

The Chat

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North Carolina
South Carolina

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Briefs for the Files

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Possible First Record of Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) Nesting in North Carolina

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Introduction

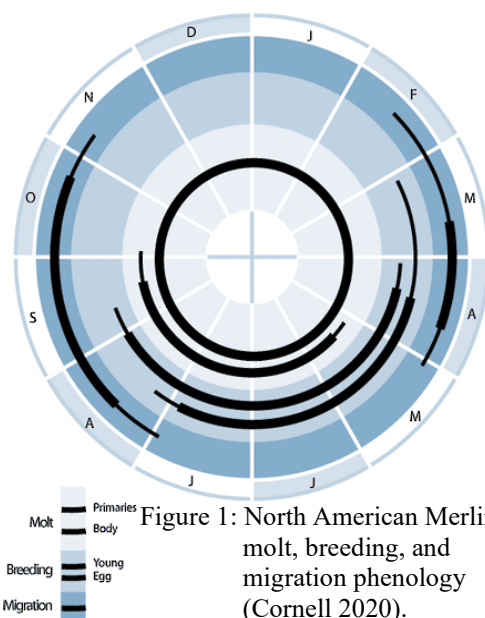
Several lines of evidence suggest that Merlins (*Falco columbarius*) successfully nested at Linville Land Harbor, in Avery County, NC, in summer 2020. If true, this would be the first known breeding record for the state of North Carolina (LeGrand et al. 2020), and would appear to be, by approximately 150-200 miles, the farthest south breeding record for the species (eBird 2020). Possible evidence for breeding includes observation by experienced birders of three Merlins together exhibiting begging/feeding behavior on 1 August, photo documentation of Merlins practicing flights uncharacteristic of migration on 3 August, along with verbal descriptions of that flight in full, and verbal descriptions of the loud and raucous calling behavior that often characterizes Merlin families at the nesting grounds during the time in question.

Background

The historical breeding range of the Merlin in eastern North America includes Canada and only the northernmost fringe of the US (Peterson 1980; Sibley 2000). Data from the United States Geological Survey (2020) estimate that populations have increased by a factor of five since the 1960's and have doubled since the late 1990's. By 2020, eBird breeding range maps included the mountains of NY, PA, and WV, with a small presence in VA (eBird 2020).

Peak spring migration occurs roughly from mid-March to mid-April but can occur from mid-February until early May. Peak fall migration is from late August to late September but can occur from late June through early November. Breeding can occur from March through early September, with young present from April through early September. (Warkentin et al. 2020). See Figure 1.

The sightings mentioned in this report occurred in early June and spanned the entire month of August. The single early June report is well within the breeding window, since migration is not expected to take place at that time.



The August reports, while within the earliest time frame for fall migration, more closely align with the breeding season. There is only one other August eBird report in the most northwestern NC counties from 2012. Other eBird sightings have been later in the year during migration (2021).

Sightings

On 28 April, John Frazier photographed a Merlin in flight above Land Harbor Lake in Linville, NC. This Merlin appeared fairly pale in color and may or may not be related to subsequent sightings. Frazier again observed, without photographing, a Merlin on 8 June perched on a small snag by the waterline on the northern shore of the lake by the clubhouse. It was being mobbed by smaller birds for several minutes. There were no more sightings until almost two months later.



Figure 2: Image of Merlin perched at typical snag.
Photo courtesy of Dean Stewman.

On 1 August, Barbara and Dean Stewman observed three Merlins for over an hour, two of which seemed to be harassing an adult and exhibiting “feeding or begging behavior”. One of the birds, assumed to be adult based on darker, more contrasting plumage, remained perched on a dead snag (Fig. 2) for much of the time. The Stewmans also noted that all three birds gave a “kee-kee-kee” call very “loudly” and “raucously” (Stewman and Stewman, pers. comm., 14 October 2020). Merlins, although typically silent, most commonly

give the “ki-ki-kee” call, which can be used in a variety of situations, including courtship, territory, or other agonistic interactions (Feldsine and Oliphant 1985). An observer in Maine notes hearing similar loud calls from nestlings begging for food, especially when they were almost old enough to fledge (Wells and Wells 2013).

On 3 August the Stewmans observed two Merlins in flight for several minutes. According to them, the birds were “almost flying in tandem” and were “quite acrobatic” (Stewman and Stewman, pers. comm., Oct. 14, 2020). Feldsine and Oliphant (1985)

describe many different flight patterns such as “high circling/soaring,” “powerflying,” and “rocking glide,” which are characteristic of territorial displays, mating, or pair bonding activities. While there is a lack of literature addressing the timeline of adult courtship displays, it may be unlikely that these are pair bonding flights given the proximity to the end of the breeding season. Since the two birds are similar in size, lacking the obvious size difference of a male and female pair, they are more likely to be juveniles at play (Fig. 3). Regardless, the flight observed by the Stewmans differs from the powered, early-morning flights and soaring of migratory Merlins.

A single Merlin was also observed on 2, 5, 9, 11, 18 and 30 August. The bird was perched on the same snag almost every observation. Feldsine and Oliphant (1985) found that Merlins typically use tall trees as perches for guarding their nest sites. Since perching was not observed at the location throughout the summer, nest guarding does not seem very likely. However, the fact that this bird, assuming it is the same individual, remained in one area over the span of weeks seems inconsistent with migratory behavior.



Figure 3: Image of the Merlins performing the synchronized flight observed by the Stewmans.

There were several other sightings of Merlins in the same time frame by a birder, Alex Trifunovic, at Lees McRae College, Avery County, about 8 miles north of Land Harbor Lake. He observed 2 on 14 August, 1 calling on 15 August, and a group of 5 birds flying over on 1 September. Although the September sighting was within peak fall migration, it is possible that these individuals were associated with the same birds at Land Harbor Lake.

Discussion

One possible reason that there is a lengthy time period of no observations between 8 June and 1 August may be due in part to the nature of Merlin nesting behavior. They are very secretive, often nesting in dense conifers or deciduous trees in order to avoid predation (Fox 1964; Hodson 1976; Smith 1978; Sieg and Becker 1990). Incubation averages 30 days, and fledging occurs around Day 29, summing to approximately two

months before the young leave the nest (Cramp and Simmons 1980; Ruttledge 1985; Becker and Sieg 1985; Oliphant and Tessaro 1985; Palmer 1988). This could account for the two-month gap in observations. It is also possible that the lack of observations throughout the summer is because residents were vacationing and not consistently at their homes.

The nest, assuming breeding did occur, could have been located far enough away from Land Harbor Lake to render any obvious behaviors unnoticed during the summer. Males usually give the “ki-ki-kee” call when bringing food to an incubating female, yet no observations of calls were reported before August. The activity of the adults and young over these two months could have been overlooked if the birds were nesting in a secluded location in the surrounding area. Anecdotal accounts exist of “raucous calling” immediately pre- and post-fledging, which could account for the lack of observations of calling until later in the summer (Wells and Wells 2013). There is little other information regarding nestling and fledgling vocalizations during the post-fledging period. In fact, according to *Birds of the World* (Cornell 2020), there is no quantitative data about fledglings after they leave the nest. There is much more to be learned about fledgling behavior, family group behavior, and movements and dispersal, which may bring additional clarity to the sightings this summer (Warkentin et al. 2020).

Merlins are usually solitary outside of the breeding season and would not usually exhibit begging or courtship behaviors at other times (Sodhi et al. 1993). However, they have also been known to loosely migrate together and winter in pairs (Cramp and Simmons 1980; Cade 1982). Perhaps these birds were an early migrating group, but the interesting behavioral displays reported by the Stewmans, the timing of the sightings well within the known breeding period, and the lengthy period of time that Merlins were seen in the area, all suggest otherwise.

The lack of confirmable breeding evidence (i.e., nest, eggs, copulation, etc.) leads us only to speculate based on circumstantial observations. Age assessments of individual Merlins is likely not possible based on the limited number of photographs. However, these observations of Merlins in western North Carolina are certainly intriguing and merit further examination, especially in future breeding seasons.

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First Record of Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) in North Carolina

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On the evening of 22 December 2018, Steve Ritt located a Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) while sorting through a group of White-throated Sparrows (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) occupying a hedgerow between a gasoline station and Holly Ridge Golf Course at the intersection of Caratoke Highway and Edgewater Drive in Currituck County, NC. The bird was initially seen for a period of about ten minutes in fading light and relocated the next morning by Ritt and several other birders. Ritt states in the initial eBird report: "The first features that caught my attention, differing from the flock of White-throated Sparrows it was with, were the gray cheeks lacking an eyeline and the lack of contrast between the throat and upper breast. I then noticed that there were thin, blackish lateral throat stripes and no apparent malar or "moustachial" stripes. There was a yellowish wash to the front of the crown and lores broken by dark brownish lateral crown stripes. The flanks and general appearance of the bird was lighter and smoother than adjacent White-throated Sparrows, even in the fading evening light. The bill appeared dark".



Golden-crowned Sparrow, 31 Dec 2018, Currituck County, NC. Photo by Greg Hudson.

Ritt notes that the Golden-crowned Sparrow appeared slightly more skittish than the White-throated Sparrows with which it associated. The bird remained in an *Elaeagnus* sp. hedgerow and nearby wet, brushy mixed tree line through at least 14 February 2019.

After discovery, news of the birds' presence quickly spread throughout the birding community, and scores of observers were able to view the sparrow during a period of several weeks. This represents a first record of the species in North Carolina, and with acceptance of photos by the North Carolina Bird Records Committee, Golden-crowned Sparrow was added to the state's Definitive list of accepted species (Swick 2019).

Golden-crowned Sparrow is primarily a species of North America's Pacific coastal

states and provinces, with birds wintering from Baja California North to Washington and

breeding from British Columbia north to Alaska (Sibley 2000). Scattered records exist for birds wandering east from established nesting and wintering areas, with all states and provinces west of the Mississippi River, with the exception of Arkansas, having one or more reports. East of the Mississippi River, there are dozens of reports for states in the Midwest, Northeast and the Canadian Maritimes. The Southeast and Deep South have fewer reports, with one report each for Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky (eBird 2021). Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, West Virginia, Virginia, and Delaware have no reports (eBird 2021). The single South Carolina record dates to 22 December 1993, when Perry Nugent reported a bird from the Francis Marion National Forest on the Charleston Christmas Bird Count (Worthington 1995).

It appears that the pattern of vagrancy in the East favors a more northerly component, although the relative lack of sightings may be due to lack of coverage or other factors not related to the actual distribution of the species.



Golden-crowned Sparrow, 17 Jan 2019, Currituck County, NC.

Photo by Pamela Ford.

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B. Everett Jordan Lake Bird Counts – Part Four

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Part 1 in this series of articles covered background information about the Jordan Lake bird counts and discussed the long-term data for several species of birds that are closely tied to the lake itself. Part 2 looked at the long-term data for one family of birds, the woodpeckers, while Part 3 discussed issues concerning species in decline. Here, in the final installment, we look at bird species that have been increasing.

The populations of several species we have been monitoring for 40 years in the Jordan Lake count circle have been increasing. Is this good news? Are more birds always better? This article examines the data for some of these species and tries to identify patterns that may help us understand what has been happening.

Introductions and Reintroductions

Humans tend to ‘mess with Mother Nature,’ as the saying goes. We introduce species to areas where they have never been before, and we re-introduce species to areas where they have been extirpated. We even introduce species for our own uses.



Figure 1. House Finch (photograph, Norm Budnitz)

House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)

House Finches were originally birds of dry, open habitats in the southwestern part of the United States and Mexico. In 1939, a few individuals were released from a pet store in New York City (Badyaev et al. 2020). These birds bred, and by the mid-1940s, a small population became established on Long Island and surrounding areas. In the ensuing decades, House Finch populations expanded rapidly throughout the eastern half of the United States.

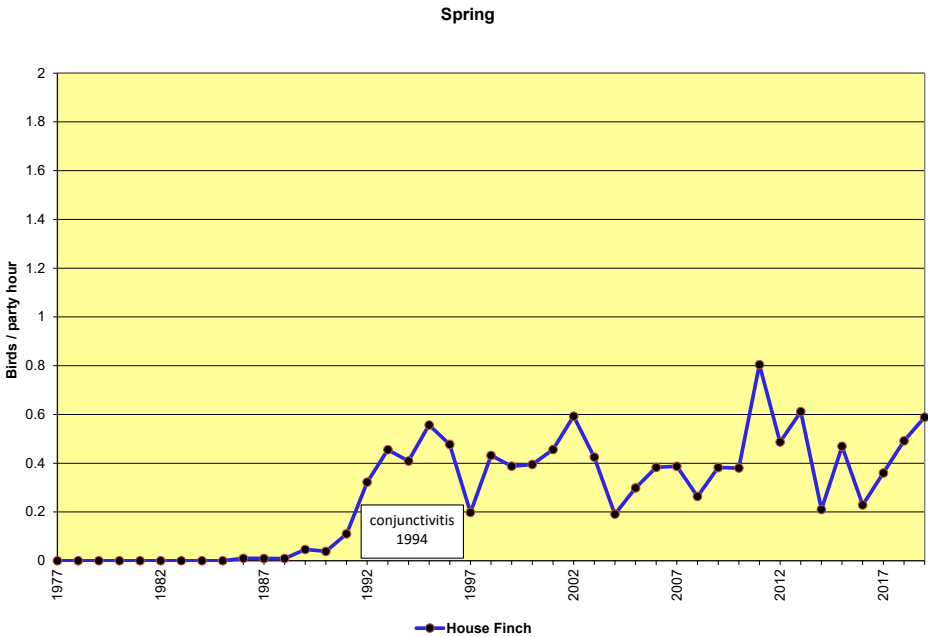


Figure 2. SBC, House Finch

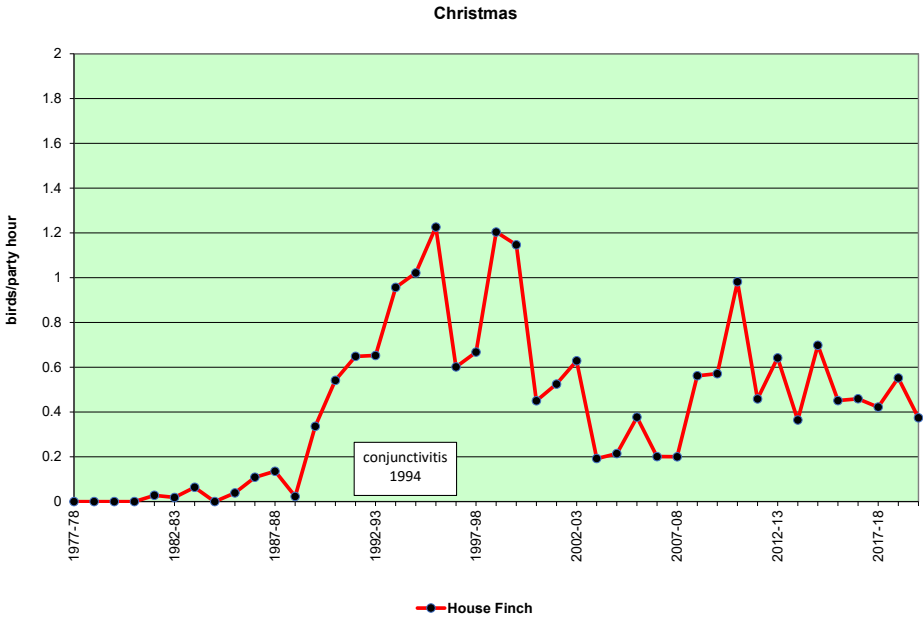


Figure 3. CBC, House Finch

Figures 2 and 3 show that House Finches were first recorded on our spring (SBC) and Christmas (CBC) bird counts in the mid-1980s. In 1994, an eye infection (conjunctivitis) appeared in House Finches in Washington, D.C. The disease may have spread from poultry, where it is common. This illness, often lethal in finches, soon spread throughout populations in the east, including North Carolina. As can be seen in Figure 2 and Figure 3, our local finch population declined in the mid-1990s and has fluctuated a bit ever since. The disease seems to take its toll most heavily in the winter. Our CBCs often show increases in these birds because of the addition of young birds from the previous breeding season. By spring, in stable populations, the numbers return to their usual levels. That seems to have happened with House Finches, so perhaps, they have developed some immunity to the disease over time.



Figure 4. Wild Turkey (photograph, Norm Budnitz)

Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)

Wild Turkeys were found throughout North Carolina when Europeans first came to North America. However, in the 1800s, market hunting and deforestation decimated the turkey population; by the early 1900s their numbers dropped to near zero (McRoberts et al. 2020; North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission 2020). Restoration of turkeys began in the mid-1900s, and since 1953 more than 6000 birds have been released in North Carolina, mostly in the western part of the state and in counties along the Virginia border, but not in our immediate area. Statewide restoration efforts ended in 2005, about the time that we started seeing turkeys on our bird counts. The statewide population has increased from about 2000 birds in 1970 to more than 265,000 birds in 2015.

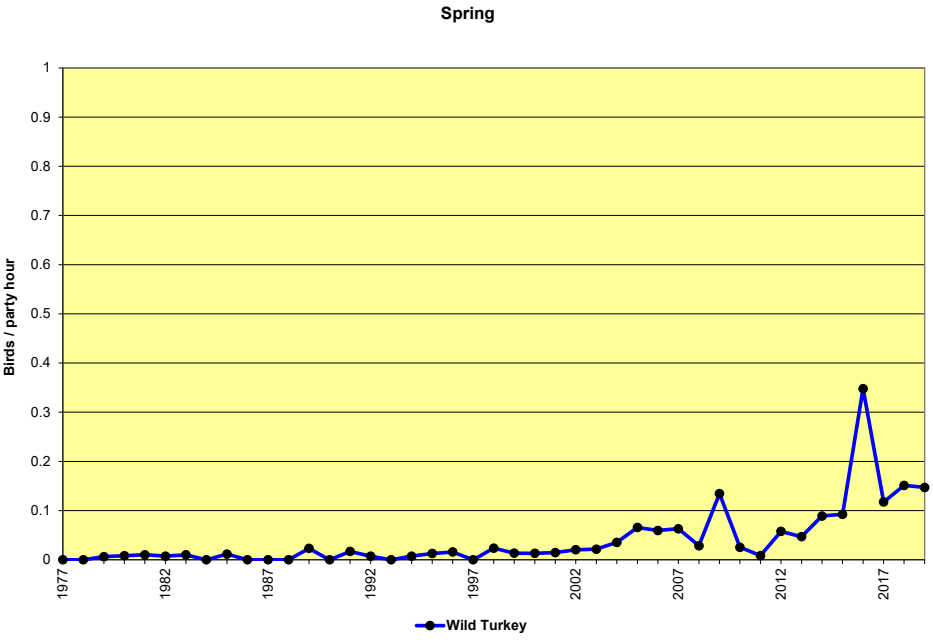


Figure 5. SBC, Wild Turkey

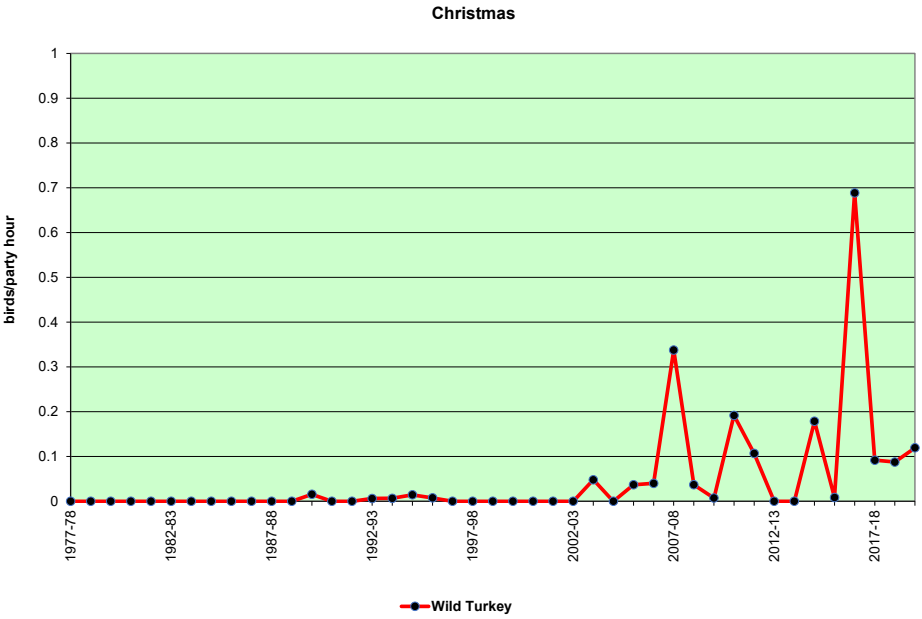


Figure 6. CBC, Wild Turkey

Figures 5 and 6 show that sightings of Wild Turkeys in the Jordan Lake Count Circle were rare until about 2005. Though they have not been seen in large numbers in any given year, they have been reported on almost every count in the past 10 years. These birds have probably spread from surrounding areas where they have been reintroduced. When turkeys forage in open habitats—grasslands or weedy fields—they can be relatively easy to see, because they are large. In forested habitats, they can be extremely difficult to see even at remarkably close range if they are quiet. If they do take flight to leave the scene, they do so with an extremely loud flapping of wings that will cause the human heart to beat dramatically and the accompanying adrenalin rush may take several minutes to subside.

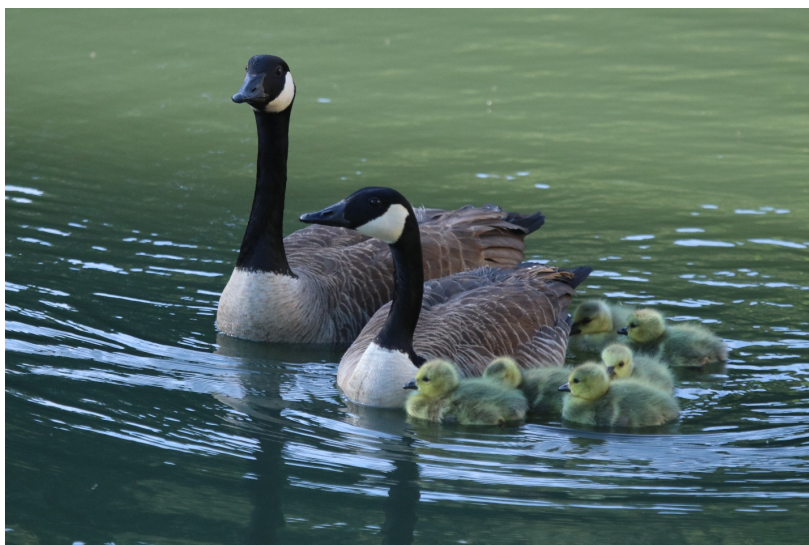


Figure 7. Canada Goose (photograph, Vern Bothwell)

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Canada Geese in Piedmont North Carolina are more land birds than water birds. They are grazers, happily feeding on lawns and golf courses, and moving to water mostly for safety at night and during the breeding season. Such was not always the case. In the middle of the 1900s, Canada Geese were generally seen only in winter, when migratory birds returned south from their breeding grounds further north. But in the mid-1900s, geese were introduced (or reintroduced) in the midwestern and southern states. The genetics are murky, but it seems that many of the introduced birds came from sedentary, perhaps semi-domesticated populations. These birds, which do not migrate, found lots of amenable habitat with abundant resources. The result has been a population explosion. The sounds of a skein of geese flying overhead in October no longer indicate the return of wild birds from the far north. Those birds may just be your neighborhood geese, moving from one lawn to another.

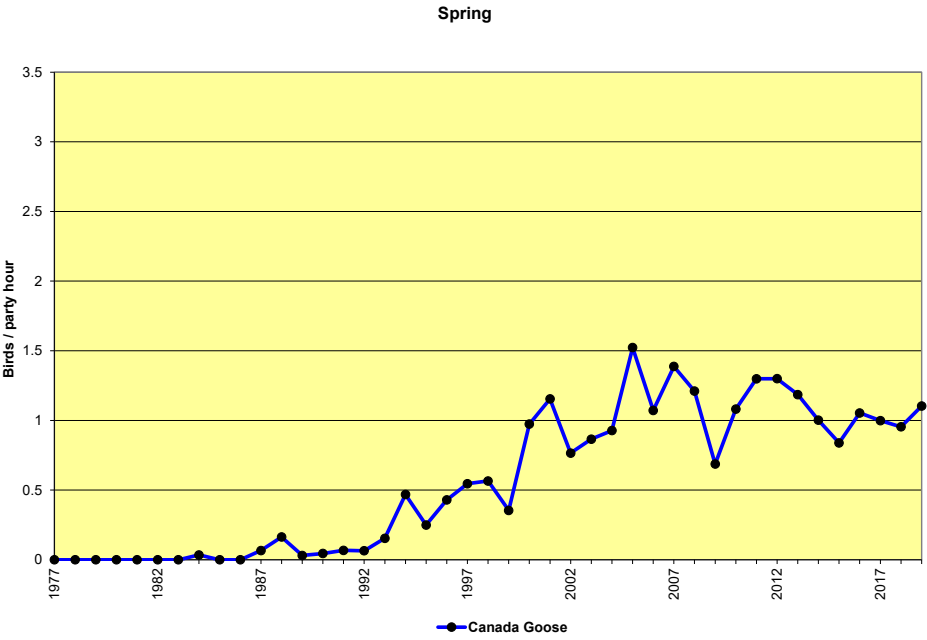


Figure 8. SBC, Canada Goose

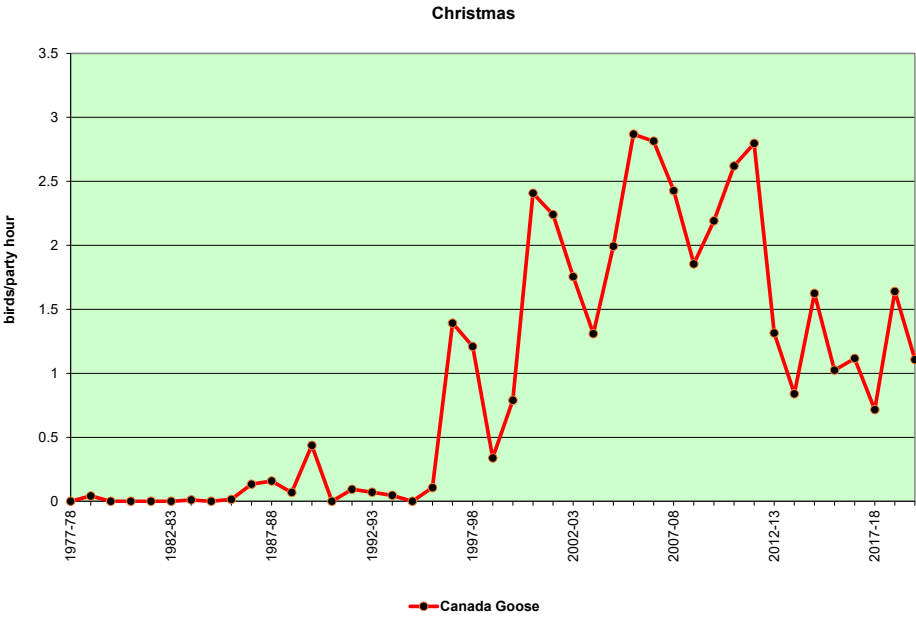


Figure 9. CBC, Canada Goose

Figures 8 and 9 show that Canada Geese began to appear in our count circle in significant numbers in the mid-1990s. A rapid increase in breeding birds (Fig. 8) may now be leveling off. The higher winter numbers (Fig. 9) probably reflect the young birds from the breeders of the previous spring. Adult geese are large, powerful birds with no real predators other than humans. They have thrived in our suburban areas where hunting is not allowed. If their numbers are leveling off, as our data indicate, perhaps they have reached the carrying capacity of our suburban resources. Bird counts over the next decade may help us to understand what is happening.

Range Expansions

Sometimes, species that were once uncommon in an area become more common as a result of range expansion from populations elsewhere. Following are some examples in our area. In each case, the species in question are compared to closely related species that were already present.



Figure 10. Turkey Vulture (photograph, Joe Donahue)



Figure 11. Black Vulture (photograph, Vern Bothwell)

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

These two vulture species are closely related, but they have some interesting differences that are significant. Both species eat mostly carrion. Turkey Vultures find their food by soaring overhead and using visual and olfactory cues to detect carcasses. Unlike most bird species, Turkey Vultures have a very well-developed sense of smell (Buckley 2020). They have been caught in concealed traps that were baited only with scent, and they often approached those traps from a downwind direction. Black Vultures, on the other hand, hunt by sight. They find food visually; however, they also watch Turkey Vultures and will move in aggressively and take over a carcass the Turkey Vultures have found.

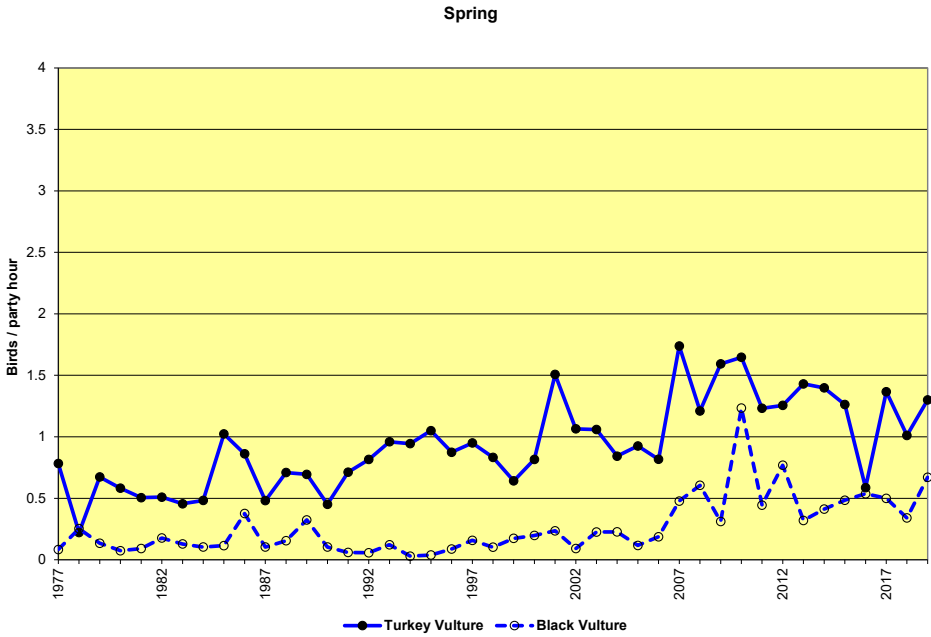


Figure 12. SBC, Turkey Vulture and Black Vulture

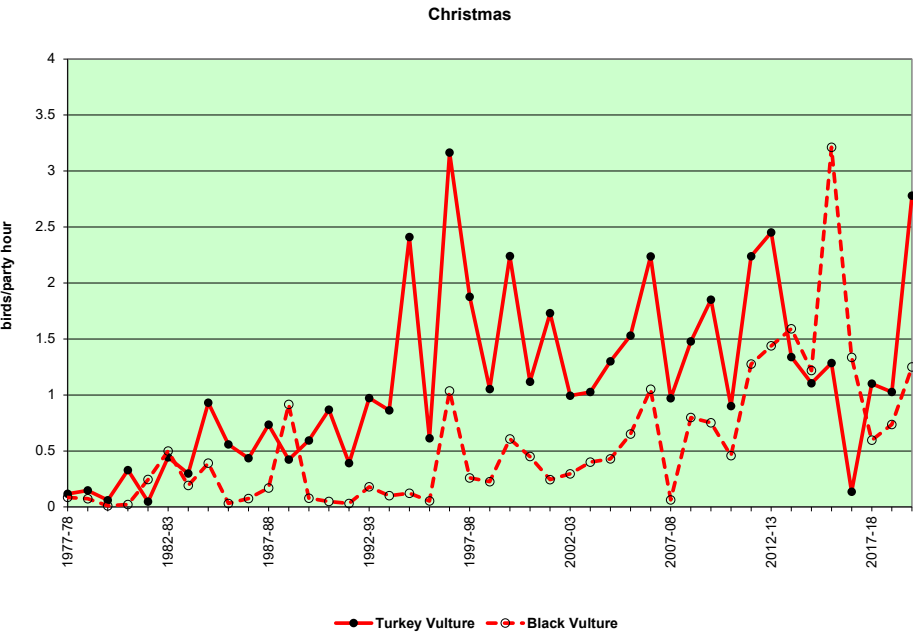


Figure 13. CBC, Turkey Vulture and Black Vulture

Finding vultures on our counts can be a hit or miss operation. They do not usually start flying until well after the sun has come up and begins heating the land surface, creating thermals for the vultures to use to get a free ride up to soaring/foraging altitude. In rainy weather they may not fly at all. On the other hand, they often roost communally, sometimes both species together. The result can be seen in the large fluctuations in the data from year to year, especially in winter (Figs. 12 and 13). The graphs show that both Turkey Vultures and Black Vultures have been on the increase over the decades, and that Turkeys have almost always outnumbered Blacks. However, it appears that Blacks may be increasing faster in recent years while the population growth of Turkeys may have leveled off.

Both vulture species are year-round residents throughout South America and southern North America, and both are somewhat migratory. Some individuals reside in our area year-round, while others, particularly Turkey Vultures, migrate north to breed, returning in the winter months (Buckley 2020; Kirk et al. 2020). Black Vultures do not move quite as much, and they have not extended their range as far north as Turkey Vultures. The observed range expansion and increase in numbers are probably influenced by human activities such as the creation of large landfill sites and increases in road kills resulting from increased development of roads and highways.



Figure 14. American Crow (photograph, Brendan Klick)



Figure 15. Fish Crow (photograph, Brendan Klick)

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*)

These two species of crows are almost indistinguishable, except by voice. Fish Crows are a bit smaller, but this is not a reliable field mark. The relative lengths of two of their primaries are characteristic. The labels added to Brendan Klick's excellent photographs above show that P9 is about the same length as P5 in American Crows, while P9 is longer than P5 in Fish Crows. Of course, observing these feathers on a flying bird in the field is all but impossible.

On the other hand, in spring, when both species are vocal, they can be relatively easy to identify, if they call. The drawn out “caw” of an American Crow is quite different from the shorter “uh uh” or “car car” of a Fish Crow. However, juvenile American Crows can sound just like Fish Crows, so summer identification can be trickier. And in winter, when both species tend to be much less vocal, it can be impossible to tell them apart in the field.

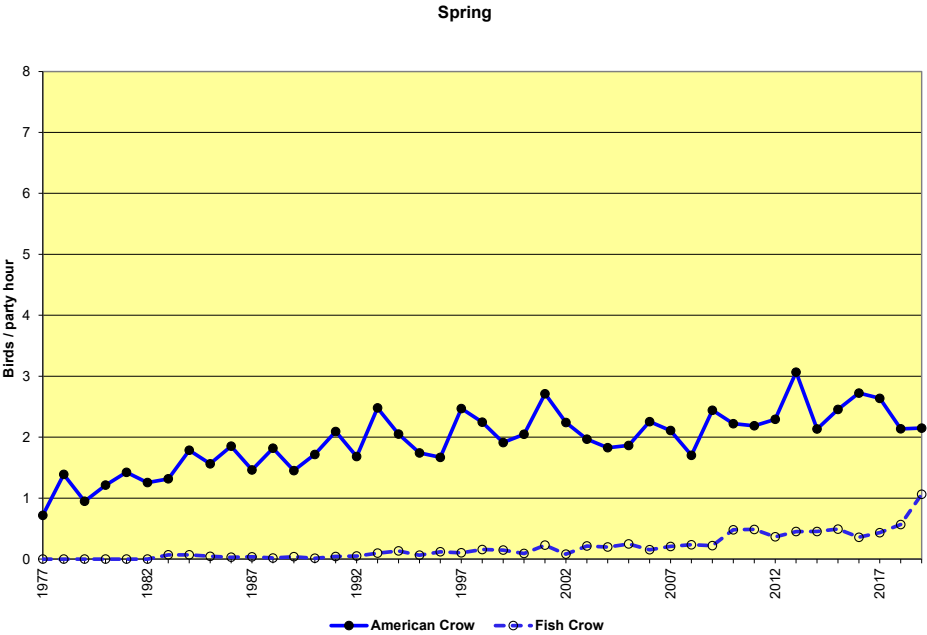


Figure 16. SBC, American Crow and Fish Crow

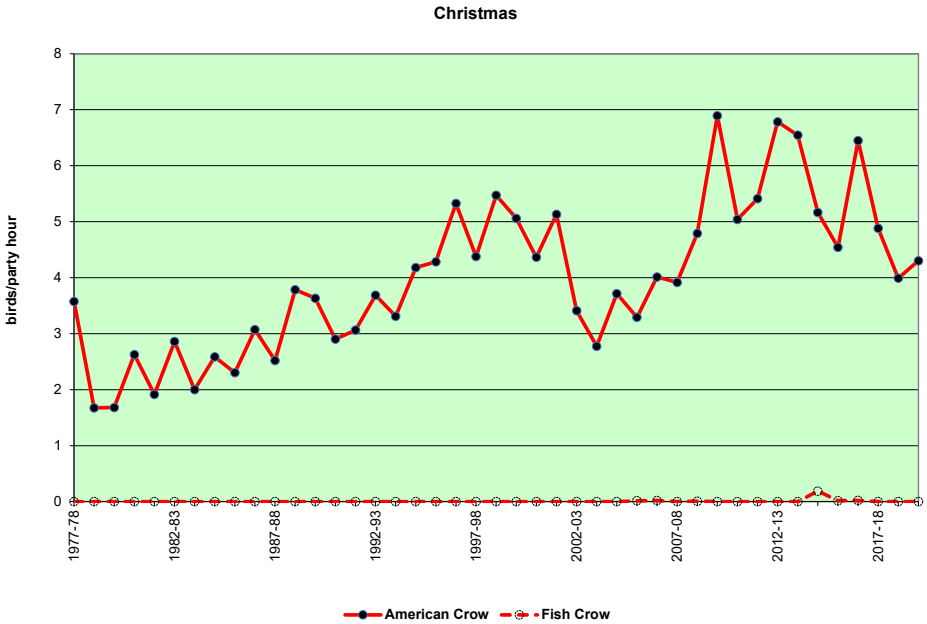


Figure 17. CBC, American Crow and Fish Crow

Figures 16 and 17 show that American Crows have been increasing slowly but steadily for the past four decades. Fish Crows were rare during this period until the early 2000s, when they became more regular in the spring and summer months, though they are far outnumbered by American Crows. Prior to the 2000s, Fish Crows in North Carolina were considered to be a coastal or tidewater species. As Figure 17 shows, they have been all but absent in the Piedmont when we do our CBCs, probably withdrawing east, back toward the coast in December and January. However, it is possible that they have simply not been counted if they have been silent. In general, when a crow is seen but not heard, it is counted as an American Crow—the *default* crow. This could bias our data to some degree.

It is difficult to speculate with any certainty why these species have been increasing. Both species tolerate and even take advantage of human population centers. Both species readily forage at landfills and parking lots of fast-food restaurants. And Fish Crows may be attracted to the large reservoirs humans have created in the area (Jordan and Falls Lakes).

Human ‘Habitats’

Several species in our area seem to respond well to the alterations humans have made to the environment. Residential areas with trees and lawns, ornamental plantings, bird feeders, water features, and nest boxes are all attractive to some species at the expense of others that require larger forest tracts, shrubby second growth, or extensive grasslands. Red-bellied Woodpeckers, as discussed in Part 2 of these articles, is a typical example. The species discussed below also seem to fit this pattern.



Figure 18. Carolina Chickadee (photograph, Norm Budnitz)



Figure 19. Tufted Titmouse (photograph, Norm Budnitz)

Carolina Chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*)

Tufted Titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*)

Chickadees and titmice are “leaders of the pack.” In the Piedmont region of North Carolina, they are non-migratory, year-round, permanent residents. In the spring, they pair up to lay eggs and raise young, but by mid-summer they congregate in small, multi-species flocks and move around their home range in search of resources. Other species join these roving bands, especially in winter—for example, White-breasted Nuthatches, Downy Woodpeckers, Brown Creepers, Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets. Chickadees and titmice seem to explore every nook and cranny in the natural environment—searching under leaves, probing into tree bark crevices, poking into dead flower stalks—but also in human constructions—searching under eaves, probing into siding, poking into forgotten laundry on a clothes line. And of course, when humans put up bird feeders, chickadees and titmice are usually the first species to find them.

Spring

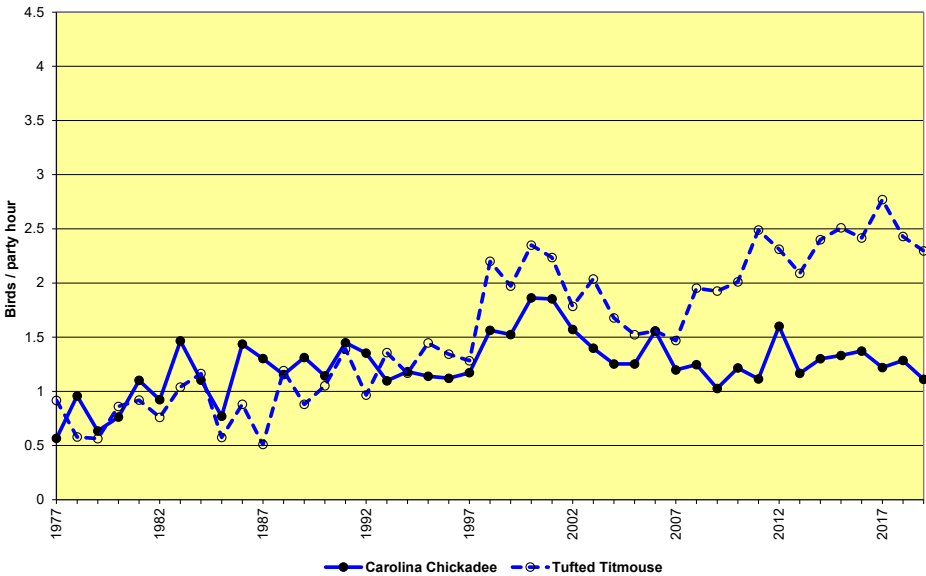


Figure 20. SBC, Carolina Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse

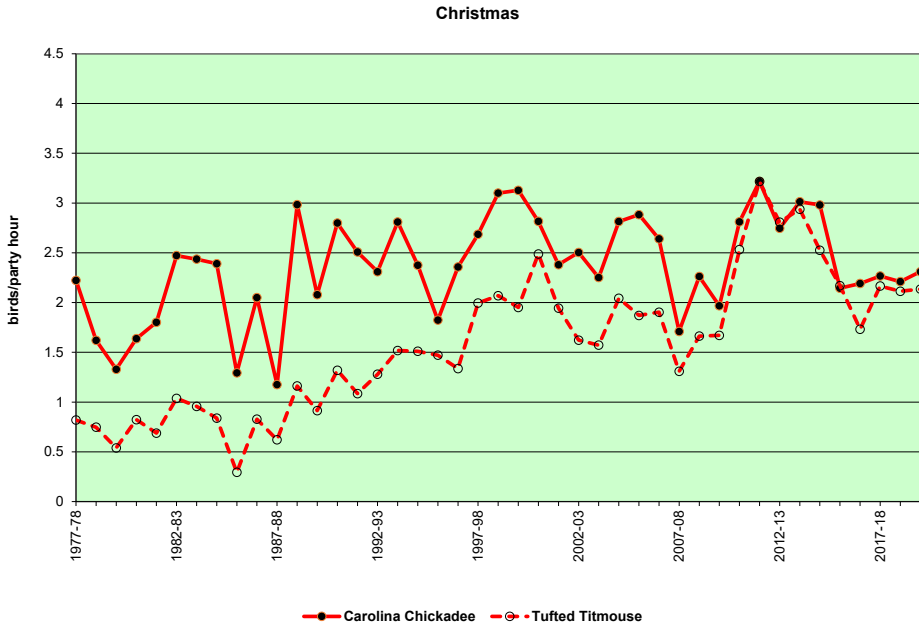


Figure 21. CBC, Carolina Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse

Figures 20 and 21 show that the populations of both species are increasing in the Jordan Lake bird count circle. This growth parallels the increase in numbers and the expansion in range of humans in this area. Parks and campgrounds, residential communities, and small commercial zones all create habitats that provide resources these birds need. These graphs indicate that while the populations of both species are increasing, titmouse numbers seem to be growing faster than chickadee numbers. In winter (Fig. 21, CBC), chickadees almost always outnumber titmouse in any given year, but titmice are clearly gaining. In spring (Fig. 20, SBC), chickadees were more common until the 1990s, when titmice took the lead and have outnumbered chickadees ever since.

The following speculations by the author are just that—speculations, not definitive explanations. The intent is to pique interest and perhaps experimentation and further analysis by others. Two questions to consider: 1) Overall, why are titmice increasing more rapidly than chickadees? 2) What happens over the course of a year such that the number advantage of chickadees in December becomes a number advantage for titmice by May?

- Regarding the first question, changes in land use patterns by humans could be affecting the two species differently. Chickadees and titmice may differ in certain subtle ways in terms of food preferences, nest site selection, interactions with other bird species, and so forth. Any or all of these differences could be influenced by changes wrought by humans. The number of people living in the Triangle area (Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill) has increased dramatically

during these four decades. Growing numbers of housing developments and shopping malls, development of industrial parks, and decrease of natural areas are all factors that might affect these two species differently.

- Regarding the second question, it could be that the relative numbers recorded is an artifact of the techniques used by the counters. Chickadees and titmice may breed at different times. For example, during the spring count period (the first week in May), if chickadees breed earlier, they may be incubating eggs and singing and moving about less conspicuously, while titmice may be singing vociferously, establishing territories and attracting mates.
- Climate change since the early 1990s may have reached a threshold that influenced the winter hardness of one or the other or both of these species. For example, perhaps titmice are more subject to winter kill than chickadees at certain temperatures. If winters are now milder, this might allow for greater relative survival of titmice and therefore larger numbers reported in the spring.
- Or the opposite could be true. Milder winters might have a negative impact on chickadees, making them more susceptible to certain diseases that decrease their numbers.
- If there is an advance in breeding dates due to climate change, this might affect which species is singing when and therefore affect the ‘apparent’ numbers of individuals and subsequently their reported numbers.



Figure 22. Brown-headed Nuthatch (photograph, Norm Budnitz)



Figure 23. White-breasted Nuthatch (photograph, Norm Budnitz)

Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*)

White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*)

Though closely related, these two species have strong preferences for quite different habitats. Brown-headed Nuthatches are birds of mature pine forests (Slater et al. 2020). Throughout its range in southeastern North America, this nuthatch is always associated with pines, though the species of pine varies, depending on local conditions. In our area, the most common species is Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*). Loblolly stands are regularly managed—clear cut, reseeded, allowed to mature, and then clear cut again. Loblollies can grow to 50 feet tall in just 20 years, so depending on how they will be used (wood pulp or lumber), the harvesting cycle may be just a few decades long.

White-breasted Nuthatches prefer mature deciduous forests or mixed deciduous/conifer forests (Grubb Jr. 2020). These forests take longer to develop and are typically less common in our area. Perhaps this is why White-breasted Nuthatches are less common in our area than Brown-headed Nuthatches.

About a decade ago, Audubon North Carolina began a program to install 10,000 nest boxes specifically for Brown-headed Nuthatches (Audubon North Carolina 2020). These nuthatches typically excavate holes in dead snags or use holes made by woodpeckers. Audubon NC became concerned that climate change and human activities could potentially threaten these birds.

Figure 24 shows that the populations of both species are increasing. It is difficult to speculate about how the interplay among forest growth and harvesting, human incursions into their habitats, and the Audubon NC program might be affecting these species.

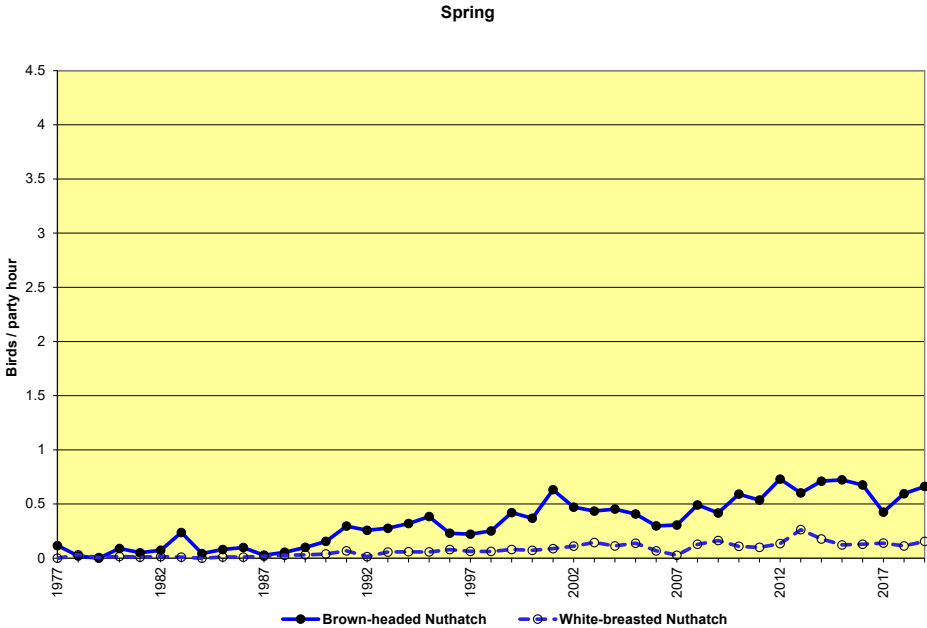


Figure 24. SBC, Brown-headed Nuthatch and White-breasted Nuthatch

Other Species

The alterations humans have made to the environment may be influencing population increases in other species as well. The following spring count (SBC) graphs show the data for several of these species. The Christmas count (CBC) graphs would be similar. I will let the graphs speak for themselves, rather than restate the factors listed above in the introduction to this section. All these graphs use the same vertical scale of 0 to 4.5 birds/party hour (the same as for the chickadee and titmouse and nuthatch graphs) to show their abundance relative to each other.



Figure 25. Carolina Wren (*Thryothurus ludovicianus*) (photograph, Norm Budnitz)

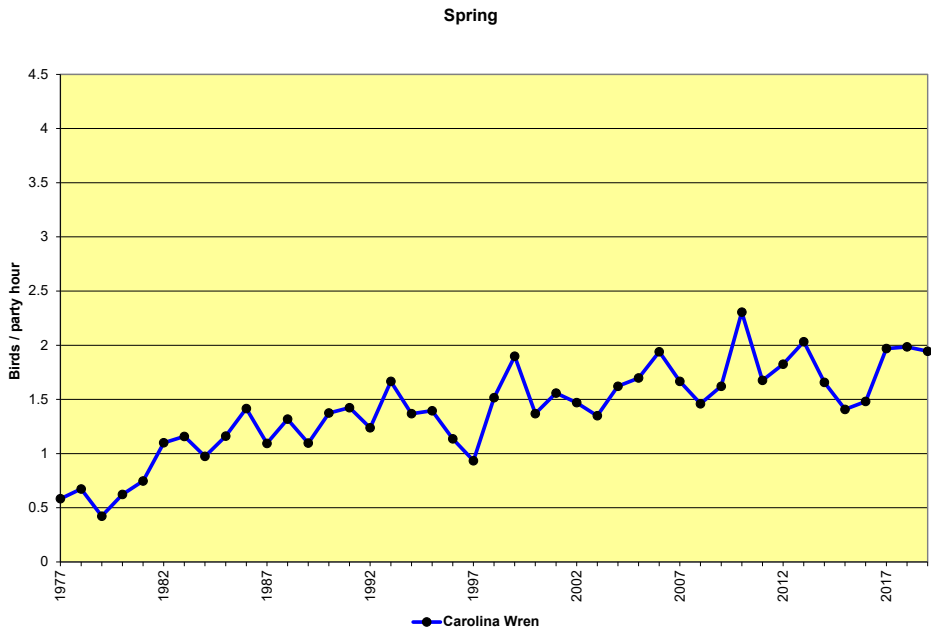


Figure 26. SBC, Carolina Wren



Figure 27. Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) (photograph, Bill Majoros)

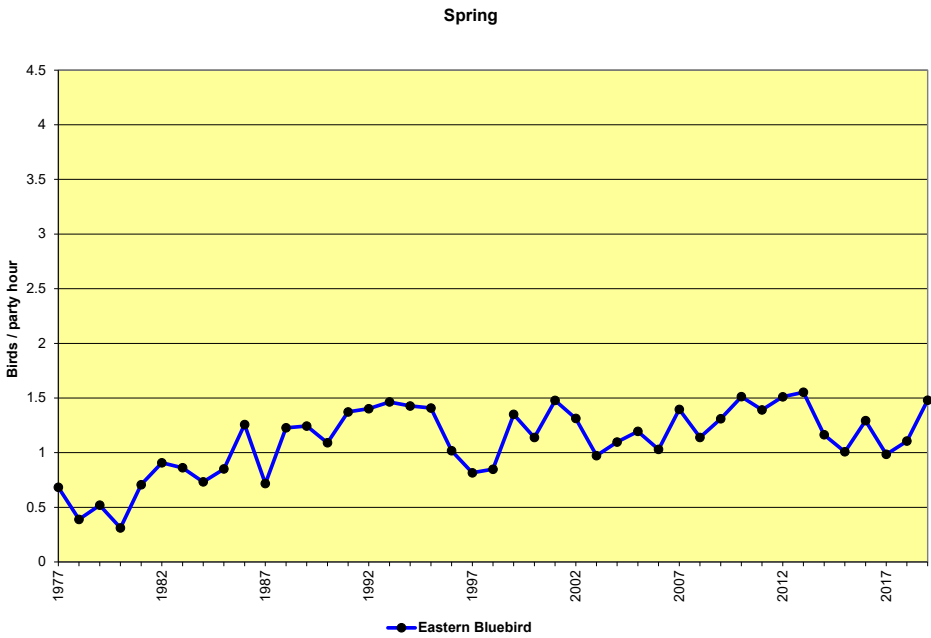


Figure 28. SBC, Eastern Bluebird



Figure 29. Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) (photograph, Norm Budnitz)

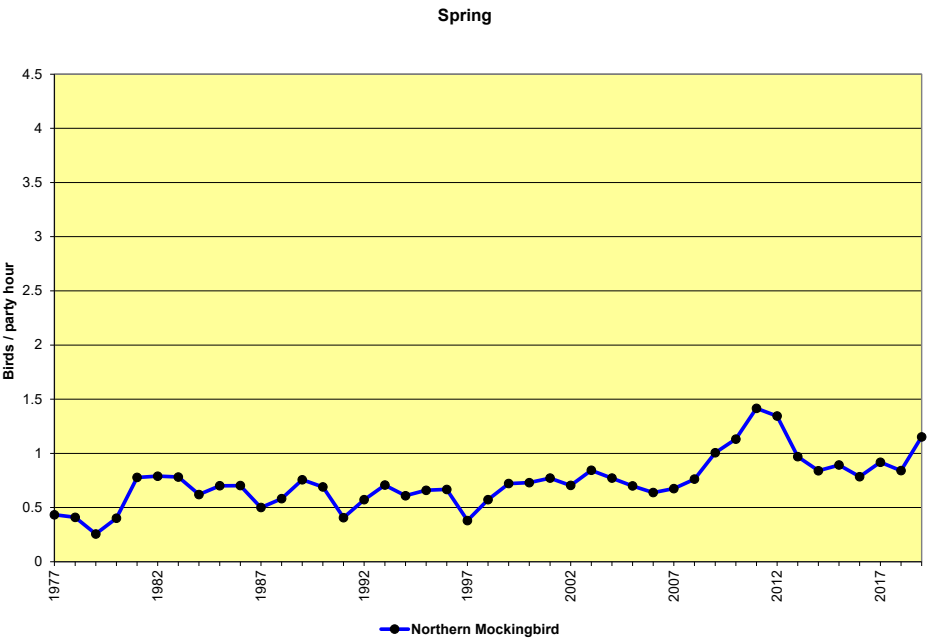


Figure 30. SBC, Northern Mockingbird



Figure 31. Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerine*) (photograph, Norm Budnitz)

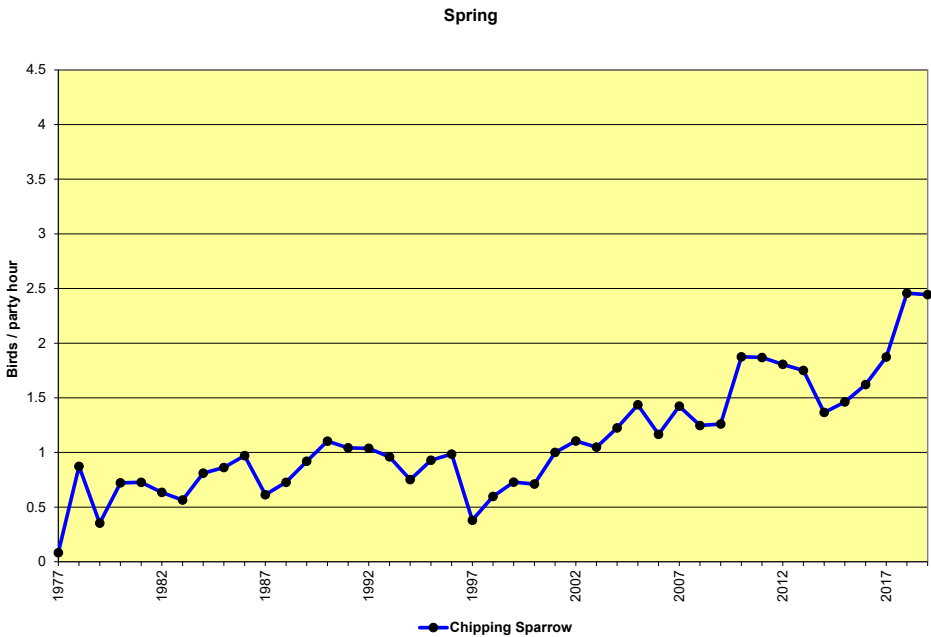


Figure 32. SBC, Chipping Sparrow



Figure 33. Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) (photograph, Tom Driscoll)

Spring

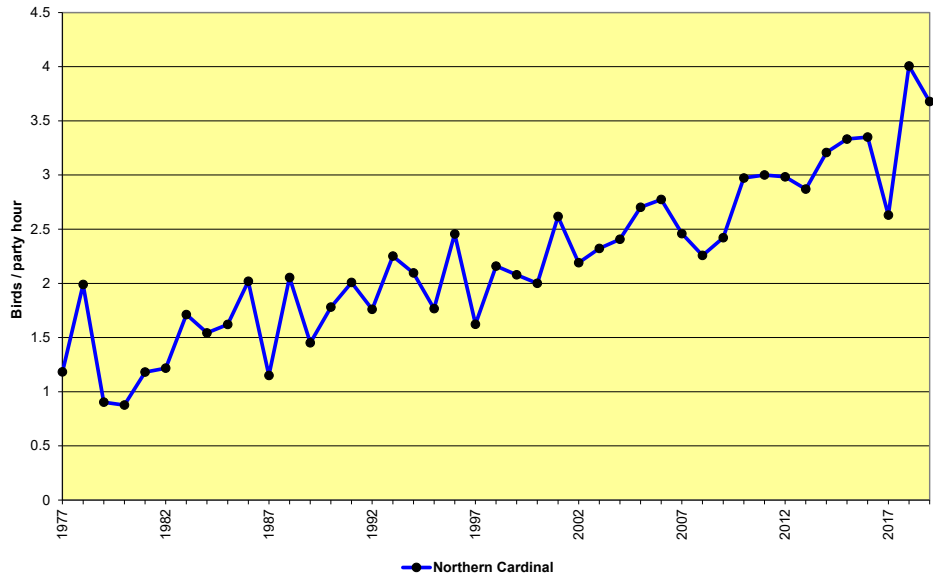


Figure 34. SBC, Northern Cardinal

Discussion

The species mentioned in this article all show signs of increasing population sizes in Piedmont North Carolina. And these increases have all been mediated in one way or another by human activities—introduction or reintroduction by humans, global warming, and extensive increases in residential and commercial areas. In fact, this can be said for the birds mentioned in all four of these articles. While increases in some species are aided by these human activities, decreases in others appear to be the result of these same activities. The 40-plus years of data we have gathered, and will continue to gather, should help us understand these long-term changes.

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BRIEFS FOR THE FILES

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(All dates Spring 2021, 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.

<i>Winter</i>	<i>December 1–February 28</i>	<i>due March 20</i>
<i>Spring</i>	<i>March 1–May 31</i>	<i>due June 20</i>
<i>Summer</i>	<i>June 1–July 31</i>	<i>due August 20</i>
<i>Fall</i>	<i>August 1–November 30</i>	<i>due December 20</i>

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, **Dr** – Drive, **et al.** – and others, **Ft** – Fort, **– 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.

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck: The high count this spring was 62 at Eagle's Point Golf Club *Beaufort* SC 14 Apr (Steve Salisbury, et al.). Sightings made in NC, rare but increasing, included two in Vander *Cumberland* NC 9-16 May (Yvonne Porter, m. obs.), five at Porters Neck Country Club *New Hanover* NC 23-28 May (m. obs.), and five at Carolina Beach Lake *New Hanover* NC 25 May (Jamie Adams, m. obs.).

Greater White-fronted Goose: One at Lake Julian *Buncombe* NC 10 Apr through 3 May (Steve Barlow, m. obs.) was somewhat late.

Tundra Swan: Two seemingly healthy adults at the Pungo Unit of Pocosin Lakes NWR *Washington* NC 20 May (Greg Hudson) were rather late.

Cinnamon Teal: Two, a drake and a hen, seen on the pond next to Ramp 43 at Cape Point *Dare* NC 31 May (m. obs.) were amazing finds. This sighting was not only the first of more than a single bird in the Carolinas but also the latest ever made in spring.

American Wigeon: A drake at Dobbin Farms *Anderson* SC 29-30 May (Cindy Groff, m. obs.) was rather late.

Mottled Duck: Two along the Basin Trail at Ft Fisher *New Hanover* NC 21 May into June (Dave Hart, m. obs.) were unusual for NC.

Common Eider: Several notable counts were made in *Carteret* NC—18 at Beaufort Inlet 8 Mar (Randy Newman), nine on the Morehead City waterfront 27 Apr (John Fussell, et al.), and likely the same nine birds at Beaufort Inlet 15 May (Michael Cheves). The latter count was especially high for mid-May. Individuals lingered into late May and June at several sites along the coast.

Surf Scoter: One on Oak Hollow Lake *Guilford* NC 5 Apr was the only inland sighting reported this spring.

White-winged Scoter: A hen on Lake Crabtree *Wake* NC 3 Mar (Ann Stinely, m. obs.) was the likely the same individual seen later that same day on Lake Lynn *Wake* NC (Trenton Voytko, m. obs.).

Long-tailed Duck: Individuals on Lake Crabtree *Wake* NC 2 Mar (Kevin Markham, Marc Ribaud, m. obs.) and on Lake Marion *Calhoun* SC 17 Mar (Gus & Susan Moody) were unusual for sites away from the coast.

Common Merganser: This species continues to increase as a breeder along rivers in the NC mountains. Breeding was confirmed again along the Tuckasegee River in *Swain* NC when a hen was seen with at least four chicks 28 Apr (Simon Thompson). Suggestive of possible breeding in the NC mountains were drake/hen pairs on the Tuckasegee River in *Jackson* 11 Mar (Jeremy Hyman) through 15 Apr (Blake Ledbetter), on the French Broad River in *Buncombe* 11 Mar (Bob Butler), on the Mitchell River in *Surry* 12 Mar (G. Patton), on the Swannanoa River in *Buncombe* 12-20 Mar (Casey Girard), on the Pigeon

River in *Haywood* 13 Mar (Nikhil & Vim Reddy), on Cane River in *Yancey* 13-23 Mar (Robin Tingley, m. obs.), and on the Little River in *Alleghany* 2 May (Patsy Bailey). Three, one drake and two hens, on the Ararat River in *Surry* 26 Apr (Ann Newsome) and, possibly the same three birds, on W. Kerr Scott Reservoir *Wilkes* 2 May (Guy McGrane, Maxwell Ramey) were unusual for the NC foothills in late spring. A hen photographed at Howell Woods *Johnston* NC 18 Apr (Rob Rybczynski) was a first for that county.

Red-necked Grebe: One near the dam on Lake Tillery *Montgomery* and *Stanly* NC (Baxter Beamer, Martina Nordstrand, m. obs.) 7-13 Mar was the only one reported this period.

Eared Grebe: Two were seen around Cape Point *Dare* NC 2 Mar (Daniel Irons) through 10 Mar (Andrew Thornton). The individual that wintered on Lake Julian *Buncombe* NC was last seen 25 Mar (Rebekkah LaBlue).

White-winged Dove: Individuals were seen at five sites along or near the coast from 15 Apr through 30 May.

Black-billed Cuckoo: Pairs of singing birds at North River Preserve *Carteret* NC 9 May (John Fussell, et al.) and at Alligator River NWR *Dare* NC 29 May (Christian Hawn, et al.) were suggestive of attempted breeding at those sites.

Rufous Hummingbird: An adult female visiting a feeder in Asheville *Buncombe* NC 10-22 Mar (Simon Thompson, m. obs.) was unusual for the mountain region in spring.

Common Gallinule: One photographed on Arrowhead Pond at Pee Dee NWR *Anson* NC 3 Apr (Mike Conway) and 5 Apr (Ann Stinely) was unusual for that part of the state.

Limpkin: The pair seen in the Island Green community in southern *Horry* SC beginning in January apparently bred at that site, as an adult was photographed alongside seven chicks 28 May (Dawne Dutton). Nesting in SC was first confirmed only a year ago. One in the Bluff Unit of Santee NWR *Clarendon* SC 18 Apr through 10 May (Nick Tepper, m. obs.) was unusual for that site.

American Golden-Plover: Two were seen along Hooper Ln *Henderson* NC 27 Mar (Todd Arcos, Wayne Forsythe, m. obs.) and one was seen there 2-12 Apr and 3-5 May (m. obs.). Individuals were seen at six sites along the southern half of our coast 19 Apr through 13 May (m. obs.).

Upland Sandpiper: Spring sightings included one at Biltmore Estate *Buncombe* NC 27 Mar (m. obs.) and 6-7 Apr (Jay Wherley, Simon Thompson, m. obs.), one along Zion Church Rd in *Union* NC 8 Apr (Martina Nordstrand, m. obs.), one along Friendship Church Rd in *Guilford* NC 24 Apr (Roberta Newton, Ann Van Sant, m. obs.), two along Willoughby Rd in *Union* NC 26 Apr (Chris Huffstickler, m. obs.), and one at Ecusta Pond *Transylvania* NC 28 Apr (Nathaniel Axtell).

Whimbrel: 5500 on Deveaux Bank *Charleston* SC 25 Apr (Nathan Senner, Maria Stager) was a remarkable count.

Long-billed Curlew: Pairs continued at the Rachel Carson Reserve *Carteret* NC though 14 Mar (Evans Lodge) and on East Shackleford Banks *Carteret* NC through 15 Mar (Vic Nebes, Suzanne Roberts). Individuals were seen at New River Inlet *Onslow* NC 18 Mar (Moirá Maus), on Deveaux Bank *Charleston* SC 27 Mar (Nathan Senner), on East Shackleford Banks 30 Mar (Trevor Sleight) and 23 Apr (Matt Spangler), and at the Rachel Carson Reserve 13 May (John Fussell).

Bar-tailed Godwit: The individual that has wintered on East Shackleford Banks *Carteret* NC for the past five years remained until at least 23 Apr (Matt Spangler).

Ruddy Turnstone: Four at the Hemingway WTP *Williamsburg* SC 15 May (Jay Chandler) and one at the Goldsboro WTP *Wayne* NC 23 May (Ricky Davis) were good finds for sites away from the coast in spring.

Ruff: A female (Reeve) was seen at J. Morgan Futch Game Land *Tyrrell* NC 11-16 Apr (Ricky Davis, m. obs.).



*Ruff (Reeve), 13 Apr 2021, J. Morgan Futch Game Land, Tyrrell County, NC.
Photo by Jeff Lewis.*

Stilt Sandpiper: One photographed at the Cedar Island Ferry Terminal *Carteret* NC 27 Mar (Jamie Adams) was somewhat early for NC.

Dunlin: Inland sightings included one along Hooper Ln *Henderson* NC 4-5 May (Mike Resch, m. obs.), one at Lake Crabtree *Wake* NC 6-7 May (Chip Davis, m. obs.), one at Dobbins Farm *Anderson* SC 9-10 May (Steve Patterson, m. obs.), two along Hooper Ln 10 May (Rebecca Crofton, et al.), and two at Lake Crabtree 21 May (Rob Rybczynski).

Purple Sandpiper: Four at Ft Moultrie *Charleston* SC 27 Apr (Elizabeth Anderegg) were somewhat late.

Baird's Sandpiper: One at Bear Island WMA *Colleton* SC 1 May (Sidney Gauthreaux) was a good find for spring.

Short-billed Dowitcher: Inland sightings included one along Hooper Ln *Henderson* NC 10 May (Rebecca Crofton, m. obs.), 20 along Hooper Ln 12 May (Tim Novak), 44, a remarkable inland count, at Lake Adger *Polk* NC 12 May (Mike Resch), one at Lake Crabtree *Wake* NC 13 May (Henry Gargan, m. obs.), one in the Ellerbe Creek arm of Falls Lake *Durham* NC 18-24 May (Corinne Hibbard, Bruce Young, m. obs.), and seven at Lake Crabtree 21 May (Rob Rybczynski).

Solitary Sandpiper: One at Brookshire Park *Watauga* NC 26 Mar (Anita Clemmer, m. obs.) was somewhat early for the NC High Country. 19 at North River Preserve *Carteret* NC 9 May (John Fussell, et al.) was a notable count for that county.

Willet: 400 at Howland Rock in the North River estuary *Carteret* NC 28 Feb (John Fussell, Curtis Merrick) and 275 there 28 Mar (Fussell, et al.) were notable counts. Three at Lake Junaluska *Haywood* NC 30 Apr (Timothy Carstens, m. obs.) and one at Nantahala Lake *Macon* NC 30 Apr (Allen Hurlbert) were good finds for the mountains.

Wilson's Phalarope: One was seen around the Salt Pond at Cape Point *Dare* NC 7-9 May (m. obs.) and 18-22 May (Daniel Irons, m. obs.).

Red-necked Phalarope: One seen and photographed on Lake Junaluska *Haywood* NC 26-27 Mar (Vince Kloster, m. obs.) was extremely early and a first for that county. Multiple sightings were made at inland sites in the latter half of May including five at the Hemingway WTP *Williamsburg* SC 18 May (Jay Chandler, Jamey Eaddy) with one continuing through 25 May (m. obs.), one at Lake Crabtree *Wake* NC 19-21 May (Eddie Owens, m. obs.), two on Jordan Lake *Chatham* NC 21 May (Denise Ward), up to four at Maple View Farm *Orange* NC 21 May (Lucretia Kinney, m. obs.) with one continuing through 23 May (m. obs.), one on Lake Norman *Mecklenburg* NC 22 May (Jeff Lemons, et al.), three at the Goldsboro WTP *Wayne* NC 23 May (Ricky Davis), two southeast of Louisburg *Franklin* NC 25 May (Phil Doerr), and one at Mattamuskeet NWR *Hyde* NC 30 May (Ed Corey). Along the coast, migrants were seen over the ocean from multiple

sites in late May, including an amazing count of 2125 in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 24 May (Daniel Irons).

South Polar Skua: All-day sea-watches allowed for rare from-shore sightings at Cape Point *Dare* NC intermittently 22-28 May (Daniel Irons, m. obs.) including an amazing from-shore count of eight in eastbound flight 26 May (Irons). Skuas were also seen on seven of the eleven nearly-consecutive pelagic trips out of Hatteras *Dare* NC 20 May through 1 June, including counts of four on 20 May and 22 May (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.).

Pomarine Jaeger: 12 in flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 25 May (Daniel Irons) was a remarkable from-shore count.

Parasitic Jaeger: All-day sea-watches allowed for impressive counts from Cape Point *Dare* NC this spring—24 in eastbound flight 11 Apr, 29 in eastbound flight 15 Apr, 42 mostly in westbound flight 22 Apr, 22 in eastbound flight 19 May, 37 in eastbound flight 22 May, and 23 in eastbound flight 25 May (Daniel Irons). Nine off Atlantic Beach *Carteret* NC 5 Apr (Matt Hafner) was a good count for that area.

Long-tailed Jaeger: Individuals in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 25 May and 26 May (Daniel Irons) were good finds from shore. This species was seen on seven of the eleven nearly-consecutive pelagic trips out of Hatteras *Dare* NC 20 May through 1 June, including five on 22 May and six on 25 May (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.).

Dovekie: Though dovekies typically depart our waters by spring, this year multiple sightings were made throughout March. Counts included 41 on a pelagic trip out of Hatteras *Dare* NC 6 Mar (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.), 219 in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 8 Mar (Daniel Irons), and 76 in eastbound flight off Cape Point 18 Mar (Irons). Individuals were seen as far south as Murrells Inlet *Georgetown* SC where one was seen and photographed by many 4-11 Mar (Tammie Vied Smith, m. obs.). That report is pending review by the SC BRC, as the species is still on the state's review list. One at Mason Inlet *New Hanover* NC 27 Mar (Chelsea Bullock) was quite late. Multiple injured or moribund dovekies were found along the Bogue Banks *Carteret* NC this spring as late as 12 Apr (*vide* John Fussell).

Razorbill: 3861 in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 9 Mar (Daniel Irons) was the peak count this spring. Farthest south was one photographed from the pier at Myrtle Beach SP *Horry* SC 18 Mar (Ted Falasco). One in eastbound flight off Cape Point 16 Apr (Irons) was rather late.

Atlantic Puffin: All-day sea-watches allowed for rare from-shore sightings from Cape Point *Dare* NC intermittently 12-24 Mar (Daniel Irons), including a count of nine in eastbound flight 18 Mar (Irons). One seen on Barden Inlet from the ferry to Cape Lookout *Carteret* NC 12 Apr (Edward Jenkins) was both unusual for that area and also very late.

Black-legged Kittiwake: Four were seen in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 24 Mar (Daniel Irons).

Black-headed Gull: An adult on Harris Lake *Wake* NC 13-20 Mar (Eddie Owens, m. obs.) was a good find for an inland site.

Little Gull: 12 in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 24 Mar (Daniel Irons) was a notable count. An adult at Masonboro Inlet *New Hanover* NC 7 Mar (Ricky Davis) and 23 Mar (Jamie Adams) possibly was the same individual seen at nearby Mason Inlet 7 Feb (Sam Cooper).

Laughing Gull: Farthest inland this spring was an adult on Lake Julian *Buncombe* NC 3 May (Clifton Avery, m. obs.).

Franklin's Gull: One in breeding plumage at Cape Point *Dare* NC 15 May (Daniel Irons, m. obs.) was very unusual for spring.

California Gull: Individuals were photographed at Cape Point *Dare* NC 18 Mar and 6 Apr (Daniel Irons). It has been seven years since this species was last reported in the Carolinas.

Iceland Gull: Individuals at the Horry County Landfill *Horry* SC 19 Mar (Chris Hill, John Hutchens) and on the Ft Fisher Spit *New Hanover* NC 20-27 Apr (Greg Massey, Harry Sell, m. obs.) were good finds for sites away from the Outer Banks.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: 71 on Harris Lake *Wake* NC 6 Mar (Duncan Fraser) and 340 on Buckhorn Reservoir *Wilson* NC 21 Mar (Ricky Davis) were notable counts for inland sites. 70 at the Horry County Landfill *Horry* SC 20 Mar (Pam Ford, Craig Watson) was a notable count for SC. A first-winter individual at High Rock Dam *Davidson* and *Rowan* NC 7-8 Mar (Rob Rogers, m. obs.) was a first for either county. An adult at the Lake Murray Dam *Lexington* SC 5 May (Irvin Pitts) was rather late for an inland site.

Glaucous Gull: One continued from winter at Cape Point *Dare* NC until 13 Apr (Daniel Irons). A third-cycle individual photographed on Kiawah Island *Charleston* SC 31 May (Aidan Rominger) was quite late.

Least Tern: One at Huntington Beach SP *Georgetown* SC 10 Mar (Kathleen O'Grady, Julie Mobley, Mary Jo Dawson) was quite early. Least Terns do not typically begin to show up until very late March or early April. One seen in the Ellerbe Creek arm of Falls Lake *Durham* NC 18 May (Corinne Hibbard, m. obs.) and one well-photographed in southern *Mecklenburg* NC 28 May (Strummer Edwards) were unusual for sites in the Piedmont, especially when not following the passage of a tropical storm.

Black Tern: One in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 21 Apr (Daniel Irons) was somewhat early.

Roseate Tern: One had returned to Cape Point *Dare* NC by 26 Apr (Daniel Irons). Ten in mostly eastbound flight off Cape Point 25 May (Irons) was a notable count.

Arctic Tern: Good numbers were had on pelagic trips out of Hatteras *Dare* NC in late May including 11 on 20 May, eight on 21 May, six on 23 May, and ten on 26 May (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.). Six in the eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 25 May (Daniel Irons) was a notable from-shore count.

White-tailed Tropicbird: An adult was seen on a pelagic trip out of Hatteras *Dare* NC 23 May (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.).



*White-tailed Tropicbird, 23 May 2021, off Hatteras, Dare County, NC.
Photo by Kate Sutherland.*

Red-billed Tropicbird: An adult at the Salt Pond at Cape Point *Dare* NC 25 Mar (Daniel Irons) was notable, though not unprecedented, as there have been a number of spring sightings at that site in the past decade. An immature bird was seen on a pelagic trip out of Hatteras *Dare* NC 24 May (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.).

Pacific Loon: Individuals in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 23 Apr and 26 May (Daniel Irons) were unusual for the latter half of the season.

Wilson's Storm-Petrel: Multiple sightings were made from shore in late May including an amazing count of 1189 in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 22 May (Daniel Irons). Individuals seen from shore on Kiawah Island *Charleston* SC 17 May (Aaron Given) and at Winyah Bay Inlet *Georgetown* SC 25 May (Wendy Allen) were notable for SC.

Northern Fulmar: One seen in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 24 Mar (Daniel Irons) was very unusual from shore.

Trindade Petrel: On pelagic trips out of Hatteras *Dare* NC, two were seen 14 May and individuals were seen 20 May, 23 May, 27 May, and 28 May (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.).

Fea's Petrel: Individuals were seen on pelagic trips out of Hatteras *Dare* NC 9 May and 24 May (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.).

Wedge-tailed Shearwater: Pending review by the NC BRC is the reports with photographs of an apparent Wedge-tailed Shearwater seen during a pelagic trip out of Hatteras *Dare* NC 22 May (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.). If accepted, the report would provide the first record of this pacific tubenose for the Carolinas, and, amazingly, for the entire Atlantic Ocean.

Cory's Shearwater: One in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 29 Apr (Daniel Irons) was somewhat early. Several sightings were made from shore in *Dare* NC from 16 May through the end of the period including a count of 195 in eastbound flight off Cape Point 25 May (Irons). 12 in eastbound flight off Atlantic Beach *Carteret* NC 28 May (Jacob Raber, et al.) was a good count for that area.

Sooty Shearwater: Multiple from-shore sightings were made in the latter half of May including a remarkable count of 6036 in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 22 May (Daniel Irons).

Manx Shearwater: 26 in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 22 May and 23 May (Daniel Irons) were notable counts for late spring.

Wood Stork: 225, adults and juveniles, at a nesting site in eastern *Robeson* NC 27 May (Ed Corey) was a good count for NC.

Magnificent Frigatebird: Individuals were photographed over the Cape Fear River in *Brunswick* NC 30 Apr (Jack Smallwood) and just south of Emerald Isle *Carteret* NC 21 May (Mark Reaves).

Masked Booby: Four sightings involving at least two individuals were made in *Dare NC* in the latter half of May—an immature off Cape Point 16 May (Daniel Irons), an adult off Cape Point 22 May (Irons), an adult off Jennette's Pier 25 May (Sarah Toner) and an immature on a pelagic trip out of Hatteras 31 May (Brian Patteson, Kate Sutherland, et al.).



Masked Booby, 31 May 2021, off Hatteras, Dare County, NC. Photo by Kate Sutherland.

Brown Booby: Two were reported this spring—a juvenile off Southern Shores *Dare NC* 17 May (Wendy Addison) and a subadult off Cape Point *Dare NC* 19 May (Daniel Irons).

American White Pelican: 35 in flight over Roan Mountain *Mitchell NC* 30 Mar (John Britt) were very unusual for the northern mountains and a first for that county. A few of the higher counts this spring were 71 at High Rock Dam *Davidson* and *Rowan NC* 24 Mar (Thomas Gray), 130 on Marsh Island at Cape Romain NWR *Charleston SC* 26 Apr (Merrill Lynch), and 58 in flight over Swannanoa *Buncombe NC* 28 May (Joe Meyer).

American Bittern: Nine along Brickhouse Rd in the Butner Game Land *Durham NC* 25 Apr (Norm Budnitz, et al.) was a notable count for a site in the Piedmont.

Snowy Egret: Farthest inland was one at Lake Junaluska *Haywood NC* 8 Apr (Chris Huffstickler) and 5 May (Tim Carstens, m. obs.). One at Lake Hickory in *Alexander NC* 21 May (Caroline Martin) was first for that county.

Reddish Egret: A white-morph individual on North Pond at Pea Island NWR *Dare NC* 28 May through 3 Jun (Derek Courtney, m. obs.) was unusual for the Outer Banks in spring.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron: Two or more had returned to known nesting sites in Charlotte *Mecklenburg NC* by 19 Mar (Jeff Turner, m. obs.) and in Winston-Salem *Forsyth NC* by 23 Mar (David & Susan Disher).

White-faced Ibis: Pending review by the SC BRC is the report with photographs of an apparent White-faced Ibis on Kiawah Island *Charleston SC* 22 Apr (John Kotz) and 25 Apr (Aaron Given). If accepted, the report would provide SC with its second definitive record.

Roseate Spoonbill: One photographed in Barnwell *Barnwell* SC 3 May (Mary Jo Dawson) was unusual for a site away from the coast in spring. One photographed in northwestern Winston-Salem *Forsyth* NC 31 May (Nancy Tutterow) was especially unusual for a site in the Piedmont in spring, and a first for that county.

Swallow-tailed Kite: Migrants began showing up in SC in mid-March and were seen as far north as Southern Shores *Dare* NC by 24 Mar (Jim Gould). Individuals over Jordan Lake *Chatham* NC 28 Mar (Jonathan Cantrell) and over I-85 in *Anderson* SC 7 May (Neil Owens) were unusual for sites so far inland in spring. One seen building a nest in the Green Swamp *Brunswick* NC 3 Apr (Derb Carter) was notable, as there are only a few nesting records for NC, the first from 2013.

Golden Eagle: An immature seen in flight over J. Morgan Futch Game Land *Tyrrell* NC 11 Apr (Ricky Davis) was rather late for a site in the coastal plain.

Cooper's Hawk: Three active nests were noted along the Outer Banks *Dare* NC in late spring, in Corolla, in Southern Shores, and on Roanoke Island (*fide* Jeff Lewis). Breeding along the coast is rare though increasing.

Mississippi Kite: Individuals over Biltmore Estate *Buncombe* NC 15 May (Seth Buddy) and Beaver Lake *Buncombe* NC 29 May (Simon Thompson) were unusual for the mountain region in spring. 80+ over fields along Governor's Rd in *Brunswick* NC 15 May (Sam Cooper) was a notable count for NC.

Snowy Owl: One seen on a jetty at the Cedar Island Ferry Terminal *Carteret* NC 24 Mar (Carolyn & Don Hoss, *fide* John Fussell) was almost certainly the same individual seen on the nearby Core Banks from early February until 23 Mar (Michael Parrish). One photographed at Raleigh-Durham International Airport *Wake* NC 12 Apr (*fide* Carolina Raptor Center) was both very unusual for an inland site outside a major irruption year and also quite late.

Ash-throated Flycatcher: One photographed along Link Rd at Alligator River NWR *Dare* NC 4 Mar (John Lynch) was unusual for spring. It is likely that bird spent the entire winter at that site.

Western Kingbird: One seen and photographed along Snow Mill Dr in *Spartanburg* SC 3 May (Andrew Dettro, m. obs.) was a great find for spring. Almost all sightings in the Carolinas are made in fall and early winter.

Gray Kingbird: Individuals were seen at North Pond at Pea Island NWR *Dare* NC 16-17 Apr (Ben Jessup, m. obs.) and on a powerline in Ocean Isle Beach *Brunswick* NC 12 May (Mark LaRose).



*Gray Kingbird, 17 Apr 2021, Pea Island NWR, Dare County, NC.
Photo by Jeff Lewis*

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher: One returned to the traditional nesting site near the Rock Hill-York County Airport *York* SC by 27 Mar (Marcus & Cheryl Morris) and two were there by 17 Apr (Judy Walker). One was seen along Thompson Creek Rd in *Spartanburg* SC, at the same site where a pair was seen last year, 18 May into June (Neil Owens, m. obs.). Individual migrants were found along Lighthouse Rd in Buxton *Dare* NC 2 Apr (Brice Sweeney), at Bear Island WMA *Colleton* SC 22 Apr (Tom Riley), and in Kitty Hawk *Dare* NC 22 May (Jonathan Cooley).

Fork-tailed Flycatcher: Pending review by the SC BRC is the report with photographs of an apparent juvenile Fork-tailed Flycatcher at Dobbins Farm *Anderson* SC 28-29 May (George McHenry, m. obs.). Interestingly, a Fork-tailed Flycatcher was seen at this same site on 21 May 2017.

Olive-sided Flycatcher: Individuals were reported at seven sites from 5 May through 19 May, with one in Apex *Wake* NC 14-15 May (Susan Campbell, Steve Shultz, m. obs.) being the easternmost.

Alder Flycatcher: Individuals heard calling at separate sites in *Forsyth* NC 15 May and 17 May (John Haire) were good finds for the Piedmont.

Willow Flycatcher: One at Valle Crucis Community Park *Watauga* NC 21 Apr (Paul Laurent, Silas Powell, et al.) was early. Individuals heard calling on Roanoke Island *Dare* NC 27 May (Jeff Lewis) and at the Little Kinnakeet Lifesaving Station *Dare* NC 31 May (Daniel Irons) were good finds for the Outer Banks.

Say's Phoebe: Pending review by the SC BRC is the report with photographs of an apparent Say's Phoebe along the Pitt St Causeway *Charleston* SC 4 May (Tom Riley). This sighting was unusually late—all previous reports in the Carolinas are from the period from September through April.

Warbling Vireo: Very unusual for the Outer Banks *Dare* NC in spring were two along the Duck Park Boardwalk 9 May (Jeff Lewis), one along Park Rd in Frisco 11 May and 21 May (Daniel Irons), and one at Nags Head Woods 14 May (Irons).

Red-eyed Vireo: One photographed at Saluda Shoals Park *Lexington* SC 19 Mar (John Tjaarda) was somewhat early.

Yellow-green Vireo: Pending review by the NC BRC is the report with photographs of an apparent Yellow-green Vireo at Nags Head Woods *Dare* NC 14-15 May (Daniel Irons, m. obs.). If accepted, the report would provide NC with its first record of this tropical vireo.



*Apparent
Yellow-green Vireo,
15 May 2021,
Nags Head Woods
Ecological Preserve,
Dare County, NC.
Photo by Max
Nootbaar.*

Black-whiskered Vireo: Interestingly, at least two were seen in *Dare* NC in early May—one along Buxton Woods Trail 30 Apr (Daniel Irons), likely the same individual along nearby Open Ponds Trail 4 May (Irons), and a different individual on the Hatteras Inlet Peninsula 6-15 May (Irons).

Loggerhead Shrike: Successful nesting was confirmed in Morehead City *Carteret* NC when an adult was seen feeding two juveniles 28 May (John Fussell). Nesting in that county has become very rare over the last several decades.

Common Raven: Pending review by the NC BRC is the report with photographs of an apparent Common Raven at Oregon Inlet Campground *Dare* NC 17 Apr (Dawn Lloyd, m. obs.). One photographed at the adjacent Oregon Inlet Fishing Center 19 Apr (Karen Lebing) and one seen 40 miles to the south at Cape Point 22-24 Apr (Daniel Irons, m. obs.) were likely that same individual. If accepted, the report would provide the first record of this species at a site along the coast in 90 years and first ever for that county.

Cliff Swallow: Five along the Catawba River in *York* SC 14 Mar (Gretchen Locy) were rather early.

Sedge Wren: One at Lake Lure *Rutherford* NC 21 Apr (Bill Hooker, Mike Resch) was a first for that county.

Varied Thrush: The individual seen in a yard in Cary *Wake* NC throughout the winter was last seen 31 Mar (*fide* Susan Campbell).

Evening Grosbeak: Grosbeaks lingered from this winter's irruption until mid-May at several sites. Latest were individuals in northwestern *Wake* NC 17 May (Nancy Pinter) and at Lake Orange *Orange* NC 18 May (Brian Bockhahn).

Grasshopper Sparrow: 12 at the Greenville WTP *Pitt* NC 15 May (Howard Vainright) and 11 along Harlees Bridge Rd in *Dillon* SC 2 Jun (Shawn Smolen-Morton) were good counts for those areas.

Lark Sparrow: Sightings included one continuing from winter in Hemingway *Williamsburg* SC 6 Apr (Jay Chandler), one to two along Champion Rd in *York* SC 28 Apr through 6 May (Greg Hays, m. obs.), and one at the old lighthouse site in Buxton *Dare* NC 4-8 May (Daniel Irons, m. obs.).

Clay-colored Sparrow: Individuals were seen in a yard on Folly Island *Charleston* SC 21 Mar (Jarvis Baker), at Eastside Park *Pitt* NC 23 Mar (Howard Vainright), along College Rd in *Edgecombe* NC 1 Apr (Ann Brice), at North River Preserve *Carteret* NC 12 Apr (Edward Jenkins), in a yard near Lake Wheeler *Wake* NC 23-24 Apr (Stacy & Natalie Barbour), and in a yard in Wake Forest *Wake* NC 25-26 Apr (Jeremy Wrenn).



Clay-colored Sparrow, 24 Apr 2021, Wake County, NC.

Photo Stacy Barbour.

Dark-eyed Junco: One seen and photographed in southwestern *Moore* NC 21-31 May (Jeff Beane) was quite late for a site outside of the mountains.

LeConte's Sparrow: One seen and photographed at Riverside Park in Spruce Pine *Mitchell* NC 22-23 Apr (John Britt) was a great find for the mountain region and a first for that county.

Lincoln's Sparrow: One along Pokeberry Creek in northern *Chatham* NC 18 May (Mark Goodwin) was somewhat late.

Bobolink: 1000 along Snow Mill Dr in *Spartanburg* SC 4 May (Matthew Campbell) was a notable count.

Bullock's Oriole: A female was photographed at a feeder in *Durham* NC 17-18 Mar (Amanda McGuire). An adult male was photographed at a feeder in Moncks Corner *Berkeley* SC 3-4 Apr (Stephen Thomas).

Brewer's Blackbird: Sightings included one or more at Dobbins Farm *Anderson* SC from early February through 21 Mar (m. obs.), a male individual along Zion Church Rd in southeastern *Union* NC 26-29 Mar (Martina Nordstrand, m. obs.), and a female individual at Biltmore Estate *Buncombe* NC 27 Mar (Mike Resch), 8 Apr (Casey Girard, m. obs.), and 25 Apr (Aaron Steed, m. obs.).

Worm-eating Warbler: One at Alligator River NWR *Dare* NC 28 Mar (Jeff Lewis) was somewhat early.

Blue-winged Warbler: Two were seen building a nest in the Norco Tract of Sandy Mush Game Land *Buncombe* NC 28 May (Kristin Hillegas, Krista Kelly, et al.).

Prothonotary Warbler: One along the Six Mile Creek Greenway *Mecklenburg* NC 19 Mar (Wayne Covington) was rather early.

Swainson's Warbler: One seen along the Edisto Nature Trail *Colleton* SC 28 Mar (Tate Curry) and photographed 29 Mar (Elizabeth Lyons) was early.

Tennessee Warbler: Individuals in Wilmington *New Hanover* NC 30 Apr (Sam Cooper), at the northern end of Pea Island NWR *Dare* NC 14 May (Daniel Irons), and on the Hatteras Inlet Peninsula *Dare* NC 24 May (Irons) were unusual for sites along the coast in spring.

Connecticut Warbler: Individuals were seen or heard singing in the Norco Tract of Sandy Mush Game Land *Buncombe* NC 11-16 May (Aaron Steed, m. obs.), at Fants Grove WMA *Anderson* SC 13 May (Kevin Kubach), at Jackson Park *Henderson* NC 14 May (Kevin Burke), at Rosman Community Park *Transylvania* NC 14-16 May (Nathaniel Axtell, m. obs.), and at Cliff Pitts WMA *Laurens* SC 17 May (Kubach). Notably, two were reported in the Norco Tract of Sandy Mush Game Land 14 May (Jeffrey Bailey) and 16 May (Seth Buddy).

Mourning Warbler: Two were reported this spring—individuals at Historic Bethabara Park *Forsyth* NC 10 May (John Haire, m. obs.) and in the Brevard Hospital Fields *Transylvania* NC 12 May (Michael Plauché).

Cape May Warbler: An adult male photographed at Coker Arboretum *Orange* NC 6 Mar (Donna Wilder) likely over-wintered in that area, as it was too early for a returning spring migrant. Interestingly, two over-wintered at that same site Feb-Mar 2017.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: A singing adult male photographed on Daniel Island *Charleston* SC 25 May (Tate Curry) was rather late for the SC Lowcountry.

Townsend's Warbler: One seen and photographed at Huntington Beach SP *Georgetown* SC 13-14 Mar (Steve Patterson, m. obs.) was almost certainly the same individual seen at that site 22 Dec 2020 through 6 Jan 2021. One wonders how this bird remained undetected for so long.

Wilson's Warbler: Three at Miller Park *Forsyth* NC 9 May (Ron Morris, et al.) was a notable count for a single site in the Carolinas.

Western Tanager: Individual males were photographed in yards in southwestern *Wake* NC 1 Mar (Jessica Williams) and just east of Charlotte *Mecklenburg* NC 7 Mar (Jack Stutts). A male visiting a feeder in northern Raleigh *Wake* NC during the winter, first identified 24 Mar, continued at that site until the very late date of 30 Apr (Patty McQuillan).

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: There were multiple reports of early returning spring migrants this year, the earliest being three in a yard in northern *Chatham* NC 26 Mar (Alan Avakian) and two in a yard in southeastern Charlotte *Mecklenburg* NC 29 Mar (Janet Palmer). This species does not typically show up in the Carolinas until mid-to-late April.

Lazuli Bunting: Pending review by the NC BRC is the report of a Lazuli Bunting seen just west of Boone *Watauga* NC 9 May (Skip Sinanian).

Painted Bunting: A female or immature male photographed at a feeder at Snowbird Mountain Lodge *Graham* NC 13 May (Emilie Travis, et al.) was very unusual for the mountain region. The report is pending review by the NC BRC, as the species is on the review list for the mountain region.

Dickcissel: An adult male photographed in Washington *Beaufort* NC 27 Mar (Betsy Kane) was unusual for early spring. Peak counts at known nesting sites included five along Snow Mill Dr in *Spartanburg* SC 3-4 May (Michael Robertson, m. obs.), seven including six singing males at North River Preserve *Carteret* NC 23 May (John Fussell, et al.), and 20 at Dobbins Farm *Anderson* SC 30 May (Richard Taylor). Suggestive of attempted nesting were up to seven including up to five singing males along Zion Church Rd in southeastern *Union* NC 5 May into summer (Martina Nordstrand, m. obs.), two pairs including a female carrying nesting material at the Greenville WTP *Pitt* NC 15 May (Howard Vainright), and two singing males in southeastern *Stokes* NC 29-30 May (Tony & Cara Woods). Individuals at Biltmore Estate *Buncombe* NC 5 May (Mike Resch, m. obs.) and at Mills River Park *Henderson* NC 16 May (Kevin Burke, Simon Thompson, m. obs.) were unusual for the mountain region.

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

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