

American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana*



Folk Name: Long-billed Avocet

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Casual to Very Rare

Habitat: Shallow waters on lake edges, impoundments, mudflats

The American Avocet is the only one of the world's four avocet species that is found in North America. It is most commonly found in shallow water habitat along the coast of the Carolinas during the spring, fall, or winter. Occasionally, flocks of 900 or more are seen. The American Avocet is a very colorful bird and is about 18 inches long with "extraordinarily long blue legs and a very slender bill, comprising nearly a fourth of the bird's entire length and having a strong upward curve."

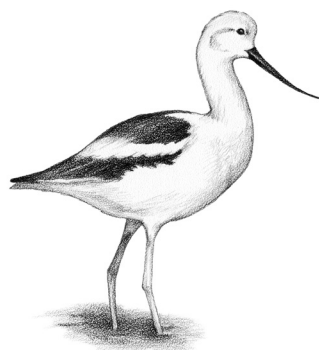
"Its very appearance is distinguished and instantly arrests attention. The plumage is of sharply contrasted black and white, with yellowish buff on head and neck; the legs are like stilts, while the bill, is long and slender, curving up in a way to make one wonder how the creature can eat." —*The Charlotte News*, August 28, 1906

"Its actions are no less peculiar than its looks. Wading in shallow water, it bends forward so that the curve of the bill touches the bottom and it swings it back and forth in unison with its advancing steps. The movement suggests a man with a scythe, the object being to discover with the very sensitive bill the food which the muddy bottom conceals." —*The Intelligencer*, Anderson, SC, December 25, 1901

We currently have a total of nine records of American Avocet in the Central Carolina region. One was reported here during the twentieth century, and the remaining eight have been reported since 2000. The earliest report is a group of avocets found by Jane and Jeff Burton on Lake Norman in September 1979. The Burton's sighting



American Avocets on Lake Norman. (Rob Van Epps)



was published in the Mecklenburg Audubon newsletter that fall. Unfortunately, no specific date was given, and no details of the sighting were provided.

Recent sightings of American Avocet in this region include: a single avocet in non-breeding plumage found by Alan Kneidel at Lake Don T. Howell, Cabarrus County, on September 3, 2001; a single avocet found by Monroe Pannell on a sandbar on Lookout Shoals Lake along the border of Catawba and Iredell County on August 14, 2007; another found by Pannell at Riverbend Park in Conover, Catawba County, on August 22, 2009.

While birding by boat, David and Marcia Wright and Jeff Lemons found a flock of 12 avocets, in both winter and "mixed" plumages, on the point of Governor's Island on Lake Norman on October 20, 2012. Lemons was able to take an excellent photograph of the flock. These birds flew off towards Mecklenburg County. Monroe Pannell found a pair of American Avocets on a mudflat on Lake Norman in Catawba County (his 3rd and 4th sighting there) on July 20, 2015.

On August 8, 2015, Rob Van Epps photographed a flock of 11 American Avocets on a sandbar in Lake Norman off of Norman Island Drive in Cornelius. This is the first confirmed record of avocet for Mecklenburg County. The birds were later noted as "showing molt in their inner primaries" which is consistent with molting from their breeding plumage to their "basic" or winter plumage. It is interesting to note that after these birds disappeared, a flock of 11 avocets showed up at Falls Lake in Durham County just 3 days later.

Our most recent records are of birds photographed in Stanly County and in Union County. Kevin Airington photographed a lone avocet in breeding plumage standing on the edge of Badin Lake in Stanly County on July 7, 2016. While out kayaking, George Andrews photographed a flock of a dozen avocets wading in a marshy spot on Cane Creek Park Lake in Union County on July 26, 2016.