# Southern Atlantic



### **Ricky Davis**

he weather this fall was generally average in precipitation and temperature. L Exceptions were the above-average rainfall along the coast and warmer-than-normal August and November. Two storm events of note occurred along the North Carolina coast, one being Tropical Storm Ernesto 31 August-1 September (see the Special Interregional Report, this issue), the other an intense low-pressure system that moved up the Outer Banks 21-22 November. The fall migration was characterized as being slow and late, with waterfowl numbers being down and most passerines being down, especially sparrows and finches. Some of the avian highlights included a Whitetailed Kite, an "invasion" of Swainson's Hawks. another Snowy Plover, and a Bell's Vireo.

Abbreviations: C. Hatt. (Cape Hatteras, Dare, NC); E.L.H. (E. L. Huie Land Application Facility, Clayton, GA); H.B.S.P. (Huntington Beach S.P., Georgetown, SC); Hoop. (Hooper Lane, Henderson, NC); Kennesaw Mt. (Kennesaw Mt. National Battlefield Park, Cobb, GA); L. Matt. (Lake Mattamuskeet N.W.R., Hyde, NC); N.R.F. (North River Farms, Carteret, NC); Pea l. (Pea Island N.W.R., Dare, NC); S.S.S. (Savannah Spoil Site, Jasper, SC).

## **WATERFOWL THROUGH WADERS**

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks continue to make news in the Region. The best count was 20 at Donnelley W.M.A., SC 26 Oct (LM), while the first known breeding of wild birds in Georgia was documented s. of Quitman, Brooks 25-27 Aug, when 2 ads. and 14 young were found (PHi). Another wandered into North Carolina at Winding River, Brunswick 18-20 Sep (fide JE). Goose highlights included 3 Greater White-fronteds at L. Patrick, Berrien, GA 25 Nov (fide CEv), 2 Ross's at Santee N.W.R., SC 25 Nov (SS et al.), and a Ross's at the Hendersonville, NC W.T.P. 12 Nov (WF, RS) for about the 4th for the mts. of that state. The best Eurasian Wigeon count was of 3 at L. Matt. 19 Nov (DC, RD). A Mottled Duck wandered from the usual coastal areas to the E.L.H. 30 Aug-2 Sep (EB, CL), providing the first inland sighting for that state. Common Eiders were found in all three states this fall, with the most interesting reports involving no fewer than 3 total in Georgia (2 at Tybee I. 14 Oct-23 Nov, one at Brunswick 17 Oct+; m.ob.) and 3 together at H.B.S.P. 24 Nov (JWa et al.). Inland duck reports of note included 2 White-winged Scoters and a Black Scoter at Bear Creek Res., Jackson, GA 7 Nov+ (MF), a Long-tailed Duck at L. Walter F. George, GA 13 Nov (EB), and 2 Common Mergansers in Jones, NC 18-19 Nov (CB).

The loon migration seemed to be very late this fall, with few birds showing up along the coast, even in late Nov. However, Georgia had 2 Pacific Loons this fall: one at Plant Scherer. Monroe 22 Oct+ (Tl, m.ob.) and the other at L. Walter F. George 17-19 Nov (EB et al.). This species has become an annual visitor to the Region, with North Carolina and Georgia getting most of the reports. Always noteworthy, Red-necked Grebes were found at Plant Scherer. GA 4-18 Nov (TI et al.) and at Oregon Inlet. NC 18 Nov (HW et al.). Eared Grebes were found at the usual locations, with the best count being 8 at the S.S.S. 27 Nov (SC). Pterodroma highlights from Hatteras, NC waters this fall (BPI) included single Herald Petrels 5 & 6 Aug, a Fea's Petrel 12 Aug, and a Bermuda Petrel 28 Aug (ph. BP et al.). Numbers of other tubenoses on offshore pelagic



Gray Kingbird, a rarity in autumn in the Carolinas, turned up 17 September 2006 (here) at Cape Lookout, North Carolina. Photograph by Melissa Whitmire.

trips seemed to be about average, while two trips off Hatteras produced 2 White-tailed Tropicbirds each, 13 & 19 Aug (BPI). American White Pelicans continued to increase in the Region, with the best counts being 240 at the S.S.S. 11 Nov (SC), 200 at West Point L., GA 17 Nov (PH et al.), and 45 at Pea I. 1 Nov (JL). American Anhingas lingered in many areas in above-average numbers, no doubt due to the mild late-season conditions. Single Magnificent Frigatebirds were noted at Harkers 1., NC 1 Aug (fide JF) and in the Gulf Stream off of Hatteras, NC 6 Aug (BPI).

Reddish Egrets were present throughout the coastal areas again, with the best reports being 5 at the s. end of Ocracoke I., NC (RB et al.), 3 at H.B.S.P. 15 Sep (JP), and one still there 11 Nov (SCo et al.). Roseate Spoonbill numbers were up this fall; 29 at the S.S.S. 22 Sep (SC) and up to 19 along the Edisto R near Bear Island W.M.A., SC through early Oct (ND, CR, m.ob.) were the highest counts Very rare inland reports of spoonbills included one still present from the summer along the Congaree R., Richland, SC until at least 20 Aug (PHu), one at L. Twitty near Monroe, Union, NC late Aug-24 Sep (JWa et al., m.ob.), and 3 near Harrison, Washington, GA 25-30 Sep (LS, JFl, EH). Wood Storks also wandered inland, with the most out-of-range birds being the 9 in Spalding, GA 14 Aug (EB). In North Carolina, one at the Goldsboro W.T.P. 24 Aug was also well inland (ED et al.), while 2 lingered at Greenfield L., Wilmington 17 Nov+ (KK, m.ob.).

## RAPTORS THROUGH JAEGERS

South Carolina hosted its 11th White-tailed Kite at the Bluff Unit, Santee N.W.R. 21 Oct (ph. STr). Interestingly, this was the first autumn sighting of this species in that state. Mississippi Kites once again were found in good numbers, with the best total being 86 at four sites e. of Bishop, Oconee, GA 11 Aug (PS, SH). Also of interest was the nest with one young in Rocky Mount, NC on the late

date of 4 Sep (fide MBr). A large aggregation of Bald Eagles was noted at the catfish ponds near Roper, Washington, NC, where 62 were counted 6 Nov (RD), possibly a new record count for one area in that state. The very rare Northern Goshawk was noted once, that being an imm. flying past Mt. Pisgah, NC 10 Oct (RSh et al.). The Broadwinged Hawk migration along the ridges was highlighted by an impressive kettle of 1500 at Pilot Mt., NC 26 Sep (PD et al.). Kettles of this size of migrating Broad-

wingeds in our Region are extremely rare.

Noteworthy buteos included a calurus Redtailed Hawk returning for the 2nd year in a row to Oxbow Meadows, GA 4 Nov (WC) and up to 2 Rough-legged Hawks at the usual Alligator River N.W.R., NC area 6 Nov+ (RD, m.ob.). The number of Golden Eagles reported was about average, with 4 from South Carolina and 2 from Georgia. Migrating falcons seemed to be in average numbers, with the best count being 22 Merlins flying past Wassaw I., GA 2 Nov (SC et al.). Yellow Rails were seen twice this fall: one at the Glennville, Tat-

A Unprecedented numbers of Swainson's Hawks were found in the Region this fall. In Georgia, a perched light morph was seen well s. of Adairsville, *Bartow* 6 Sep (SP), and a light-morph ad. was photographed at Griffin, *Spalding* 18 Oct (EB); the species is still classed as Provisional on the Georgia list. In North Carolina, multiple sightings of juvs. came from N.R.F. (JF et al.). Three (2 light, one intermediate) were noted 24 Oct, with 2 light morphs there 28 Oct and one 30 Oct. One intermediate was noted 19 Nov, probably a different bird from the previous one. That would represent a minimum of 4 Swainson's there during the fall, a most amazing occurrence. North Carolina had only about 10 previous reports of the species, all of single birds!

tnall, GA W.T.P. 26 Oct (fide GW) and 2 at N.R.F. 26 Nov (JF et al.). Rare for the mts. was the Common Moorhen on a pond near Brevard, NC 8 Nov+ (TJc); there are only about 10 reports from that region. Georgia had two reports of Limpkin this fall: at least one from the summer was still present at Reed Bingham S.P., Colquitt/Cook 15 Oct (MD et al.), and one was along Alex Cr. near Sansavilla W.M.A., Wayne 21 Sep (fide PH). Four Sandhill Cranes were somewhat early at the E.L.H. 16 Aug (CL), while one near Surfside Beach, Horry, SC 1 Oct (fide PT) was locally rare.

American Golden-Plovers were reported in average numbers this fall, with the best counts being 3 at Mills R., Henderson, NC 9 Sep (ST) and 3 at Hoop. 17 Oct (WF et al.). South Carolina hosted its 4th Snowy Plover at H.B.S.P. 4-7 Nov (JP, BM, RC, CE, ND, m.ob.). The count of 123 Piping Plovers during a survey from Oregon Inlet to Ocracoke, NC 5 Aug (NPS) was encouraging for this declining species. A Black-necked Stilt was rather late at the S.S.S. 27 Nov (SC), and 3 at Davis Impoundment, Carteret, NC 6 Aug (JF et al.) were locally unusual. Willets are rare inland migrants; thus of note were up to 3 at the E.L.H. 31 Aug (DV, CL, EB), probably migrants entrained by, or grounded by, Tropical Storm Ernesto. The Upland Sandpiper migration was better this year than last, with 52 at the Marshallville, Macon, GA sod farm 28 Aug (EB) and 22 at the American Turfgrass farm near Creswell, Washington, NC 18 Aug (DL) being the top tallies. Long-billed Curlews were found at the usual spots; the high count of 8 came from Cape Romain N.W.R., SC 24 Sep (ND et al.). Always noteworthy in the Region, Hudsonian Godwit reports included 4 at Ft. Fisher, NC 6 Sep (BS) and one at N.R.F. 10 Sep (JF et al.). Baird's Sandpiper reports were about average, with one or 2 being found at various sites in all three states. A Pectoral Sandpiper was late near Furman, SC 24 Nov (MT). The only Curlew Sandpiper mentioned was at Deveaux Bank, SC 6-15 Aug (SM). Again this fall, observers located good numbers of Buff-breasted Sandpipers. The most interesting sightings involved 10 at the Perry, GA Super Sod farm 8 Sep (JM et al.), 7 at Hoop. 4 Sep (WF, RS), and 5 at a sod farm near Rome, GA 29 Aug (MD). The top inland

Short-billed Dowitcher count was 25+ at Hoop. 12 Aug (WF, RS). The peak count of Wilson's Phalarope at the S.S.S. was 11 on 17 Aug (SC); this site regularly hosts such numbers each year. Also of note was a Red Phalarope inland at Jordan L., NC 10 Oct (GB et al.), where sightings are quite rare.

Franklin's Gulls were reported much more than often than usual this fall, with singles in South Carolina and Georgia and 4 in North Carolina. The earliest was at Kiawah I., SC 23 Sep (ND), while the latest was at West Point L., GA 6 Nov (EB). Extraordinary was a firstwinter Little Gull present for one day only at Sandling Beach, Falls L., NC 16 Nov (BB), providing one of only a handful of inland sightings for that state. A first-winter Blackheaded Gull found at Edisto Beach, SC 24 Nov (TA) was a locally rare record in that state. Lesser Black-backed Gulls continue to increase, as evidenced by the amazing assemblage 150+ at C. Hatt. as early as 8 Oct (P&NM, ML). Single Sabine's Gulls were found 64 km off Tybee I., GA 27 Aug (BZ et al.), that state's 4th or 5th, and one far inland in the mts. in Transylvania, NC 10 Sep (DT, WF). Very rare for the Region onshore were single first-winter Black-legged Kittiwakes at Tybee I., GA 22 Oct (DB, SW) and at Hart S.P., L. Hartwell, GA 11 Nov (JFl, EH). An ad. Brown Noddy was found offshore 104 km e. of Charleston, SC 5 Aug (ND). Peak Sooty Tern counts were of 29 off Tybee 1., GA 27 Aug (BZ et al.) and 16 off Hatteras, NC 13 Aug (BPI); high counts of Bridled Terms included 23 off Tybee I., GA 27 Aug (BZ et al.) and 19 off Charleston, SC 5 Aug (ND). Noteworthy tern reports involved a Least Tern far inland at West Point L., GA 29 Aug (MB), an impressive total of 4000+ Black Terns at Stono Inlet, SC 23 Sep (ND), and a very good count of 35 Blacks at Falls L., NC on the late date of 8 Oct (BB). The best onshore jaeger reports included a Pomarine and 4 Parasitics at Rodanthe, NC 12 Nov (RJD, JPi) and 3 Parasitics at Ft. Fisher, NC 25 Nov (RD). A Long-tailed Jaeger off Tybee 1. 27 Aug (BZ et al.) would constitute a 4th or 5th record for Georgia.

### **DOVES THROUGH CROSSBILLS**

Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to increase at many locations, and White-winged Doves

were also mentioned from several sites in all three states. Of particular interest was the discovery of 4 Common Ground-Doves in Calhoun, SC 16 Sep (RC), an area at the edge of the known inland range for the species in that state. Black-billed Cuckoo sightings included one at Carver's Gap, Roan Mt., NC 18 Aug (RK) and one very late at Cowan's Ford Refuge, Mecklenburg, NC 30 Oct (JB). Late swifts included a Chimney at Santee N.W.R., SC 29 Oct (CR, KO) and an unidentified Chaetura at Bodie I., NC 11 Nov (WCo); any swift in Nov could just as easily be a Vaux's in our Region. Hummingbird news this fall included the usual increasing numbers of lingering Ruby-throateds, the usual scattering of Rufous/Allen's, including an ad. male Rufous at Morehead City, NC 6 Oct+ (CRe), and an imm. male Callione Hummingbird banded near Crowder's Mt., Gaston, NC 29 Nov (DW).

Olive-sided Flycatchers were reported four times (twice each in Georgia and North Carolina), about average for autumn. Empidonax flycatcher sightings included about 18 Yellow-bellieds from all three states, a handful of Willows, and about 6 Leasts. A female Vermilion Flycatcher returned to the Bradley Unit, Eufaula N.W.R., GA 4 Nov+ (JFl, BZ et al.) for the 2nd year in a row. Western Kingbirds were noted as usual across the Region, with about 4 from North Carolina and 3 from Georgia. The rare Gray Kingbird was detected twice: along White House Rd., Richland, SC 27-29 Aug (KO et al., RC) and at Cape Lookout, Carteret, NC 17 Sep (MW). Interestingly, the former bird was at a location where one was found in 2004, most unusual for an inland site. The summering Scissor-tailed Flycatchers at Southern Pines, NC were finally successful on their 3rd nesting attempt and fledged 3 young during the first week of Aug (SCa et al.); these birds remained until at least 21 Oct, when 2 were seen (SHa). Other Scissor-taileds included one at the Altamaha W.M.A., GA 29 Sep-15 Oct (LT et al., TK et al.), one at Folly Beach, SC 20 Oct (JBa), and one in South Nags Head, NC 5 Nov (JT).

North Carolina got its first documented Bell's Vireo when one was photographed at Carolina Beach S.P., New Hanover 21 Sep (JPa); only a handful of previous sight reports exist for that state. Other notable vireos included single Warblings at Kennesaw Mt. 14 Sep (PH et al.) and Roanoke I., NC 16 Sep (JL) and multiple Philadelphia Vireos across the Region; the number of reports of Philadelphia Vireo was down but the number of individuals seemed up. The best count was the amazing group of at least 13 in the Carter's L., GA area 21 Sep (JSp). This season's Common Raven reports from cen. North Carolina included sin-

gles in *Orange* 15 Aug (GT), in downtown High Point the first week of Sep (GMo), and 2 over Durant Park, Raleigh 19 Nov (JC). Very late swallows included a Northern Roughwinged at the Altamaha W.M.A., GA 26 Nov (SB) and a Cliff at L. Matt 24 Nov (ET); the latter was carefully studied to rule out the more likely Cave Swallow! Cave Swallows once again invaded the Region, this time in unprecedented numbers. The best count was an impressive 200+ in the Patriot's Pt., Mt. Pleasant, SC area 21 Oct (ND et al.). Other good counts included 20 at James I., SC 22 Oct (DF), 11 at Gull Rock, *Hyde*, NC 19 Nov (RD), and 10 at Sullivan's I., SC 21 Nov (WH).

Red-breasted Nuthatches made a poor showing in the Region this fall, no doubt meaning a lackluster winter season to come for the species. The thrush migration seemed to be better than in recent past seasons. Of particular interest was the impressive predawn count conducted at Kennesaw Mt. 26 Sep, when 22 Veeries, 63 Gray-cheekeds, 1096 Swainson's, and 211 Woods were heard (GB et al.). Other noteworthy thrush reports involved a very late Swainson's Thrush at Edisto Beach S.P., SC 24 Nov (TA), an early Hermit Thrush in *Orange*, NC 10 Sep (DS), and late Wood Thrushes at Leland, *Brunswick*, NC 3 Nov (GM) and Cayce, *Lexington*, SC 6 Nov (RC).

A Golden-winged Warbler was a very good find near the coast, where rare, at New Bern, NC 16 Sep (BH et al.). There were several Brewster's Warblers reported this fall, with one or 2 from each state. The much rarer Lawrence's Warbler was found once, a female at Lawrenceville, GA 28 Aug (KT). Several late warblers of note included a Tennessee at the Bradley Unit, Eufaula N.W.R., GA 17 Nov (EB), a Yellow at N.R.F. 26 Nov (JF et al.), a Magnolia in Atlanta, GA 29 Nov (SB), an ad. male Hooded along the Chattahoochee R., Cobb, GA 19 Nov (DH), and a Yellow-breasted Chat at Brickhouse Rd., Durham, NC 19 Nov (KF). A female Audubon's Warbler returned to a Chapel Hill, NC yard for the 3rd year in a row, 15 & 29 Oct (JMu). Georgia got its 4th Black-throated Gray Warbler, a male at Carters L. 20-23 Oct (MM, JSp et al.). Connecticut Warbler reports were down for the 2nd consecutive fall. This year, singles were at Ft. Fisher, NC 21 Sep (GM), at Tybee I., GA 1 Oct (DLo), and at Gastonia, NC 18 Oct (STr). Mourning Warblers were seen at Duke Forest near Durham, NC 20 Sep (JPi), at Indian Trail Park, Durham, NC 24 Sep (MS), at Lawrenceville, GA 9 Oct (KT), at Miller Gap Rd., Union, GA 10 Oct (BBe), and at Atlanta, GA 13 Oct (EB). A Summer Tanager was very tardy in a yard in Waycross, GA 21 Nov (SWi). The only Western Tanager reports involved feeder birds in Chapel Hill, NC 14 Nov (fide WCo) and at Bradley Creek, Wilmington, NC 26 Nov+ (PSh).

Of interest was that 5 different Bachman's Sparrows were located in the Croatan N.E., NC 29-30 Nov (JF et al.), all in recently burned pine savannahs. This species winters in such areas, but it is difficult to observe them. Very rare, and unexpected in such a mild season, was the American Tree Sparrow found at Fletcher Park, Fletcher, NC 24 Nov (VS). Clay-colored Sparrow numbers were up, including 4 at Cape Lookout, NC 30 Sep (EE), 4 at the Altamaha W.M.A., GA 14 Oct (KB et al.), 3 at Ft. Fisher, NC 13 Oct (BS), and 3 at N.R.F. 5 Nov (JF et al.); one wintered at a feeder in Lenoir, NC 14 Oct+ (WK) for the 3rd winter in a row. Lark Sparrows were also reported frequently, with at least nine North Carolina sightings and two Georgia reports. A Savannah Sparrow in the Pine Chapel area of Gordon, GA 25 Aug (JSp) provided a new early arrival date for that state by three days. Numbers of the three grassland Ammodramus (Grasshopper, Henslow's, and Le Conte's Sparrows) seemed about average for the fall season, with a few of each species being found in all three states. Lincoln's Sparrow numbers were down when compared to previous fall seasons; just six North Carolina, four Georgia, and two South Carolina reports were received. Interesting White-crowned Sparrow reports involved 2 at the Bradley Unit, Eufaula N.W.R., GA 1 Oct (BZ et al.), providing a new early date for that state, and one banded at Carver's Gap, Roan Mt., NC 10 Oct (RK), furnishing a rare high-elevation record. This season's only Lapland Longspur sightings involved up to 2 at H.B.S.P. 5-9 Nov (RC, CE, ND, DF) and one at the n. end of Pea I. 7 Nov (RD). Snow Buntings were detected twice, with one at North Pond, Pea I. 4 Nov (IL) and 2 at H.B.S.P. 5 Nov (RC, CE).

An excellent count of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks was made at Carver's Gap, Roan Mt., NC 21 Sep, with 220+ tallied flying through the gap (RK). Also of interest was the female Rose-breasted lingering at a feeder in Columbia, SC 15 Oct-2 Nov (JG). Dickcissels were mentioned a little more than normal this fall: there were five Georgia, three South Carolina, and six North Carolina reports, the earliest at the Altamaha W.M.A., GA 28 Aug (SB), the latest in a Charleston, SC yard 25 Nov (ND). Only one Yellow-headed Blackbird was noted, that being a male at Carolina Beach S.P., NC 11 Nov (FD). Several interesting Rusty Blackbird reports included 15+ at Carters L., GA on the early date of 5 Oct (ISp) and the excellent count of 525 at Phinizy Swamp, Augusta, GA 30 Nov (fide TM). A Boat-tailed Grackle was a surprise at the rice fields near Roper, Washington, NC in early Aug (DR); this area is some distance from the normal tidewater range of the species. Only one Shiny Cowbird was noted, continuing the trend for the past several years, a male at the Altamaha W.M.A, GA 28 Oct (BZ et al.). Red Crossbill sightings were few: one at Carver's Gap, Roan Mt., NC 17 Sep (RK) and 8 at a feeder in Blowing Rock, NC in early Oct (fide SHa).

Corrigendum: The Harlequin Duck at Myrtle Beach, SC was present from 17 Dec+, not 17 Jan (North American Birds 60: 216).

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