

FROM THE FIELD

AUGUST - NOVEMBER 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.

Deluge. Buckets. Cats and dogs. Call it whatever you like, as precipitation in Georgia this fall transcended “above average” and might be better described as “mind-boggling.” Central and northern portions of the state were particularly affected: in mid-September, catastrophic 500-year flooding devastated metropolitan Atlanta, causing millions of dollars in damage and killing 10 people. Thankfully, no hurricanes or tropical storms had a major impact on our coastlines, pelagic waters, or their birdlife this fall. Though the negative impacts of the heavy rains on the state’s avifauna are unknown, birds did respond to new “wetlands” that formed, especially in agricultural areas. Ponds and farm fields still recovering from years of drought were suddenly saturated, offering fertile foraging grounds for many species, particularly shorebirds and waders; inland migrant shorebirds were both abundant and diverse, and even included the state’s fifth Sabine’s Gull - a most surprising visitor to a flooded sod farm.

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 - The species was again observed in several locations away from AWMA, including evidence of breeding: up to 28 adults, juveniles, and ducklings in Baker Co. from 1 August - 13 September (Wayne Schaffner, m. ob.) and 2 adults with 10 ducklings on Ossabaw Island on 12 October (Nathan Farnau et al.). Not surprising but significant was a high count of 75 at AWMA on 10 October (Bill Lotz).



Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Ossabaw Island, 12 October, by Rachel Cass

SNOW GOOSE - One was unseasonable in Morgan Co. from 23-27 August (Patty McLean, m. ob.), and 31 migrants were notable over Reed Bingham State

Park on 7 November (Wayne Schaffner).

ROSS'S GOOSE - One seen in Ila, Madison Co., on 8 September (Mark McShane) has remarkably been resident since February 1999.

TUNDRA SWAN - One was early at MBBP on 21 November (Lois Stacey).

RING-NECKED DUCK - A male found at Vogel State Park on 3 August (Vicki DeLoach) may have spent the summer there.

SEA DUCKS - Off the shores of Jekyll Island, SSI, and Sea Island, massive rafts of diving ducks appeared starting in mid-November, including up to 1200 scaup (both greater and lesser) on 27 November (Bob Zarembo et al.), and an impressive 7500 Black Scoters on 15 November (Nathan Farnau et al.); both

Surf and White-winged Scoters were reported in varying abundance amidst these flocks.

COMMON EIDER - An influx of this species along the coastlines of southern Atlantic states began in early November and quickly reached Georgia, with 2-5 present at Sea Island from 7 November through the end of the period (Bill Flatau, m. ob.; pending, GCRC 2009-34).



Common Eiders, Sea Island, 27 November, by Rachel Cass

SURF SCOTER - A female was inland at West Point Dam from 2-3 November (Walt Chambers, m. ob.) and up to 3 were at CLRL from 11-30

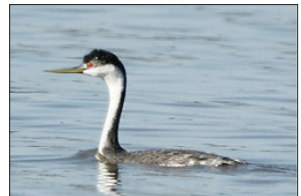
November (Darlene Moore et al., Mark McShane).

BLACK SCOTER - A female was inland at Hartwell Dam on 7 November (Jim Flynn).

PLAIN CHACHALACA - A single bird was seen on Sapelo Island on 5 October (Lorene Winter).

WESTERN GREBE - A keen kayaker took note of this very rare vagrant on Lake Oconee on 6 November (Walter Knapp; pending, GCRC 2009-31), providing the state's third well-documented record.

Western Grebe, Lake Oconee, 6 November, by Walter Knapp



AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN - Very impressive, especially for the inland locale, were 90 flying over Cobb Co. on 18 October (Stacey Zarpentine).

BROWN PELICAN - Noteworthy inland birds were singles in Macon on 3 August (Trey McCuen) and at LWFG on 27 August (Walt Chambers); three were at the latter location on 21 November (Ken Blankenship et al.).

ANHINGA - This species was again recorded far inland, providing evidence of continued range expansion (usually along major river corridors). One was at ELHLAF on 2 August (Carol Lambert et al.), and may have been the same individual still lingering there on 8 November (Mary Meyer). Six were at Macon's Cherokee Brickyard property, Bibb Co., on 6 September (James Fleullan et al.).

GREAT EGRET - Two were still lingering in Greene Co. on 29 November (Paul W. Sykes, Jr., Bill Blakeslee).

TRICOLORED HERON - Several appeared inland: one in Berrien Co. on 2 August (Wayne Schaffner), and up to 5 in Baker Co. from 21 August - 8 September (Wayne Schaffner).

GREEN HERON - One was very late in Bartow Co. on 15 November (Ken Blankenship, Rachel Cass).

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON - An excellent count was 100 at Raccoon Key on 5 September (Bill Lotz et al.).

ROSEATE SPOONBILL - The “pink tsunami” rolled right into autumn, with birds appearing all along the coast and continuing at many inland locations (see summer column) from southern Georgia all the way to the northern reaches of North Carolina. Significant observations included: fifty on Raccoon Key on 5 September (Bill Lotz et al.); a new state high count of 103 in roosts in Glynn Co. on 3 September (Gene Wilkinson); and an astounding 372 on the state line at the Savannah River spoil site, South Carolina, on 9 September (Steve Calver).

WOOD STORK - Post-breeding dispersal was about average, with several notable reports. The highest inland count of 50 came from Baker Co. on 2 August (Jim Flynn). Far inland were 6 at the Reeves Creek wetlands, Henry Co., on 26 August (Carol Lambert); and 2 were far north and late in Greene Co. on 25 October (Paul W. Sykes, Jr.).

TURKEY VULTURE - Independent “vulture watches” on 18 October reported 1500 over Clarke Co. (Joel McNeal, Richard Hall) and 1030 over Cobb Co. (Stacey Zarpentine); both counts surpassed the previous state high count.

SWALLOW-TAILED KITE - An established rite of early fall, huge flocks of foraging birds congregated over fields in Long Co., with an impressive high count of 135 on 2 August (Gene Wilkinson, Sheila Willis et al.). The farthest inland report was one in northern Cherokee Co. on 3 September (Jenny Michaels).

MISSISSIPPI KITE - The highest count of this widely-dispersing species was 43 in Newton Co. on 21 August (Mark Freeman).

GOLDEN EAGLE - Two were reported this fall: one at Lake Russell WMA on 7 November (Vanessa Lane), and one at Piedmont NWR on 29 November (Mark McShane).

BLACK RAIL - At least 6 continued in Greene Co. through August (Paul W. Sykes, Jr.). A nice surprise was one flushed by a tractor at Panola Mountain State Park on 30 September during exotic vegetation management activities (Nathan Klaus).

VIRGINIA RAIL - One was an interesting find in the mountains of Union Co. on 18 October (Jim Flynn).

PURPLE SWAMPHEN - An adult was a most unexpected discovery at the Glennville Water Treatment Facility, Tattnall Co., on 21 November (Gene Wilkinson; pending, GCRC 2009-33). This bird was hundreds of kilometers north of an established population of this exotic species in southern Florida. Though its provenance is unknown, it certainly represented the first record of the species in Georgia.



Purple Swamphen (right), Tattnall Co., 21 November, by Gene Wilkinson

COMMON MOORHEN - This species again nested at ELHLAF, with 5 adults and 3 juveniles observed on 11 August (Carol Lambert). An extraordinary count for the Piedmont was 47 at the same site on 17 November (Carol Lambert). **SANDHILL CRANE** - As expected, the vast majority of reports of southbound birds came from the northwest portion of the state, with a maximum of 1300 over CLRL on 26 November (Max Medley).

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER - An above-average number of inland reports included one at the MSS on 15 August (Wayne Schaffner, Bruce Horn); one in Dougherty Co. on 15 August (Wayne Schaffner); four at CLRL on 17 August (Max Medley); one in Bartow Co. on 17 August (Ken Blankenship); one in Gordon Co. on 22 August (Patty McLean, Kathy Miller); one at the MSS on 30 August (Sheila Willis et al.); and one in Emanuel Co. on 28 August (Brenda Brannen).

AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER - This sought-after species was also widely reported this season: one in Emanuel Co. on 28 August (Brenda Brannen); two at the MSS on 29 August (Steve Parrish); one in Dougherty Co. 29 August - 13 September (Jim Flynn, Wayne Schaffner); up to 7 in Taylorsville, Bartow Co., from 8-27 September (m. ob.); one at ELHLAF on 12 September (Carol Lambert); and 5 outside Cartersville, Bartow Co., on 20 September (Nathan Farnau).

WILSON'S PLOVER - An excellent count of 99 was recorded on CINS on 22 August (Doris and Patrick Leary), possibly an important staging area for this declining species.

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER - Large numbers appeared on Wolf Island during migration, with cumulative counts of 300+ from late August into September (Brad Winn). Leg bands indicated that individuals were from breeding populations in Georgia, Massachusetts, North Carolina, South Carolina, New Jersey, and Virginia (Brad Winn).

AMERICAN AVOCET - Inland sightings included one in Bartow Co. from 24 August - 5 September (Nathan Farnau, m. ob.); one in Laurens Co. from 7-8 November (Lance Jones); and one at OM on 11 November (Walt Chambers).

WILLET - A handful of migrant westerns turned up inland, including a high count of 5 at CLRL on 2 August (Mark McShane et al.); two in Dougherty Co. on 7 August (Wayne Schaffner); one in Bartow Co. on 16 August (Patty McLean, Kathy Miller); and one at CLRL on 17 August (Max Medley).

UPLAND SANDPIPER - Widely reported (too many to list individually), the maximum of 20-40 predictably came from MSS in mid-August (m. ob.).

LONG-BILLED CURLEW - One was on the beaches of LSSI on 14 September (Charlie Muise). The high count of 6 was recorded there on 27 October (Tim Keyes).

MARbled GODWIT - The highest count was 150 at Wolf Island NWR on 27 October (Tim Keyes).

RUDDY TURNSTONE - Two inland birds were in Baker Co. on 3 August (Wayne Schaffner)

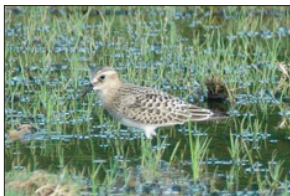
RED KNOT - The mouth of the Altamaha River is likely one of the most critical staging areas on the southern Atlantic coast for this declining migrant, as attested by the 6000-8000 seen there on 18 September (Brad Winn, Tim Keyes). Five thousand were observed feeding on Wolf Bar and Little Egg Island Bar the next day (Brad Winn).

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER - A flock of 104 seen at CLRL on 2 August tied the inland state high count (Mark McShane et al.).

WESTERN SANDPIPER - An excellent count of 1100 was observed on SSI on 31 October (Joel McNeal).

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER - There were 4 reports this autumn.

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER - A juvenile was found at the Bostwick sod farm, Morgan Co., from 18-20 September (Mark Freeman, m. ob.). Rare fall sightings of this transient in the eastern U.S. almost always pertain to juveniles.



Baird's Sandpiper, Morgan Co., 18 September, by Joel McNeal

PURPLE SANDPIPER - The first one was noted at the north beach of Tybee Island on 13 November (Nan Lloyd et al.).

STILT SANDPIPER - A report of 22 was notable in Bartow Co. on 16 August (Patty McLean, Kathy Miller).

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER - Among many sightings of this sometimes-scarce species was a report of one on the beach at the dredge spoil island (“Bird Island”) near Brunswick on 12 September (Charlie Muise et al.).

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER - Up to 22 frequented AWMA from 10 October through the end of the period (Ken Blankenship et al., Nathan Farnau, m. ob.).

WILSON’S PHALAROPE - One was in Baker Co. on 2 August (Jim Flynn).

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE - One was at the American Proteins facility in Forsyth Co. from 22-23 September (Jim Flynn, m. ob.).

RED PHALAROPE - Two inland birds definitively photographed on Lake Herrick in Athens, Clarke Co., on 15 October were quite a surprise (Richard Hall).



Red Phalaropes, Clarke Co., 15 October, by Richard Hall

SABINE’S GULL - An adult foraging on a flooded sod farm in Murray Co. on 22 September stunned observers (Joshua Spence, m. ob.; pending, GCRC 2010-09). It represented the state’s second inland record and only the fifth overall.

Sabine’s Gull, Murray Co., 22 September, by Dan Vickers

LAUGHING GULL - Among an above-average 7 inland reports was a high count of 5 at the MSS on 21 September (Walt Chambers).

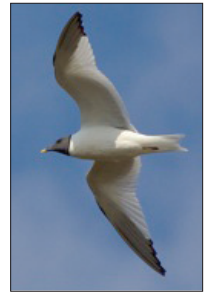
FRANKLIN’S GULL - An immature bird was early at West Point Dam on 29 September (Walt Chambers).

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL - A total of 27 was an excellent tally at SSI on 12 October (Jeff Sewell).

CASPIAN TERN - Notable inland were 2 at ELHLAF on 25 August (Carol Lambert).

ARCTIC TERN - Tucked in amidst several dozen Common Terns on SSI was an adult on 6 September (Ken Blankenship, Joel McNeal et al.; pending, GCRC 2009-26A/B), representing the first onshore fall record for the state; see article in this volume for more details.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE - One was in Glynn Co. from 22-26 November (Gene Keferl).



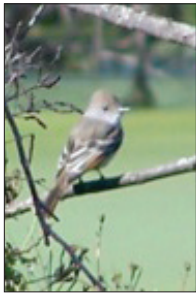
BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO - Always a good find, one was in Milledgeville on 30 August (Steve Parrish), and one was reported in Athens on 3 October (Ed Maioriello, Vanessa Lane).

SHORT-EARED OWL - One was a good find at OM on 24 October (Walt Chambers).

WHIP-POOR-WILL - A nocturnal survey detected 34 at Oconee WMA on 7 September (Jim Flynn), likely representing a new high count for one location.

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER - A species that is more often encountered in fall than in spring, singles were found at the Mercer Wetlands, DeKalb Co., on 2 September (Patty McLean), and at CSU from 18-19 September (Mark Davis, m. ob.).

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER - This rare western vagrant was a great find in Tattnall Co. on 19 October (Gene Wilkinson; pending, GCRC 2009-29).



Ash-throated Flycatcher, Tattnall Co., 19 October, by Gene Wilkinson

WESTERN KINGBIRD - One was on Jekyll Island from 27-28 August (Tim Keyes, m. ob.), and another was on Sapelo Island on 9 October (Malcolm Hodges et al.).

EASTERN KINGBIRD - One was late at HP on 20 October (Dan Vickers).

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER - One was found on Jekyll Island on 8 October (Lydia Thompson et al.).

WARBLING VIREO - Singles were detected in Habersham Co. on 13 September (Jim Flynn), and in Muscogee Co. on 30 September (Annie Crary).

CAVE SWALLOW - The annual eastward pilgrimage of this species was evidenced by only one report in Georgia: one inland at MBBP on 24 October (Anne Waters, Lois Stacey; pending, GCRC 2009-27).

Cave Swallow, Richmond Co., 24 October, by Lois Stacey

WINTER WREN - A count of 23 along the Cook's Trail in Clarke Co. on 21 November (Joel McNeal) was impressive: it is over half the state high count of 42, recorded on the Atlanta CBC in 1998.

SEDGE WREN - This species was numerous at BUENWR, as 15 were detected on 23 November (Ken Blankenship et al.).



URBAN WARBLERS - See the note in this volume pertaining to several late fall records of wood warblers (and other species) in downtown Atlanta from late October through the end of the period.

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER - Hopefully good news for this declining species was final approval of a plan to restore open oak woodlands through selective logging, controlled burns, and herbicide use on Brawley Mountain in the Chattahoochee National Forest, the only remaining breeding site in Georgia (Nathan Klaus). The project had been stalled for years due to negotiations over environmental concerns. Georgia had 3 records of “Brewster’s” Warbler this season. This hybrid between Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers is emblematic of the daunting challenges for Golden-winged conservation.

YELLOW WARBLER - The presence of 40+ on Wolf Island on 18 September was surprising for the late date (Giff Beaton).

MAGNOLIA WARBLER - An impressive 35 were tallied along the Cook’s Trail in Clarke Co. on 11 October (Joel McNeal et al.).

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER - An individual was photographed in Gilmer Co. from 9-12 November (Roy Brown, m. ob.; pending, GCRC 2009-30), providing only the state’s fifth record.



Black-throated Gray Warbler, Gilmer Co., 9 November, by Roy Brown

YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER - One was quite late at CLRL on 17 November (Max Medley).

BLACKPOLL WARBLER - Rare in fall, and even more so inland, one was a surprise at HP on 10 September (Jeff Sewell, Hugh Garrett).

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER - One may have been a wintering bird in Greene Co. on 29 November (Paul W. Sykes, Jr., Bill Blakeslee).

WORM-EATING WARBLER - One individual must have been chilly, still lingering in the mountains of Union Co. near Suches on 1 November (Betty Belanger).

CONNECTICUT WARBLER - One was a rare find at HP on 14 September (Hugh Garrett). One or 2 birds have been recorded at this site in both spring and autumn for the past 2 years, which is notable because the literature indicates that most birds of this species depart the mid-Atlantic coast in fall and fly over the ocean en route to their wintering area in South America.

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW - Singles were at Raccoon Key from 9-11 October (m. ob.), and at AWMA on 11 October (m. ob.) and 27 November (Bob Zaremba).

LARK SPARROW - A very early juvenile in Cobb Co. was present until 8 August (Sue Aughey, m. ob.). Another immature bird was on Jekyll Island from 27-29 August (Gene Keferl, m. ob.).



Lark Sparrow, Cobb Co., 8 August, by Rachel Cass

HENSLOW'S SPARROW - Single migrants were in Gwinnett Co. on 21 October (Karen and Luke Theodorou), and at CSU from 25-29 October (Patty McLean et al., Hugh Garrett). One was at the annual wintering site at Paulk's Pasture WMA on 16 November (Nathan Farnau).

Henslow's Sparrow, Gwinnett Co., 21 October, by Luke Theodorou



LE CONTE'S SPARROW - Two seen in Henry Co. from 19 November through the end of the period may have been wintering birds (Jeff Sewell, Hugh Garrett). This is substantially farther north than traditional wintering areas in the southwest quadrant of the state.

NELSON'S SPARROW - Rarely observed inland, a juvenile was a nice find in Murray Co. from 6-20 October (Johnny Parks).

LINCOLN'S SPARROW - Seemingly increasing in the state, there were 3 reports this fall.

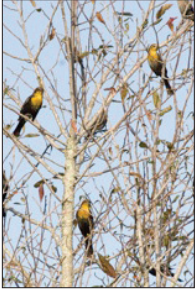
WHITE-THROATED SPARROW - One heard singing in Cobb Co. on 4 July and seen on 1 August was quite early (Wayne Skelton).

WESTERN TANAGER - A male visiting feeders in Forsyth Co. on 5 November (Rusty Trump) was perhaps the same individual seen there in February 2009.

DICKCISSEL - This species remained numerous and widespread, with likely nesting activities observed at several locations. This included a large semi-annual breeding colony on Moss Rd in Gordon Co., where 13 were recorded on 4 August (Joshua Spence).

BOBOLINK - One was somewhat early in Bartow Co. on 22 August (Ken Blankenship et al.).

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD - Three were picked out of a flock of mixed blackbirds by careful field trip leaders at AWMA on 11 October (Carol Lambert, m. ob.).



Yellow-headed Blackbirds, McIntosh Co., 11 October, by Rachel Cass

PINE SISKIN - Some began to trickle into the state starting in mid-October, in stark contrast to the invasion of last fall.

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