019. Accept (9-0). Irvin Pitts submitted a written report along with one photograph of a Franklin's Gull at Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge (Charleston Co.) on 4 December 2016.

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*). 2018-005. Accept (9-0). Martina Nordstrand submitted a written report along with one photograph of an Iceland Gull at Huntington Beach State Park (Georgetown Co.) on 15 January 2018.

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*). 2018-020. Accept (9-0). Chris Hill submitted a written report of an Iceland Gull that was seen at Bird Island at the Little River Inlet (Horry Co.) on 6 February 2018.

Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*). 2018-009. Accept (9-0). The Committee voted on an eBird report by Irvin Pitts who photographed a Sooty Tern at the north end of the Lake Murray Dam (Lexington Co.) on 12 September 2017. Tropical Storm Irma moved through South Carolina on 11 September 2017 displacing this coastal species several hundred miles inland.

Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*). 2018-010. Accept (9-0). The Committee voted on an eBird report by Linda Montgomery and photographs by Scott Davis of a Sooty Tern at the Lake Hartwell Overlook (Anderson Co.) on 12 September 2017. Tropical Storm Irma moved through South Carolina on 11 September 2017 displacing this pelagic species several hundred miles inland.

Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*). 2018-011. Accept (9-0). The Committee voted on an eBird report by Mark Vukovich and Matt Malin who photographed five Sooty Terns at Scott's Ferry Ramp (McCormick Co.) on 12 September 2017. Tropical Storm Irma moved through South Carolina on 11 September 2017 displacing this coastal species several hundred miles inland.

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*). 2018-012. Accept (9-0). The Committee voted on a series of photos uploaded to the Carolina Bird Club photo gallery by Meghan Galipeau of a Brown Booby at the Port of Charleston (Charleston Co.) on 8 August 2017.

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*). 2018-025. Accept (9-0). Derek Aldrich and Jack Rogers submitted two separate written reports of a Brown Booby at Swan Lake on the campus of Furman University. The bird was seen and photographed by many birders from 26 April 2018 to 30 May 2018.

Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*). 2018-021. Accept (9-0). Bill Anderson submitted a written report of a Snail Kite that he photographed at Savannah National Wildlife Refuge (Jasper Co.) on 4 April 2018. The bird was apparently a one-day wonder and was never relocated. This is the third record for South Carolina.

Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*). 2018-004. Accept (9-0). The State, a daily newspaper published in Columbia, SC, published an article about a Snowy Owl that was seen on 6 January 2018 in a Lake Murray neighborhood in Lexington County. The article included quotes from Julian Wilson, the person who saw and photographed the bird.

Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*). 2018-033. Accept (9-0). Tammy Hester submitted a written report of a Burrowing Owl at Harbor Island (Beaufort Co.) on 30 July 2018. The bird was seen and photographed over the next 6 days.

Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*). 2018-036. Accept (9-0). Erin Szarek, Ed Blitch, Pam Ford, Craig Watson, John Cox, and Frank Lawkins submitted separate written reports of a Tropical Kingbird at Huntington Beach State Park (Georgetown Co.) on 12 October 2018. A very helpful audio clip was obtained which ruled out the nearly identical looking Couch's Kingbird. The bird was photographed by several people on the 12th but was never relocated after that. This report represents the first record of Tropical Kingbird in South Carolina.

Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*). 2018-014. Accept (9-0). The Committee voted on a series of documentary evidence provided on various eBird reports from John Cox, Irvin Pitts, Michael Robertson, David Youngblood, and Kathy Woolsey of Great Kiskadee at Bear Island Wildlife Management Area (Colleton Co.) from 31 December 2017 to 16 April 2018. Several photographs and audio were obtained from this bird which is presumably the same individual that wintered at Bear Island WMA in 2016-2017.

Great Kiskadee, 16 Apr 2018, Colleton Co, SC. Photo by David Youngblood

Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*). 2018-022. Accept (9-0). Kevin Kubach submitted a written report of a Say's Phoebe at Clemson/SCDNR Cherry Farm Complex (Pickens Co.) on 11 April 2018. Photographs provided by Linda Montgomery via eBird moved this species to the definitive list.

Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*). 2018-041. Accept (9-0). George McHenry submitted a written report of a Say's Phoebe at Clemson University's Simpson Research Station (Anderson Co.) on 6 December 2018. The bird was seen and photographed by many until early February 2019.

Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*). 2018-046. Accept (9-0). Ritch Lilly submitted a written report of a Cave Swallow at Huntington Beach State Park (Georgetown Co.) on 16 November 2018. Up to four individuals were reported on eBird after Ritch's initial sighting until early December.

Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*). 2018-013. Accept (9-0). Aaron Given submitted a written report along with photographs of a Sprague's Pipit that was seen on the Ocean Course Golf Course on Kiawah Island (Charleston Co.) from 18-19 October 2018.

Snow Bunting,
22 Dec 2018,
Horry Co, SC.
Photo by Irvin Pitts

Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*). 2018-042. Accept (9-0). Ritch Lilly submitted a written report of 2 Snow Buntings at Huntington Beach State Park (Georgetown Co.) on 19 December 2018. These birds were seen and photographed by many birders throughout the winter.

Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*). 2018-016. Accept (9-0). Aaron Given submitted a written report along with photographs of a female Bullock's Oriole he captured and banded at a private residence in Mount Pleasant (Charleston Co.) on 9 February 2018. The bird was originally reported in late January and stayed through at least late March.

Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*). 2018-027. Accept (8-1). The Committee voted on an eBird report from Matthew Tozer who photographed a Shiny Cowbird at Savannah National Wildlife Refuge (Jasper Co.) on 7 July 2018. The report was accepted with 8 votes to accept and 1 to not accept.

Mourning Warbler (*Geothlypis philadelphia*). 2018-032. Accept (8-1). Kevin Kubach submitted a written report of a Mourning Warbler that he observed at Fants Grove Wildlife Management Area (Anderson Co.) on 14 September 2018.

Mourning Warbler (*Geothlypis philadelphia*). 2018-035. Accept (9-0). Michael Gamble submitted a written report and photographs of a Mourning Warbler that was captured and banded on Kiawah Island (Charleston Co.) on 4 October 2018.

Kirtland's Warbler (*Setophaga kirtlandii*). 2018-034. Accept (9-0). Michael Gamble submitted a written report and photographs of a Kirtland's Warbler that was captured and banded on Kiawah Island (Charleston Co.) on 5 September 2018.

NON-ACCEPTED REPORTS

White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus*). 2018-037. Non-accept (3-6). The Committee considered a written report of a White-tailed Tropicbird observed over the ocean near the Charleston/Georgetown County line on 12 October 2018. Some members noted that the detail presented in the report were plausible for a tropicbird but lack enough evidence to eliminate Red-billed Tropicbird.

Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*). 2018-048. Non-accept (0-9). The Committee considered a written report of "heard-only" Black-capped Chickadee from the upstate (Greenville Co.). Committee members commented that distinguishing Black-capped Chickadee from Carolina Chickadee based on call notes was problematic given the wide range of vocalizations, and variation of those vocalizations of both species.

Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*). 2018-030. Non-accept (4-5). The Committee considered a written report of 4 Savannah Sparrows observed on the beach at Huntington Beach State Park (Georgetown Co.) on 16 June 2018. Some members comment that the report lacked sufficient details to rule out more expected species.

UNRESOLVED REPORTS

The following reports received a majority of votes to accept but more than one vote to not accept. These reports will need to be reevaluated by the Committee.

Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*). 2018-044. 6-3 vote.

Anna's x Calliope Hummingbird (*Calypte anna x Selaphorus calliope*). 2018-024. 6-3 vote.

Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). 2018-008. 7-2 vote.

Cassin's Vireo (*Vireo cassinii*). 2018-047. 5-4 vote

Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*). 2018-031. 5-4 vote

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Committee thanks all the observers who submitted reports, and those who encouraged others to submit reports. Your actions increase our understanding of bird occurrence in South Carolina.

LITERATURE CITED

Given, A.G., G. Beaton, J. Click, L. Glover, S. Harvey, C. Hill, K. McCullough, W. Post, and S. Wagner. 2018. 82:75-81.

BRIEFS FOR THE FILES

Josh Southern
203 Hyannis Drive
Holly Springs, NC 27540
joshsouthern79@gmail.com

(All dates Spring 2019, unless otherwise noted)

Briefs for the Files is a seasonal collection of uncommon-to-rare or unusual North and South Carolina bird sightings and events which do not necessarily require a more detailed Field Note or article. Reports of your sightings are due the 20th of the month after the end of the previous season.

Winter	*December 1–February 28*	*due March 20*
Spring	*March 1–May 31*	*due June 20*
Summer	*June 1–July 31*	*due August 20*
Fall	*August 1–November 30*	*due December 20*

Reports may be submitted in any format, but I prefer that you use email, list multiple sightings in taxonomic order (rather than by date or location), and type your report directly into the body of the email. If your sightings are in a file, please copy-and-paste the text into the body of the email, rather than sending an attachment.

Suitable reports for the Briefs include any sightings you feel are unusual, rare, noteworthy, or just plain interesting to you in any way! It is my responsibility to decide which reports merit inclusion in the Briefs.

Please be sure to include details of any rare or hard-to-identify birds.

I rely in part on sightings reported in Carolinabirds. Please don't, however, rely on me to pick up your sightings from Carolinabirds. Instead, please also send your sightings directly to me as described above.

If I feel that your sighting warrants a Field Note, I will contact either you or the appropriate state Field Notes editor. You may, of course, submit your Field Note directly to the editor without going through me.

Abbreviations: **BRC** – Bird Records Committee, **et al.** – and others, **Ln** – Lane, **m. obs.** – multiple observers, **NC** – North Carolina, **NWR** – National Wildlife Refuge, **Rd** – Road, **SC** – South Carolina, **SP** – State Park, **WMA** – Wildlife Management Area, **WTP** – Water Treatment Plant

All italicized place names are counties.

Note on 2019 Spring Migration: Many birders commented on the atypical nature of this year's spring songbird migration, noting delayed arrivals of returning breeding species, lack of pass-through migrants, and low overall numbers.

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck: Sightings made outside of the SC coastal plain, increasing in recent years, included seven at Salem Lake *Forsyth* NC 14 Apr (John Haire, m. obs.), eight at Lake Conestee Nature Park *Greenville* SC 7 May (Mark Harvell), 15 at Archie Elledge WTP *Forsyth* NC 13 May (Harvey Clodfelter, m. obs.), and two at Biltmore Estate *Buncombe* NC 16-17 May (John Koon, m. obs.). Four photographed just beyond the surf in Corolla *Currituck* NC 31 May (David & Jonathan Longo) were unusual for the ocean.

Brant: 25 off Shell Point on Harkers Island *Carteret* NC 6 Mar (John Fussell, et al.) was a notable count for a site south of the Pamlico Sound.

Trumpeter Swan: Pending review by the SC BRC is the report of an immature Trumpeter Swan seen and photographed amongst Tundra Swans at Bear Island WMA *Colleton* SC 8-12 Mar (Irvin Pitts, Mac Williams, m. obs.). If accepted, this report would provide SC with its first definitive record of this large swan.

Immature swan reported as Trumpeter Swan 12 Mar 2019, Colleton Co, SC. Photo by David Youngblood

Tundra Swan: Individuals, or possibly the same individual, photographed at Mattamuskeet NWR *Hyde* NC 26 May (Caleb Bronsink) and at Mackay Island NWR *Currituck* NC 26-27 May (Nathaniel Watkins) were quite late to be passing through.

Mottled Duck: Breeding may have occurred in southeast NC this spring, as a hen with three chicks was photographed at a country club lake in northeast Wilmington *New Hanover* NC 16 May (Sam Cooper). It is very possible that the chicks were hybrids, however, as the only drakes seen in the area were Mallards.

Green-winged Teal: Two, a drake and a hen, at McAlpine WTP *Mecklenburg* NC 23 May (Ron Clark, Greg Hays, Dennis Kent) were late.

Common Eider: A first-winter drake in Charleston Harbor around the Pitt St Causeway *Charleston* SC 4-19 May (m. obs.) and a hen in the Bogue Sound off Morehead City *Carteret* NC 19 May (Marty Wall, et al.) were late.

Surf Scoter: Five, two drakes and three hens, on Lake Julian *Buncombe* NC 22 Mar (Aaron Steed, m. obs.) was a great count for a site in the mountain region.

Black Scoter: 1437 in northbound flight off Oceanana Pier in Atlantic Beach *Carteret* NC 23 Mar (John Fussell, Martha Mayo) was a notable count.

Common Merganser: Breeding was confirmed at two sites in the NC mountains this spring—on the Tuckasegee River in *Jackson* NC where, after multiple sightings of two to five adults were made during the early spring, a hen was photographed with three chicks 20-22 May (Tom Quetchenbach), and on the Green River in *Polk* NC where a hen was photographed with six chicks 5 May (Vicky Burke) and again on adjacent Lake Adger, 20 May (Nora Murdock, Marilyn Westphal) and 27 May (Todd Arcos). Reports of breeding in the southern NC mountains have been regular since first documented in 2008.

White-winged Dove: Individuals were seen on Hilton Head Island *Beaufort* SC 31 Mar (Michael Smith, et al.), at a feeder in North Myrtle Beach *Horry* SC 28-29 Apr (Deb Winter), and at a feeder in Wilmington *New Hanover* NC 30 Apr (Wanda King).

Black-billed Cuckoo: Individuals on territory at the Dare County Bombing Range *Dare* NC 26 May (Merrill Lynch), along Tyne Rd at Mayo River SP *Rockingham* NC 28 May (Marty Wall), and at Singletary Lake SP *Bladen* NC 30 May (Wayne Hoffman) were good finds for those sites outside the mountains.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird: Ten distinct individuals continued from fall in a yard with feeders in Buxton *Dare* NC 20 Apr (Ann Maddock).

Virginia Rail, 8 Apr 2019, Rockingham Co, NC. Photo by Marty Wall

Virginia Rail: One in a wetland in Eden *Rockingham* NC 8-9 Apr (Marty Wall) was a first for that county.

Purple Gallinule: One at Mackay Island NWR *Currituck* NC 2 May (Emily Johnson, Nathaniel Watkins, et al.) was unusual for a site so far north.

Common Gallinule: One photographed along NC-8 in *Stokes* NC 12 May (Tony & Cara Woods) was a first for that county.

Limpkin: Sightings, increasing in our region the past two years, were made at four different sites towards the end of period. Individuals were photographed at Hidden Cypress Golf Club *Beaufort* SC 29 Apr (Cherry Underwood), at Mountain Island Lake *Mecklenburg* NC 21 May through 10 Jun (m. obs.), and in flight over Riverfront Park *Richland* SC 24 May (Tracy Martin). Two were seen, one photographed, in the Sparkleberry Swamp at the north end of Lake Marion *Sumter* SC 28 May (Elizabeth Anderegg, et al.). Is this recent increase in sightings due to food (snail) scarcity inside its normal range, or some other reason?

Sandhill Crane: One photographed in an urban area of Apex *Wake* NC 14 Apr (Nikki Miller) was likely forced down by inclement weather. Two photographed at David Pond *Lexington* SC 2 May (Bailey Parker) and three seen in flight over Lake James SP *McDowell* NC 6 May (Brian Bockhahn) were also unusual for those areas.

Whimbrel: 3000 in flight off Edisto Beach SP *Colleton* SC 17 Apr (Judy Walker) was an amazing count.

Long-billed Curlew: One seen over Deveaux Bank *Charleston* SC 28 Mar (Janet Thibault) may have been the same individual photographed at nearby Botany Bay Plantation WMA 5 Apr (Nicole-Marie Pettinelli).

Curlew Sandpiper: One seen and photographed on North Pond at Pea Island NWR *Dare* NC 15 May (Alan MacEachren, m. obs.) was a great find. Sightings of this Eurasian species have been few and far between this past decade.

Sanderling: One photographed along Hooper Ln *Henderson* NC after a period of heavy rain 19 Apr (Vicky Burke) was very unusual for the mountain region in spring.

Baird's Sandpiper: One seen in Mills River *Henderson* NC 16 May (Aaron Steed, Simon Thompson, et al.) was a great find for spring.

Short-billed Dowitcher: 30 along Hooper Ln *Henderson* NC 12 May (Timothy Carstens, m. obs.) was a remarkable count for an inland site.

Wilson's Phalarope: One seen at Lake Busbee in Conway *Horry* SC 15 May (Stephen Thomas) was, surprisingly, a first for that county.

Red-necked Phalarope: Two in a flooded field along Butler Bridge Rd in *Henderson* NC 19 Apr (Kevin Burke) and one at Lake Wheeler *Wake* NC 3 May (Marc Ribaudo) were great finds away from the ocean.

Red Phalarope: One seen and photographed on a small pond along Wyatt Ln in *Alamance* NC 13 Apr (David Pennebaker, m. obs.) was very unusual for an inland site, especially in spring.

South Polar Skua: Skuas were seen on ten of fourteen nearly consecutive pelagic trips out of Hatteras *Dare* NC 18 May through 2 Jun, with high counts of three skuas on 25 May and 26 May (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.).

Long-tailed Jaeger: An adult well-seen over the beach just west of Cape Point *Dare* NC 24 May (Michael Gosselin) was an excellent sighting, as this species is the least likely jaeger to be seen from shore in the Carolinas.

Glaucous Gull: First/second-year birds seen at three sites in *Dare* NC—at Pea Island NWR 18 Mar (W. Douglas Robinson), over the Roanoke Sound 9 Apr (Jeff Lewis), and near the Oregon Inlet Campground 19 Apr (Paul Doshkov)—may have been the same individual that was seen around Pea Island NWR during the winter.

Great Black-backed Gull: An immature bird photographed at Carolina Marina on Belews Lake *Rockingham* NC 13 May (Marty Wall) was a first for that county.

Great Black-backed Gull
13 May 2019, Rockingham Co, NC.
Photo by Marty Wall

Sooty Tern: One seen in a tern nesting colony on Deveaux Bank *Charleston* SC 15 May (Brad Wilkinson, et al.) was suggestive of attempted breeding there.

Least Tern: Audubon NC Coastal Biologist Lindsay Addison estimates that there were 2400 adult Least Terns in a nesting colony at the north end of Lea-Hutaff Island *Pender* NC this spring. This count is the highest made in NC since tri-annual surveys began in 1977, and possibly in modern times, which is encouraging news for a threatened species.

Roseate Tern: Individuals were photographed inside the bird protection area at Cape Point *Dare* NC 17 May (Michael Gosselin) and in flight northbound off Oceanana Pier in Atlantic Beach *Carteret* NC 22 May (Marty Wall).

Sandwich Tern: One seen on the beach in Atlantic Beach *Carteret* NC 16 Mar (Martha Mayo) was somewhat early to return.

White-tailed Tropicbird: An adult was photographed approximately 83 miles south-southeast of Cape Lookout *Carteret* NC 31 May (Hannes Leonard).

Red-throated Loon: Individuals on Lake Townsend *Guilford* NC 10-12 Mar (Matt Wangerin, m. obs.) and on Lake Hartwell *Anderson* SC 1 Apr (Steve Patterson) were notable for inland sites.

European Storm-Petrel: One was briefly seen on a pelagic trip out of Hatteras *Dare* NC 1 Jun (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.).

Trindade Petrel: This rare gadfly was seen on four pelagic trips out of Hatteras *Dare* NC this spring, with one intermediate-morph and one dark-morph 23 May, one light-morph 24 May, one dark-morph 25 May, and one dark-morph 29 May (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.).

Bermuda Petrel: Individuals were seen on pelagic trips out of Hatteras *Dare* NC 8 May, 9 May, and 29 May (Brian Patteson, et al.).

Fea's Petrel: Individuals were seen on three pelagic trips out of Hatteras *Dare* NC this spring, on 22 May, 2 Jun, and 8 Jun (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.).

Sooty Shearwater: 19 in northbound flight off Jeannette's Pier *Dare* NC 22 May (Jelmer Poelstra, et al.) was a notable count from shore.

Magnificent Frigatebird: An immature bird was seen soaring over a golf course in Edisto Beach *Colleton* SC 27 May (Andrew Kratter).

Masked Booby: Individuals, sub-adults or near adults, were seen on pelagic trips out of Hatteras *Dare* NC on 23 May, 1 Jun, and 8 Jun (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.).

Brown Booby: An adult female was photographed on the beach just north of Oregon Inlet *Dare* NC 18 Mar (Paul Doshkov).

Great Cormorant: Three adults in Beaufort Inlet *Carteret* NC 5 Mar (John Fussell, et al.) was a good count for that site.

Anhinga: Individuals seen soaring with vultures near Pilot Mountain SP *Stokes* NC 23 Apr (Jesse Anderson) and in flight over Little Beaverdam Creek in *Anderson* SC 27 Apr (Andy Norris, Steve Patterson) were unusual for sites so far inland, likely migrants that overshot their summering grounds. 21 at North River Preserve Carteret NC 5 May (John Fussell, Jack Fennell) was a record count for that county.

American White Pelican: The high count below the dam on High Rock Lake *Davidson* and *Rowan* NC this spring was 72 on 7 Mar (David & Susan Disher, Marbry Hopkins). Nine on Falls Lake in *Durham* NC 13-14 Mar (Ed Corey, m. obs.) and 17 on Jordan Lake *Chatham* NC 24 Mar (Jelmer Poelstra) were good counts for those sites. Six in flight over the Yadkin River in Siloam *Yadkin* NC 2 May (Brian Bockhahn) were a first for that county. 720 at Canal WMA *Berkeley* SC 16 Mar (Brad Sale) was an impressive count.

Least Bittern: One seen in the tall grass around the pond at Valle Crucis Community Park *Watauga* NC 19 May (Bruce Young, et al.) was a first for that county or for any site in the mountains north of Mount Mitchell.

Cattle Egret: An estimated 1200 inside a large heronry at a former quarry in west-central *Marlboro* SC 19 May (Mac Williams, et al.) was an amazing total.

White Ibis: 1460 counted flying towards an island roost south of Harkers Island *Carteret* NC during the evening of 18 May (Trevor Sleight) was a good count for NC, indicative of the species' growing numbers in the state. Still more numerous in SC, 5000 White

Ibises were counted going to roost in a swamp near Ruffin *Colleton* SC 24 Mar (Sidney Gauthreaux, et al.).

Swallow-tailed Kite: A pair photographed building a nest in a Tulip Poplar tree in *Onslow* NC 29 Apr (Hunter Phillips) provided the third documented report of nesting in the state. One photographed in flight over Gunter Rd *Greenville* SC 7 May (Joan Baker, Denise DuPon) was unusual for upstate SC in spring.

Gray Kingbird: One was seen and photographed on a powerline in Edisto Beach *Colleton* SC 12 May (Pam Ford, Craig Watson, et al.) but not thereafter.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher: One seen along Middleton Loop Rd in southeast *Stokes* NC 15-16 Apr (Jesse Anderson, m. obs.) was a first for that county. A pair nested in a maple tree near the Rock Hill-York County Airport *York* SC 25 Apr into summer (Andy Lazenby, m. obs.). One was seen along Mid-Pines Rd in *Wake* NC 23 May (Alan Avakian) but not thereafter.

Philadelphia Vireo: One seen and recorded singing in north *Watauga* NC 1 May (Merrill Lynch) was a great find for spring.

Barn Swallow: One seen in flight off Shell Point on Harkers Island *Carteret* NC 6 Mar (John Fussell, et al.) was early.

American Pipit: One photographed at Archie Elledge WTP *Forsyth* NC 17 May (John Haire) was somewhat late.

Evening Grosbeak: Likely migrating back north after the mini-irruption this winter were two to three photographed at a feeder in Black Mountain *Buncombe* NC 25-28 Apr (Jay Wherley) and two photographed at a feeder in Wake Forest *Wake* NC in early May (Mark Joyner).

Red Crossbill: Two at Pilot Mountain SP *Surry* NC 26 Mar (Jesse Anderson) were unusual for the Foothills region outside of an irruption year.

Pine Siskin: This finch may have bred in *Orange* NC this spring, as an adult was seen feeding a juvenile in a yard in Chapel Hill 13 May (Dave Hart).

Lark Sparrow: Individuals continued from winter in *Camden* NC through 11 Apr (James Harrison) and at Myrtle Beach SP *Horry* SC through 22 Apr (Scott Hartley).

Clay-colored Sparrow: Individuals near the Moore County Airport *Moore* NC 9 Apr (Susan Campbell) and at Price Park *Guilford* NC 23 Apr (Andrew Thornton, m. obs.) were unusual for those areas, and for spring.

Yellow-headed Blackbird: Individuals were photographed with grackles under a feeder in Myrtle Beach *Horry* SC 16 Mar (Jordan Matejceck), with a flock of cowbirds near Summerton *Clarendon* SC 5 Apr (Rebecca Jordan), and at a feeder in Leland *Brunswick* NC 12 Apr (Diane Preble).

Brewer's Blackbird: This species was seen at Dobbins Farm in Townville *Anderson* SC throughout March with a high count of 35 there 23 Mar (Linda Montgomery, et al.). Up to three were seen along Hooper Ln in *Henderson* NC 24 Mar to 3 Apr (Wayne Forsythe, m. obs.).

Louisiana Waterthrush: Two singing males at creeks along NC-171 in Jamesville *Martin* NC 30 Apr with one continuing 2 May (Jeff Lewis) were unusual for that area of the coastal plain.

Brewster's Warbler (hybrid): A singing male was on territory in southwest *Macon* NC 30 Apr through 4 Jun (Samuel Merker, m. obs.).

Connecticut Warbler: A definite migratory movement through our southern mountains took place 12-13 May, with individual migrants photographed at Table Rock SP *Pickens* SC 12 May (Jerry & Brenda Callaway), seen and heard singing along the Oconaluftee River in *Swain* NC 13 May (Angus Pritchard, et al.), and heard singing in the Hospital Fields in Brevard *Transylvania* NC 13-15 May (Michael Plauché, et al.). One recorded singing just northwest of Weaverville *Buncombe* NC 29 May (Steve Semanchuk) was also rather late.

Hooded Warbler: One seen and recorded singing along the French Broad River near Brevard *Transylvania* NC 14 Mar (Nathaniel Axtell, et al.) was quite early.

Cerulean Warbler: Ten singing males along a ten mile stretch of the Roanoke River in *Bertie* NC 8 May (John Carpenter, Alexander Worm) was a notable count of that disjunct breeding population.

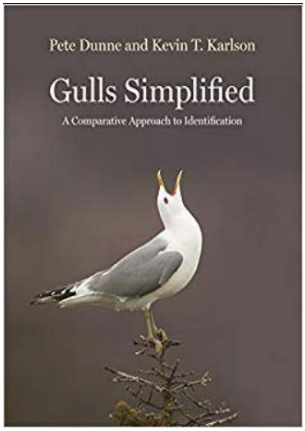
Western Tanager: Individual males were photographed in yards in Trent Woods *Craven* NC 20-29 Mar (Lee Rouse) and in Southern Shores *Dare* NC 17 Apr (Jim Gould).

Indigo Bunting: A first-winter male that visited a feeder in Straits *Carteret* NC 17-20 Mar (Carolyn & Don Hoss) was early to arrive.

Dickcissel: Dickcissels began showing up at traditional breeding/summering sites in late April and early May, with one in the Bluff Unit of Santee NWR *Clarendon* SC 24 Apr (Julie Mobley, et al.) being the earliest. Numbers peaked at many sites by mid-to-late May, with eight at Dobbins Farm *Anderson* SC 27 May (Charlie Quattlebaum) and six at North River Preserve *Carteret* NC 1 Jun (Ronnie Hewlette, et al.) being the high counts.

Birders' Book Review
Gulls Simplified:
A Comparative Approach to Identification

Steve Shultz



Two words not often placed in conjunction with one another. "Gulls", perhaps one of the most confounding groups of birds from an identification perspective, and "simplified", a term not usually associated with the former.

Merriam-Webster defines gulls as "*any of numerous long-winged web-footed aquatic birds (subfamily Larinae of the family Laridae)… usually gray and white bird (especially of the genus Larus) differing from a tern in usually larger size, stouter build, thicker somewhat hooked bill, less pointed wings, and short unforked tail."* An alternative definition is "*to take advantage of (one who is foolish or unwary) : Deceive*". And deceive they often do. With hybrids, close relationships between species, and broad clinal variation across individual species, gull identification can be anything but easy. Note various synonyms of the second definition (bamboozle, beguile, bluff, buffalo, burn, catch, con, cozen, deceive, delude, dupe, fake out, fool, gaff, gammon), and one can more or less tell that birders find gulls to be one of the harder aspects of identification.

So can gulls be simplified, as Dunne and Karlson suggest? They make a valiant attempt. Breaking down our "seagulls" (you knew I could not resist) into four groups of small, medium (gray-backed), large (dark-backed) and "dark horse", the authors approach gull identification from the perspective of comparison, versus absolute or diagnostic field marks, which, while commonly used in other families of birds, are less common in gulls. And since a picture is reputed to have the value of many words, most species accounts provide copious numbers of photographs to illustrate key points. For example, the Laughing Gull chapter includes no less than 31 photos of a species that is not, for the most part, as great a challenge as some others.

I especially like the use of photographs with multiple species shown together, as this helps drive the point of comparison home, and very much enjoyed testing my skills via the 35 quiz photos comprising the books last chapter.

The authors introduce gull identification and challenges by discussing several factors including: a human desire to specifically catalog or identify each individual, which may not always be possible with gulls, at least visually; the complex molt strategy of gulls, which produces many expressions of a single species; the propensity of gulls to interbreed within the macro groups noted above; and the human (birder) behavior of finding additional "value" in rare or out of range birds, thus creating situations where

birders are sorting through more common species with the specific intent of finding a rarity.

The authors suggest simplifying our *approach* to gulls, using geography and probability as a useful tool, not something to fight against, and focusing on learning (and learning well) the common, local species and variation within, so that when a genuine rarity appears, it will stand out all the more due to the observers deeper knowledge and understanding of size, structure and general impression, versus "that mirror on P8".

And this, I feel, is the key takeaway from the work. Will it provide "six new surefire markings to note when differentiating Ring-billed and California Gulls"? No. But will the reader be encouraged to better understand what makes a California Gull a California Gull by deepening the understanding of structure and appearance? If the answer is "yes", then the book has done its job. And the way that the job is done is to try and de-mystify the dark voodoo that often comes into discussion about gull identification. By increasing the observers confidence that they can have a reasonable expectation of correctly identifying the vast majority of the gulls encountered, the authors bestow upon the reader the ability to not be intimidated, and thus, in this roundabout way, succeed at making gulls (somewhat more) simplified.

When I started this review, the intent was to define how another entry into an already crowded field of book promising easier identification was not especially required by the target audience, but after more careful attention and time with the book, I find it my first choice when trying to age a particular bird, or brush up on what to look for when I'm hoping to find a Franklin's among the Laughing.

Returning to our friends at Merriam-Webster, the word simplify is defined as: *"a: to reduce to basic essentials; b: to diminish in scope or complexity; c: to make more intelligible."* While basic essentials may be met by the traditional Peterson's or Sibley guide, and where it might not be possible to diminish the complexity of something as diverse as gull plumage and variation, I feel the authors very much succeed at the attempt to make gull identification more intelligible.

Did You Know?

30 years of past issues of *The Chat* are available online (of which the two most recent years are available to CBC members only). They can be accessed via their Tables of Contents; or their Cumulative Index. Also, Briefs for the Files and Bird Records Committee reports can be searched in an online database.

For more information on *The Chat*, including accessing the search tools noted above, please visit: https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/chat/

CAROLINA BIRD CLUB

www.carolinabirdclub.org

The Carolina Bird Club is a non-profit organization which represents and supports the birding community in the Carolinas through its official website, publications, meetings, workshops, trips, and partnerships, whose mission is

- To promote the observation, enjoyment, and study of birds.
- To provide opportunities for birders to become acquainted, and to share information and experience.
- To maintain well-documented records of birds in the Carolinas.
- To support the protection and conservation of birds and their habitats and foster an appreciation and respect of natural resources.
- To promote educational opportunities in bird and nature study.
- To support research on birds of the Carolinas and their habitats.

Membership is open to all persons interested in the conservation, natural history, and study of wildlife with particular emphasis on birds. Dues, contributions, and bequests to the Club may be deductible from state and federal income and estate taxes to the extent allowable. Pay dues or make donations at https://carolinabirdclub.org/dues. Make change of address at https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/members/profile. Send correspondence regarding membership matters to the Headquarters Secretary. Answers to questions about the club might be found at https://carolinabirdclub.org/about.html.

ANNUAL DUES

Individual or non-profit	$30.00
Family	$35.00
Student	$15.00
Sustaining and businesses	$30.00
Patron	$50.00 and up
Life Membership (payable in four consecutive $100 installments)	$500.00
Associate Life Membership (in same household as life member)	$100.00

ELECTED OFFICERS

President	Lewis Burke, Columbia SC	lewisburkej@yahoo.com
NC Vice-Presidents	Guy McCrane, Deep Gap NC	
	Martina Nordstrand, Indian Trail NC	
SC Vice-President	Craig Watson, Mount Pleasant SC	
Secretary	Jill Midgett, Charleston SC	
Treasurer	Paul Dayer, Durham NC	
NC Members-at-Large	Lester Coble, Ernul NC	
	Karyl Gabriel, High Point NC	
	Sandra Gahlinger, Morehead City NC	
	Marilyn Westphal, Hendersonville NC	
SC Members-at-Large	Ed Blitch, Charleston SC	
	Mac Williams, Hartsville SC	

EX-OFFICIO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chat Editor	Steve Shultz, Apex, NC	chat@carolinabirdclub.org
Newsletter Editor	Deborah McDougall Roy	newsletter@carolinabirdclub.org
Website Editor	Kent Fiala, Hillsborough, NC	webeditor@carolinabirdclub.org
Immediate Past President	Christine Stoughton Root, Merritt NC	

HEADQUARTERS SECRETARY

Carol Bowman	9 Quincy Place Pinehurst NC 28374	hq@carolinabirdclub.org