



Field Trip: Howerton Road/Guilford County Farm, November 15, 2020

Submitted by Matt Wangerin

Howerton Road is a site that harbors a great diversity of birds throughout the year, and is especially good for sparrow species in the fall. Eighteen members of the Piedmont Bird Club braved the light rain showers and blustery conditions to look for sparrows and other grassland bird specialties.

Trip leader Matt Wangerin arrived before 8:00 a.m. and was able to view a Virginia Rail running across the matted grasses at the roadside pond. A revisit to the pond area with the assembled group shortly after enabled many to hear the rail vocalize its peculiar call, typically all that this elusive species yields. All were able to get good looks at Song Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows, and a couple of Field Sparrows. A chattering Belted Kingfisher delighted, and a noble Northern Harrier patiently put up with some pestering American Crows.

A walk to the field west of the pond found many White-throated Sparrows and some American Goldfinches, but no Savannah Sparrows or Vesper Sparrows, the latter being a particularly rare target of this trip. The windy conditions likely kept these species hunkered down. All the while, flocks of Blue Jays, American Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Eastern Bluebirds coursed overhead, mostly moving south in migration. A flock of beautiful Cedar Waxwings were a group favorite.



Northern Harrier, bottom, being harassed by American Crows. Photo by Lee Capps.



photo by Lee Capps



White-crowned Sparrow
by Lou Skrabec

The group then walked east past the farm buildings toward the far end of Howerton Road. A lot of European Starlings and some woodpeckers were observed in the trees, and Eastern Meadowlarks were seen in the fields. An American Kestrel perched on a line.

Near the culvert at the bottom of the hill, we were able to cajole one juvenile White-crowned Sparrow to make a quick appearance (the accompanying photo was captured a couple days later in the same spot under better conditions). This bird was another target for the trip and a lifer for some of the group. More White-throated Sparrows and Song Sparrows were not as secretive.

Walking south from Howerton Road along a park trail to a fallow soybean field, we came upon another lifer for some of the group: a flock of American Pipits feeding in the stubble, visible through the scope. Ann Van Sant decided to sneak forward for a better photograph, and her shot clearly shows the white outer tail feathers, a fine field mark for pipits.



American Pipit by Ann Van Sant



Savannah Sparrow by Ann Van Sant

Species List

Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Virginia Rail
Killdeer
Great Blue Heron
Turkey Vulture
Northern Harrier
Accipiter sp.
Red-shouldered Hawk
Belted Kingfisher
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Pileated Woodpecker

Northern Flicker
American Kestrel
Eastern Phoebe
Blue Jay
American Crow
Carolina Chickadee
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
White-breasted Nuthatch
Carolina Wren
European Starling
Northern Mockingbird
Eastern Bluebird
American Robin
Cedar Waxwing
American Pipit

American Goldfinch
Chipping Sparrow
Field Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
Eastern Towhee
Eastern Meadowlark
Red-winged Blackbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Common Grackle
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Northern Cardinal