

# Thanksgiving Trip to the Outer Banks

## November 24-28, 2016

*Submitted by Emily Tyler, Trip Leader*

*Sites Visited: Pea Island, Bodie Island, Alligator River NWR, Jennette's Pier at Nags Head, Lake Mattamuskeet NWR*

*Participants: Diana Bowman and Mike Howard, Julien McCarthy and Jude Pate, Lyn McCoy, Anne Presnell, Jim Strickland, Emily Tyler, and Stella and Tom Wear*

Ten PBC Birders headed to the Outer Banks on November 23 for three and a half days of birding at one of the most beautiful and productive wildlife areas in N.C., if not the whole East Coast. We met for dinner that evening to enjoy a meal together and to refine the plans for the following days.



*Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy*

The number of species recorded by the group this year was 100 with 3 additional species seen after the group split up to head back home on Sunday. These numbers fall within the normal range for this late fall trip in the past decade.

Thanksgiving Day was spent at Lake Mattamuskeet and surrounding areas. Despite a brief shower that morning, as well as early on Saturday, we were fortunate to have good weather for most of the trip, not too hot, too cold or too windy.



*Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy*

We spent Friday at Pea Island, South Pond, Oregon Inlet, Bodie Island and Jennette's Pier. We started at the Pea Island Visitor's Center, joining the field trip held every Friday for the public. This walk covers a portion of the dikes surrounding North Pond as well as the oceanfront for those willing to climb over the nearby dune. John Wright led the trip again this year. We joined him in helping the novices get a better view of distant birds through our scopes. We

followed John to South Pond afterwards to see American Avocets and other birds not seen earlier. Next, John offered to accompany us to Oregon Inlet where we hoped to see a Great Cormorant and Purple Sandpiper which would be life birds for some in our group. Indeed, he led us right to them! For at least one of us, climbing the boulders to get to the end of the jetty to find the sandpiper proved quite challenging!

Our next stop was Bodie Island. Although we saw no new ducks on the water from the observation platform there, several good additions to our list were spotted in the pine woods off from the parking lot, including Red-breasted and Brown-headed Nuthatches,

Yellow-rumped Warblers, a Pine Warbler, and a very cooperative Merlin perched on a snag giving us a great look.



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy

To wrap up a great day of birding we went to Jennette's Pier in Nags Head where we saw Surf and Black Scoters, a Common Loon, and Northern Gannets, as well as a skate pulled from the ocean by a fisherman sharing our space at the end of the pier.

On Saturday we spent several hours at Alligator River NWR which was disappointing as far as ducks on the impoundments, which numbered far less than previous trips. However, we took a nice walk on a boardwalk at the end of Buffalo City Road which led through a wetland area where we picked up some new species. Later Saturday afternoon some went to Nags Head Woods and others to Elizabethan Gardens to end the day. A Hermit Thrush was added to the species list.

I am grateful to the participants who shared favorite sightings or memories of the 2016 trip. Below are their contributions:

Diana Bowman:

I've come to value my friendships in the PBC more and more, and to have the opportunity to share what we love to do, as much as get to know one another a little better during the times when we weren't birding made for a rich weekend.

One of my favorite experiences was the quest for the Purple Sandpiper. Not only was that a life bird for me, but it was fun to walk out to the jetty where we were told the sandpiper would be and to actually find it! So much of this trip was about the "journey," as much as the "destination."

Another exciting experience was to sneak up on a Clapper Rail that put on a show for us at the edge of a marsh at Oregon Inlet. It's so rare to see these birds except for a quick glimpse as they scurry into the reeds. This particular bird allowed us to watch for about three minutes as he/she fed along the bank.

There is nothing as beautifully haunting as the whistling of the Tundra Swans that we heard by the thousands at Lake Mattamuskeet. No matter how many times I've heard them, it's always a treasured experience.

What's not to love about loons and grebes and other divers with their "now you see them, now you don't" behaviors! They kept us guessing about where they would turn up next.

Every now and then you come to the right tree at the right time, and all you have to do is to hold your binoculars steady while the birds come to you. This was the case along a



Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy

woodland edge we visited at Lake Landing. In this one spot, we saw both kinglets, an Eastern Phoebe, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Blue-headed Vireo, Pine Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, and Red-winged Blackbird. All within a few minutes!

Anne Presnell:

I enjoyed the trip very much, as usual. We were lucky to have John Wright willing to spend time with us and show us some good places we wouldn't otherwise have found. Here's what I enjoyed the most, probably the same as others:

- Clapper Rail seen up close at Oregon Inlet
- Northern Gannets and Black Scoters seen from Jennette's Pier
- Marsh Wren at Mattamuskeet
- Spotting nuthatches, kinglets, and warblers, which were very active at times
- Going to some different places around Lake Mattamuskeet



*Photo Credit: Julien McCarthy*

Julien McCarthy:

As the group broke up to leave for home on Sunday, Jude and I decided to revisit Lake Landing, a new venue for us at Lake Mattamuskeet. While walking a dike for the first time, we were surprised as an American Bittern flushed right beside us and quickly descended with a crunching sound into a nearby stand of tall rushes.

Eventually, as a mature Bald Eagle flew low overhead, thousands of Snow Geese of both races flushed all at once with a roar, and in the distance, huge numbers of the expected species of over-wintering ducks could be seen.

What better way to spend the last day of the traditional PBC Thanksgiving trip?

### Thanksgiving Trip 2016 Bird List (Final)

Outer Banks (Pea Island, Bodie Island, Alligator River NWRs)  
 Jeannette's Pier at Nags Head, Lake Mattamuskeet NWR

November 24 – 28, 2016

Snow Goose		Northern Harrier		American Crow
Canada Goose		Sharp-shinned Hawk		Fish Crow
Tundra Swan		Cooper's Hawk		Tree Swallow
Gadwall		Red-tailed Hawk		70
Eurasion Wigeon		American Kestrel		Carolina Chickadee
American Wigeon		Merlin		Red-breasted Nuthatch
American Black Duck		40		Brown-headed Nuthatch

Mallard		Clapper Rail		Marsh Wren
Northern Shoveler		American Coot		Carolina Wren
Northern Pintail		American Avocet		Golden-crowned Kinglet
10		American Oystercatcher		Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Green-winged Teal		Black-bellied Plover		Eastern Bluebird
Redhead		Killdeer		Hermit Thrush
Ring-necked Duck		Greater Yellowlegs		American Robin
Surf Scoter		Willet		80
Black Scoter		Ruddy Turnstone		Gray Catbird
Bufflehead		Sanderling		Northern Mockingbird
Hooded Merganser		50		European Starling
Ruddy Duck		Purple Sandpiper		Orange-crowned Warbler
Common Loon		Bonaparte's Gull		Common Yellowthroat
Pied-billed Grebe		Laughing Gull		Palm Warbler
20		Ring-billed Gull		Pine Warbler
Northern Gannet		Herring Gull		Yellow-rumped Warbler
Double-crested Cormorant		Lesser Black-backed Gull		Eastern Towhee
Great Cormorant		Great Black-backed Gull		Savannah Sparrow
American White Pelican		Rock Pigeon		90
Brown Pelican		Mourning Dove		Song Sparrow
American Bittern		Hummingbird sp		Swamp Sparrow
Great Blue Heron		60		White-throated Sparrow
Great Egret		Belted Kingfisher		Dark-eyed Junco
Snowy Egret		Red-bellied Woodpecker		Northern Cardinal
Cattle Egret		Yellow-bellied Sapsucker		Red-winged Blackbird
30		Downy Woodpecker		Eastern Meadowlark
White Ibis		Northern Flicker		Common Grackle
Turkey Vulture		Pileated Woodpecker		Boat-tailed Grackle
Osprey		Blue-headed Vireo		American Goldfinch
Bald Eagle		Eastern Phoebe		(100)

Total Species, Group list, 2016: : 100

2016 Alternate List of birds seen November 28 by individuals outside designated trip area when driving home (3 new species)

Julien and Jude saw Wood Ducks and a Greater Scaup at Pocosin Lakes NWR

They also saw a sow bear with two cubs

Tom and Stella Ware saw a Barred Owl near Corolla, Northern Banks

Total species from both lists: 103