

Lower Neuse Bird Club

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September Announcements

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, club meetings will continue to be suspended for now. Socially-distance bird walks will continue. The following Saturday bird walks have been announced:

- September 5 – North River Preserve. Meet at Bridgepointe Hotel in New Bern at **7:00 AM**.
- September 19 – Martin Marietta Park (Glenburnie Quarry). Meet at the quarry entrance at **7:00 AM**.
- September 26 – Martin Marietta Park (Glenburnie Quarry). Meet at the quarry entrance at **7:00 AM**.

How I Became A Birder

by Les Coble, LNBC Co-president & CBC Eastern NC Representative at Large

Birding can be done anytime, anywhere, and during oh-so-many activities. I can also just listen while working around the farm, horseback riding, biking and fishing on the local rivers and bays. After all, birds are everywhere. Birds add dimension to trips locally, nationally, and around the world. My goal recently is to concentrate on bird activity and behavior, their interaction with each other and their environment. After all, this is how my birding started.

My first memory of the drama in bird life was during my first year hunting. I was too young to be permitted to carry a rifle, but I was fascinated in the up-close encounters with wildlife through a pair of binoculars. I remember sitting on a central Pennsylvania ridge in November, a Great Horned Owl was being harassed by a murder of American Crows. After flying up the slope from tree to tree, it finally settled on a large limb and hopped to the trunk. There, it turned and placed its back against the trunk. As the dozen crows came closer, more vocal with short and sharp, high-pitched caws, the Owl began lifting a feathered leg and extending it outward. That clearly warned the crows how close they could safely come. After 20 minutes, during which I would never have been able to hear a deer, the crows moved on from this no-win encounter. I saw this twice during the few years I hunted.

But, I had never birded with a group. My family kept strictly to itself, and my birding was limited to those hunting expeditions. While hunting, Whip-poor-wills often landed next to me, their wing flicking near another Will certainly kept me from looking for my quarry. Winter Wrens teased my patience to not smile too broadly as they walked over my boots and pant legs, and Red-tailed Hawks took rabbits while I sat as still as possible in the cold for yet another hour. Ruffed Grouse danced on downed logs after drumming.

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Lower Neuse Bird Club

How I Became A Birder

by Les Coble, continued from front page



While in college in MD, my wife elected to take a 2-credit course in Ornithology, basically a field class in bird watching. The final exam included a practical on a minimum of 30 birds out of 50 required songs to be known. She spent hours of studying for the exam, and we spent hours listening to bird songs instead of The Moody Blues. In late spring, summer and fall, I was a seasonal ranger at nearby Shad Landing State Park, learning the birds as I led wildflower walks. There, I saw my first Black-throated Blue Warblers, I presumed a pair, as they danced around a shrub a few feet off my trail. The ID pattern seemed out of place. The shimmering blue on the back, a dark facial mask, and a dark throat contrasting with snow white breast and belly caught my imagination. I would call this the “spark bird”, especially for an interest in warblers as my most sought after birds. Maryland took all new Naturalists on a statewide trip of the Parks in Western MD. I saw my first Golden-winged Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, and Chestnut-sided Warbler in the Appalachians. In central MD, my first Cerulean Warblers were seen, but under an upsetting scenario. One male and two females were feeding a Brown-headed Cowbird. I was disturbed two females would not be adding to the population that year.

We moved to my wife’s home town on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, where I was invited to participate in a bird walk. I knew many of the birds and was asked how many were on my life list. Life List? What’s that? I returned home to open the Golden Guide my wife used in class and counted a whopping 290 species. My interest was further peaked as the founder of the club had talked of his 100th bird, 200th bird, and so on. What would be my 300th bird? It was spring migration on the Shore. At that time, a 3 hour walk could yield 22 species of warblers! Within 2 weeks, a Hooded Warbler ticked #300 and now I can’t wait to see it every year (they nest here in Eastern NC on my farm).

Then I got to bird with Chandler Robbins, one of the Golden Guide’s authors, whose passion for birds and conservation was virulently contagious. I caught his enthusiasm. He always pressed me for details in sightings and I learned quickly. One day, I could not answer an ID question when I stated I had seen a Long-billed Dowitcher. He asked in a skeptical tone, “How many tail feathers did it have?” Then, after my quizzed look, he proceeded to create a smile with an, “I got ya” moment.

My other mentor was a history teacher who had started a bird club in the local high school and mentored dozens of future professionals. Many of those students still lead walks in the local club. In his retirement, he started a Tour Company. I went on several trips to gain the experience and knowledge he desired for leading the groups. Trips to Arizona, Florida, Texas, Maine and Canada’s Maritimes had me see the Razorbill as life bird #400 and Purple-crowned Hummingbird as #500.

As a sidebar, life bird #600 is unknown as the AOU had a major split fest one year. I have that as an unknown armchair lifer. #700 came at 10:00 PM near Nome, Alaska as my birding partner on the trip took it upon himself that last evening to push till I could achieve that goal. A Pacific Golden-Plover hopped atop a tundra tussock while sharply calling to attract a mate, or warn me I was far, far too close.

How I Became A Birder

by Les Coble, continued from Page #2

But that was less spectacular than the pair of Gyrfalcons at 11 PM that same night, who were mutually hunting a side slope. One Gyr waited upslope till the other drifted further down slope to scatter prey, with the up slope Gyr the ambush killer. This alternating pattern continued till a scurrying rabbit succumbed. I remember when someone seeing 700 birds was a rarity worthy of a big celebration party. It still is, but thanks to the great Cornell eBird team, this is now easily within reach of birders, as is 750, in my opinion. My jinx bird? – the only N.A. warbler I have never seen – a Hermit Warbler, as much as anything because I have only birded California at San Diego, and never in Oregon.

After teaching at a local college and seeing many students join bird clubs, I took my path of study to the task of learning the meaning behind those scientific names. New field ID clues came to my birding. Birding history also comes to life through birds named after many early naturalists. Birding now for 59 years, I guess I will forever see Myrtle Warblers, but had to lose Oldsquaw after years of scolding from female birders, albeit most proper. Many ancient and mythological characters have shaped our birds' names and are a tremendous set of stories for bird presentations. I asked college students to use the acronym of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) as the mnemonic for the study and grasping of visual clues when birding. SPCA, I explained, was the manner in which to learn and observe birds: Shape, Pattern, finally color and then Anything Else, or All that Gizz. Today the "Anything Else" has become an increasingly major factor in field clues as guide books and periodicals are more frequently printing valuable observations that distinguish many birds.

Bird behavior has much to tell us. Jon Young's book *What the Robin Knows* is a grand start for many birders. I now bird primarily to observe the "anything else", and return to my roots of wildlife observer. If you have ever watched Semipalmated Sandpipers on the breeding territory, you will always think "Lover and Actor Extraordinaire" of this bird that is so drab in spring and fall on the mid-Atlantic. For further study, I want to know why in mid-December in Eastern NC, the two Blue-headed Vireos I watched were so agitated and then aggressive to the three Yellow-rumped Warblers? Both used vocal with sounds I had never heard. How many Bald Eagles does it take to get an Osprey to relinquish its catch? One? Two? The Osprey gave up at the third, which was on its back beneath the Osprey, at that point no more than 5 feet from the water's surface. The adult eagle caught the fish in midair, and as quickly and expertly right itself to accelerate with deep wing beats toward shore, and with his immature challengers in tow. It is safe to assume the youngsters learned a lesson.

My life list has always been dictated by bird observation goals. I got to 700 life birds simply seeking field experiences with birds. Chasing rarities has always been down the priority list. I have many successful rarity chasing experiences, but do not seek these opportunities. I picked out an Ivory Gull life bird in Delaware on one such trip, simply because the flight pattern was out of place within the large mixed flock.

I have come full circle. But I will always bird for birding for my beloved orchids – the Warblers.



The **Hermit Warbler's** golden face shines like a beacon as it flits through Pacific Northwest mountain forests. This natty gray-and-white warbler hunts insects high in pine, Douglas-fir, spruce and other conifers. In summer, its buzzy song drifts down to the forest floor. On wintering grounds, in the cool pine-oak forests of Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, Hermit Warblers forage among flocks of warblers and other birds, often just above eye level. Hermit Warblers are close relatives of Townsend's Warblers, and the two species hybridize where their ranges come together.

Photo and Text from:
allaboutbirds.org

Lower Neuse Bird Club

LNBC Bird Walk –North River Preserve, June 6, 2020

by Ronnie Hewlette

As the last Bird Walk for the 2019-2020 season, the Club scheduled a First-Saturday trip to the North River Preserve in Carteret County on June 6th. This was to be our last outing, as a club, until this fall.

As is our practice, John Fussell met us at the gate to escort us through the 6,000 acre restored wetlands, stopping at known sites for birds in general and specifically in areas where John has recently located birds of interest.

The Dickcissel was our target-bird for the day, with a known population of breeders in this one particular area. Eastern NC is outside the “normal” migration range, so this is the one local spot for us to view and hear this beautiful bird. Does it look like a miniature Meadowlark to you?

A group of 16 birders converged at the gate on the North River Farms Road, between Otway and Smyrna, NC, around 8:00 AM and began our 10-vehicle caravan through the acres of forested, freshwater, and tidal wetlands. Due to the Coronavirus social-distancing requirements, car-pooling was limited.

As we drove along with windows rolled down, we heard several birds along the way (Meadowlark, Chats, Carolina Wrens, Cardinals, Red-winged Blackbirds, Blue Grosbeaks). On our first stop, we found the target-bird, the Dickcissel, in the top of a shrubby pine, singing a somewhat unorthodox song. This was to be the first of several that we will see and hear as the morning goes along.

—We drive on – headed for the wet area on the far side of the grasslands we initially traversed. Along the way, we spotted Orchard Orioles and Indigo Buntings, among others, and heard a Yellow-throated Warbler. This wetland area dried out last year, allowing grasses to fill in, and recent rains have raised the water level, but open mud-flat areas were limited. As we eased along the levee road, a Wild Turkey was spotted and a couple of Gull-billed Terns flew away, visible for identification by those that arrived first. This tern is a summer resident to the coast of NC; identified by its stout black bill and long, black legs. Its main diet consists of insects and is frequently found over marshes or farm fields. This is a good place to find them.

We all saw Snowy Egrets, a lot of Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Little Blue Herons, and numerous Cattle Egrets in flight. Scores and scores of White Ibis, flight after flight all morning! A couple of sharp-eyed birders picked out a Tricolored Heron, a Glossy Ibis, and a pair of Double-crested Cormorants.

Along the way, Les and Christine both heard a Yellow-throated Vireo – same location, but two separate events. This is a first occurrence for the North River Preserve, according to John Fussell. Way to go, Les and Christine!

Red-tailed Hawks, a Summer Tanager, and a singing but difficult to find, Red-eyed Vireo, were added to our growing list of species. Interesting note: we did encounter a Cottonmouth snake in the grass, beside the vehicles. It was spotted as we prepared to leave. It was coiled tightly in low-cut, thick cover, but its signature, wide-open “Cottonw-white mouth” shined, as we were careful to give it a wide berth!

Several times, Yellow-billed Cuckoos were heard, and a couple were spotted in flight. This is such a graceful bird in flight, with its gray-brown wings and rufous primaries and long tail. The Cuckoos have a unique silhouette, easy to recognize!

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“Big Al”

©Michael Creedon

LNBC Bird Walk –North River Preserve, June 6, 2020

by Ronnie Hewlette, continued from Page #4

We drove to the back of the property, to the “mountain”, overlooking the Open Grounds Farm. Hundreds of gulls were seen in the distance over Ag-land that was being worked. Much of the farmed acreage we saw close up, actually lay fallow. We drove about 2.5 miles farther West, along the edge of the Ag-land, to possibly get a closer look at the gulls, with the hope of encountering a Swallow-tailed Kite. Not going to happen on this trip, but we did observe a Cooper’s Hawk – add that one to the list!

There were 70 species recorded for the morning. Can you believe it? That’s quite a list! Birding with John Fussell at North River Preserve is always a productive experience, and this trip was no exception. Thanks, John, for a wonderful day!



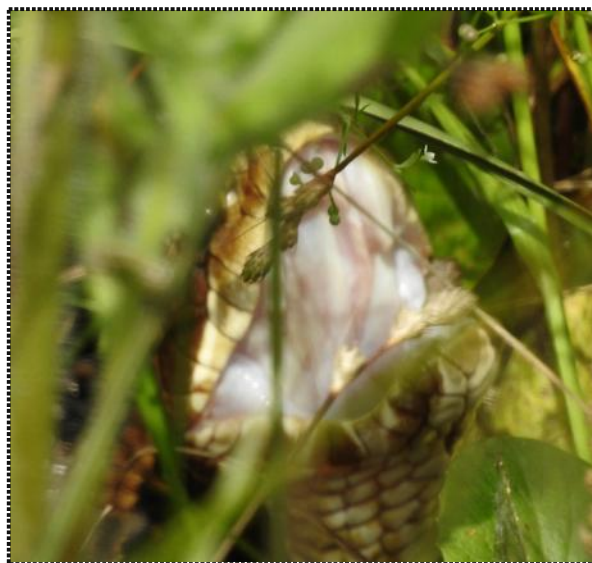
Dickcissel
©Ronnie Hewlette



Cattle Egret
©Ronnie Hewlette



Indigo Bunting
©Ronnie Hewlette



Cottonmouth
©Christine Stoughton-Root

Lower Neuse Bird Club

North River Preserve Checklist – June 6, 2020

Compiled by Ronnie Hewlette

No.	Species	No.	Species
1	Canada Goose	36	Carolina Chickadee
2	Wood Duck	37	Tufted Titmouse
3	Mallard	38	Purple Martin
4	American Black Duck	39	Tree Swallow
5	Northern Bobwhite	40	Barn Swallow
6	Wild Turkey	41	Brown-headed Nuthatch
7	Mourning Dove	42	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
8	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	43	Carolina Wren
9	Killdeer	44	European Starling
10	Laughing Gull	45	Gray Catbird
11	Double-crested Cormorant	46	Brown Thrasher
12	Gull-billed Tern	47	Northern Mockingbird
13	Great Blue Heron	48	Eastern Bluebird
14	Great Egret	49	American Robin
15	Snowy Egret	50	Chipping Sparrow
16	Little Blue Heron	51	Eastern Towhee
17	Tricolored Heron	52	Yellow-breasted Chat
18	Cattle Egret	53	Eastern Meadowlark
19	White Ibis	54	Orchard Oriole
20	Glossy Ibis	55	Red-winged Blackbird
21	Turkey Vulture	56	Brown-headed Cowbird
22	Cooper's Hawk	57	Ovenbird
23	Red-tailed Hawk	58	Common Grackle
24	Red-headed Woodpecker	59	Boat-tailed Grackle
25	Red-bellied Woodpecker	60	Prothonotary Warbler
26	Downy Woodpecker	61	Common Yellowthroat
27	Eastern Wood-Pewee	62	Northern Parula
28	Great Crested Flycatcher	63	Pine Warbler
29	Eastern Kingbird	64	Yellow-throated Warbler
30	White-eyed Vireo	65	Prairie Warbler
31	Yellow-throated Vireo	66	Summer Tanager
32	Red-eyed Vireo	67	Northern Cardinal
33	Blue Jay	68	Blue Grosbeak
34	American Crow	69	Indigo Bunting
35	Fish Crow	70	Dickcissel

Photo Gallery – September 2020



Wood Ducks
©J. McDiarmid
7/31/20



Green Heron
©J. McDiarmid
7/31/20



American Alligator
©J. McDiarmid
7/31/20

Ken Lady Retires as Burlington Bird Club Bird Walk Leader

Courtesy of BBC News, Volume 10, Issue 8, submitted by Olwen Jarvis

[Former LNBC member and secretary] Ken Lady announced his retirement as bird walk leader for the Burlington Bird Club. Ken joined the BBC in October 2011. He assumed the job in 2012, and has led an estimated 100+ bird walks and Audubon Bird Counts.

Not only did Ken lead the bird walks, he provided detailed written reports for the BBC newsletter, and he also provided very detailed reports at many of our monthly meetings. In addition, Ken was the leader and compiler of the Audubon's Annual Christmas Bird Counts and other smaller bird counts for the Audubon Society. He also recently retired from that position. Not only did he find the birds, he happily shared his knowledge with others, as well as his spotting scope so that all could see and enjoy seeing each bird.