



Lower Neuse Bird Club

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LNBC Annual Holiday Party – December 12th, 2021

The LNBC's next regular monthly meeting will be held on **January 4th, 2022**. There is no regular meeting during the month of December. All members are invited to the LNBC Annual Holiday Party on Sunday, December 12th beginning at 5:00 PM. Our hosts this year are Olwen and Bill Jarvis. The party will be at the Jarvis' home in [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Detailed directions will be emailed to LNBC members. Spouses and significant others are encouraged to attend!



LNBC Meeting Minutes – November 2nd, 2021

By Jenni Ford, LNBC Secretary

28 Members were in attendance at Garber UMC Church.

Wade's opening remarks: This is the last monthly meeting of the calendar year. In lieu of a December meeting, Olwen and Bill Jarvis will host a holiday party on Sunday, December 12th at 5:00 PM at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Olwen will send out a map by email. Spouses and significant others are welcome. Some refreshments will be provided, and guests are asked to bring a dish to share if so inclined.

Special sightings this past month: **Thick-billed Longspur** (formerly McCown's Longspur) has been seen at Oregon Inlet. Ronnie Hewlette logged a **Lapland Longspur** at Cedar Island. It is an occasional bird in our area; it is not seen here every year.

Upcoming bird walks: Emails will be sent to members – or already have been – in advance of the following trips:

Nov. 6th Lawson Park – Meet at 7:30 at the parking lot near the kiosk and restrooms. The group will continue to Simmons Street Wetlands with other stops along the way.

Nov. 10th/11th Pea Island NWR – Two full days of birding. There are many other stops on this trip, not all of which have been decided yet. Refer to lowerneusebirdclub.com, emails and the November newsletter for the most up-to-date details.

Continued on Page #11



The next regular monthly meeting for the LNBC will be on Tuesday, January 4th starting at 6:30 PM at Garber UMC in New Bern. The topic for January will be "Alligators, Part 2", presented by Alicia for, Alligator Specialist from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission.

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Join Audubon's 122nd Annual Christmas Bird Count



The following dates have been confirmed for the Christmas Bird Counts in our region. All birders are welcome to participate, regardless of experience level. To join a count, contact the coordinator listed below:

Pamlico County: Tuesday, December 14th
Coordinator: Dianne Midness (dmidness@gmail.com)

New Bern: Thursday, December 16th
Coordinator: Wade Fuller (wade@fullersmusic.com)

Morehead City: Sunday, December 19th
Coordinator: John Fussell (jofuss@ec.rr.com)

Central Beaufort County: Sunday, December 19th
Coordinator: Kevin O'Kane (okanek@suddenlink.net)

Birding Calendar
Dec 2021-Jan. 2022

Saturday December 4th,
7:30 AM: Pamlico County
Bird Walk. Start at the
Oriental Dog Park, 130
Straight Rd. (see
announcement by Les
Coble, this page)

Sunday December 12, 5:00
PM: Christmas Party at Bill
and Olwen Jarvis' home (no
meeting this month)

Christmas Bird Counts (See
Page 11 for details):
Pamlico: Tues, Dec. 14th
New Bern: Thurs, Dec. 16th
Morehead City: Sun, Dec.
19th
Central Beaufort County:
Sun, Dec. 19th

Jan. 4th: Monthly Meeting
(Garber UMC) Guest
Speaker:

Jan. 8th: First Saturday
Bird Walk (TBD – New
Bern waterfowl ponds or
Spring Creek
impoundments)

LNBC Monthly Bird Walk – Pamlico County, Dec. 4th

by Les Coble

This is always a popular walk as we visit several sites that provide a variety of habitats. The trip will be guided by several of our highly competent Pamlico County birders, assisted by Al Gamache. Expect to visit the Oriental Wastewater Treatment Plant and River Dunes Lagoon.

Meet at the Oriental Dog Park, 130 Straight Rd., Oriental, NC. This is located behind the Pamlico County Fire Department on a wide dirt road just before the Fire Department, taking you to the back of the Fire Department building. Park near the Port-A-Pots at the end of the parking lot. **Meet at 7:30 AM.**

Birding will start in the parking lot. Yep, be mindful of the trees around the parking lot area as birds move to and fro the adjacent woods.



**Meet up for Saturday,
Dec. 4th Bird Walk at
Oriental Dog Park, 130
Straight Rd.**

LNBC Pea Island Trip – Nov. 10-11, 2021

by Ronnie Hewlette

The Lower Neuse Bird Club's plans for the fall of 2021 included a two-day overnight trip to the Outer Banks. This is an annual event for the Club and the itinerary for the first day was to include a stop at the Vernon James Research Center near Roper, in Washington County, two stops at Pettigrew State Park (Cypress Point Access & the boat ramp on the East side of Phelps Lake), stops at Alligator River NWR, and then to conclude the day at Bodie Island Lighthouse Pond, as the sun sets. Whew!

The rendezvous point was the Rest Area on Highway 17, near Chocowinity, NC. By 7:30 AM, all vehicles had arrived, and our first bird sighting of the day was the Loggerhead Shrike that has come to call this rest area its home. Seems like every time we stop here, that bird is in the area. It's going to be a good day!

Fourteen birders departed from here, caravanning to our first stop at the Roper Research Station. The Vernon G. James Center is located on the NCDA Tidewater Research Station. The 32,000 square foot facility was opened in February 1991, and houses NCSU faculty, North Carolina Department of Agriculture (NCDA) management, and support personnel. Operated by North Carolina State University (Read more at: <https://vernonjames.ces.ncsu.edu/about-vernonjames/>)

The Tidewater Research Station was established in 1943 in Washington County and occupies 1,558 acres, of which 840 are woodland, 428 are cropland and pastures, and 95 are used for roadways, waterways, support facilities, and aquaculture ponds. Research studies conducted at the Station involve field crops, livestock, aquaculture, horticulture, and soil & water. These grounds host a variety of birds, especially Bald Eagles, and we have rarely been disappointed with a drive-through of this area. Bald Eagle populations have dwindled in this area since the work with catfish ponds have been abandoned, but we almost always find a number of these birds on site.

Driving along the Research Station Road, past the buildings and into the cutover agricultural land, several birds were spotted, moving around, so we pulled over to have a better look. A nice specimen of a Horned Lark was spotted out in the field at a relatively close distance, allowing good looks with scopes and binoculars. It is amazing how this species can blend in with the ground cover and disappear. While standing there, we heard and saw several Eastern Meadowlarks, a Bald Eagle flew over, along with several Tree Swallows, a Kestrel, and a Red-tailed Hawk. It was a nice morning; partly cloudy with calm winds and temps in the mid-50s.

Following the road around the back side of the Research Station, we found more Eagles, Kestrels, a Red-shouldered Hawk, Eastern Phoebe, Sparrows (Song & Savannah), Rock Pigeons, Turkey Vultures and Black Ducks (seen in the distance).



*The Roper catfish ponds at Vernon James Research Station once provided habitat and food for the largest known population of Bald Eagles in North Carolina. The highest count of Bald Eagles ever recorded in North Carolina was at the Roper catfish ponds, by Ricky Davis, Nov. 17th, 2007, with a count of **102 Bald Eagles!***

The LNBC saw a comparatively modest 6 Bald Eagles on Nov. 10, 2021. One pair was perched on top of a telephone pole together, on the back side of one of the catfish ponds.

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Lower Neuse Bird Club

LNBC Pea Island Trip – Nov. 10-11, 2021

by Ronnie Hewlette, continued from Page #3

As we exited the agricultural lands, we stopped again where a fifty-foot ROW intersected the road. This mowed area was bordered by field ditches with brushy areas on one side and a mid-rotation Pine Plantations on the other, creating some interesting habitat to investigate. Immediately, we heard a bird that, according to the Merlin App, was attributed to a Baltimore Oriole. Really? After much discussion and calling, we finally concluded that we were hearing a House Wren. Over in the pines, a Golden-crowned Kinglet was first heard and then seen. A total of twenty-two species were identified at the Research Station – not bad for our first stop!

Our next stop of the morning was at Cypress Point on the west side of Phelps Lake, a part of Pettigrew State Park. A few birds were seen on the water (Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe and Laughing Gulls), but several birds were heard along the boardwalk through the Cypress trees, as we returned to our vehicles. At this brief stop, we were able to identify Woodpeckers (Hairy & Pileated), a Blue-headed Vireo, Cedar Waxwings, and we heard a Hermit Thrush, among others.

From here, we drove over to the other side of Phelps Lake, to the parking area and boat ramp site. This involved a drive of about 15-20 minutes, but this stop was also a part of Pettigrew State Park. Here we found Forster's Terns and a couple of Royal Terns, along with Ring-billed Gulls and American Crows and a couple of Fish Crows.

It was almost noon but we had one more stop before lunch. A Ross's Goose has been reported in the ponds along the roadside of US Highway 64, just east of Creswell. This would be a rare bird in this area, so we had to check it out. When we stopped there, we found a large number of Canada Geese on the far side of the pond, along with a single white goose. It was best described by as a medium size white goose, about the size of the Canada Geese or slightly smaller, showing black on the wingtips, with a reasonably long neck and fairly large reddish-pink bill. A lot of discussion ensued but it was the consensus of the group that this was a Snow Goose and not a Ross's Goose. Even with our review of photos, it was confusing. Based on the goose's posture or position, one photo would portray a Ross's Goose, while another would confirm it to be a Snow Goose. We finally settled on calling it Snow Goose.

It was just a short drive over to Columbia, where we stopped at the Tyrrell County Visitor's Center for lunch. This was a nice setting for lunch – the weather continued to be just outstanding, and our view of the Scuppernong River was relaxing.

From here we continued east along US Highway 64 to Alligator River NWR for a quick drive through – entering at Buffalo City Rd. then across on Sawyer Lake Rd. to Long Curve Rd. and out to Hwy-264 via Barrow Pit Rd. [*Sawyer Lake Rd. was closed for maintenance, so we ended up doubling our tracks on both Buffalo City and Milltail Rds., eventually resuming our route on US-64E. – Ed.*] We picked up a Cooper's Hawk, Merlin, American Kestrel, a few Northern Harriers (nothing like we have seen on previous trips). It was almost 3:00 PM as we returned to US-Highway 64 and headed to Nags Head to check in at the Comfort Inn South.

Continued on Page #5



Golden-crowned Kinglet
Vernon James Research
Station
Nov. 10th, 2021
©Michael Cheves



Snow Goose
Hwy-64E Pond (Creswell)
Nov. 10th, 2021
©Michael Cheves

LNBC Pea Island Trip – Nov. 10-11, 2021

by Ronnie Hewlette, continued from Page #4

While checking in at the motel, we discovered a notification that a Snow Bunting was being seen at the Old Coast Guard Station on the south side of Oregon Inlet. Since this would be a Life-bird for a number of us, we decided to scrap our plans to go to Bodie Island Lighthouse and to go chase the Snow Bunting.

Under a setting sun, we hurried down to Oregon Inlet and walked out along the edge of the South Rock Jetty. In the failing light, about a ¼-mile from the parking lot, at the first “somewhat open” area, we spotted the Snow Bunting on the ground. What luck! What unbelievably good luck! Beautiful, Life-bird for several of us!

Feeling good about this find, we ambled back to the parking area and walked out toward the public fishing pier. Another great find – an American Pipit (reported earlier in the day) was seen in the short grass, under the bridge, just as the sun set.

What a great way to end a great day of Birding! Back to the Comfort Inn and on to dinner! Groups split up at this point to go to their restaurant of choice.

Day 2, sunrise breakfast was provided by the motel, and we were on our way to Pea Island NWR, driving down to South Pond for our initial stop. What lies ahead for Day 2 of our Birding Adventure?

Well, it was a foggy morn, but that didn't dampen our enthusiasm. Standing on the observation platform at South Pond, birds began to materialize as the fog lifted. There were Northern Pintails everywhere you looked! Mixed in with them, in lesser numbers, were American Black Ducks, Northern Shovelers, Bufflehead, a few Lesser Scaup and Redheads, American Wigeon and one Eurasian Wigeon (Life-bird for several of us) was identified. This one stop provided a list of close to 30 species!

Moving north from here to the Visitor's Center, we walked out along the North Pond Wildlife Trail where we were able to get close-up looks at several species. In fact, we had a Black-bellied Plover fly overhead and land on the bulkhead in front of us. This event was followed by the arrival of two Dunlin, a Lesser Yellowlegs, and three American Pipits in the grass.

Standing on the Wildlife Trail, we could see at least 75 American White Pelicans, with most of them bunched together on a small island in New Field Pond, the impoundment south of the trail.

Walking down the trail on the levee between the two water bodies allowed us a perfect view to study the birds in some detail while discussing the attributes of the different species. This was a great learning opportunity for some of the less experienced birders in our group and a good exercise for all of us. We identified Canada Geese and Tundra Swans, of course. But additionally, we saw Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, more American Black Ducks, Wigeons and Pintails, Redheads, a lone Greater Scaup and Hooded Merganser (Male), Grebes, Coots and others.

Continued on Page #6



*Snow Bunting
Rock Jetty, Oregon Inlet
(South)
Nov. 10th, 2021
©Ronnie Hewlette*



*Nags Head disappears
beneath a blanket of fog*

*Nov. 11th, 2021
©Michael Cheves*

Lower Neuse Bird Club

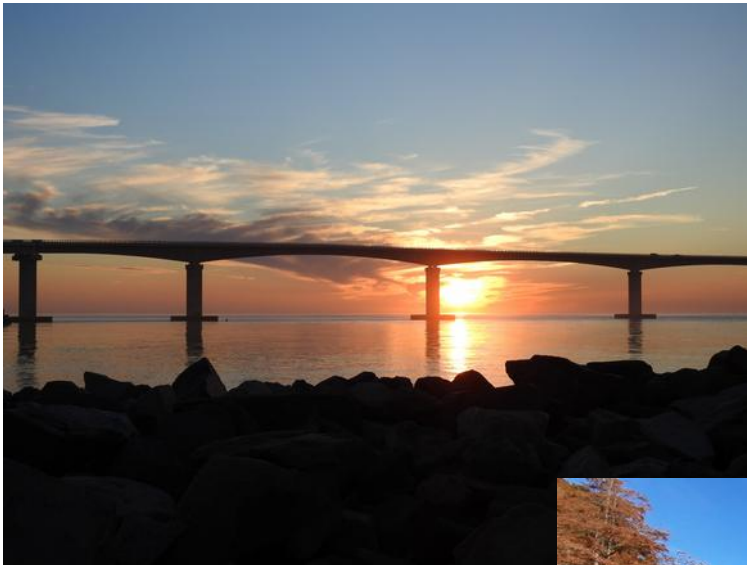
LNBC Pea Island Trip – Nov. 10-11, 2021

by Ronnie Hewlette, continued from Page #5

Our next stop was at the mud flats on the edge of North Pond. This location is just south of the Bird Photo Blind that has been taped-off and not accessible. As we were leaving the Wildlife Trail, we were told by another birder that Marbled Godwit were seen at the flats, earlier. We pulled over on the West side of the road, not far from where the DOT equipment was working to build up the sand dunes that had washed away in the Nor'easter just a couple of days earlier. We weren't going to be able to stay long... (Well, we actually stayed about 45 minutes.)

When we arrived, we saw no Marbled Godwit, but there were plenty of shorebirds to keep us referring to our guidebooks and phone-apps. Western Sandpipers, Dunlin, a single Willet, a single Caspian Tern, Snowy Egret and White Ibis were on the flat, mingled in with Canada Geese and ducks as seen previously. There was a Short-billed Dowitcher that gave us all a difficult time of identification, since it kept its head down in the water, feeding and moving around all the time. A couple of Marbled Godwit finally flew in, and we saw our first Semipalmated Plover along with some Black-bellied Plovers. This was a good stop!

From here we somewhat broke into groups. Some headed home, a couple of vehicles went over to Bodie Lighthouse Pond, while another one drove up to Jennette's Pier to check out the ocean. With nothing significantly new to report, everyone headed home. It has been another great adventure to Pea Island with a list for the two days of 110 species.



*Left: Sunset over Oregon Inlet
Nov. 10th, 2021
©Ronnie Hewlette*

*Below: LNBC Surveying from Cypress
Point at Phelps Lake, Pettigrew SP
Nov. 10th 2021
©Michael Cheves*



Checklist: Pea Island/Surrounding, Nov. 10-11, 2021

Compiled by Ronnie Hewlette

#	Species	#	Species	#	Species
01.	Snow Goose	38.	Laughing Gull	75.	Blue-headed Vireo
02.	Canada Goose	39.	Ring-billed Gull	76.	American Crow
03.	Tundra Swan	40.	Herring Gull	77.	Fish Crow
04.	Blue-winged Teal	41.	Great Black-backed Gull	78.	Horned Lark
05.	Northern Shoveler	42.	Caspian Tern	79.	Tree Swallow
06.	Gadwall	43.	Forster's tern	80.	Carolina Chickadee
07.	Eurasian Wigeon	44.	Royal Tern	81.	Tufted Titmouse
08.	American Wigeon	45.	Common Loon	82.	Brown-headed Nuthatch
09.	Mallard	46.	Northern Gannet	83.	Brown Creeper
10.	American Black Duck	47.	Double-crested Cormorant	84.	House Wren
11.	Northern Pintail	48.	American White Pelican	85.	Marsh Wren
12.	Green-winged Teal	49.	Brown Pelican	86.	Carolina Wren
13.	Redhead	50.	Great Blue Heron	87.	Golden-crowned Kinglet
14.	Ring-necked Duck	51.	Great Egret	88.	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
15.	Greater Scaup	52.	Snowy Egret	89.	Eastern Bluebird
16.	Lesser Scaup	53.	Tricolored Heron	90.	Hermit Thrush
17.	Bufflehead	54.	White Ibis	91.	Gray Catbird
18.	Hooded Merganser	55.	Black Vulture	92.	Northern Mockingbird
19.	Ruddy Duck	56.	Turkey Vulture	93.	European Starling
20.	Pied-billed Grebe	57.	Osprey	94.	Cedar Waxwing
21.	Rock Pigeon	58.	Bald Eagle	95.	American Pipit
22.	Mourning Dove	59.	Northern Harrier	96.	Snow Bunting
23.	Clapper Rail	60.	Cooper's Hawk	97.	Eastern Towhee
24.	Virginia Rail	61.	Red-shouldered Hawk	98.	Savannah Sparrow
25.	American Coot (Red-shielded)	62.	Red-tailed Hawk	99.	Song Sparrow
26.	American Avocet	63.	Belted Kingfisher	100.	Swamp Sparrow
27.	Black-bellied Plover	64.	Red-bellied Woodpecker	101.	Eastern Meadowlark
28.	Semipalmated Plover	65.	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	102.	Dark-eyed Junco (Slate-colored)
29.	Killdeer	66.	Downy Woodpecker	103.	Red-winged Blackbird
30.	Marbled Godwit	67.	Hairy Woodpecker	104.	Brown-headed Cowbird
31.	Sanderling	68.	Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted)	105.	Common Grackle
32.	Dunlin	69.	Pileated Woodpecker	106.	Boat-tailed Grackle
33.	Western Sandpiper	70.	American Kestrel	107.	Orange-crowned Warbler
34.	Short-billed Dowitcher	71.	Merlin	108.	Palm Warbler
35.	Greater Yellowlegs	72.	Peregrine Falcon	109.	Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle)
36.	Willet	73.	Eastern Phoebe	110.	Northern Cardinal
37.	Lesser Yellowlegs	74.	Loggerhead Shrike		



Abundant waterfowl at Pea Island NWR
Nov 11th, 2021
©Michael Cheves

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Familiar Woodland Resident: The Red-bellied Woodpecker

by Jo Ann Abell

Reprinted from *Bird Watcher's Digest* November/December 2021, with permission.
See birdwatchersdigest.com

One of the most conspicuous and vocal birds throughout its range, with a high tolerance for people, the red-bellied woodpecker is one of the most familiar woodpeckers in the eastern half of the country. With their good looks and punctuality for showing up at our feeders in winter for sunflower seeds and suet, this species would get my vote hands down for Most Welcome. At a time when the dreary scenery can seem almost devoid of life and energy, their dashing colors and rolling *kwirr, kwirr* calls, announcing their presence as they fly in from one last glide to the feeder, brightens and energizes the winter landscape.

This species is named for the faint reddish tinge on its abdomen, rarely visible as it hitches its way up the tree. In fact, the common names of many birds do not reflect the obvious field marks, in part because birds were often named at a time when birding tended to be done with a gun instead of binoculars, and biologists were looking at and dissecting dead specimens. In the 1730s, English artist and naturalist Mark Catesby named the species *Picus ventre rubro*, or “woodpecker with a red abdomen, and the name stuck.

Here in the Appalachian temperate rain forest of southwestern Virginia, the mature oak-hickory forests of the Blue Ridge are to the liking of this species – the dampness promotes the rotting of dead trees that attract the wood-boring insects and larvae that it craves. Elsewhere, this habitat generalist can be found in deciduous forests, mixed hardwood and pine forests, woody farm edges, suburban parks, residential neighborhoods, and almost anywhere there are large trees in the eastern half of North America. It is the most abundant woodpecker in the Southeast, but less common in other parts of its range, which extends northward into Canada thanks to the massive subsidy of bird feeders.

Well Adapted for Their Ecological Role. All members of the family Picidae, to which the red-bellied belongs, are amazingly well adapted for maneuvering around tree trunks in their search for insects and spiders. Their toes – two facing forward, two facing backward – enable them to grasp vertical tree trunks, and their stiff tail feathers act as a brace as they hitch their way up the tree. Bristles covering their nostrils protect their lungs by filtering out dust and tiny wood chips. Sturdy beaks allow them to drill holes into trees while searching for insects and to chisel out nesting cavities, and a long, sticky, worm-like tongue with a barbed end enables them to snag and extract insects from crevices and holes deep inside the tree.



Red-bellied Woodpecker
New Bern, NC
March 25th, 2019
©Michael Cheves



Left:
Red-bellied Woodpecker

Right:
Hairy Woodpecker

Plate 57 from 'Catesby's
Birds Of Colonial
America' (Edited by
Alan Fedducia, ©1985
The University of North
Carolina Press)

Continued on Page #9

Familiar Woodland Resident: The Red-bellied Woodpecker

by Jo Ann Abell, continued from Page #8

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As amazing as the woodpecker's tree-climbing and foraging talents are, they pale in comparison to the forces at work while drumming or chiseling out nest holes. Large neck and shoulder muscles enable these jackhammers of the forest to deliver a powerful strike at a rate of up to 22 times per second, each strike transmitting a seemingly brain-rattling force of up to 1200G (1,200 times the force of gravity) upon impact with the tree. Humans are often left with a concussion if they experience 80 to 100G, so how the woodpecker avoids brain damage is amazing.

Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley studied video and CT scans of the birds' bodies and found that the force from the impact of pecking is spread out over the bird's body, while only a fraction enters the brain. The woodpecker is equipped to absorb mechanical shock in several ways: a hard-but-elastic beak; a sinewy, springy tongue-supporting structure, called the hyoid, that extends behind the skull; an area of spongy bone in its skull to protect the brain; and strong muscles at the base of the bill that suppress vibration.

Coexistence at the Feeder. Despite its size of 10 inches and wingspan of 17 inches, the red-bellied woodpecker coexists peaceably with the smaller birds that come to our feeder. Many times I've watched a redbelly and a black-capped chickadee both work on different sides of the same block of suet while a titmouse or junco stands underneath, waiting to get any pieces that fall. This coexistence is possible because the smaller birds pose no threat to the larger woodpecker, unlike, say, the blue jay, a chief food competitor. The bold and brash blue jay preys on weakness and vulnerability. One snowy day I watched as a jay bullied chickadees, juncos, and finches from our feeder all morning, but when challenged by a red-bellied – a bird more its size – the notorious bully backed down. The jay took one look at the woodpecker's long dagger-like bill and its crouched, ready-to-rumble stance, and judiciously beat a hasty retreat, hurling epithets from a safe distance.

By the time winter rolls around to February, I hear the familiar drumming of a red-bellied male laying claim to his breeding territory and advertising for a mate. The powerful *rat-tat-tat* of the woodpecker's bill against the resonant wood of a favorite drumming tree (or anywhere else that can amplify their message) is a reminder that winter is losing its grip and spring is just around the corner. It also tells me that nesting season for our redbellies is officially underway. The winter territory will be abandoned, and a smaller breeding territory, usually focused on a nesting tree, will be zealously guarded and defended.

Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus*

What to Look For

Medium-sized at 9 to 10 inches, the red-bellied woodpecker has black and white barring on its wings and back, and a pale, grayish-tan underside. Males and females both have a red nape, but only the male has a red crown. (Females have a gray crown.) Juveniles have a brown head with no red at all. This species is often confused with the less common red-headed woodpecker, whose head is completely red. Like other woodpeckers, redbellies have a distinct undulating flight consisting of a few rapid wing beats followed by a quick glide with wings tucked against the body rather than spread like many other birds.



This male Red-bellied Woodpecker is a regular visitor to feeders in New Bern, NC
©Michael Cheves

Continued on Page #10

Lower Neuse Bird Club

Familiar Woodland Resident: The Red-bellied Woodpecker

by Jo Ann Abell, continued from Page #9

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Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus*

This species' most frequently used call is a loud, musical **kwir**, **kwir** most often heard during early winter to elicit a response from a female. You might also hear a gruff, coughing **cha-aa-ah**, used in a short-range context between other redbellies; or an often-repeated **chiv**, which might be used when disturbed by a human intruder. Calls when they are excited include a loud **chee-wuck**, **chee-wuck**, **chee-wuck**, or a high-pitched **kew**, **kew**, **kew** when intensely excited. They also issue a throaty **grr**, **grr** to establish or maintain pair bonding.

Drumming is the woodpecker equivalent of singing. Males drum in winter to attract a mate and also during boundary disputes between other red-bellied males. Both sexes use tapping and mutual tapping during pairing and also post-pairing around the nest cavity to establish and maintain the pair bond.

Where and When to Look.

Keep an eye out for this species in woodlands year-round, particularly along the main boundaries and trunks of trees. They prefer old stands of oak and hickory over younger stands of hardwoods and pines. Although most common in deciduous forests of the Southeast, this species is found throughout the eastern half of North America, extending east from the wooded portion of the Great Plains states to the Atlantic Coast and from the Gulf of Mexico to northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and New York, and southern portions of Ontario. Extremely adaptable, they are found along woodland edges, groves, orchards, suburbs, and city parks. Primarily year-round residents, those living farther north may retreat south during harsh winters in search of food.

Can't We All Just Get Along? During the nonbreeding season, redbellies occupy individual territories, often with a male in one area and a female in an adjacent area. Both sexes seem to employ a strategy of indifference to food competitors, storing caches of acorns, nuts, seeds, and occasionally insects, deep into bark crevices where they are difficult to steal rather than aggressively pursuing intruders to defend their stores. This passive approach to food rivals enables the red-bellied to conserve its energy, an important survival tactic in cold weather.

In our area, the red-bellied shares its territory with other woodpeckers, each utilizing different foraging techniques that allow them to exploit the same range and habitat with less competition for resources. The red-bellied depends upon mast for its winter diet but does not defend the mast it stores, eliminating much of the potential for conflict. Downy and hairy woodpeckers feed on many of the same foods, but do not cache food items and forage over a large area. Pileated woodpeckers forage an extensive area, drilling into dead trees and fallen logs in search of carpenter ants and termites deep in the wood. Red-headed woodpeckers are uncommon in our area, but where the two species' territories overlap, it can spell trouble for the red-bellied.

In the past, red-bellied and red-headed woodpeckers coexisted by making use of different habitats, different foods, and nesting at different times, but in more modern times, fragmentation of the forests and the introduction of the European starling into the mix upset the balance. Since starlings can't excavate their own nesting cavities, they are notorious for taking over cavities excavated by woodpeckers. Often just about the time a red-bellied pair finishes their nest cavity, a pair of house-hunting starlings will show up and try to oust the occupants (giving us one more reason to dislike this nuisance species). According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, in some areas, as many as half of all red-bellied nests get invaded by starlings.

During the breeding season, competition for mates and nesting areas can cause conflict. Threat displays employed by the red-bellied include the stiff pose, characterized by an arched back and the raising of feathers covering the upper back, giving the bird a rigid, somewhat hump-backed appearance. In more intense interactions, the full-threat display is given, with tail outspread and wings outstretched at an upward angle, or, in conflicts over nest cavities, with wings spread out against the trunk of a tree like a moth. In the floating-threat display, birds in flight appear to float toward a given perch or toward a rival with wings held in the position of a full-threat display. Confrontations can escalate to chasing or flying at each other, which may result in body collisions or grappling with feet in the air.

Continued on Page #11

Familiar Woodland Resident: The Red-bellied Woodpecker

by Jo Ann Abell, continued from Page #8

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See birdwatchersdigest.com

Economic and Ecological Benefits of the Species. Like all woodpeckers, redbellies are important nest providers for many species within their ecological community. Rather than using old nest sites, they prefer to excavate a new hole each year in dead or rotting trees, typically chiseled out lower and lower in the same tree as the wood rot works its way down the tree. Over time, nesting trees are decorated with a series of holes that are often appropriated by bluebirds, wrens, chickadees, and titmice, as well as small mammals, including bats, squirrels, and chipmunks.

Redbellies also play an important economic role as insect control agents, consuming beetles, grasshoppers, flies, caterpillars, and other larvae. They are a major predator of the invasive emerald ash borer in the Midwest, consuming up to 85 percent of borer larvae in a single infested ash tree. Rarely do they punch holes in healthy trees; instead, they peck away the bark from dead or dying trees and eat any wood borers or carpenter ants they find, preventing their spread to healthy trees. For this reason, forest managers often purposefully leave older, often dying, trees that aren't suitable for lumber or other use to benefit woodpeckers and other cavity-nesters.

It's been said that the recipe for success is simply "suit up and show up." It's certainly a winning combination for the red-bellied woodpecker. Adorned in showy black and white zebra-striped jacket and flashy red seaman's cap, their exuberant calls, tolerance of humans, and regularity at the feeder make them a familiar and welcome backyard favorite.

Jo Ann Abell lives on a small farm in Appalachian Virginia with her husband, three dogs, and 80,000 honeybees. She is a previous contributor to Bird Watcher's Digest.

LNBC Meeting Minutes – November 2nd, 2021

by Jenni Ford, continued from front page

Program: Michael Creedon's Photo Trip in Alaska

Mike and Carole Creedon take wonderful trips in which they immerse themselves in a location. This year, they went to Alaska in June. That is peak birding season, since birds are refueling on insects prior to migration. Mike shared his spectacular photos and amusing stories of the 116 species (61 of which were life birds) that the couple experienced on the trip. Members can email to Mike at capmike52@gmail.com to view a 45-minute video about their trip.

Reminder Christine Root is collecting annual membership dues for the program year (September 2021 through June 2022). Payment can be made in person or by mail – cash or checks (please make checks payable to **Lower Neuse Bird Club**). Payments can be mailed to LNBC Treasurer Christine Stoughton Root:

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

Thanks to Dianne Midness, Liz Lathrop, and Sheryl McNair, who provided refreshments during the meeting.

Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes Carolinus*

Feeding Behavior

This species is omnivorous, feeding on beetles, ants, and other insects, and plant material, including acorns and beechnuts, wild and cultivated fruits, and seeds. It forages on tree trunks and major limbs searching for insects, and perches among branches to pick berries and nuts. They sometimes catch flying insects in the air. Nuts and seeds taken in fall may be stored in bark crevices and eaten during winter. Occasional items in their diet include sap taken from sapsucker drill wells, tree frogs, eggs of small birds, oozing sap, and small fish.

Courtship and Nesting Behavior

In early spring, red-bellied woodpeckers tap on trees, gutters, roofs, or some other resonant surface to claim a territory and to attract a mate. They breed only once per year, and when a mate is found, tapping is shared by both sexes near the nesting site. Both male and female excavate the nest hole, from five to 70 feet above ground, usually in dead or dying trees. The cavity is lined with wood chips and is about a foot deep. The female lays three to eight eggs (usually four or five), and both the male and female incubate the eggs and care for the young. The chicks hatch in about 14 days and leave the nest in 22-27 days. Parents may continue to feed young for six weeks or more after they leave the nest.

--J.A.A.

Lower Neuse Bird Club

LNBC Photo Gallery

To have your photograph featured in the LNBC Photo Gallery, send your photos to lowerneusebirdclub@gmail.com All birds, wildlife landscape, and nature photographs are welcomed. Submitter will retain all rights to his/her own work, and full credit will be printed.



Above: Bald Eagles
Across the creek from the home of Bill & Olwen Jarvis
Nov 25th, 2021 ©Bill Jarvis



Right: Great Blue Heron
Link Rd. @ Alligator River NWR
Nov. 19th, 2021 ©Michael Cheves



Merlin at Vernon Blades Park, Bridgeton
waterfront
Dec. 1st, 2021 ©Michael Cheves



American White Pelicans at Pea Island NWR
Nov. 11th 2021 ©Ronnie Hewlette

LNBC Photo Gallery

Page 2/2



Marbled Godwit
Pea Island NWR, Nov. 11th, 2021
©Michael Cheves



Black-bellied Plover
Pea Island NWR North Pond, Nov. 11th, 2021
©Michael Cheves



Short-billed Dowitcher
Pea Island NWR, Nov. 11th, 2021
©Michael Cheves



Wilson's Snipe
Retention Pond at New Bern Regional Airport
Nov. 11th, 2021 ©Michael Cheves



American Pipit
Pea Island NWR, Nov. 11th, 2021
©Michael Cheves



Lesser Yellowlegs
Pea Island NWR, Nov. 11th, 2021
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