

Chesapeake Bay and Virginia's Eastern Shore February 2-4, 2019

Submitted by: George Wheaton, Trip Leader

This trip, originally scheduled for mid-January, was postponed from the original date because of high winds and cold weather. Those conditions led to cancellation of the featured boat trip to the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. The rescheduled February date promised better weather but reduced the trip from four days to three.

On February 2, five members of the Piedmont Bird Club traveled to Virginia Beach for an afternoon of birding at the Pleasure House Point Natural Area, Lynnhaven Inlet, Rudee Inlet, and the Virginia Beach oceanfront. Pleasure House Point revealed many ducks and gulls, a few harriers and eagles, as well as close-up views of Clapper Rails and a lucky Osprey. Rudee Inlet afforded close looks of a Long-Tailed Duck and more distant views of scoters, Razorbills, a pair of American White Pelicans, and a large group of Red-breasted Mergansers.



Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Clapper Rail

On the following day, the PBC joined 55 other birders aboard the "Bay Princess," a large head boat, which boasted a heated cabin. The plan was to bird around all four of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel's man-made islands and then to bird out to the mouth of the bay. The cabin was deserted because on-deck

temperatures reached 50°F, and there was no wind. The Chesapeake was as flat as a mirror and as calm as any of the more experienced hands could remember.

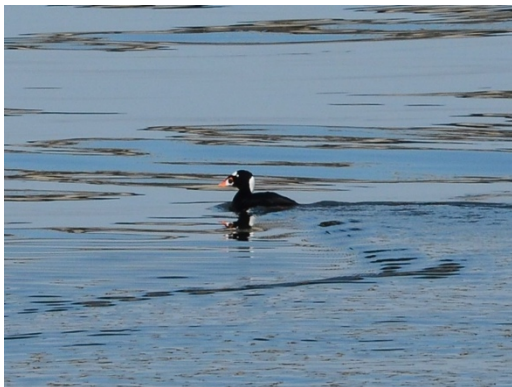


Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Surf Scoter

Good birds were seen throughout the four-hour trip. Among them were such coveted targets as: Harlequin Duck, all three scoters, Long-tailed Duck, Common Eider, Great Cormorant, Razorbill, Purple Sandpiper, Northern Gannet and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. The Northern Gannets put on a show as they plunge-dove for bits of chum being tossed off the stern of the boat. The Lesser Black-backed Gulls with their bright yellow legs and feet were easy to pick out among the dozens of other gulls that were dozing on the islands and enjoying the unseasonably warm weather. Vying for our

attention were 10 or more Harbor Seals hauled out on the rocks and one or two Humpback Whales that lazily dove and surfaced several times close to the boat.



Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Long-tailed Ducks

After returning to Lynnhaven Inlet and saying goodbye to our shipmates, we drove across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel and headed north for the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. We arrived well before dark and were able to bird around the three-mile wildlife drive and to walk along the shoreline of Tom's Cove in pursuit of our most wanted target – a Bar-tailed Godwit. During this first foray we did not see the godwit but did add many waterfowl to our trip list, including Tundra Swans and Snow Geese. Interestingly, we encountered many Mallards. For some reason, this species is

often quite hard to come by in January or early February on the Eastern Shore. We also managed to get up close and personal looks at several of Chincoteague's famous wild ponies.

On Monday morning, after a good dinner and a sound sleep, we resumed our search for those species not yet seen but hoped for. We made two trips to the shore of Tom's Cove to search for the Bar-tailed Godwit. We dipped on our first try and blamed it on the unusually high tide. Just before noon we got lucky. Alerted by another birder that he had just seen our quarry, we hot-footed it down the beach and found the Bar-tailed Godwit hanging out with a couple of Willets, a Ruddy Turnstone, and a few other small shorebirds. This was only the third record for this species



Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Bar-tailed Godwit

in Virginia and a bird that Sibley describes as rare along the Atlantic coast. After high fives all around, we began the long drive home, tired but with that warm glow of having seen a rare bird exceptionally well.

Thanks to Matt who helped lead the trip, and to Anne, Linda, and Paul for their enthusiasm and bright eyes!

Bird List

American Black Duck
 American Crow
 American Oystercatcher
 American Kestrel
 American Robin
 American White Pelican

American Wigeon
 Bald Eagle
 Bar-tailed Godwit
 Belted Kingfisher
 Black Scoter

Black Vulture
 Black-bellied Plover
 Blue Jay
 Boat-tailed Grackle
 Brant

Brown-headed Nuthatch
Brown Pelican
Bufflehead
Canada Goose
Carolina Chickadee
Carolina Wren
Clapper Rail
Common Eider
Common Grackle
Common Loon
Cooper's Hawk
Double-crested Cormorant
Downy Woodpecker
Dunlin
Eastern Bluebird
Eastern Towhee
European Starling
Fish Crow
Forster's Tern
Gadwall
Great Black-backed Gull
Great Blue Heron
Great Cormorant
Great Egret

Greater Yellowlegs
Harlequin Duck
Herring Gull
Hooded Merganser
Horned Grebe
House Finch
House Sparrow
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Long-tailed Duck
Mallard
Merlin
Mourning Dove
Northern Cardinal
Northern Gannet
Northern Harrier
Northern Mockingbird
Northern Pintail
Northern Shoveler
Osprey
Peregrine Falcon
Pied-billed Grebe
Purple Sandpiper
Razorbill
Red-breasted Merganser

Redhead
Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Red-throated Loon
Red-winged Blackbird
Ring-billed Gull
Rock Pigeon
Ruddy Turnstone
Sanderling
Savannah Sparrow
Snow Goose
Snowy Egret
Song Sparrow
Surf Scoter
Swamp Sparrow
Tundra Swan
Turkey Vulture
White-throated Sparrow
White-winged Scoter
Willet
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Total: 84 Species



Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Osprey



Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Northern Gannet



Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Snow Goose



Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Purple Sandpiper



Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Harlequin Duck