



Lesser Black-backed Gull (Tim Stamps)

DAY 1. Thursday evening, Fredericksburg Birding Club members settled into the Comfort Inn South Oceanfront, Nags Head, and began the birding weekend at daybreak, Friday, January 24. Members gathered on the hotel deck to scope the Atlantic Ocean in great expectation of Dovekies, Loons, Scoters, and Razorbills. The first exciting find was on the beach, where Scott Byrd pointed out a Lesser Black-Backed Gull with its yellow legs in obvious contrast to the pinkish legs of the more common Greater Black-Backed Gull. Brown Pelicans (12), Northern Gannets (25), Double-crested Cormorants (35), and Ring-

billed Gulls (25) were among the most numerous large fliers over the ocean. The more secretive ocean-going birds were visible for only brief moments before diving or sinking out-of-sight behind the wave crests. These included Red-throated Loons (24), Red-breasted Merganser (1), Black Scoters (6), and Horned Grebe (1). One flight of 3 Razorbills passed low over the waves but they, along with Dovekies, went undetected the rest of the weekend. Boat-tailed grackles were abundant around the hotel grounds and were quite stunning when the sunlight illuminated their yellow eyes and iridescent plumage.

Orders were issued at 8:00 AM to car-up and head inland to the Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge includes 40,000-acre Lake Mattamuskeet, North Carolina's largest natural lake. In total, the Refuge covers 50,173 acres and is a fish and wildlife haven attracting thousands of wintering waterfowl.



Boat-tailed Grackle (T Stamps)



Birding the Mattamuskeet Lodge (Tim Stamps)

Built in 1915, the Mattamuskeet Lodge was once the world's largest pumping station. In 1980, the lodge was placed on the National Historic Register and is a main attraction for the Refuge in addition to the teeming wildlife. In 1911, investors wanted to drain the lake and farm its rich lands. The Lodge was able to pump 20,000 gallons of water per second. After millions of dollars were spent, the investors found the idea impractical and abandoned it.



American Coot (Jim Goehring)

The 90-minute drive to Mattamuskeet was briefly interrupted by a search along Lake Worth Road near Stumpy Point for a Rough-legged Hawk reported in e-Bird. The hawk wasn't found but Scott Byrd reported an Anhinga in a roadside ditch prior to the stop. After resuming travel, several large roosts of Black and Turkey Vultures were passed along the way to the Mattamuskeet Visitor Center. At the Visitor Center, Brown-headed Nuthatches were squeaking in the pine trees and a few other songbirds were tallied before we moved along to the Wildlife Loop, a driving trail encircling a flooded impoundment. Birding began in earnest and 67 species were logged over the 6 1/2 hours aboard the Refuge.



Great Egret landing in a flock of White Ibis (Jeffrey Pozner)

Entering the Wildlife Loop, we encountered a small flock of American Coot. Another quarter mile in, we observed a mixed flock with White Ibises and Great Egrets being the primary players. One Ibis had a food morsel that was fancied by an Egret and they had some aerial skirmishes until the contest was decided. We could see and hear scads of waterfowl on the north side of the impoundment and were



White Ibis drops into the flock (Jeffrey Pozner)

rather anxious to get there. We turned northward onto the causeway (Route 94) and drove about a mile before turning east onto the north side of the Wildlife Loop. A River Otter darted across the road just before the turn. We stopped at the first observation post and were awestruck by the numbers and varieties of waterfowl. Although the day had started overcast with occasional sprinkles, the sun was now beaming with temperatures heading to the 60's. Coats came off and sunscreen went on! Gadwalls, Northern Shovelers, American Wigeons, and Pintails together numbered in the thousands and were literally uncountable. As far as one could see, there were ducks, Canada Geese (450), and Tundra Swans (500) foraging in this shallow impoundment. Species in lesser numbers that we could count included Blue-winged Teal (20), Green-winged Teal (8), American Black Duck (50), Ring-necked Duck (1), Ruddy Duck (3), Mallard (10), and Wilson's Snipe (2). A morning highlight occurred when Jim Goehring yelled "bittern" as one alighted in the rushes near us. The American Bittern eventually went on the prowl, left the dense grass, and gave everyone a view of its stealthy stride. An Orange-crowned Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, and Palm Warbler were detected in the Groundsel bushes along the road. We drove back to the Visitor Center for lunch. A Cooper's Hawk gave us a fly-by with a few shrill call notes. As we packed up from lunch, a rufous-colored bird jumped from the understory up to a pine limb: "Voila," a Fox Sparrow.



Fox Sparrow (Tim Stamps)

The group proceeded to a boardwalk through a cypress swamp. A Barred Owl hooted as we entered the boardwalk. A small lizard (photo on page 10) and a turtle caught the attention of the birders as did the



Spotted Turtle Basking on Log (Tim Stamps)

knobby projections (cypress knees) that grow out of the soil surrounding cypress trees. The question was asked, “what function do these have?” Current hypotheses suggest they might help aerate the tree’s roots, assist in anchoring the tree in the soft substrate, or create a barrier to catch debris and reduce erosion, or all the above. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Winter Wren, Carolina Wren, and Great Blue Heron were among species encountered. After the boardwalk, we explored a pond where Gadwalls and Nutrias were present. The Nutria is a non-native rodent that can damage marsh vegetation. In size, they are like giant muskrats or small beavers and have scruffy hair and coarse white whiskers.



Cypress Reflections (Jim Goehring)



Heron Reflections (Jim Goehring)



Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Owl Watch at Dusk (Tim Stamps)

We left the Visitor Center and drove north along the Route 94 causeway that splits the lake into eastern and western sections. Two target species were spotted along the drive, Forster's Tern (14) and Bonaparte's Gull (5), to complete the day at Mattamuskeet. Our next destination was Milltail Creek Road in the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge to look for Short-eared Owls at dusk. This refuge has flooded impoundments as well as large expanses of agricultural fields. Some of the fields are left fallow and overgrown and some are seasonally flooded following crop harvest. This creates great habitat for grassland birds as well as attracting migratory waterfowl to the flooded croplands. Five Northern Harriers were hunting the grasslands in the diminishing light. Killdeer (4), Eastern Meadowlarks (15), Northern Pintails (150), Tundra Swans (40), Northern Shovelers (4), Song (4) and Swamp (1) Sparrows were among other birds spotted. As light got low, we heard the "covey" calls of the Northern Bobwhite and the "peent" call of the American Woodcock. Bobwhite use the "covey" call to locate each other as they gather into a nighttime roost with tails inward and heads outward. The owls failed to appear!



Pintail Pair at the Bodie Island Lighthouse (Jim Goehring)

DAY 2. Members of the group slept in a bit longer on Saturday to wait out the forecasted rain. Thankfully, the rain broke early, and a quick scan of the beach added White-winged Scoters (6) and Sanderlings (4) to the trip list despite the gusting wind and roiling surf. The group then headed for the first stop of the day at the Bodie Island Lighthouse. Several Brown-headed Nuthatches and Eastern Towhees called from the pines adjacent to the parking lot. Some Swamp Sparrows called as we

walked the path out to the pond observation deck. Like the day before, large numbers of ducks occupied the pond, including large numbers of Northern Pintail (250), Green-winged Teal (80), and Gadwall (200). There were several White Ibises, a Snowy Egret, and a Clapper Rail observed foraging along the edge of the marsh. After wrapping up at the pond, we started walking along a path out to the water but returned to the Visitor Center after encountering a rainsquall. Before the rain started, the group observed a lone Tree Swallow flying overhead and Yellow-rumped Warblers (24) foraging in the shrubby vegetation adjacent to the marsh. Several Eastern Meadowlarks hung out in the grassy vegetation adjacent to the lighthouse.



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Black-crowned Night Heron (Jeffrey Pozner)

From Bodie Island, the group headed to Oregon Inlet Fishing Center. The target species for this spot was the Black-crowned Night-Heron and we were not disappointed as several roosted in the open, providing nice views. Several others hid deeper in the vegetation after we approached. A large raft of Buffleheads (35) observed swimming in the bay were the first seen during the trip. Sadly, the Great Horned Owl nest was not occupied this year. From Oregon Inlet, we moved south to Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge.

Our first stop at Pea Island was the observation deck inside the Visitor Center where the group scoped several new birds for the trip, including American White Pelicans (3) and Snow Geese (15). The refuge impoundments also held huge rafts of Tundra Swans (1000) and Northern Pintails (3000). Based on a tip from refuge staff, we drove back north a short distance to visit an observation blind. Despite the design of the blind making birding tough for anyone remotely tall, it did provide a great spot to observe shorebirds, including a large number of American Avocets (80), Dunlins (6), Sanderlings (25), Willets (12) and a single Black-bellied Plover. A Snowy Egret and Tricolored Heron foraged along the marsh edge.



American Avocet with an Itch (Tim Stamps)



Blue-winged Teal Pair (Jim Goehring)

Large swells and breaking waves made birding difficult. Even so, we observed 3 Common Eiders swimming just off the pier. Surf (1), Black (4) and White-winged Scoters (6) flew by or floated in the swells. Large numbers of Northern Gannets (50) passed by, as did Bonaparte's Gulls (8), Forster's Terns (3) and a single Royal Tern. Additional species observed off the pier included Horned Grebe (8), Red-throated Loon (10), Common Loon (1), and Red-breasted Merganser (19). Brown Pelicans (11) rode the wind and sailed effortlessly on fixed wings.

The group next drove back to the Visitor Center parking lot and hiked along a levee trail to several observation decks. Along the path, we observed Blue- (3) and Green-winged Teal (12), Pied-billed Grebes (4), American Wigeons (8), and a large raft of Redheads (100). Also observed were additional American White Pelicans (20) and American Avocets (60). An Eastern Meadowlark perched beautifully in the afternoon sun. After wrapping up at Pea Island, we drove back to Nags Head and Jennette's Pier.



Common Eider (Jim Goehring)



Brown Pelican glides by Jennette's Pier (Jeffrey Pozner)



Common Gallinule (Sally Knight)



Wood Stork (Jim Goehring)

Based on a tip, Sally Knight led some Club members south along Old Oregon Inlet Road to find a reported Common Gallinule, a rarity in North Carolina. After reaching the location, Jeff Pozner and Sally asked if everyone had seen the Wood Stork we passed along the way. Those who missed it drove back north and found the Wood Stork, another rarity, foraging in the roadside canal. After photographing the Wood Stork, they returned to look for the Common Gallinule. It was hidden in the vegetation but, after a short wait, it did reappear in the open long enough to be photographed. The two rarities provided a nice end to a great day.

DAY 3. No new species were detected at sunrise Sunday morning, so we departed the hotel and headed back to the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. This sunny morning produced 37 species including a notable, but brief, view of a Merlin. This small falcon was impressive in its rapid darting maneuvers and extreme speed. There were plenty of good looks at Eastern Meadowlarks (11), Killdeer (20), Northern Harriers (6), Savannah Sparrows (6), Wilson's Snipe (6), and Greater Yellowlegs (12). Sally picked up a Prairie Warbler. A drive from Milltail Road to Buffalo City Road, via the Sawyer Lake Road, passed several other impoundments well stocked with Northern Pintails (2,000), Northern Shovelers (100), Tundra Swans (200), Gadwalls (300), Ruddy Ducks (10), and Mallards (4).

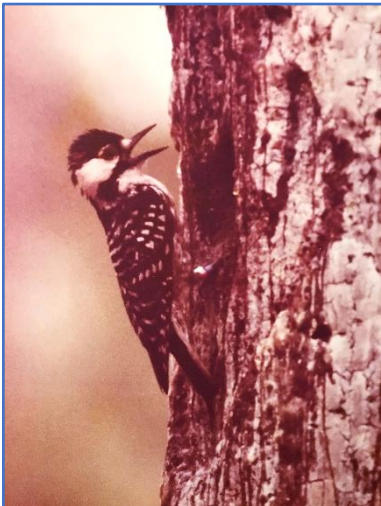


Michael Lott and Jim Goehring scope the ocean at sunrise (Tim Stamps)



Two Wilson's Snipe step out of the corn stubble (Tim Stamps)

The group exited the Refuge and headed west on Route 64 to the last stop. After crossing the Alligator River, we turned northward towards the Palmetto-Peartree Preserve (PPP) established for Red-cockaded Woodpecker management. Entering the PPP, we drove slowly with frequent stops, hoping to cross paths with the birds. Good fortune was not with us and we did not find a Red-cockaded Woodpecker. But we did come across a Red-cockaded Woodpecker cavity tree cluster with some recent activity, and we also added Golden-crowned Kinglet to the trip list.



Male RCW at natural cavity in Longleaf Pine, Southern Pines, NC (Tim Stamps, ca 1981)

Red-cockaded Woodpeckers excavate cavities in old living pine trees. Cavity excavation can take many years to complete, and the Red-cockaded Woodpecker must compete with Flying Squirrels, Red-bellied Woodpeckers and

other species that try to usurp their cavities. Wildlife scientists learned that the shortage of cavities was a limiting factor and began to create artificial cavities for the benefit of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Many of the cavities at this PPP site were man-made inserts and were aging and deteriorating. Nevertheless, fresh resin

well excavations on some of the cavity trees documented that Red-cockaded Woodpeckers are still present and using the site. Red-cockaded Woodpeckers excavate pits around the cavities to produce a sticky resin flow that is a deterrent to predators and cavity stealers. A group of cavity trees is normally used by a mated pair who are sometimes assisted by a helper, often a



Man-made cavity in Loblolly Pine at Palmetto-Peartree Preserve (Jeffrey Pozner).

male offspring. This cooperative breeding system allows the pair to be assisted in the care of offspring and cavity excavation.

An interesting article on the history of the PPP is found here:

<https://www.coastalreview.org/2018/01/palmetto-peartree-preserve-new-hands/>

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TRIP LIST: Compiled by Michael Lott, see page 11



*Michael Lott catches lizard along boardwalk
(Sally Knight)*



Green Anole Lizard (Sally Knight)



Parting Shot: more Great Blue Heron Reflections (Jeffrey Pozner)

FREDERICKSBURG BIRDING CLUB OBX WEEKEND – 24-26 JANUARY 2020

Snow Goose
 Canada Goose
 Tundra Swan
 Wood Duck
 Blue-winged Teal
 Northern Shoveler
 Gadwall
 American Wigeon
 Mallard
 American Black Duck
 Northern Pintail
 Green-winged Teal
 Redhead
 Ring-necked Duck
 Lesser Scaup
 Common Eider
 Surf Scoter
 White-winged Scoter
 Black Scoter
 Bufflehead
 Hooded Merganser
 Red-breasted Merganser
 Ruddy Duck
 Northern Bobwhite
 Pied-billed Grebe
 Horned Grebe
 Rock Pigeon
 Mourning Dove
 Clapper Rail
 Common Gallinule
 American Coot
 American Avocet
 Black-bellied Plover
 Killdeer
 Sanderling
 Dunlin
 American Woodcock
 Wilson's Snipe
 Greater Yellowlegs
 Willet
 Razorbill
 Bonaparte's Gull
 Ring-billed Gull
 Herring Gull
 Lesser Black-backed Gull
 Great Black-backed Gull
 Forster's Tern
 Royal Tern

Red-throated Loon
 Common Loon
 Wood Stork
 Northern Gannet
 Double-crested Cormorant
 Anhinga
 American White Pelican
 Brown Pelican
 American Bittern
 Great Blue Heron
 Great Egret
 Snowy Egret
 Tricolored Heron
 Black-crowned Night-Heron
 White Ibis
 Black Vulture
 Turkey Vulture
 Northern Harrier
 Cooper's Hawk
 Bald Eagle
 Red-tailed Hawk
 Barred Owl
 Belted Kingfisher
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
 Red-bellied Woodpecker
 Downy Woodpecker
 Hairy Woodpecker
 Pileated Woodpecker
 Northern Flicker
 American Kestrel
 Merlin
 Eastern Phoebe
 American Crow
 Carolina Chickadee
 Tufted Titmouse
 Tree Swallow
 Golden-crowned Kinglet
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet
 White-breasted Nuthatch
 Brown-headed Nuthatch
 House Wren
 Winter Wren
 Carolina Wren
 European Starling
 Gray Catbird
 Brown Thrasher
 Northern Mockingbird
 Eastern Bluebird

Hermit Thrush
 American Robin
 American Goldfinch
 Chipping Sparrow
 Fox Sparrow
 Dark-eyed Junco
 White-throated Sparrow
 Savannah Sparrow
 Song Sparrow
 Swamp Sparrow
 Eastern Towhee
 Eastern Meadowlark
 Red-winged Blackbird
 Common Grackle
 Boat-tailed Grackle
 Orange-crowned Warbler
 Common Yellowthroat
 Palm Warbler
 Pine Warbler
 Yellow-rumped Warbler
 Prairie Warbler
 Northern Cardinal

TRIP LIST

THE FREDERICKSBURG
 BIRDING CLUB LOGGED 118
 SPECIES DURING THIS
 NORTH CAROLINA OUTER
 BANKS BIRDING
 ADVENTURE, 24-26
 JANUARY 2020.