

**Simon Thompson**

## **The Birder's Eye**

### *A Delicious Dessert of Spoonbills*

Imagine finding a Roseate Spoonbill up here in the North Carolina Mountains? It seems almost unbelievable. Well, we can do more than imagine it now- it's just happened. 2018 has been an odd year for birds here in the western mountains. Spring brought us more than the normal number of Golden Swamp Warblers (Prothonotary Warblers – in case you didn't read my last column!), a spring storm dropped large numbers of shorebirds at Hooper Lane in Henderson County; by far the best shorebird spot in the Western counties.



*Spoonbill Photos by Tim Carstens*

Along with large numbers of the more expected species, we had dozens of Whimbrel, Black-bellied Plover and Ruddy Turnstone plus a small flock of Red Knot – the first for the county. Also several Cattle and Snowy Egrets have made an appearance. And now we have Roseate Spoonbills. Not just one, but 3 birds seemingly feeding happily in a Henderson County wetland – and they may have been here for a while.



The first report was of a single bird seen by LeNorah Allen along the French Broad River on June 3, with one being seen soon afterwards in Transylvania County by Lindsay Rutland on June 7 – also along the French Broad River. The rest of us had to wait until July 14 when 3 birds were found along Rugby Road, also in Henderson County where, as I write this column, they still reside.



I certainly don't need to describe the finer points of Roseate Spoonbill identification as few birds are quite as distinctive as these large pink wading birds with large spatulate bills. Adults do show far more brilliant crimson in their wings than immature birds with a much greener skin coloration to the head and bill, especially during the breeding season. Immature birds are far paler overall and still retain whitish feathering on their heads. As is typical with out of range

individuals, all of the Spoonbills recorded so far in Western North Carolina have been young birds. It's anyone's guess how long they will stay around but until the day they decide to leave, hopefully many of us will get to enjoy these spectacular visitors from the Deep South.