

## GENERAL NOTES

BIBB, BLECKLEY, MACON, AND MONROE COUNTY BIRD RECORDS IN 2004 AFTER HURRICANE FRANCES AND HURRICANE IVAN, INCLUDING BLACK-NECKED STILT, GULL-BILLED TERN, SOOTY TERN, AND BLACK SKIMMER -- The hurricane season of 2004 produced an unrivaled variety of coastal and pelagic species in Middle Georgia. Hurricane Frances made landfall on 5 September in Florida, and Hurricane Ivan made landfall in Alabama on 16 September 2004 (National Hurricane Center, [www.nhc.noaa.gov](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov); Fig. 1). These hurricanes precipitated 4 new Middle Georgia birds: Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*), Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*), Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*), and Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*). Additionally, the following 8 species records were notable because of high numbers or casual occurrence reported from the same area of the state: Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*), Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*), Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*), Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio martinica*), Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*), Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*), Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*), and Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*). Several of these reports were unpublished until this note.

Hurricane Frances made landfall on the east coast of Florida with approximately 168 kph winds. On 6 September, Frances, by then a tropical storm, had crossed the peninsula, moved into the Gulf of Mexico, and was again making landfall, this time on the Florida Panhandle (National Hurricane Center, [www.nhc.noaa.gov](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov); Fig. 1). The northeast-bound storm passed through Georgia on 7 September. After Tropical Storm Frances left Georgia, the weather was sunny and warm by 9 September, the day Jerry Amerson and I observed 4 unusual terns at Lake Tobesofkee from Lower Thomaston Road where it crosses the lake in Bibb County. The observation period started at approximately 1830 h and lasted less than 30 min. One tern approached us to within 100 m, and 3 were seen at a distance of several hundred meters. I observed the terns with my Leica 10 x 42 BA binoculars and Leica Televid 77-mm spotting scope over the large, open body of water at the northwest part of the lake. I used The Sibley Guide to Birds (Sibley, D.A. 2000. New York [NY]: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.) to assist me with identifying field marks.

My notes describe the terns as “bigger than the Forster's & Black Terns,” they had dark napes, “white forehead[s],” and dark lores. My sketches show a slender, pointed bill, and my notes describe “very dark upperparts” when the birds were over the water. Jerry Amerson described the terns in this way:

“When they turn against the trees they look black.” The terns had white bellies, sides, flanks, and throats (Fig. 2). They had “slightly forked tail[s],” according to my field notes (Fig. 3). With respect to the underside of the wings, my notes mention that the “middle part is lighter than the dark edges” (Fig. 2), but Fig. 3 better shows the white coverts and dark primaries and secondaries. These characteristics strongly suggested to us at the time that the birds were Sooty Terns, which is what I stated in my notes, though Bridled Terns (*Sterna anaethetus*) were not out of the question. However, my notes also describe a “white trailing edge of wing,” which I later realized is not a characteristic of Sooty Terns or Bridled Terns.

The white foreheads, large size, and dark upperparts I observed on these birds eliminated all other terns except the Bridled Tern, but that species features a longer tail in comparison to Sooty Terns, and it has relatively less black in the mantle. The extent of the white forehead over the eyes of these birds, another key factor separating Sooty Terns from Bridled Terns, was not seen well enough to be helpful. This author is not aware of any reports concerning observations of Bridled Terns found inland in Georgia after the passage of Hurricanes Frances and Ivan, but they were seen on the coast at Tybee Island on 6 September (Oriole 70-71:37). The day before (8 September), I observed 3 Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*) and 25 Forster’s Terns (a new local high count) at Lake Tobesofkee, and these birds were distinctly smaller than the Sooty/Bridled Terns I observed. I also saw one of the Sooty/Bridled terns the following day, 10 September, at the same location at Lake Tobesofkee.

Many Sooty Terns were reported in inland Georgia at Lake Blalock, Lake Jackson, Lake Lanier, Lake Oconee, Carter’s Lake, Lake Allatoona, and West Point Dam (Oriole 70-71:38) after Hurricane Frances passed through on 7 September 2004. In fact, 2 Sooty Terns were recorded in Upson County, one of which was grounded in Thomaston on 8 September and was carried to a rehabilitator. It died the next day (Todd Schneider, pers. comm.). The other bird was found dead around the same time under a large power line where it crosses the southern portion of Sprewell Bluff State Park (Terry Johnson and Nathan Klaus, pers. comm.). It likely hit the power line during the strong gales of the storm.

Other rarities were recorded elsewhere in the area during the approach and passage of Hurricane Frances. On 4 September 2004, a Purple Gallinule was seen at the Macon Cherokee Brickyards in Bibb County by Ty Ivey, Ken and Arlene Clark, and Paul Johnson (Oriole 70-71:34). Two Sooty Terns were seen at Rum Creek Wildlife Management Area by Terry Johnson et al. on 10 September

2004, 3 days after Hurricane Frances made landfall (Oriole 70-71:37-38). On that same day, Johnson's group saw 7 Common Terns at Plant Scherer Ash Pond in Monroe County. This was a new Middle Georgia high count. Johnson's group also saw 7 Laughing Gulls. Three Red-necked Phalaropes were also seen at this location on 10 September (T. Johnson, pers. comm.). Numerous additional reports of Red-necked Phalaropes came from other counties in Georgia (Bartow, Cobb, and Murray Counties) after Hurricane Frances passed through on 7 September 2004 (Oriole 70-71:36).

Hurricane Ivan made landfall on 16 September 2004 on the Gulf Coast in Alabama with approximately 193 kph winds (National Hurricane Center, [www.nhc.noaa.gov](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov); Fig. 1). While the main path of the hurricane passed through Alabama, the storm produced many tornadoes and heavy rainfall in Georgia on 17 September. Possibly the most picturesque scene of the period was the Black Skimmers found fishing at Rum Creek Wildlife Management Area on 18 September 2004 during the Monroe County North American Migration Count (NAMC). Terry Johnson, Jerry and Rose Payne, Donna Price, Ron Lee, Larry Ross, Ann Amis, and Michael Beohm found 4 birds skimming over the water at Plant Scherer Ash Pond (T. Johnson, pers. comm.). Johnson noted one of the skimmers "knifing the surface of the water as it tried to feed in Lake Juliette!" The group also found a Tricolored Heron, one of the few records for the Middle Georgia Piedmont. A new high count of 11 Laughing Gulls was also present at Lake Juliette on 18 September (T. Johnson, pers. comm.). Nathan Klaus found at least 2 accidental Gull-billed Terns "perched on stickups," seen from a sailboat (T. Johnson, pers. comm.) on the same day at Lake Juliette. The latter species was the rarest inland bird reported during the period after the passage of Hurricanes Frances and Ivan. Klaus' sighting represents what may be the fourth inland state record. (Note: The species was also reported from West Point Dam on 17 September 2004 by Walt Chambers, Oriole 70-71:35.) Only 2 pre-2003 inland records are mentioned in the Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds (Beaton, G., P.W. Sykes, Jr., and J.W. Parrish, Jr., 2003, GOS, Occasional Publ. No. 14). Terry Johnson's group also saw 5 Caspian Terns, one Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*), one Common Tern, 4 Foster's Terns, 3 Sanderlings (*Calidris alba*), 5 Western Sandpipers (*C. mauri*), 67 Least Sandpipers (*C. minutilla*), and 5 Pectoral Sandpipers (*Calidris melanotos*) during the Monroe County NAMC. Last, but not least, 2 Black-necked Stilts were seen the same day during that count.

In Monroe County on the following day, 19 September, "Terry [Johnson] noted he had a call from a local dairyman who reported Black-necked Stilts

feeding along the shore of a small pond on his dairy farm” (The Fall Line 32(9), Ocmulgee Audubon Society, October 2004). On 3 October, Dave Bucholz noted that 4 Black-necked Stilts remained in Montezuma, Macon County, and the birds had been there 2 days (GABO-L, 3 October 2004; The Fall Line, Volume 32(10), Ocmulgee Audubon Society, November 2004). Hurricane activity also led to fall 2004 reports of Black-necked Stilts in Clayton, Bartow, and Murray Counties from 17 September to 15 November (Oriole 70-71:35). Finally, Hurricane Ivan was probably responsible for a Roseate Spoonbill seen in Bleckley County on 22 September 2004. Larry Ross observed one south of Cochran at a pond owned by a friend. Larry watched it “for more than an hour before it flew north towards Cochran” (The Fall Line 32(9), Ocmulgee Audubon Society, October 2004).

The next major hurricane of the season, Hurricane Jeanne, made landfall in Florida on 26 September (National Hurricane Center, [www.nhc.noaa.gov](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov); Fig. 1). It was downgraded to a tropical depression as it arrived in Central Georgia on 27 September. This storm may have been the cause of some of the Black-necked Stilt records reported for the state during that period.

The Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds (Beaton, G., P.W. Sykes, Jr., and J.W. Parrish, Jr., 2003, GOS, Occasional Publ. No. 14) mentions only 4 inland Sooty Tern reports in Georgia and 9 pre-2003 inland Black-necked Stilt sightings. There are 7 pre-2003 Black Skimmer inland reports according to Beaton et al. In the wake of Hurricane Ivan, Black Skimmers were found at the E.L. Huie Land Application Facility in Clayton County, Lake Walter F. George, Carter’s Lake, West Point Dam, and at the Bostwick sod farm in Morgan County (Oriole 70-71:38). Red-necked Phalarope, Laughing Gull, Caspian Tern, and Common Tern are all rare inland transients in Georgia. There is only one possible historical Red-necked Phalarope record in Middle Georgia, a listing in the accidental section for the Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge bird checklist (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1985. Birds of the Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge. RF-41680-2).

Hurricane Ivan was responsible “for more than 150 Laughing Gulls at Lake Walter F. George on 17 September” (Oriole 70-71:35), and Hurricane Frances produced a Roseate Spoonbill in Lanier County on 9 September (Oriole 70-71:34). There are 12 records of Roseate Spoonbill in the Coastal Plain according to Beaton et al. (2003). Purple Gallinule sightings in Middle Georgia are rare, with just 7 records. There are only 2 Monroe County records of Tricolored Heron before the 2004 season (Johnson, P., 1998, Annotated Checklist of Birds of Middle Georgia, 64 pages. Ocmulgee Audubon Society [out of print]).

Hurricane Frances and Hurricane Ivan were devastating storms, yet they brought a plethora of rare birds to inland Georgia.

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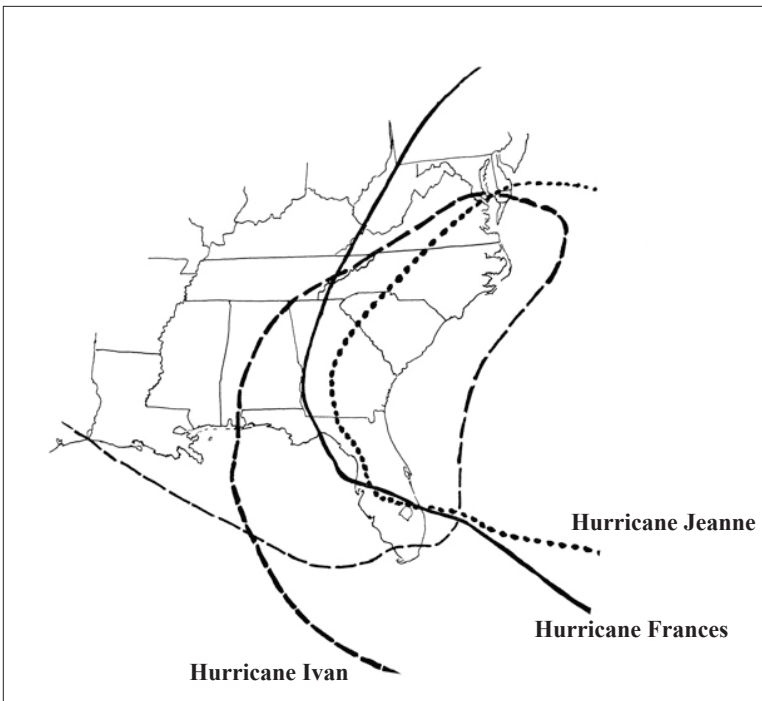


Figure 1. The routes of Hurricanes Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne, September 2004. Adapted from the National Hurricane Center, [www.nhc.noaa.gov/HAW2/english/history.shtml](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/HAW2/english/history.shtml).

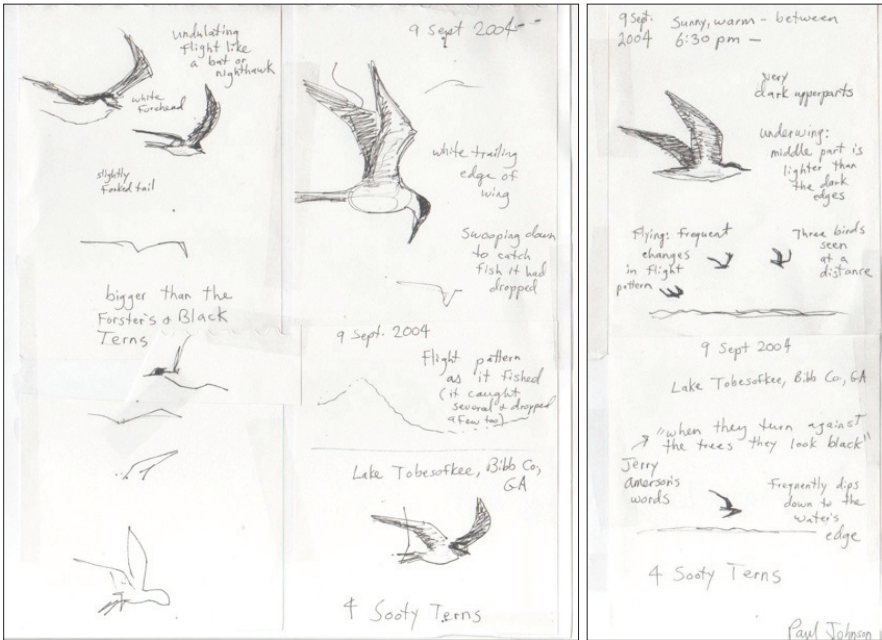


Figure 2. Sooty/Bridled Tern drawings by Paul Johnson, Lake Tobesofkee, Bibb County, Georgia, 9 September 2004.

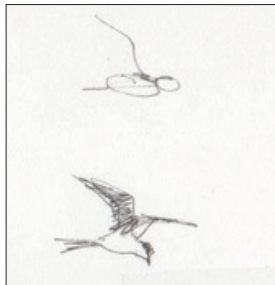


Figure 3. Sooty/Bridled Tern drawings by Paul Johnson, Lake Tobesofkee, Bibb County, Georgia, 9 September 2004.