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THE ORIOLE

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HOUSE FINCHES IN GEORGIA

Doris Cohrs

The winter of 1976-1977 brought an astonishing number of reports of House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) from many parts of Georgia. This species has only recently been accepted for the official list of Georgia birds. (Denton, et al. 1977.)

The House Finch was first reported in Georgia in 1970 in Henry County, McDonough, at the feeding station of Laura Galbreath. These birds were observed from 2 January until 4 April 1970 (Einhorn, 1970).

In 1974, four specimens were collected in Athens on 25 February by Robert J. Hamilton. These were preserved at the University of Georgia Museum (Denton, et al, 1977).

The next recorded sighting was of a male House Finch near Interstate 20 and Georgia Highway 83, Morgan County, near Madison. This observation was made by Sam Pate on 15 August 1976 (*Georgia GOShawk*, 1976).

The following are reports from various parts of the state and cover a time period from around Christmas of 1976 up until the end of July 1977.

Athens: Harriet Moeur reported up to three females and up to three males seen at a time at feeders between 23 January and 16 March. A female was the first bird observed, the first male not arriving until 31 January.

Atlanta (Dunwoody): Dick Miller observed about six House Finches, usually about equal numbers of males and females, from late December until sometime in February or March.

Atlanta (East Point): Don and Doris Cohrs saw a male House Finch 18 January. Additional birds arrived every few days and reached a peak number of 25+ in mid-February. At that time, there were approximately equal numbers of males and females. From 16 March until 26 March, the Cohrs were out of town and their feeders became depleted. After that time, less than a dozen House Finches remained and their number kept decreasing until there was only one left by the first week in April, a male. It was seen every few days at the feeder and was heard singing throughout April, May, and up until 14 June. It was never heard after that date but was seen on two other days, 28 June and 31 July.

Columbus: About a half dozen Houses Finches were reported to have been seen at a feeder by Peggy Spencer, dates not stated.

Dalton: Anne Hamilton reported a female seen at her feeder from 25 January until 6 February and a male was observed on 28 January.

McDonough: Laura Galbreath again had these finches at her feeders, this time 30+ birds, between Christmas and early April.

Marietta: On 31 July Mary Anne Neville saw a male House Finch at Kennesaw National Battlefield.

Pendergrass: In late February or early March, Terry Moore and Vaughn Morrison saw several House Finches feeding in a field.

Until 1940 the House Finch was a bird found only in the western part of the United States. Elliott and Arbib (1953) relate how it seems to have arrived in the east. Bird dealers released caged birds after a ban was placed on commercial sale of native species early in 1940. These birds had been trapped in California and shipped east for sale in pet stores for several years preceding 1940. By 1951 there were about 280 House Finches located mostly in Nassau County, Long Island, New York, and Greenwich Township, Connecticut. Later, numerous instances are cited in *Audubon Field Notes* and *American Birds* showing the gradual expansion of their breeding and winter ranges. As an example, five were seen on the Birmingham, Alabama, Christmas Bird Count on 2 January 1972, the first state record for Alabama. (*American Birds* 1972). By 1973 the eastern House Finch had been found as far north as southern Canada and westward to West Virginia and possibly Ohio (Paxton, 1974).

There seem to be many unanswered questions about the House Finch and there are many avenues for study of these birds in Georgia: their general range expansion, their breeding status in Georgia, relationship of their appearance with winter finch "invasion" years, an apparent migratory behavior of the eastern population (Paxton, 1974), etc.

In hopeful anticipation of the return of these finches in the winter of 1977-78, the author has obtained a Federal banding permit. If some of these Georgia House Finches can be banded, perhaps some useful data may be accumulated on their eastern status and population growth. Any information of additional past occurrences and/or future sightings of these birds in Georgia would be greatly appreciated.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to Harriet Moeur for compiling the majority of sightings and references used in this article. She gathered this information before moving from Athens, Georgia, to Rochester, New York.

Addendum

On 25 September 1977 a male House Finch, presumably the same one seen on numerous earlier occasions in East Point at the Cohrs' feeder, was caught in a Potter trap and banded with USFW band # 71-20403 by Doris Cohrs. The bird was recorded as an after hatch year male, wing

chord 81 mm, culmen 10 mm, weight 24 gm. The culmen was definitely curved. Body streaking was very narrow. The tail was square. Plumage was somewhat blotchy, dull, with the crown light pinkish, the rump brighter pink. The color was not the orange-red coloration observed earlier in the year. Joseph Grinnell says, "in the fresh fall plumage the red is of a conspicuous pinkish cast . . . ; there is thereafter a gradual change through crimson, until by summer a brilliant poppy red is displayed." (A. C. Bent, "Life Histories of North American Cardinals, Grosbeaks, Buntings, Towhees, Finches, Sparrows, and Allies", part 1. Dover Publications, Inc. New York. 1968.) This bird was observed visiting the feeder again on 26 September.

On 12 November, a second male House Finch was trapped and banded at the Cohrs' feeder. It received band # 71-20407 and was recorded as an unknown age male, wing chord 78 mm, culmen 10 mm, weight 22 gm, tail 60 mm. The crown and rump were light brick red, the rump somewhat brighter, and the breast had a pale reddish wash.

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TREE SPARROW IN WHITFIELD COUNTY, GEORGIA

Harry White and Harriett DiGioia

On 17 January 1977 at about 2:00 p.m. Harry White identified one bird in a mixed flock of sparrows in his driveway as a Tree Sparrow (*Melospiza arborea*). The accompanying species were Field (*Spizella pusilla*), White-throated (*Zonotrichia albicollis*), Song (*M. melodia*), and House (*Passer domesticus*) Sparrows. He watched the bird for about 30 minutes, checking its markings with his field guide (Robbins et al., 1966). About 2:30 p.m. the bird left, then returned at about 4:30 p.m. White recorded the following field marks and reported them to Harriett DiGioia by telephone at about 5:00 p.m.: central spot on clear grey breast, rusty cap and eye line, one wingbar (a second was not discerned during the first few sightings), reddish back, streaked dark, and tail feathers edged with white. The weather was recorded as clear and very cold (5° F.).

On 18 January (clear, temperature -2° F.) DiGioia and Delano Crowe joined White at about 4:15 p.m. to try to see the bird. It was located feeding on grain spread beneath an Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) tree in the back yard. All three observers recorded all field marks noted above.

On 23 January (partly cloudy, temperature about 40° F.) Norene Boring, Anne Hamilton, Doris and Delano Crowe, Harriett and Frank DiGioia, and Jean and Harry White located the Tree Sparrow at a mud puddle in the road near White's house. It flew back and forth between the puddle and a Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*) growing on a fence beside the road. Both wingbars were visible to all present.

On 26 January (partly cloudy to clear, windy, temperature about 40° F.) Bob Manns, Jean Bevis, Joe Greenberg, Anne Hamilton, Harriett DiGioia, and Harry White again saw the Tree Sparrow about noon. Jean Bevis photographed it and obtained recognizable, though slightly blurred, pictures. These are available to corroborate this report.

On 28 January (clear, cold, temperature dropping 40° to a 10° F. reading in eight hours) White saw the Tree Sparrow for the last time. It stayed in the driveway, road, and rose bush on the fence for about 30 minutes.

In its various appearances White noted that larger birds, such as Mourning Doves (*Zenaidura macroura*) and Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) would frighten the Tree Sparrow from the driveway into the road/rose bush location. It was not inclined to associate with larger birds, but did keep company with various species of sparrows.

Denton (1977) did not include the Tree Sparrow on the official or hypothetical lists for the state. Burleigh (1958) included it on the hypothetical list with three birds seen by Aaron C. Bagg on 25 February 1921 feeding on a lawn within the city limits of Augusta. Jeff Petit reports (noted in Georgia GOSHawk, 4(3):4, 5) two near Duluth on 4 February 1977. Tree Sparrows have been reported from neighboring states.

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**WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN AT
JEKYLL ISLAND, GEORGIA**

Robert Manns

On Thursday, 15 September 1977, at about 10:00 a.m. Robert Manns and Jean Bevis found a bird which they subsequently identified as a White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) in a group of some 70 to 80 gulls and terns on the south beach at Jekyll Island, Ga. Manns had been watching the group with a 25X telescope when this one bird attracted his attention. It was heavily bodied, about 10 in. in length, with wing tips extending beyond the tail. Its bill was short, black, and totally unlike the usual tern bill. From its tip it grew in circumference until it reached its largest size at the basal end. An S-shaped black patch ran through the eye. The legs were a deep orange. No crest or crown coloration was seen. Elsewhere the bird was white with grey wings. Bevis was called to the scope and made the same observations. After about three minutes the bird began to act nervously, then flew over the water toward Cumberland Island. Its tail was narrowly forked, and its wingspan was estimated to be 20 to 25 in. In flight a grey mantle, white head, and white rump and tail were observed. The grey of the mantle appeared to be lighter than that of the Black Tern (*C. niger*). Its flight was direct and unlabored. Manns observed the head and bill to point downward in tern fashion.

Both observers realized immediately that they did not recognize this species and concluded that it was not likely to be portrayed in North American field guides. Returning to Atlanta, they consulted the eight references listed below and concluded without reservation that the species involved was a White-winged Black Tern, a European breeder not previously recorded in Georgia.

Separation from the Black Tern, also a European breeder, is quite easy, even in winter plumage. The White-winged Black is stockier, and its bill appears to be about half as long as that of its relative. The bird is very "clean". There is no mottling, no shoulder marking. The eye patch is definite. The legs are deep orange. Separation from the European Whiskered Tern (*C. hybrida*) was made by observation of the white rump and tail in sharp contrast to the mantle.

While the White-winged Black Tern has not previously been recorded in Georgia, it has been seen in Delaware (American Birds. 1975, 29(1):38; 1977, 31(6):1119) and in Virginia (American Birds. 1974, 28(5):888; 1975, 29(5):957; 1976, 30(1):49).

The following references were consulted in making this identification:

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LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL AT JEKYLL ISLAND, GEORGIA

Robert Manns

On 15 October 1977, during field trips held in conjunction with the fall meeting of the Georgia Ornithological Society at Jekyll Island, a single Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) was studied at the south end of that island by Vince Jackson, Trina Jackson, Pat Bevis, Jean Bevis, and the writer. First seen at a distance of about 250 feet, the gull revealed black, or dark slate, wings and back. Its head, neck, breast, and tail were white. It remained alone in the water, ignoring some 100 to 150 other gulls and terns on the south beach sand bar.

All five observers approached to a distance of about 120 to 130 feet, whereupon they were able to discern brown striations on the hindneck, suggesting the last of the bird's third year plumage (RM). The bill was yellow, and the lower mandible contained the familiar red mark of several gull species. The bird, by comparison with several Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*) on the beach, seemed to be identical in size. The observers agreed that we were looking at either the North American Great Black-backed Gull (*L. marinus*) or its smaller European relative, the Lesser Black-backed Gull. After about 15 minutes the gull rose and displayed yellow legs and a size in flight comparable to that of the Herring Gull.

I acknowledge that many Herring Gulls in Europe have yellow legs rather than pink and that some subspecies of Herring Gulls (*L. a. heuglini* and *L. a. atlantis*) have mantles nearly as dark as the Lesser Black-backed (Heinzl, et al., 1974). I do not know whether those races have ever appeared here. However, the Lesser Black-backed Gull has recently been recorded several times in Florida (American Birds, 1975, 1977; Stevenson, 1975; Woolfenden and Schreiber, 1974). It is my hope, therefore, that this species will receive recognition at least on the hypothetical list for the birds of Georgia.

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THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE COLONIAL POCKET GOPHER

Brian H. Winchester*

and

Roy S. DeLotelle*

Pocket gophers (*Geomys* spp.) are small territorial rodents that feed on roots and herbaceous material and spend most of their lives in shallow underground burrows. Four species have been recorded in Georgia, all confined primarily to the coastal plain. The Colonial Pocket Gopher (*Geomys colonus* Bangs) has the most restricted range of the four and is found only in Camden County in southeastern Georgia. Historical collections of *G. colonus* have been relatively few, with most occurring around the turn of the century (Bangs, 1898; Elliott, 1901; Harper, 1927). Little specific information on the ecology of the species accompanies these collections, though Harper (1927) delineated its range and briefly described its habitat. Neuhauser (1977) observed pocket gopher mounds within the historic range in 1967, but his subsequent field inspections in 1975 failed to reveal any *Geomys* sign. In 1976 the Georgia Department of Natural Resources listed the Colonial Pocket Gopher as an endangered species.

Harper (1927) described the historic range of *G. colonus* as "... scarcely a dozen square miles of territory, lying between Crooked River on the north, Dark Entry Creek on the east, St. Marys River on the south and Millers Branch on the west." A small isolated colony also occurred 2 to 3 miles east of Dark Entry Creek in the vicinity of Bridge Hammock, reportedly containing individuals darker in coloration than typical *G. colonus* (Harper, 1927). Harper indicated that *G. pinetis* was the only other geomyid occurring in close proximity to *G. colonus* and that Millers Branch formed the eastern boundary of *G. pinetis* range.

G. colonus is morphologically distinguishable from neighboring *G. pinetis* populations on the basis of cranial characters and pelage color, though the latter may not be diagnostic. Handley (1977) typifies *G. colonus* as having dark coloration; a wide palate; broad, U-shaped mesopterygoid fossa; and short, nearly straight edged nasals. In contrast, *G. pinetis* is described as having paler coloration; a narrow palate; narrow, V-shaped mesopterygoid fossa; and long, hourglass shaped nasals.

As part of an ecological survey of the region, we conducted periodic searches for *G. colonus* mound activity within the historic range from August, 1976, to September, 1977. Fresh mounds were found only at the western edge of the historic range on silvicultural lands in the vicinity of Scotchville. Under the authority of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, a specimen was collected and taken to the Smithsonian Institution for verification. Dr. Charles Handley (1977), curator of Mammals

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at the Smithsonian Institution, identified the specimen as *G. colonus*, stating that it could be exactly matched to other specimens of *G. colonus* from the St. Marys area.

The current range of *G. colonus*, which includes areas of known activity and contiguous suitable habitats, is about 500 acres. Field efforts identified an estimated 20 to 30 separate tunnel systems. Although searches were made, we found no *Geomys* mounds in the vicinity of the St. Marys Golf Course (where Neuhauser had observed *G. colonus* activity in 1967) or in the vicinity of Bridge Hammock.

Geomys activity occurred in young Slash Pine (*Pinus elliotti*) plantations with relatively open canopies and in periodically mowed clearings and road shoulders. Early fall observations of ground flora indicated that *Aristida stricta*, *Seymeria cassioides*, *Ilex glabra*, and *Vaccinium myrsinites* were dominant in the pine plantations. Ground vegetation in the sparsely wooded clearing was dominated by *Panicum angustifolium*, *Axonopus affinis*, *Aristida* spp., *Paspalum setaceum*, *Stenotaphrum secundatum*, and *Cyperus globulosus*. Both areas had few saplings or large woody shrubs.

The decline of *G. colonus* over the past half century may have been due largely to habitat loss or alteration. Harper's (1927) description of the open, sunny, park-like flatwoods supporting "luxuriant" growths of herbs presents a marked contrast to the thickly-grown, closed-canopy pinelands abundant in the region today. Such intensively managed forestlands may offer less suitable habitat for *G. colonus* than the previous flatwoods. Although new habitats have been created within *G. colonus* range in recent decades which may be suitable (e.g., grassy road shoulders, clearings, cutover pinelands) the current reduced range indicates that less suitable habitat is now present than 50 years ago. According to Odom *et al.* (1977), further modification of habitats now utilized by *G. colonus* comprises the major threat to the species' survival. Cutting of timber is presently occurring on a portion of *G. colonus*' current range.

Other factors may also have bearing on the decline of *G. colonus*. Its restricted geographic range and relatively small population size may have led to problems in maintaining heterozygosity and genetic variability (Neuhauser, 1977). In addition, a small, scattered population such as that of *G. colonus* may have a threshold population size below which males are less successful in finding mates. Vaughan and Hansen (1964) observed this for other pocket gopher species.

Another potential threat to *G. colonus* lies in the fact that its range is now less isolated by natural barriers. Where the moist soils and seasonal flooding of Millers Branch may have formerly provided a formidable barrier to westerly overland travel or tunnel extension (Harper, 1927; Golley, 1962), a highway and accompanying grassy road shoulder now traverse the Branch. This corridor provides an avenue for potential interaction between *G. colonus* and *G. pinetis* to the west, opening the possibility for competition or hybridization and swamping of the *G. colonus* gene pool.

Detailed studies are presently being conducted to provide a precise evaluation of the status of *G. colonus*, its distribution, and habitat requirements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was conducted as part of an environmental survey funded by the U.S. Navy in connection with the proposed Trident Submarine Facility at Kings Bay, Georgia. We also wish to thank Charles Handley and Hans Neuhauser for their technical assistance; Ron Odom for granting trap permits and James Newman for reviewing the paper. Environmental Science and Engineering, Inc. provided materials, typing and funds for preparation of manuscript.

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GENERAL NOTES

WESTERN Tanager Sightings in Whitfield County, Ga. — Two Western Tanagers (*Piranga ludoviciana*) were sighted within two days in Dalton and in surrounding Whitfield Co. during September, 1976. These are the first records for the area.

Sandy Pangle sighted the first one on 16 September in his yard in Dalton. As the bird showed touches of red about the head, he concluded that it was a male changing into winter plumage. He again saw a male Western Tanager in his yard on 25 September and assumed it to be the same bird seen previously.

On 17 September at our farm on the west side of Whitfield Co. near the Walker Co. line I saw a female Western Tanager as it flew across a kudzu patch and lit in the top of an oak tree which was about 20 ft. from me. I am familiar with this species, having seen it before on a trip to Arizona. However, knowing that it is quite rare in Georgia (Denton, J. F., et al. 1977. *Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds*. Georgia Ornithological Society, Occas. Paper #6, P. O. Box 38214, Atlanta, Ga. 30334), I verified the identification in my field guide (Robbins, C. S., et al. 1966. *Birds of North America*. Golden Press, New York, N. Y.). The tanager posed in the tree long enough for me to note all of the field marks, then continued on its way.

The bird was yellowish underneath, yellow-green on the head and neck. The wings were black with two prominent wingbars. The tail was black and notched. The bill was a typical tanager bill, light in color.

Harriett G. DiGioia, U. S. Forest Service, 401 Old Ellijay Road, Chatsworth, Ga. 30705.

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER IN MIDSUMMER IN MURRAY COUNTY — Denton (J. F. et al. 1977. *Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds*, Georgia Ornithological Society, Occas. Paper #6, P. O. Box 38214, Atlanta, Ga. 30334) lists the Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Nuttallornis borealis*) as a rare transient in spring, 27 Apr 1924 - 10 June 1939, and in fall, 7 Sept 1958 - 26 Oct 1975, over most of the state. On 3 August 1977 in a clear cut area beyond Emery Creek, situated below Grassy Mountain, I watched an Olive-sided Flycatcher light in the top of a dead tree, then remain there for a few minutes. Its field marks were clear. There were white patches on each side of the back, a large, dark head, and a large, stout bill. It displayed the "unbuttoned vest" peculiar to this species with a light, yellowish breast edged by olive-grey sides. (See Robbins, C. S., et al. 1966. *Birds of North America*. Golden Press, New York, N.Y.).

The next day, 4 August, a pair of flycatchers came into the same dead tree. I thought they were both Olive-sided Flycatchers, but was unable to identify them with certainty, as an emergency required removal of Forest Service personnel on sudden notice.

On 6 August 1977 in the same clear cut area I again saw an Olive-

sided Flycatcher at the top of a dead tree. It remained perched for a time, allowing definite identification, then flew into nearby woods.

Olive-sided Flycatchers breed in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, favoring spruce-fir forests above 3,500 ft., according to Stupka (Arthur. 1973. *Notes on the Birds of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park*, U. of Tenn. Press, Knoxville, Tenn.). Grassy Mountain stands at 3,682 ft. The clear cut area is at 3,200 ft. Emery Creek is approximately 2,000 ft. in elevation. Cowpen Mountain at 4,149 ft. and Bald Mountain at 4,005 ft. are near Grassy Mountain, and other elevations above 3,500 ft. exist in the district. Although no spruce or fir trees grow in this area, cool, coniferous forests are present. Food (bees, wasps, ants, other insects) abounds.

Maps of the region show a continuous chain of mountains between the Great Smokies and the Cohutta Ranger District, where this bird was seen, and all of the rest of the mountainous sections of North Georgia. I believe that Olive-sided Flycatchers will be found breeding in the North Georgia mountains at a future date.

Harriett G. DiGioia, U. S. Forest Service, 401 Old Ellijay Road, Chatsworth, Ga. 30705.

CONNECTICUT WARBLER AT JEKYLL ISLAND — We found a Connecticut Warbler (*Oporornis agilis*) at the north end of Jekyll Island, Georgia, near the picnic grounds on 14 October 1977. It was in dense understory growth at the edge of the row of low, thick trees bordering the sandy coastal strip. It seemed to be taking some sort of small insects in the bushes, and it came to the edge, where the light was quite good for seeing it. It did not seem to be very disturbed by our presence, staying long enough for good identification by use of binoculars and bird field guides.

A description of this individual bird seems to be in order. The complete white eye-ring was quite evident. There were no markings of any kind on the wings and back, which were olive-green. The crown was dull bluish-gray, with little, if any, wash of brown. The throat and breast were dusky grayish, a bit lighter on the throat, and with a faint tinge of brownish, and seemed to be less dark than in the spring plumage. There was a fairly definite demarcation line between the breast and the rest of the underparts, which were yellowish and somewhat dull, except for the under tail-coverts, which were brighter yellow, with the feathers extending nearly to the end of the tail.

We found the bird quite easy to observe until it moved away into the inner gloom of the thicket and was lost to view.

George A. Dorsey, Rome, Georgia, and Emily Ford, Riverdale, Georgia.

GLAUCOUS GULL IN GEORGIA — A Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*) was seen on 4 December 1977 in the lock at the Walter F. George Dam on the Chattahoochee River. The dam is located on the Alabama line above Fort Gaines. The lock is on the Georgia bank of the river.

The gull was sitting on the water in the lock some 30 feet below the walkway and about midway across the water. Don and Doris Cohrs made the observation at about 2:00 P.M. on a sunny day. The gull was observed bathing and preening for about 10 minutes before it rose from the water, circled to the west, and went behind the lock structure, apparently settling on the rocks below the dam. It was not seen again that day.

The following observations were made. The bird was alone, but it appeared to be large, about Herring Gull size. It was all white. There were no black markings anywhere. The bill was flesh colored with a dark tip, there were light, fine bars across the tail. These appeared to be similar to a mark a fine point felt tip pen would have made if drawn across the fanned tail. In flight, when the bird banked for a turn, the upper wing and mantle took on a dull, whitish gray cast briefly. Because the gull was below the observers when it took off, the feet were never visible.

Two days later, 6 December 1977, Bob Manns and Joe Greenberg visited the area and saw a large white gull which they identified as a Glaucous Gull. Both Mr. Manns and Dr. Greenberg feel that they observed the same bird that the Cohrs saw. Another party visited the dam on 11 December 1977, but they were unable to locate the bird.

This is the third record of a Glaucous Gull in Georgia and the first inland record. Previous sightings were near Savannah and at Tybee Island in 1933 and 1951 respectively. The latter sighting was substantiated with a specimen. The normal range of the Glaucous Gull is New York-Long Island area north to the Arctic and down the west coast to the Seattle area.

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GREAT WHITE HERON IN THE UPPER COASTAL PLAIN OF GEORGIA — A large white heron, believed to be the white morph of the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), was observed in Laurens County, Georgia, on several occasions in the month of January, 1978. The bird, in company with a dark morph Great Blue Heron and a Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*), was first identified on 3 January at a small, wet weather pond adjacent to the eastbound lane of Interstate 16, six km east of the Oconee River. I had seen what I believe to be the same three birds on a number of occasions in the prior month as I drove by the area, and had assumed both white birds to be Great Egrets. At 09:30 on the sunny morning of 3 January, I slowed the car as I passed the area and noted that the Great Blue Heron and one of the white waders startled. Flying, the white bird looked equally as large and ponderous as the Great Blue Heron. After getting out of the car, with binoculars, I clearly saw the yellow legs of the departing white bird. Only then did the Great Egret, much more tolerant of my attention, leave the area.

On the following day at 09:50, my son, Hunter, and I returned to the area. I photographed the three birds with a 135 mm lens at a distance of approximately 175 m, and the suspected white morph with a 400 mm lens at 125 m. These photographs clearly reveal the comparative size of the birds, and the white plumage and yellow legs of the "great white heron." With binoculars, we observed two occipital plumes on the bird.

That evening, when I searched the literature for further confirmation of my identification, I found that Palmer (1962, *Handbook of North American Birds*, Vol. 1) cautioned that "an albino Great Blue could confuse the [Great White Heron] records." In my subsequent observations of the bird, I made efforts to clarify the question which he had raised.

On Saturday, 14 January, under overcast skies, H. P. Spivey and I confirmed the field marks using a 20X-45X telescope. On the following day at 16:30, with the hazy sun partially obscured by high clouds, the three birds were again present; and viewing through the telescope at 125m from the northwest, I was able to make deliberate comparisons and judgements on field identification. The following field marks of the great white bird were noted.

The plumage was white with no dark feathers present.

On the back of the head were two very fine, feathery, white plumes which I estimated to be 10 to 12 cm long, after comparing them to the length of the bill. There were no such plumes on either of the other two birds.

The legs, which had appeared yellow in the bright sun, were a milky yellow on the back, and a greenish yellow on the sides and front. The legs of the dark morph were a greenish gray, with little hint of yellow. The legs of the Great Egret were black.

The bill was similar in color to the milky yellow of the legs, with the upper mandible darker, particularly near the base. On either side of the upper mandible just in front of the eyes was a small but distinct, elliptical white spot. The bill of the dark morph was similar in size and shape, but

generally darker and without the white spots. I was unable to make direct comparisons of the bill lengths. The bill of the Great Egret was yellow-orange throughout its length. Later, in examination of available visual representations of subspecies of the Great Blue Heron, I found white spots similar to those that I had seen only on Audubon's painting (1966, *The Original Water-Color Paintings by John James Audubon for the Birds of America, Vol. 1*, plate 219) of the Great White Heron (*A. h. occidentalis*).

When the suspected white morph and the dark morph faced toward the west, I was able to see clearly through the 45X telescope that the iris in the eyes of both was the same vivid yellow. There was no pinkish hue to the lores of the white bird.

I compared the wing-beats of the two larger birds on take-off and in accelerating flight. It appeared that the wing-beat of the white bird was faster by approximately one beat in ten than that of the dark morph.

The two birds were seen together again at the same place on 24 January. Heavy rains after that date apparently made the pond less attractive as a feeding area. The two were last seen together on 31 January in a small Cypress (*Taxodium*, sp.) pond on the opposite side of the Interstate.

Quite probably, only the specimen could remove all doubts as to the bird's subspecific classification. However, there appears little basis to question that the bird was the white morph of the Great Blue Heron, more probably *A. h. occidentalis*.

T. K. Patterson, 1409 Edgewood Drive, Dublin, Georgia 31021.

FROM THE FIELD

The format of this informal column precludes presentation of detailed accounts of rare birds. Records listed here are largely unchecked and their appearance in this column should not be considered to constitute scientific publication. They are intended primarily to bring interesting sightings to the attention of the membership and to alert others to look for unusual species in the areas indicated.

NORTH GEORGIA

Ann and Dan Forster report a Common Loon at Suches on April 30. Jeff Petit watched 200 Sandhill Cranes fly over Duluth on 11 March. Two active hawk nests were found, both on the Cohutta Ranger District, Chattahoochee National Forest. The first was a Red-shouldered Hawk nest with three young and an adult coming to feed them on Forest Service Road 17, Murray Co., on 6 June. The other was a Red-tailed Hawk nest with two ready-to-fly young along Forest Service Road 68, Gilmer County, on 26 June. Both nests were observed by Harriett DiGioia.

On 1 April Gerald Knighton saw a Laughing Gull at Augusta. Vivian Poindexter found a Short-eared Owl on 31 March, also at Augusta. Olive-sided Flycatchers were sighted in Whitfield and Murray Cos.: Wyatt Bruce saw one on Georgia Highway 2 near Prater's Mill on 9 May and Harriett DiGioia both heard and saw one at Millstone Creek Release Cutting, Forest Service Road 18, on 16 May.

House Wrens sang in two locations: one was at Augusta on 22 April, heard by field trippers of the Augusta Audubon Society, and two were at Tibbs Trail Release Cutting, Forest Service Road 78, on 3 May, heard by Harriett DiGioia. Worm-eating Warblers were on the Cohutta Ranger District with 13 records from 16 May - 13 June, and a Northern Parula Warbler sang at Bear Creek Hunt Camp, Forest Service Road 241, from 19 May to 2 July, reported by Harriett DiGioia.

A House Finch came to Bob Raymund's feeder in Atlanta during the month of June. A Dark-eyed Junco was spotted by Harriett DiGioia beside Georgia Highway 2, Cohutta Ranger District, Fannin Co., on 31 May.

(Compiled by Harriett G. DiGioia, U. S. Forest Service, 401 Old Ellijay Road, Chatsworth, Ga. 30705)

SOUTH GEORGIA

Whistling Swans and White-fronted Geese, both rare in south Georgia, were sighted at several localities in the winter of 1977-78. Peggy Waters reported 6 White-fronted Geese at Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) on 19 February and noted that Whistling Swans again wintered at the Refuge. James Miller saw 2 swans at West Point Lake near Columbus on 5 January and 3 landed on a small Thomas County pond on 12 December (Jesse Chastain *et al.*). Brent Orgega, surveying Eufaula NWR's bird life (see below), noted 9 White-fronted Geese there on 4 March.

For most of south Georgia, it was a winter characterized by an irruption of northern finches; Pine Siskins and Evening Grosbeaks were especially numerous. Florence Lynn in Columbus and Harriet Hawkins in Thomas County both noted an association of Sharp-shinned Hawks with feeders filled with siskins. Betty Komarek reported that "Myrtle" Warblers were the scarcest she has seen in 40 years of feeding in Grady County. Mike Fuller had a House Finch at his Columbus feeder on 18 February. Rare or uncommon water birds normally absent from the Coastal Plain in winter were sighted occasionally: eight Cattle Egrets were seen by Beth Crawford near Reno, Grady County, on 12 December and three at Hopeful, Mitchell County, on 5 January; a Double-crested Cormorant was in Thomas County 5 January (Robert Crawford); a Louisiana Heron was spotted at Green Island Hills, Columbus, 28 January by David Johnston and Mike Fuller; a Ring-billed Gull was found moribund in Thomas County 13 December (Mrs. Terrell Single-tary).

When B. J. Bramlett chopped down a large oak tree in his Pavo (Thomas County) yard on 4 February, he found 2 downy young Barn Owls, the first evidence of local breeding (specimen to Tall Timbers Research Station). Sam Pate, Bill Matheny, *et al.* saw 2 Golden and 3 Bald Eagles at Eufaula NWR on 11 February.

Purple Martins, early spring migrants, were seen in Valdosta on 26 January by Clyde Connell. Tom French saw an early Glossy Ibis on 25 March on Champney Island, McIntosh County, and a Long-billed Curlew the same day on the Jekyll Island Causeway. In Thomas County a Common Loon was seen on 9 April and a Whip-poor-will was heard on the morning and evening of 22 April (Robert and Beth Crawford); a late Rose-breasted Grosbeak was on Leon Neel's feeder 20 May.

In Laurens County, T. K. Patterson noted a Semipalmated Plover on 22 April and a pair on 14 May, American Golden Plovers on 8-9 April, Upland Sandpipers 15-16 April (one group of 14 on the 15th), four White-rumped Sandpipers on 10 May, and a pair of Black Terns on 10 May.

From March through May Brent Ortego conducted weekly surveys of water birds at Eufaula NWR. The following observations are only the highlights of Ortego's interesting report which, we hope, will be presented in full some time in the future: Brown Pelican, 1 imm. 15 April; Semipalmated Plover, 3 on 22 April and 9 on 13 May; Am. Golden Plover, 2 on 21 March; Black-bellied Plover, 1 on 8 April and 2 on 14 April; Willet, 11 on 24 April and 2 on 27 May; White-rumped Sandpiper, 3 on 29 April (early) and 80 on 13 May; Stilt Sandpiper, 2 on 24 April, 3 on 29 April, 4 on 13 May; Caspian Tern, 2 on 8 April, 3 on 22 April, 5 on 29 April, and 2 on 20 May. No distinction was made in the report between Georgia and Alabama, but for the water birds at least, there seems little doubt that they occur in both states.

(Compiled by Robert L. Crawford, Tall Timbers Research Station, Rt. 1, Box 160, Tallahassee, Fla. 32312.)

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