

FROM THE FIELD

DECEMBER 2009 - FEBRUARY 2010

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.

The season began with an extremely wet December. Portions of the state were flooded, and a few snow and ice events affected areas of the Blue Ridge Mountains. But the January quickly ushered in a theme that would come to dominate the rest of winter: COLD. Huge Arctic air masses penetrated deep into the Southeast and remained in place for days. There were record-breaking low temperatures across the state and Region (see definition in abbreviations below). But even more anomalous was the lack of daytime warmth. Record-low maximum temperatures were logged at scores of weather stations, some on consecutive days. Along with the cold came impressive snowfall events. Not only did the southern Appalachians receive large accumulations, but a mid-February event dumped 20 cm of snow across central Georgia.

This winter, birders again found numerous birds that “just shouldn’t be here” in the colder months. Despite the bone-chilling weather, there were mid-winter records of species not even considered semi-hardy such as Swainson’s Thrush, Tennessee Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, and more. When considered as a whole, such increases in accidental winter occurrences by a diversity of species seem to beg the question: Are these events truly “accidental,” and how much of a role might climate change be playing in the current trend? The highlight of the season was without a doubt an adult Ivory Gull that spent 5 days at West Point Dam before perishing, representing the southernmost record in North America.

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, 6 February); *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.; ph. - “photographed by,” indicating that a photo is on file with GOS; 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 stronghold for this species remains at AWMA, with 52 tallied there on 9 January (Bob and Deb Zaremba, Lex Glover).

ROSS’S GOOSE - Sightings of both pure and possible hybrids (with Snow Goose) appear to be on the increase in the state, as evidenced by many reports this winter: one on Lake Kedron in Peachtree City from 1-3 December (Brock Hutchins); a possible hybrid at CSU on 9 January (ph. Charlie Bostwick); one at Richard’s/Southwire Lake, Carroll Co. from 31 January - 1 February (ph. Michael Barrett, m. ob.); an individual now resident for at least 10 years in Ila, Madison Co., was seen on 14 February (Joshua Spence, Jarred Starks); another possible hybrid was in Milledgeville on 19 February (Chris Skelton); and one was at ELHLAF on 24 February (ph. Steve Mitchell, m. ob.).

TUNDRA SWAN - One was present in a small pond near Georgia Highlands College, Floyd Co., from 13 January through the end of the period (Jeff Dixon, m. ob.).

MOTTLED DUCK - Recent research indicates that the population in Georgia has increased to about 300, primarily in and around AWMA (Greg Balkcom). Genetic analysis indicates that they are closely related to introduced South Carolina populations, and that Georgia's birds are a natural expansion from that state (Greg Balkcom).

COMMON EIDER - The influx that began in fall increased in winter, though many more birds were reported from the Carolinas. Two to 5 continued at Sea Island throughout the period (m. ob.; accepted, GCRC 2009-34).

COMMON GOLDENEYE - A high count of 49 came from West Point Dam on 7 February (Mark McShane).

COMMON MERGANSER - A female was reported at CLRL from 4-12 January (Max Medley, m. ob.; accepted, GCRC 2010-01A/B).

RED-NECKED GREBE - One was detected on the Savannah CBC on 2 January (fide Giff Beaton).

EARED GREBE - Three were on Lake Juliette, Rum Creek WMA, on 2 January (Trey McCuen), and 3 or 4 were at West Point Dam on 26 January (m. ob.).

GREAT CORMORANT - An adult was seen at LWFG on 6 December (Panos and Cheryl Kanes; accepted, GCRC 2010-16) and 27 February (Walt Chambers). This is presumably the same individual who wintered at this location last year (accepted, GCRC 2008-33A/B).

WOOD STORK - An impressive new state-wide CBC total of 547 was established this winter (fide Giff Beaton).

REDDISH EGRET - One was at Gould's Inlet, SSI, on 14 December (Lydia Thompson); one was detected on the CINS CBC on 19 December (fide Sheila Willis); one was on Jekyll Island on 12 January (fide Lydia Thompson), and one was back at SSI on 17 January (Patty McLean).

CATTLE EGRET - A total of 49 were tallied state-wide on CBCs, 29 of which were on the Bainbridge-Lake Seminole CBC 28 December (fide Annie Crary); one was in Camden Co. on 28 December (Jake Trower); two were in Baker Co. on 2 January (Melvin Dees); four were in Mitchell Co. on 11 January (Todd Lanier); six were in the Brunswick area on 5 February (Charlie Muise); twelve were in Long Co. on 10 February (Gene Wilkinson), and 2 were in Burke Co. on 24 February (Mark Freeman).

GREEN HERON - Eight were counted state-wide on CBCs. Odd for mid-winter was a bird in Dalton, Whitfield Co., from 16-25 December (Adam Smith); one was at the Savannah NWR, SC, on 16 January (Tracey Muise); one was at Jekyll Island on 17 January (Sheila Willis); another was seen at the Savannah NWR, SC, 24 January (Matt Malin); one was at Harris Neck NWR on 30 January

(John and Nancy Crosby); one was on LSSI on 1 February (Ron Morris); one was on Jekyll Island on 7 February (Mark Freeman), and one was in Camden Co. on 15 February (Walter Frazier).

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON - A remarkable 109 birds were seen during this period, easily eclipsing the previous state-wide CBC record of 42 set 3 years previous. An impressive single-site total of 48 birds were recorded on Jekyll Island on 3 January (Joshua Spence).

GLOSSY IBIS - Forty-four were tallied state-wide on CBCs.

ROSEATE SPOONBILL - Now established as a permanent resident in Georgia, winter reports are uncommon but by no means accidental: one was at Harris Neck NWR from 20-25 December (Barbara Nies, Bill Tollefson); twelve were at Jekyll Island on 21 December (Tim Keyes et al.); sixteen were recorded on the Glynn Co. CBC on 2 January (fide Giff Beaton); one to 4 were on Jekyll Island from 14 January through the end of the period (m. ob.); one was on LSSI on 1 February, and 4 were present 3 February (both Ron Morris) and 18 February (Lydia Thompson), and one was on SSI on 14 February (Bill and Karla O'Grady).

GOLDEN EAGLE - Individuals were reported at CLRL on 5 December (Sandy Pangle et al.), on the Rum Creek WMA-Lake Juliette CBC on 14 December (fide Jeff Sewell), and in Floyd Co. on 23 January (Dan Roper).

WHOOPIING CRANE - One was spotted in a southbound group of Sandhill Cranes at 2 different locations over Atlanta on 10 December (Steve Barlow, Jeff Sewell).

PIPING PLOVER - A total of 67 tallied on the MWS was less than half the average for that count.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW - One was on LSSI on 1 and 18 February (Ron Morris, Lydia Thompson), one was on SCI on 6 February (Jeff Sewell), and because the species is rare away from beaches, one was a good find at the Jekyll Island visitor center mud flats on 8 February (Joel McNeal).

PURPLE SANDPIPER - An impressive southern movement of this species was noted across the Region this winter, including high counts of 37 during the MWS on the jetties of CINS near the border with Florida, and 18 on Tybee Island on 7 February (Joel McNeal).

RED PHALAROPE - Seventy-two were observed on a pelagic trip off Tybee Island on 15 January (Dan Vickers et al.).

IVORY GULL - The highlight of the season, an adult was present at West Point Dam, Troup Co., from 25-29 January (Walt Chambers; accepted, GCRC 2010-11A/B; *NAB* 64:241-242, 355; Georgia Museum of Natural History Specimen

#6289). On 29 January, the bird was observed on a beach huddled against a tree, showing signs of labored breathing. It later perished. A necropsy revealed that it was a male and, like many wayward arctic birds, had succumbed to a fungal infection in its lungs (*Aspergillosis*). This specimen documented the southernmost record of this high Arctic species anywhere.



Ivory Gull, West Point Dam, 26 January, by Ed Schneider

FRANKLIN'S GULL - Extremely rare in the South Atlantic Bight in winter, one seen on CINS on 19 December provided the first winter and CBC records for the state (ph. Roger Clark).

CALIFORNIA GULL - One reported at LWFG on 29 January represented only the second state record (ph. Walt Chambers; pending, GCRC 2010-18).

THAYER'S GULL - One was reportedly at West Point Dam on 26 January (ph. Mike Todd; accepted, GCRC 2010-12).

GLAUCOUS GULL - An immature bird was an excellent find on Tybee Island on 18 January (Scott Winton, ph. Ed Maioriello).

RAZORBILL - Data in recent years indicate that this species is an erratic rare to uncommon winter visitor, and is likely annual. Four were seen off Tybee Island on 15 January (Dan Vickers et al.), and 100 were offshore near Brunswick on 10 February (Clay George, Mark Dodd).

WHITE-WINGED DOVE - One was seen at feeders in Darien from 14 February - 8 March (fide Doris Cohrs, m. ob.).

NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL - Though present annually in the South during the winter, this poorly-understood species is extraordinarily difficult to detect without the aid of audio lures and mist nets. A female captured in Lamar Co. on 5 December (Charlie Muise; accepted, GCRC 2009-32) bore a band from Eels Lake, Ontario, where it had been banded on 22 October 2009.

EASTERN WHIP-POOR-WILL - A rare wintering species on the immediate coast, 4 were recorded on CBCs (fide Giff Beaton).

WINTER HUMMINGBIRDS 2009-2010

“The 2009-2010 winter hummer season is complete and we had 54 reports in 32 counties. The highlight was the Buff-bellied Hummingbird that showed up just after the New Year and stayed for several weeks in a yard on St. Simons Island. We had a few returning adults and some interesting recaptures of birds moving from one location to another. Another interesting observation is the number of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds this season (14), which tied the number of confirmed Rufous Hummingbird sightings. Thanks for all of your help in gathering this data on wintering hummingbirds in Georgia. It will be interesting to see the trend on the yearly reports as the word gets out about feeding our winter hummingbirds in Georgia.”

— Rusty Trump

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD - The most exciting winter hummer recorded was a female present at feeders on SSI from 2-29 January (Richard and Martha Armstrong, m. ob.; *NAB* 64:243, 359), providing only the second record for the state.



Buff-bellied Hummingbird, St. Simons Island, 12 January, by Bob Churi

VERMILION FLYCATCHER - One was a nice find on the Albany CBC on 2 January (fide Giff Beaton).

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER - This species appears to be established as a rare but annual fall and winter visitor to far southern and eastern reaches of the Region.

One reported from the Okefenokee NWR on 27 December represented the state's third CBC record (Sheila Willis, ph. Richard Roche).

WESTERN KINGBIRD - Two were detected state-wide on CBCs, and one was in Brunswick on 16 February (ph. Brad Winn).

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER - Unusual for the season was one at ELHLAF from 5-6 December (Tom Wilson, ph. Darlene Moore, m. ob.).

SWAINSON'S THRUSH - One observed on SSI from 23 December - 2 January (ph. Dave Slager) provided a rare winter record for the United States.

LAPLAND LONGSPUR - A mid-December front accompanied by strong westerly winds brought in unusually high numbers of this species. Up to 36 were in one flock in Bartow Co. from 12 December - 23 January (Patty McLean, Kathy Miller, m. ob.; accepted, GCRC 2009-35). One was in Macon Co. on 15 December (Walt Chambers; accepted, GCRC 2010-17), and one was recorded on the Carter's Lake CBC on 22 December (Charlie Muise et al.; accepted, GCRC 2010-02).

TENNESSEE WARBLER - Considered accidental in winter, one was recorded on the SCI CBC on 19 December (fide Giff Beaton).

NASHVILLE WARBLER - Singles were recorded on the CINS CBC on 19 December (fide Giff Beaton), and at PSNP from 29 January - 7 March (Bob Dellinger, Cynthia Worthington, ph. Lois Stacey).

VIRGINIA'S WARBLER - Only the second record for the state, and the first to be photographically documented, a cooperative individual wintered at a residence in Valdosta, Lowndes Co., from 15 January through the end of the period (John and Kate Swiderski, Jim Flynn, m. ob.; accepted, GCRC 2010-14; *NAB* 64:243, 356).



Virginia's Warbler, Lowndes Co., 6 February, by Giff Beaton

NORTHERN PARULA - One was recorded on the Augusta CBC on 19 December (fide Anne Waters).

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER - One observed on the CINS CBC on 19 December furnished the state's sixth winter record (fide Giff Beaton).

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER - A total of 87 tied the state-wide CBC high count.

AMERICAN REDSTART - One observed near Savannah on 2 January represented the fourth state CBC record (fide Giff Beaton).

WILSON'S WARBLER - One was found on the Macon CBC on 19 December (fide Jerry Amerson).

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT - Two were recorded state-wide on CBCs.

LARK SPARROW - One was found near Lake Blackshear on 14 December (fide Terry Johnson), providing the fifth CBC record for the state.

SAVANNAH SPARROW - A new state high count of 536 was recorded on the Lake Oconee CBC on 15 December (fide Steve Holzman). Although 1,104 were tallied on the Savannah CBC on 1 January 2006, some of that CBC circle occurs in South Carolina.

LE CONTE'S SPARROW – One to 3 were seen at Nash Farm, Henry Co. from 20-25 January, which is likely the northernmost extent of the species' wintering range (Jeff Sewell, Hugh Garrett, m. ob.). Another bird was seen in the Albany area on 27 February (Alan Ashley).

SUMMER TANAGER - This species appears to be spending the winter in the Region annually in small numbers. The season's only report for Georgia was a female at a feeder in Laurens Co. from 23-26 January (ph. Lance Jones).

SCARLET TANAGER - A well-described male was seen in Buford, Gwinnett Co., on 17 December (Karen Theodorou), furnishing one of few credible records of the species from the United States for the winter season.

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK - A bird seen in Macon on 20 December (ph. Jim Ferrari) represented the first state record for CBC week.

PAINTED BUNTING – Observers were surprised to find a male of this species far inland at feeders in Carroll Co. from 15 December through the end of the period (Julie Kidd-Mohs, ph. John Kidd).

DICKCISSEL - An immature male was a surprise visitor to feeders on Sapelo Island from 27-28 January (Doris Cohrs, ph. Jessie Kanes).

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD - One was found on the Bainbridge-Lake Seminole CBC on 28 December (fide Giff Beaton).

RUSTY BLACKBIRD - Georgia again hosted good numbers of this declining species, with noteworthy high counts of 2,000 at the Okapilco floodplain/pasture in Brooks Co. on 31 January, where 500 were present on 7 February (both Brad Bergstrom). In the Macon area, 280 were observed on 13 February (Rose Payne); and 290 were seen in Muscogee Co. on 14 February (Walt Chambers, Bill Birkhead).

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD - An above-average flock size of 50-100 wintered at a semi-annual location for the species on Taff Rd in Bartow Co. (m. ob.).

BALTIMORE ORIOLE - This species continues to show a strong winter presence, as 21 were recorded during the CBCs, which is the second-highest state-wide total recorded (fide Giff Beaton).

RED CROSSBILL - Three birds were recorded as they flew over observers in the Jones Mill community, Fannin Co., on 6 December (Ken Blankenship, Rachel Cass). Spectrograms made from the recording were too weak for absolutely certain identification, but appeared to indicate "Type 1" birds.

Ken Blankenship, 2400 Barrett Creek Blvd #827, Marietta, GA 30066
kenhblankenship@comcast.net

Giff Beaton (some CBC highlights), 320 Willow Glen Drive, Marietta, GA 30068
giffbeaton@mindspring.com