



Lower Neuse Bird Club

Editor: Michael Cheves, LowerNeuseBirdClub@gmail.com

LNBC Monthly Bird Walk, Sat. March 6, 2021 Fort Macon SP Area

by Les Coble

We will meet at the Bridge Pointe Hotel in downtown New Bern, leaving at **7:00 AM** to travel to Ft. Macon, where we will then meet members from the coast area (at the far end of the parking lot).

They will direct us to stops for late winter/early migrant species. We hope to visit some sites we generally miss, possibly including Hoop Pole Creek and the Gallants Channel Trail, and maybe even a home where unexpected birds have over-wintered. It will be an interesting morning, so put us on your schedule.

It is always windy along the coast, so plan on warm layers of clothing. A scope is always a handy tool for several stops.

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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 cover our year of club activities, which start in September and continue through June.

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
458 Country Club Drive West
Arapahoe, NC 28510

Please note updated
mailing address!



Bullock's Oriole
Morehead City, NC
©Michael Cheves Feb. 2021

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Tennessee Warbler

by Al Gamache

On Wednesday, 9 December 2020, around ten o'clock in the morning, nearly simultaneously, two warblers land upon a no melt suet block out at my back yard bird feeding station. One was on the left side, the other on the right. The one on the left side is instantly identified as a Pine Warbler.

On the other hand, the one on the right side was perplexing. It was just so much smaller than the Pine Warbler. Otherwise, this tiny warbler was handsomely attired in all greenish-yellow color on the upper parts, with no wing-bars to speak of, and some whitish underparts, its face featured a black eye-line with a pale eyebrow... and kind of an eye-ring, which suggested a possible Orange-crowned Warbler, then immediately both flew off, burying themselves in a flowering Camellia bush, and hence disappeared.

I rushed off to the bookcase to get my binoculars and positioned myself at my desk, staring out the window, hoping for a possible return of this diminutive warbler. The small warbler had suggested a possible Orange-crowned, but that conjecture didn't really stick, it had to be something else. Luckily, and blessed be good luck, maybe twelve, fifteen minutes later, it was back attacking the suet block, this time the little guy was feeding upside down. Indeed the underparts, now fully exposed, were white, including the undertail coverts (eliminating the Orange-crowned). And the underside of its tail was a soft gray and projected not much beyond those coverts, implying a short tail. The underparts were without any suggestion of streaking. And in the area of the throat, and upper breast, and a touch of it on the flanks, there was a nice soft blush of yellow.

So I got out my Sibley, indexed the Orange-crowned, and onto page 331. Curiously! on the facing page, THERE it was! The Tennessee Warbler, and the drawing of the female breeding Tennessee looked like a dead ringer of the bird that was pecking away at my suet block.

This is the first time I've sighted this bird in eastern North Carolina. Previously, I've only seen this species along the Blue Ridge Parkway during spring and fall migration. Its wintering grounds include the southern tip of Mexico, to Colombia and Venezuela.

Anyway, it's been an absolute delight to see this little mite of a bird visiting my suet block over and over and over again. A rather plain bird to be sure, but ever so sweet, in all of its subtle details.

-Al Gamache

Tennessee Warblers are dainty, thin-billed warblers that breed in the boreal forest of Canada. Though they lack the brilliant colors of other warbler species, breeding males are a crisp mixture of gray head, white stripe over the eye, and green back. Females and nonbreeders can look more generally yellowish, inviting confusion with species like Orange-crowned Warblers, but they always show white under the tail. This numerous species eats mostly small caterpillars and benefits from the spruce budworm outbreaks that happen periodically in their breeding habitat.

Text from allaboutbirds.org



*Tennessee Warbler
Gamache Residence
New Bern, NC
3 Feb. 2021*

©Michael Cheves

LNBC Trip Report – Lake Mattamuskeet NWR

by Les Coble

10 birders met Saturday, February 6, at the Beaufort County Rest Stop, with the goal to visit the impoundment at Lake Mattamuskeet. Anticipation is always a hallmark at the start of a bird walk. In this case, it is primarily fueled by the temperature, which is just below freezing, but promising to quickly rise near 50. The sea foam sky at the horizon adds subtle shades of background color to the scene.

Our first birding thoughts were centered on whether the Loggerhead Shrike present last month could still be present. A look to the trees in the center resulted in a pleasurable announcement of yes. A few minutes later, several birders realized the bird had begun calling with sharp, emphatic notes. A second Shrike appeared! The pair were soon moving from tree to tree, with the Shrike that was calling always trailing the second. Yet, to untrained eyes, this did not “sound an alarm”. The second, silent Shrike flew across the parking lot, spinning around the limb on which it landed. The first Shrike continued to call, but less sharply and lengthy. Almost immediately a *third* Shrike appeared, but in the same tree with the first Shrike! The first Shrike dropped to the ground, picked up an insect, and took it to the newest Shrike, which ate the offering. Males often feed females on the nest, but this is rarely reported in a pair not yet nesting. Well, the feeding activity answers the reason for the sharp calls that got our attention. Yes, three Shrikes – a pair and an intruder, which disappeared thereafter. The question now is whether the couple will nest in the parking lot area. Stay tuned for the next chapter.

We drove not to Mattamuskeet, but toward Lake Pungo. First stop was at the Davis Cemetery on Grassy Ridge Road, just shy of the access to the Pungo Lake area. This was the site of the first stop on a scouting trip by the Triumvirate on Thursday, where a Lark Sparrow sat 20-feet from the vehicle! Alas, no Sparrow was found, but over a dozen Wood Ducks from both sides of the road were a sign of spring, as these birds group up in migration. Across from Grassy Ridge Road, several Wild Turkeys had gathered, most feeding. But like many flocks we passed along the highways, a few males were beginning to drop their wings as they anticipate the lekking season, when their tail feathers will be fanned. March is our month to see this full display. Note this wing drop position in the photo. You can also see the “beard” on these males, a bristle-like group of feathers at the breast. 5% of females also have a beard, whose purpose is unknown, but believed to be for the attraction display.

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Loggerhead Shrikes
©Gary Kurtz
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Wild Turkeys
©Bob Rumer
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LNBC Trip Report – Lake Mattamuskeet NWR

by Les Coble, continued from Page #3

On to Canal D Road along Lake Pungo. We access this road from Pat's Road on the west side of the refuge. Pat's Road is paved. Nice, especially when D Road degrades to a muddy mess, but still passable. Our goal was the 10 Sandhill Cranes just beyond the impoundment to our right. The impoundment is filled with Snow Geese and Tundra Swans. I am absolutely certain other birds are with them (besides the Shovelers we could detect), but Federal Park Rangers have been scouring the area recently and issuing tickets. Staying on the road was prudent. A few members got a glance at a Short-eared Owl! The NC Youth Hunt Day this morning resulted in the Snow Geese and other birds (cranes) absent from the fields. Some irregular lines of Snow Geese from other directions were still visible as they headed into the Lake.

Several Bald Eagles are seen. An injured Snow Goose was observed trying to remain about 20-feet in front of a trailing immature Eagle, hopping along as it contemplated the meal. The goose drops into a shallow trench and we do not see its fate. Time to move onto Lake Mattamuskeet.

We stopped at the unofficial parking area on the left just before the NWR entrance. Land birds were scarce, but one of the multiple hundreds of Yellow-rumped Warblers we would see over the day was picking insects off the water's surface. Yellow-rumps often "fly-catch", as do most warblers, but I seldom see them performing this feeding activity.

The impoundment along the NWR entrance road was not densely packed with ducks, but we managed to see 12 more species, with several displaying to mates as the season for nesting approaches. A pair of Blue-winged Teal were so close, we were able to see that the white patch on the side of the head was lined with black. This is not a field mark, but great to see, almost as grand as the ring on a Ring-necked Duck. Ever seen it? Good luck. The author has seen it but twice in 55 years!

Lunch time!!! We move toward the Visitor's Center BUT... what is the bird with those Coots in the canal? Al Gamache queries Greater Scaup, and Les jumps out of the car to confirm and hopefully point the extremely up-close and personal view of this duck to trailing cars. This is a female. Greater Scaup have a larger bill and more pronounced nail to its cousin, the Lesser Scaup. At lunch, I offer a possible mnemonic for separation of these two similar birds. Greater Scaup's name starts with the letter "G", a round-shaped letter that represents the round profile of this scaup's head. The head color also tends to be "G"reen when light conditions allow this iridescence. The Lesser Scaup's name starts with "L", whose head shape has a pronounced peak at the rear (think an upside-down "L"). The head color when very rarely seen will radiate purplish.

The welcoming committee at the Visitor's Center picnic tables was 3 Golden-crowned Kinglets, but the oft found Black-crowned Night Herons were absent in the trees around the old pumping station.

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LNBC Trip Report – Lake Mattamuskeet NWR

by Les Coble, continued from Page #4

Our last planned stop of the trip was a private impoundment surrounded by the Gull Rock Gamelands and Wysocking Wildlife Sanctuary. The access road is directly across Rt. 264 at the intersection of the New Holland Road that we use to leave the NWR. The impoundment is on the east side of the road, such that the cloudy afternoon light is behind us. We get to see Shovelers, Green-winged Teal, Pintails and several Greater Yellowlegs in this cloudy but “enlightening” glow.

A discussion on the possible presence of Lesser Yellowlegs meant the members were trying not to miss this bird. Is the bill on several in front of us short enough to make them a Lesser? The rather straight Lesser’s bill is just barely as long or just slightly longer than the length of the head. The Greater’s bill is 1.5 to 2 times the length of the head and tends to slightly curve upward. We all agree we have not heard a Lesser, as all calls are in the usual 3’s of a Greater, and concede no Lesser’s can be confirmed.



Greater Yellowlegs
©Tom Piorkowski
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Lesser Yellowlegs
©Pete Blanchard
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As a sidebar here, look at the photos above. The bill length difference in these photos is distinct. But even in these breeding plumaged birds, there is more barring, just below the wings along the sides and behind the legs on the Greater Yellowlegs. This is not a diagnostic clue, but tends to be more noticeable on Greater Yellowlegs. What is diagnostic, if present, is spots on the belly in the Greater Yellowlegs. Lesson here is the same as your physician diagnosing an illness – they often must piece together many symptoms to come to a decision.

Our only Dark-eyed Junco of the day was heard and a probable Merlin was not confirmed. This is one site of the Mattamuskeet Christmas Count, a location for Nelson’s Sparrow and Saltmarsh Sparrow. Neither bird made a show. The road beyond this area leads to many birding sites, but is far more muddy and deeply rutted. Heading for home is prudent, since it is after 2, but we collectively have tallied 70 species, appreciating the ducks that did make eastern NC home for the season. On the drive home, we comment the winter number of Kestrels has been unusually high this winter, but the numbers have also risen recently. This marks the beginning of the northerly migration, as birds further south slip into and out of the area. Expect sightings to peak in a month.

See photos from Lake Mattamuskeet trip on Page #11

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Lake Mattamuskeet Trip Checklist – Feb. 6, 2021

Compiled by Les Coble

#	Species	#	Species	#	Species
01	Snow Goose	25	Turkey Vulture	49	Tufted Titmouse
02	Canada Goose	26	Bald Eagle	50	Carolina Wren
03	Tundra Swan	27	Northern Harrier	51	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
04	Wood Duck	28	Red-shouldered Hawk	52	Golden-crowned Kinglet
05	Gadwall	29	Red-tailed Hawk	53	Eastern Bluebird
06	American Wigeon	30	Loggerhead Shrike	54	American Robin
07	Mallard	31	American Coot	55	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
08	Blue-winged Teal	32	Killdeer	56	Yellow-rumped Warbler
09	Northern Shoveler	33	Greater Yellowlegs	57	Palm Warbler
10	Northern Pintail	34	Ring-billed Gull	58	Pine Warbler
11	Green-winged Teal	35	Mourning Dove	59	Brown-headed Nuthatch
12	Ring-necked Duck	36	Short-eared Owl	60	Eastern Towhee
13	Greater Scaup	37	Belted Kingfisher	61	Chipping Sparrow
14	Bufflehead	38	Red-bellied Woodpecker	62	Song Sparrow
15	Hooded Merganser	39	Downy Woodpecker	63	Savannah Sparrow
16	Ruddy Duck	40	Northern Flicker	64	White-throated Sparrow
17	Wild Turkey	41	Pileated Woodpecker	65	Dark-eyed Junco
18	Pied-billed Grebe	42	American Kestrel	66	Red-winged Blackbird
19	Double-crested Cormorant	43	Eastern Phoebe	67	Eastern Meadowlark
20	Great Blue Heron	44	Blue Jay	68	Common Grackle
21	Great Egret	45	American Crow	69	American Goldfinch
22	Cattle Egret	46	Fish Crow	70	House Sparrow
23	White Ibis	47	Tree Swallow		
24	Black Vulture	48	Carolina Chickadee		

Birding Warbler Road in the Blue Ridge Mountains

by Jerry Uhlman

Reprinted from *Bird Watcher's Digest* March/April 2021, with permission.

See birdwatchersdigest.com

During spring migration along the Atlantic Flyway, species heading for breeding grounds may follow the coastal plain and piedmont, or they may cross the Appalachian Mountains on their northward journey. In the Mid-Atlantic, birds heading for the mountains first encounter the Blue Ridge range that stretches from northeastern Georgia into south-central Pennsylvania. A large swath of the range covers southwestern Virginia, and birders can enjoy following the 215-mile Blue Ridge Parkway along its spine in pursuit of colorful songbirds.

Among the many sites that attract birders along the scenic Blue Ridge, you won't find a more productive and exciting spot than **Warbler Road** in the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. Warbler Road is actually a route along several gravel forest roads with endpoints at the James River near the village of Arcadia located along Interstate 81, and Sunset Field Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Sunset Field, at milepost 78.4, is not far from the Peaks of Otter Lodge, a summer vacation playground with a small lake, hiking trails, and campground.

The winding route through the mountains has earned a reputation over the years as one of the most reliable sites to find songbirds during migration, especially warblers – more than two dozen species. What attracts birders is the ease with which targets can be spotted in the ravines and on hillsides from the roadway, often at eye level. Birders who enjoy photography can often get unexpected and spectacular shots.

Whether you take the 14-mile Warbler Road route downhill from Sunset Field Overlook or uphill from Arcadia, either way you'll find birds foraging and calling nearly all morning and afternoon, and end your day with an impressive and very satisfying list of species.

The ascent from the river bottom to the Blue Ridge Parkway is nearly 1,600 feet along a narrow track with numerous switchbacks that cross several creeks. From late April through May, you're apt to encounter slow oncoming traffic and distracted roadside strollers with upturned binoculars.

For two reasons, I prefer starting at the river bottomland at the bridge over the James River (east of Arcadia on Arcadia Road/Route 614) and slowly working up the mountainside. First, in early May it's often chillier and windier as you move up in elevation, so you can take advantage of the sun's warmth by heading to the top when the temperature is rising. Second, birding is often better along the bottomland early in the morning, and the higher-altitude species will generally still be singing and actively foraging when you near the top.

Just at daybreak, as you stand by the James River Bridge at the edge of the national forest, you'll first hear the songs of field, white-throated, and song sparrows. Soon there's a symphony of birdsong as the sun's first rays bathe the surrounding fields. The songs of Baltimore and orchard orioles fill the air as the birds chase each other from tree to tree.

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Birding Warbler Road in the Blue Ridge Mountains

by Jerry Uhlman, continued from Page #7

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On the opposite side of the road, below in the bottomland fields, yellow-breasted chats cackle in the tangles, prairie warblers call, and indigo buntings and blue grosbeaks streak back and forth along the field edges. You'll be amazed at the number and variety of birds that you'll see and hear along both sides of the road before heading into higher elevations.

After driving away from the James River, within a half-mile you'll encounter a bridge that crosses North Creek and leads to a railroad track. Plan to spend some time along this short stretch where you'll often hear and see Baltimore and orchard orioles, scarlet tanagers, and a variety of warblers. With a little patience, you're apt to find red-eyed, white-eyed, blue-headed, and warbling vireos. Watch for belted kingfishers that ply the stream banks.

Beyond the railroad track and an old country store, watch for a left turn over North Creek onto Solitude Road, a narrow lane that leads to a roadside marsh within three miles. The marshy wetlands will be your best shot at finding a black-billed cuckoo, and perhaps a yellow-billed cuckoo as well. Prothonotary and yellow warblers are common here, and you're likely to see blue grosbeaks and indigo buntings in the fields along the road. When finished, backtrack to Arcadia Road.

Continuing along Arcadia Road, within a mile you'll see signage for North Creek Campground; a left turn onto the gravel road will lead uphill to one of the best sites on Warbler Road. The campground and the surrounding area are best explored on foot, including the creek and woods across from the campground and both sides of the roadway beyond the campground. This is the most reliable spot for Louisiana waterthrushes, and you'll most likely find ovenbirds, as well as hooded and black-throated green warblers.

Driving uphill from the campground, you'll soon enter a twisting and narrow roadway with switchbacks that cross small creeks and gorges, often giving you unexpected views of songbirds at eye level. The warblers you are used to straining to glimpse in the forest canopy will often be easily spotted on low-hanging branches or downhill treetops. Along this middle section of the route, listen and watch for ovenbirds, thrushes, and worm-eating, black-throated blue, and magnolia warblers. You're likely also to find many blue grosbeaks and indigo buntings along the way.

Along the final few miles, you'll likely hear not only similar-sounding black-throated blue and cerulean warblers, but many other warbler species: blackpoll, Blackburnian, chestnut-sided, hooded, black-and-white, worm-eating, Cape May, and Kentucky, as well as American redstarts and yellow-breasted chats.

Before reaching the top at Sunset Field Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway, watch for a gravel road on the left that leads to a distant radar tower.

Turn onto the gravel road and park along any of the wide spots. It's possible to drive this track a half-mile, but the road is gated ahead with a tight turnaround. You'll certainly enjoy birding this gentle grade on foot, where the birdlife is usually active.

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Birding Warbler Road in the Blue Ridge Mountains

by Jerry Uhlman, continued from Page #8

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The tower track is a reliable site for a number of species you may not have found at lower elevations, such as wood and Swainson's thrushes, veery, and rose-breasted grosbeak. You'll find Canada warblers, often a difficult species to spot, singing on territory around several clusters of large boulders shortly before reaching the closed gate. You're also likely to find dark-eyed juncos foraging along the road edges. Juncos are a common winter feeder bird along Virginia's coastal plain before leaving for mountain breeding grounds in early spring.

At the Sunset Field Overlook, the upper terminus of Warbler Road, birding can be lively, too. Searching the treetops may bring you warbling vireos, a rose-breasted grosbeak, scarlet tanager, or American redstart. In the brushy field below, indigo buntings often sing, and a yellow-breasted chat may surprise you with a fluttering display nearby.

If you follow the Parkway north of Sunset Field roughly 15 miles, you'll find the James River Visitor Center where the Parkway crosses the historic river. You can descend a staircase to the river, where a fascinating exhibit highlights the locks where flatboat bateaux skirted rapids long before freight trains replaced them after the Civil War.

The visitor center is also an access point for a trail that follows Otter Creek for several miles upstream, often a lively warbler thoroughfare. The brushy banks and thick canopy are magnets for songbirds.

When you end your Warbler Road adventure, you'll have a long list of sightings, and it will certainly include many dazzling warblers prized by birders.

Jerry Uhlman is an inveterate traveler and birder. He has written two Virginia bird-finding guides and numerous magazine articles, including frequent contributions to Bird Watcher's Digest.

Directions to Follow Warbler Road

James River to Blue Ridge Parkway Route: From Buchanan, Virginia, northeast of Roanoke, take I-64 north to the Arcadia exit, County Road 614. Follow the winding road down to the James River, and enjoy the dawn chorus at the parking lot on the south side of the narrow bridge. Continue on County Road 614 across the railroad track, past Arcadia to Forest Road 59, and follow the signs to North Creek Campground. Turn left onto Forest Road 768 and follow this track to Forest Road 812. Turn right onto 812 and follow it to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Convenient, modest lodging is available at the Wattstull Inn (wattstullinn.com, 540-254-1551), located at exit 168 on Interstate 81 near the village of Arcadia and the town of Buchanan. The motel has a restaurant, and there is a service station nearby. If you stay at the Wattstull, to begin the Warbler Road trek, turn right from the motel access road onto Arcadia Road and follow it to the James River.

Convenient lodging is available at Peaks of Otter Lodge along the Blue Ridge Parkway near milepost 86 on the Blue Ridge Parkway (peaksofotter.com, 866-387-9905). The lodge has a restaurant and small camp store.

Airline services. The most convenient airport to the Blue Ridge Parkway near Warbler Road is the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport (ROA), served by three major airlines. To reach Arcadia, drive roughly 30 miles north on Interstate-81 to exit 168

Lower Neuse Bird Club

100 Species per Month?

by Michael Cheves

Why challenge myself? I thought. No reason to shoot for any specific number. I'm just out here doing what I love to do, watching trees, and hoping for an occasional bird sighting. That was until I looked on my eBird profile, and noticed that it was only the second week of February, and I had already racked up 94 species without even really trying. I hadn't really traveled much, save for an afternoon in Carteret County (I haven't been to any State Parks or National Wildlife Refuges this month, yet!). A few of my species had come from a trip to visit my cousin in Waynesville, NC, especially the beautiful and obliging Brown Creeper at the Davie County Rest Area on I-40 Westbound (I highly recommend this stop, as it is next to a horse pasture and is very quiet for an interstate stop). Most sightings had come just from the variety currently present at Martin Marietta Park, the former quarry right here in New Bern. Local rarities such as the Evening Grosbeaks at the Creedons' and Al Gamache's Tennessee Warbler helped out a lot as well.

So I guess my goal wasn't exactly 100, but going ahead and getting those last six for February. A trip near sundown out to a clearing just past the Wildlife Depot on National Forest Road easily checked off #95, American Woodcock. #96 came to me on 17th Feb., during a hike at Latham-Whitehurst Nature Park with Dan Kendrick.

A year bird for Dan, and a month bird for me, we saw a cooperative pair of Golden-crowned Kinglets in perfect light. On the way home, I noted that I had not seen the American Black Ducks on the pond behind the Food Lion in Bridgeton since January, so I stopped there, and within 10 minutes I was up to #97 for the month of February.

I figured if I didn't reach 100 by the weekend, a trip to Fort Macon SP or New River Inlet should easily propel me past 100. But, it turned out, all I needed to do was go home, and stop at the neighborhood dog park on the way. An 11-acre dog park, surrounded by wetlands, offers a surprising variety when there aren't any dogs around. #98 was actually a life bird for me, a pair of Rusty Blackbirds that flew into the nearby wetlands. #99 was scolding me near the parking lot, a Blue-headed Vireo. And right next to him was a cute flying zebra, Black-and-White Warbler, officially my 100th species for February. Actually not that difficult, at least not during this busy time of year as birds prepare for migration and breeding season.

And of course, I am still behind other birders in Craven County who have more than 100 species for February. But numbers don't matter that much. Whether you see one species, 100 species, or more, as long as you're out there watching and appreciating what you see, that is what counts the most!



Bald Eagle attending the
nest
Martin Marietta Park
(the quarry)
16th Feb. 2021

©Bill Jarvis

Lake Mattamuskeet Trip Photos – Feb. 6, 2021

All Photos ©Jenny McDiarmid



*Above: Northern Pintail
Below: Song Sparrow*



White Ibis



Lower Neuse Bird Club

Photo Gallery, Part II



©Jenny McDiarmid, Feb. 6, 2021



Loggerhead Shrike
New Bern, NC
Feb. 15, 2021
©Michael Cheves

Caption this photo? →

Eurasian Collared-Dove
Morehead City, NC
Feb. 21, 2021
©Michael Cheves

