

## Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*



**Folk Name:** Larger Yellow-shanks, Greater Tell-tale, Tell-tale Snipe

**Status:** Migrant

**Abundance:** Uncommon

**Habitat:** Mudflats, lakes, ponds

The Greater Yellowlegs and the Lesser Yellowlegs are fairly large sandpipers that breed in the Arctic tundra and winter on both the east and west coast of the United States and southward. As might be expected, both have obvious yellow or yellow-orange legs. Their plumage is also fairly similar, but there are several field marks that can help distinguish between the two. At 14 inches, the Greater is about 3 ½ inches larger than the Lesser. Also, the length of their bill differs. The bill of the Greater is longer, slightly thicker, and is somewhat upturned, while the bill of the Lesser is shorter, thinner, and straight. The Greater Yellowlegs' bill may be two-toned black and gray, while the Lesser's is all dark. One other key difference is their call. The call of the Greater is usually three or more descending *tew* notes, while the call of the Lesser, is usually one to three higher and shorter *tew* notes. Both Yellowlegs have square, white rump patches which are visible in flight.

Both the Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs were game birds regularly hunted as food until the late 1920s.

“Bird lovers, sportsmen, and game officials are all pretty much agreed in the desire to protect all the useful species of bird life. At the same time such birds as ducks, jacksnipe, woodcock, geese, yellowlegs, coot, quail, grouse, pheasants, and other birds are regarded as useful and desirable food, and as such are legitimately hunted under proper game laws that have the approval of good citizens. The American Game Protective Association strives to secure sensible game laws that will command respect.” —*Gaffney Ledger*, September 20, 1928

The Greater Yellowlegs is an uncommon spring and fall migrant throughout the Central Carolinas. We have records from all months except January. Ron Clark reported our only two February records. Both sightings were of individual birds seen at Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge. One was one reported on February 20, 2010, and the other on February 18, 2012. Matthew Daw reported one present in Catawba County on the late spring date of June 10, 2009, providing our only June report. In spring, most Greater Yellowlegs move through this region from



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mid-March until mid-May. In fall, they move through from late July through November. Shelley Rutkin reported one on 19 July in 2008 at the York Hill access on the Yadkin River. Heathy Walker and Harriett Whitsett found two Greater Yellowlegs lingering “rather late” at Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge on November 22–23, 1988. December records are rare, but Greater Yellowlegs have occasionally been recorded on local Christmas Bird Counts since the turn of the twenty-first century.

Our earliest account of Greater Yellowlegs and first specimen of this species in the region is from the town of Chester in Chester County: Leverett Loomis shot a single bird from a flock of seven that had landed “on the margin of a little mill-pond” on April 21, 1880. Our peak flock size appears to be only 10 or 11 birds. Charlotte Spring Bird Count observers tallied a highlight number of 10 Greater Yellowlegs on the count conducted May 2, 1987. Dwayne Martin counted 11 in a flock in Cabarrus County at Lake Don T. Howell on October 19, 2002.



Greater Yellowlegs. (Kevin Metcalf)