



Lower Neuse Bird Club

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February Meeting – Wildlife of Madagascar (Part 1)

by Les Coble

Our monthly meeting for February will be the first of a two-part presentation on the **Wildlife of Madagascar**. Madagascar hosts a number of lemurs, fossas, aye-ayes, and other species found nowhere else in the world. A magical land in the Indian Ocean, Madagascar's wildlife is unique and its forests are full of surprises. Many endemic animals lend credence to the island being the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean. Mike Creedon will be our speaker, using video and photos to introduce us to a place we will want on our bucket list, if not already there.

The meeting starts at **6:30 PM on Tuesday, Feb. 4**, at the Ministry Center of Garber United Methodist Church, 4201 Country Club Rd., New Bern. Refreshments for this meeting will be provided by Wade Fuller.

January 2020 Meeting Minutes

by Jura Hill

The January meeting of the Lower Neuse Bird Club was called to order at 7:00 PM on Tuesday the 8th by Wade Fuller, with a larger than usual group of 30 members in attendance.

The first topic of discussion was the 120th Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC), with representatives of several count circles on hand. The CBC for Central Beaufort County was on Sunday, December 15th. The New Bern count was held on Monday the 16th, and the Pamlico CBC was on Tuesday the 17th. The Beaufort count (Kevin O'Kane coordinating) ended with a total of 79 total species. 115 species were recorded during The Pamlico CBC (Liz Lathrop and Diane Midness coordinating). A highlight of the Pamlico CBC was a sighting of 7 Soras together in a field. 104 species were tallied during the New Bern count (Wade Fuller coordinating), with Al Gamache adding the last 5 species in the afternoon. All counts indicated that waterfowl numbers were down compared to previous years.

It was then time for Les Coble to present his *Tips For Beginning Birders*. The topic for this edition was "pattern". Les walked us through the patterns used to identify sparrows. He showed a slide with four breast patterns that help with identifying sparrows. All North American sparrows fall into a category of plain, spotted, streaked, or streaked with a spot. Sometimes the spot within a streaked breast is more a clumping of dark feathers in a splotch, yet it is almost always distinguishable.

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Lower Neuse Bird Club

January 2020 Meeting Minutes

by Jura Hill, continued from Page 1

Talk of walks included that the first Saturday walk of January had been postponed and would take place (weather dependent) on the second Saturday. The planned annual trip to Mattamuskeet will take place in February, with details to be confirmed at the monthly meeting on February 4th.

In the “tell” segment of Show and Tell, there were not many unusual birds, and it was mentioned that American Goldfinches and Pine Siskins had not yet appeared. A freezer-preserved window-strike bird from November was passed around during the “show” part. It was a rather drab bird, and the conversation got going with several guesses. It was a good exercise in narrowing down what the bird wasn't. Too big for a Kinglet, bill too thick for a Warbler. It was not a Flycatcher, since the base of the bill was not wide. It did show an eye stripe. The bird was ultimately identified as a Red-eyed Vireo.

The speaker for the night was Christine Stoughton Root, with a presentation on “**Birding Iceland**”. She had made the trip in the latter half of March 2019. Christine spoke of the demographics and culture in Iceland. English is widely spoken, so there was no language barrier. The population of the entire island is 100,000 less than the population of Raleigh. She recommended what was her first stop at the Blue Lagoon, a geothermal spa in southwestern Iceland, as a great start after a very long journey from the States. One of the notable characteristics of Iceland is the overall lack of trees. As birders, that’s where we often look! Another physical feature are the black sand beaches, since the island is of volcanic origin. The weather on Iceland can change very quickly, and every slide of the island seems to be on the windward side. In all, Christine saw 56 bird species. A fun sighting were some Snow Buntings sitting on a shelter roof, and a clear moment in the weather provided some very nice photos. In a climactic ending nearing the end of her stay on the island, Christine located one of the “target” species of her trip, a Rock Ptarmigan, which was walking along a path near the airport! Following its tracks in the snow yielded a great photo opportunity for Christine.



The hardy Rock Ptarmigan nests as far north as there is land in the world. This chunky grouse wears two kinds of camouflage: it's nearly all-white in the snowy winter, and mottled brown in the summer. Male Rock Ptarmigan stay white until they've finished courting females, and then intentionally dirty their plumage to hide from predators until they have molted into a safer (but less dashing) brown plumage. Their feathered feet help them to walk on deep snow and to dig snow burrows and tunnels for refuge from severe cold.

Photographs ©
Christine Stoughton-Root
March 28, 2019

Text from
AllAboutBirds.org

Rock Ptarmigan tracks made in the fresh snow

Photography by Christine Stoughton-Root
March 28, 2019



Mexico’s Magical Migrations! – 2021

The Friends of the Maritime Museum in Beaufort, NC, is partnering with EcoQuest Travel to offer a trip to witness two of nature’s greatest spectacles – the wintering Monarch Butterflies and Humpback Whales in Mexico. This 10-day natural history and archaeological experience departs **January 10, 2021**. Cost is \$4,260 plus airfare. For more information contact JoAnne Powell, trip leader, at joannepowell1208@gmail.com.

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 in New Bern 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.

- March 7: Fort Macon SP
- April 4: Croatan National Forest (spring migrants/warbblers)
- May 2: Beaufort County (Henslow's Sparrow)
- May 16: Camp Brinson (Black-throated Green/breeding warblers)*
- June 6: North River Wetlands Preserve (Dickcissel)

* = *bonus trip*



*LNBC Members Birding on Lilliput Drive
Jan. 11, 2020
©Ronnie Hewlette*

Craven County Ponds – LNBC January Bird Walk

by Ronnie Hewlette

The Lower Neuse Bird Club's trip to visit Craven County Ponds was held on Saturday, January 11th. With 9 of us gathering at the Bridge Pointe Motel in New Bern (7:00 AM), and two more on the way, we headed over to Lilliput Pond with hopeful anticipation of finding some waterfowl. Temps began in the mid-60s, eventually heading into the 70s by noon with cloudy and/or overcast skies, making for a great day to be out and about.

Not to be disappointed, there were a couple of rafts of ducks near the middle of the pond as we drove to the Northeast corner of the lake to get a clear view. Most numerous were Ring-necked Ducks and American Wigeons, with three Redheads, four Hooded Mergansers, a handful of Pied-billed Grebes, and a couple of Gadwalls. As we stood and watched, some of the ducks got up, circled and came back to the water, getting just a little closer for us to inspect with scopes and binoculars.

But it was the presence of the land birds that stole the show. Cedar Waxwings numbered well over 100! Les saw a Clay-colored Sparrow with some Chipping Sparrows, but it disappeared, and no one else got views of it. Too bad, that would have been a Life-bird for many of us. A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was sighted in the bare-limbs of a tree right overhead, providing great, unobscured looks at this dainty gray ball of energy.

A Bald Eagle was sighted in the distance by several as we rounded up a total of 31 species at this one stop.

Moving back toward Merchants Grocery on Perrytown Rd., our next stop was at the pond behind Merchants. The access road we usually use has recently been gated, but not *POSTED*. A lot of the brush along the lake has been cut back, reducing the usable habitat, but we managed to find birds on the lake and in the bushes that border the wet area on the north side of the road. A Black & White Warbler was sighted, our first House Sparrow was heard, and other species were identified that produced a final count of 16 species for this stop.

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Lower Neuse Bird Club

First Saturday Bird Walk: Craven County Ponds

by Ronnie Hewlette
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Red-shouldered Hawk
at Dick & Sally Rowe's
(River Bluffs)

©Michael Cheves Jan. 11, 2020



Bins aimed and scopes lined
up!

LNBC at Lilliput Pond
Jan. 11, 2020

©Ronnie Hewlette

Marion Drive was our next stop. Not a pond, but open fields near the Coastal Carolina Regional Airport's southern runway. Always a good stop for Meadowlarks, Kestrels, and various grassland birds. This stop produced a Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, several Savannah Sparrows, Bluebirds, Grackles and Starlings for a total count of 12 species.

Lake Clermont Subdivision's lake did not add a long or variable count to the list, but we saw a Forster's Tern with its rowing wingbeats and dives to the water, as it worked one end of the lake. At Ronnie's house, on the north end of the lake, two Great Blue Herons flew over as we scoped from the side yard, and an immature Red-shouldered Hawk gave us good looks, both front and back, as it perched on a fence. It also gave a view of the narrow bands on its tail when it came in for a landing on the fence. We added a Great Egret to the list as we drove around the lake on Kelso Rd., near the airport, continuing our morning bird-walk. Next stop – New Bern's Civil War Battlefield Park, a Hotspot on eBird, located just beyond the railroad, at the entrance to the Taberna Subdivision.

We are now specifically looking for a Red-headed Woodpecker, known to frequent this area, particularly in the Redan-5 area of the park. Michael is the guide for this stop, and to quote him, "I love this place!" What more does a guide need to find the RHWO for us? And find it, he did. Great looks at a mature bird, as it worked around a dead snag, in full view for all to see. We also found several Mallards and a Great Blue Heron in the beaver pond and adjacent wetland; with Juncos, Warblers, Chickadees, Kinglets, Nuthatches and others sighted along the trails through the park. On the way out, Les caught a glimpse of a Hermit Thrush in an area that historically has been a seasonal home to thrushes (Hermit, Gray-cheeked, Wood). A total of 17 species for this stop.

Final stop is at Dick and Sally's home in the River Bluffs Subdivision. As we walked up the drive to the house, a Red-shouldered Hawk came barreling out of the trees, at just about head-height, moving from right to left. Check off that one – oh, we already have one of those for the day. Oh well, you can't ever have too many sightings!



Some Cedar Waxwings seen alongside Lilliput
Drive, Jan. 11, 2020 (total number of Cedar
Waxwings was well over 100!)

©Ronnie Hewlette Jan. 11, 2020

Dick is at the door, welcoming us with his hot cider and gingerbread, and we graciously accept his hospitality. Out on the deck, we scan the river for ducks. Two weeks ago, there were countless ducks viewable from this very spot. But on this morning, we have nothing. Oh, not really nothing – we see a handful of Ruddy Ducks, a few Scoters, Cormorants, and a Belted Kingfisher. Back to the gingerbread and cider!

It was a great morning for a club outing, with 11 birders and unbelievable weather for January. There were at least 60 species tallied, including the gulls and coots seen at the Bridge Pointe at the end of the trip.

What can I say but WOW!

Craven County Ponds – Checklist for Jan. 11, 2020

Compiled by Ronnie Hewlette

#	Species Name	#	Species Name	#	Species Name
1	Canada Goose	21	Great Egret	41	Carolina Wren
2	Gadwall	22	Turkey Vulture	42	European Starling
3	American Wigeon	23	Osprey	43	Northern Mockingbird
4	Mallard	24	Bald Eagle	44	Eastern Bluebird
5	Redhead	25	Northern Harrier	45	Hermit Thrush
6	Ring-necked Duck	26	Red-shouldered Hawk	46	American Robin
7	Black Scoter	27	Belted Kingfisher	47	Cedar Waxwing
8	Hooded Merganser	28	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	48	House Sparrow
9	Ruddy Duck	29	Red-headed Woodpecker	49	Chipping Sparrow
10	Pied-billed Grebe	30	Red-bellied Woodpecker	50	Darrk-eyed Junco
11	Rock Pigeon	31	Pileated Woodpecker	51	Clay-colored Sparrow (local rarity)
12	Mourning Dove	32	Northern Flicker	52	Savannah Sparrow
13	American Coot	33	American Kestrel	53	Eastern Meadowlark
14	Killdeer	34	Eastern Phoebe	54	Red-winged Blackbird
15	Ring-billed Gull	35	Blue Jay	55	Brown-headed Cowbird
16	Herring Gull	36	American Crow	56	Common Grackle
17	Great Black-backed Gull	37	Carolina Chickadee	57	Black-and-white Warbler
18	Forster's Tern	38	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	58	Pine Warbler
19	Double-crested Cormorant	39	Brown-headed Nuthatch	59	Yellow-rumped Warbler
20	Great Blue Heron	40	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	60	Northern Cardinal



*Red-headed Woodpecker
a frequent sighting
at New Bern's
Civil War Battlefield Park
©Michael Cheves*

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Pileated Woodpecker: Carpenter of the Forest

by Stephen Shunk

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The roll of the pileated woodpecker is one of the most impressive sounds in nature, and among the noblest of spring, being most frequently heard on still, humid mornings when the air seems hungering to transmit sound... All the woodpecker tribe love to beat the tom-tom to such weather, but the stately roll of (the pileated) easily lords it over all. It is then as the gavel of the speaker calling the Whole House of Nature to order after the defection and chaos of winter. – Ernest W. Vickers (1914)

I remember that day like it was yesterday. Shortly after entering Yosemite National Park, we stopped in an area playfully known as Chevron Meadows, named for the gas station at the Crane Flat junction and the nearby network of small meadows surrounded by giant conifers. We sought the great gray owls that were nesting in this storybook old-growth forest. In short time, we easily found the owls – three puffy nestlings in a snapped-off snag – and their mother hunting in the nearby meadow. Certainly, nothing could ever eclipse the thrill of this amazing experience.

On the walk back to the car, I was surprised and delighted to see my second-ever white-headed woodpecker working the bark furrows of a huge sugar pine. Striking bird, the white-headed. Now, doubly satisfied with our walk, we nearly let our guards down when – from out of nowhere – a massive black bird with a fiery red crest swooped through the darkened canopy and lit on a fir tree just 30 yards before us. I had never seen this beast before, but there was no question that we had encountered a pileated woodpecker.

Log-cock, cock-o'-the-woods, stump-breaker, Indian hen, johnny-cock, rain crow, and devil's woodpecker. Early colloquial names included these, plus up to 25 additional monikers. *PY-lee-ay-tid* or *PILL-ee-ay-tid*? It gets its name from the Latin *pileum* (*PY-lee-um*), meaning “the top of the head of a bird from the bill to the nape”, but either of the two pronunciations is considered correct today. Whatever you call North America's pileated woodpecker, you can't help but be impressed when this pterodactyl of woodpeckers flies through your favorite woodland.

A powerful forest carpenter, the pileated is indeed a big bird. Often described as crow-sized, it is the seventh-largest woodpecker in the world. That's big, when you consider a total world list of more than 220 woodpecker species. With the ivory-billed likely absent among North America avifauna, the pileated remains the reigning monarch of mature woods from British Columbia to the Florida Keys and from Southern California to Nova Scotia.

The large, industrious carpenter ant represents the most consistent part of the diet across the pileated's range, but the balance of its menu remains as diverse as its local habitat preferences. If you have watched these impressive birds enough, then you have seen one extract a giant grub – as big as its formidable bill – from a dead or dying tree. And, if you feed birds at home, you may be fortunate enough to have one visit your suet feeder!

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The pileated is best known for its call: a loud, repeated series of *cuk*, *cuk* notes that resemble the call of the northern flicker, though the pileated calls with a slower cadence, typically lower in pitch, and tapering downward near the end. The other most frequently heard call is a long series of *cuk* notes at an irregular pitch and volume typically uttered while feeding. They are most vocal during courtship, in territory defense, and in the morning. Pairs communicate all year but are least vocal in winter. They frequently call on their way to roost in the evening.

When viewed from below, half of the pileated's underwings show as bold white. Outer halves of primaries and secondaries show as broad dark wingtips and trailing edges. A thin dark line borders white along the leading edge of the wing. From above, the wings appear mostly dark, with a small amount of white in the flight feathers showing through, appearing as a mottled white band in the carpal area. Little to no white shows in the folded wings.

Text by Stephen Shunk
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Photo ©Michael Cheves
New Bern Battlefield Park
July 9, 2018

Pileated Woodpecker: Carpenter of the Forest

by Stephen Shunk, continued from Page 6

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In my current backyard along the eastern slope of the Oregon Cascades, pileateds are fairly scarce, despite the wide expanses of coniferous forests. Here on the dry side of the Cascades, territories can be large, and the birds can seem frustratingly elusive. As with most species, a bird's local range depends on habitat quality. The pileated occupies larger territories in dryer forests that support fewer carpenter ants. When I really want to see a log-cock, I choose one of three options. Cross the Cascades westward into the temperate rainforest; go north into the boreal forest of Canada; or head east, either to the upper Gulf Coast or the mixed woodlands east of the Great Plains.

One of my best pileated memories came on my first visit to Little Rock, Arkansas. After leaving the airport, I drove just 20 minutes to Boyle City Park on Forche Creek. I couldn't even get my binoculars out of the car before I saw a family of four pileateds, chatting and bouncing among the downed trees next to the parking lot.

Every time I visit Florida's Everglades City, I head straight for the Camelia Street Grill, near the southwestern corner of Big Cypress National Preserve. I've been visiting this waterfront bistro for 20 years, and I swear that before my lobster roll hits the table, I see the very same pileated woodpecker perched on the very same utility pole across the street. The longevity record for this species is just over 12 years, so maybe I'm now seeing the offspring of the bird I saw on my first visit. Nonetheless, I swear I'm seeing the oldest pileated of all.

Away from these areas where pileateds are common and predictable, resident birds are typically heard well before they are seen. The log-cock's forceful drumming and haunting call often precede – and frequently eclipse – visual observation. Because they occupy territories up to a mile in diameter, you should not expect to see the birds on every visit, even if you hear the familiar flicker-like “jungle call” or its powerful drum roll.

More often, the bird makes its presence known by its impressive carpentry. Take two trees lying side by side on the forest floor, each with its own colony of carpenter ants. Now, take a jackhammer and dig yourself a deep chasm in one of the trees, maybe four inches deep and three feet long. Come back in a week, and the second tree just might have a matching excavation, with three- to four-inch chunks of wood strewn pell-mell away from the trunk. A pileated woodpecker was here. Visit a mature open grove in Japsar National Park or a bug-killed stand of black spruce in northern Alberta, and you might see the very same excavations. Venture out to the second-growth bottoms of Alabama's Tensaw River, or to a second-growth woodland outside our nation's capital, and you may see the carpentry of our largest woodpecker. These second-growth woodlands actually have a story to tell.

Leading up to the 1900s, humans had mowed down huge swaths of our eastern forests, and local pileated woodpeckers nearly vanished. These striking “game birds” were also sought after for the value of their feathers and for food and sport. However, by the 1920s and 1930s, forests had begun to reclaim abandoned old farms.



The pileated can be found year-round in hardwood forests across Canada, throughout the eastern United States, and in parts of the Pacific coast. Equally at home in the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest and the riverine bottomlands of the Southeast, the pileated woodpecker's habitat preferences seem diverse. The common denominator: rotting wood, and the more rotten the better. Indeed, this giant woodpecker occurs in its highest densities in the wettest habitats, where plenty of downed wood and dead trees persist as home for this woodpecker's favorite food: the carpenter ant. Pileated woodpeckers glean from branches, trunks, and logs; peck in bark; strip bark off trees; and excavate into the cambium of trees. Large rectangular or oval excavations in trees and logs expose ant galleries behind long slivers of wood and are signatures of the pileated work.

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Photo ©Michael Cheves
Pileated Woodpecker
feeding in a cypress swamp
in New Bern, NC, Sept. 10,
2019

Pileated Woodpecker: Carpenter of the Forest

by Stephen Shunk, continued from Page 7
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State and federal agencies also enacted protections for the pileated and many other species. The spread of Dutch elm disease in eastern North America since the 1950s increased the pileated's invertebrate food supply and left plenty of dead and dying trees for nesting, both of which led to an increase in woodpecker populations.

In a striking example of short-term adaptation, the pileated woodpecker started moving into the second-growth timber, and populations rebounded dramatically. Thanks to the recovery of these forests and further protections of important habitats, this giant woodland carpenter continues to reoccupy land within and beyond its former range, from Wisconsin to Oklahoma and from Ohio to New York. Today, though the pileated woodpecker remains a sensitive species in parts of North America, most populations continue to thrive.

Ask your local utility company how pileateds are doing. The lack of snags on the landscape has forced the woodpeckers to excavate in utility poles, costing the industry millions of dollars in annual repairs. You may even be a victim of the bird's same compulsion when your neighborhood pair decides your home is the best substrate for a nest or roost site. They may even be feeding on carpenter ants that have occupied your wooden walls. Remember that the pileated woodpecker loves those carpenter ants and that the ants love dead timber. Leave your snags standing, or, if you must cut trees, leave 10 feet or so above the ground. If you allow its natural habitats to thrive, you may be lucky enough to peacefully coexist with America's largest woodpecker.

Stephen Shunk is based in Bend, Oregon, home to half the North American woodpecker species. He is the author of the Peterson Reference Guide to Woodpeckers of North America, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016. He owns and guides for Paradise Birding, paradisebirding.com.



Pileated woodpeckers are socially monogamous, and presumed to mate for life. Courtship displays include spread wings, raised crest, and swinging head, with repeated single call notes, tapping, and drumming. They engage in flight display during pair formation. The male apparently selects the nest site and begins excavation. It occasionally uses live trees even if snags are abundant. Pairs may reuse the same tree in successive years but excavate a new cavity for nesting. Old nest cavities may be used as roost sites. Both sexes excavate the nest cavity, but the male does more of it. Excavation usually takes three to six weeks. The pileated is the only North American woodpecker to excavate cavities deeper than 17 inches. A pair may start several excavations each spring, some of which might be completed and used for nesting in later years.

Like most woodpeckers, adults exchange incubation and brooding duties repeatedly during daylight; males incubate and brood during the night. Young are fed by regurgitation and leave the nest between 24 and 30 days after hatching. Young pileateds stay in their parents' territory for three to five months, then wander until spring to find mates and establish territories of their own.

Text by Stephen Shunk

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County Line Rd., New Bern (East prong Brice's Creek)

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