

Lower Neuse Bird Club



Editor: Michael Cheves, LowerNeuseBirdClub@gmail.com

LNBC Monthly Bird Walk – North River Wetlands Preserve, Saturday, June 5th

by Les Coble

On Saturday, June 5th, Lower Neuse Bird Club will travel to North River Wetlands Preserve. This is the last walk of the season and always an interesting and engaging sojourn through varying habitats near the coast.

We will meet at the gate at **8:00 AM**. Please car pool. The gate at the entrance will be closed behind us. It is an hour from James City, which leaves a few minutes for a restroom stop at the gas station at the corner of Harker's Island Road about 1/2-mile away. Please plan your driving time carefully.

If you would like to travel with someone, please contact Les Coble (410-829-5501) or Wade Fuller (252-229-8012), and we will gladly help find a seat for you.

The 6,000-acre wetlands restoration project is among the largest projects of its kind in the nation (source: ncoast.org). Dickcissels (rare for NC) have been breeding at this site for the past few years, so we will hope to find a few of them. Last year's trip was productive for an impressive variety of birds.

Wear clothing to protect against mosquitoes and ticks AND bring water. There is a restroom on the Preserve we will be near at one point during the walk. A hat and sunscreen is also strongly advisable. Add that favorite pair of binoculars and bring a scope if you have one. We will be scanning impoundments for lingering migrant shorebirds and resident nesters.

The immensely knowledgeable author of *A Birder's Guide to Coastal North Carolina*, John Fussell, will be our onsite guide. He has reported Swallow-tailed Kite and Dickcissels for this Preserve this spring. It would be a day to remember if we could see both of these birds that morning. We will leave around noon from the Preserve.

Club Officers

Co-Presidents

Wade Fuller
Ronnie Hewlette
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514-2822



LNBC New Members

LNBC is pleased to welcome two new additions to our growing membership roster. Laura Gauthier of New Bern, and Wild Birds Unlimited of New Bern (wbunewbern@gmail.com) have both joined the club. Welcome to all our new members, and we are happy to have you in our "flock" of birders!

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Lower Neuse Bird Club Bird Walk – Goose Creek SP April 30, 2021

by Kevin O'Kane

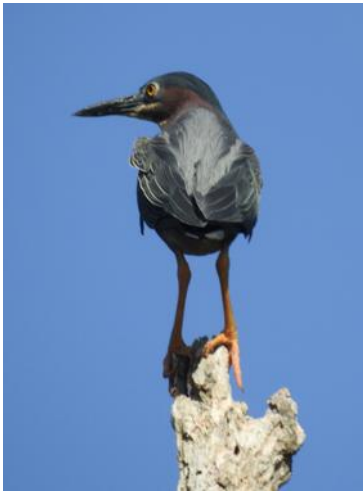
Goose Creek State Park in Beaufort County was the location for our April 30th birding adventure. Goose Creek State Park is located east of Washington, NC on the shores of the Pamlico River. There are eight miles of trails crossing a broad range of habitats, transitioning from upland pine forest to cypress swamps and marsh wetlands. Live oaks draped in Spanish moss line the shores of the Pamlico River.

Several years ago, the park had the overstocked upland Loblolly Pine stand that surrounds the visitor center selectively thinned. The benefits of thinning are numerous, including wildlife diversity, forest health, and fire hazard reduction. More than fifty percent of the remaining standing trees from the thinning were blown over or snapped off during the last two years of hurricanes. Although the area has an upset appearance, it currently provides open forest habitat for a wide range of wildlife and will recover with time and management.

Our group of twelve plus met at the visitor center's parking area and had excellent looks at a singing male Orchard Oriole, a Kingbird, and a Red-headed Woodpecker to begin our walk. Towhees, Brown Thrashers, Mockingbirds, Pine Warblers, Chipping Sparrows, Carolina Wrens, Ovenbirds, Cardinals, and Summer Tanagers were seen and heard as we headed towards Palmetto Boardwalk a little after 8:00. The Palmetto Boardwalk begins at the high water edge of the cypress swamp. On the first several hundred feet of the boardwalk, in the transition zone, we heard or saw Great-crested Flycatchers, Tufted Titmouse, Red-eyed Vireos, White-eyed Vireos, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Northern Parulas, Yellow-throated Warblers, and at least two Northern Bobwhites calling in the distance. Several Great Blue Herons flew over as we approached the open water of the swamp. I was somewhat disappointed that we had not seen more species close up as we approached the end of the boardwalk. However, our return walk on the boardwalk certainly made up for it. A Prothonotary Warbler decided to pose for the group for several minutes. It was followed by a flyover of four Green Herons. Two Green Herons decided to rest in the tops of snags for excellent viewing and picture taking. Next there were great views of a Yellow-throated Warbler and a Northern Parula. A Yellow-billed Cuckoo decided to share his presence by calling out several times. Although not everyone was able to hear it, Les was also able to pick out a Virginia Rail calling. We also heard a Yellow-throated Vireo and had excellent views of an Acadian Flycatcher on our way back. Twice, several of us heard an Indigo Bunting singing in the open thinned area, but we were unable to locate it. Such a beautiful bird.

Our second walk included the beach access path and Huckleberry trail. This area had been prescribed burned two weeks earlier and there were already fresh green shoots popping up on the forest floor. The controlled burn reduces the fire hazard in the park while improving forest health with various wildlife benefits. The burn also opened up visibility for the ground and low to mid-story birds.

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*Green Heron
Goose Creek SP*

©Christine Stoughton-Root

Lower Neuse Bird Club Bird Walk – Goose Creek SP April 30, 2021

by Kevin O’Kane, continued from Page #2

Immediately we heard or saw Pine Warblers, Great-crested Flycatchers, Brown-headed Nuthatches, an Eastern Wood-Pewee, Blue Jays, Bluebirds, and both American & Fish Crows. A lone Ruddy Duck caught our attention on the river. There were several Forster’s Terns on the swim area pilings and an active Osprey nest in a cypress snag on the river’s edge – the adult’s head could be seen just above the nest. I saw a Merlin perched on a branch on the forest edge of the marsh earlier in the week, but it was not found today. There were several warblers that did not stay long enough for identification. That is frequently the case when I am birding. It keeps me alert, my enthusiasm high, and always coming back. We saw Red-headed Woodpeckers, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpeckers, and Pileated Woodpeckers, but missed the Hairy Woodpecker which is fairly common in a few spots in the park. Our next identification challenge was a female Blue Grosbeak. Both Wade and Les gave us clues until someone saw it clear enough for the correct identification. We closed out this walk by locating a mature Bald Eagle high overhead in the parking lot as many of us were calling it a day.

Thanks go out to all that participated because each contributed to making the walk enjoyable, interesting, and as always, a learning experience. Special thanks to Wade Fuller for his leadership, constant attention to all the birds that were present, and unending patience. Thanks to Les Coble for setting up the walk, communications out to the club, and sharing his remarkable knowledge.

Although a very windy day, our energetic group of 12 plus, managed to locate 58 species by the time the walk was completed, with four additional species seen by several who stayed after the walks were completed.



*Birding at Goose Creek SP
©Michael Creedon*



*Above: Ovenbird
Right: Red-headed Woodpecker
Photos ©Michael Creedon*

Upcoming Bird Walks

June 5th: North River Wetlands Preserve (final walk of the 2020-2021 season)

Lower Neuse Bird Club

LNBC – Goose Creek SP Checklist, April 30th, 2021

Compiled by Kevin O'Kane

#	Species	#	Species	#	Species
01	Ruddy Duck	22	Eastern Wood-Pewee	43	American Goldfinch
02	Northern Bobwhite	23	Acadian Flycatcher	44	Chipping Sparrow
03	Wild Turkey	24	Great Crested Flycatcher	45	Eastern Towhee
04	Mourning Dove	25	Eastern Kingbird	46	Orchard Oriole
05	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	26	White-eyed Vireo	47	Red-winged Blackbird
06	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	27	Yellow-throated Vireo	48	Brown-headed Cowbird
07	Virginia Rail	28	Red-eyed Vireo	49	Common Grackle
08	Killdeer	29	Blue Jay	50	Yellow Warbler
09	Forster's Tern	30	American Crow	51	Magnolia Warbler
10	Double-crested Cormorant	31	Fish Crow	52	Ovenbird
11	Great Blue Heron	32	Carolina Chickadee	53	Worm-eating Warbler
12	Green Heron	33	Tufted Titmouse	54	Prothonotary Warbler
13	Turkey Vulture	34	Purple Martin	55	Northern Parula
14	Osprey	35	Barn Swallow	56	Pine Warbler
15	Bald Eagle	36	White-breasted Nuthatch	57	Yellow-throated Warbler
16	Red-shouldered Hawk	37	Brown-headed Nuthatch	58	Kentucky Warbler
17	Belted Kingfisher	38	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	59	Summer Tanager
18	Red-headed Woodpecker	39	Carolina Wren	60	Northern Cardinal
19	Red-bellied Woodpecker	40	Brown Thrasher	61	Blue Grosbeak
20	Downy Woodpecker	41	Northern Mockingbird	62	Indigo Bunting
21	Pileated Woodpecker	42	Eastern Bluebird		

Moving On – Jim & Carol Oldham

by Christine Stoughton-Root

At this time, we would like to acknowledge Jim & Carol Oldham, who many of us know as the previous owners of the Wild Birds Unlimited Store in New Bern. Their generosity to and support of the Lower Neuse Bird Club was displayed throughout their membership. In the past, they have supplied the Bluebird and Prothonotary houses for installs completed by the LNBC. They have provided gift certificates for Les Coble's bird challenge IDs. Most importantly, it was Jim Oldham who created the current Lower Neuse Bird Club web site, for which we are very grateful. As you may know, they sold their business in July of last year. They have now sold their home and soon will be Pennsylvania bound to be with family.

Jim and Carol, we thank you for your support and wish you safe travels. Enjoy your family and HAPPY PA BIRDING!



Passing of longtime LNBC and CBC Member

by Michael Cheves

Sad news, as longtime LNBC member and active birder Barbara Gould of Minnesott Beach passed away on 8th May after a brief struggle with an undisclosed illness. According to Liz Lathrop, Ms. Gould regularly attended the CBC quarterly meetings and went on many birding trips with the LNBC. Perhaps most notably, she made the tasty green salad to go with the hot chili for lunch at the Pamlico CBC tally rally. Her second passion was golfing at her local golf club, where she was known to point out all the birds to her fellow golfing buddies. I will personally forever have fond memories of riding with her crew the first year I participated in the Pamlico CBC. Godspeed and Rest in Peace, Ms. Gould.

Strangely Delightful: Yellow-billed Cuckoo

by Julie Zickefoose

Reprinted from *Bird Watcher's Digest* May/June 2021, with permission.

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Yellow-billed Cuckoo
2nd October 2018
Blue Ridge Pwky—Ridge
Junction OL
©Michael Cheves

When Bill was excited – really excited – about something, usually a bird, you could see the whites of his eyes, all the way around his irises. He'd come running up from the Secret Path in our orchard where he'd been clearing a tangle of honeysuckle so he could get the tractor through. "Julie, I think I found a cuckoo's nest!" Part of me was always ready to scramble when Bill was around. I grabbed my little Olympus camera and, in a moment of unusual foresight, set it to "video" and stealthily pushed it through the honeysuckle until it pointed down into the nest. I didn't know and couldn't see what I would capture, but I figured it would be good. But what I saw on replay took my breath away.

A pair of day-old yellow-billed cuckoos lay still in the shallow twig platform, breathing peacefully atop the sky-blue shards of their eggshells. Stringy yellowish down lay across charcoal skin. Their eyes were sealed shut. By chance, the camera bumped a twig, and the weird, reptilian chicks instantly transformed, lifting themselves high on their haunches, standing erect. They flapped their paddle-stub wings rapidly as they opened cavernous gapes. Brilliant red mouths, studded with white protuberances called "pearls", opened wide. Two heads waved wildly as the chicks emitted a sizzling rattle that startled me. I couldn't tell if they were begging or trying to scare me away, but I backed off immediately.

Rapid Development. After that electrifying moment of discovery, we stayed far away, not wanting to disturb this precious family. We heard cuckoos calling in the nest vicinity and hoped all was well. A few days later, I peeked into the nest, hoping hard to see something wonderful. It was empty. My heart sank. Something had gotten the chicks. Hoping I was wrong, I turned to *Birds of North America*. There, in Dr. Janice M. Hughes's elegantly condensed writing I found something that made me sit up on my haunches and flap my wings.

"Growth rapid, 17 d from start of incubation to fledging – among shortest for any species of bird; young gain an average of 4.9 gld while in nest... At 2d can perch on side of nest and snap at flies."

Wait. What?? Perching and snapping at flies at only two days old, when most altricial birds are blind and helpless? The account goes on, describing a preternatural rate of development that, for one who has looked into a lot of bird nests, defied belief. Come again? 17 days from *start of incubation to fledging*? Incubation is only 9 days, and the young stay in the nest only 8. How could this be?

But it got stranger. Yellow-billed cuckoos feather out completely on Day 6 or 7. By Day 8, they are able to run along branches and *fly* to safety. My brain refused to process this information.

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Strangely Delightful: Yellow-billed Cuckoo

by Julie Zickefoose, continued from Page #6

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Big Blue Egg. I riffled through my mental catalogue of cuckoo encounters and pulled out a card from the summer of 1993. Someone had called with a strange bird they'd found by a southeastern Ohio roadside. It didn't seem to be hurt, but neither would it fly. I opened a shoebox to find a beautiful yellow-billed cuckoo sitting back on its tail, as if slightly drunk. It voiced a guttural rattle and spread its wings in defense, leaning side to side. Checking it over, I found no broken bones, nor any explanation of its plight other than a distended abdomen. I installed it in a cage by a window in the basement and gave it bowls of live mealworms and water.

The cuckoo ate and moped on the bottom of its cage. It was bright enough, but I found it odd that it wouldn't try to attain the cage's higher perches. I took it in hand and blew on it to part the feathers on its abdomen. A naked brood patch was to be expected in June. The hard mass I could feel in its abdomen wasn't expected. It hit me that this cuckoo could be a female suffering from egg binding, with an unlaidd egg stuck somewhere on its descent. I fetched and warmed some baby oil and gently massaged it into the cuckoo's vent, a skill that has never made it onto my resume.

On my next check, I was elated to find the cuckoo on a high perch in the cage. An extremely large pale blue egg lay on the cage floor. I could hardly believe that monstrous egg came out of this slender bird. The cuckoo felt so much better after ridding herself of the massive egg that she made it clear she wanted OUT. Scrambling to the farm supply store for materials, I used chicken wire and a staple gun to construct a crude outdoor flight cage, about 6 feet by 10 feet, using our raised deck struts for a frame. The cuckoo gained strength quickly, and only four days later I was able to open the door, a huge smile on my face, and watch her arrow into the leafy canopy of our woods, free to fly and lay more enormous blue eggs.

Enormous eggs, it turns out, have big yolks, and hatch big chicks, well-provisioned for growth and fast development. The yellow-billed cuckoo produces among the largest eggs relative to body size of any North American altricial bird – around 14 percent of the female's body mass.

Although not songbirds, cuckoo chicks are still technically altricial; they are not able to locomote within hours of hatching. But they come darned close.

Potter's Cuckoos. In my quest to learn more about cuckoos, I read Eloise Potter's 1980 study in the *Journal of Field Ornithology*. In July of 1973, Ms. Potter found a yellow-billed cuckoo nest in her yard and spent almost 60 hours behind a spotting scope, observing without disturbing it. Think about what it took to sit for a total of 60 hours, watching a nest, being present for everything that happened during daylight hours, seizing the moment, knowing that almost anything you recorded would be new to ornithology. With her dedication to this one deceptively simple act, Potter contributed priceless knowledge to what little we know about yellow-billed cuckoos. The inquiry of field ornithology happens, in large part, in backyards and gardens.

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What to Look and Listen For

This cuckoo is a long, slender creature, warm-brown above and snow white below, with a strong rufous wash in the primaries. The long, narrow tail, rufous above and black below, is broadly spangled below with six white medallions – the tips of folded tail feathers. The bill is rather long, decurved, with a corn-yellow mandible; the eye large and dark with a grayish (adult) or yellow (juvenile) fleshy orbital ring. Feet are zygodactyl, two toes pointing forward and two back.

Distinguish the yellow- from the black-billed by its snowy underparts (the black-billed is dusker, pearly grayish below); the bright yellow mandible to the black-billed's gray; and the much smaller white tips on the black-billed's tail feathers. In flight, the yellow-billed shows a great deal of rufous in its wings; the black-billed has much less. Flight is breathtakingly rapid and direct; the bird drops from its perch and arrows purposefully, sometimes sideslipping, to its next destination.

The yellow-billed cuckoo's song is a rapid *tuk tuk tuk tuk tuk tuk kittle kittle kittle kittle...* Folklore proclaims that you can count the *kittles* to find out how many hours until it rains; a common name is raincrow. (There is also an excellent band by that name.) By far the most commonly heard (and least-recognized) call of this species is the soft, slightly melancholy, evenly metered series of coos: *quoh... quoh... quoh...* that can go on for 20 seconds or more before petering out. Many surmise it's an owl, calling in the daytime. Wooden, guttural clicks round out the vocal repertoire.

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Strangely Delightful: Yellow-billed Cuckoo

by Julie Zickefoose, continued from Page #7
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When and Where to Look

This neotropical migrant breeds across the eastern two-thirds of the U.S., barely reaching Quebec and southern Ontario, in a broad swath from the Canadian border south to Florida, Texas, and into the Gulf Coast and Pacific Slope of Mexico. It's a rare and local, threatened breeder in the American Southwest, and endangered in California, where its populations are threatened by riparian habitat degradation and ever-changing and challenging water regimes. Relying as they do on caterpillars and orthopterans (grasshoppers, locusts, etc.), cuckoos are rather late to arrive on breeding grounds in spring (late April to late May throughout much of their range; two or three weeks earlier in the deep South). Likewise, they hang around for the caterpillar months of August and September, most departing by early October for wintering grounds in South America, flying via Central America and the West Indies. Their preferred habitat is broken, open woodland with scattered clearings and much undergrowth; overgrown orchards and dense thickets along streams are ideal.

On Day 1, Potter's study chicks were fed pulverized, regurgitated insects. On Day 2, they received whole live caterpillars, butterflies, and katydids. I could not imagine any two-day old hatchling gagging down a live katydid. But the enormous, white-pearled scarlet maws of the day-old cuckoos I filmed in my orchard looked fit to receive just such fare. Their strength and vigor were simply astonishing. I'd never seen a day-old chick of any species flap its wing-stubs so fast they blurred, much less stand up on its tarso-metatarsi and holler like a buzzing rattlesnake. Potter theorized that the white pearly protuberances in the chicks' gapes might help them grip and subdue the "still-kicking" prey offered by the parents, describing a suction-cup effect of young birds latching onto and clinging to their provider's bills.

Though cuckoos are deservedly famous for eating hairy caterpillars, having a stomach lining they can periodically shed and gag up to remove feltlike wads of the caterpillars' imbedded setae, Ms. Potter did not observe the pair feeding such hairy fare to their chicks.

The cuckoos began nest construction in Eloise Potter's North Carolina yard on July 11. Their last nestling fledged July 30, only 19 days later. In that breathlessly short space, the birds built a nest, the hen laid eggs, incubated them, and the chicks developed enough to clamber-fly from the nest. That worked out to a 9-day incubation period per egg, and a 7- and 8-day nestling period for both surviving chicks. And that is the shortest nesting period of any North American altricial bird. Yes, cuckoos are a breed apart!

Weirder Still. But it gets weirder, as it always seems to with cuckoos.

Yellow- and black-billed cuckoos are the only known facultative (as opposed to obligatory) interspecific brood parasites among altricial birds, according to Janice Hughes of the Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Biology at the Royal Ontario Museum. *Facultative* means they will lay their eggs in other birds' nests (11 species noted to date) when they need to; not always, as is the case with the European cuckoo, an obligate brood parasite. Our cuckoos choose to impose on species that also lay blue eggs: American robin, gray catbird, and wood thrush. Dr. Hughes speculates that, while these two North American cuckoos generally lay eggs and raise young in their own nests, this egg-dumping behavior may be an adaptation to their tendency to produce excess eggs in times of abundance. Who knew? Not Me!

I'll always be grateful and amazed at the torrent of cool findings that sprang from Bill's discovery of a yellow-billed cuckoo's nest in the honeysuckle. The cuckoo's soft *quoh* call, repeated endlessly, is a midsummer staple here in my deciduous woodland. A smile flickers across my face whenever I hear it. I think about the bizarre life history of that cryptic caller and try to catch a fleeting glimpse of one of the most interesting birds in my woodland; in Ohio; in North America... if not the world.

Julie Zickefoose is a naturalist, artist, and author of five books, the latest of which is Saving Jemima: Life and Love with a Hard-luck Jay.

LNBC Photo Gallery

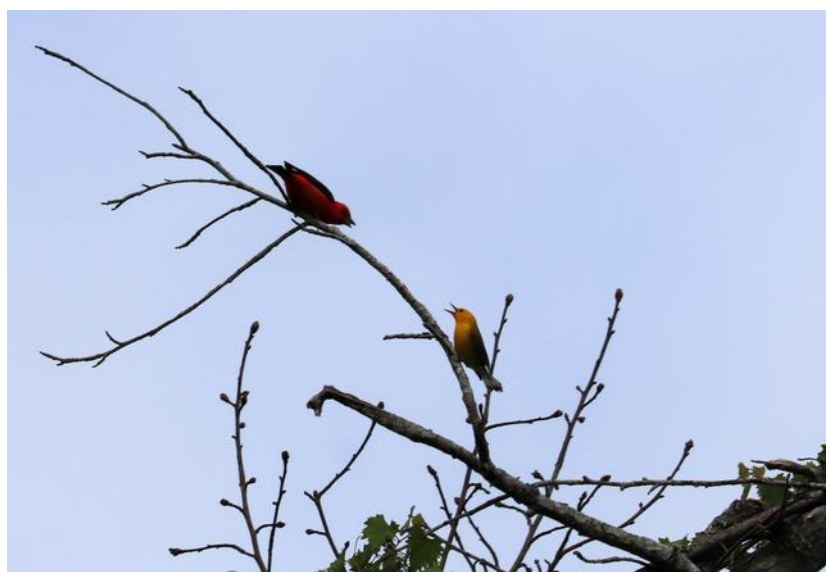
Submit your photos to
[lowerneusebirdclub@gmail.com!](mailto:lowerneusebirdclub@gmail.com)



Left: Prairie Warbler
Camp Brinson
6th May, 2021
©Dick Barmore



Carolina Chickadee Nestlings
6th May 2021 (fledged the day before
Mother's Day!)
©Michael Cheves



Top Left: Scarlet Tanager
Above: Scarlet Tanager with Prothonotary
Warbler (very uncommon sighting in Craven
County!)
Bottom left: Worm-eating Warbler
Camp Brinson, 6th May, 2021
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