

Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinicus*



Folk Name: Blue Peter, Moonshine

Status: Migrant

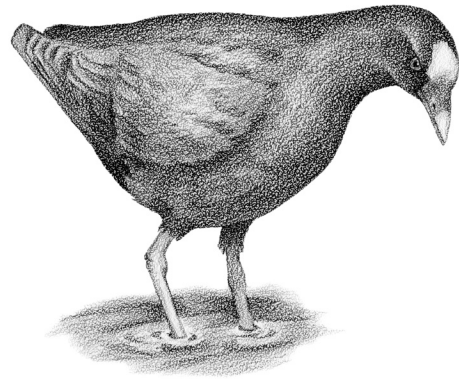
Abundance: Very Rare

Habitat: Wetlands

This surprisingly colorful wetland walker is a very rare find in the Carolina Piedmont. Its bright colors and somewhat gawky appearance belies its ability to move slowly and gracefully through a marsh, almost without detection. Its long yellow toes help it to walk on top of emergent wetland plants, like lily pads, without sinking. The Purple Gallinule generally breeds along the Outer Coastal Plain of southern South Carolina, but in 1979 breeding was confirmed in southern Kershaw County, only about 60 miles southeast of Mecklenburg County. A few have also been found breeding sporadically in the Coastal Plain of North Carolina off and on since 1951.

The Purple Gallinule is often noted as a long-distance vagrant. It regularly wanders out of its normal range and has appeared at many surprising sites scattered across eastern North America. There are only five records of this species known from the Central Carolinas. The earliest report is from southern Iredell County. On May 6, 1922, a live Purple Gallinule was captured 8 miles from downtown Statesville and brought to the office of Dr. Wallace Hoffman. Dr. Hoffman kept the Gallinule on display for a time before releasing it. He later reported his account to H.H. Brimley at the North Carolina State Museum. On April 17, 1982, a Purple Gallinule flew into the side of the American Colors and Chemical building on Westinghouse Boulevard in Charlotte. Mrs. Mabel Payne thought it such a strange looking bird that she contacted staff at Discovery Place to see if they would be interested in identifying it. The science museum staff collected it and prepared a mounted specimen, which is still occasionally used for public display. The third record of a Purple Gallinule is a bird found on Lake Norman on the eastern boundary of Lincoln County. Mary Welty, a Charlotte birder and photographer, photographed this colorful gallinule at the edge of the lake on June 1, 1991.

Most recently, individual Purple Gallinules were discovered in Mecklenburg County in both 2011 and in 2012. Lisa Gaffney, a local field biologist, was surprised



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to find one on a small wetland retention pond in a new development in the Town of Huntersville on May 10, 2011. She photographed the bird and reported her find to local Audubon members. Many observers were fortunate to watch and photograph this bird at fairly close range, and Gaffney's discovery was later featured in an article in *The Charlotte Observer*. This bird was observed eating a large frog. In 2012, another Purple Gallinule was discovered in Mecklenburg County in a small wetland off Green Ridge Road in a south Charlotte business park, less than a half-mile off Interstate 77. Tom Sanders and Rob Gilson discovered and photographed the bird on April 30, 2012. Kevin Metcalf later provided this description: "Seen at close range and photographed—m.obs. Unmistakable. Head, neck and underparts glossy blue, purple and turquoise; back green and bronze; bright yellow legs with very long toes; blue shield on forehead with bright red-based bill with yellow-greenish tip. White undertail coverts."

This bird was heard vocalizing several times, and a second Purple Gallinule was later observed in the same wetland. These birds remained there for close to a month and were seen by many observers. This small swamp is located only about 2 miles from the Westinghouse Boulevard location where the voucher specimen was collected in 1982.

The State of America's Birds 2016 report for North America indicates the breeding population of the Purple Gallinule is in steep decline.