



CBC Newsletter

ISSN No. 0162-7120

*For members of the Carolina Bird Club, Inc.,
Ornithological Society of the Carolinas*

Volume 68

Issue 1

February 2022

CAROLINA BIRD CLUB SPRING MEETING – MAY 5 - 7

Carolina Bird Club is planning our spring meeting for the weekend of May 5-7 in Asheville N.C. As is typical, the spring meeting will consist of field trips in the Asheville and Western North Carolina area, along with a slate of speakers on engaging topics on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Because of Covid, the speakers will present virtually via Zoom, so bring your electronics to tune in. More field trip information will follow in the April newsletter, along with online registration information. Attendees are urged to make their own hotel reservations soon, since accommodations do book up quickly in the area during this season.

Field trips will depart outward from Asheville in all directions, so most lodgings in or close to Asheville should allow reasonable access to starting points. Note that if you use a site like TripAdvisor, you can easily specify a hotel with a kitchenette - useful for making your lunches for all day field trips. Meals will be on your own, but the Asheville area is famous for its many wonderful restaurants.

We are working on a contract with the Crowne Plaza Resort in Asheville, check the CBC website for updates



CBC Research, educational and conservation grants are available through the Carolina Bird Club. For additional information visit www.carolinabirdclub.org.

CBC Newsletter (USPS# 023-534), February 2022, Volume 68, Number 1 Published bimonthly by the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., 9 Quincy Place, Pinehurst, NC 28374. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *CBC Newsletter*, Carolina Bird Club, Inc., 9 Quincy Place, Pinehurst, NC 28374.

Finding Out About and Locating Rare and Unusual Birds!

By Craig Watson

A few years ago I wrote an article about reporting and finding rare and unusual birds in the Carolinas or anywhere you might be travelling (February 2020 Newsletter - [2020-v66n1-February.pdf](#) (carolinabirdclub.org). There has been a lot of activity in both Carolinas the past few years with rare and unusual sightings, including Bar-tailed Godwit, Slaty-backed Gull, and Townsend's Solitaire in South Carolina, and Varied Thrush, White-winged Tern, and Painted Redstart in North Carolina. The tools listed here certainly, and in some cases, greatly assisted birders in locating some of these birds. Here is a quick refresher on some of the more useful and widely used tools available to birders in the Carolinas.

eBird – eBird email alerts have become a popular method for receiving rare eBird data output for a given region, whether it be county, state, ABA area, etc. One can subscribe to these outputs daily, but by far the best choice for those wanting quick updates is to subscribe to hourly updates. Of course, the timeliness of any update is dependent upon how soon an eBird checklist is submitted, but generally, those with known rare and unusual birds to report often do so right way or use another one of the tools below to report. To utilize the eBird rare bird reporting system, you should go to Manage My Alerts on your eBird home page and subscribe to any county, state, region, or country from where you want to receive rare bird alerts. You can set your email alerts to arrive *hourly*, otherwise you will receive alerts daily, and this means you will want to check your email often for the hourly alerts or daily for the standard alerts. One such example of how this worked for me was a friend of mine who gets hourly reports received a report of a Townsend's Solitaire on his hourly eBird rare bird alert, whereas I was not subscribed to the hourly update and did not see the report. Fortunately, he contacted me, and I was able to change directions and drive to the location where the bird was reported, and which I saw within a short period of time.

eBird “app/widget” for smart phone home screen. For those that do not check email often or wish to use eBird alerts in another way, one can easily add one or two different links to your home screen of your smart phone where you can tap on that icon and get immediate output of eBird data rather than relying on email alerts from eBird.

On the Carolina Bird Club website, eBird rarities are updated frequently for North and South Carolina under the menu tab Sightings, and one can copy and paste this link to your home screen. When you tap the Recent Notable Sightings icon on your phone, it will open to the latest eBird rarities reported for the past several days (Figure 1), giving you the updated information without having to check email. On this same page is a large green titled Nearby Notable Sightings (red arrow). By tapping this button, you will get updated eBird reports filtered of differing mileage radii or by state that you select, from your current location, and works anywhere in the WORLD! This button is most helpful when outside of the Carolinas. An example of how I have used this was on a recent birding trip to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. During the drive home, I opened this widget/app from my home screen and a Pacific Loon showed up as occurring approximately 30 miles off the interstate, and my brother and I drove over and located the bird. You can also copy the link of this and add another icon to your home screen, it's your preference as to whether you want one or two icons to use. Kent Fiala has developed this for the membership of the Carolina Bird Club, and both links are here:

[North and South Carolina eBird Rare Bird Reports](#)

[Nearby Notable eBird Reports.](#)

Carolina Bird Club Affiliate sites: Birds of North Carolina Carolina Young Birders

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Recent Sightings

The most timely sources of information about current sightings of birds both rare and common in the Carolinas are the [carolinabirds mailing list](#) and [eBird](#). The [most recent carolinabirds messages](#) can be found at [American Birding Association Birding News](#).

The list of eBird reviewers for the Carolinas is [here](#).

eBird statistics for January 26, 2022 at 19:18

	checklists	eBirders	species
NC	393	291	145
SC	179	132	160

Notable sightings that have been reported to eBird for recent dates.

Notable sightings are submitted to an eBird reviewer for acceptance. Only those sightings with a check mark by the species name have so far been accepted; others are pending confirmation.

For a more localized report *anywhere in the world*, click

[Nearby notable sightings](#)

North Carolina notable sightings

January 26

8 Savanna Sparrow	Lake Julian Park	Buncombe County datasheet info
Glen Abbott		checklist
1 Song Sparrow	Lake Julian Park	Buncombe County datasheet info
Glen Abbott		checklist
1 Song Sparrow	Lake Julian Park	Buncombe County datasheet info
Galen Goodrum		checklist
1 Song Sparrow	Lake Julian Park	Buncombe County datasheet info
Jay Whitley		checklist 2 photos
8 Savanna Sparrow	Lake Julian Park	Buncombe County datasheet info
Jay Whitley		checklist

South Carolina notable sightings

January 26

1 White-throated Sparrow	Lake Robinson (2 Verne Smith Park)	Greenville County datasheet info
Steve Patterson		checklist
X Purple Finch ✓	1322 Old Boulevard Rd, Mount Pleasant SC 29567-7781	checklist
Karla Miller		checklist
1 White-throated Sparrow	Lake Robinson (2 Verne Smith Park)	Greenville County datasheet info
David Link		checklist
1 White-throated Sparrow	Lake Robinson (2 Verne Smith Park)	Greenville County datasheet info
Yves Limpain		checklist
1 American Black Duck	Berry Hill Road (Lumbert Access)	Greenville County datasheet info
		checklist

Figure 1. Recent Notable Sightings for North and South Carolina and Nearby Notable Sightings (Anywhere in the World!)

GroupMe App – North and South Carolina Rare Bird Alert – this alert is by far the easiest to use and receive real time notifications of rare birds and their location. To join the rare bird alert, click on the links below and follow the instructions. You can also use this app directly from the field and let your fellow birders know of your discovery. Each Group is monitored so please only share pertinent bird sightings and locations. Do not reveal locations of sensitive species, situations of trespass, or locations on private property unless authorized.

North Carolina - [CBC NC Rare Bird Alert](#)

South Carolina - [CBC SC Rare Bird Alert](#)

Although still used by some for reporting rare and unusual birds the **Carolina Birds Listserv** provides another forum to receive word of rare and unusual birds. It is also used to report rare birds and requires typing the email in the field from your device or doing so later from another device. When used in conjunction with the GroupMe app the listserv can be a very efficient and quick way of receiving and disseminating information. To join the Carolina Birds listserv, follow the instructions at this link: [Carolina Birds listserv](#).

Finally, locations of rare and unusual birds should not be reported for eBird sensitive species and for those species located on private lands (unless public access and permission is granted). Many of these species need protection from any level of disturbance and trespassing to view birds is never an acceptable behavior. Additionally, there are other circumstances in which rare birds should not be reported, so please consider your circumstances before reporting. Here is a link to the eBird sensitive species list: [eBird Sensitive Species List](#).

Welcome New CBC Members!

Upgrade to lifetime membership

George Andrews, Matthews, NC

Ryan Justice, Raleigh, NC

Katrina Waugh
Murrells Inlet, SC

Laurine Curtis
Bluffton, SC

David Campbell
Hickory, NC

Linda & Clinton Burfitt
Raleigh, NC

Deborah Bordner
Belmont, NC

Isaac McShane
Wilmington, NC

Mary Alice Hayward
Duck, NC

Tracy & Lloyd Mustin
McLean, VA

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Bahama, NC

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Greensboro, NC

Melanie Crawford
Hillsborough, NC

Deidre & Ray Schipani
Wake Forest, NC

Angela Derrickson
Raleigh, NC

Ann Humphries
Columbia, SC
Ken Lipsy
Salisbury, NC

Jewel Gauger
Asheville, NC

Joyce Agris
Raleigh, NC

Jeanne Wilkinson
Raleigh, NC

Jack Ruff
Haley McDonald
Charlotte, NC

Myron Steed
Mount Pleasant, SC

Joshua & Nicole Stone
Hopkins, SC

Donald Grant
Parkton, NC

Deirdre Herrington
Winston-Salem, NC

Tina Arnoldi
Mount Pleasant, SC

Claire Sullivan
Durham, NC

Laura Durlacher
Raleigh, NC

Angus Twombly
Raleigh, NC

Troy Bradford
Mount Holly, NC

Kate Rothra Fleming
Charleston, SC

Mike Manetz
Wake Forest, NC

Leigh Layton
Brevard, NC

Donna Lee Andrews
Fayetteville, NC

Crystal Cockman
Asheboro, NC

Bethany Lee – Youth
Member
Piedmont, SC

Emilia Smith – Youth
Member
Raleigh, NC

Camryn Friedman – Youth
Member
Raleigh, NC

Jenna & Rix White
Mebane, NC

Stephanie Vong
Goose Creek, SC

Wally Tuberville
Hartsville, SC

Jenn Clementoni
Saint Helena Island, SC

Why Can't They Just Leave the Names (and Taxonomic Order) of Birds Alone?

Article and photos by Steve Dowlan

The pursuit of birding as a pastime is for many practitioners disconnected from the science of ornithology. This might be referred to as “small b” birding versus “big B” birding. For most birders, many of whom spend all their birding hours watching their feeders, the enjoyment of birds does not require any depth of knowledge about of the science of birds. For others, their enjoyment is deeply rooted in understanding connections and relationships.

When I started birding as a teenager and later as an excited novice, I had had the pleasure of “small b” birding with people who were much older than me. I respected many of these older birders as mentors, and a few had even birded with Roger Tory Peterson, iconic author of what is considered to be the first modern bird field guide. Peterson’s guide was the only game in town for a very long time! These mentors were generally a wealth of experiential knowledge, and they would willingly and enthusiastically pass on the wisdom they had accumulated. Their enjoyment of birds was often grounded in the permanence of the names they had learned as younger birders.

For many years... decades even, the common names they used did not change much, nor did the taxonomic order of bird families as they appeared in the Peterson Field Guide. Many common names represent no discernible relationship between the species and its field marks or habitat relationships. For instance, how often do you really see a red belly on a Red-bellied Woodpecker? How often have you seen a Magnolia Warbler in a magnolia tree? Who the heck was Swainson? Still, these common names, for the most part, had not changed since they were originally assigned.

The long-lasting and apparently durable taxonomic order of bird families prior to the 1980s was based on factors related to where and when a species first appeared in the fossil record, the ability of related species to interbreed, and on similarities in physical

features (morphology) among families. As the pace and complexity of the science of birds accelerated, new names and family realignments appeared frequently through the 1980s and 1990s, along with the proliferation of new field guides. This became a constant source of irritation to my older birding mentors in the “small b” faction. The comment I heard more than once was ***“why can't they just leave the names of birds alone?”***

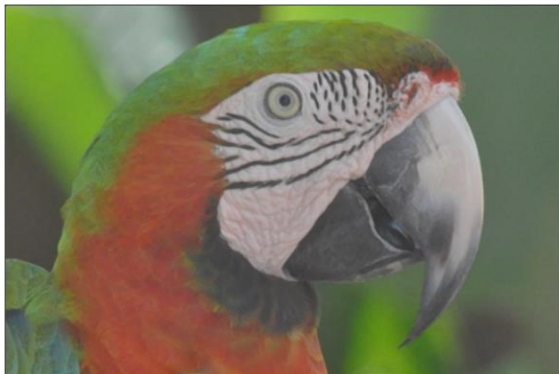
It is important, however, to understand that the taxonomic sequence of bird species, families and orders always has been fluid, although more like molasses than water for most of the 20th century. Modern advances in gene sequencing have revolutionized the depth of understanding of these relationships at an ever-increasing rate, resulting in more frequent changes to names and relationships between bird species. Morphological and fossil evidence are still used, but information from the DNA of bird species has led to major updates in the common and scientific names, as well as the taxonomic order of species, families, and even orders of birds in the most recently published field guides, especially compared to those from 20 or even 10 years ago.

All these changes are based on decisions of the American Ornithologists’ Union’s North American Classification Committee (NACC). The process for evaluating these changes occurs each year when ornithologists gather as a committee to discuss and implement changes after considering the latest research and analyses. This committee presided over by 12 ornithologists and evolutionary biologists is tasked with a never-ending quest to assemble the evolutionary relationships between bird species and families. Each donates his or her spare time to the cause. These changes give birders the luxury few other naturalists have: a single, codified set of names and relationships. As of 2010 the NACC began posting their deliberations as well as the changes themselves to keep birders in the loop on why names

changed. You can explore these changes at www.bit.ly/aouchanges.

The recent realignment of falcons in the taxonomic order of birds as presented in *eBird* away from hawks and eagles and toward songbirds and parrots has, I am certain, caused many honored but departed birders to rage from their graves, and it certainly will confuse anyone who has spent much time watching both falcons and parrots. If you focus specifically on the appearance, diets and behaviors of parrots and falcons, the two groups could hardly appear to be further apart.

Birds we know as parrots formerly appeared in the taxonomic sequence in field guides between pigeons and cuckoos as one family – *Psittacidae* in the order *Psittaciformes*. Species of parrots have plumages with bright saturated colors, are almost entirely vegetarian, are known for intelligence and social tendencies, are nonmigratory, and are found mostly in tropics. Parrots do not seem to be superficially similar to any other group of birds.



Species we know as falcons formerly were presented as the family *Falconidae* within the order *Falconiformes*, along with hawks, eagles, and new world vultures. Falcons are generally solitary top-level predators and have plumage mostly in muted earth tones. Falcons are found from the tropics to the Arctic and include a species with one of the longest migratory routes of all birds. The form and function of falcons appears to strongly resemble those of hawks, eagles, and kites to the casual observer. Because of these obvious differences, it is certainly fair to ask: “How can we be sure of this surprising and counter-intuitive change to the

way we understand the relationship between parrots and falcons?”



Clues were found by examining the entire genome - the complete sequence of DNA - of species within the two groups. Specifically, researchers from universities in Germany and the United States studied unique “transposable element insertions” that are shared exclusively between closely related orders and families. The very simplest definition of a transposable element, also known as a “jumping gene” is that it is a specific DNA sequence that can change its position within a genome.

These jumping genes may create or reverse mutations and alter a cell's genetic identity and genome size. In a 2011 paper published in the journal *Nature Communications*, the researchers presented statistically significant evidence that, based in similarities in transposable elements, parrots are the closest relatives of songbirds, and falcons are the second-closest related order. Another way to think about these relationships is that parrots, songbirds and falcons definitely share an ancestral species.

I completely understand the level of exasperation that would be experienced today by my birding mentors when a falcon is suddenly no longer close cousin to an eagle, and instead a slightly-more-distant cousin to a shrike. It does not seem to make much sense. The Peregrine Falcon they had been observing and enjoying for decades still looked and acted like a Peregrine Falcon did when they first were introduced to the name, although some might have first observed a “Duck Hawk” ... Their enjoyment of the species had not changed. A

Peregrine Falcon was and still is a magnificent example of sheer power and mastery of flight. Shrikes are predatory and very regal birds, but nothing like falcons, right?

As a natural resource professional, I also appreciate the excitement of seeing the same falcon in a different big-picture context. It is fun to imagine an ancestral bird flying over my head that appears to be part falcon, part parrot and part shrike, diverging and changing through thousands of generations to become a Peregrine Falcon, Scarlet McCaw, and Loggerhead Shrike. Each is thrilling to see and hear for unique reasons, but each is bonded by common ancestry. I enjoy the buzz when “counterintuitive” has become “realization.” Through evolution, life finds different paths to achieve similar outcomes. What a wonderful world!

More changes to well-known common names are now being discussed as part of a larger effort to promote inclusivity in birding. Up to this point, birding has been the activity of an overwhelmingly white community in which people of color have often felt, excluded, ignored, and even threatened. Bird names such as McCown’s Longspur call back to an ornithologist who was a Confederate officer who fought to defend the institution of slavery. By memorializing a man who fought to defend this heinous and immoral economic model, some birders and scientists feel that this amounts to a barrier to inclusion for any group harmed by the institution of slavery.

Earyn McGee, a Ph.D. student in conservation biology at the University of Arizona said in a recent Smithsonian Magazine article; *“Naming and language have power. The way that you use language tells people whether they belong or not.”* Earyn is an organizer of Black Birders Week, an online campaign to celebrate and increase visibility of Black birders and nature enthusiasts. The full text of this July 2020 article can be found at:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/bird-named-confederate-general-sparks-calls-change-180975376/>

This discussion is certain to generate a great deal of heat, and hopefully some light that mirrors the larger context of social and political discourse in the U.S. In my view, it cannot be avoided, and I welcome changes that promote inclusivity,

After all, a McCown’s Longspur does not care what we call it. Bird common names are just markers for common reference between peers and researchers in the “small b” and “big B” ornithological communities. When an archaeologist mistakenly assigns the wrong culture to an artifact and later learns its true origin after further consideration, the label gets changed. That’s science.

I am grateful for the exposure I had to both the “small b” birders and the “big B” birders during my life and career. For me, the pastime of birding and the science of ornithology coexist with no conflict, because both feed appreciation for the natural world and a sense of wonder, even if at different levels.

As I skate along the fringe between the pastime and science of birds, I fondly remember the friends and mentors, living and departed who encouraged me and influenced my appreciation for birds. They remind me that the science of ornithology has been greatly influenced by citizen practitioners who learned to diligently observe and record; **Walter Fye**, a businessman, trash collector and bird bander who handed me a live Yellow-breasted Chat when I was 15; **Bill Kehew**, a high school French teacher who invited me on to his porch better see his feeder birds; **Charles Robbe**, Professor Emeritus of History who taught me that I could hand-feed chickadees; **Harry Nehls**, a retired postal worker who deserves a statue in honor of his many decades of calm leadership in Oregon birding circles; and **Michel Kleinbaum**, Holocaust survivor, Korean War veteran, Manhattan jeweler, and field guide artist who told me harrowing stories of escape and joyous stories of discovery that I will never forget.

I owe each of them a debt of gratitude for instilling in me appreciation of both the pastime and science of birds.



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Raleigh, NC 27612

Periodicals Postage Paid
at Pinehurst, NC 28374
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Upcoming CBC Meetings

Spring 2022 - Black Mountain, NC - May 5 - 8, 2022

Fall 2022 – Litchfield, SC – September 24 -22, 2022

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Deadlines for submission of Volume 68, Issue 2 is March 15, 2022

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The *CBC Newsletter* is published bimonthly by Carolina Bird Club, Inc. Founded in 1937, the membership is open to anyone interested in birds, natural history, and conservation. Current dues are: Individual & non-profit, \$30; Family and Business, \$35; Student, \$15; Patron, \$50 and up; Life, \$500; Associate Life (in household with Life Member), \$100 (both Life memberships can be paid in four annual installments). Membership dues include access to publications: the *CBC Newsletter* and *The Chat*, which is only available on line. Tax deductible as allowable by law.

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

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