



Lower Neuse Bird Club

Club Officers

Co-Presidents:

Les Coble
sialia2016@gmail.com
Ronnie Hewlette
hewlette@suddenlink.net
Wade Fuller
wade@fullersmusic.com

Secretary

Jenni Ford

Treasurer

Christine Stoughton Root
252-269-6306

Newsletter Editor

Michael Cheves
252-670-1238
lowerneusebirdclub@gmail.com

Refreshments Captain

Sally Rowe
252-514-2822
sdrowe106@yahoo.com

Editor: Michael Cheves, LowerNeuseBirdClub@gmail.com

October Dates

Two dates to mark on your calendar are **Saturday, October 2nd** and **Tuesday, October 5th**. On October 2nd, the LNBC will convene at Martin Marietta Park in New Bern ([Directions—Google Maps](#)) to look for warblers in fall migration. Some great birds have already been seen there (Nashville Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, American White Pelicans...) and that is only the tip of the iceberg. Meetup at **7:00 AM** sharp at the parking lot on the right, next to the restrooms and kayak launch.

The LNBC monthly meeting on Tuesday, October 5th, will begin at 6:30 PM with refreshments and snacks, and the meeting will start at 7:00 PM. Meetings are held in Room 123 of Garber United Methodist Church in New Bern, 4202 Country Club Road. The keynote speaker for October is Chris Kent, the Wildlife Biologist for North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission in District 2 (southeast NC). Chris will share interesting facts and research about alligator biology and management in our region. As usual, be sure to check your email for any last minute additions or changes to our schedule.

Meeting Minutes – September 7, 2021

by Jenni Ford

26 people attended the meeting held at Garber UM Church, including several new and non-members. Wade Fuller was pleased to open the first in-person meeting since the Covid-19 crisis shut down such meetings. He commented that although 2020-21 was a difficult year, it was an awesome year for birding. Given the current uncertainty around the pandemic, the organization will make decisions regarding indoor meetings a month at a time. However, it is safe to be outside, so regularly scheduled monthly bird walks and impromptu bonus trips will continue. Wade introduced current board members for 2021-22:

Co-leaders: Wade Fuller, Ronnie Hewlette, Les Coble

Secretary: Jenni Ford

Treasurer: Christine Root

Newsletter Editor: Michael Cheves

Refreshments Coordinator: Sally Rowe

The next bird walk will be September 11th at 8 AM to North River Wetlands Preserve. A trip to East Shackleford Banks is tentatively scheduled for the following weekend September 18th. Thanks to Sally and Dick Rowe for the refreshments provided during the meeting. A sign-up sheet was circulated for volunteers to help with refreshments at future meetings.

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*Black-throated Green
Warbler
Martin Marietta Park
Sept. 28, 2021
©Michael Cheves*

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Meeting Minutes – September 7, 2021

by Jenni Ford, continued from front page

Christine Root introduced Kris Smith, who is Community Science Program Manager with the Wildlife Resources Commission. He coordinates Citizen Science programs throughout the state, which includes the North Carolina Bird Atlas (NCBA). NCBA is a five-year effort to map birds throughout the state. It differs from some efforts in other states in that it is not just a breeding atlas, but is an observation of all birds.

Kris provided an overview and discussion of some of the finer points of the program. Since eBird is already widely used by birders, it is the medium that scientists use to accumulate NCBA data. There were many take-aways, but most importantly:

Christine is the regional coordinator for our Region 2. She is available to assist with eBird and with the Atlas. She can be reached at NCBARegion2@gmail.com, cssrbdr@gmail.com, or 252-269-6306. She encouraged us to contact her. The intent is to have three regional coordinators for each region.

If you currently use eBird, the data you report is already being used for the Atlas. However, it will be more valuable to the effort if you select the North Carolina Bird Atlas portal in your account settings (instructions provided by Christine in a separate email).

There are many tools to assist you – and some perks, including free classes on eBird now put on by Cornell Lab's McCauley Library. More can be found at the web site <https://ebird.org/atlasnc/about>

Reminder: LNBC Membership Dues

With the start of the new Program Year, it is time to pay your annual membership dues. Dues are \$15 per person and cover the Program Year from September 2021-May 2022. Dues provide for room rental, monthly programs, field trips, our holiday party, and additional projects and donations undertaken by the club. Checks should be payable to **Lower Neuse Bird Club**. Dues can be paid at a monthly meeting, or mailed to:

Christine Stoughton Root
458 Country Club Drive West
Arapahoe, NC 28510

Welcome to New Members

This month, the Lower Neuse Bird Club welcomes two new members. Karen Mason of Havelock and Cathy Elkins of Pollocksville have both joined the club. Welcome and happy birding to both!

Birding Calendar

October 2: Bird Walk at
Martin Marietta Park

October 5: Monthly
Meeting at Garber UMC

October 9:
World Migratory Bird Day,
October Big Day

October 18-24:
Birdability Week 2021

November 2: Monthly
Meeting at Garber UMC

November 6: Bird Walk at
Lawson Creek Park &
Simmons Street Wetlands

November 10-11: Alligator
River, Pea Island NWRs
(overnight/mid-week)



Lower Neuse Bird Club Bird Walk: North River Preserve – September 11, 2021

by Ronnie Hewlette

North River Wetlands Preserve in Carteret County was to be the location for our first birding adventure for the 2021-22 season. John Fussell met us at the gate, just off Highway-70 at 8:00 AM, and our group of thirteen birders proceeded into the preserve behind him. John had picked out some spots where he anticipated seeing some birds and we followed his lead into the heart of the preserve. The impoundments still had too much water to host any shorebirds, but the shrub-line on the back side should have some migrants. At the first intersection, we were greeted with a flock of 35-45 **Bobolink**, feeding on the grass seed-heads. These birds are all pale yellow with brown highlights, indicative of the non-breeding colors of both males and females. We all gathered to get a better look at a “not so commonly seen” bird species.

According to North Carolina Coastal Federation’s web site, this 6,000-acre restoration project at North River Farms in eastern Carteret County is one of the largest wetland restoration projects in North Carolina, and is among the largest project of its kind in the nation. The habitat diversity is inviting to many common and uncommon birds throughout the year. eBird lists this as the number one hotspot in Carteret County, with 250 species on record.

On the initial drive, we encountered turkeys, Blue Grosbeaks, Baltimore Orioles, and Prairie Warblers to name a few.

Last fall, **White Ibis** was the most abundant species (several hundred) for our Bird-walk, but today none were seen. A single **Glossy Ibis** will be encountered later in the morning as it circled overhead before landing in one of the wet areas. There were two bear sightings and a couple of deer were seen around mid-morning.

At the brush-line near the Open Grounds Farms cornfields, we found several Eastern Kingbirds flocking together, moving across the treetops. There were at least 16 individuals within sight. These are easily identified with their contrasting black and white colors, black head and bill, white band on tip of tail, and their fluttering flight pattern when feeding.

A couple of stops along this border of trees produced the greatest number of species for the day: **Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Glossy Ibis, Eastern Kingbird, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Orchard Oriole, American Redstart, Yellow Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting**. Moving over to the “mountain” that provides a view of Open Ground Farms, we located 2-3 **Gull-billed Terns**, as they foraged on insects, down low over the corn crops.

On the way out, we made a quick run back to the main road and over to a wetland on the West side of the property, looking for an Anhinga. Unexpectedly, we encountered two **Black-crowned Night-Herons** that we spooked out of the low trees. The Anhinga that has been in this area was not found. Moving on, we drove over to the impoundments on the East side of the property. Here we found a small flock of **Blue-winged Teal**, 5 or 6 **Pied-billed Grebes**, several **Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets**, a **Tricolored Heron**, and a **Little Blue Heron**.

A trip to the North River Preserve never disappoints. The **Bobolink** was the most unexpected find for the day. We had a fine list of 37 species and great weather to enjoy on this first Bird Walk of the fall season. Thanks to John Fussell for again hosting the Lower Neuse Bird Club’s Bird Walk for September at North River Wetlands Preserve.



*Eastern Kingbird
North River Preserve
June 5th 2021
©Ronnie Hewlette*

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Checklist: North River Preserve – September 11, 2021

Compiled by Ronnie Hewlette

#	Species	#	Species	#	Species
01	Blue-winged Teal	14	Turkey Vulture	27	Gray Catbird
02	Wild Turkey	15	Red-tailed Hawk	28	Northern Mockingbird
03	Pied-billed Grebe	16	Belted Kingfisher	29	Bobolink
04	Mourning Dove	17	Red-bellied Woodpecker	30	Orchard Oriole
05	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	18	Downy Woodpecker	31	Baltimore Oriole
06	Chimney Swift	19	American Kestrel	32	Common Yellowthroat
07	Laughing Gull	20	Great Crested Flycatcher	33	American Redstart
08	Gull-billed Tern	21	Eastern Kingbird	34	Yellow Warbler
09	Great Blue Heron	22	White-eyed Vireo	35	Prairie Warbler
10	Great Egret	23	Red-eyed Vireo	36	Northern Cardinal
11	Little Blue Heron	24	American Crow	37	Blue Grosbeak
12	Black-crowned Night-Heron	25	Carolina Chickadee	38	Indigo Bunting
13	Glossy Ibis	26	Carolina Wren		

*Bobolinks
North River Preserve
Sept. 11th 2021
©Ronnie Hewlette*



Lower Neuse Bird Club Bird Walk: East Shackleford Banks – September 18, 2021

by Ronnie Hewlette

East Shackleford Banks, near the Cape Lookout Bight in Carteret County, was our second birding adventure for the month of September. The club has not made this outing since October of 2017. Expectations were high!

We planned to meet at the Ferry dock at the east end of Harkers Island, in time to catch the 9:15 AM ferry to East Shackleford Banks. This approximately 20-25 minute ferry ride drops you off at the beach where you will be picked up later, as the ferry is run every 30 minutes from 8:15 AM – 5:15 PM. We had planned to arrive on the falling tide, hoping to have the birds concentrated for us to observe. There were 11 birders that participated in this stroll across the mud flats. A smaller group continued on to the Hidden Flats as the morning progressed and the sun became more intense.

There were two birds of special interest – the Long-billed Curlew and the Reddish Egret. Both birds have been seen regularly in this area for the last few years. Both of these would be Life-birds for some, with the Curlew being a Life-bird for most of us.

According to Cornell Lab “All About Birds”, Long-billed Curlews spend the summers in areas of western North America with sparse, short grasses, including shortgrass and mixed-grass prairies as well as agricultural fields. After their young leave the nest they may move to areas with taller, denser grasses. En route to their wintering grounds along the coast and interior Mexico, they use shortgrass prairies, alkali lakes, wet pastures, tidal mudflats, and agricultural fields. In winter you can find them in wetlands, tidal estuaries, mudflats, flooded fields less than 6 inches deep, and beaches. Only seen in a few favored sites in Eastern NC and only in very small numbers (1-3), they are considered Rare to Very Rare in North Carolina.

The Reddish Egret is a rare visitor from late spring to early autumn and prefers ocean inlets where there are sandy tidal flats. When the club last visited East Shackleford Banks in 2017, we observed a Reddish Egret doing its memorable “feeding dance” through the shallow water, in search of food while it spreads its wings into a canopy while they hunt.

When we arrived at the beach, there were a number of birds in flight or on the mudflat that was becoming exposed. We moved away from the beach and toward the flat, following a creek to gain a better view of the backside of the island.

The beach area was filled with terns, Ruddy Turnstones, and a host of Marbled Godwits. A flock of Black Skimmers made their way along the water’s edge as we moved along. The Godwits were burying their long bill in the sand, searching for mollusks, crustaceans, and other aquatic creatures that live in the sand and mud.

To begin with, we had a few clouds, and an occasional light sprinkle of rain, but with a nice breeze there were no bugs and as long as there were clouds, it was quite comfortable.

Mike and Carol eased their way out ahead of the rest of us and he located a Seaside Sparrow in the brush, after a 15-minute chase. Persistence pays off!

The tide was falling, and more shorebirds showed up. The Oystercatchers were working on the exposed oysters as other shorebirds worked the exposed sand/mud for a meal

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Lower Neuse Bird Club

Lower Neuse Bird Club Bird Walk: East Shackleford Banks – September 18, 2021

by Ronnie Hewlette, continued from Page 5

A Clapper Rail stepped out of the marsh, just ahead of us, enough for a quick look before it retreated, deeper into the grass.

Lots of Black-bellied Plovers were there; some in breeding plumage, others in non-breeding plumage. We were able to pick out a few Wilson’s Plovers, Semipalmated Plovers and Piping Plovers. Michael Cheves snagged a photo of a Piping Plover that had a Green-flag leg-band. *[The green flag is used by Virginia Tech shorebird researchers. Response from VT Plovers confirmed that the bird in the photograph bearing the code “LNV” was flagged as a 2-week old chick on June 28th, 2021, at Fire Island, NY—Ed.]*

It wasn’t long before we found two Reddish Egrets at a distance, hanging out with a couple of the wild horses. They stayed where they were, but we all were able to get a look at them with scopes as they preened or rested in place. The Long-billed Curlew was right where it had been reported and provided close-up views for all to enjoy. Both of these birds were “Life-birds” and qualify as the “Bird of the Day”.

Around 11:15 AM, the party began to break up. A few in the group decided to walk on over to what John Fussell refers to as the “Hidden Flats” (area of oyster flats that are mostly not visible from Back Sound, Barden’s Inlet, or the nearby ocean shoreline). The others headed back to the beach to catch the next ferry back to Harkers Island.

These flats of East Shackleford Banks are a hidden gem that is often overlooked for birding. We need to make this one a regular trip in the future. Thanks all, for making this trip so successful!



Reddish Egret
East Shackleford
Banks
18th Sept. 2021
©Ronnie Hewlette



Above: Piping Plover
©Michael Cheves

Right: Long-billed Curlew
©Mike Creedon



Checklist: East Shackleford Banks, Sept. 18, 2021

Compiled by Ronnie Hewlette

#	Species	#	Species	#	Species
01	Mourning Dove	16	Short-billed Dowitcher	31	Snowy Egret
02	Clapper Rail	17	Greater Yellowlegs	32	Little Blue Heron
03	American Oystercatcher	18	Willet	33	Tricolored Heron
04	Black-bellied Plover	19	Laughing Gull	34	Reddish Egret
05	Wilson's Plover	20	Ring-billed Gull	35	Cattle Egret
06	Semipalmated Plover	21	Herring Gull	36	White Ibis
07	Piping Plover	22	Great Black-backed Gull	37	Osprey
08	Whimbrel	23	Caspian Tern	38	Northern Harrier
09	Long-billed Curlew	24	Common Tern	39	Cooper's Hawk
10	Marbled Godwit	25	Forster's Tern	40	Merlin
11	Ruddy Turnstone	26	Royal Tern	41	Barn Swallow
12	Sanderling	27	Sandwich Tern	42	Northern Mockingbird
13	Least Sandpiper	28	Black Skimmer	43	Seaside Sparrow
14	Semipalmated Sandpiper	29	Brown Pelican		
15	Western Sandpiper				



LNBC at East Shackleford

Island Express Ferry Service

Photos ©Mike Creedon

Lower Neuse Bird Club

East Shackleford Banks – Sept. 18, 2021



LNBC at East Shackleford Banks
©Ronnie Hewlette



Black-bellied Plover (non-breeding)
©Mike Creedon



Wild Horses at East Shackleford Banks
©Mike Creedon



Marbled Godwit
©Mike Creedon



Seaside Sparrow
©Mike Creedon

Dull in Fall

by Alvaro Jaramillo

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If you are a fan of orioles, and we are not talking baseball here, you might be drawn to the bright colors of the male Bullock's, Baltimore, orchard, or hooded, to give four examples. You will obviously like – but not be as wowed by – the duller coloration of the females and young males. That is natural, although practicing how to separate female hooded and orchard orioles will hone your skills, as these two can be tough.

Perhaps some of you have birded in the lower Rio Grande valley of Texas and seen the Altamira oriole, or perhaps you have seen the introduced spot-breasted orioles in the Miami, Florida area. If not, have a look at the field guide and you will see something odd. The females of these species are as bright as the males! Why? Well, it is thought that in these resident species, where the pairs are maintained year-round, and where both males and females help in territorial defense, there is selection in the evolutionary sense for females to look bright and have the right display colors in order to do that task. In migratory species like the orioles mentioned in the first paragraph, the females do not have time after settling into the breeding habitat to do much other than nesting, so they do not engage in territorial defense. Having bright colors incurs a cost: the risk of drawing attention of a predator. For a female orchard oriole, better to be dull and blend in, as she would not get any benefit from the bright plumage.

Female Baltimore orioles are variable in appearance, and some are even male-like, and such females may also be variable in their behavior; male-appearing female Baltimore orioles are surely more territorial than the duller females.

At this point you are wondering, *OK, what is he getting at with respect to identification this time?* It is about being bright in fall and winter: who stays bright and who goes dull. The above paragraphs are a preview to understanding why.

Consider Warbler Plumages. For example, fall warblers can be dull and unlike the bright coloration of the males in spring. A good one to think about is the blackpoll warbler: bold and black-and-white in spring, becoming greenish and much more subdued in fall. On the other hand, the male American redstart keeps its black and orange plumage right into Halloween, appropriately, and beyond. That means that you have to learn fewer appearances for an American redstart than you do for a blackpoll warbler, since male and female redstarts each look essentially the same in spring and fall. The only addition to the mix is that in fall, you have the young birds. Young males warblers are often a tad brighter in coloration than young females.

So which warblers keep the same plumage all year round? In the major group, the genus *Setophaga* – black-throated blue, hooded, Kirtland's, yellow-throated, and Grace's warblers, American redstart, and northern and tropical parulas; and in the "pointy-billed" warblers, the orange-crowned, blue-winged, golden-winged, Virginia's, Nashville, Lucy's, and Colima stay pretty much the same year-round. Same for the brown or ground warblers, which include the worm-eating, Swainson's, ovenbird, and both waterthrushes – they all keep the same plumage in the nonbreeding season. Similarly, the *Cardellina* group, which is Wilson's, Canada, and red-faced, all stay the same, as does the Southwest's painted redstart. All yellowthroats and their relatives – common yellowthroat, Kentucky, MacGillivray's, mourning, and Connecticut – look the same throughout the year.



Bullock's Oriole
Morehead City, NC
Feb. 3rd, 2021
©Michael Cheves

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Dull in Fall

by Alvaro Jaramillo

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Boy, so how do you keep all that straight? Think of it this way: Try to look at the warblers as subgroups based on their genus. The “pointy-billed” are *Vermivora* and *Leiothlypis*, and out of those species only one changes in winter: Tennessee warbler. All of the yellowthroat/mourning warblers stay the same, all of the brown or ground warblers stay the same. So, all you have left are the typical warblers, the ones that at one time were in the genera *Dendroica*, *Parula*, and *Setophaga* – which have all been moved to *Setophaga*. It is these typical warblers that you need to remember change – except the ones highlighted in the paragraph above.

But Why? Why do some change and some do not? This is a very good question. Many warblers maintain winter territories – not all, but some. Some, like yellow warblers, defend their space partly by giving call notes. One wonders: If the territorial defense communication is visual, then do those species retain their breeding look? And if their territorial defense is more acoustic, do they lose the bright plumage? Some warblers flock in winter or are otherwise found in high densities, such as the Tennessee warbler, so for these, maybe the lack of bold plumage and use of calls to communicate some level of aggression or territoriality might be the better option?

Consider Piranga Tanagers. A great set of birds to look at are our *Piranga* tanagers, in particular the three migratory species: scarlet, western, and summer. In the nonbreeding season you will see flocks of scarlet or western tanagers (depending on where you are) mixed in with various other species. But they are in groups, not defending any territory. Males of these two species become greenish or dull, losing the bright red coloration in the winter. The summer tanager, on the other hand, is territorial and very vocal in winter, and males maintain the red plumage of the breeding season. The more territorial and solitary nature of this species versus its two relatives may be why male summer tanagers stay red year-round.

Consider Sparrows. For birds that are dull-colored or brownish and never really develop a bright plumage, it seems logical that they would stay the same throughout the year. This is what happens for many sparrows, just like the brown or ground warblers mentioned above. Think of a song or Lincoln’s sparrow, which are pretty much the same year-round. There are no bright and fancy bits of plumage that might attract a predator or just attract undue attention. The plumages are essentially cryptic, even with the ovenbird’s fancy orange crown stripe. They are not showy, so why not stay that way?

Subdued plumage staying the same throughout the year applies to the overwhelming majority of sparrows. In the “skinny” sparrows (genus *Spizella*), two have a subtle change: The chipping becomes duller and loses the red cap, and the black-chinned loses the black around the face. Very subtle changes, really. A sparrow with a bold seasonal change – which you would expect given how fancy-looking this bird is in the breeding season – is the black-and-white lark bunting, which becomes streaky and brown in winter. This allows it to meld with the environment, and perhaps not offend flockmates, as they do form flocks in winter. In other words, they are not solitary and territorial.

A group that does have fancy-looking plumages they keep year-round, even though they flock in the winter, are the juncos. They do not become dull in winter, and this does not fit the pattern of flocking birds becoming dull and inoffensive. Perhaps we can understand this a bit better if we look at their relatives, the crowned sparrows in the genus *Zonotrichia*. This includes the white-crowned, Harris’s, golden-crowned, and white-throated.

An Incomplete List of Male Songbirds That Turn Drab in Winter

Tennessee Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
Cape May Warbler
Magnolia Warbler
Blackburnian Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Blackpoll Warbler
Bay-breasted Warbler
Palm Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Scarlet Tanager
Western Tanager
Chipping Sparrow
Black-chinned Sparrow
Lark Bunting
Golden-crowned Sparrow
Harris’s Sparrow
Indigo Bunting
Lazuli Bunting
Snow Bunting
Thick-billed Longspur
Chestnut-collared Longspur
Smith’s Longspur
Lapland Longspur

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Dull in Fall

by Alvaro Jaramillo

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Here we have an interesting set of birds with a lot going on in their flock structures, and they all flock in winter. Of these species, the white-crowned and the white-throated keep their breeding coloration into the winter. The golden-crowned and Harris's, on the other hand, molt into a duller winter plumage, which can be variable.

Boldness and Dominance. Interestingly enough, people who have studied these species find that the ones with more black on the crown or face are dominant in the winter flocks relative to the browner ones. Birds that have been banded and followed over many winter seasons return to wintering areas with the same level of head darkness year after year. That is to say: black-crowned (dominant) golden-crowned sparrows return each winter in that same role. So, there is a baseline in dominance and matching plumage that is individually variable and stable over years. It is probably governed by hormones, and essentially is a visual representation of their personality! There are mellow golden-crowns and Type A golden-crowns! Whitecrowns and whitethroats retain bright plumage in winter, although the duller-plumage immatures seem to be less dominant in the flocks than the adults. So that bright plumage does serve some benefit, it seems, even in flocks, for these species.

The best of all is the white-throated sparrow. It comes in two forms: tan-striped (dull) and white-striped (bright). These are not correlated to sex, so a female whitethroat can be a white-stripe or a tan-stripe. The white-striped birds, no matter the sex, are more territorial and less likely to do work at the nest than tan-stripes of the same sex. White-striped females tend to mate with tan-striped males, and white-striped males tend to mate with tan-striped females. Why? Well, if two tans paired off, no one would really be all that concerned with territorial defense or other activities of that ilk, and similarly if two white-stripes paired off, it would be all territory and singing, and no one would do any of the nest work. Wow!

Pondering Plumage. In the end, plumage brightness can be fun to contemplate: why it changes, and even why it takes some young males many seasons to arrive at the bright plumage, while for others it is not the case. You can watch northern cardinals together at a site, and largely see only one pair at any one spot throughout the winter (except, perhaps, at feeders, and during particularly frigid temperatures or in deep snow). Also, you can hear winter calls and songs that suggest they are territorial year-round, which explains why the male retains his red "warpaint" all year long. This is very different from their relatives the indigo and lazuli buntings, which flock in winter. They become brownish and only return to the fancy blue coloration in the breeding season.

Snow buntings and longspurs flock and are not territorial in winter, so you might predict that these species become dull in winter, and you would be correct. Now these are not hard and fast rules, but are tendencies. I offer them as a way to understand and also try and remember which species are bright in winter, and which are dull. Keep in mind that I have been thinking of songbirds here – not all birds, as the patterns differ in other groups.

Some songbird types stay the same all year long, and maybe that is because these species just never developed the bright/dull back-and-forth dichotomy; think of crows, jays, wrens, vireos. Others have such a subtle change that it seems like it is not even worth it. For example, the blue-gray gnatcatcher male loses its black over the eye in winter.



White-throated Sparrows will be a common sight at feeders in Eastern NC this winter. Look for both white-striped (top) and tan-striped (bottom) morphs.
Photos ©Michael Cheves

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Lower Neuse Bird Club

Dull in Fall

by Alvaro Jaramillo

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But back to our orioles: You know what is very cool about them? Unlike most species that become monomorphic (both sexes are the same color), in tropical orioles, both sexes are bright, not both dull. For many of our monomorphic species, like song sparrows, both sexes are dull. Yet many more tropical sparrows have fancy plumages, in which both males and females are bright. Similarly for many tropical tanagers – both bright. It is mainly in the realm of migratory and more temperate species where we find this situation of sexual dimorphism (males and females have differing plumage), and the typical situation is for the male to be brighter than the female. There are some birds where the female is brighter than the male – phalaropes, for example – but within the songbirds, there are none in North America.

I hope this column has made you ponder which songbirds may be brightly colored and why; to realize that these are not hard and fast rules, but tendencies; but also, to realize that understanding this may help in remembering which birds might look bright in the fall and winter, and which have all switched to a more subtle winter plumage.

Happy birding! Enjoy the fall colors, whether bright or brown, dull or vivid.

Alvaro Jaramillo is the author of several bird books and has a fun time guiding birding and nature tours. He lives with his family in Half Moon Bay, California.

LNBC Photo Gallery – Alaska

Submit your photos to lowerneusebirdclub@gmail.com

All nature and bird-related contributions are welcome! Contributors will be credited for their work.

*Breeding birds of Alaska
All photos ©Mike Creedon*

*Clockwise from left:
Barrow's Goldeneye, Greater Scaup, Rock
Ptarmigans*

