

FBC QUANTICO BIRDING TRIP
March 2, 2019
By Tim Stamps and Sally Knight

The FBC got an early morning start by gathering in North Stafford and departing promptly at 5:30 AM for Marine Corps Base, Quantico (MCBQ). Thanks go to Christa Nye, Fish and Wildlife Program Manager, Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Branch, for arranging the logistics and coordinating Base access. The caravan of eight vehicles entered MCBQ and parked near an engineer equipment training grounds adjacent to the Chopawamsic Creek floodplain. All birders were positioned and ready to listen for the target species, American Woodcock, by 5:55. Woodcock perform courtship flights in openings, known as “singing grounds,” that are close to their daytime forest habitat. The flights begin under low light conditions, typically 30 minutes before sunrise and 30 minutes after sunset. Under clear skies and moonlight, the morning flights will usually occur earlier, but under low cloud cover, the flights may occur later. Official sunrise was 6:40 so the expected start time for the flights was 6:00 – 6:15 AM. The link below provides detailed life history information as well as video of a foraging woodcock.

The American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) is known by a host of colloquial names, the most common being timberdoodle. Other colorful nicknames include Labrador **twister**, bogsucker and mudsnipe. Source: www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/Woodcock-Facts

It rained most of the night, heavily at times. At 5:00 AM there was still some mist in the air but by 6:00 AM, the mist had cleared. There was still enough dampness to make the 36-degree air temperature seem colder. Woodcock did fulfill their part of the program by arriving sometime after 6:00. Wing twitters of woodcock in flight as well as some vocal territorial cackling was heard, followed by “peent” calls from an uncertain location. After a few minutes, it was determined that a woodcock was using a singing ground at the far end of the training field near



1. American Woodcock by Jim Goehring

a set of bleachers. Once moving to that location, we observed a very cooperative woodcock peenting on the ground and making multiple courtship flights, always returning to the same ground location. We should have known from the beginning the show would be at the bleachers! Tim Stamps illuminated the peenting bird with a flashlight beam so the group could get a better look at the woodcock. Fortunately, the timberdoodle was intent upon courtship duties and paid no attention to the spotlight. Woodcock viewing was accomplished!

The next adventure was a short hike to the Wounded Warrior hunting blind near Chopawamsic Creek wetlands. A heron rookery and Bald Eagle nest were observed from long distance and a few flights of Canada Geese went by in a westerly direction. The morning was still relatively quiet.

We drove a short distance to Buffalo Pond to check for waterfowl. A pair of Wood Ducks and a female Lesser Scaup were on the pond. A Pileated Woodpecker and Blue Jays were seen and heard nearby. From there, we drove to the Natural Resources Office, "Log Cabin" building. Will and Jeannie Hartzell, Conservation Volunteer Program participants at MCBQ, talked about their management of a Blue Bird nest box program and other volunteer experiences on the Base.



2. Red-headed Woodpecker by Jeff Pozner



3. Industrious Beaver Work by Jim Goehring

The next stop was at the Chopawamsic Creek Wildlife Viewing Area and North Bank Trail off Russell Road. Among birds observed were Tundra Swans, Mute Swan, Hooded and Common Mergansers, Wood Duck, Bufflehead, Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagle, Red-winged Blackbird, and Lesser Scaup. A rather soggy hike was taken up North Bank Trail. While most bird-life seemed to be getting a late start, Red-headed Woodpeckers were heard often and glimpsed occasionally. Hermit Thrush, Carolina Wrens, Brown Thrasher, Blue Jays, White-throated Sparrows, and Eastern Blue Birds were seen. Of interest to many were the beaver works along the trail, where some massive trees had been felled and gnawed into short sections.

The caravan proceeded to the Expeditionary Warfare School to overlook Quantico Creek and observe an active Bald Eagle nest. Besides the excellent look at the eagle incubating eggs, most people got views of Red-headed Woodpeckers.

The last field visit of the day was to the Lunga Reservoir Dam to look for waterbirds. Birds appeared absent at first, but a few Common Mergansers and Ruddy Ducks were seen in the far distance. Then, a grebe surfaced, and Scott Byrd insisted something looked different about it. The bird gradually swam closer, and with aid of photo documentation by Jeff, it was determined to be a red-necked grebe, a rare find in Stafford County! So, the day afield ended with an exciting find!



4. Bald Eagle on Nest by Tim Stamps



5. Red-necked Grebe by Jeff Pozner

The trip ended at the MCBQ Game Checking Station classroom for brown-bag lunches and a photo presentation by Tim Stamps about his December trip to Trinidad and the Asa Wright Nature Center.



6. Female and Male Purple Honeycreepers.



7. Bearded Bellbird



8. Tufted Coquette Hummingbird

Total species seen 2 March 2019: 35

Canada Goose
Mute Swan
Tundra Swan
Wood Duck
Green-winged Teal
Lesser Scaup
Bufflehead
Hooded Merganser
Common Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Red-necked Grebe
Mourning Dove
American Woodcock
Ring-billed Gull
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Bald Eagle

Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Pileated Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Blue Jay
American Crow
Carolina Wren
Eastern Bluebird
Hermit Thrush
American Robin
Brown Thrasher
European Starling
Dark-eyed Junco
White-throated Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Eastern Towhee
Red-winged Blackbird
Northern Cardinal

Trip Participants:

Tim Stamps
Mike Lott
Jim Goehring
Scott Byrd
Maureen Daly and Ben Hamm
Jeff and Joan Pozner

Brenda Chase
Sally knight
Curtis Dee
Will and Jeannie Hartzell
Christa Nye