

Impromptu Piedmont Bird Club Trip
Virginia's Eastern Shore and C.B.B.T.
January 28 -31, 2017

Prompted by the likely closure of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel (CBBT) to birding this coming fall, the PBC decided to take advantage of this unique opportunity while it was still available. Construction of a second tunnel is slated to begin in October and will lead to closure of the four man-made islands, only one of which is currently available to the public. This closure may last for the foreseeable future. Accordingly, an impromptu visit to bird the islands seemed a good idea.

Ten PBC members left Greensboro early on the morning of the 28th, arriving in Virginia Beach around noon. After a quick lunch, we birded nearby areas winding up at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) to watch a beautiful sunset. On the morning of the 29th we met our security detail on the CBBT and traveled north, stopping to bird the three northern islands that are closed to the public. The weather cooperated with temperatures in the 40s and only a moderately strong breeze. There was a nice variety of birds and an impressive assortment of naval and commercial ships passing through the CBBT's channels. (None of us felt the least bit sea-sick!) We then continued north and decided to try for a stake-out Bullock's Oriole that was coming to feeders not far from our planned route. Success! We all had wonderful looks at a handsome young male. He was a life bird for nearly everyone. After high-fives all around, we birded our way north and finally arrived at Saxis Wildlife Management Area (WMA) just south of the Maryland line. From there we proceeded to dinner and lodging in Chincoteague.

Monday the 20th dawned chilly and blustery with occasional snow showers. We spent the day birding "hot spots" close to Chincoteague and then moved next door to the Chincoteague NWR and Assateague Island National Seashore. We stopped at various times at such places as Swan Cove, Tom's Cove, the beach, and Snow Goose Pool. After taking a final lap around the Wildlife Drive, we headed south and reached our motel just north of the CBBT shortly after dark. On Tuesday, January 31 we birded some areas previously visited on Sunday as well as some other locations. We concluded the trip on Island #1 (open to the public) and then headed for home arriving back in Greensboro at dusk.

The trip list (see attached) included 113 species. As is always the case, some of our target birds played hooky and were not seen. (Where were you hiding Snowy Owl and Black-headed Gull?) Other birds decided to give us a break and included such beauties as: Lesser Black-backed Gull; Iceland Gull (seen by only two of us); American Bittern at point blank range; Long-tailed Ducks and both male and female Common Eiders; the aforementioned Bullock's Oriole; and superb looks at a male Eurasian Wigeon (close and in perfect light). At our last stop before heading home we added another Harbor Seal to the several already seen and two Hump-backed Whales, spouting as they headed east toward the open ocean. Hopefully there will be future opportunities to visit this magical place.

CBBT and Eastern Shore of Virginia
PBC Field Trip
1/28 – 1/31, 2017

Itinerary

Saturday 1/28/2017

Pleasure House Point Natural Area
Lynnhaven Inlet (briefly)
15th Street Fishing Pier, Virginia Beach (briefly)
Rudee Inlet – Lesser Black-backed Gull
Back Bay NWR – American Bittern

Sunday 1/29/2017

CBBT Island #2 – North Thimble Shoals
#3 – South Chesapeake
#4 – North Chesapeake
Chesapeake Bay Overlook
Church Neck Road - Bullock's Oriole Stakeout
Oyster
Willis Wharf
Gargatha Landing
Saxis Marsh WMA

Monday 1/30/2017

Mosquito Creek Overlook
Queen Ann's Landing
Chincoteague NWR Headquarters
Chincoteague NWR Beach Access Road
Swan Cove
Tom's Cove Visitors' Center
Assateague Island National Seashore
South Main Street

Tuesday 1/31/2017

Willis Wharf
Magotha Road
ESVANWR (briefly)
Chesapeake Bay Overlook
CBBT Island #1 – South Thimble Shoals

BIRDS

Red-throated Loon
Common Loon
Pied-billed Grebe – Single at Pleasure House Point Natural Area
Horned Grebe
Northern Gannet
American White Pelican
Brown Pelican – Single off Island #1

Double-crested Cormorant
American Bittern – Back Bay NWR
Great Blue Heron

Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Tricolored Heron – Two flying over Chincoteague Causeway
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Snow Goose
Canada Goose
Brant – Up close and personal along S. Main Street in Chincoteague
Mute Swan – One in Falls Lake during drive to Eastern Shore
Tundra Swan

Gadwall
Eurasian Wigeon – One male, up close and personal, in Swan Cove
American Wigeon
American Black Duck
Mallard – Many rather than the usual 0 to 1
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail – Beautiful drakes in Snow Goose Pool north of road
Green-winged Teal – Two, in the same spot as above
Canvasback – Eight, Back Bay NWR
Ring-necked Duck – One, Island #2

Lesser Scaup
Common Eider – Female Island #2, male Island #4
Surf Scoter
Black Scoter
Long-tailed Duck
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser – 1,000s
Ruddy Duck

Osprey – Only at Pleasure House Point
Bald Eagle – Common
Northern Harrier
Cooper's Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Rough-legged Hawk – One perched at dusk and at long range; Saxis Marsh; ID still being discussed
American Kestrel
Peregrine Falcon – Perched on lamp pole at southern end of Fisherman's Island
Wild Turkey

Clapper Rail – One heard a long way off. Where were the Clappers?

Black-bellied Plover

Semipalmated Plover

Killdeer

American Oystercatcher – Including one tagged bird

Greater Yellowlegs

Willet

Marbled Godwit – Willis Wharf the second time around

Ruddy Turnstone

Sanderling

Western Sandpiper

Purple Sandpiper – Small flock on Island #3; two on Island #1

Dunlin – Many

Short-billed Dowitcher

Wilson's Snipe – Snow Goose Pool and Magotha Road

Bonaparte's Gull

Ring-billed Gull

Herring Gull

Iceland Gull – an adult seen by Lynn and Phil on Island #1

Lesser Black-backed Gull – A single at Rudee Inlet. Thanks, Lou.

Great Black-backed Gull

Forster's Tern

Rock Pigeon

Mourning Dove

Eastern Screech-Owl – Saxis Marsh

Great Horned Owl – Refuge Inn motel

Belted Kingfisher

Red-headed Woodpecker – One, Oyster

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

Downy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker – Heard only

Pileated Woodpecker – Two flying over Rte. 600 near Magotha Road

Blue Jay

American Crow

Fish Crow

Tree Swallow – A few at Oyster

Carolina Chickadee

Tufted Titmouse

Red-breasted Nuthatch

Brown-headed Nuthatch – Chincoteague area

Carolina Wren

Marsh Wren

Golden-crowned Kinglet

Eastern Bluebird
American Robin
Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
Cedar Waxwing
Yellow-rumped Warbler – Many; one along Wildlife Drive with a distinctive yellow crown

Savannah Sparrow – One, Tom's Cove Visitors' Center; another at Pleasure House Point.
Song Sparrow
Swamp sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Northern Cardinal
Red-winged Blackbird
Common Grackle
Boat-tailed Grackle
House Finch

American Goldfinch
House Sparrow
BULLOCK'S ORIOLE – Handsome young male. Thank you, Ann!

MAMMALS

Delmarva Fox Squirrel
Red Fox
Raccoon
Muskrat
Opossum
White-tailed Deer
Harbor Seal
Hump-backed Whale – Two from Island #1

OTHER SIGHTINGS

US Navy Aircraft Carrier, sp.
Container Ships
Cargo Ships
US Navy Warship, sp.
Amy's Musksnipe
Etc.

