

# Lower Neuse Bird Club

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## February Meeting – Wildlife of Madagascar (Part 2)

by Les Coble

Our monthly meeting for March will be the conclusion 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, March 3**, at the Ministry Center of Garber United Methodist Church, 4201 Country Club Rd., New Bern.

## February 2020 Meeting Minutes

by Jura Hill

The February meeting of the Lower Neuse Bird Club was called to order at 7:00 PM on Tuesday the 4<sup>th</sup> by Wade Fuller, with 15 members and 2 visitors in attendance.

The February field trip to Lake Mattamuskeet NWR and the surrounding area was planned for Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup>. Several members that had recently been up to that region told of sightings including an impressive 800 **Common Mergansers** on Lake Phelps. Read further in this newsletter for what else we found!

Show and Tell began with a window-strike bird being passed around. One would think a non-moving bird in a baggie would be easy to identify, but it goes to show how much we do depend on the behavior and location to help us with identification. In this case, it was agreed that the little guy was a Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

A few members mentioned seeing this year's elusive American Goldfinch as mostly single birds. The more unusual birds seen by club members included a **Western Tanager** in Trent Woods, and a **Philadelphia Vireo** at the former rock quarry on Glenburnie, now officially Martin Marietta Park.

An exciting addition to the meeting was a short presentation by Carol Reigle on the Crystal Coast Stargazers Club. The group is part of NASA's Night Sky Network. After a short video, Carol told of the regular activities at Fort Macon, and how the club is working on getting Cape Lookout designated as a Dark Sky location.

## Lower Neuse Bird Club

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### February 2020 Meeting Minutes

*by Jura Hill, continued from Page 1*

Clouds and light pollution are the nemesis of nighttime sky-watching, which limits where the best viewing can take place, so having designated areas helps in preserving the darkness.

The speaker for the night was Mike Creedon with **Madagascar – Part 1**. Mike began with an overview of the geography; Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the world. The original inhabitants arrived from Indonesia when the island was completely wooded. As happens when a habitat is settled, the trees became shelter and fuel, and now the island is only around 10% forested. Of all the flora and fauna on the island, 80% of the species found on the island do not exist elsewhere. The wildlife is now only found in the remaining forests.

Madagascar is the 9<sup>th</sup> poorest country, with a very corrupt government. People wearing shoes outside of the cities just was not seen. The ancient tribal beliefs are strong, and many were happy to have their picture taken, since they believe this would allow them to travel along with the photographer.

Traveling around the island was mostly done by plane, involving a return trip to the capital, Antananarivo, known as Tana, to then catch a flight to the next town. Most of the towns are on the coasts where the Arabs set up port towns 1,000 years ago. Modes of transportation also included taxibuses, where it could take 5 hours to go 50 miles.

The wildlife in Madagascar includes 80% of the world's chameleons. The best-known animal group are the lemurs. There are 103-105 species on the island, with half of those being nocturnal. The most fascinating lemurs are known as the Dancing Sifakas. They sleep in trees on one side of a road, and in the morning, come down and cross the road to eat. They move on their hind legs in a sideways motion, while hopping with arms flailing. The still shots Mike got were wonderfully humorous.

Interspersed in the photos of the island were some beautiful bird photos. None of the birds were identified, as that is Part 2, coming up in the March 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting. See you there!

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## 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](mailto: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/warblers)
- 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 at Lake  
Mattamuskeet NWR  
Feb. 8, 2020  
©Ronnie Hewlette*

## Wildlife Resources Birding Workshops

**Bird Identification: April 23, 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM**  
**Weyerhaeuser Cool Springs Environmental Education Center**  
**New Bern**

Coastal Carolina is a major breeding spot for neo-tropical migratory birds. These birds winter in Central and South America, and make their summer home in this area. The NC Wildlife Resources Commission is offering a class where we will identify these well-traveled birds, as well as other birds that are here year-round, by using visible field marks and habitat.

**Birding By Ear: April 28, 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM**  
**Weyerhaeuser Cool Springs EE Center, New Bern**

The NC Wildlife Resources Commission is offering a class that involves fieldwork to identify birds by their songs and calls.

Both workshops are free and open to the general public, ages 16 and up. Pre-registration is required. Please bring binoculars (some will be available for use), and comfortable walking shoes.

To register, contact Mike Campbell at:  
[mike.campbell@ncwildlife.org](mailto:mike.campbell@ncwildlife.org)  
 (252)-670-0090

## Lower Neuse Bird Club

### LNBC Bird Walk, Feb. 8: Mattamuskeet NWR

by Ronnie Hewlette

In the pre-dawn light of Saturday, February 8<sup>th</sup>, members of the LNBC begin to stir in preparation for a day afield, birding Lake Mattamuskeet, and Lake Phelps, with a planned late-day showdown at the entrance fields of Pungo Lake in Hyde County, NC, with the expectation of seeing thousands of Snow Geese. This day is to be remarkable, with temps in the 40's, clear skies and practically no wind, following two days of rain with winds of 25+ MPH that drained the water right out of the coastal creeks and rivers of our Eastern NC.

LNBC members from Morehead City, New Bern and Fairfield Harbour caravanned toward Lake Mattamuskeet, to be joined by others from Little Washington and Pamlico County. With a phone call, a quick drive-by stop is inserted into the schedule, adding a stop for Bell Island Pier on Rose Bay (Swanquarter NWR). This stop yields upwards of two dozen birds, including Sparrows, Hawks, Eagles, Tree Swallows, Bufflehead, Forster's Terns, Gulls and Loons.

At the entrance of Mattamuskeet NWR and the subsequent drive along Headquarters Road, we found numerous waterfowl, including Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Shovelers, Pintails, American Wigeons, Gadwalls, Canada Geese and a few Tundra Swans, among others. Bonus birds for this stop included a Common Yellowthroat, Orange-crowned Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Catbird, Bald Eagles and a Wilson's Snipe (right in front of us) as we took time to look and listen. Traffic, up and down Headquarters Road, was constant, but did not seem to affect the birds or us, for that matter.

From here, we headed toward the East End Pond, driving from the Visitor's Center, along Wildlife Drive. This is a three-mile drive along the southern edge of Lake Mattamuskeet, with numerous opportunities to stop and observe birds along the roadside. Lots of Chipping Sparrows, Cedar Waxwings, Robins, Woodpeckers, Hawks, and Eagles, and a quick overhead fly-by of two White Pelicans, contributed to this excellent day of birding. At the end of the road there was a tree located across the pond, holding a hundred or more White Ibis, appearing from a distance to be a Magnolia tree in bloom! A Great Horned Owl flew across the pond for the group to see, and Les, Sheryl and Diane got a quick glimpse of a Yellow-breasted Chat that had been reported earlier at this location.

Given the setting and the time, we paused for lunch before heading back to the main road and out over the causeway. Due to personal commitments, four birders dropped out and headed home, leaving eleven birders to continue on into the afternoon.

With a stop along the causeway to locate the Bonaparte's Gull, we continued North towards Lake Phelps. As we approached the Pettigrew SP Boat Ramp, we spotted two Northern Harriers, soaring together, fairly high up over the open fields. This bird is normally seen gliding effortlessly over fields and cutovers, only a mere foot or so above the ground. The long tail, gray underside and black wingtips tagged this as a male Northern Harrier!

With a quick look from the dock at the boat ramp and finding few birds to record, we continued on to the west side of the lake, stopping at Cypress Point. We were in search of the **Common Merganser**, a bird that is uncommonly seen locally, but that gathers here in numbers this time of year.

From the end of the dock at this location (Cypress Point), we could just make out the Mergansers across the lake. With our scopes and quick looks at pictures and descriptions of Common Mergansers vs. Red-breasted Mergansers, we concluded that most of these were Common Mergansers, our target bird! Standing at the end of the dock, we heard another Great Horned Owl (3<sup>rd</sup> for the day) and several Common Loons were located, out on the lake.

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## Bird Walk – Lake Mattamuskeet & Surrounding

by Ronnie Hewlette  
Continued from page 4

Having located one of our target birds and estimating a count of 300 individuals marks a milestone for the day, but as we were packing up to leave, a flight of the Common Mergansers got up and began flying low over the water right at us; Unbelievable! They came all the way across the lake and passed within 50 yards of our position. What a sight!

Returning to our vehicles, we departed for Pocosin Lakes NWR (Pungo Lake), in search of Snow Geese. Along the way, several fields of Tundra Swans were observed, picturesque with the expanse of white on the ground, with the constant movement of birds, flying in and out of the flock. Easily, hundreds in each field, if not thousands.

Winding our way around the back roads, we eventually got over to Highway 45 that will take us to Pat's Road and what is known as the Entrance Fields of the Pungo Unit of Pocosin Lakes NWR.

Along the way, we spotted a flock of about 20 Wild Turkeys, feeding in a cut-over corn field. This time of year, turkeys are bunched up and easily seen feeding in fields, all over Eastern NC. It won't be long before they begin splitting up into smaller groups. According to the NWTf, hens become secretive while searching for a site to nest prior to laying eggs, and it takes hens about two weeks to lay a full complement of nine to thirteen eggs. Hens will only visit the nesting site long enough to deposit her egg for the day. The rest of her time will be spent elsewhere feeding and roosting. At the end of the laying period, incubation starts. During this time, the hen puts herself in danger to stay on the nest day and night for about 28 days. The timing of breeding is determined by the female turkey and researchers are now learning that physical conditioning may have a greater influence on reproduction. A hen is not suited to take on the rigors of nesting unless physically in a condition to do so. Therefore, poor conditioning caused by poor nutrition can delay nesting.

Due to habitat loss and over-hunting during the early 1900s, turkey populations declined dramatically. With awareness of issues affecting turkey populations and effective population restoration and habitat management, wild turkeys are again abundant (NCSU Extension Publication). This is a great comeback story for us to enjoy.

OK, back to the issue at hand. It's 4:30 PM and we were standing on the side of the road looking at thousands of Tundra Swans feeding in a cut-over corn field. No Snow Geese to be seen. But wait! – on the horizon there appears a black smudge that gradually develops into more defined patterns of geese, flying towards the Entrance Fields. Here they come!

Skein upon skein of Snow Geese, numbered in the thousands, circling and massing together into a plump, ever-lower with each pass, until finally they are piling into the fields where the Swans are feeding. There were White Morph adults, some with an orange wash over their face, Dark Morphs, having a dark body and wings with white neck and head ("Blue Goose"). A few appear to be Ross's Geese, based on a smaller overall size, shorter neck and stubby bill.

We were there for half an hour, watching these geese circling, landing, getting up and circling again. All the while, there were more geese overhead, still very high up, moving on to other locations.

Let's recap – We had targeted the Snow Geese and the Common Mergansers, and we found Snow Geese and Common Mergansers. Mission accomplished!

But there were so many birds of significance, accentuating the fact that we had **89 species** by the end of the day. Ross's Geese, Blue-winged Teal (always a good find), American White Pelicans, Yellow-breasted Chat, Orange-crowned Warbler, Bonaparte's Gull, Rusty Blackbird and Common Yellowthroat just for starters. Everyone has their favorite!

Wow! What a day!

# Lower Neuse Bird Club

## Mattamuskeet NWR & Surrounding Area Photo Gallery

All photos ©Ronnie Hewlette



# Mattamuskeet NWR & Surrounding Areas – Feb. 8

Compiled by Ronnie Hewlette

COMBINED CHECKLISTS			
1	Snow Goose	31	Double-crested Cormorant
2	Ross's Goose	32	American White Pelican
3	Canada Goose	33	Brown Pelican
4	Tundra Swan	34	Great Blue Heron
5	Blue-winged Teal	35	Great Egret
6	Northern Shoveler	36	White Ibis
7	Gadwall	37	Black Vulture
8	American Wigeon	38	Turkey Vulture
9	Mallard	39	Northern Harrier
10	American Black Duck	40	Bald Eagle
11	Northern Pintail	41	Cooper's Hawk
12	Green-winged Teal	42	Red-shouldered Hawk
13	Bufflehead	43	Red-tailed Hawk
14	Common Merganser	44	Great Horned Owl
15	Red-breasted Merganser	45	Belted Kingfisher
16	Ruddy Duck	46	Red-bellied Woodpecker
17	Wild Turkey	47	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
18	Pied-billed Grebe	48	Downy Woodpecker
19	Rock Pigeon	49	Northern Flicker
20	Mourning Dove	50	Pileated Woodpecker
21	American Coot	51	American Kestrel
22	Killdeer	52	Eastern Phoebe
23	Wilson's Snipe	53	Blue Jay
24	Bonaparte's Gull	54	American Crow
25	Ring-billed Gull	55	Fish Crow
26	Herring Gull	56	Tree Swallow
27	Lesser Black-backed Gull	57	Carolina Chickadee
28	Great Black-backed Gull	58	Tufted Titmouse
29	Forster's Tern	59	Brown-headed Nuthatch
30	Common Loon	60	House Wren
		61	Marsh Wren
		62	Carolina Wren
		63	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
		64	Eastern Bluebird
		65	American Robin
		66	Gray Catbird
		67	Brown Thrasher
		68	Northern Mockingbird
		69	European Starling
		70	Cedar Waxwing
		71	American Goldfinch
		72	Eastern Towhee
		73	Chipping Sparrow
		74	Field Sparrow
		75	Savannah Sparrow
		76	Song Sparrow
		77	Swamp Sparrow
		78	White-throated Sparrow
		79	Dark-eyed Junco
		80	Yellow-breasted Chat
		81	Red-winged Blackbird
		82	Rusty Blackbird
		83	Common Grackle
		84	Orange-crowned Warbler
		85	Common Yellowthroat
		86	Palm Warbler
		87	Pine Warbler
		88	Yellow-rumped Warbler
		89	Northern Cardinal

## Lower Neuse Bird Club

### LNBC Special Report: Bronzed Cowbird

by Ronnie Hewlette

*Bronzed Cowbird identified 2/14/2020 in Morehead City, NC – extremely out-of-range for this species.*

It just so happens that this bird, and its friends, the Red-winged Blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds, likes the backyard habitat provided by Carol Reigle (LNBC Member).

She has had these birds coming to her feeders for weeks, but not until recently did she confirm that one in the flock “just didn’t look right”. With a little investigation and confirmation from other birding experts, she realized that the strange one was a **Bronzed Cowbird**, native to Mexico and Central America, with some moving north into southern US states. This happens to be the first recorded occurrence of this species in North Carolina.

Since mid-February, more than 50 birders have converged on Carol’s residence to catch a glimpse of this wayward bird. The most remote birders have been a couple from Maine, who happened to be coincidentally on their annual birding trip and heard about it. Carol has graciously invited birders to come out and take a look. She has taped off the path down her driveway and around to the backyard fence, inviting birders to sign-in at the notebook hanging on the fence.

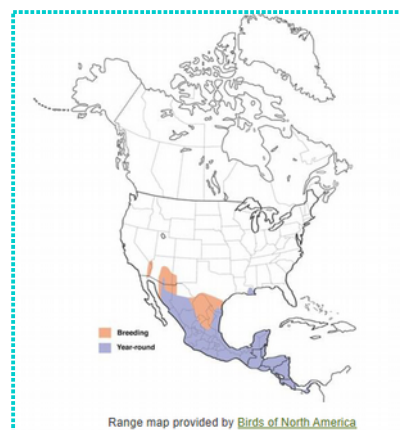
Birders are requested to observe the following conditions:

- **Park on the street**
- **Visit only between 8:00 AM and 3:00 PM** (the bird has not been seen in the late afternoon, anyway)
- **Go around to the east side of the house (to the right as you’re facing the house), look from the outside gate, and do NOT go into the neighbor’s yard**

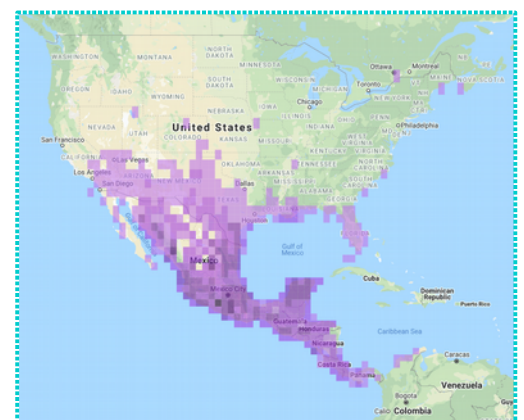
According to Cornell Lab’s eBird description of this species, the male Bronzed Cowbird is dark brown to matte black; with iridescent bluish wings. Thick neck and heavy bill. Look for vampire-like staring red eye. Males have an incredible display where they puff out a mane of neck feathers and hover in a circle above the female. Found in a variety of open or semi-open areas, including pastures, forest edge, yards, and agricultural areas. Visits feeders. Often in flocks, sometimes with other blackbirds.



©Ronnie Hewlette



Range Map:  
2020 Observations



Range Map: eBird observations,  
2015-present