

FROM THE FIELD

June - July 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.

Meteorologically speaking, it was a season of contrasts. Summer bolted out of the gates in June with relatively dry and extremely hot conditions: Atlanta sizzled, with 15 consecutive days over 90° F. However, July brought much cooler weather by typical “Deep South” standards, with many cloudy days and mean high temperatures in several areas establishing record lows for the month. Despite a few severe weather events that produced locally drenching rains and some flash flooding, precipitation was slightly below average. Like the weather, the breeding season also delivered mixed news, with both successes and failures among the nesting birds of the Peach State. Although no major Atlantic storms affected the Region, unexplained extreme high tides impacted several coastal nesting species. In the Blue Ridge, several species were again observed at the southernmost outposts of their known breeding ranges in eastern North America, including Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and others. An isolated breeding population of Black-throated Green Warblers was confirmed in Harris County, possibly the southernmost in North America. On Georgia’s coast, several tern species bred abundantly on a dredge spoil island created just for them. However, marsh and beach-nesting species elsewhere endured great hardships in part due to the aforementioned tidal events. For example, out of 75 monitored pairs, only a single American Oystercatcher chick fledged on the entire Georgia coast.

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 Jan); 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 - There were many sightings away from the stronghold at AWMA, all in the Coastal Plain: four in Thomasville on 5 June (Yvonne Stimson); one at Reed Bingham State Park on 7 June (Mary McDavit, Wayne Schaffner); four in Dougherty Co. from 16 June - 6 July (Mary McDavit, Wayne Schaffner, Alan Ashley); two at PSNP from 20 June through the end of the period (fide Lois Stacey); two in Shellman Bluff on 30 June (Paul W. Sykes, Jr. et al.); and 2-6 in Baker Co. from 25 July through the end of summer (Wayne Schaffner).
GADWALL - Possible new “fall” arrival records were represented by one at ELHLAF on 15 July (Carol Lambert) and 2 at Panola Mountain State Park on 25 July (Charlie Muise).

GREEN-WINGED TEAL - Very unusual for mid-summer was one in Macon on 12 June (Ty Ivey, Ken Cheeks).

HOODED MERGANSER - Two females were observed at ELHLAF from 18 June - 27 July (Carol Lambert), though breeding was not detected.

COMMON LOON - A bird in breeding plumage was seen at the Bear Creek Reservoir, Jackson Co., on 3 July (fide Mark McShane).

PIED-BILLED GREBE - This species again nested “in good numbers” in the Piedmont at ELHLAF (Carol Lambert).

CORY’S SHEARWATER - One was seen on a pelagic trip off Tybee Island on 14 June (Ken Blankenship et al.).

NORTHERN GANNET - Two immature birds were late off Tybee Island on 14 June (Ken Blankenship et al.).

BROWN PELICAN - This species again nested in Georgia at the Satilla Marsh Island (350 pairs) and on Little Egg Island Bar (1000 pairs); nest and chick abandonment were high at the latter location due to an avian tick infestation (Brad Winn). One adult was found inland at LWFG from 26-27 July (Wayne Schaffner).

LEAST BITTERN - At least 2 were found in appropriate breeding habitat in Bartow Co. on 19 July (Georgann Schmalz et al.). The species is likely a very rare and local breeder in the Ridge and Valley; more fieldwork is needed.

TRICOLORED HERON - Notable inland were 2 found in Baker Co. from 25-31 July (Wayne Schaffner).

GLOSSY IBIS - Wandering inland from the coast were one to 4 in Sumter Co. from 3-19 July (Clive Rainey, Wayne Schaffner), and 3 in Dooly Co. on 25 July (Jim Flynn). Two were surprisingly offshore, 88 km east of Blackbeard Island, on 14 June (Ken Blankenship et al.).



Glossy Ibis, Sumter Co., 3 July, by Phil Hardy

SPECIAL REPORT: ROSEATE SPOONBILLS

A species once considered likely to be encountered only in Gulf Coast states, sightings of Roseate Spoonbills were reported all along the Georgia coast and inland this summer (Table 1). Unexpected pink blobs in wader roosts or foraging in shallow, wet areas also surprised and delighted birders far to our north, even to inland North Carolina. The wave spread deep into the Coastal Plain, with several noteworthy records: an early arrival of 2-5 juveniles in Miller Co. from 2-22 June (Teresa Adkins, m. ob.); one in Bulloch Co. on 12 June (fide Brenda Brannen); one in Atkinson Co. on 13 June (Annette Bittaker); two juveniles in Sumter Co. from 12-25 July (Clive Rainey, Phil Hardy); and one in Decatur Co. on 26 July (Larry Lynch). Spoonbills are uncommon in Georgia and South Carolina spring through fall, with juveniles appearing in early June. Nesting in Georgia is considered imminent by some biologists, but has yet to be documented. The species has even been observed mingling in wading bird nesting colonies, including 2 on Wolf Island in summer 2008 (Brad Winn), and a pair among nesting White Ibis on James Island, South Carolina, on 6 June (Will Post). The species is now a permanent resident along the Georgia coast, though still considered rare in winter.

Table 1. Number of Roseate Spoonbills observed in Georgia during summer 2009.

No.	Date	Observer(s)	County
4	1 June	Gene Wilkinson	McIntosh
1	1 June	Patty and Steve Livingston	Chatham
2	2 June	Teresa Adkins	Miller*
3	2 June	Regi Sonnen	Chatham
1	5 June	fide Brenda Brannen	Bulloch*
7	13 June	Darlene Moore et al.	McIntosh
17	13 June	Jeff Sewell et al.	Glynn
1	13 June	Annette Bittaker	Atkinson*
5	15 June	Gene Wilkinson	McIntosh
5	22 June	Darlene Moore, Bill Lotz	Miller*
1	30 June	Paul W. Sykes, Jr. et al.	McIntosh
2	30 June	Sarah Lucas	Chatham
2	5 July	Tim Rose	Camden
2	12 July	Phil Hardy	Sumter*
1	26 July	Larry Lynch	Decatur*

* = inland sighting



Roseate Spoonbill, Sumter Co., 12 July, by Phil Hardy

WOOD STORK - This recovering species had a productive nesting season this year: 1900 pairs were observed statewide, including 500+ at the largest rookery at Harris Neck NWR (Brad Winn); inland dispersal was about average, with the most noteworthy sightings being one juvenile at ELHLAF on 13 June (Carol Lambert), and 20 at PSNP on 20 June (Lois Stacey).

SWALLOW-TAILED KITE - Biologists participated in the first interstate effort to survey nesting populations between eastern Texas and South Carolina. Because the birds form large communal roosts in late summer, aerial surveys along major rivers may provide a means to accurately estimate numbers across their U.S. range. In Georgia, 155 were found gathered in 7 roosts between 21-22 July (Tim Keyes), with a few scattered pairs as well. Biologists flying along the Savannah River between 19-25 July found 3 roosts containing 110 birds on the Georgia side, with an additional 104 birds on the South Carolina side (fide Tim Keyes).

PEREGRINE FALCON - An adult was observed at Rabun Bald on 12 June (Pierre Howard). Summer sightings in the state are quite rare outside of downtown Atlanta, where the species nests on skyscrapers.

BLACK RAIL - Several were detected at a known nesting site in Greene Co. on 26 July (Paul W. Sykes Jr. et al.).

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER - Though a few summer annually, a group of 10 seen on SSI from 20-21 June was notable (Greg Kratzig).

Semipalmated Plovers, St. Simons Island, 20 June, by Greg Kratzig

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER - Already beleaguered by a May storm that wiped out early nests, the species suffered even more hardships, as raccoon predation combined with unexplained extreme tides from late June into July repetitively foiled later attempts. Only one chick is known to have fledged in Georgia this season (Brad Winn).



BLACK-NECKED STILT - One was notable inland in Baker Co. from 28-31 July (Wayne Schaffner).

WILLET - An early inland migrant was at ELHLAF on 29 July (Carol Lambert).

UPLAND SANDPIPER - The first report and highest count were 5 at the reliable MSS on 12 July (Wayne Schaffner); sightings of this species were below average.

MARbled GODWIT - All 3 birds tracked in the ongoing satellite-tagging project (<www.seaturtle.org>) returned to Georgia from breeding grounds in the Dakotas by early July. Hopefully, they bred successfully!

RUDDY TURNSTONE - Always noteworthy inland, one was in Bartow Co. on 31 July (Ken Blankenship, Rachel Cass).

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER - One was a good find at ELHLAF on 30 July (Carol Lambert).

RING-BILLED GULL - One was quite late in Gordon Co. on 28 June (Max Medley).

COLONIAL NESTING TERNS - Biologists reported a successful second nesting season on the dredge spoil island near Brunswick that was created specifically for the birds. Least Terns, Gull-billed Terns (60 pairs), Royal Terns (600 pairs), and Black Skimmers (400 pairs) fledged many young there (Brad Winn). Least Terns also nested on the roofs of K-Mart buildings (200 pairs) in Savannah and Kingsland (Brad Winn). While 1300 pairs of Royal Terns nested on Little Egg Island, the biggest news for this species was the report of a large colony on Tompkins Island, South Carolina, just across the Savannah River from Tybee Island. The majority of birds that once nested elsewhere in both states have apparently converged on this site, where 12,000-15,000 pairs nested this season (fide Brad Winn); this may be the largest breeding colony on the Atlantic Coast. In stark contrast to the successes on the dredge spoil island, 100 pairs of Black Skimmers on Little Egg Island took a one-two punch from raccoon depredations and tidal inundations and did not nest successfully.

BLACK TERN - Four were observed off Tybee Island on 14 June (Ken Blankenship et al.); currently listed as accidental in spring on the coast and offshore in the latest ACOGB, this would constitute only the third spring offshore record. However, the species' status may need to be revisited as 100+ were at the Savannah Spoil Site, South Carolina, on the state line on 13 June (Steve Calver), indicating a significant presence even this late in the season. More fieldwork is needed.

WILLOW FLYCATCHER - Several were noted outside of their core range in the Blue Ridge: 2 were in Clayton Co. on 11 June (Carol Lambert) and one was in Henry Co. on 27 June (Patrick Brisse, Hugh Garrett)

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER - None are known to have nested, though there were 3 reports: the returning unpaired male in Henry Co. on 2 June (Tom

Striker); one in Murray Co. on 13 June (Theresa Hartz, Georgann Schmalz); and one in Clarke Co. on 9 July (Eugenia Thompson).

COMMON RAVEN - Eight represented an excellent count at Rabun Bald on 12 June (Pierre Howard).

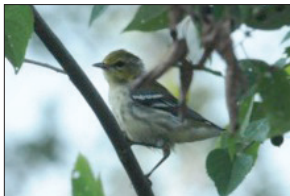
CLIFF SWALLOW – This species appears to be continuing to expand its range eastward and southward across the state. Expansion usually occurs as new colonies are established downstream along substantial rivers, the nests constructed on bridges and dams. Colonies are also now turning up in the northern tier of the state on overland bridges. Though the species has apparently not fully colonized the Coastal Plain, an outpost was again noted near the coast: 12 nests were observed on the U.S. Hwy 17 bridge over the Ogeechee River in Chatham Co. on 15 June (Sheila Willis et al.). The species also nests on the I-95 bridge over the same river, just upstream.

BROWN CREEPER - This rare and local mountain breeder was again detected in Rabun Co., with a male singing on Hale Ridge Rd on 20 June (Ken Blankenship et al.).

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET - Seemingly out of place for the date was a bird singing at Cloudland Canyon State Park on 7 June (Malcolm Hodges). The most solid evidence yet of the species nesting in the state was an adult feeding a fledgling on Hale Ridge Rd, Rabun Co., on 20 June (Ken Blankenship et al.).

MAGNOLIA WARBLER - A bird heard singing and later observed in detail was exceptionally late in Clarke Co. on 13 June (Brady Mattsson).

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER - Very exciting was the confirmation of an isolated breeding population on Pine Mountain Ridge, Harris Co. Five singing males and food delivering behavior were observed on 2 June (Walt Chambers), and a juvenile was being fed by adults on 22 June (Walt Chambers).



Black-throated Green Warbler (juvenile), Harris Co., 22 June, by Walt Chambers

PALM WARBLER - An individual seen in Chattahoochee Co. on 4 June (Clark Jones) established a new late departure date for the state.

CERULEAN WARBLER - An excellent count of 10 was recorded at KMT on 26 July (Giff Beaton, Bob and Deb Zaremba).

OVENBIRD - This species has been documented in recent years nesting along the Fall Line. This season they were found even farther south, including 4 males singing at Ohoopsee Dunes Natural Area, Emanuel Co., between 2-9 June

(Malcolm Hodges) and 2 at Yuchi WMA, Burke Co., on 13 June (Lois Stacey). These Ovenbirds are utilizing a sandy habitat in transition zones between arid longleaf pine-turkey oak scrub and mesic hardwood bluff forests (Malcolm Hodges). If nesting is confirmed at the former location, it would represent the southernmost known breeding population in North America. More fieldwork is needed.

BACHMAN'S SPARROW – This season brought good news for this species of conservation concern when 20 singing males were heard during a survey at Chickasawhatchee WMA on 22 June (Darlene Moore et al.). Furthermore, the species was discovered nesting outside of typical open pinewoods, as 3 were in sandhill habitat in Burke Co. on 9 June (Pierre Howard).



Bachman's Sparrow, Burke Co., 9 June, by Pierre Howard

LARK SPARROW - A juvenile seen in Cobb Co. from 24 July through the end of the period established a new fall early arrival date for the state

(Sue Aughey).

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW - Very odd for the date was a bird singing in Cobb Co. on 31 July (Wayne Skelton, Jeff Sewell).

DICKCISSEL - This erratic breeding species was widely reported, from 11 different sites, but without any large colonies noted.

PURPLE FINCH - A male with an apparently infected eye frequented a feeder in Dawson Co. on 3 June (Georgann Schmalz).

PINE SISKIN - Among a few sightings of singles at the southern edge of their breeding range at high elevations was an atypical report from the Piedmont in Clarke Co. on 11 July (Bill & Karla O'Grady). Nesting of the species in Georgia has only been confirmed in the northeast corner of the state in mountainous Rabun Co.

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