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LOWER NEUSE BIRD CLUB

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LNBC Upcoming Events Schedule

Monthly Meeting Programs:

- ♦ April 4, 6:30 PM Neuse Riverkeeper Presentation (Samantha Krop)
- ♦ May 2, 6:30 PM 6 Easy Shorebirds to start your ID Foundation (Les Coble)

Meet & Greet 6:30 - 7:00 PM & Meeting Agenda begins at 7:00 PM

Location: Garber Methodist Church (Room 123)
4202 Country Club Drive, Trent Woods

First Saturday Bird Walks

- April 1 Patsy Pond/Cedar Point/Haywood Landing ([Details on page 7](#))
- May 6 Beaufort County VOA
- June 3 North River Wetlands Preserve



STELLER'S SEA EAGLE

SAGA OF THE STELLER'S SEA EAGLE IN NORTH AMERICA

Written by Nicholas Lund
Supplemented by Les Coble

The saga of this bird started in 2020 and now continues into 2023. From January to the end of March of 2022, the Steller's Sea-Eagle continued to be spotted by thousands of birders in Maine.

In April, it got restless—birders spotted it in Nova Scotia, and then again in Newfoundland, where it resided through the summer and attracted plenty of attention. Most recently, in November, the bird was spotted in New Brunswick. Where might this star eagle go next?

- Nicholas Lund

Now on Les Coble's Life List!

Congratulations!

Read the "Rest of the Story"
Page 2-4

 Audubon

STELLER'S SEA EAGLE

“At 10 pounds and with a 7-8 foot wingspan, the **Bald Eagle** is one of the largest flying birds in the United States. Yet the two juvenile Bald Eagles I saw perched in a tree in Massachusetts on December 20, 2021 looked like pigeons compared to the other bird on the limb with them: a *Steller's Sea-Eagle*, the heaviest in the world.

Everything about seeing a Steller's Sea-Eagle is incredible. It's an awe-inspiring bird—about a foot longer and taller than an adult Bald Eagle and as many as five pounds heavier, with a massive golden bill that looks like pirate treasure. It's rare: There are only about 4,000 of this vulnerable species left in the wild, compared to hundreds of thousands of Bald Eagles. And of course, it's not supposed to be here. Steller's Sea-Eagles are native to far eastern Russia, the Korean peninsula, and northern Japan.

So how did this bird get to New England? It flew - the whole way. And it's still flying now.

TO START, Matanuska-Susitna County, Alaska – March 30, 2020

Americans first became aware of the bird when Alaskan birder Josh Parks photographed a Steller's Sea Eagle on August 20, 2020 along the Denali Highway. It was big news, but not shocking. These eagles occasionally show up in Alaska, with a handful of records in recent decades. But the Denali bird was unusual for being spotted inland, far from its typical habitat. It would be a sign of things to come.

The timeline and travels of this single bird, from Alaska to Texas to eastern Canada to New England, must be seen to be believed. Now the biggest question for birders is where this wandering giant will go next?

Vagrancy—*the tendency for birds to show up far outside their normal range*—is one of the most exciting aspects of birding. The Steller's Sea-Eagle is the epitome of a vagrant bird, and the same individual has been tracked across North America since it was first spotted.

Coletto Creek Reservoir, Victoria, Texas – March 10, 2021

The bird's trail went cold for months. Then, the Barnhart Q5 Ranch & Nature Retreat in Texas posted a photo, and birders were stunned. Could this be the same bird? No wild Steller's Sea Eagle had ever come anywhere near Texas before. Still, a massive winter storm had blown through weeks before, and there were no jesses or other signs of captivity in the photograph. The image didn't have detail to compare unique feather markings, either, so birders could do little more than scratch their heads. With no further sightings, the mystery continued.

Gaspé Peninsula, Quebec/New Brunswick, Canada – June 28, 2021

The bird popped up next in late June—more than 2,500 miles away in eastern Canada. Gerry Isaac, a ranger from the Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation, first spotted the bird in a tree on June 28 and got the word out. People from across Canada converged on the location, but it was only spotted a handful of times, mostly on July 1. Still, high quality spread-wing photographs allowed birders to notice something crucial: The distinctive border between the white and brown feathers on the upper wings was an exact match to the bird previously seen in Alaska. It was confirmed the two sightings were of the same individual. The eagle continued to bounce around the Gaspé Peninsula in July and early August.

Avon River, near Falmouth, Nova Scotia – November 3, 2021

Almost three months after its last sighting, Nova Scotia biologist Phil Taylor spotted the Steller's while birding along the Avon River. Dozens of local birders rushed to the scene to enjoy the bird during its short, two-day stay. Then, gone again.

Taunton River, Massachusetts – December 12, 2021

Late on December 19, word got out of a sighting in southern Massachusetts that occurred a week before. The bird was re-found early on the 20th. This was most U.S. birders' first real shot at seeing the bird, due to pandemic rules for crossing into Canada, so New England's entire birding scene was in a scramble. I immediately speed down to southern Maine where I watched the massive, rare, incredible, wandering Steller's Sea Eagle tower over nearby Bald Eagles. The crowd was elated, whooping and high-fiving and shaking their heads with incredulity. Hours later, after we left, the eagle left its perch. It was not seen again.

Sheepscoot River, Maine – December 30, 2021

I (Nick Lund) had written a blog post about my journey to Massachusetts, and on Dec. 30 a comment notification popped up. A woman named Linda Tharp let me know "it's in Five Islands ME today, 12/30." By the next morning, the eagle was being enjoyed by hundreds of birders on the scenic coast of Georgetown. The scene was ripe for conflict but instead it was one of acceptance of the economic impact birding has on local businesses. The eagle went missing on January 2 but was spotted on January 6 not far away on another stretch of the river before again disappearing.

The Story Continues – February 2023

It showed up again on February 4, 2023 on Back River just a few miles up the road to Five Islands."

"Les Coble can recount dozens of rare birds within hours of where he lived in Maryland but never got the "British tickers fever." However, the lure of this magnificent Eagle had the desktop computer hot with keystrokes seeking the path to Maine last winter. Alas, common sense won and the bird disappeared in March. But reappearing in the Five Islands area northeast of Portland this month was too much to take. I left home 2 AM on Saturday morning, the 11th for RDU and a flight to Boston. From there a rental car's 2.5-hour drive got me to the bridge over Back River at 12:40 PM for the thrill every ticker dreams. Just like that first view of the Grand Canyon which dispels the mind's false imbedded visions from flat photos when faced with the reality of that Arizona mile-deep-chasm, one cannot fully sense the awesome reality of this massive raptor. Bald Eagles will always remain majestic.

The locals embraced the notoriety the Eagle brought to the area putting up signs to warn drivers of the birder-congested bridge. EVERY vehicle crossing the bridge stopped to get an update and distribute well wishes (though a few souped up pickups were less than cordial). The influx of money over last winter and recently had to be immense to this popular rural area south of Bath. I met birders from New Mexico, Arizona, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Michigan, Minnesota, and the entire northeast in just 4.5 hours".¹



Les' telescope at the now infamous Rt. 127 Bridge over Back River at Georgetown/Sagadahoc, Maine



The most often seen view, on a favorite perch about 600' from the bridge. Photo by Kim Smith

"The bird seems to be hanging out in Maine for the time being, but where, as it has disappeared again. For a bird as large and powerful as the Steller's Sea Eagle, and with its history of flying great distances, there's no telling where it might show up. It has shown a preference for tidal rivers with tall trees and lots of islands. Many areas along the Maine coast fit that bill. If it has flown south, perhaps to escape dropping temperatures in Maine, likely areas could include Boston harbor, Buzzards Bay, and back on the Taunton River. Further than that, the Chesapeake Bay, Delaware Bay, Hudson River, (and New Bern)² are all possibilities.

¹ & ² Lester Coble

The Future

It's hard to know exactly what health condition the wandering Steller's Sea-Eagle is in, but by all accounts it appears healthy. After all, it's clearly strong enough to fly across an entire continent and take several hundred-mile flights every couple of weeks. It has been observed feeding on fish at several locations and displays no sign of injury or illness.

Why the bird has strayed so far from its native range is anybody's guess. Marshall Iliff, ***eBird project leader at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology*** and one of the first to spot the eagle in Massachusetts, says scientists are just beginning to understand the tendency of raptors to wander. "Raptors are more and more blowing our minds with their movements," he says, "and with more observers, more cameras, and digital tools like eBird, we're seeing that long-distance raptors dispersals are a rare but regular phenomenon." Iliff says that many of these wandering raptors are juvenile birds dispersing to find new areas to live. There are other reasons birds show up far from their normal range, including habitat loss, weather events, and simply migrating in the wrong direction. (In its native range, the declining population is threatened by habitat loss, lead poisoning, climate change, and nestling predation by brown bears, according to International Union for Conservation of Nature.)

Though it's far from home and will likely never make it back, there's a chance that this eagle could find a place it'd like to stay in North America. It's not uncommon for individual vagrant birds to thrive in their new territory, such as the Red-billed Tropicbird that has returned to the Gulf of Maine for 16 years and counting. In fact, it's possible that Steller's Sea-Eagles could breed with local Bald Eagles, as evidenced by this supposed hybrid eagle seen in Juneau, Alaska, in 2004.

When asked to guess the future of the Steller's Sea-Eagle, Iliff said he could easily see it wandering North America for years to come. "I predict that we're going to have a lot more fun with this bird," he says. The only thing that's certain with this bird is that, wherever it's found, it'll leave a group of stunned and elated birders in its wake."



Steller's Sea Eagle Size in relationship to a Bald Eagle
(Photo credit unknown.)



(<https://www.audubon.org/news/inside-amazing-cross-continent-saga-stellers-sea-eagle>)

LNBC MEETING MINUTES

MARCH 7, 2023

Wade Fuller opened the meeting at Garber Methodist Church. 27 participants including guests and several new members were in attendance.

Les Coble circulated a membership roster for attendees to confirm or correct their contact information. Members are encouraged to contact Les or other Board members to help keep the roster up-to-date.

Attendees shared recent sightings of bird species including White Pelicans at Martin Marietta Park by Ronnie Hewlette and Al Gamache and a very rare Red-footed Booby in the Raleigh area.

LNBC Meeting Minutes (Continued from pg-4)

Upcoming walks/events - Emails with additional details will be provided in advance of walks:

- Saturday April 1st – Patsy Pond/Haywood Landing/etc. Carpooling participants will meet at Lawson Creek Park. [Possibility of Millis Road stop if it is ready for visitors.]
- Tuesday April 4th – regular monthly meeting – presenter Samantha Krop, Neuse Riverkeeper

Program: Mike and Carol Creedon’s 2017 trip to Galapagos Islands. Mike gave a brief geology and detailed history of the Galapagos Islands most of which has been a National Park since 1959. Tourism is the only industry. 600 miles off the Ecuador coast, these volcanic islands on the equator are at the crux of two nutrient-rich currents. Due to these factors the islands hosts many endemic species – of birds, flora and other fauna. Among his many beautiful images, Mike captured many of the endemic species. A half-hour long feeding frenzy by a large flock of Blue-footed Boobies next to and around the watercraft was clearly a high point for Mike – and for the audience. Surprising to some of us – elevation of the islands range from sea level to 5000 feet contributing to stunning landscapes and the variety of species – and photos.

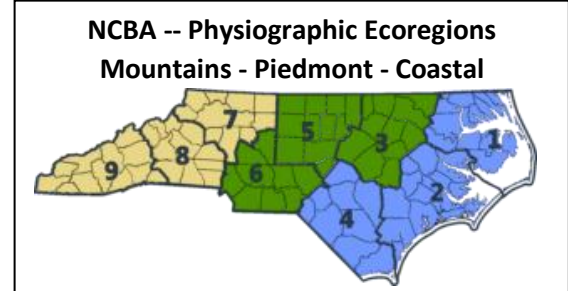
We express our gratitude to Elizabeth White and Dick Barmore for providing refreshments for the meeting.

Submitted by Jenni Ford
LNBC Secretary



North Carolina Bird Atlas
1d · 🌐

7, 6, 5, 3, 3, 1... not a perfect countdown but close enough for recall. These are the full-moon dates counting down to and through the breeding season. March 7, April 6, May 5, June 3, July 3, August 1, Can you guess why this matters to those contributing to the NC Bird Atlas?



Regional Coordinator Coastal Region 2



Christine Stoughton Root
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252-269-6306

Nocturnal birding guide by select species

<https://ebird.org/atlasny/news/nocturnal-atlasing-guide>



FORT MACON BIRD WALK – March 4, 2023



Ft Macon Beach © Ronnie Hewlette

Saturday morning, March 4th, the LNBC Bird Walk was scheduled for 7:45 AM at the Fort Macon State Park in Atlantic Beach, NC. The night before, Gail Warnings were in effect for Craven and Carteret Counties but clear skies, warming temperatures and winds of 15-20 mph were forecast for Saturday.



Razorbill © Michael Creedon

We gathered in the Fort Macon parking lot and some that had arrived a bit early had already spotted birds on the water from the beach observation Gazebo. The scene was a bit dis-jointed/comical as seventeen of us began to meander to the gazebo to check it out. Seabirds and shorebirds seemed to be everywhere! We could see Hundreds of Bonaparte Gulls on the beach and in the air out over the inlet channel. Conditions were windy with a sea-mist haze hampering long range views, but we had plenty to look at, up close. On the beach, we identified Black Skimmers, Laughing Gulls, and a single Ruddy Turnstone mixed in with the plethora of Bonaparte Gulls. Not long after these birds got up and flushed, a flock of 18-20 Ruddy Turnstones replaced them, running along the sand at the water's edge.

Moving our full attention back to the water, a couple of Razorbills were sighted. Then a couple more popped up, out in the channel. The Bonaparte's Gulls were flocking around them, looking for an easy meal. They moved closer, until they were just a few yards off the beach! At that point we concluded it was time to "hit the beach". Our group was able to get very close, observing how they dive and swim under water using their wings. What a show! And just look at the size of that bill.

With all the Bonaparte Gulls around, there could have been a Little Gull mixed in and we most likely would not have noticed the dark under wing of this species. Making note of the similarities, we turned our attention to the walk along the beach toward the rock jetty.

Not far down the beach a couple of sparrows were spotted feeding in the sand dunes. These were identified as the "Ipswich" Savannah Sparrow, a subspecies which breed on islands in maritime Canada and winter along the East Coast. They are large and obviously much lighter in color than other Savannah Sparrows.



LNBC Members at Ft Macon Beach © Ronnie Hewlette

The wind was steady and the roll of the ocean was fully exaggerated to our view, as we walked along with an occasional stop to inspect the flocks of birds diving and recoiling in the wind over the waves. These were moving fast and too far out for a confident ID, but some along the beach were identified as Bonaparte Gulls,



Bonaparte's Gull © Ronnie Hewlette

Herring Gulls, Laughing Gulls, Ring-billed Gulls and Great-black Backed Gulls. Forester Terns occasionally whipped past and Northern Gannets (large white bodies and black tipped wings) were seen well enough in the distance. A small

flock of Black Scoters flew by as a Horned Grebe was spotted in the roll of the waves. Looking back along the beach we had just walked; we saw Sanderlings fly in and spread out along the wash of the waves.

It was around 9:00 AM and time to return to the parking lot. Before leaving this location however, we took one more look out over the inlet at the tallest channel marker, hoping to see the Great Cormorants that have been seen and reported there. It wasn't a clear look for identifying field marks but we saw four cormorants and we concluded that one was obviously larger overall in size, so we claimed it as a Great Cormorant.

Back at the parking lot, we got dis-jointed again as small groups of 3-6 broke off and went different directions. Anyway, it is all good --- at the pond we found White Ibis, Yellow-rump Warblers (of course), Common Grackles, and heard Fish Crows.

LNBC Bird Walk (Continued from pg-6)

Out in the channel we finally spotted our first and only Common Loon for the morning. We eventually got back together and re-grouped down the road at the Beach Bathhouse to look for the Vesper Sparrow that's been seen in the brush behind the bathhouse. We spent 15-20 minutes trying to locate the Vesper but only found Song, Savannah, and House Sparrows.

Out on the beach we had a broad view of the white-foam and rolling waves, but it was not so rough as to prevent finding Horned Grebes, a Red-throated Loon, Northern Gannets, Brown Pelicans, and the most Ring-billed Gulls we had seen all morning.

Our next stop was Hoop Pole Creek Natural Area, just a short drive to the West, from Fort Macon SP. On the way over there we spotted a Eurasian Collared Dove on top of a power pole. This has always been a reliable location for us to find this species!

On our walk along the path through the maritime forest, an Orange-crowned Warbler was heard and then briefly seen by as it responded to a call. We tried to coax a Clapper Rail with a call but maybe the wind was too much or the tide was too far out or whatever – no rail sighting this morning. Four Great Egrets were foraging in the marsh and as turned back to the trail, a Cooper's Hawk appeared high overhead, making several passes, before drifting off to the East.

Looking back at the headwaters of the creek, a Tri-colored Heron was found on a low tree branch hanging over the water.

The winds were slacking off a bit, and we were able to walk out into the marsh and keep our feet dry. However, not much was moving. We did observe a couple of Oyster Catchers flying low along the edge of the marsh, as 40-60 White Ibis flew up into the trees. One interesting observation was to see a Herring Gull pick up an oyster (assumed oyster), fly straight up about 25-30 feet, drop the oyster, and then go back and repeat this maneuver several times before flying off. Now, that's thought-provoking in a multitude of scenarios.....

Spring birds are showing up – let's go Birding!!

-Ronnie Hewlette



Go to *Page 8* to see the *Species List* for the *Fort Macon Bird Walk*

April 1st Bird Walk – Patsy Pond/Cedar Point/Haywood Landing.

We will meet Saturday, April 1st at 7:30 AM in the parking lot for Patsy Pond (Hwy-24),

Located 6.5 miles East of Cape Carteret (Intersection of Hwy 58 & 24)

(New Bern Car-poolers should meet at Lawson Creek Park to depart no later than 6:45 AM)

This ½ day of birding will target the Bachman's Sparrow, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, and Rails, with a good chance to find Ovenbirds, Yellow-throated Warblers, and more.

Photo Gallery



Red-winged Blackbird © Ronnie Hewlette



Baltimore Oriole © Michael Cheves



Wood Duck © Ronnie Hewlette

FORT MACON BIRD WALK

Species List

March 4, 2023

No.	Species	No.	Species	No.	Species
1	Black Scoter	17	Forster's Tern	33	Fish Crow
2	Horned Grebe	18	Black Skimmer	34	Carolina Chickadee
3	Rock Pigeon	19	Red-throated Loon	35	Carolina Wren
4	Eurasian Collared-Dove	20	Common Loon	36	Northern Mockingbird
5	Mourning Dove	21	Northern Gannet	37	Brown thrasher
6	American Oystercatcher	22	Great Cormorant	38	House Sparrow
7	Killdeer	23	Double-crested Cormorant	39	Savannah Sparrow
8	Willet	24	Brown Pelican	40	Song Sparrow
9	Ruddy Turnstone	25	Great Blue Heron	41	Red-winged Blackbird
10	Sanderling	26	Great Egret	42	Eastern Meadowlark
11	Razorbill	27	Tricolored Heron	43	Common Grackle
12	Bonaparte's Gull	28	White Ibis	44	Boat-tailed Grackle
13	Laughing Gull	29	Osprey	45	Yellow-rumped Warbler
14	Ring-billed Gull	30	Cooper's Hawk	46	Northern Cardinal
15	Herring Gull	31	American Kestrel	47	
16	Great Black-backed Gull	32	American Crow	48	

Club Business:



Annual Membership

Program Year (Sept – May)

Submit payment to our treasurer

Christine Stoughton Root

458 Country Club Drive West

Arapahoe, NC 28510

Dues are \$15 per person. Checks should be made out to Lower Neuse Bird Club.



**** LAST CALL ****

Club Tee-shirts

Only two left

(Size Small).



\$20 each. Cash or Check
(Checks should be made out to
Lower Neuse Bird Club.