

FROM THE FIELD

MARCH - MAY 2009

Note: The appearance of observations in this section does not suggest verification or acceptance of a record. Observations of Review Species need to be documented and a rare bird report submitted to the Georgia Checklist and Records Committee (GCRC) for consideration.

April showers bring May... showers? Such was the sentiment among many of Georgia's birders, as spring delivered soaking rains in April, and even more in May. On the bright side, this deluge brought an end to a two-year period of severe drought; by early June, even the worst-affected areas virtually disappeared from the U.S. Drought Monitor. A rare heavy snow event swept through central Georgia in early March, and areas in the Coastal Plain experienced flooding after torrential rains in early April. Persistent easterly and southeasterly winds related to a low-pressure system off the coast of Florida displaced many migrating seabirds, some of which turned up on our beaches or just offshore: Sooty Shearwater, Arctic Tern, and Wilson's Storm-Petrels. Sadly, exceptionally high water generated by the storm wiped out nesting attempts by several species on the Georgia coast, including Wilson's Plovers, American Oystercatchers, and several species of terns. The season's prolific wet weather was welcomed by birds that rely on sustained wetlands for successful breeding, such as rails and colonial nesting waders. Many small ponds and mud holes were likewise rejuvenated, to the delight of shorebirds and birders alike.

Abbreviations: ACOGB - Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds, 2003, Beaton, G. et al., GOS Occ. Publ. No. 14; AIC - Andrews Island Causeway, Glynn Co.; AWMA - Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area, McIntosh Co.; BUENWR - Bradley Unit of the Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge, Stewart Co.; CBC - Christmas Bird Count; CINS - Cumberland Island National Seashore, Camden Co.; CLRL - Carter's Lake Re-regulation Lake area, Murray Co.; CRNRA - Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area; CSU - Cochran Shoals Unit of the CRNRA, Cobb Co.; ELHLAF - E.L. Huie Land Application Facility, Clayton Co.; HP - Henderson Park, DeKalb Co.; JIBS - Jekyll Island Banding Station, Glynn Co.; KMT - Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park, Cobb Co.; LSSI - Little St. Simons Island, Glynn Co.; LWFG - Lake Walter F. George, Clay Co.; MBBP - Merry Brothers Brickyard Ponds, Richmond

Co.; m. ob. - multiple observers; MSS - Marshallville Super Sod Farm, Macon Co.; MWS (Mid-winter Waterbird Survey of the Georgia coast, 16 January); NAB - North American Birds (journal of the American Birding Association); NWR - National Wildlife Refuge; OM - Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center, Muscogee Co.; PCR - Pine Chapel Rd, Gordon Co.; PSNP - Phinizy Swamp Nature Park, Richmond Co.; Region - when capitalized, refers to Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina; SCI - St. Catherine's Island, Liberty Co.; SP - State Park; SSI - St. Simons Island, Glynn Co.; v. ob. - various observers; WMA - Wildlife Management Area.

Note: Species that appear in a **bold-faced font** represent those that were considered “review” species by the GCRC during the year of the sighting. This list changes from year to year. The current review list may be viewed at the following link: <http://www.gos.org/checklists/reportables.html>

GCRC activity, including the status of reports listed as “pending” as of press time, may be viewed at the following link: <http://www.gos.org/checklists/gcrc-activity.html>

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK - Most reports came predictably from AWMA: the high count of 40+ was recorded there on 4 May (Nathan Farnau). A report of 17 seen in Savannah on 7 May (Jim Jackson), may represent birds from the nearby Savannah River spoil site in South Carolina, where the species is known to breed.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE - One lingered in Gordon Co. until 11 April (Joshua Spence).

SNOW GOOSE - A few remained well into April, with 2 sightings being particularly notable: one in Columbus, which was present from 14 April through the end of the period (Walt Chambers), and one still in Newton Co. on 24 May (Patrick Brisse, Terry Miller).

TUNDRA SWAN - Though the species winters in the 1000s as close as eastern North Carolina, 2 immature birds seen in Walker Co. from 21-30 March caused quite a stir among Georgia birders (Loretta Kolodziecki, m. ob.).



Tundra Swans, Walker Co., 24 March, by Darlene Moore

RING-NECKED DUCK - A male still lingered at Vogel State Park, Union Co., on 12 May (Dot Freeman).

GREATER and LESSER SCAUP - An inland count of 430 mixed scaup was notable at CLRL on 15 March (Nathan Farnau et al.).

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER - A male appeared inland in Columbus on 5 March (Walt Chambers).

COMMON GOLDENEYE - Two females were at Arrowhead Environmental Education Center, Floyd Co., from 7-9 March (Dan Roper, m. ob.), and a pair was seen at CLRL on 15 March (Nathan Farnau et al.).

HOODED MERGANSER - An adult female with 6 young was observed at Arrowhead Environmental Education Center, Floyd Co., on 18 April, an area where the species has nested previously (Dan Roper).

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER - Lingering singletons were in Towns Co. on 12 May (Marion Dobbs) and in Catoosa Co. from 27 May - 1 June (David Hollie).

RED-THROATED LOON - Only 2 were reported: one at Bear Creek Reservoir from 27 March - 3 April (Joel McNeal, m. ob.) and one at Lake Varner on 30 March (Mark McShane).

PACIFIC LOON - Two seen on Lake Russell from 19 April - 24 May spent time in both Georgia and South Carolina waters, providing the first photographically documented record of the species in the latter state (Jim Flynn, m. ob.; pending, GCRC 2009-28A/B).



Pacific Loon, Lake Russell, 23 April, by Jeff Catlin

COMMON LOON - The high count was a remarkable 821 inland at Lake Lanier on 29 March (Jim Flynn).

PIED-BILLED GREBE - This species again nested at ELHLAF, as adults were seen with young on 28 April (Carol Lambert).

HORNED GREBE - A breeding-plumaged individual seen on Tybee Island, Chatham Co., on 15 May was quite late (Giff Beaton).

BLACK-CAPPED PETREL - An excellent count of 54 was recorded in South Carolina and Georgia waters during a pelagic trip on 30 May (Nathan Dias et al.).

SOOTY SHEARWATER - One was found dead on CINS on 24 May in the wake of the powerful spring gale (Patrick Leary; pending, GCRC 2009-13).



Sooty Shearwater (deceased), Cumberland Island, 24 May 2009, by Patrick Leary

WILSON'S STORM-PETREL - High winds produced many unusual from-shore sightings of storm-petrels in the Region, including one unidentified bird flying over the surf on 24 May (Patrick Leary) and 2 of this species on 25 May (Jim Flynn, Earl Horn), both just off the beaches of CINS.

RED-BILLED TROPICBIRD - An immature bird was tracked and photographed in both Georgia and South Carolina offshore waters on 30 May (Nathan Dias et al.).

BROWN PELICAN - One seen again at LWFG on 30 May (Jeff Sewell, Carol Lambert) may be a permanent resident in the area.

GREAT CORMORANT - Georgia's second inland record, this rare visitor present since fall 2008, was last observed at LWFG on 7 March (Patty McLean et al.; accepted, GCRC 2008-33A/B).

ANHINGA - Continuing their apparent inland range expansion, singles were seen in Clayton Co. on 4 March (Carol Lambert) and in Cobb Co. on 7 March (David Hedeem).

TRICOLORED HERON - Inland records included one at PSNP on 2 May (Lois Stacey et al.) and 2 in Stewart Co. on 9 May (Walt Chambers).

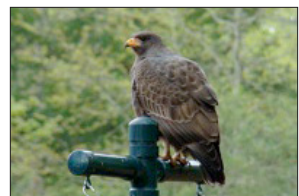
BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON - One was far inland in Murray Co. on 24 April (Joshua Spence), and another migrant was at CSU on 25 April (Al Mercer et al.).

SNAIL KITE - One was reported soaring near Bainbridge, Decatur Co., on 23 April (Paul Raney; pending, GCRC 2009-16). If accepted, this would represent the first state record.

CUBAN BLACK-HAWK - Employees at Callaway Gardens in Harris Co. were astounded when they found an individual of unknown provenance perched on a bird feeder pole on 10 April (Cory Croft, m. ob.; pending, GCRC 2009-20). If accepted, this would represent the first record of the species for the ABA area.

Cuban Black-Hawk, Harris Co., 10 April, by Kelly Floress

AMERICAN KESTREL - In an effort to better understand the ecology of the threatened, non-migratory Southeastern American Kestrel



(subspecies *paulus*), 5 birds were outfitted with radio transmitters in Taylor Co. and Talbot Co., including a female whose eggs were actively hatching on 14 May (Nathan Klaus).



Southeastern American Kestrel egg hatching, 14 May, by Nathan Klaus

MERLIN - Locally unusual was a bird at CSU from 8-17 April (Nathan Farnau, m. ob.).

BLACK RAIL - Three were heard calling at the rejuvenated marsh in Greene Co. on 10 May (Paul Sykes).

PURPLE GALLINULE - One was unusually far inland in Muscogee Co. from 19-25 April (John McMahan, m. ob.).

WILSON'S PLOVER and AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER - Both of these beach-nesting species were among Georgia's breeding birds whose first nests were destroyed by high water generated by the mid-May storm (Brad Winn).

BLACK-NECKED STILT - Rare inland birds were spotted at PSNP on 19 April (Gene Zielinski) and in Bostwick, Morgan Co., on 7 May (Jeff Sewell, Vanessa Lane, m. ob.).

UPLAND SANDPIPER - This species was reported in average numbers, but in some locally unusual places: on Sapelo Island on 3 April (fide Doris Cohrs) and at AWMA on 18 April (Patrick Brisse, Hugh Garrett).

WHIMBREL - An impressive staging of migrating birds was observed at SSI on 25 April (Sheila Willis et al.), as 500+ were resting on the beach or flying north just offshore.

MARBLED GODWIT - A satellite-tagging project quickly yielded useful results: 3 out of 6 birds tagged on LSSI departed Georgia in April, arriving in the Dakotas by early May for the breeding season; two did not migrate and split time between Georgia and South Carolina, while the sixth stopped transmitting on 20 April (Brad Winn, <www.seaturtle.org>).

**Marbled Godwit with satellite tag,
Little St. Simons Island, by Bridget Olson**

RED KNOT - An encouraging sighting of this declining species was a flock of 400+ at SSI on 20 April (Bob Sattelmeyer).



BAIRD'S SANDPIPER - One was found in Bartow Co. on 24 May (Cindy Tobin).

PURPLE SANDPIPER - A bird still lingering on Tybee Island on 15 May represented a new state late date (Giff Beaton).

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE - One was seen in Bartow Co. on 24 May (Cindy Tobin).

BLACK-HEADED GULL - One spotted in St. Catherine's Island Sound on 9 May was just the fourth state record (Brad Winn et al.).



Black-headed Gull, Liberty Co., 9 May, by Brad Winn

FRANKLIN'S GULL - Particularly rare for spring were 2 at SSI on 18 April (Patrick Brisse, Hugh Garrett).

LEAST TERN, GULL-BILLED TERN, and BLACK SKIMMER - Nearly all nesting attempts by these species in southern coastal Georgia were wiped out by the spring gale in mid-May (Brad Winn).

LEAST TERN - A likely migrant in Laurens Co. on 25 April was a rare inland find (Jim Gilreath et al.).

ARCTIC TERN - A bird resting on the beach on CINS on 24 May was likely blown off course by stiff east winds (Patrick Leary; pending, GCRC 2009-12). This represented the state's third coastal record and only the ninth overall.

Arctic Tern, Cumberland Island, 24 May, by Patrick Leary



WHITE-WINGED DOVE - Sightings this season included singles at the Okefenokee Swamp on 11 March (Vanessa Lane); at Jekyll Island on 5 April (Marjorie Clark); at Savannah on 11 April (Steve Wagner); and at AWMA on 27 April (Darlene Moore et al.).

BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO - One was seen on Jekyll Island on 24 April (Sheila Willis et al.).

SHORT-EARED OWL - One was still in Stewart Co. on 5 March (Bill Lotz).

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER - A bird flying over downtown Atlanta was an unusual sight on 8 May (Jeff Madsen); it even appeared to attempt to land on the roof of the Georgia Dome!

WILLOW FLYCATCHER - Along with reports of up to 5 birds from the continuing active breeding site on Butternut Creek in Blairsville, Union Co., were a few interesting sightings: several birds at various sites on creeks in Dillard, Rabun Co., throughout May (Patty McLean, m. ob.), one at the Harold

Hefner River Park, Gilmer Co., on 10 May where the species bred last year (Ken Blankenship, Nathan Farnau), 2 birds calling in urban Atlanta on 22 May (Charlie Muise, m. ob.), and one at the Mercer Wetlands, Dekalb Co., from 23-29 May (Jeff Sewell, Carol Lambert, m. ob.). The latter 2 sightings are well south of typical nesting areas in the mountains, but a small breeding population in Macon, Bibb Co., from 2002-2004 demonstrates that the species is capable of extending its breeding range even farther south (Johnson 2009).

LEAST FLYCATCHER - A high count of 5 were calling at the annual breeding site on Hale Ridge Road, Rabun Co., on 3 May (Ken Blankenship).

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER - Singles appeared in McDuffie Co. on 7 May (Leonard Dupree) and in McDonough, Henry Co., from 9-28 May (Dan Vickers, Rachel Cass, m. ob.), where only the male of a former breeding pair has been seen for several years.

WARBLING VIREO - One found in Monroe Co. on 25 April (Malcolm Hodges et al.) was only the fourth to be photographed in the state.



Warbling Vireo, Monroe Co., 25 April, by Dan Vickers

RED-EYED VIREO - An impressive 67 were tallied at KMT on 1 May (Giff Beaton).

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH - Once considered rare in Georgia's mountains, recent fieldwork has revealed that this species appears to be a locally uncommon breeding bird in appropriate white pine-hemlock habitat. In May, multiple pairs were detected in Fannin Co., Union Co., and Rabun Co., including a high count of 7 birds on Overflow Creek Road on 3 May (Ken Blankenship).

BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH - One at the high elevation of 823 m in Union Co. on 9 May was extremely unusual (Jim Flynn).

BROWN CREEPER - This species was first documented breeding in Georgia in spring 2008. Surveys in Rabun Co. this year were likewise productive: on Overflow Creek Road 3 males were singing on 3 May (Ken Blankenship), with 2 additional territories detected there on 18 May (Brandon Best). One was seen delivering food on Coleman River Road on 10 May (Ken Blankenship).

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET - Another species that is likely summering in Rabun Co., males were singing vigorously on Coleman River Road on 10 May and 1 June (Ken Blankenship, Nathan Farnau), and on Hale Ridge Road on 24 May (Patty McLean, Kathy Miller).

WOOD WARBLER MIGRATION was generally reported to be productive this spring. KMT lived up to its reputation as one of the best destinations in the East

for observing these colorful dynamos: 26 different species were recorded there on 24 April (Giff Beaton)!

BREWSTER'S WARBLER - A single bird was spotted at KMT on 27 April (Al Mercer et al.).

NASHVILLE WARBLER - Three were a nice find at KMT on 22 April (Chuck Saleeby).

BLACKPOLL WARBLER - A high count of 47 was recorded on 1 May at KMT (Giff Beaton).

CERULEAN WARBLER - High counts included 14 on Pine Mountain Ridge, Harris Co., on 21 April (Walt Chambers), and 8 at KMT on 24 April (Giff Beaton). Good news for this declining species came in late April when surveys of specially-designed forest cuts along Gumlog Gap Road and Ivy Log Gap Road in Towns Co. revealed that as many as 7 out of 10 treated areas hosted pairs (Nathan Klaus).

SWAINSON'S WARBLER - A high count of 8 was recorded in Rabun Co. on 3 May (Ken Blankenship).

CONNECTICUT WARBLER - One was spotted in Catoosa Co. on 2 May (David Hollie), and several unique encounters involved 2 males counter-singing at HP from 13-26 May (Jeff Sewell, m. ob.). Another surprising find was a singing male in Centennial Olympic Park in downtown Atlanta on 28 May (Jeff Madsen).



Connecticut Warbler, Dekalb Co., 21 May, by Steve Slayton

MOURNING WARBLER - Sightings included singles at the State Botanical Garden, Clarke Co., on 9 May (Joel McNeal et al.), at the Okefenokee

Swamp the same day (Sheila Willis et al.), and at Clyde Shepherd Nature Park, Dekalb Co., on 20 May (Jeff Sewell).

WILSON'S WARBLER - There were 3 reports, all singles: at KMT on 8 May (Stan Chapman), in Atlanta on 9 May (Dan Durbish), and at HP on 13 May (Patty McLean).

YELLOW-BREADED CHAT - An impressive count of 20 was recorded at Dawson Forest on 9 May (Theresa Hartz).

LINCOLN'S SPARROW - This species appears to be increasing across the Region. Reports included one at Harris Neck NWR on 8 March (Nathan Farnau, Steve Fox), one at KMT on 2 May (Mark McShane), 2 in Gilmer Co. on 4 May (Ken Blankenship), one in Barrow Co. on 7 May (Mark Freeman), and one in Catoosa Co. on 12 May (David Hollie).

SCARLET TANAGER - A total of 52 was notable at KMT on 1 May (Giff Beaton).

PAINTED BUNTING - Unusually far inland were singles in Barrow Co. on 30 Apr (Verna Johnson) and in Jackson Co. on 2 May (Bruce Weeks). This spring phenomenon has been documented for several years, and scientists are now using genetic data from blood and tail feather samples from populations throughout the Southeast to determine if these birds represent eastern overshoots or migrating western birds (Paul Sykes).

DICKCISSEL - This species was widely reported in the Region this season, including possible or suspected breeding in several Georgia counties: Bartow, Dade, Lamar, Morgan, Newton, Oconee, Sumter, Walker, and Walton (m. ob.).



Dickcissel delivering food, Newton Co., 28 May, by Steve Slayton

BOBOLINK - The high count of migrating birds was 800+ at AWMA on 3 May (Nathan Farnau).

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD - A deceased male was found in Houston Co. on 28 March (fide Jeff Sewell).

COMMON GRACKLE - Two fascinating observations were made at a residence in early May of a bird arriving at a tray feeder with a prey item (a skink or anole) already in its bill. The bird tossed its prey around in sunflower meats until it was coated, and then flew away with its “cuisine” (Fred Land).

RED CROSSBILL - Though known to nest in the mountains, direct evidence of breeding is rare. An adult male was observed feeding fledglings in Rabun Co. on 25 April (Ken Blankenship). See the article in this volume for more details about Red Crossbills in Georgia.

PINE SISKIN - Invading forces began their retreat from the Region in late April, though some lingered well into May. One banded on 11 January in Lamar Co. turned up dead in Kalkaska Co., Michigan, on 13 May (Charlie Muise).

Literature Cited

Johnson, Paul. 2007. A Summer Population of Willow Flycatchers in Bibb County, Georgia. *Oriole* 72:15-17.

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