October 2020
Volume 29
Issue 2

Lower Neuse Bird Club

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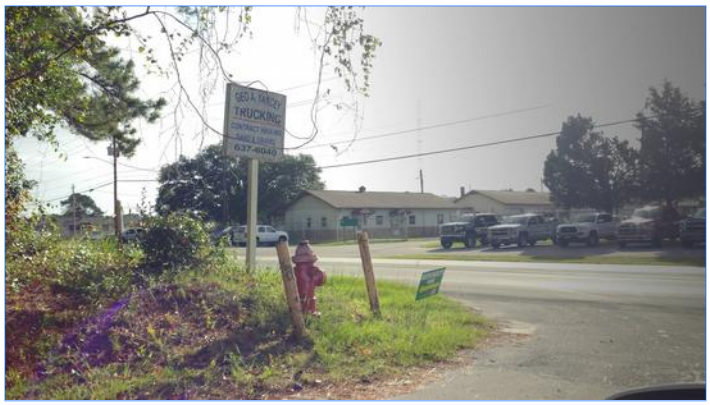
October Announcements

There is no club meeting for October, as club activities continue to be limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Socially-distanced First Saturday Bird Walks will continue this **Saturday, October 3rd**, as the LNBC returns to Martin Marietta Park (Glenburnie Quarry). We will meet up at the entrance at **7:00 AM** and start from there. This weekend's forecast is calling for cool and dry weather. Our primary "target" birds will be the variety of warbler species that pass through the Quarry during fall migraton. The North winds forecasted for Thursday and Friday nights might be favorable for warbler viewing as well. Wear comfortable walking shoes for the hike, and dress for cool weather early on, warming into the upper 60s as the sun's rays warm us up. The full hike around the Quarry is a loop that runs roughly 3.5 miles. The entrance to the Quarry is off S. Glenburnie Rd. in New Bern. Coming from US-70, the access road leading to the entrance is on the left side of Glenburnie, just before and across the road from the NCDOT office (see photo).



Entrance to Martin Marietta Park ("The Quarry"). Looking from the entrance onto Glenburnie Rd., across the street is the NC DOT office.

LNBC Membership Dues

Lower Neuse Bird Club annual membership dues are $15 per person, and cover the program year from September 2020 through May 2021.

Please send your dues to:
Christine Stoughton Root
LNBC Treasurer
651 Quail Rd.
Merritt, NC 28556

Checks should be made payable to LNBC. Please be sure to notify Christine of any changes to your contact information.

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Trip Report – North River Preserve, Sept. 5, 2020

by Ronnie Hewlette

Almost three months to the day since the LNBC gathered at North River Wetlands Preserve for a Club Birding adventure in June, this first Saturday in September, we returned to NRWP in pursuit of shorebirds and the possibility of seeing early migrants. The weather cooperated by being a little cooler, with a lower dewpoint and a light breeze most of the morning. We had a light turnout of only eight birders, but no matter, we enjoyed a beautiful day!

John Fussell met us at the gate and suggested that we go directly to the wetlands on the northeast side of the property, looking for shorebirds. Lots of birds were present earlier in the day. (Next visit, maybe we need to meet at the gate at 7:00 AM to capitalize on this.) As we caravaned over, an immature Red-tailed Hawk was spotted gliding low over the brushy treetops. John had mentioned seeing an American Kestrel earlier, and as we turned east, a gorgeously-bright Kestrel appeared, first soaring at tree-top level to our left, then perching in a dead tree, providing a quick view before moving on. First of the season – Outstanding!

Turning right onto the levee road, we made our first stop where water was standing along a ditch. Here, we encountered Gull-billed Terns (2), Solitary Sandpipers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, a Tricolored Heron, a Snowy Egret, and several Little Blue Herons (mostly juvenile birds in white plumage). Juvenile Little Blue Herons have greenish yellow legs, and blue-grey bills with a dark tip. They start off all white, then go through molting to achieve the darker adult plumage. The transition plumage is referred to as "Calico", reflecting the hodgepodge of white and grey plumage, and it doesn't last very long. We saw at least one Calico Heron in all the birds we saw for the morning.

Moving along to the next wet area beyond the large earthen mound, we begin seeing more Little Blue Herons – eventually we will count close to 65 Little Blue Herons! A handful were in adult plumage, having slate gray body plumage with a purple-blue head and neck and a dark gray bill with a black tip, but most were all white. It is said that the Snowy Egret tolerates the close proximity of the white, juvenile LBHE more than that of the dark adults. We did finally count 7 Snowy Egrets with their "yellow slippers", but this count is pale in comparison to the number of the Little Blue Herons.

As we continue to flush groups of the Little Blue Herons, a flock of eight or so Blue-winged Teal get up and fly off, led by a couple of Northern Shovelers. Wow! As we are glassing the area around us, a group of Blue-winged Teal are spotted, tightly bunched together in a small ponded area not too far off the road – their heads and backs are just barely visible above he blades of grass. Discussion followed as to what we are looking at for sure, so John marches off across the dry, grassy area to flush them, so we can verify their identification. Those ducks were so comfortable where they were, that they refused to get up – John had to practically run over them to get them to flush! They were Blue-winged Teal for sure, with the pale blue wing coverts, now obvious in flight. Most were juveniles or females, but a few males were seen with their distinctive white crescent on a gray head. Let's see ... we have now seen Blue-winged Teal, Wood Ducks, and possibly American Black Ducks (not a unanimous concensus) in addition to all the birds that we had anticipated.

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Pairs and small groups of this tiny dabbling duck inhabit shallow ponds and wetlands across much of North America. Blue-winged Teal are long distance migrants, with some birds heading all the way to South America for the winter. Therefore, they take off early on spring and fall migration, leaving their breeding grounds in the United States and Canada well before other species in the fall.

Text from allaboutbirds.org
Photo ©Ronnie Hewlette

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Trip Report – North River Preserve, Sept. 5, 2020

by Ronnie Hewlette, continued from Page #2

We have now reached a point along the road where it is roped off to vehicular traffic, so we get out and march on by foot, to get closer to the birds a little further down. White Ibises, Great Egrets, more Little Blue Herons and some of the Blue-winged Teal that were so stubborn to flush were sighted, along with a Pectoral Sandpiper and a couple more Solitary Sandpipers. More Yellowlegs were added to our growing count, but we will get better looks, later on.

As we retrace our route back to the large earthen mound, we stop to view a couple of Gull-billed Terns as they fly over. John has gone on ahead, and we find him stopped and scoping more Gull-billed Terns on a mud flat. There were at least four, maybe five Gull-billed Terns within sight now, as we all begin to move closer to them. One appears to be an adult with a black cap that extends down the nape. The others are younger birds, not having developed the black cap, yet. They all have a short, black bill (defining feature), black legs and long wings. They look more like a gull when at rest, but in the air, those long wings are impressively tern-like! They eventually got up and flew towards us before veering off and away. Nice sighting and a new bird for some.

A medium-sized tern with broader wings and a thicker bill than most other terns, the Gull-billed Tern is found along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States and very southern California.

Text from allaboutbirds.org
Photo ©Ronnie Hewlette

As we travel North toward the high ground with a view of Open Ground Farms, we encounter a single Turkey hen and then farther on, a group of four more. Several Eastern Kingbirds are added to the list with a final count for the day of 20. From the top of the high ground, we spot a Baltimore Oriole in the bare limbs of a dead hardwood with a female Blue Grosbeak sitting just below it. Interesting size comparison.

This completes our morning at NRW-Preserve, with a total count of 35 species. Not bad for early September. The Gull-billed Tern sightings and the sheer number of Little Blue Herons were certainly stand-out moments. Oh, and the views of the Greater Yellowlegs standing next to the Lesser Yellowlegs for a direct comparison were so revealing. Another great Bird Walk at the North River Wetlands Preserve! Thank you, John Fussell, for hosting the first Lower Neuse Bird Club outing for the 2020-2021 Program Year!

Leaving North River Wetland Preserve, four of us drove over to Harkers Island to check out Willow Pond behind the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Shell Point at the end of the road.

From the parking area near Shell Point, we saw a flock of nine Willet fly over, headed to Shackelford Banks. Usually, these shorebirds are seen as individuals on the beach, at the water's edge. They are easily identified in flight, even at a distance, by the broad, white wingstripe on black wings. It was quite windy and very few birds were moving at this point, so we drove over to the Waterfowl Museum.

Wade had seen Black-crowned Night Heron and one Yellow-crowned Night Heron at the pond earlier, so we had high hopes of adding to our list for the day. It was not surprising to find several juvenile Little Blue Herons (one Calico) at the pond, along with a few Snowy Egrets, White Ibis, a Great Egret and a couple of adult Black-crowned Night Herons. Disappointingly, we did not find the Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Maybe another time. The Black-crowned Night Heron is the most commonly seen Night-Heron in our coastal area, so what we found was to be expected.

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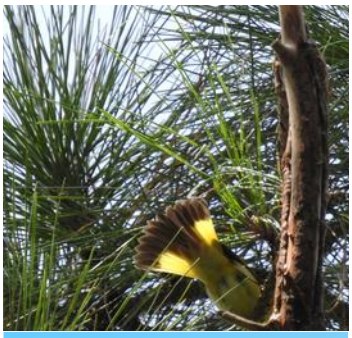
Lower Neuse Bird Club

Trip Report – North River Preserve, Sept. 5, 2020

by Ronnie Hewlette, continued from Page #3

As we were leaving the Willow Pond blind, a few chip notes were heard, causing us to pause and look around. As we glassed the trees, several American Redstarts were found darting around us. Most of these appeared to be females, flashing their yellow tails, but a couple appeared to be more orange, characteristic of young males. As we continued to follow these birds, we saw a Black-and-White Warbler, a Prairie Warbler, a Red-eyed Vireo, and more. How exciting! Seeing American Redstarts is a sure-sign that migration has begun!

Heading back to New Bern, a stop along a marsh on the back side of Harkers Island resulted in hearing a Clapper Rail and seeing another Clapper Rail, along with several other wading birds. Seeing this rail get up in the marsh and fly about 15 feet and then drop out of sight was a perfect ending for a fine day of birding with the Lower Neuse Bird Club.



A lively warbler that hops among tree branches in search of insects, the male American Redstart is coal-black with vivid orange patches on the sides, wings, and tail. True to its Halloween-themed color scheme, the redstart seems to startle its prey out of the foliage by flashing its strikingly patterned tail and wing feathers. Females and immature males have more subdued yellow "flash patterns" on a gray background. These sweet-singing warblers nest in open woodlands across much of North America.

Text from allaboutbirds.org
Photo ©Ronnie Hewlette

North River Wetlands Preserve & Harkers Island – Sept. 5, 2020
Checklist Compiled by Ronnie Hewlette

01. Wood Duck	20. Great Black-backed Gull	39. Pileated Woodpecker
02. Blue-winged Teal	21. Gull-billed Tern	40. American Kestrel
03. Northern Shoveler	22. Common Tern	41. Great Crested Flycatcher
04. American Black Duck	23. Forster's Tern	42. Eastern Kingbird
05. Wild Turkey	24. Double-crested Cormorant	43. Red-eyed Vireo
06. Pied-billed Grebe	25. Brown Pelican	44. Blue Jay
07. Eurasian Collared-Dove	26. Great Egret	45. American Crow
08. Mourning Dove	27. Snowy Egret	46. Carolina Chickadee
09. Clapper Rail	28. Little Blue Heron	47. Purple Martin
10. Killdeer	29. Tricolored Heron	48. Tree Swallow
11. Least Sandpiper	30. Black-crowned Night Heron	49. Carolina Wren
12. Pectoral Sandpiper	31. White Ibis	50. European Starling
13. Semipalmated Sandpiper	32. Turkey Vulture	51. Baltimore Oriole
14. Solitary Sandpiper	33. Osprey	52. Black-and-white Warbler
15. Greater Yellowlegs	34 Red-shouldered Hawk	53. American Redstart
16. Willet	35. Red-tailed Hawk	54. Prairie Warbler
17. Lesser Yellowlegs	36. Belted Kingfisher	55. Blue Grosbeak
18. Laughing Gull	37. Red-bellied Woodpecker	
19. Herring Gull	38. Downy Woodpecker	

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Blue Jays – Cyanocitta cristata ("The Crested Blue Bird")

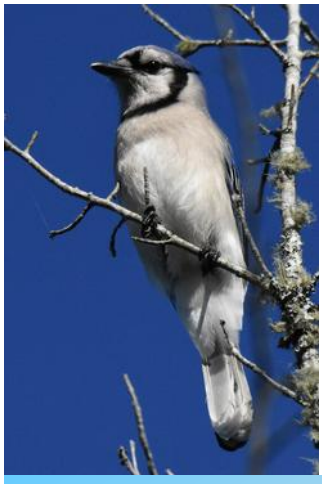
by Les Coble, LNBC Co-President

Often associated with being aggressive, Blue Jays are quite "loving" to their mate. The male serenades her with many soft non-jay-like sounds while they are nest building. The nest starts with a twig he has selected, and when accepted by the female, she begins the nest while he collects more twigs. He brings foods to her and will do so for the years they are together (monogamous).

We think of Blue Jays as noisy, but have you noticed how silent they are during the nesting season? They are secretive, which may be a protective strategy against predators, especially those egg and nest robbing squirrels. Jays have been known to also rob a nest, but this is rare, as they are omnivorous with nuts and insects. Some of the nuts collected by Jays are buried, and thus those that are "lost" contribute to forestation.

Back to the association of Jays as noisy. One of the sounds we hear that is a mimicking sound is of the Red-shouldered Hawk. This may be a means to frighten other birds from food sources, or as a warning of a nearby Red-shouldered. Feeding groups of Jays are no different than mixed flocks of foraging birds. These provide for announcing discovery of foods, serve to help maintain the foraging flock, and provide many eyes to also scan for predators. Late winter into early spring is a time to look for mate selection behavior. Unpaired birds, the males, will follow an unpaired female with raucous sounds. Submissive birds will lower their crest and drop out of the group. Eventually, the flock will diminish in size as the lone male at the end of the day claims the right to the nesting and mating activity.

Jays have been observed using tools. Feathers, twist ties, paper strips and paper clips have been used to collect foods not easily reached otherwise. Finally, look closely at those jays at your feeder. Notice that the black bridle across the face pane and throat varies extensively. Not only does this help Jays recognize one another, but you may recognize which Jay is more actively feeding, or vocal, as you relax with that favorite drink and binoculars.



Blue Jay
(*Cyanocitta cristata*)

April 17, 2018
Croatan National Forest

©Michael Cheves

Welcome New Members!

The Lower Neuse Bird Club is happy to welcome its newest members! Please extend a warm welcome to:

Barb Forbes
email: baf8203@yahoo.com

Cathy Elkins
email: camimnaugh@gmail.com

Don and Karen Hammond
New Owners at Wild Birds Unlimited of New Bern
2029 S. Glenburnie Rd.
email: wbunewbern@gmail.com
web: https://www.wbu.com/newbern

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Tracking Our Smallest Migrants

by Scott Weidensaul
Reprinted from Bird Watcher's Digest July/August 2020, with permission.
See birdwatchersdigest.com

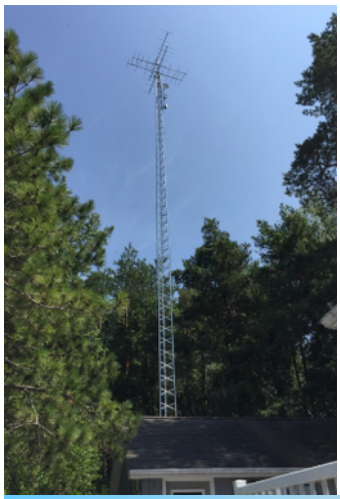
It was a mild November day, one of those last-gap surges of Indian summer warmth before winter decides to get serious in the mountains of central Pennsylvania. As I drove northwest, cresting successive ridges and dropping into the farm valleys that lie in between, the distant views had a little of the haziness of summer, softening the newly bare hills.

There was no direct route to my destination, just one small, twisting country road connecting to another. The first time I had driven this way, well beyond any good cell network, I was grateful for my battered old topographic gazetteer that never needs a battery recharge or a couple of bars of signal strength. Now, though, I knew the way by heart.

The road wound up a long ridge, until I turned off onto a dirt lane with a heavy yellow gate pole chained across it. I fiddled with the combination lock, drove in and locked it behind me, then bumped my way for almost two miles higher and higher through the gray trees and ochre of the frost-killed ferns. It was warm enough to have the windows down, and I heard one last, defiant katydid, which had somehow escaped the cold, still singing his summer song.

A second gate, a final turn, and there lay my destination: a tall communication tower set in the wide forest, with a small, tidy block building at its base, surrounded by a chain-link fence. I entered the lock combos for the gate and door and let myself in, giving a friendly wave to the security camera. It always pays to be polite to the FBI.

I was inside a communications hub for the local county 911 system, which (or so I had been told) was also used by the FBI and state law enforcement. But I wasn't a nefarious hacker bent on mischief. Inside, amid all the gentle humming and whirring communications equipment sat a green waterproof case, connected by cables to a series of antennas attached to the soaring tower just outside. Flashing red and green lights on the cube-shaped computer inside told me it was working perfectly: one small part of an exciting global effort to unmask many of the mysteries of bird migration.



A receiving station for the Motus Wildlife Tracking System.
Photo credit: motus.org

This site in the mountains of central Pennsylvania is part of a rapidly growing network that is allowing scientists to track the once-untrackable: the smallest birds and bats and even migratory insects, The Motus Wildlife Tracking System was the brainchild of biologists at Birds Canada (formerly Bird Studies Canada), and I've been involved with it now for five years, since shortly after Motus was launched in 2014. Its been one of the most exciting scientific experiences of my life.

There are amazing technologies these days for tracking wildlife: transmitters that communicate with Argos satellites or through the cell phone network, for instance. But most of them are far too heavy for the vast majority of migratory birds, meaning pretty much anything smaller than, say, a large shorebird or a small raptor. They're also expensive, costing thousands of dollars each.

The Motus network (the name comes from the Latin *motus*, for *movement*) applies an old, inexpensive technology – VHF radio transmission – miniaturizes it, and couples it with automated receiver stations, like the one I was visiting on that lonely ridgetop, to create something new and revolutionary

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Tracking Our Smallest Migrants

by Scott Weidensaul. Continued from Page #6.
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Scientists can now use nanotag transmitters that weigh a fraction of a gram to follow warblers, thrushes, swifts, even hummingbirds, monarch butterflies, and green darner dragonflies as they migrate across the landscape. Besides being small, the tags cost only a few hundred dollars each, and the receiver sites only a few thousand.

There are now more than 900 receiver stations from the Canadian Arctic to the southern tip of South America, and increasingly also in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. Some, like this one, are located on existing structures, like fire towers or communications masts. Others are stand-alone, solar-powered rigs 40 or 50 feet high on mountaintops, coastlines, or even city rooftops, their directional antennas constantly seining the sky for signals. Every station listens, and every tag broadcasts on the same frequency, 166.380 MHz. Every few seconds each transmitter emits a unique, coded ID pulse a little like Morse code, so it can be uniquely identified.

Motus Wildlife Tracking System enables scientists and researchers to follow our smallest migratory animals on their migration routes. We can learn more than ever about the migratory paths of species such as this Gray-cheeked Thrush (New Bern, NC, October 13, 2018)

Photo ©Michael Cheves

I'm part of the Northeast Motus Collaboration, a partnership between the Willistown Conservation Trust, the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art, and the Carnegie Museum's Powdermill Avian Research Center, as well as Project Owlnet, a continental effort to study owl migration. Most Motus receivers have been built one or two at a time by researchers using the technology for local projects. We decided to focus on building out the infrastructure for the benefit of any scientist using the Motus network (though we also use it for our own research questions). Since 2017, we've erected close to 90 receiver sites in the mid-Atlantic region and New York, making us second only to Birds Canada in terms of the number of stations we operate. And, with a large grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that's recently been approved, we'll be erecting nearly 50 more in New England the next couple of years.

Some sites are wired, others connected wirelessly, but at many of them, someone must visit a couple times a year to download the data, as I was doing that day in Juniata County, Pennsylvania. The whole process took me just a few minutes, swapping out data cards, and with a farewell wave at the security camera, I headed back down the mountain, scattering a flock of turkeys on the way. At home that evening, I uploaded the raw data to Birds Canada's computer, and a few minutes later opened the processed report, a glimpse at what had been passing since my previous visit in August.

An awful lot, as it turned out. I felt like a kid at Christmas, as I always do when I see the data from one of our stations. Let's see... there were several dozen thrushes, because a number of researchers in eastern Canada and New England are using Motus to study the movements of wood, Swainson's, gray-cheeked, and Bicknell's thrushes. Many of these researchers are trying to answer questions close to the breeding grounds, like tracing the birds' movements between deep-forest breeding habitat and fruit-rich thickets where thrushes and many other species bulk up for migration. But – and this is the icing on the cake – once the thrushes leave those study sites, Motus receivers up and down the hemisphere provide a blow-by-blow record of their global journeys, anytime the birds fly within 10 or 15 miles of a receiver array.

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Tracking Our Smallest Migrants

by Scott Weidensaul. Continued from Page #7.
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Tag deployment	Species
Churchill#6:7.9 M.34770	Semipalmated Plover
Churchill#139:9.7 M.33713	Semipalmated Plover
Churchill#40:7.9 M.34764	Semipalmated Plover
Plover Migration#519:5.3 M.36356	Piping Plover
SORA#52:6.7 M.34290	Sora
SORA#150:7.1 M.38954	Sora
BrazilShorebirds#322:9.6 M.43677	Semipalmated Sandpiper

Sample of migratory birds detected at Cedar Island NWR receiving station (motus.org)

What else? A white-rumped sandpiper tagged on James Bay; a semipalmated sandpiper from Long Island, New York; and two semipalmated plovers caught and tagged at Churchill, Manitoba. Two cedar waxwings from southwestern Pennsylvania and nine cliff swallows from a colony in Ontario. A silver-haired bat tagged on the north shore of Lake Erie and an eastern red bat marked just to the north, near State College, Pennsylvania. Four common nighthawks tagged – small world – by one of my former owl-banding volunteers, now a grad student in Ontario, using Motus to track her nighthawks all the way to South America.

Still more… a Virginia rail fitted with a transmitter the previous spring in Ohio on its way north, now taking a more easterly route south. A rusty blackbird, a species whose unusual migratory behavior (long stopovers in the Great Lakes region) has only recently been revealed by Motus. An ovenbird tagged in Connecticut, part of a study to investigate the role that mercury contamination may play in altering a bird's migratory instincts, and a black-throated blue warbler from New Hampshire. No monarch butterflies, but one of our other sites picked up several that had been tagged in southern Canada.

Jealous that I had such a high-tech, front-row seat for the migration? Don't be! Most of this data is available to anyone with a computer connection. Go to the Motus website, **motus.org**, zoom in on the map that shows receiver locations, and click on one that interests you, like, say, Burnt Point, up on Hudson Bay. In the box that pops up, you'll see "Tags detected" – more than 120, in this case. Click on "table" and you'll get the full list, ranging from whimbrels and red knots to sanderlings and black-bellied plovers, which at Burnt Point are mostly birds that were tagged at that site during the breeding season. You can then click on any bird and then select "Show detections in a map," Some were never detected away from the tagging site, but for others, you can follow their migration all the way to Tierra del Fuego.

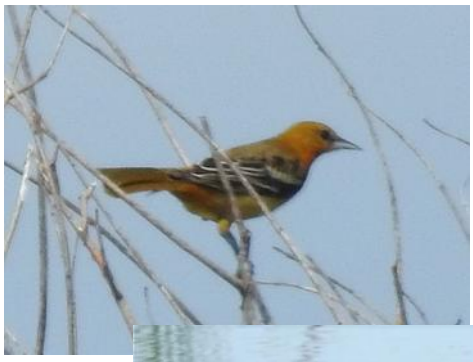
Right now, the North American part of the Motus network is predominantly eastern, but that's changing in a hurry. Large regional efforts like ours in the mid-Atlantic and Northeast are being organized in many other parts of the continent, as biologists, conservation NGOs, resource agencies, and educators realize we finally have the tools to follow, understand, and celebrate the travels of our smallest migrants.

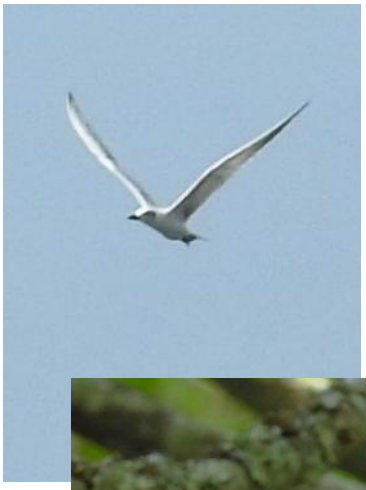
A growing flood of research from Motus is reshaping what we thought we knew about this most dangerous, yet least-understood time in a bird's annual cycle. Researchers have used Motus to explore how neonicotinoid insecticides interfere with migration orientation; to track the post-breeding flights of purple martins, and to look into the seasonal changes in the gut microbiome of Kirtland's warblers, by making it possible to find the same individuals at both ends of the birds' migration route, just to pick a few examples.

Motus is more than just an exciting window into an amazing natural phenomenon. It's providing critical information that may come just in time, as we scramble to help these smallest travelers navigate – literally – a rapidly changing world. And you can come along for the ride.

Photo Gallery – October 2020

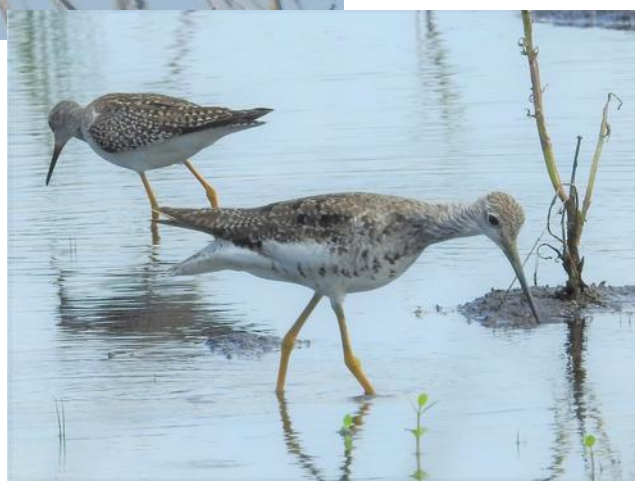
All levels of photography welcome
Submit your bird and wildlife photos to
lowerneusebirdclub@gmail.com





Counter-clockwise from left:
Baltimore Oriole
Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs
American Redstart (female)
Gull-billed Tern

Photos
©Ronnie Hewlette
North River Preserve &
Harkers Island, Sept. 5, 2020



Bottom left: one of five Rose-breasted Grosbeaks reported by Christine Stoughton Root from her yard on September 27.
Photo ©Christine Stoughton Root

Bottom right:
Bull elks from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, September 2020
©Michael Cheves