



CBC Newsletter

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Ornithological Society of the Carolinas*

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CBC Winter Meeting: back to the Outer Banks!

Thursday through Sunday, January 12-15, 2023—put it on your calendar now!!

by Susan Campbell

Plans are well underway for the winter weekend at one of our most popular meeting locales: the North Carolina Outer Banks! As many of you are aware, last year's winter meeting had to be cancelled at the last minute due to the resurgence of Covid-19. A huge amount of planning went into the weekend by Les Coble, the CBC Board and a number of volunteers. So, we are pleased to announce that, in homage to all of that work, we plan to offer much of the programming, trips and activities that participants would have enjoyed back in January. We hope to add one or two additional trip experiences this year as well.



Great Skua, a species sometimes observed on winter pelagic trips off the North Carolina coast. Photo by K. Sutherland.

The Outer Banks is not only a destination that produces incredible bird diversity of birds in the winter months but hosts an astounding abundance of feathered fauna. We expect to tally well over 150 species during the weekend. And it is not impossible that nearby impoundments will be holding tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of waterfowl and an impressive array of waterbirds. Participants can expect to see everything from hawks to hummingbirds in drier areas. On this stretch of the North Carolina coast, we will have the opportunity to visit not only National Park and US Fish and Wildlife Service refuges but State Park and private lands as well. This part of the state is blessed with a large number of protected acres that provide excellent habitat for a wide variety of wintering birds. Also, we are very fortunate to have trip leaders involved with this meeting who are not simply experienced birders, they are some of the

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Merlin. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

most knowledgeable guides in the area-- being extremely familiar with the locations where they will be leading.

Our host hotel will be the Comfort Inn on the Ocean (1601 Virginia Dare Trail, Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948). They have blocked out a variety of 90 rooms for us at extremely reasonable prices. They include nine Dune Rooms and 32 Oceanfront Rooms (both \$79 a night) as well as 49 Street side Rooms (\$54 a night) for Thursday through Saturday nights at these special group rates. These are a combination of rooms with a king or queen bed or two double beds: based on availability-- and on a "first come, first served" basis. As always, you simply will need to identify yourself as a club member. Also be aware that these rates are subject to the local 12.75% room tax. ** IMPORTANT NOTE: if you are thinking about attending the meeting, you will want to make reservations soon! Our cut-off date to book these special rooms is currently December 12, 2022 at midnight.

As is the custom we will have Friday and Saturday evening speakers as well as a banquet at the hotel on Saturday evening. On Friday evening John Gerwin, Bird Collections Manager from the NC Museum of Natural

Sciences, will present a program about some of the more interesting bird species distributions in North Carolina. Saturday evening's presentation will take us much further afield during Steve Shultz's Galapagos talk. There will be other low-key evening activities on the schedule and will be plenty of time for socializing.

In addition to half and all-day field trips in and around the coast, there will be (weather permitting) a pelagic trip aboard the Stormy Petrel II. Brian Patteson will lead the trip on Friday, with Saturday as the backup day in case weather is a factor Friday. Brian has been leading these trips for years and is very well known for serendipity birds on all his seasonal routes. Sign up early for this trip as Brian will offer it to the general public in December. The cost will be \$210 per person. Please register via the Sign-Up form on his website - <https://patteson.com/sign-up/> - and note in the comments section that you are registering for the CBC trip. The departure point will be Hatteras or Wanchese depending on weather conditions and recent sightings. The departure location will



Tundra Swan. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

be announced and communicated to those registered with CBC the week of the meeting. On this winter trip you may see Northern Fulmar, Manx Shearwater, Red Phalarope, Great Skua, Black-legged Kittiwake, Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill and Dovekie among others. This time of year, the Northern Gannets put on quite a show when on a school of fish and are frequently close at hand for the chum provided, making excellent photo opportunities.

You will need to send your payment, by check, directly to Brian Patteson, P. O. Box 772, Hatteras, NC 27943. Please note your payment does not include tips for the crew, which is customary on these trips. You will need to have cash on hand for that. More information about Brian's trips and preparation for your day are online at www.patteson.com. Brian can be reached at 252-986-1363 or by email at cahow1101@gmail.com.

{*IMPORTANT: meeting registration will open on December 3rd at 2PM and close January 1st at noon.} Details on field trips and registration as well as other special aspects of the meeting will be forthcoming in the December newsletter. So, stay tuned!

Online Elections for New Officers to the Executive Committee

By Cathy Miller, SC VP for the Carolina Bird Club

As a member of the Nominating Committee for the Executive Committee, I have the pleasure of announcing our slate of candidates running for open positions on the Executive Committee. These positions need to be filled immediately as the current officers have served past their Spring expiration date. We are still making adjustments in officers' terms due to Covid. We were going to do this election during our Fall meeting in Litchfield Beach, SC that we unfortunately had to cancel. We hope to be back on track with terms by Spring 2023.

Our slate of candidates are:

Katie Greenberg for Western NC Vice-President

Paul Laurent for Western NC Member-at-large

Julie Davis for SC Member-at-large

We still have an office open, Eastern NC Member-at-large for which we do not have a candidate. If you would like to nominate someone or yourself, please contact me as soon as possible. You can reach me at mmemiller.cathy@gmail.com

You will receive instructions via email from Kent Fiala, our web editor, about nominations and the upcoming online vote.



CBC Outer Banks Trip - December 3 - 4, 2022

By Steve Shultz

Widely considered at the top of the list for early winter birding sites in North Carolina, the Outer Banks of Dare County are home to thousands of wintering swans, ducks, geese, shorebirds, waders, gulls, and more. Join members of the Carolina Bird Club as we explore the Bodie Island lighthouse area, Oregon Inlet, Pea Island NWR, the ocean beaches of Hatteras and Bodie Islands and other “hotspots”.

The trip will focus on waterfowl and shorebird identification as well as building a broad trip list including everything from grebes to sparrows. The trip starts Saturday, December 3, at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot the south end of the new Basnight Bridge over Oregon Inlet. Saturday will be devoted to birding along the immediate coast. Sunday will include a stop at Alligator River NWR and potentially Mattamuskeet NWR.

Detailed information including directions, lodging choices, dining opportunities and more will be provided to registrants. Birds that you can expect to see include loons, numbers of Tundra Swans and Snow Geese, most of the dabbling ducks that winter in eastern North Carolina, chances to see sea ducks including all three American scoters, gulls, wintering passerines, and winter shorebirds including American Avocet and possibly Purple Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher and Piping Plover. Alligator River NWR may provide an opportunity to see Black Bear, raptors, shorebirds (if water levels are right) and numbers of Tundra Swan and waterfowl.

Logistics: The fee for this field trip is \$60 and advance registration is required. Participation is limited to 12. Participants are responsible for lodging and meals. A number of motels, hotels, and other lodging are available in Nags Head north through Kitty Hawk. We will attempt to carpool in order to reduce the number of vehicles caravanning to the birding sites. Spotting scopes are useful if you have one. Dress for the weather and in layers. If we are enjoying a warm early winter, mosquito repellent may be useful. Lunch on Saturday will likely either be at a seafood restaurant or Subway. If you prefer, bring a bag lunch. A variety of restaurants are open for Saturday dinner.

To register for this field trip contact Steve Shultz sshultz@nc.rr.com or (919) 629-7226. Upon confirmation of your slot on the trip you will be sent a registration form/waiver that can be submitted with your trip fee. Note that there is a modest fee to walk out on Jennette’s Pier.



Field Marks and Field Anomalies: What to do when the bird doesn't match the picture

By Steve Dowlan

In the beginning, we look at birds in the field and hope that they are all dead ringers for the paintings or photos in our field guide of choice. When I say beginning, I mean when we begin our pursuit of the pastime known as "birding." The vast majority of the birds we see in the field or at our feeders neatly match the pictures, and we are happy to apply a label with confidence. As experience accumulates, difficult identification pairs, trios, or even genera present themselves. With time and practice, we learn to separate the most common confusing pairs that we see in our back yards: House Finch and Purple Finch, Cooper's Hawk and Sharp-shinned Hawk, Downy Woodpecker and Hairy Woodpecker, and if you live in the Northeast, Chipping Sparrow and American Tree Sparrow when their paths cross in migration.



Aberrant (above) and normal Cassin's Finches, Cabin Lake Bird Blind, Lake County, Oregon. Photos by S. Dowlan

If we live near an ocean or other large body of water, we move on to other problematic pairs and genera such as Greater and Lesser Scaup, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Arctic, Common and Forster's Tern, and winter-plumage loons. Many developing birders who live near or visit areas where multiple species of gulls congregate try their best to ignore them... the task seems simply overwhelming unless the bird is an adult gull in breeding plumage. Small sandpipers often appear to be equally overwhelming.

Still, the struggles we undertake do not represent insurmountable obstacles, for the most part. With practice and exposure, we gain an understanding of age-related and seasonal plumage differences that are the result of molt, seasonal occurrence patterns, behavior, and habitat associations, all of which contribute to affirmative identification of those tricky species. But what happens when we have applied all of the wisdom we have accumulated to a clear and lengthy look at a bird in good light with adequate optical assistance... and it still does not quite add up?

Sometimes, the bird is the right size, is in the right habitat, appears in the right season, and displays all the right field marks... except one or two. I once observed a finch near Fort Rock in central Oregon that displayed very broad white wing bars. Because of the wing bars, this bird looked like an adult female Lark Bunting, which I had seen for the first and only time just a week

before on the Oregon Coast. This is a very rare bird in Oregon. It was drinking from a made-made dripper in front of a very well-known photography blind in a ponderosa pine forest, where Cassin's Finch is common. Cassin's Finches were swarming by the dozens around this blind at the time.

The facial markings were not bold enough for Lark Bunting, and Cassin's Finch normally has no wing bars. This was my dilemma... I tried very hard to make my finch into a Lark Bunting, but in the final analysis, an aberrant Cassin's Finch among dozens of others is much more likely than an aberrant Lark Bunting all by itself... perhaps in the entire state of Oregon! I talked myself off the ledge and labeled my photo "Cassin's Finch." When I look at the photos now, I see an "aberrant" or abnormally plumaged Cassin's Finch. Quite simply, it happens, and we all need to be aware of the phenomenon.

When a bird in your binoculars is the right size and shape for a common species that you are familiar with, or a species you are seeing for the first time but the color or pattern is not right, an absence or over-abundance of one or more pigments is probably the cause. When a bird does not produce melanin at a normal level or in a normal pattern, the resulting color patterns are referred to as being *albino* (white), *leucistic* (patches of pure white), or with *dilute plumage*. If a bird produces too much melanin, it is referred to as *melanistic*. An unusual color pattern can be the result of injury, poor nutrition, or a genetic mutation. Sometimes aberrant plumage is simply the result of sun bleached or extremely worn feathers, high air pollution in the case of unusually dark plumage, or even the result of berries that stain plumage red or purple.

Aberrant plumage can confound experienced observers. I once had a friend who asked me for help in identifying an odd bird in his yard. The man was familiar with all of the common birds on his property. He described the bird as looking like a white American Robin...same size and general shape as a robin. I suggested to him that his mystery bird was in fact most likely an albino or leucistic American Robin, but he dismissed this suggestion by saying "I know what a robin looks like and this is not a robin. Several weeks passed, and when I saw him again, he said "Well, you were right. It was a white robin." He had studied the bird and convinced himself.

Albinism is a recessive genetic characteristic that is generally quite rare in animal populations. It has been estimated that only 0.5% to 1.0% of all birds display any sign of albinism, partial or complete. Both parents have to carry the uncommon recessive genes that produce rare pure white offspring. A true albino bird typically has pink or red feet, legs, bill, and its eyes are pale. Birds that display pied or piebald leucistic feathers are rarely in a symmetrical pattern. Some birds with leucism have white feathers where dark-pigmented feathers would normally be while still maintaining the bright colors of their red, orange, or yellow feathers. Because many birds use plumage color as a way to find and recognize potential mates, individuals with discoloration may struggle during courtship.

To further confound our mission to identify every bird we see with confidence, even the hard parts of a bird may not neatly match the picture in our field guides. Bill deformities, also known as Avian Keratin Disorder may alter the appearance of a familiar species and cause an observer to wander off the beaten path in search of an alternate identification. From 2000 through 2006 Project FeederWatch collected 215 reports of bill deformities, representing 38 species from 38 states and provinces.

We all strive to identify every bird we see with a reasonable degree of certainty. Unfortunately for us as birders, the birds don't cooperate to achieve our mission. Field guides cannot possibly display all of the possible aberrations, deformities and worn and broken parts that modify the appearance of a bird. Recognition of aberrant field marks is an important tool in the field identification toolbox. Sometimes a robin, however odd it appears to be, is still just a robin!

Welcome New CBC Members!

New Life Members

Pat Martin & Brad Turley, Chesterfield, SC

Upgrade to Life Membership

Timothy Campbell, Shelby, NC

Jared & Heather Miles, Charlotte, NC

Laura Voight
Hilton Head Island, SC

Roper Halverson
Winston Salem, NC

Chuck Boyce
Mount Pleasant, SC

Susan Arrington Boyd
Beaufort, NC

Cindy and Jeff Lightsey
Irmo,
SC

Brooke Mahany
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John Long
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Cecelia King
Mebane, NC

Ronald Hill
Charlotte, NC

Isaac Brace
Hanahan, SC

Mokozi Rivers - Youth
Chapel Hill, NC

Isse Rivers - Youth
Chapel Hill, NC

Christian, Terrie & Gabe Thoma
Jamestown, NC

Elliot Vittes
Columbia, SC

Alan Hendrick
Travelers Rest, SC

James Moore
Neeses, SC

Alice Tenney
St. Petersburg, FL

Blair Thomas
Mebane, NC

Linda Patchett
Chapel Hill, NC

Arul Nandhi Balasubramanian
Charlotte, NC

Thomas & Betty Bouldin
Chapel Hill, NC

Susan Walker
Black Mountain, NC





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Upcoming CBC Meetings

Outer Banks Trip - January 12 - 15, 2023
Boone/Blowing Rock - Spring 2023

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Cost for CBC bird checklists, including postage: 10@\$5.45, 25@\$13.40, 50@\$27.00, and 100@\$54.00.

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