



Lower Neuse Bird Club

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Upcoming Bird Walks

The following socially-distanced bird walks are planned for the rest of the 2020-2021 Program Year. Unless otherwise announced, rendezvous will be at the Bridge Pointe Hotel in downtown New Bern at 7:00 AM.

- Jan. 9: New Bern Area Waterfowl
- Feb. 6: Lake Mattamuskeet NWR/Lake Phelps/Lake Pungo
- March 6: Fort Macon SP
- April 3: Southern Croatan NF (Patsy's Pond/Pringle Rd/Millis Rd)
- May 1: Goose Creek SP
- Mid May (TBD): Camp Brinson
- June 5: North River Wetlands Preserve

LNBC Membership Dues

by Christine Stoughton Root

The pandemic has had many organized groups somewhat disorganized for the past 1/2-year, and struggling with that club's goals and objectives for the next 1/2-year. For now, let's ignore the lack of LNBC meetings and ask the question a member of any organization must ask themselves when expected benefits are greatly reduced. Why should I join/re-join "X" Association? Your elected officials struggled with this, and learned some groups have reduced dues, while others kept the same renewal level with the defined goal that unused funds would allow increased donations to oft considered 501-3c groups. Increasing donations is the plan by your leadership. It will immeasurably help struggling environmental/bird related activities of those organizations and allow you, the member, to receive the Newsletter and emails of activities in which we can most safely participate.

Dues are \$15 per person. Checks should be made payable to LNBC. Please be sure to notify Christine of any changes to your contact information. Dues should be mailed to:

*Christine Stoughton Root
651 Quail Rd.
Merritt, NC 28556*

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Lawson Creek Park Bird Walk – Nov. 7, 2020

by Ronnie Hewlette

Ten LNBC members met at Lawson Creek Park in New Bern, at the Entrance parking area around 7:30 AM. The plan for the day was to bird the Jack's Island part of the Park before moving over to Simmons Street Wetlands for the second part of the Bird Walk. Lawson Creek Park is made up of roughly 140 acres of coastal wetlands/marsh, surrounded by water on three sides by the Trent River and Lawson Creek, providing habitat for many bird species throughout the year. There are two boat ramps, a soccer field, walking trails, boardwalks, and ample parking for the many activities that occur here.

We drove from the entrance over to the boat ramp on the Trent River, then proceeded a short distance to the Jack's Island parking area. En route, we observed two American Coot, Red-winged Blackbirds, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Cardinals, and of course, Mockingbirds. Les heard a Greater Yellowlegs over in the marsh, and we all saw a Great Blue Heron standing in the shallows of the Trent River to our right. Also, as we exited our vehicles, a White-throated Sparrow was heard behind us. This was a "First of Season" for me – I have seen recent reports of this bird on eBird, but they have eluded me until now. Check that one off! This would be the first of several we would see and hear during the morning.

We were attracted right away to the thick habitat that continues down both sides of the road where we stopped. This area produced a House Wren, more Yellow-rumped Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and most notably, a rare sighting of a Female or immature Black-throated Blue Warbler, identified by the drab-olive colors, curved white eyebrow, and white wing patch. Nice find!

Overhead, during the morning, there were two flocks of Double-crested Cormorants, each flight was in a ragged "V", headed South. This is a migratory species, but they are found in our area year-round. Walking around the perimeter of the Jack's Island picnic area, several sparrows were heard and seen. A Gray Catbird, a Marsh Wren, and a couple more House Wrens were heard as we returned to our vehicles. As we drove around the marsh to complete the loop back to the main road, we heard a Carolina Wren, to complete our list for this site.

We were birding for about an hour, mostly along the edges of Jack's Island, and we tallied a combined total of 36 species.



A uniquely colored, midnight-blue bird of tangled understories, the male Black-throated Blue Warbler sings a relaxed, buzzy I-am-so-lazy on warm summer days in Eastern hardwood forests. He's aptly named, with a midnight blue back, sharp white belly, and black throat. The olive-brown females, while not as dramatically marked as the males, have a unique white square on the wing that readily separates them from other female warblers. This warbler breeds in the East and spends the winter in the Caribbean.

Photo and text courtesy of allaboutbirds.org

Trip Report – Simmons Street Wetlands, Nov. 7

by Ronnie Hewlette

Nine LNBC Members drove over from Lawson Creek Park in New Bern, having completed the first half of our scheduled 2-stops for the morning. This next stop at the Simmons Street Wetlands, is the second half of the morning's adventure for this LNBC "First-Saturday Bird Walk" for November.

We parked on the North side, at the Oaks Road parking area, and proceeded around the gate to the first open area and walked the perimeter, not finding much more than a few Yellow-rumps and a couple of Cardinals, and an outlandishly large grasshopper. The grass was wet with dew, but it wasn't overgrown, and the trails were found to be in good shape. (*Watch out for fire ants.*)

We tried calling rails and got a far-off response, but not enough to confirm it. Later on, Al Gamache heard another and tagged it as a Virginia Rail. Overhead were several Tree Swallows, but everything else seemed to be laying low. No waders, no waterfowl, and not many Yellow-rumps, up to this point. We made it to the backside and headed toward the railroad in the back corner, where we saw a couple of Towhees and a few more Yellow-rumps. Woodpeckers (heard), Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds and Grackles flew over.

At this point, we turned around and back-tracked a short way to reach the trail that leads back to the parking lot along the east boundary. Here, we picked up a couple of Eastern Phoebes. One was silhouetted against the blue sky in the top of a sweet gum sapling, with the wind fluffing its crown, making it appear to be anything other than a Phoebe, but in the end, that's what it was. Not far from there, we saw a second Phoebe. This one had its back to us, but the lighting was much better – no confusion on this one.

As we approached the eastern tree line, a Cooper's Hawk bolted from the top of a tree and quickly flew across in front of us and out of sight. Long, thick, barred tail, tubular body, relatively short, pointed wings are the key to identifying this hawk. Similar in appearance to a Sharp-shinned Hawk, only the Coop is larger (16.5" vs. 11" length) and has a stiffer wingbeat (not quick-snappy).

Returning to the parking area, we spotted a Red-shouldered Hawk in the trees and two Red-tailed Hawks circling overhead. You just never know what you will run into on any given day. We were birding for a little less than two hours, and we tallied a total of 32 species. A genuinely nice morning to be out birding!



Whether wheeling over a swamp forest or whistling plaintively from a riverine park, a Red-shouldered Hawk is typically a sign of tall woods and water. It's one of our most distinctively marked common hawks, with barred reddish-peachy underparts and a strongly banded tail. In flight, translucent crescents near the wingtips help to identify the species at a distance. These forest hawks hunt prey ranging from mice to frogs and snakes.

Photo ©Michael Cheves
Text from allaboutbirds.org

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Checklist – Lawson Creek Park, Nov. 7, 2020

Compiled by Ronnie Hewlette

| # | Species | # | Species | # | Species |
|----|----------------------------|----|------------------------|----|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) | 13 | Belted Kingfisher | 25 | Northern Mockingbird |
| 2 | Mourning Dove | 14 | Red-bellied Woodpecker | 26 | Eastern Bluebird |
| 3 | King/Clapper Rail | 15 | Pileated Woodpecker | 27 | American Robin |
| 4 | American Coot | 16 | Northern Flicker | 28 | White-throated Sparrow |
| 5 | Killdeer | 17 | American Kestrel | 29 | Song Sparrow |
| 6 | Greater Yellowlegs | 18 | Eastern Phoebe | 30 | Swamp Sparrow |
| 7 | Laughing Gull | 19 | Blue Jay | 31 | Red-winged Blackbird |
| 8 | Ring-billed Gull | 20 | House Wren | 32 | Brown-headed Cowbird |
| 9 | Double-crested Cormorant | 21 | Marsh Wren | 33 | Common Grackle |
| 10 | Great Blue Heron | 22 | Carolina Wren | 34 | Black-throated Blue Warbler |
| 11 | Turkey Vulture | 23 | European Starling | 35 | Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle) |
| 12 | Osprey | 24 | Gray Catbird | 36 | Northern Cardinal |

Checklist – Simmons Street Wetlands, Nov. 7, 2020

Compiled by Ronnie Hewlette

| # | Species | # | Species | # | Species |
|----|----------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|----|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) | 13 | Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted) | 25 | Northern Mockingbird |
| 2 | Mourning Dove | 14 | Eastern Phoebe | 26 | Eastern Bluebird |
| 3 | Virginia Rail | 15 | Blue Jay | 27 | American Robin |
| 4 | Laughing Gull | 16 | Carolina Chickadee | 28 | Song Sparrow |
| 5 | Ring-billed Gull | 17 | Tree Swallow | 29 | Swamp Sparrow |
| 6 | Turkey Vulture | 18 | Ruby-crowned Kinglet | 30 | Eastern Towhee |
| 7 | Osprey | 19 | House Wren | 31 | Red-winged Blackbird |
| 8 | Cooper's Hawk | 20 | Marsh Wren | 32 | Common Grackle |
| 9 | Red-shouldered Hawk | 21 | Carolina Wren | 33 | Common Yellowthroat |
| 10 | Red-tailed Hawk | 22 | European Starling | 34 | Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle) |
| 11 | Red-bellied Woodpecker | 23 | Gray Catbird | 35 | Northern Cardinal |
| 12 | Pileated Woodpecker | 24 | Brown Thrasher | 36 | House Sparrow |

Annual Pea Island NWR Trip – Nov. 10-11, 2020

by Ronnie Hewlette

The Lower Neuse Bird Club traveled to the Outer Banks of North Carolina on November 10th, 2020, as is our normal practice, to view waterfowl at Pea Island NWR. We had arranged to stay overnight at the Comfort Inn South in Nags Head, NC.

With the COVID Pandemic impacting what we can do and how we do it, it was encouraging to find 15 birders willing to safely participate, maintaining social distancing and wearing face masks when appropriate, for their own protection and that of others.

This year's trip was also different for several other reasons, in addition to COVID guidelines. We decided to go to Pea Island first and to skip any stops along the way because we wanted to avoid the wind and rain that was in the forecast for our second day at Pea Island NWR, thinking the stops on the way back would not be so severely impacted. We did, however, make one stop at Alligator River NWR on the way out, looking for the Rough-legged Hawk that has been reported there. That's where this adventure begins.

Entering Alligator River NWR at Milltail Road, we caravanned down to Long Curve Road, driving along ditch cuts that have had crops that are grown and maintained for the benefit of wildlife. The seasonally high water table is maintained throughout the refuge by controlling the water level in ditches where possible in this peat and mineral soil. Some roads are well stabilized with rock, while others are not. We experienced both as we navigated further, making a loop down to Grouse Road, over to Bear Road, up to Link Road and back to Long Curve Road. At one stop along Long Curve Road, some of us spent several minutes attempted to get good looks at a hawk that was moving about on the ground, in the grass. Looking to confirm or disprove the appearance of the Rough-legged Hawk, we used binoculars, scopes and cameras to finally arrive at the conclusion that we were looking at a Red-tailed Hawk. It finally flew up to the top of a mound of dirt and we could clearly see it was a Red-tailed Hawk and not the Rough-legged Hawk.

Moving along to the intersection at Link Road, we stopped again to look for any sign of the Rough-legged Hawk that Christine had seen earlier in the morning (very early in the morning). We stayed almost two hours, never seeing the hawk, although we did see a number of other birds; Northern Harriers (very abundant), woodpeckers, sparrows, all three of the falcons, and a plethora of Black Vultures.

Moving on, we drove over the Virginia Dare Bridge at Manteo, down toward the North Pond of Pea Island NWR, with a stop at the Oregon Inlet Fishing Center, and then over to the Old Coast Guard Station at the base of the new Herbert C. Bonner Bridge. It had gotten warm, to say the least, approaching 80°F, with light winds under a clear sky.

A handful of birds were seen at the marina, most notably was +/- 90 Brown Pelicans, skimming along, just above the surface of the water. Saltmarsh Sparrows have been seen here, but none made an appearance while we were there. At the CG Station, Christine was persistent enough to track down a Rusty Blackbird in the thick growth off the path by following its chip call and getting a quick glimpse of it in the cover. Others hiked over toward the beach, climbing a great mound of sand for a bird's-eye view of the area.

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Lower Neuse Bird Club

Annual Pea Island NWR Trip – Nov. 10-11, 2020

by Ronnie Hewlette, continued from Page #5

At the Salt Flats Wildlife Trail, a few wading birds were seen close-up, and a lot more waterfowl were seen in the distance. We decided to move on south, for a closer view. At the Bird blind, we began seeing what we had come to see, but with the afternoon sun in our face, it is difficult to make out details. Still, it was good to see a few Tundra Swans, Canada Geese, Pintails, Wigeons, Black Ducks, American Avocets, Western Sandpipers, Dowitchers, Willets and gulls. This would be the only place that we were to see the Avocets, and this has been true in years past.

At the Pea Island NWR Visitor's Center (closed) parking lot, we were able to get the sun at our backs. Scanning the area, we saw a mature Whitetail Buck wading across the pond. Other deer were seen, grazing on the far side of the pond. Not what was expected!

Nice opportunity to see many ducks and swans, and other water birds interacting, reasonably close to our viewing location. And of course, we got to see the American White Pelicans. At least 30 individual birds were counted from this spot as they congregated on a small island.

It was unusual to see several Pied-billed Grebes bunched together. They are rarely seen in flight, preferring to dive to escape predators. Did you know that a group of grebes is collectively known as a "water dance" of grebes? New term for me! It was also enjoyable to watch four Hooded Mergansers, three males and one female. The males have such a beautiful appearance with its white and black crested or plumed head pattern.

The bird for the day was seen as we were leaving – an American Bittern! Very near the trailhead, in a small indentation in the marsh grass, this bird stepped out into the open for most all to see. Very rare to actually see this one, but so rewarding! Nice!

Leaving the Visitor's Center Parking Area, we drove further down to South Pond, where there is an observation platform near the road. Not much different from what we have seen at previous stops, but there were close to 50 American White Pelicans, +/- 100 American Coots, and we added a couple of Eastern Meadowlarks in addition to the Swans, Wigeons, Pintails and other waterfowl.

It was a quick stop and now as the sun drops lower in the West, we turned around and headed to the Bodie Island Lighthouse ponds, where Christine has been hanging out for a while. Her efforts produced a list of birds that exceeded what most of us saw. The list of birds at this stop was far less than in past years, but it included a Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, Tricolored Heron, Northern Gannet, Seaside Sparrow, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Marsh Wren, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch.

As the group was leaving, a Virginia Rail was coaxed out of the cover to actually be seen. Good way to end the day!

It was disappointing not to see more waterfowl, but it seems that the warmer weather may have affected their patterns. They go where the food is available and undoubtedly, they have found food sources further North.

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You'll need sharp eyes to catch sight of an American Bittern. This streaky, brown and buff heron can materialize among the reeds, and disappear as quickly, especially when striking a concealment pose with neck stretched and bill pointed skyward. These stealthy carnivores stand motionless amid tall marsh vegetation, or patiently stalk fish, frogs, and insects. They are at their most noticeable in spring, when the marshes resound with their odd booming calls that sounds like the gulps of a thirsty giant.

Photo and text courtesy of allaboutbirds.org

Annual Pea Island NWR Trip – Nov. 10-11, 2020

by Ronnie Hewlette, continued from Page #6

Back to Nags Head and check-in at the Comfort Inn South for most of us. Within COVID guidelines, we were able to have a social hour at the end of the day in a large meeting room, with large, well-spaced tables that provided what we needed to enjoy fellowship, while being considerate of others around us.

Next morning, we gathered around 7:00 AM and drove over to Jennette's Pier to find gulls, Northern Gannets, Willets, Sanderlings, and a few Black Scoters. As with the waterfowl numbers of yesterday, the counts were lower than what we've experienced in the past. On the upside, the weather is not nearly as bad as we had anticipated, and we headed out to make a second attempt at finding the Rough-legged Hawk.

One component of an outing like this where we are caravanning with so many vehicles, it's easy to get spread out. As we drove up to the area where we hoped to see the Rough-legged Hawk, some cars were ahead, others stopped and others lagged behind. When the hawk made its appearance and there was a lot of texting, yelling and flagging to get everyone on point to see our targeted "Bird of the Day".

It was swooping, soaring, and kiting on the far side of the field, but was easily identified by the white and dark colors on the underside and tail, even at this distance. As we all watched this bird, some jumped in vehicles and drove around Link Road to get a closer look. Momentarily, we could not find it, then it was re-located and the square, black carpal patches on the underwing at the wrist were clearly seen, as was the white upper-tail and banded tip, and the solid, dark belly-band. This was a "Life Bird" for many of us, and a great sighting, anytime!

Our next stop was at the eBird Hotspot, Lake Landing, on the east side of Lake Mattamuskeet NWR. Parking at the gate, we walked about 1/4-mile along a brushy canal to the first impoundment. Looking east, down a wide canal, we spotted several Wilson's Snipe in flight, at a distance. Moving along this canal, we spotted Vultures, a Harrier, a Bald Eagle, a Red-tailed Hawk, and others. Notably, several of us heard a Virginia Rail, and then in the same spot, a Marsh Wren's rattle. As we tried to coax the Marsh Wren out of its cover with playback, it was seen moving around, but it never came out into view.

It has gotten hot again, but the wind has picked up, and clouds are building as we leave Lake Landing, driving over to the entrance of Mattamuskeet NWR. Stopping at the entrance, a few ducks and Swans are seen at a great distance, so we drove on toward the Refuge Office (Closed). In the canal, just past the road intersection with West Wildlife Drive, an Anhinga was seen on a dead tree that had fallen out into the canal. Several of us saw the birds on the tree and assumed that they were all Cormorants. It was Les Coble and his keen eye that spotted it. Some of us turned around and went back, while others continued on, and they sighted a second Anhinga near the bridge at the head of Wildlife Road. Two Anhingas in one general area – Wow! Sightings of these birds have been few and far between this year; this is great. We spooked the first one by getting too close, and it got up and circled the area, wanting to come back. This gave us good views of it in flight.



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Annual Pea Island NWR Trip – Nov. 10-11, 2020

by Ronnie Hewlette, continued from Page #7

At this point, the vehicles go in different directions, heading home. The bird numbers have been less than in past years, but it has been a good two-day trip. “Bird of the Day” goes to the targeted, Rough-legged Hawk, followed by the American Bittern. For some of us, the Anhinga, American White Pelicans, Rusty Blackbird, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and the Bonaparte’s Gull were special as well. The Bonaparte’s Gull was picked up by Wade Fuller and Al Gamache at the next to last culvert on the Causeway of Lake Mattamuskeet. Interestingly enough, Kevin and I drove down there ahead of Wade and did not find it. Timing can be everything when you are birding!

On Day #1 (Tuesday), we identified a total of 79 species. This included the 2-hour stop at Alligator River NWR and several stops at Pea Island NWR (Oregon Inlet Marina, Old Coast Guard Station at the base of the new bridge, North Pond and South Pond, and our final stop at Bodie Island Lighthouse Pond).

On Day #2, we started out with a walk out to the end of Jennette’s Pier before going back to Alligator River NWR, where we found the Rough-legged Hawk. We wrapped up the day with stops at Lake Mattamuskeet NWR (Lake Landing and Wildlife Drive). The total species count for Day #2 was 74. The trip total for both days combined was 103 species. Compared to last year’s Pea Island trip count of 87 species, this was outstanding, considering the number of special species we observed this year! Great Trip!



Top row: Red-tailed Hawk,
White-tailed buck at
Mattamuskeet NWR,
Anhinga

Bottom row: Rough-legged
Hawk at Alligator River NWR

Photos ©Ronnie Hewlette

Pea Island & Alligator River NWR Checklist – Nov. 10-11

Compiled by Ronnie Hewlette

| # | Species | # | Species | # | Species |
|----|-----------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|-----|-------------------------|
| 1 | Canada Goose | 36 | Lesser Black-backed Gull | 70 | Eastern Phoebe |
| 2 | Tundra Swan | 37 | Great Black-backed Gull | 71 | American Crow |
| 3 | Northern Shoveler | 38 | Royal Tern | 72 | Fish Crow |
| 4 | Gadwall | 39 | Northern Gannet | 73 | Tree Swallow |
| 5 | American Wigeon | 40 | Double-crested Cormorant | 74 | Carolina Chickadee |
| 6 | Mallard | 41 | Anhinga | 75 | Tufted Titmouse |
| 7 | American Black Duck | 42 | American White Pelican | 76 | Brown-headed Nuthatch |
| 8 | Northern Pintail | 43 | Brown Pelican | 77 | Red-breasted Nuthatch |
| 9 | Black Scoter | 44 | American Bittern | 78 | White-breasted Nuthatch |
| 10 | Lesser Scaup | 45 | Great Blue Heron | 79 | House Wren |
| 11 | Bufflehead | 46 | Great Egret | 80 | Marsh Wren |
| 12 | Hooded Merganser | 47 | Snowy Egret | 81 | Carolina Wren |
| 13 | Ruddy Duck | 48 | Little Blue Heron | 82 | Golden-crowned Kinglet |
| 14 | Wild turkey | 49 | Tricolored Heron | 83 | Ruby-crowned Kinglet |
| 15 | Pied-billed Grebe | 50 | White Ibis | 84 | Gray Catbird |
| 16 | Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) | 51 | Black Vulture | 85 | Eastern Bluebird |
| 17 | Mourning Dove | 52 | Turkey Vulture | 86 | American Robin |
| 18 | Yellow-billed Cuckoo | 53 | Osprey | 87 | Northern Mockingbird |
| 19 | Virginia Rail | 54 | Bald Eagle | 88 | European Starling |
| 20 | American Coot | 55 | Northern Harrier | 89 | House Sparrow |
| 21 | American Avocet | 56 | Sharp-shinned Hawk | 90 | American Goldfinch |
| 22 | Dunlin | 57 | Cooper's Hawk | 91 | Savannah Sparrow |
| 23 | Semipalmated Plover | 58 | Red-shouldered Hawk | 92 | Song Sparrow |
| 24 | Killdeer | 59 | Red-tailed Hawk | 93 | Swamp Sparrow |
| 25 | Sanderling | 60 | Rough-legged Hawk | 94 | White-throated Sparrow |
| 26 | Western Sandpiper | 61 | Belted Kingfisher | 95 | Eastern Meadowlark |
| 27 | Short-billed Dowitcher | 62 | Red-bellied Woodpecker | 96 | Red-winged Blackbird |
| 28 | Lesser Yellowlegs | 63 | Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | 97 | Rusty Blackbird |
| 29 | Willet | 64 | Downy Woodpecker | 98 | Common Grackle |
| 30 | Greater Yellowlegs | 65 | Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted) | 99 | Boat-tailed Grackle |
| 31 | Wilson's Snipe | 66 | Pileated Woodpecker | 100 | Palm Warbler |
| 32 | Bonaparte Gull | 67 | American Kestrel | 101 | Black and White Warbler |
| 33 | Laughing Gull | 68 | Merlin | 102 | Common Yellowthroat |
| 34 | Ring-billed Gull | 69 | Peregrine Falcon | 103 | Yellow-rumped Warbler |
| 35 | Herring Gull | | | | |