

Post, W., and S.A. Gauthreaux, Jr. 1989. Status and distribution of South Carolina birds. Contrib. Charleston Mus. No. 18.

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Figure 1. Nest box with two of the four nestling House Wrens that were present in late July and early August, 2004. Photo was taken 8 August, three days before they fledged.

INFLUXES OF LAUGHING GULLS (*LARUS ATRICILLA*) INTO THOMASVILLE, GEORGIA — Thomasville, in Thomas County, Georgia, is about 88 km north of the Gulf of Mexico where Laughing Gulls (LAGU) are common breeding residents (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). In Thomas County however, the species has been considered a rare visitor, usually appearing after strong storms, tropical or otherwise, and those birds were mostly solitary, in non-breeding (basic) plumage, and present for only a day (Crawford 1998). Accounts in Burleigh (1958) and Beaton et al. (2003) suggest this pattern for the state as well. Exceptions to this pattern in Thomas County happened when I saw and heard 2 LAGU in Thomasville on 1 May 2008 and another on 7 May

2008; there had been no recent storms. Both times I was at the same wooded suburban site and could only see the silhouettes of the gulls as they flew over, in both instances northeasterly.

In 2013 an unprecedented influx of LAGU occurred in Thomasville, beginning on 12 May, when I saw 2 at a shopping center. A store clerk told me she had seen the black-headed birds at a city park some days before. From then through 16 June, I saw the species on 5 more days, in flocks of 2-7, except for on 26 May, when I saw a flock of 21 in a "kettle" swirling high over a pond adjacent to a shopping center. In that kettle was also a Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*), altogether a truly extraordinary sight. There were no storms associated with these events. Twenty-one appears to be the fourth highest inland count of LAGU for Georgia, according to Beaton et al. (2003) and Zaremba (2005-2006). Giff Beaton (pers. comm.) informed me that Walt Chambers counted 22 LAGU at the Walter F. George Dam in Clay County on 3 May 2014; all but one were black-headed adults. Beaton et al. (2003) also pointed out that half of the inland Georgia records of LAGU occurred in April and May.

Remarkably, *all* of the gulls I saw in 2013 were adults with black heads. Also, the birds were usually silent with only occasional short calls by some, maybe one in a flock. An entire flock could pass with no vocalizations, which is unusual behavior for such a vocal species (Burger 1996). A distinct difference from the previous Thomas County LAGU occurrences was that the former were usually one- or rarely 2-day events (the birds did not linger), whereas in 2013 the species, if not the same individuals, was present for over a month with no association with storms.

These sightings are baffling. Post-breeding dispersal would be an obvious explanation (as well as colony disturbance), but all were adults, and eggs are laid mostly from late April to late May (Burger 1996). Another source (Stevenson and Anderson 1994) noted instances in Florida of first hatching on 14 May and at a north Florida site, feathered juvenals on 1 July. Incubation for this species is about 25 days and both sexes incubate (Burger 1996). Thus the 2013 Thomas County influx occurred when the species might normally be tending nests.

I considered the 2013 incursion as perhaps a fluke, but the next year on 14 June 2014 I saw a flock of 11 LAGU in Thomasville flying about a supermarket parking lot. All were black-headed adults, and there had been no storms. I was out of town from 31 May through 10 June 2014, so I could have missed earlier birds that year. On 11 July 2014, I saw 2 gulls at a distance in Thomasville, and

the next day, 12 July, I saw 19 LAGU flying over the same parking lot as on 14 June. All were black-headed and one gave a short call. They seemed to be drifting to the NE.

In both years, virtually all sightings came from an area encompassed within a 1.5-km-diameter circle that takes in major commercial areas with shopping centers, strip malls, and fast food outlets, but I never saw one scavenging or land though I did see 4 afloat on a pond on 19 May 2013. These observations make for an abrupt and puzzling change of status for the species in Thomas County.

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