

Piedmont Bird Club

An organization for lovers of wild birds in North Carolina's Piedmont

# Summary of Actvities January-May 2020



White Street Landfill Field Trip, Saturday, January 11, 2020

submitted by Lynn Moseley, Trip Leader with Matt Wangerin & Carolyn Allen



photo by Lee Capps

Twenty PBC members, new and old, braved a rainy forecast to bird this well-known Greensboro site. Thanks to member Carolyn Allen, our club receives special permission to bird the landfill, which is not open to the public for such purposes. Despite an occasional light drizzle and unseasonably warm temperatures, we found 32 species during our 2 ½ hour visit. This landfill, with its old trash mounds covered with soil and seeded with grasses, provides some extensive areas of meadows for birds that seek out those habitats. Small ponds on the property usually produce waterfowl and other wetland species.

On this day we were successful in finding a number of grassland specialties, such as Killdeer, Eastern Meadowlarks, Savannah Sparrows, and four American Kestrels, including a male and female that landed together on an electrical wire.

Only four native species of waterfowl were observed (Canada

Geese, Wood Ducks, Mallards, and Buffleheads), although a domestic Muscovy Duck was grazing on grass around the pond at the entrance.

A Wilson's Snipe, a favorite on any field trip, surprised us by bursting out of a soggy ditch near the top of one of the tall grassy mounds. The woods and forest edges produced woodpeckers, songbirds, two species of hawks and other usual suspects.



female (I) & male (r) Kestrels, by Ann Van Sant

Killdeer, by Lee Capps

PBC Activity Summary 2017-2018

Our bird club has birded the landfill in early January for many years, and we've encountered bitter cold temperatures, ice, wind, fog, and at least one snowstorm during those trips. As far as I know, we've never experienced temperatures in the mid-60's like we did this year.

#### Species List—32

Canada Goose 4 Wood Duck 4 Muscovy Duck (Domestic type) 1 Mallard 5 Bufflehead 7 Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) 32 Mourning Dove 7 Killdeer 4 Wilson's Snipe 1 Ring-billed Gull 30

- Great Blue Heron 1 Black Vulture 18 Turkey Vulture 14 Cooper's Hawk 1 Red-tailed Hawk 2 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 2 Red-bellied Woodpecker 2 Northern Flicker 3 American Kestrel 4 Blue Jay 5 American Crow 15 Fish Crow 32 Flyover, calling
- Carolina Chickadee 7 Carolina Wren 3 European Starling 10 American Robin 1 Cedar Waxwing 10 White-throated Sparrow 1 Savannah Sparrow 14 Song Sparrow 6 Eastern Meadowlark 28 Northern Cardinal 3



### Field Trip: Greensboro Lakes for Waterfowl, January 12, 2020

submitted by Dennis Burnette, photos by Dennis Burnette

On Sunday afternoon, January 12, we had what has become our annual field trip around the Greensboro lakes to look for over-wintering and migrant waterfowl. The outing was a joint activity with Piedmont Bird Club and T. Gilbert Pearson Audubon Society. It was led by Dennis Burnette, who is active in both groups.

A great turnout of 19 participants joined us to look for ducks, geese, coots, grebes, and other waterfowl. It was designed as a drive-and-stop field trip to visit as many lake and pond overlooks as possible.

We were surprised to see fishing boats in the water at our first stop next to Buffalo Lake. None of us recall ever seeing boating on the lake. There were several small flocks of ducks in the distance, but they kept on the move up and down the lake as they were disturbed by the boats.



Overlooking Buffalo Lake



Bog Garden boardwalk overlooking Benjamin Lake

We continued on our tour, stopping at overlooks on Lake Townsend, Lake Brandt, and Trosper Pond as well as marshes on Yanceyville Rd. and Plainfield Rd. We ended our trip overlooking the pond at the Bog Garden. Waterfowl were scarce everywhere we went, although we did end up with a short list of species plus Red-headed Woodpecker and other land birds.

It would have been nice to see more ducks, but it hardly mattered to most of us because the day was beautiful, with a sunny blue sky and unseasonably warm temperatures. (Any day out birding is a good day!) We speculated that many ducks are still much farther north because the mild winter has kept ice and snow from covering their food sources. There's no need to fly south if there's plenty to eat where they are.

This was a great field trip for beginners who wanted to learn more about identifying birds with a congenial group. We have other field trips coming up and hope folks of all birding levels will join us.



### Program: "Avian Brood Parasites: A Story of the Evolutionary Arms Race Between Brood Parasites and Their Hosts", January 16, 2020

Submitted by Lisa Frandock, Recording Secretary (edited from the January minutes)

Approximately 35 people attended the January meeting to hear our speaker for the evening, Dr. Lynn Moseley, with a program on "Brood Parasitism—Alternate Nesting Strategy". This was a fascinating program focusing on female birds that lay eggs in a host nest, leaving them with no nest and no parenting.

Two scenarios:

1. Facultative—some seasons they lay in their own nest and other times they deposit their eggs in a host nest. Examples: American Cuckoo and Wood Ducks.

2. Obligate—the species never build nests or raise their young. Examples: Brown-headed Cowbird and European Cuckoo. (Over 100 species in this category).

The Brown-headed Cowbird is a nomadic bird associated with livestock. The females may lay over 40 eggs per year and are known to have used over 200 species as hosts. The parasite bird benefits from laying over 40 eggs per year. They also spread their eggs over multiple hosts. They must watch nests to lay at the appropriate time to match the host. They have been known to lay eggs in 41 seconds, so as not to be detected. They can also in some cases match the eggs closely in appearance. Questions arise about how the parasite bird recognizes its species and learns their songs. Male cowbirds are hard-wired to produce their own songs and they will only mate with female cowbirds.

Diana Bowman gave the minigrant report. Four grants were awarded.

- 1. River Landing bird club (baffles for four nest boxes)
- 2. Dennis Burnette (create birding/pollinator garden)
- 3. Adams Farm Preschool (bird feeder and supplies)
- 4. Melanie Buckingham (birding opportunities for middle and high school students-Piedmont Young Birders)



### Field Trip: North Carolina Inner and Outer Banks Expedition, February 13-16, 2020

submitted by Julien McCarthy, Trip Leader (with Jude Pate) photos by Julien McCarthy



Chris & Lisa Frandock, Dan & Patty Dery, Tom & Stella Wear, Susie Hodnett, Nancy Lee Adamson, Jude Pate, Julien McCarthy, and Phil Khoury (photojournalist) met at 1:00 p.m. on 2/13/20 (a day of weather infamy) near the entrance to the Pungo Unit of Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). We rushed to the impoundments near Canal D Road and found them covered with Tundra Swans, Northern Shovelers, Gadwalls, Northern Pintails, and both Green-winged and Blue-winged Teals. Some of us had never seen this before and the awe for this moment was palpable. An approaching ferocious front was almost on us, but we forged ahead for the Charles Kuralt Overlook to spot Snow Geese. The bottom fell out! By the time we reached that spot, the roads were pure loam goo and we had to sit for 20+ minutes in our vehicles waiting for a break. It came. We climbed up and found a mat of swans right in front of us, but in the distance the water appeared as if snow had stuck to the surface. It was all Snow Geese—tens of thousands of them. They began to lift. They were headed out to feed and I knew exactly where. We jumped into the fleet and began the arduous feat of sloshing through the muck at 20 mph. (Do not slow down in this stuff or pay the price.) I could barely see out the window as the deluge had resumed, but in my rear view I could see waves of mud flying off the sides of the fleet. After a few miles of this we arrived at the feeding fields and found this record flock (Audubon data) falling like leaves onto the corn stubble and all cackling at the same time—what a din. Satisfied, we headed out for Martelle's Feed House and scarfed down a decent meal.

On Friday, we went up to Lake Mattamuskeet and had great looks at a myriad of expected duck species, found the repulsive nutria, saw a couple of deer feeding, and walked the trail at the terminus of Canal Road, where we discovered a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. We got most of the woodpeckers, a few sparrow species, and several raptors, including an adult Bald Eagle. A highlight was a group of five



Snow Geese

juvenile White Ibis close up. We toured headquarters and did lunch on the porch. Because of the degradation of the lake's food chain, this refuge "ain't what it used to be." We dawdled all the way back to Bear With Us, Jude's & my home at Stumpy Point, and along the way discovered a nice raft of Red-breasted Mergansers in the harbor at Engelhard. We visited the folks at the Hotel Engelhard and enjoyed a surprise of snacks prepared just for us. We proceeded to the cottage where we had a nice pasta meal and laid plans for Saturday.





Sandhill Cranes

Since the Outer Banks was laid down in 20 MPH wind, which ruins birding, we decided to return to Pocosin Lakes so that we could enjoy the clear and less windy weather there-a fateful decision indeed. As we took a diversion to Nebraska Road, we found good close looks and took pictures of Wilson's Snipe, Kestrels a-plenty, and a few other birds. On the way out the entrance road, a very close and graceful "grey ghost"male Northern Harrier—plied the air just over Canal D and stayed just in front of us for a long time. We walked over to the impoundments and gained a more intimate experience this time. At the end of this road we walked about 2 miles and spent time at a spot where we could creep up close to the bank of Pungo Lake and watch the swans and other birds quite near. We found canine tracks that were probably covote or red wolf, and bobcat prints as well. There was some scat and print evidence of bears, too. We had a much easier exit this time, and perusing the fields was more revealing without the rain. As I radioed to Chris, who was ahead a good way, he excitedly said, "I think we have Sandhill Cranes," I sped up!! Sure enough, there were seven adult cranes feeding about 100 vards out. We spent quite a time photographing them —WOW!!

Departing for the exit, I saw a dark spot way out a grassy road. Yep. Bear. It was a huge boar lumbering in our direction. Eventually a couple of deer popped out of the woods in front of him waving white tail warnings about his approach. There was even a Great Blue Heron close by. At about 50 yards out he turned into a ditch, swam over, and climbed into a corn patch: his dinner table. We were fulfilled. But it wasn't over yet. Running out Pat's Road, we found the biggest flock of Snow Geese I have ever seen. Great murmurations of them descended upon us, and the 100+ acres in front of us were covered with them. They were gorgeous in the pink sky of the setting sun. Their conversation was music to our ears and they were joined by thousands of Tundra Swans, a symphony indeed. On to a restaurant for dinner in Fairfield and then to plan a trip to the Outer Banks on Sunday with a perfect weather forecast.

Sunday was incredible. We headed to Jennette's Pier at Nags Head, and, with a nearly flat ocean, had great views of Common Eiders, Razorbills, Forster's Terns, Northern Gannets, various gulls, and other water birds. This destination is a must. From there it was on to Bodie Island, where the usual flocks of ducks were in abundance, but no great revelations. Unfortunatly the Great Horned Owl usually found by Lisa Frandock nesting on channel marker #13 at Oregon Inlet was absent. So now it was out to North Pond at Pea Island NWR, where a large flock of American Avocets waltzed in their feeding pattern just in front of the blind—perfect. And if that weren't enough, here came the White Pelicans—bingo.

It was a trip full of firsts and lots of birds to see and hear—a really close-up experience worth the effort, even on day one through the deluge and wind. In spite of the challenges, this trip was the best one yet that we have led for the PBC. Perhaps this report will encourage more folks to venture to the Inner and Outer Banks in early February to see this awesome reality series put on by the wild things there.



American Avocet



## Piedmont Young Birders Club Meeting, January 19, 2020

submitted by Dennis Burnette

The new Piedmont Young Birders Club met on Sunday, Jan. 19th, for their monthly outing. For this meeting the group convened at Lake Higgins Marina in Greensboro. This youth birding club is a joint project of Piedmont Bird Club and T. Gilbert Pearson Audubon Society and is guided by volunteers from those two groups.

The group was met in the marina classroom by Alma Stott, an environmental educator with Greensboro Parks & Recreation. Alma also is an artist. She showed the students how to sketch birds and encouraged them to start a nature journal. Each participant got their own nature journal to take with them and use in future meetings.

Following the classroom portion of the meeting, everyone went outside to do some birding around Lake Higgins. Ducks were scarce, but most of the group members saw American Coots, Double-crested Cormorants, a lone Pied-billed Grebe, several Great Blue Herons, and many Ring-billed Gulls.

We bring loaner binoculars and field guides each time for the students to use. In addition, thanks to several of the adult volunteers, we had three telescopes on hand for long range viewing. Most people were able to get close-up looks at the chalk-white bill and red eyes of a coot and the black ring around the bill of one of the gulls.

Thanks to adults Lynn Allison, Melanie Buckingham, Dennis Burnette, Megan Damico, Lynne Gray, Amy Hansen, Ann Steighner, Alma Stotts, Stella Wear, and Tom Wear for volunteering their time for this fun group.

There are no dues or other charges to be a member of the Piedmont Young Birders Club. We hope that parents, grandparents and other responsible adults will encourage Middle School and High School students in their lives to join in the fun activities of this new group.



### Piedmont Young Birders Club Meeting, February 16, 2020

submitted by Dennis Burnette photos by Dennis Burnette, except where noted

On sunday Afternoon, February 16, the Piedmont Young Birders Club held its monthly meeting, this time on the campus of Guilford College in Greensboro in the ornithology lab of the Frank Family Science Center. Eight students and three parents attended. Dr. Christine Stracey, a biologist and professor of ornithlogy at the college, was the host of the event.



Dr. Stracey (in green shirt) and an assistant laid out study specimens, bones, feathers, and eggs and explained how they help scientists understand the lives of birds in our area. Those who wanted were able to handle some of the specimens and look at feathers under a microscope.

Following the lab experience, the group went outdoors to watch birds around the campus. Members of the Piedmont Bird Club and the T. Gilbert Pearson Audubon Society, the two groups co-sponsoring the young birders group, accompanied them. We had binoculars and field guides on hand to lend to those who didn't bring their own.







photo by Lynn Allison



# Field Trip: A&T Farm, March 7, 2020

submitted by Roberta Newton, trip leader photos by Lynn Allison

Twenty adventuresome folk braved the crisp, yet sunny day to bird the various habitats at A&T Farm. In the parking lot, we were greeted by a Carolina Wren, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Eastern Bluebird. Our first stop was the pond and fields near the cattle barn. We encountered the usual flocks of Rock Pigeon, European Starling, and Canada Goose, but also saw Buffleheads, a Great Blue Heron, Eastern Meadowlarks, and several Killdeer. A newborn Black Angus was in the field.

The second stop was the pond and field by a greenhouse on the north side of McConnell Road. Circling Northern Shovelers were funneling the water to raise food from the bottom of the pond. This was a life species for many of the new birders. Canada Geese, Ring-billed Gulls, Ruddy Ducks, and several Eastern Meadowlarks were also spotted, along with a Northern Mockingbird. A tabby cat, part of the integrated pest management system (mouse catcher) for A&T Farm, was also present.





Northern Shovelers and Canada Geese



Killdeer

Although the number of species was a bit low, we set forth to another pond and farmland area in hopes of locating additional species. Fortunately, we were able to locate several Brown-headed Nuthatches, a Pine Warbler, and Red-winged Blackbirds in the pine trees. The ponds yielded Canada Geese and Ruddy Ducks. We attributed the low number of observed species to cool and windy conditions. However, our group was hopeful.

The last part of A&T Farm we visited was the Hog Unit. The drive to the parking area brought flocks of American Robin. By now the temperature was a little warmer and the thermals yielded many species including Turkey and Black Vulture, a Red-shouldered Hawk, three Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrel, and Merlin (confirmed by a photograph). The number of woodland birds was low, but we were able to hear a Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, the loud song of the Carolina Wren, and at last, several Cardinals and Sparrows (Song and White-throated). A short walk to the lagoons yielded several Song and Swamp Sparrows and the highlight of the trek—a Sora whose call was simultaneously confirmed by three birders.

Although we had a slow start, the total number of species was 38. The entire group enjoyed the trek and the new birders appreciated the sharing of birding identificationSpring Bird Count, May 2, 2020 *submitted by Elizabeth Link, Count Coordinator* 

#### **Species List**

Canada Goose Northern Shoveler Bufflehead Ruddy Duck Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) Mourning Dove Sora Killdeer Ring-billed Gull Great Blue Heron Black Vulture Turkey Vulture Red-shouldered Hawk Red-tailed Hawk Yellow-bellied Sapsucker Red-bellied Woodpecker Downy Woodpecker American Kestrel Merlin American Crow Fish Crow Carolina Chickadee Tufted Titmouse Brown-headed Nuthatch Carolina Wren European Starling Northern Mockingbird Eastern Bluebird American Robin White-throated Sparrow Swamp Sparrow Eastern Towhee Eastern Meadowlark Red-winged Blackbird Common Grackle Pine Warbler Northern Cardinal



# Spring Bird Count, May 2, 2020

submitted by Elizabeth Link, Count Coordinator

The Spring Bird Count was held in Greensboro on Saturday, May 2nd, 2020. The weather was perfect for a spring day, with a low of  $43^{\circ}$  and a high of  $74^{\circ}$ . Skies were partly cloudy, and the wind was light from the southwest, averaging 5 to 10 mph with occasional gusts to 15 mph. We really couldn't have asked for better weather.

Because of the quarantine and stay-at-home orders in place for the COVID-19 pandemic, our count teams were a bit different than usual. Back in April when I first asked for volunteers I wasn't sure if we were going to have much of a count at all. As it turned out, teams broke up and covered their territories in ones or twos, found a way to get around without piling into one car, a few birded in their neighborhoods, and altogether we ended up with 40 people counting, which is about average for us, and pretty good coverage of our count circle.

Our species count was 125, and the number of individual birds counted was 7435, both of which are right about average for our count circle. We had a combination of winter birds that are sometimes gone by the time we do the count, such as Greater Scaup, Hooded Merganser, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet; and late-arriving birds, such as Acadian Flycatcher and Mississippi Kite, that frequently haven't arrived by the time we do the count. (While we have sometimes gotten the Mississippi Kite on count week, this is only the second time they've actually appeared on the count.)

Oddities included a Red-necked Grebe, seen by Matt Wangarin on Lake Townsend. The bird had been spotted on the lake at various times for at least a couple of months, and was still hanging out on count day. Other species that we don't usually pick up included Forster's Tern, Caspian Tern seen on count week, a Philadelphia Vireo, which has only been seen on the count 3 previous times, spotted by Melanie Stadler's group, and Blue-winged Warbler.

The prize for most individuals of a single species goes to Lynn Moseley's group for the 209 Chimney Swifts, probably mostly picked up by Amy Hanson downtown. Second prize goes to Roberta Newton, Ann Van Sant, and Melissa Whitmire for their 108 Northern Cardinals. had thought that Cardinals were ubiquitous in my territory, but my count is nothing compared to theirs!

Results of the count are below. These results will be added to the historic results spreadsheet compiled by George Wheaton and posted on the PBC website. Many thanks to everyone who helped with the count—your efforts are appreciated more than ever!

Thanks to Nancy Adamson, Carolyn Allen, Frank Cashwell, Megan Damico, Scott DePue, Jim Eldrett, Lynne Gray, Chris Groh, Amy Hanson, Asha Khopkar, Elizabeth Link, Henry Link, Clarence Mattocks, Julien McCarthy, Shelley McDiarmid, Lynn Moseley, Roberta Newton, Lane Oldham, Judith Pait, Ann Presnell, Emily Reeve, Judy Roy, Danny Royster, Wallace Sills, Brian Stadler, Melanie Stadler, Ann Steighner, Linda Sumner, Paul Sumner, Emily Talbert, Andrew Thornton, Emily Tyler, Ann Van Sant, Anita Vigorito, Joe Vigorito, Ann Walter-Fromson, Matt Wangarin, Stella Wear, Tom Wear, and Melissa Whitmire.

Canada Goose	334
Wood Duck	26
American Black Duck	1
Mallard	98
Greater Scaup	CW
Red-breasted Merganser	5
Hooded Merganser	2
Wild Turkey	8
Red-necked Grebe	1
Rock Pigeon	29
Mourning Dove	175
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	5
Chimney Swift	335
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	14
Killdeer	14
Semipalmated Sandpiper	2
Spotted Sandpiper	31
Solitary Sandpiper	27
Greater Yellowlegs	6
Lesser Yellowlegs	7
Ring-billed Gull	1
Caspian Tern	CW
Forster's Tern	4
Common Loon	1
Double-crested Cormorant	104
Great Blue Heron	221
Green Heron	8
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	1
Black Vulture	116
Turkey Vulture	79
Osprey	12
Mississippi Kite	1
Bald Eagle	6
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1
Cooper's Hawk	7
Red-shouldered Hawk	52
Red-tailed Hawk	20
Great Horned Owl	1
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Barred Owl	5
Belted Kingfisher	10
Red-headed Woodpecker	16
Red-bellied Woodpecker	116
Downy Woodpecker	47
Hairy Woodpecker	7
Northern Flicker	22
Pileated Woodpecker	15
American Kestrel	1
Eastern Wood-Pewee	1
Acadian Flycatcher	12
Eastern Phoebe	37
Great Crested Flycatcher	56
Eastern Kingbird	54
White-eyed Vireo	25
Yellow-throated Vireo	5
Blue-headed Vireo	2
Philadelphia Vireo	1
Red-eyed Vireo	133
Blue Jay	166
American Crow	278
Fish Crow	57
Common Raven	1
Purple Martin	105
Tree Swallow	95
North. Rough-winged Swallow	59
Cliff Swallow	36
Barn Swallow	128
Carolina Chickadee	159
Tufted Titmouse	155
White-breasted Nuthatch	49
Brown-headed Nuthatch	48
House Wren	30
Carolina Wren	247
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	80
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	23
Eastern Bluebird	202
Veery	7

Gray-cheeked Thrush	2	Black-throated Blue Warbler	43
Swainson's Thrush	6	Pine Warbler	39
Hermit Thrush	1	Yellow-rumped Warbler	105
Wood Thrush	31	Prairie Warbler	13
American Robin	260	Canada Warbler	1
Gray Catbird	127	Yellow-breasted Chat	12
Brown Thrasher	56	Eastern Towhee	119
Northern Mockingbird	166	Chipping Sparrow	78
European Starling	182	Field Sparrow	20
Cedar Waxwing	161	Savannah Sparrow	2
House Sparrow	60	Grasshopper Sparrow	3
House Finch	140	Song Sparrow	82
American Goldfinch	116	White-throated Sparrow	41
Ovenbird	40	Swamp Sparrow	1
Worm-eating Warbler	1	Summer Tanager	14
Louisiana Waterthrush	2	Scarlet Tanager	37
Northern Waterthrush	2	Northern Cardinal	439
Blue-winged Warbler	2	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	9
Black-and-white Warbler	26	Blue Grosbeak	21
Prothonotary Warbler	3	Indigo Bunting	82
Common Yellowthroat	50	Bobolink	103
Hooded Warbler	3	Red-winged Blackbird	56
American Redstart	26	Eastern Meadowlark	28
Northern Parula	86	Common Grackle	190
Bay-breasted Warbler	2	Brown-headed Cowbird	57
Yellow Warbler	7	Orchard Oriole	25
Chestnut-sided Warbler	5	Baltimore Oriole	7

#### **Covid-19 Cancellations**

The following scheduled activities were all cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

2/20/20 Program: "Birds and Marine Life in Antarctica" (with TGPAS)

- 3/19/20 Program: "Why Birds? The Importance of Birds in Conservation"
- 3/21/20 Event: Work day at the Pollinator Garden
- 3/22/20 Activity: Piedmont Young Birders March meeting
- 4/4/20 Event: Cleanup at Price Park & Highwoods Trail
- 4/16/20 Program: "Utilizing Modern Tools for Birdwatching"
- 4/19/20 Activity: Piedmont Young Birders April Meeting
- 4/25/20 Field Trip: Randolph County Preserve
- 5/8-5/9/20 Field Trip: Warbler Road—Virginia's Blue Ridge Parkway
- 5/16/20 Field Trip: The Summit at Haw River State Park
- 5/16/20 Social Activity: Spring Picnic
- 5/17/20 Field Trip: Mayo River State Park and Deshazo Road
- 5/17/20 Activity: Piedmont Young Birders May Meeting
- 5/23/20 Activity: Work day at Pollinator Garden