



# Lower Neuse Bird Club

Editor: Carol Oldham, LowerNeuseBirdClub@gmail.com

## Club Officers

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First Meeting of the 2017-2018 Program Year

**Tuesday, September 12, 2017 at 6:30 pm**

The Cardinal: Be Surprised  
by Your State Bird

Presentation by Club Member Les Coble



Meetings are held at Garber United Methodist Church, Country Club Road, New Bern, Room 123 of the Ministry Center, across the street from the main church. Parking and entrance are at the rear of the building.

Join us for refreshments & conversation for the first half hour; meeting begins at 7 pm.

*Refreshments for this meeting are being provided by Sally Rowe.*

## A Few Notes Since Our Last Meeting

*By Carol Oldham, Editor*

Minutes from May and information about the final birding field trips of May and June were included in the Newsletter Extra submitted to you in June. One correction to be made is that the North River Farm Preserve is owned by the **North Carolina Coastal Federation**.

Many club members have made summer trips that included some great birding. We'll hear more about their travels through this year's monthly programs. Check inside and mark your calendars for this year's schedule of Saturday field trips and extra birding opportunities.

Fall migration is getting underway; I've already heard about a Black-and-white Warbler and an American Redstart sighting. Keep your eyes peeled for strangers in our midst!

## Lower Neuse Bird Club

### Saturday Field Trips

Mark your calendars with the following dates for this season’s bird walks. Most trips end by noon and do not require much walking. Remember to bring your binoculars, scopes, field guides, insect repellent, rain gear, snacks and water.

Unless otherwise announced, all trips depart from the parking lot of the Bridge Pointe Hotel at 7 am sharp. Carpools can be arranged as we meet up. The planned destination may be changed at the last minute if a special sighting or different location gives us a better opportunity for birding. Information will be updated with each newsletter.



#### CBC Meeting Dates

Sep 29-30-2017  
Litchfield, SC

Jan 26-27, 2018  
Wrightsville Beach, NC

April 27-28, 2018  
Flat Rock, NC

#### Other Events of Interest

Wings Over Water  
Oct 17-22, 2017  
Nags Head, NC  
[www.wingsoverwater.org](http://www.wingsoverwater.org)

- September 9 Cedar Island
- September 23 New Bern Quarry (Fall Warbler migration)
- September 30 New Bern Quarry (Fall Warbler migration)
- October 7 Shackelford Banks
- November 4 Simmons Street Project, New Bern
- December 2 Pamlico County
- January 6 New Bern area for ducks
- February 3 (?) Mattamuskeet
- March 3 Voice of America—Sparrows
- April 7 Croatan
- May 19 Camp Brinson
- June 2 North River Preserve

### Extra Birding Opportunities

These extra birding trips are still in the planning stage. More details will be provided as they become available.

- Pea Island, November 14-15 (Tue-Wed)  
Includes Roper/Phelps Lake/Alligator River
- Spring Mountain Trip, May 5-6-7 (Sat-Sun-Mon)



## LNBC Membership Dues

With the start of the new program year, it is time once again to pay your annual membership dues. Lower Neuse Bird Club dues are \$15 per person and cover the program year from September 2017 through May 2018.

Your dues provide for our room rental, monthly programs and field trips, our newsletter, our holiday party and any additional projects and donations undertaken by the club.

Dues may be paid at a monthly meeting, or you may send them directly to Christine Root, LNBC Treasurer, 651 Quail Road, Merritt, NC 28556. Checks should be payable to LNBC.



## OBX Birding Rates

The coastal region of North Carolina is a birding hotspot. It consistently provides some of the highest species counts in the world. This rich environment makes North Carolina's coastal lands and the Outer Banks a magnet for hundreds of bird species.

Ramada Plaza Nags Head Oceanfront Hotel is offering these special "birding rates":

Jan 1—Mar 31	\$ 55
Apr 1—Memorial Day	\$ 79
Memorial Day—Labor Day	\$ 149
Sep—Oct 31	\$ 79
Nov—Dec 31	\$ 55

1701 S Virginia Dare Trail  
Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948  
252-441-2151

Mention the "OBX BIRDING RATE" to receive the preferred rates. Rates are valid on City Rooms Sun—Thurs. (Not valid Weekends or Holidays.)



*Pauline Sterin and Elizabeth White visited Bob Holmes' Memorial Tree at Valle Crucis. Look how it's grown!*

## The 100-Year Perspective of Frank M. Chapman

A True Nature Article by Julie Zickefoose

BIRD WATCHER'S DIGEST • SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER '17 • [birdwatchersdigest.com](http://birdwatchersdigest.com)

Nearly every page of this newly republished work gives a 21st century birder a bit of whiplash. Simply perusing the list of species included as common gives one pause....

We must now travel with intent to find and observe any of these once abundant species...

“He taught men to know birds; children to love them.” The epitaph of “the most articulate ornithologist of his generation” captures the then-novel blend of ornithologist and conservationist that was Frank M. Chapman (1864-1945). Creator of the first federal bird sanctuary; originator of the Christmas Bird Count; founder of *Bird Lore*, later to become *Audubon Magazine*; and author of ground-breaking ornithological texts, Chapman was passionate about protecting the birds he studies. Often lyrical, at times quaint, at others startling, Chapman’s *Bird Life: A guide to the Study of Our Common Birds* invites the 21st century reader to contemplate how birds and bird appreciation in the eastern United States have changed since it was written in 1897. Nearly every page of this newly republished work gives a 21st century birder a bit of whiplash. Simply perusing the list of species included as common gives one pause, for the bobwhite, dickcissel, horned lark, vesper sparrow and bobolink have, like the open farmland they once inhabited, now nearly vanished as resident breeders in the eastern United States. Frank Chapman describes an open, agrarian landscape that is no more. We must now travel with intent to find and observe any of these once abundant species in the largely reforested East.

*Bird Life* was written when the much-lamented and celebrated passenger pigeon still existed, though the enormous flocks of “less than fifty ears ago” were long gone. Yet, not all of the contrasts in this important text incite

wistfulness. Much in the human/avian interface has changed for the better. Gone are the days of “shotgun ornithology,” whereby we learned about a bird’s appearance and habits with the bang of a gun, dissection, and examination of its stomach contents. The book is salted with observations that could have been gained in no other way, making for fascinating reading.

Throughout, our historically adversarial relationship with birds comes through in sometimes shocking ways. Herons, unprotected by any law, were shot for fun; egrets were killed for their plumes and “(Bald) Eagles are becoming so rare in the Northern States that their occurrence is sometimes commented on by the local press... Nevertheless, no opportunity to kill them is neglected, and the majestic birds who in life arouse our keenest admiration are sacrificed to the wanton desire to kill.”

I have often wondered why belted kingfishers, in contrast to all other kingfisher species I’ve observed, take immediate flight upon approach, whether on foot or by boat; their skittishness seeming extreme and unwarranted. Here in this passage may lay the answer.

“The Kingfisher is generally branded a fish thief and accounted a fair mark for every man with a gun and, were it not for his discretion in judging distances and knowing just when to fly, he would long ago have disappeared from the haunts of man...”

In these harsh times, Chapman is an advocate for birds we now would never think of killing: “Bee-keepers accuse the

Kingbird of a taste for honeybees, but the examination, made by Prof. Beal, of two hundred and eighteen Kingbirds' stomachs show that the charge is unfounded."

What an image this conjures! I am glad to live in a world where the notion of shooting 218 eastern kingbirds in order to prove their innocence as honeybee predators is not only unthinkable, but also laughable—and illegal. So, it must be mentioned, is shooting any native non-game bird. And along with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, finally passed in 1918, the destructive attitudes Chapman so passionately fought have changed as well.

In Chapman's time, terns were still being slaughtered at their nesting colonies to be put on women's hats; Pennsylvania still paid a bounty on dead hawks. Now, tern colonies throughout New England are maintained through intensive management, and hawk enthusiasts perch by the thousands on windswept Kittatinny Ridge in eastern Pennsylvania just to watch the splendor of raptor migration, at the very spot where, until 1934, tens of thousands of these birds were brought down by sport shooters.

Other things that are looking up for today's bird watchers: the plethora of field guides of every description, using paintings and photographs to help put a name on an mystery bird. Handy smartphone apps summon up images and sound recordings of birds, obviating the need to carry a heavy book in the field. Chapter VIII, "A Field Key to our Common Land Birds," starkly demonstrates just how far bird identification has come. This text-only key, doubtless a great boon in its time, evoked a chuckle as I scanned the categories. The key, which moved through torturous verbal descriptions of plumage and behavior of quite dissimilar birds, unaided by any illustrations, made me wonder how anyone of Chapman's time came to know the birds, and I understood better why shotguns had been necessary for identification. Binoculars, mist nets, aluminum

*Binoculars, mist nets, aluminum bands, and geotransmitters have long since replaced the shotgun as the primary tools for bird study.*

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In its anachronism, this book is fascinating fodder. Nearly every species account reveals changes in birds' distribution, abundance, and even behavior from Frank Chapman's time. For instance, red-headed woodpeckers are described as locally common in summer; red-bellied woodpeckers did not merit mention. Today, red-headed woodpeckers are rare and very local throughout the Northeast, and red-bellied woodpeckers are now common, having extended their range

from the American southeast well past the Canadian border. Common nighthawks are described as nesting "on the bare ground or a flat rock in open fields, and, rarely, on a house top in the city." Today, natural nighthawk nests are virtually unknown, and almost all of these rapidly declining birds have taken to nesting on flat gravel roofs in cities. Similarly, chimney swifts have utterly changed their nesting behavior since 1897. "Swifts naturally nest in hollow trees or caves, and it is only in the more densely populated parts of their range that they resort to chimneys and outbuildings." Today, chimney swift nests in trees are rare enough to merit a note in an ornithological journal. Virtually all chimney swifts have switched to using manmade chimneys.

Some species accounts are real head-scratchers.

Of the northern cardinal, Chapman writes,

*"...in spite of his bright colors, the Cardinal is a surprisingly difficult bird to see...The Cardinal is a bird of the Southern rather than the Northern states and is rarely seen north of New York City...To one who associates it with magnolias... it seems strangely out of place amid snowy surroundings."*

I paused. Since when do cardinals look out of place in snow?



Chapman's description of the rare, skulking southern cardinal may hearken to the fact that this book was written before any hint of organized, regular bird feeding took hold. The massive subsidy of cardinals (not to mention red-bellied woodpeckers, tufted titmice, house finches, and Carolina wrens) with sunflower seed, peanuts, and suet has doubtless contributed to these species' invasion of the north-eastern United States. If one wanted to see goldfinches, Chapman recommended you "devote a corner of your garden to sunflowers." This is a far cry from the continually replenished feeding stations in millions of backyards around the country. This is only one of the myriad ways in which the human/bird interface has radically changed since Chapman's time. Which, in its turn, has helped to shape avian range expansions. Humanity's influence is most of the story in changing bird distributions.

Surprisingly, there are very few outright errors to be found in this work; most of the inaccuracies are the result of actual changes in bird distribution, abundance, and behavior. Ruby-throated hummingbirds incubate their eggs for 17, not 10 days; and birds are now known to descend not from reptiles but from dinosaurs. But beyond the fun of ferreting out how much has changed for birds and bird watchers, the unexpected delight of the book is the whimsical beauty of Frank Chapman's writing. Describing the skulky behavior of cuckoos, he opines: "...*there is something about the Cuckoo's actions which always suggests to me that he either has just done, or is about to do, something he shouldn't.*"

A few things about bird study will, apparently, never change. How completely this passage resonates in

1897 and 2017: "The sight of a bird or the sound of its voice is at all times an event of such significance to me, a source of such unfailing pleasure, that when I go afield with those to whom birds are strangers, I am deeply impressed by the comparative barrenness of their world, for they live in ignorance of the great store of enjoyment which might be theirs for the asking."

*"The sight of a bird or the sound of its voice is at all times an event of such significance to me, a source of such unfailing pleasure..."*

Chapman goes on to describe the elder statesmen of nature study whom he'd been privileged to know: *"All had passed the allotted threescore and ten, and some were over fourscore. The friends and associates of their earlier days had passed away, and one might imagine that they had no interest in life and were simply waiting for the end. But these veterans were old in years only. Their hearts were young. The earth was fair; plants still bloomed, and birds sang for them. There was no idle waiting here; the days were all too short.*

*With what boyish ardor they told of some recent discovery; what inspiration there was in their enthusiasm!"*

No one could better sum up the rejuvenating powers of nature and of bird study in particular. Frank Chapman's title of Dean of American Ornithology was well-earned. We owe it to ourselves and the birds to read his important book, to reflect on all that has changed and all that remains unchanged, and the numerous ways in which birds make our lives more meaningful and beautiful.

Frank M. Chapman's *Bird Life: A Guide to the Study of Our Common Birds* has been republished, with original illustrations by Ernest Thompson Seton, by Skyhorse Press.

Julie Zickefoose, author of *Baby Birds: An Artist Looks Into the Nest*, *The Bluebird Effect*, *Letters from Eden*, and *Natural Gardening for Birds*, studies and works to help birds on an 80-acre sanctuary in Appalachian Ohio.