



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy

Expedition to North Carolina Inner/Outer Banks February 8-11, 2018

Submitted by Julien McCarthy, Trip Leader

Participants: Ann Presnell, David Henry, Matt Wangerin, Julien McCarthy, Judith Pate, Stella & Tom Wear, Lisa & Chris Frandock, Jim Eldrett

The ten of us met a week ahead and agreed to assemble at Bojangles in Plymouth, NC on February 8, 2018. Once fueled up, we set out for the Pungo unit of Pocosin Lakes NWR where we arrived at about 1:30 p.m. Before we could even get to the entrance, we were amazed at the presence of several thousand Tundra Swans feeding in cut-over corn fields just off the road. On acre after acre there was only snow white. The ground was hidden by them. We stayed a good while watching and listening to the din of their unique and constant calls. Eventually at the edge of the fields two Black Bears emerged from the forest to claim a share of the corn.



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy, Tundra Swans



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy, Snow Geese

We progressed into the refuge where we found a good variety of waterfowl and songbirds in numbers. We arrived at Kuralt Overlook at Pungo Lake to discover tens of thousands of Snow Geese on the distant water's edge. They were flushed once, filling the sky. Hours had passed as we cruised the backroads and finally closed the long loop. As we approached the end, we could not believe our eyes; there were virtually clouds of Snow Geese pouring in from the sky, and as they



Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Snow Geese

called, the din was so loud that it inhibited our voices as we spoke out in awe. An Audubon official was there teaching a photography lesson. He remarked that Audubon had done an aerial survey the day before and estimated flocks at records of 84,000 Snow Geese and over 30,000 Tundra Swans. Eventually they were all on the ground not more that 20 yards away. It was a “biblical experience” for all of us. We headed out at sunset for Martelle’s Feed House restaurant and with full bellies retired into the Engelhard Hotel with glorious plans for the Outer Banks on Day Two.



Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Snow Geese

On Day Two, the first stop was at Bodie Island where we immediately found the much sought-after American Avocet, and from the overlook, many good, close looks at ducks. From there it was on to Oregon inlet where we pulled into the sport fishing dock and found shorebirds to count. Lisa Frandock had heard about a nesting Great Horned Owl which had taken over an Osprey's nest, and sure enough she located it upon the #13 channel marker. What a crazy place to nest! Will the fledglings make it to shore? Now it was time to head out for Pea Island



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy, Greater Scaup



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy, Blue-winged Teal

NWR. There we had a lunch break, and upon the advice of the famous Moore couple, walked out the dike separating North and South ponds where we found the American White Pelicans and Canvasbacks as well as many other duck species. There were fewer than expected due to departures during the freeze-over the week before. While there, we met a person who had seen a Snowy Owl at the jetty at Oregon Inlet, so we lit out for that location. Unfortunately, the rare owl had flown North and we could not find it. We did see the Horned Grebes though. From there it was on to Jeanette's Pier where we hoped for the Razorbills which have been reported regularly. We had planned late afternoon for that search as they would be flying to roost but as we arrived we were turned away because the pier closes at 5:00 p.m. in the winter. UGH!!!! Instead, we cruised through Alligator River NWR hoping for the Swainson's or Rough-legged Hawk, but to no avail. However, we spotted a fabulous Barred Owl perched close to the road and spent quite a while observing and photographing it at dusk: BINGO! On to Martelle's Feed House again for dinner and the warm hotel for the night.

On Saturday, we headed to Mattamuskeet NWR after breakfast from the hotel owner, Ursula. A Eurasian Wigeon and a Common (Eurasian) Teal had been reported there: our targets. We stopped at Lake Landing first to see more ducks and hope for an American Bittern known to hang out there. It turned out to be more of the same, but still we saw Bald Eagles swoop in over the impoundment and watched the waterfowl fly for their lives. The refuge gave up many woodpeckers including all but Red-headed and Hairy. As we went out towards the boardwalk at the end of the canal road, deer appeared so we stopped to watch them. Halfway out, the road was closed due to muddy conditions, so we turned around and walked the nature trail where we turned up four new birds, including the Marsh Wren. Over at the new blind on Route #94, we saw great numbers of American Wigeon but did not find the Eurasian. We took the back road, Fairfield Road, home and looked for songbirds while seeing many Tundra Swans in the vast fields. A pair of Red-shouldered Hawks showed up for the count and many thousands of Cowbirds, Red Wings, and Common Grackles rolled by.



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy, Red-winged Blackbirds

Sunday was departure day, and we decided to split up to cover various spots in the count area in hopes of improving the species count, and that we did. Ann found the Razorbills at Jeanette's Pier while Matt logged the Hairy Woodpecker, Eurasian Wigeon, and a wigeon phase known as "Storm Wigeon" at Mattamuskeet. Jude and I got Wilson's Snipe and Snowy Egrets at Stumpy Point while Lisa and Chris turned up a Pine Warbler and Wild Turkeys on the Pocosin Lakes NWR boardwalk in Columbia. Finally, Jim Eldrett got that difficult American Bittern.

We logged 103 species in 3.5 days; the most ever on this trip. We had a mighty good time together stalking the birds in their habitat, and we enjoyed the local people sharing their skills with us including some good food. We wore ourselves out too. We are satisfied with our experience and results. Y'all come with us next year.

Cheeeeeers & goooooo birding.

Bird List

Snow Goose	Greater Scaup	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Amer. Bittern	Amer. Avocet	Downy Woodpecker
Canada Goose	Bufflehead	Hairy Woodpecker
Gr. Blue Heron	Gr. Yellowlegs	North. Flicker
Tundra Swan	Hooded Merganser	Pileated Woodpecker
Great Egret	Willet	Eastern Phoebe
Gadwall	Common Merganser	Blue Jay
Snowy Egret	Sanderling	Amer. Crow
Eurasian Wigeon	Ruddy Duck	Fish Crow
Tri-colored Heron	Dunlin	Tree Swallow
"Storm Wigeon"	Red-breasted Merganser	Carolina Chickadee
White Ibis	Wilson's Snipe	Tufted Titmouse
Amer. Wigeon	Wild Turkey	Brown-headed Nuthatch
Black Vulture	Amer. Woodcock	Carolina Wren
Amer. Black Duck	Red-throated Loon	Marsh Wren
Turkey Vulture	Bonaparte's Gull	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Mallard	Common Loon	Eastern Bluebird
Bald Eagle	Ring-billed Gull	American Robin
Blue-winged Teal	Pied-bill Grebe	Gray Catbird
Northern Harrier	Herring Gull	North. Mockingbird
North. Shoveler	Horned Grebe	Brown Thrasher
Cooper's Hawk	Great Black-backed Gull	European Starling
North. Pintail	Northern Gannet	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Red-shouldered Hawk	Forster's Tern	Pine Warbler
Green-winged Teal	Amer. White Pelican	Common Yellowthroat
Red-tailed Hawk	Mourning Dove	Eastern Towhee
Canvasback	Brown Pelican	Savannah Sparrow
Amer. Kestrel	Gr. Horned Owl	Song Sparrow
Redhead	Dbl-crested Cormorant	White-throated Sparrow
Amer. Coot	Barred Owl	Northern Cardinal
Ring-neck Duck	Belted Kingfisher	Red-wing Blackbird
Killdeer	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Eastern Meadowlark

Common Grackle
Boat-tailed Grackle
Brown-headed Cowbird
House Finch

House Sparrow
Razorbill
Swamp Sparrow
Total = 103 species