



Lower Neuse Bird Club

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May LNBC Schedule, Socially Distanced

by Michael Cheves

The LNBC continues to plan activities within the limitations of social distancing. As expected, the club meeting which would normally be on Tuesday, May 5, has been canceled. As social distancing guidelines allow, monthly meetings will resume, starting with the new Program Year in September. Announcements will be made through the mailing list and web site.

What we **will** be doing this month: The first-Saturday bird walk will happen on Saturday, May 2nd. Les Coble sent out the following details on the mailing list:

Meet at Latham-Whitehurst Nature Park parking lot at 7:00 AM (from Hwy-55E, turn right at the Handy Mart onto Broad Creek Rd. About 2.3 miles on your left is the gate to the park). The gate for the general public opens at 8:00 AM, but LNBC members will be allowed to enter between 6:50 and 7:05.

We will break into small groups and use different starting times/trails, meeting back at the lot. Expect to walk about 1.5 miles, or bring a lawn chair and tally a Big Sit list in the parking lot area. Travel to other areas will be optional after conclusion of this walk.

Also in the works is the annual bird walk at Camp Brinson. This normally takes place around the second week in May. When that trip has been finalized, an announcement will be sent out through the mailing list. Camp Brinson is famous for its breeding warblers, and is a reliable place for such exotics as *Prothonotary*, *Swainson's*, and *Black-throated Green Warbler*.

eBird Global Big Day: May 9, 2020

If you use eBird, May 9 is an opportunity to be part of the global birding community. Even 5 minutes of counting the birds in your yard is a unique and valuable contribution to the global effort to tally the species being observed all over the world. Last year, more than **35,000** birders from 174 countries collected more than 92,000 checklists in a *single day*. The eBird goal for this year is to break 100,000 checklists.

Participation is easy. If you don't have an eBird account, [click here](#) to sign up for free. Watch birds at any time on May 9 (from midnight to midnight, so yes, those Whip-poor-wills and Chuck-will's-widows count!), and enter what you see and hear [via the web site](#) or the free eBird app (available for Android and iOS).



Lower Neuse Bird Club

Unexpected

by Ronnie Hewlette

What do you expect when you go out birding? – The UNEXPECTED!!

I thought it would be interesting to take a look at some of those unexpected things, especially since we are under orders to “bird alone” these days and unable to share experiences with others as we have done in the past. Missing that...

Green Herons return to Lake Clermont, usually around the first week of April. This year they were early, appearing on March 24th, or two weeks early – unusual, unexpected? Maybe. Green Herons tend to be at the edges, in shallow water, or concealed in vegetation. “Visit a wetland and carefully scan the banks looking for a small, hunch-backed bird with a long, straight bill staring intently at the water.” That would be the Green Heron. The first week of April, I encountered a Green Heron in an unexpected habitat over on Tebo Road in a thick hardwood setting, with some standing water and a trickle of running water. Very unexpected, since there was no open water nearby. You just never know.

With the “stay at home” aspect of life, I found I had extra hours and needed something to do. (I’m now wondering what took up all my time in the not too distant past.) With all the migrants on the verge of showing up locally, I proceeded to listen to bird songs in preparation for birding more by ear. The one thing that I learned is that there are a lot of birds that sound similar, and you have to apply your understanding of bird shapes, canopy location, actions, environment, etc. to correctly make an ID.

Armed with a head full of bird stuff, I started planning my trips based on habitat and what I expect to see there. I found an abundance of Prothonotary Warblers at a roadside stop along the headwaters of a local creek. That’s not unexpected, but by standing and listening to the birds all around, I discovered a Swainson’s Warbler! UNEXPECTED!

Wrapping up an outing one morning, headed home, I spotted a Palm Warbler (Yellow) sitting in the top of a dead tree on the roadside. Unexpected! The Palm Warbler most often is seen on the ground or low brush. They do forage for insects much like a flycatcher, but I don’t think of them doing that. It was an unexpected find for me. Beautiful, yellow subspecies!

Another morning recently, I went out looking for a Red-cockaded Woodpecker. (It’s sometimes nice to have a target species.) As I walked slowly and purposefully down the Forest Service road, listening and looking for movement in the tall longleaf pines, I walked right into a covey of Bobwhite Quail – quite unexpected!

I love the sound of their wings as they burst up from cover, seemingly right at your feet. Makes your heart jump!

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Red-cockaded Woodpecker
©Ronnie Hewlette

Unexpected

by Ronnie Hewlette

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Finding a Waterthrush is always an unexpected moment for me. Before I got into birding, I had little to no knowledge of Waterthrushes. The first time I saw a Louisiana Waterthrush was on a first-Saturday bird walk with LNBC. It was the spring, just like now, and we were in Croatan. We stopped at a bridge, got out of the vehicles and gathered on the bridge, and right there were two Louisiana Waterthrushes. Wow – that first time (*unexpected*) encounter left a mark on me. Now I know what to look for and what to listen for, and it's not so unexpected to find this bird, but it continues to be a thrill.

Just a few days ago I went out early, birding on Catfish Lake Road. I had gotten out of the truck and walked to the other side of the road to have the sun at my back. All of a sudden, something was thrashing about in the brush across from me, and I discovered a Sharp-shinned Hawk trying his best to grab a meal. Unexpected? Yes! Unusual? No. But still exciting. I watched it for several minutes, just enjoying my time as an observer. This is another one of those birds that brightens my day when I encounter one. The diminutive Sharp-shinned Hawk is not as frequently seen as a Cooper's, or a Red-tailed, or a Red-shouldered Hawk. Maybe that is why it is so "unexpected" to me.

I think it's really cool to get a good sighting of an owl; more than to hear one or two in the distance. A couple of days ago, I was birding along Little Road in the Croatan NF. I'd made a couple of stops, finding my First-of-Season Summer Tanager, when I stopped at a timber-type transition spot. As I got out of my truck and moved to the side of the road, a Barred Owl came out of the brushy side of the road, flying over the bed of my truck, to alight in a small pine tree across the road from me. Totally unexpected! Then it sat there for a couple of minutes, allowing me to get several photos. Wow, what a moment. Reminds me of the time I was leaning up against a tree, mid-afternoon at Latham-Whitehurst Nature Park, and had a Barred Owl fly into the tree, right above me. I saw its shadow on the ground as it came up behind me. That was soooo "unexpected" – Owls fascinate me!

During my last trip to Goose Creek Impoundments, I heard several Marsh Wrens and wanted to get a photo. Of course, it's in thick reeds, but I could see the tops of the reeds quiver as it moved about. I finally saw it at the edge of the reeds and snapped a couple of photos, and while doing that, I got a glimpse of something moving behind it. After review of my photos, I found the obscured image of a **Sora** in the background. Unexpected, to say the least!

Why do you go birding? Is it for the count, or for the Life-list; for the thrill of finding a particular bird, or for seeing the migrants that are passing through? Or for spending time outside, relaxing? Might I suggest: Go birding – go for the UNEXPECTED!



Sharp-shinned Hawk
©Ronnie Hewlette

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Unexpected – Barred Owl Encounter on Little Road

Photos ©Ronnie Hewlette



Bluebirds at the Battlefield

by Michael Cheves

In Feb. 2016, I had recently acquired a Wren/Chickadee birdhouse from our local Wild Birds Unlimited shop, and within a couple of weeks of “installing” the birdhouse in a crepe-myrtle tree in our back yard, birds were already house-shopping at the new birdhouse. At this time in my life, I was experiencing an aggressive case of the shingles virus, and the joy of watching the birds in my yard compete for valuable real estate provided welcome relief from my pains. I don’t know if it was beginner’s luck, or just a really good location, but this birdhouse has started out with a pretty good record. In 2016, 2017, and 2019, a pair Carolina Chickadees raised a brood in this house. In 2018, it was a pair of Brown-headed Nuthatches. And all four broods fledged successfully!

After this hot streak, 2020 was a let-down. During the winter months, I had watched as the Chickadees seemed interested in “their” house once again, and I was expecting them to start building around mid-to-late March, as usual. But March came and went, and the house remained empty. April came and went, still no activity; however, my disappointment was consoled by monitoring a birdhouse that I’ve only known about for a year. This birdhouse is fixed to the side of a tree near the Visitor’s Center at the New Bern Civil War Battlefield Park (located across from Dunkin’ Donuts, just off Hwy-70E). Sad to say, it has very little protection from predators. I first discovered the house last year. It had a nest inside of it, but the latch that was supposed to keep the door in place was broken, leaving the nest in an extremely vulnerable position. Not surprisingly, by the time I discovered the nest, it had already been raided, and an infestation of ants was well under way. I later learned from an email correspondence with Jon Miller, the Battlefield Park’s site manager, that the person who had been responsible for maintaining the birdhouse at the park (and also the bird feeders near the third overlook site) had passed away in recent years. He gave me permission to maintain the house and feeders, and I gladly accepted the “job”.

This year, I noticed that the pair of Eastern Bluebirds had returned to their house for another attempt at nesting. The pair rebuilt their nest of mostly dried pine needles, and the female began laying eggs during the last week of March. To secure the door to the house, and avoid (as much as possible) disturbing the female bird while she was on the nest, I wrapped some bungee cord around the front of the box and behind the tree. This not only secured the door, but the bluebirds eventually began using the cord as a perch from which to feed their nestlings after they had hatched. On March 24, I first observed two bright blue-colored eggs laying on the nest. By April 1, that number had increased to five!

Right on time, two weeks later, on April 15, I loosened the bungee cord and took a *quick* look at the nest, and I found five healthy, recently hatched nestlings cuddled together in the middle of the pile of pine needles. I secured the bungee cord back in place, and continued to watch the birdhouse from a safe distance. I observed both the male and female bluebird bringing food back to the nest. It seemed like a continuous cycle, with both parents contributing equal amounts of work in order to raise their brood.



Three Eastern Bluebird eggs on the nest at the New Bern Battlefield Park.

March 24, 2020
Photo by Michael Cheves

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Bluebirds at the Battlefield

by Michael Cheves

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I continued to monitor the nest to make sure no predators (human or otherwise) were coming near the birdhouse. The adult Bluebirds continued to work tirelessly, sun-up to sun-down, carrying *rather large* insects to the nest for their little nestlings to devour. When the parents were not there, I would cheerfully observe a tiny little beak pointing up, mouth wide open, ready for the next feeding. During this time period, I would often see an adult Bluebird perched on top of a high structure, such as a street light. I presumed that this was to survey for bugs that were flying over the vacant lot nearby, as the Bluebird would take off flying from its perch, soaring down towards the ground like a missile. I never saw either adult carrying a small insect. It was always something grasshopper-sized. This pair of Bluebirds must be experienced bug-hunters.



Eastern Bluebird nestlings
Battlefield Park
New Bern, NC
23rd April, 2020
©Michael Cheves

It wasn't long before I could hear the nestlings begging for food whenever the adults came to feed them. I don't care how common a sight it is, seeing a bird feed one of its nestlings will never lose its charm for me. Maybe part of the reason for that is that this phase doesn't last long. In a "kill or be killed" world, a baby bird has to grow up fast. For Eastern Bluebirds, it's normally about two weeks from hatch to fledge. This year's brood at the Battlefield was almost like clockwork. I first observed hatched nestlings on April 15th. As fledge day approached, I could see wings flapping inside the birdhouse, and I knew the nestlings were getting ready for their big day.



Eastern Bluebird fledge #2
Battlefield Park
New Bern, NC
28th April, 2020, 3:10 PM
©Michael Cheves

Almost exactly two weeks after hatch day, on April 28th, I sat in the parking lot (surprisingly crowded for a Tuesday afternoon) of the Battlefield Park and watched for it. A nestling would poke its head out of the hole in the front of the birdhouse, look around for a few seconds, and then... it would duck back inside. Not ready yet! Bring some more food to me, papa! I decided to take a break and go for a walk along the trails. During my walk, I saw Pileated and Red-headed Woodpeckers (both at Redan #5) and my first-of-season Blue Grosbeak may have been attempting to establish territory near the train tracks. I saw and heard a singing Red-eyed Vireo, and got one of my favorite sights of this time of year, a Yellow-rumped Warbler in full, glorious breeding plumage – incredible!

Back to the parking lot, I watched an Eastern Bluebird nestling, once again peering cautiously out of the birdhouse. Its mother was calling to it from the wooded area on the east side of the parking lot, and it would call back to its mother. At about 2:50 PM, this nestling became the first official fledge, as it made the brave decision to go for it! It was getting late, and unfortunately, I couldn't stay all day, but I was able to stay late enough to watch the second fledge make its attempt, as it made its awkward first flight, up and towards a pine tree, where it landed on the side of the tree, clinging for dear life, but far enough above ground to be safe from any predator that would come by.

The Eastern Bluebirds at the Battlefield have successfully raised a brood this year! I am happy to have my "job" of monitoring the nest box, and will continue to do so as long as possible. It took so much cooperation and work from both the male and the female to make it happen, humans could really learn a lesson or two from observing how birds behave. Congratulations to the proud bird parents!

Bluebirds at the Battlefield

Photos by Michael Cheves



Fledge day, about 3 hours before first fledge.



Fledge #2
3:10 PM



Eastern Bluebird nestlings
April 18th, 2020