

The Chat

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South Carolina

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Briefs for the Files

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General Field Notes

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Cover: Slaty-backed Gull in Horry County, NC. Photograph by Christopher E. Hill.

First Record of Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*) for South Carolina

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Introduction

I report the first documented occurrence of Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*) in South Carolina. The record was accepted by the South Carolina Bird Record Committee in June 2022 (decision archived at Carolina Bird Club website <https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/brc/SC/reports.html>). Slaty-backed Gull becomes the sixteenth gull species documented for South Carolina.

Slaty-backed Gulls breed in Siberia and winter largely in Japan, North Korea, and South Korea (Malling Olson 2018). They are regular but rare in Alaska, occur annually on the Pacific Coast of North America, and annually in the last decade in the Great Lakes region, but are rare strays to the rest of the continent, especially south of about 37° North (McKee et al. 2014).

The only previous record in the Carolinas was in North Carolina on 16 February 2003 (LeGrand et al. 2005). In the rest of the southeastern U.S. prior to this sighting, the only accepted records were two from Florida (Fig. 1).

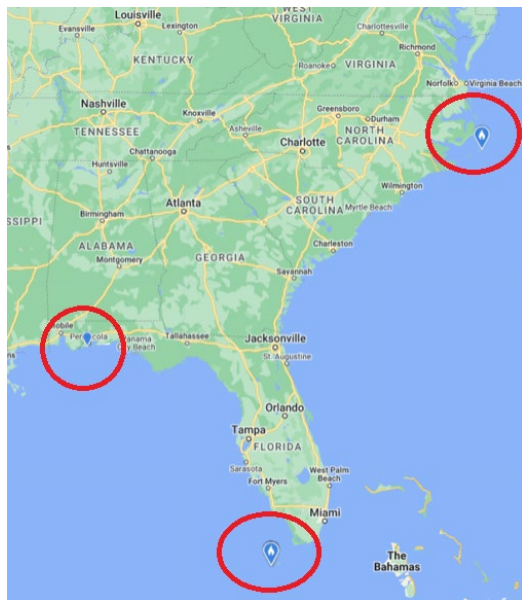


Figure 1. Prior records of Slaty-backed Gull in eBird in the southeastern United States. Red-circled, blue markers indicate three previous occurrences. Image provided by eBird (www.ebird.org), created 12 May 2022.

Observations

On 3 January 2022, while participating in a trial run of a new Christmas Bird Count centered on Lewis Ocean Bay Heritage Preserve in Horry County, South Carolina, I visited the Horry County landfill, off Route 90 east of Conway, SC. In a flock composed mostly of about 1500 Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) with half a dozen each of Lesser Black-backed (*L. fuscus*) and Great Black-backed Gulls (*L. marinus*) and numerous Ring-billed (*L. delawarensis*) and Laughing Gulls (*Leucophaeus atricilla*), I noticed an adult gull with a medium dark mantle that struck me as different from the Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

I approached the gull and noted its pink legs and feet. Perhaps due to strong winds, gusting to over 50 kph, the gulls seemed to be content to let me approach fairly closely. Only those gulls within about 15m lifted off to resettle a little farther away, so I was able to obtain many photographs of the bird that showed field marks consistent with Slaty-backed Gull (Figs 2-8).



Figure 2. Slaty-backed Gull at Horry County, SC, Landfill on 3 January 2022, with Laughing Gulls (foreground) and Herring Gulls (background). Note medium gray mantle, straight-sided bill, tan head mottling, broad white tertial crescent and pink legs. On the folded primaries note that the fourth white primary tip from the end of the wing (P7) appears as a double bump of white, which is the primary tip of P7 next to the white tongue on P8. The same pattern is visible on P6-P7 just proximal.



Figure 3. Slaty-backed Gull in flight. In this underexposed photo, note the wide white trailing edge to the secondaries, the head mottling, and the large white mirror on P10 (contacting the white apical primary spot) and the medium sized white mirror on P9, as well as the head mottling and bill shape. Photo from Horry County, SC, Landfill on 3 January 2022.



Figure 4. Slaty-backed Gull taking flight with Herring Gulls. This photo shows the “string of pearls” white tongue-tips on the primaries of the far wing particularly well. Photo from Horry County, SC, Landfill on 3 January 2022.



Figure 5. Note that the underside of the primaries appears gray on the Slaty-backed Gull, not black because the black color on each primary is largely confined to the outer web, unlike, for example, the underside in Herring Gulls. Photo from Horry County, SC, Landfill on 3 January 2022.



Figure 6. Slaty-backed Gull with Lesser Black-backed, Laughing, Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. This photo shows the mantle color as approximately as dark as the mantle of the Lesser Black-back in front of it, but the Slaty-backed's gray is slightly more leaden, and the Lesser Black-back's mantle is slightly bluer gray. Photo from Horry County, SC, Landfill on 3 January 2022.



Figure 7. Slaty-backed showing gray iris with barely visible pale pink orbital ring. Photo from Horry County, SC, Landfill on 3 January 2022.



Figure 8. Slaty-backed Gull (far right) with Great Black-backed (far left) and Herring Gulls. Although blurry, this photo shows differences in the head and bill shape and markings, and the mantle shade, between the Slaty-backed and an adult Great Black-backed Gull. Photo from Horry County, SC, Landfill on 3 January 2022.

The important features visible on this gull include 1) size approximately that of a Herring Gull, with 2) pink legs and feet; 3) a straight-sided bill, not thick or bulbous as on a Great Black-backed or Western Gull (*Larus occidentalis*); 4) a medium dark mantle and upper wing, about as dark as that of the race of Lesser Black-backed Gull that winters in eastern North America (*L. f. graellsii*), and paler than an adult Great Black-backed; 5) a broad white trailing edge to the secondaries; 6) black in the outer primaries separated from the gray in the proximal part of those primaries by white tongue-tips in a “string of pearls” pattern; 7) large white apical spots on each primary, and 8) considerable tan mottling on the head and neck, typical of a bird in winter plumage. The eye on Slaty-backs is described as “pale yellow, sometimes dark-peppered” (Malling Olsen 2018). The irides of this bird were not yellow but gray with pink orbital rings. This eye color is found regularly on Slaty-backs (Alvaro Jaramillo, pers. comm.), and this exact color combination can be found in photographs of Slaty-backs wintering in Japan (see, e.g., Cowton 2006).

The bird continued to be seen at the Horry County landfill by many observers (57 total reports to eBird) through 8 January 2022, but apparently was not seen after that date despite further visits from birders.

Discussion

With large white-headed gulls, not only is there much within-species variability, but most taxa hybridize at least occasionally; some, routinely (Hoffman et al. 1978). In the last two decades many advanced guides and articles have been published covering gull identification, but a firm identification of a vagrant such as Slaty-backed Gull in South Carolina depends on the combination of many features.

Of the most likely species for confusion, Great Black-backed has a darker mantle, a clean white head in winter and a stouter bill; Western has a clean white head in winter, a very

stout bill and less white in the wingtip; and Lesser Black-backed has yellow legs and a more slender and attenuated body shape, with head markings in winter most often dusky streaks rather than tan mottling.

The taxon that could appear most similar to a Slaty-backed, I believe, would be a Great Black-back x Herring Gull hybrid, which could perhaps duplicate the mantle tone, body structure and pink legs. However, birds that have been identified as this combination occur mostly on the Great Lakes rather than the East Coast, and I have not been able to find photographs of any that have the broad white trailing edge to the wing typical of Slaty-backed, as shown in this bird.

A Slaty-backed Gull that appeared in Maryland on 14 January 2022 (Carney 2022), Maryland's first record of the species, shares many features (bill shape and coloration, head markings, details of primary patterning) with the South Carolina bird and may have been the same individual.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the management and staff of the Horry County Solid Waste Authority for allowing birder access to their facility, and particularly to Wayne Martin, who arranged more extensive access for the Christmas Bird Count. I very much appreciate the correspondents on the Facebook group North American Gulls, including its founder Amar Ayyash, who have always been generous in sharing their expertise. I thank Alvaro Jaramillo in particular for pointing out several field characters visible in these photos of the South Carolina bird which I would have otherwise missed. I am indebted to Gene Knight of the Mississippi Ornithological Society, who helped me track down the history of a 1993 Slaty-backed Gull report in Mississippi, which was originally accepted but later rejected and removed from the state list.

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BRIEFS FOR THE FILES

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(All dates Summer 2022, 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, **et al.** – and others, **Ft** – Fort, **m. obs.** – multiple observers, **NC** – North Carolina, **NWR** – National Wildlife Refuge, **Rd** – Road, **SC** – South Carolina, **SP** – State Park

All italicized place names are counties.

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck: 19 in flight over Ocean Isle Beach Brunswick NC 4 Jul (Taylor Piephoff) were unusual over the ocean and a notable count for NC. Two photographed at Lake Surf Moore NC 11 Jun (John German, m. obs.) were a first for that county. Most other reports from NC this summer involved pairs or small flocks at sites on

and around the Albemarle / Pamlico peninsula. Farthest inland in SC was one in Clemson *Pickens* 22 Jul (Colby Denison).

Northern Shoveler: A drake photographed in the Horsepen Creek arm of Lake Brandt *Guilford* NC 18 Jun (Elizabeth & Henry Link) was unusual for summer, especially for an inland site.

Northern Pintail: A seemingly healthy drake lingered on Oak Hollow Lake *Guilford* NC from 26 Apr through 9 Jul (Andrew Thornton, m. obs.).

Ring-necked Duck: A drake summered on a small pond along US-1 in southern *Lee* NC (Jeff Beane, Stephanie Horton, m. obs.) for a sixth year in a row.

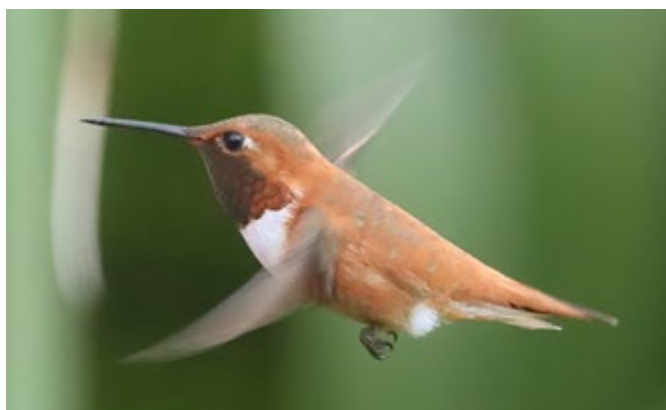
Common Eider: Latest to depart this summer was one at Hatteras Inlet *Dare* NC 26 Jun (Davis Balser, Matt Janson).

Surf Scoter: Six, two drakes and four hens, photographed at Ft Fisher *New Hanover* NC 11 Jul (Stacy & Natalie Barbour) were notable for mid-summer.

Common Merganser: Counts of family groups on rivers in the NC mountains included ten on the Green River in *Polk* 25 Jun (Aimee Tomcho), 14 on the Tuckasegee River in *Jackson* 14-16 Jul (Tom Quetchenbach) and in neighboring *Swain* 22-26 Jul (Milton Hobbs, m. obs.), and seven on the South Toe River in *Yancey* 19 Jul (Debbie Segal).

White-winged Dove: Individuals visited feeders in northeastern *Randolph* NC 12 Jun (Ginger Walter), in North Myrtle Beach *Horry* SC 12-15 Jun (Deb Winter), and in Waves *Dare* NC 18 Jul (Karen Lebing).

Rufous Hummingbird: An adult male photographed at a feeder in Southport *Brunswick* NC 10-11 Jul (Carol & Robert Cowan, David Wilson) was very unusual for the summer period.



Rufous
Hummingbird,
11 July 2022,
Southport,
Brunswick
County, NC.
Photograph by
David Wilson.

Clapper Rail: One photographed along the edge of Watson Lake *Moore* NC 19 Jun (Kate Hendricks) was very unusual for an inland site in summer. Typically, sightings at sites away from the coast only occur in spring or fall.

King Rail: 32 at Mackay Island NWR *Currituck* NC 14 Jun (Nicolas Main) was a notable count.

Limpkin: Breeding was confirmed for a third year in a row at the upper end of Goose Creek Reservoir *Berkeley* SC when four juveniles were seen there with two adults 2 Jun (Craig Watson). Up to five continued through the summer at the site in southern *Horry* SC where breeding was confirmed in May 2021 and again in May 2022. One seen and photographed at the upper end of Lake Robinson *Greenville* SC 1 Jun through 18 Jul (Frank Erk, m. obs.) was the only sighting made away from those two known breeding sites.

Sandhill Crane: Individual adults photographed in Newport *Carteret* NC 14 Jun (Rachel McGee) and at Alligator River NWR *Dare* NC 18 Jun (Betty Sue Cohen) were unusual for summer. It is likely both reports involved the same wandering individual.

Black-necked Stilt: One at Lake Surf *Moore* NC 9 Jun (Jacob Clark) was a great find inland and a first for that county. Farthest inland in SC were five at Horse Creek Water Treatment Plant (restricted access) *Aiken* 9 Jul (Peter Stangel). That site, along with nearby sites in *Aiken* and neighboring *Richmond* Georgia, has become a somewhat regular stop-over for small numbers of stilts, mostly in May and July-August, since the species was first noted in that area in 2004.

Pacific Golden-Plover: One seen and photographed at the Salt Pond at Cape Point *Dare* NC 6 Jul (Daniel Irons) through 30 Jul (m. obs.) was almost certainly the same individual seen at that site for the past three summers. Interestingly, this year's arrival date, 6 Jul, was the same as in 2020 and only two days off last year's arrival date, 8 Jul.

Upland Sandpiper: Like most years, southbound migrants began trickling through in late July. Sightings included one at the Salt Pond at Cape Point *Dare* NC 23 Jul (Daniel Irons), two at the Manteo Airport *Dare* NC 27-28 Aug (Andrew Thornton, m. obs.), and five at Vandemark Sod in *Nash* NC 31 Jul (Ricky Davis).

Long-billed Curlew: One on East Shackleford Banks *Carteret* NC 25 Jun (Jamie Adams, et al.) was the only one reported this period.

Ruff: A molting adult male at Mackay Island NWR *Currituck* NC 18 Jun (Nicholas Main) was very unusual for June. One wonders if this individual was the same molting adult male seen and photographed in *Georgetown* SC three weeks earlier 28-30 May (James Fillmore, m. obs.).

Stilt Sandpiper: One seen at the Salt Pond at Cape Point *Dare* NC 24 Jun (Daniel Irons) was somewhat early.

Sanderling: One at Buckhorn Reservoir *Wilson* NC 24 Jul (Ricky Davis) and two at that site 29 Jul (Trevor Sleight) were the only inland reports this period.

White-rumped Sandpiper: A higher than usual number of sightings were made in early June, some of which were likely related to the offshore passage of Tropical Storm Alex. A few of the higher counts included 46 at Cape Point *Dare* NC 4 Jun (Daniel Irons), 17 in northern *Beaufort* SC 9 Jun (Andy Jones, Chris Marsh, Jake Zadik), and 11 at a pond along Burma Rd in *Lexington* SC 11 Jun (Charlie Spencer).

Buff-breasted Sandpiper: One at the Salt Pond at Cape Point *Dare* NC 28-30 Jul (Anne Ruben, m. obs.) was somewhat early.

Pectoral Sandpiper: One photographed at the northern end of Coddle Creek Reservoir *Cabarrus* NC 11 Jun (Taylor Piephoff, Greg Hays) was quite late, especially for a site so far from the coast.

Long-billed Dowitcher: One at North Pond at Pea Island NWR *Dare* NC 17 Jun (Heather Buttonow) was unusual for mid-summer.

Willet: Five in the Horsepen Creek arm of Lake Brandt *Guilford* NC 10 Jul (Matt Wangerin) was a remarkable count for the Piedmont region in summer.

Wilson's Phalarope: Sightings involved three at the Savannah Spoil Site (restricted access) *Jasper* SC 8 Jul (Steve Calver), one at J. Morgan Futch Game Land *Tyrrell* NC 12 Jul (Matt Janson), one at Pea Island NWR *Dare* NC 12-13 Jul (Justin Hall, m. obs.), and one at Pea Island NWR 28 Jul (Andrew Thornton).

Red-necked Phalarope: Two on Kiawah Island *Charleston* SC 6 Jun (William Gay) were notable for the SC coast. One along the Pitt Street Causeway *Charleston* SC 11 Jul (Elizabeth Anderegg, m. obs.) was very unusual for the SC coast in mid-summer.

South Polar Skua: Amazingly, skuas were seen in flight over the ocean from Cape Point *Dare* NC on five dates this summer—on 7 Jun (Daniel Irons), 8 Jun (Irons), 21 Jun (Andrew Thornton), 26 Jun (Irons), and 3 Jul (Irons).

Pomarine Jaeger: A total of 22 in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC during an all-day ocean-watch 7 Jun (Daniel Irons) was an amazing count from shore.

Long-tailed Jaeger: Seven in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC during an all-day ocean-watch 7 Jun (Daniel Irons) was a notable count.

Dovekie: A moribund individual photographed on the beach of Portsmouth Island *Carteret* NC 25 Jun (Will Britton) was extremely unusual for summer.

Sabine's Gull: One seen in southbound flight off Jennette's Pier *Dare* NC 10 Jul (Matt Janson) and, very likely the same individual, from the ferry at Hatteras Inlet *Dare* NC 11

Jul (Daniel Irons) was extremely unusual for the summer period. There is only one previous record of this species in the Carolinas during the summer.

Laughing Gull: For a third summer in a row an immature bird was seen and photographed on Lake Norman *Mecklenburg* NC, this year 18 Jun (Patty Masten, et al.). Most sightings of this species at sites in the Piedmont region are made in spring and fall.

Heermann's Gull: An adult Heermann's Gull photographed on the beach at Hilton Head Island *Beaufort* SC 11 Jun (Chris Huffstickler, m. obs.) was almost certainly the same individual reported at multiple sites along the Atlantic coast the past couple of years.

Roseate Tern: Eight around the northern end of Pea Island NWR *Dare* NC 23 Jun (Daniel Irons) was a notable count for a site away from Cape Point.

Common Tern: Three on Lake Norman *Mecklenburg* NC 17 Jun and 30 Jul (Patty Masten, et al.) were unusual for the Piedmont region in summer.

Forster's Tern: Two on Lake Junaluska *Haywood* NC 12 Jul (Steve Patterson, m. obs.) were unusual for the mountain region and rather early for an inland site.

Royal Tern: One photographed in flight over Carolina Lake *Rockingham* NC 25 Jul (Marty Wall) was extremely unusual for a site in the Piedmont region when not following the passage of a tropical storm.

Black Skimmer: One photographed at Goose Creek Game Land *Beaufort* NC 2 Jul (Caleb Bronsink) was unusual for a site away from the coast and a first for that county.

Wilson's Storm-Petrel: The offshore passage of Tropical Storm Alex likely contributed to high from-shore counts made from Cape Point *Dare* NC 7-8 Jun, with 535 on 7 Jun (Daniel Irons) and 817 on 8 Jun (Irons).

Leach's Storm-Petrel: Two in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC 7 Jun (Daniel Irons) and 12 Jun (Ricky Davis) were notable from shore.

Cory's Shearwater: The offshore passage of Tropical Storm Alex contributed to high counts at Cape Point *Dare* NC 7-8 Jun, with 6127 on 7 Jun (Daniel Irons) and 3915 on 8 Jun (Irons).

Sooty Shearwater: One photographed resting on the beach of Kiawah Island *Charleston* SC 12 Jun (Aaron Given) was unusual for the SC coast.

Great Shearwater: This species was well-reported from shore this period, with the majority of sightings taking place around the offshore passage of Tropical Storm Alex 5-6 Jun and Tropical Storm Colin 2-3 Jul. The peak counts at Cape Point *Dare* NC were, during Alex, 1799 on 7 Jun (Daniel Irons), and, during Colin, an astounding 5532 on 2 Jul (Irons). Three found resting on the beach of Kiawah Island *Charleston* SC, 2 Jul (Aaron Given) was a notable count for SC. Not unusually, there were multiple reports of

moribund or emaciated/exhausted birds found on beaches this summer, mostly during periods following the passage of offshore weather systems.

Audubon's Shearwater: Two in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC during Tropical Storm Alex 7 Jun (Daniel Irons) and during Tropical Storm Colin 3 Jul (Irons) were notable as this shearwater species is only very rarely seen from shore.

Wood Stork: An immature individual photographed near Glendale *Spartanburg* SC 9 Jul (Neil Owens, m. obs.) was somewhat early for a site that far inland. Locally unusual were eight in a swampy area along Wiggins Mill Rd in *Wilson* NC 3 Jul (Ricky Davis) and 44 in *Edgecombe* NC 27 Jul (Trevor Sleight).

Magnificent Frigatebird: Multiple sightings, most of individuals, were made along the coast following changes in wind direction, primarily 1-2 Jun, 9-10 Jun, and 17-31 Jul. Two immatures photographed in flight together over Cape Point *Dare* NC 21 Jul (Chelsea Weithman, m. obs.) and, possibly the same pair, at Huntington Beach SP *Georgetown* SC 27 Jul (Teresa Kopec) were notable. Three immature birds photographed in flight together over Bald Head Island *Brunswick* NC 29 Jul (Jenna Albaugh, Callie Moyers, Bailey Parkhouse, et al.) were especially notable.

Masked Booby: Two were reported this summer—an adult photographed on the beach at Cape Lookout *Carteret* NC 1 Jun (Jon Altman) and an immature bird seen in eastbound flight off Cape Point *Dare* NC, following the offshore passage of Tropical Storm Alex, 7 Jun (Daniel Irons).

Anhinga: As usual, post-breeding dispersal resulted in sightings far inland of the species' breeding range. Farthest inland was one on Rhodhiss Lake *Burke* NC 22-24 Jul (Caroline Martin).

Neotropic Cormorant: Pending review by the NC BRC is the report with photographs of an apparent Neotropic Cormorant at Martin Marietta Park in New Bern *Craven* NC 30 Jul into fall (Trevor Sleight, m. obs.). If accepted, the report would provide the second record for NC.

Brown Pelican: Three photographed on Lake Hickory *Catawba* NC 7 Jun (*fide* Dwayne Martin) may have been the same three wandering pelicans seen on Lake Lure *Rutherford* NC in late May. Individuals on Lake Murray *Lexington* SC 14 Jul (Zach Steinhauser), over Lake Hartwell *Anderson* SC 23 Jul (*fide* Ann Bailes), and on Lake Norman *Mecklenburg* NC 27 Jul (Chris Huffstickler) were notable for inland sites.

Least Bittern: A pair successfully nested at Lake Conestee Nature Preserve *Greenville* SC, as, after the pair was seen at the site throughout June, a juvenile was photographed there 3 Jul (Simon Harvey, m. obs.). Individuals heard calling at Flat River Waterfowl Impoundment *Durham* NC 2-11 Jun (Larry Frauen, m. obs.) and along the Rocky River in western *Cabarrus* NC 5-8 Jun (Taylor Piephoff, et al.) were suggestive of attempted breeding at those sites.

Reddish Egret: Oddly, this summer's high count was also this summer's northernmost sighting—seven on Portsmouth Island *Carteret* NC 17 Jul (Daniel Irons).

Black-crowned Night-Heron: Breeding was confirmed in NC Piedmont for the first time when two recently-fledged juveniles were seen alongside four adults at Lake Twitty *Union* NC 13 Jun (Dennis Kent).

Roseate Spoonbill: Post-breeding dispersal began in mid-June with pairs at Lake Surf *Moore* NC 16 Jun through 9 Jul (John Bird, m. obs.) and in eastern Chapel Hill *Orange* NC 18 Jun (Teresa Noel, m. obs.) being the first inland sightings. Sightings made in the Piedmont region included two at the upper end of Jordan Lake *Chatham* NC 30 Jun through 13 Jul (Mark DiGiovanni, m. obs.), one at Lake Townsend *Guilford* NC 5-14 Jul (Amy Hanson, m. obs.), one near Glendale *Spartanburg* SC 9 Jul (Neil Owens), one at Lake Wheeler *Wake* NC 13 Jul into fall (Dale Lambert, m. obs.), one in Winston-Salem *Forsyth* NC 15 Jul (Cindy Trivette), three along the Broad River in *Fairfield* SC 16-20 Jul (David Dobson, m. obs.), one in *Greenville* SC 20 Jul (Dan Zankman), one along the Catawba River *Catawba* NC 20 Jul and 29 Jul (Caroline Martin), and one along Eighteenmile Creek *Anderson* SC 22 Jul (Kevin Kubach, m. obs.).

Swallow-tailed Kite: A total of 77 in flight over agricultural fields in northwestern *Pender* NC 4 Jul (Ricky Davis) was a remarkable concentration as well as the highest count ever made in NC. One wonders if any of these birds had nested nearby or had they all already dispersed from their breeding grounds? In mid-July kites began showing up at sites in the Piedmont with one over Lewisville *Forsyth* NC 18 Jul (Eric & Janet Scharling), six over an agricultural area in southeastern *Union* NC 18 Jul (Dennis Kent), four in *York* SC 24 Jul (Marcus & Cheryl Morris, m. obs.), and 12 in *Anderson* SC (Denise DuPon, et al.). By the end of July a few kites had dispersed all the way to the mountain region with one over Brevard *Transylvania* NC 29 Jul (Nathaniel Axtell), one over Cove Creek *Watauga* NC 30 Jul (Melanie Furr, et al.), one over the Blue Ridge Parkway in *McDowell* NC 30 Jul (Lucas Bobay), and four over Harmon Field *Polk* NC 31 Jul (Cheryl Day, m. obs.).



Swallow-tailed Kite,
5 July 2022,
northwestern
Pender County, NC.
Photograph by Kent
Fiala.

Northern Harrier: One lingered at the Voice of America site in *Beaufort* NC through most of the summer, from spring through 27 Jul (John McKay, Abbie Valine, m. obs.).

Mississippi Kite: One photographed in flight over Waves *Dare* NC 2 Jun (Karen Lebing) and, presumably the same individual, seen later that day over Cape Point *Dare* NC (Michael Gosselin, m. obs.) and Ocracoke *Hyde* NC (John Lynch), was unusual for the Outer Banks. Two immature birds photographed in Reidsville *Rockingham* NC 12 Jul (Marty Wall) were suggestive of nesting in that area.

Western Kingbird: One photographed along Long Curve Rd at Alligator River NWR *Dare* NC 17 Jul (Lee & Ryan Justice) was very unusual for the summer period.

Gray Kingbird: One seen along Dow Rd in Kure Beach *New Hanover* NC 2 Jun (Sam Cooper) may have been the same individual seen a few days earlier at nearby Ft Fisher 29-31 May (Jamie Adams, m. obs.).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher: The pair found on territory near the Amazon warehouse in Pineville *Mecklenburg* NC 8 May (Patty Masten, m. obs.) successfully nested at that site this summer, as four juveniles were seen alongside the two adults in late June (m. obs.). The pair seen along Williamson Rd in *York* SC for a second year in a row may have nested in that area, as three birds including up to two juveniles were intermittently reported through the summer (m. obs.). Breeding was likely unsuccessful at the traditional nesting site near the Rock Hill – York County Airport *York* SC as no more than two were reported at that site. Sightings away from suspected breeding sites involved individuals at Simpson Research Station *Anderson* SC 5 Jun (Linda Montgomery), along I-85 in *Cherokee* SC 21 Jun (Jeff Tell), at Shaw Air Force Base *Sumter* SC 25 Jun (Clare Ormesher), and in eastern *Burke* NC in late June and 1 Jul (*vide* Dwayne Martin).



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, 8 June 2022, Pineville, Mecklenburg County, NC.
Photograph by Kent Fiala.

Olive-sided Flycatcher: A singing male acted as if on territory in Pisgah National Forest in northeastern *Buncombe* NC along its border with *Yancey*, at ~ 5500 feet above sea level, 9-17 Jun (Kevin Caldwell, m. obs.), where audio-recorded and photographed by multiple observers. There still is no documented evidence of nesting by this species in the Carolinas.

Blue-headed Vireo: Six singing males at Ft Bragg (restricted access) in *Hoke* NC 8 Jun (Duncan Fraser) was a good count for that disjunct breeding population. Also in the Sandhills, successful nesting was confirmed in southwestern *Moore* NC where two juveniles were seen begging from an adult 25 Jul (Martina Nordstrand).

Common Raven: Six near the Martin Marietta Garner Quarry *Wake* NC 15 Jun (Clyde Sorenson) was a notable count for a site near the edge of the coastal plain.

Cliff Swallow: Notable counts were made at two under-bridge colonies on the Trent River in *Jones* NC—100 in Pollocksville 21 Apr (Will Bennett) and 70 in Oak Grove 16 Jun (David Allen). 12 were seen at the breeding colony where US-17 crosses the Roanoke River in Williamston *Martin* NC, first noted in 2014, 9 Jun (Steve Semanchuk, Liz Skiles). 20 in a colony where NC-33 crosses the Tar River in Tarboro *Edgecombe* NC 17 Jun (Patty McQuillan) were notable for that county. 1070 at the Modern Turf Farm in Rembert *Sumter* SC 24 Jul (Andrew Lydeard) was a remarkable concentration of post-breeding birds.

Swainson's Thrush: One recorded singing along Flannery Fork Rd in *Watauga* NC, at 3600 feet above sea level, 10 Jun (Sheryl McNair) was suggestive of attempted breeding in that area.

Purple Finch: A singing male photographed and audio-recorded in a yard in Waves *Dare* NC 1 Jun (Karen Lebing) was extremely late.

Bachman's Sparrow: One photographed along Pineland Forest Rd in western *Newberry* SC 30 Jun (Scott Harris) was unusual for that area.

Lark Sparrow: The pair acting as if on territory along Champion Rd in southern *York* SC in late May continued at that site through 16 Jul (Tim Kalbach). It is likely that the pair nested there, as at least one was seen carrying food on 25 Jun (Marcus & Cheryl Morris) and 5 Jul (Irvin Pitts).

White-throated Sparrow: One photographed under a feeder in Wilmington *New Hanover* NC 14 Jun (Chelsea Bullock) was very late to depart.

Louisiana Waterthrush: Individuals photographed in Emerald Isle *Carteret* NC 4 Jul (Georgia & Randy Mason, *vide* John Fussell) and at Pine Island Audubon Sanctuary *Currituck* NC 18 Jul (Matt Janson, Patty Masten) were unusual for those barrier islands, likely early migrants.

Swainson's Warbler: Three, two adults and an attendant juvenile, mist-netted at a banding project in southern *Randolph* NC in July (John Gerwin) likely nested in that area.

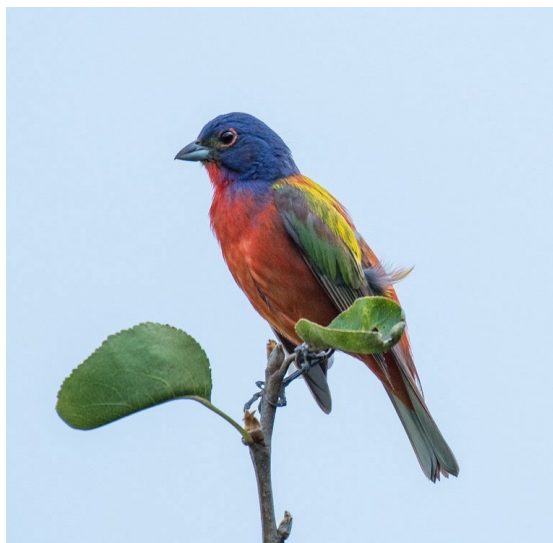
Tennessee Warbler: One seen near Micaville *Yancey* NC 30 Jul (Lucas Bobay) was quite early.

Blackburnian Warbler: An adult male photographed at Pea Island NWR *Dare* NC 2 Jun (Michael Schall) was quite late.

Black-throated Blue Warbler: A female photographed at Hunting Island SP *Beaufort* SC 7 Jun (Jenn Clementoni) was very late.

Black-throated Green Warbler: Four singing males at Hanging Rock SP *Stokes* NC 1 Jun (Nan Dewire) were likely attempting to breed at that site.

Painted Bunting: A singing adult male seen by many at Dorothea Dix Park *Wake* NC 17 Jul through mid-August (m. obs.) was unusual for that area.



Painted Bunting, 23 July 2022,
Dorothea Dix Park, Raleigh,
Wake County, NC. Photograph
by Liling Warren.

Dickcissel: Counts at known/suspected breeding sites included four, three singing males and one female, along Howerton Rd in *Guilford* NC 2 Jul (Fleeta Chauvigne, et al.) and three singing males along Mount Olive Rd just north of Cowpens *Spartanburg* SC 29-30 Jul (Steve Patterson, m. obs.). A singing adult male in northwestern *Chatham* NC 6-12 Jun (Roger Shaw, m. obs.) was locally unusual. A singing adult male at a park in *Pasquotank* NC for a second summer in a row, this year 21 Jun through 2 Jul (Greg Hudson, m. obs.), was suggestive of attempted breeding at that site.

Fifty Years Ago in The Chat

Steve Shultz

The September 1972 issue of *The Chat* featured a black and white photograph of a basic plumaged Ruddy Turnstone on the cover. Comparison of Chats from the early 70s to today highlights significant improvements in camera and optics technology, as well as the relative ease in handling of modern electronic photographs. The September 1972 issue contained a General Field Note on the first North Carolina record of Curlew Sandpiper. No photographs of the bird were included in the article, and the curlew was collected as definitive proof of occurrence in the state. Conversely, the Fall 2022 issue contains a General Field Note on the first South Carolina record of Slaty-backed Gull that includes multiple color photographs. Due in great part to the advances in photography and the increased number of field observers with cameras, collection of birds is no longer necessary to document records.

The 1972 edition's lead article examined the occurrence of Swallow-tailed Kites in the southern Appalachians, noting that the species could formerly be found with regularity north along the Mississippi Valley to Minnesota and Wisconsin. The article concluded that prior to 1900, Swallow-tailed Kites occurred fairly regularly in "portions of western North Carolina during the late summer and early autumn months".

An article summarizing spring bird counts in 1972 noted that two Black Rails were flushed at Wrightsville Beach, NC; Harry and Edmund LeGrand noted two occupied Yellow-crowned Night-Heron nests at Bodie Island, NC; gulls and Common Tern were seen at a newly-created 20,000 acre reservoir in Rocky Mount, NC; and in Charlotte, NC, Canada Geese successfully fledged two goslings.

Finally, Wake County's first record of Snow Goose was published, a sighting of 10 birds in the eastern part of that county.

Did You Know?

Full copies of *The Chat* dating back to the very first issue, March 1937, are available for viewing online. Find these and more at:

<https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/chat/>



The Chat

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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>.

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