

North Carolina Inner and Outer Banks Expedition February 7-10, 2019

Submitted by: Julian McCarthy, Trip Leader

PBC members Chris and Lisa Frandock, Ann Van Sant, Roberta Newton, Nancy Lee Adamson, Ann Steighner, Jude Pate, Julien McCarthy, and Ann Presnell joined ranks to survey the incredible bird population that inhabits coastal North Carolina during the winter months. While there are the typical indigenous birds in abundance, the over-wintering species are temporary as they come from northern areas to find food and warmer habitat before returning in March to breed and nest again in the North. Early February is the best month to go to the coast to see them because they are in the densest numbers and are gaining their gorgeous breeding plumage.



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy, Tundra Swans

First, thousands of Tundra Swans greeted us with their constant melodious utterance as they threaded their way through standing rows of corn, feeding on the drooping cobs near the entrance to Pocosin Lakes NWR. At a distance, tens of thousands of Red-winged Blackbirds performed fantastic murmurations as they flushed from the field whenever something frightened them. In a nearby pond, there were mixed flocks of ducks and swans at very close range for easy snapshots by Ann Van Sant. A sneaky Winter Wren posed atop a honeysuckle tangle for quite a time, so we got several photographs of it, too. On the way out at dusk, there were thousands of Mallards feeding in the corn field, which flushed in a roar as we passed by in the vehicles. (Chris's mighty Toyota Tundra did the trick on the sketchy back roads of this refuge).

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Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy, Winter Wren

On Friday, we left for the exciting Outer Banks to check out the birds at Jeannette's Pier, Bodie Island, Oregon Inlet, and Pea Island NWR. There were many species at Bodie Island where we got our first look at the White Ibis, and Jeanette's Pier provided several of us life birds: Razorbills and Dovekies. Lisa spotted a Great Horned Owl in its stolen Osprey's nest atop Channel Marker 13 at Oregon inlet, and we also turned up a



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy, Razorbill

Wilson's Snipe there. The new Bonner Bridge is spectacular, but we hope some of the old bridge will remain for recreational use.



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy, American Avocet

It was then on to North Pond where there were the American Avocets: WOW! The huge American White Pelicans and the cute little Wilson's Plovers were quite a contrast, and even in the bitter cold that day, we stood there gazing at many Dunlins, Sanderlings, and other shorebirds we could not identify. (We were wishing George Wheaton or Henry Link were with us.). A brief return to Jeanette's Pier gave good looks at all three scoters. We darted away for Alligator NWR in hopes of new birds and maybe a bear.



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy, White-winged Scoter

Alligator NWR not only was "bearless" but did not produce any new species. However, there were great numbers of ducks and swans to peruse. On the way back, we went to a "secret spot" to see the Bald Eagle aerie where the resident was sitting on the eggs and posed for snapshots. We wound up at "Bear with Us," Jude and Julien's cottage at Stumpy Point, for a dinner and easy views of waterfowl from the warmth of the house.



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy, Aerie

There was one more day to come, and due to wind and cold, we headed inland. Riding up Route 264, we spotted many flooded fields and impoundments full of ducks and swans, but the weirdly missing Snow Goose was still absent. The occasional Bald Eagle and close looks at herons and egrets were great fun.



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy, Black-crowned Night Heron

Arriving at the now dead Lake Mattamuskeet, Nancy intuitively went to a spot where she had found Black-crowned Night Herons, and lo and behold, there were three of them posing for pictures: YIPPEE! The wildlife drive gave us good looks at Blue-winged Teal and the others ducks we usually find.

A gross-looking nutria wobbled its way to the water in front of us. This invasive species has all but eliminated our native muskrat. A regal immature Bald Eagle flew into and perched on a close Bald Cypress tree providing really good photo opps. We headed to headquarters for lunch out of the wind and decided to go to Alligator NWR by way of Columbia.

Hoping for the recently reported Cinnamon Teal we turned onto River Road, but it was not to be. We did see the Lesser Yellowlegs though and other waterfowl there. Pressing on through the refuge, we stopped to watch the magnificent "Gray Ghost" (male Northern Harrier) effortlessly glide over the impoundment in search of prey. An early exit from the refuge to Stumpy Point provided us with a scrumptious meal at the annual oyster fest, from which we all left stuffed to the gills. After social time at "Bear with Us," we departed to sleeping quarters, where we crashed for the night.

Departure Sunday was blessed with fly-overs by the heretofore missing Snow Geese and a noisy Fish Crow at the Engelhard Hotel. Julien and Jude found a Peregrine Falcon in Alligator NWR to round out the list at a total of 116 species, a record for this trip. North Carolina provides spectacular birding at the coast in winter. If you have not been there to experience it, then you have a treat coming. GO!!



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy