



Field Trip: NC A&T Farm Trek, March 6, 2021

submitted by Lynn Moseley and Matt Wangerin

One year ago, on March 7, 2020, the field trip to the NC A&T Farm was the last outing of the bird club before the COVID lockdown. So it was a pleasure to be able to return to this favorite site after a year of pandemic-related cancellations. Still, due to continuing precautions, the number of vehicles was limited. Nonetheless, sixteen eager participants from the Piedmont Bird Club and T. Gilbert Pearson Audubon Society, some carpooling with family members or vaccinated friends, gathered at the main entrance to the farm at 8:30 a.m.

We were fortunate to have perfect weather for early March—the sun was shining (a relief after so many days of rain in the previous month). The temperatures, which started in the mid-40s, rose to almost 60° by the end of the trip, and there was a slight breeze. While we gathered in the parking lot, we were greeted by a Rock Pigeon, European Starling, American Robin, House Finch, American Crows, and a distant calling Red-shouldered Hawk.



American Robin by Ann Van Sant



*European Starling
by Ann Van Sant*



*American Kestrel, female
by Ann Van Sant*

We then left the parking lot and walked between cattle fields to the pond at the end of the gravel road. As we walked down the road, we spotted an American Kestrel, one of our target birds. This bird, a female, remained in the area the entire time we were there. At the edge of the woods beyond the fields, we spotted a Red-tailed Hawk and a flock of Brown-headed Cowbirds. As we approached the pond, a pair of Wilson's Snipe were flushed and quickly darted behind a silo, eluding most of the group. The pond itself was a delight, with a Great Blue Heron awaiting us, as well as several species of waterfowl, including the ubiquitous Canada Geese, diving Buffleheads and Hooded Mergansers, numerous dabbling Northern Shovelers, and a pair of Green-winged Teal. An absolute delight for all, and a life bird for many, was an excellent look at another Wilson's Snipe. Most unusual for that species, this individual remained out in the open in a sunlit patch of mud near the pond, continuously probing for worms and other invertebrates with its 4"-long bill. Everyone had good views of the bird through the several spotting scopes that were on hand. Note photo for proof of our successful "Snipe Hunt." As we walked back to our cars, we saw and heard Killdeer and Eastern Meadowlarks. A surprise was the sight of a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks "caught in the act" on a branch of a tree.



Wilson's Snipe by Matt Wangerin

Next, we drove across McConnell Road to the demonstration gardens and fields. Here we were particularly on the lookout for one of our target birds, the American Pipit. Last year the pipits were a no-show, so we were really hoping for a few of the birds this time, as they would be lifers for many of the participants. Fortunately, we got lucky, and a flock of ~50 flew right across the road in front of Matt's truck. They landed at quite a distance from the road, but with scopes we could make out the plain, active little birds that occasionally spend a few weeks with us during the winter before returning to their alpine and tundra breeding grounds in the West and North. Although they're inconspicuous (plain, brown- and beige- streaked birds), it's such a treat to see them since they're uncommon and because

they have to make such a long trip to get here.

In the small grove of pines near the two upper ponds, we added to our list with a Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Warbler, and Red-winged Blackbirds. The larger pond yielded a pair of Gadwalls and a solitary Tree Swallow in flight.

We ended our morning at the pig farm (aka the Swine Unit). At the entrance to this section some of the group spotted a few Savannah Sparrows. The only bird around the ponds was a Great Blue Heron. A few Killdeer were in the plowed field. We picked up some woodland and edge species that were new for the day, such as Eastern Phoebe, Carolina Wren, Brown Thrasher, and Northern Cardinal. As we ended our trek, we checked the lagoons for sparrows, and found several Song Sparrows and a couple of Swamp Sparrows (favorites of the Moseley family!).

We concluded the trip just after 11:30 a.m. Altogether we counted 44 species for the day. Several of the group saw from four to a dozen life birds, and most of us had great looks at some unusual species. Once again, the NC A&T Farm proved to meet or exceed our expectations. The trip leaders thank everyone for their cooperation. It was a wonderful day.



Great Blue Heron by Ann Van Sant



Killdeer by Ann Van Sant



Song Sparrow by Ann Van Sant

Species List

83 Canada Goose	1 Red-tailed Hawk	12 Eastern Bluebird
22 Northern Shoveler	1 Red-bellied Woodpecker	55 American Robin
2 Gadwall	2 Northern Flicker	50 American Pipit
2 Green-winged Teal	1 American Kestrel	2 House Finch
8 Bufflehead	1 Eastern Phoebe	3 Savannah Sparrow
3 Hooded Merganser	3 Blue Jay	14 Song Sparrow
45 Rock Pigeon	15 American Crow	2 Swamp Sparrow
7 Mourning Dove	1 Fish Crow	1 Eastern Towhee
11 Killdeer	1 Carolina Chickadee	9 Eastern Meadowlark
3 Wilson's Snipe	1 Tree Swallow	21 Red-winged Blackbird
1 Ring-billed Gull	1 Brown-headed Nuthatch	11 Brown-headed Cowbird
2 Great Blue Heron	2 Carolina Wren	1 Pine Warbler
8 Black Vulture	38 European Starling	2 Northern Cardinal
9 Turkey Vulture	1 Brown Thrasher	1 House Sparrow
2 Red-shouldered Hawk	1 Northern Mockingbird	44 Total