

CBC Outer Banks Bonus Trip December 2 - 3, 2023

By Steve Shultz



Common Eiders at Jennette's Pier, Nags Head, Dare County, North Carolina. Photo by Steve Dowlan

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 2, at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot at 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.

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 \$65 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.



Red Knot, Oregon Inlet, Dare County, North Carolina. Photo by Steve Dowlan

CBC Returns Once Again to the Outer Banks for the Next Winter Weekend

By Susan Campbell



The club will hold its 2024 weekend meeting on the Outer Banks of North Carolina from January 19th to the 21st. One of our most popular meeting locations, the area has a lot to offer—in addition to great birding. This time our host hotel will be the Comfort Inn South Oceanfront (8031 South Oregon inlet Rd., Nags Head) – a stone’s throw from Whalebone Junction. This hotel puts us closer to many of the locations we will be birding over the course of the weekend. It has also been recently renovated. CBC has a history of meeting at this location over the decades. The staff caters to birders on a regular basis so they are adept at meeting our needs and special requests.

Please make your reservations early! We have negotiated terrific rates once again. As in the past, our block of 90 rooms consists of rooms of two types. Street side rooms are \$64 a night and oceanfront rooms are \$89 a night, Thursday through Sunday. Available rooms are a combination of 2 Double Beds or 1 King based on availability and on a first come, first served basis. A local room tax of 12.75% will also be charged per room. It is important to note that these rates are only guaranteed until December 18th (at midnight). *Also, it is important that you call the hotel directly at 252-441-6315 to reserve your room!

This past January, we had a very good turn-out, lots of birds and good weather. 163 species were observed over the three-day period with highlights being both Glaucous and Iceland Gulls, Razorbill, Parasitic Jaeger, Long-tailed Duck and also a very cooperative pair of Snow Buntings at Alligator River. Opportunities exist in the area for non-birding family members. You will find the Wright Brothers’ Monument, Jockey’s Ridge State Park, the NC Aquarium, Jennette’s Peir as well as loads of eateries, a couple of local breweries and even a rum distillery—and much, much more!

Details of the weekend schedule, trip descriptions and registration material will be published in the next newsletter. But if you think you’d like to attend, do not delay in reserving a room as soon as possible.



CBC's Own Jeff Lewis Finds American Flamingos at the Outer Banks

By Susan Campbell

(Excerpted from article by Ben Graham, NC Audubon)

Jeff Lewis woke up Saturday, September 2nd with flamingos on his mind.

The iconic pink wading birds would be an exceedingly rare sighting on the Outer Banks, where Jeff lives and has been birding for 35 years. But reports had been trickling in that Hurricane Idalia had blown small



Immature flamingos are gray. Photo by Jeff Lewis

flocks of flamingos into Florida. Then on Friday, sightings popped up in Virginia and, of all places, Ohio. Maybe North Carolina could be next?

Jeff headed to Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge south of Nags Head, where extensive salt flats and shallow ponds often host large flocks of wading birds. Standing in an observation tower, Jeff settled in to scan the refuge's southern-most pond. "There were some pink birds way out there and I thought, 'Oh my God,' my heart started thumping," he said.

The birds were indeed flamingos: eleven of them, three adults and eight immature birds feeding in the shallows. Jeff sent out an alert to birders across the state. "It was heart-stopping," Lewis said. "My fingers were hitting all the wrong keys on my phone."

In the past few days, individuals and small flocks have shown up in a growing list of states, which now includes Alabama and Tennessee. By one tally, more than 150 sightings have been recorded across the Southeast in the last four days. The vast majority are being spotted in Florida, where, despite the bird's cultural cache, it remains rare.

American Flamingos breed in the Caribbean and Mexico. They were once more numerous in south Florida, but their numbers petered out nearly a century ago, alongside the decline of many wading birds, due to over-hunting for the feather trade and habitat destruction.

In modern times, individual flamingos have been known to show up after storms in places like Texas and Florida, most famously a flamingo named Pinky that arrived at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge after Hurricane Michael in 2018 and has appeared every year since.

But the post-Idalia movement of flamingos is different. “The numbers involved here and how widespread they are, it’s unprecedented,” said Kenn Kaufman, renowned author and birder who has been tracking the post-storm movement of flamingos.

Large breeding colonies in Cuba and Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula may be the source. One post-storm bird photographed in the Florida Keys had yellow bands on its leg, the same type of band used by researchers to track flamingos at a colony at Rio Lagartos on the north coast of the Yucatan, Kaufman said. The Yucatan is also where Hurricane Idalia lingered for days before heading toward the Florida Gulf Coast.

As for the fate of the wayward birds, it’s anyone’s guess. But Kaufman is optimistic. Flamingos have been documented flying in large flocks over the open ocean. “If I had to guess, I would imagine some of them would find their way back south,” he said. Others might remain, like Pinky.

In North Carolina, the flamingos were still present Monday morning, delighting birders who traveled across the state to get a glimpse. Tourists also stopped to see what the crowds were looking at.

Jeff Lewis’s hope is that the sighting might convert a few new birders. “That would be quite the spark bird,” he said.

American Flamingos in South Carolina

By Craig Watson

Photos by Pamela Ford

Many of us were anticipating finding storm-blown birds from Hurricane Idalia, but we never expected to find American Flamingos. Idalia came across South Carolina as a strong tropical storm, and as the weather cleared, guides with Coastal Expeditions (CE) of Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, made the voyage out to Bull’s Island on Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge to assess the damage to the property regarding the plausibility of continuing nature tours on the island. Coastal Expeditions is the major vendor for an assortment of guided trips to the island, with ferry or private boat access the only way onto the island.

While assessing the damage, Annie Owen and Captain Richard Stuhr of CE saw two pink birds in Summerhouse Pond. Expecting to find Roseate Spoonbills, a closer look revealed that they were not spoonbills, but two American Flamingos! Word went out late on September 1 and on September 2 a ferry full of birders, including Pamela Ford, who was on that first ferry trip (while I was in Tennessee!), and who took the accompanying photo of two American Flamingos were on their way to Bulls Island to look for the Flamingos. They were not disappointed! There were two present in the same area as the previous day.



Two American Flamingos at Bull's Island, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Charleston County, South Carolina



Coastal Expeditions showing birders the American Flamingos. -this is the truck and trailer

I was on my way to Tennessee for a family reunion when the news broke, and I was not able to take the first ferry out. However, I did reserve a ferry for the following Tuesday from Tennessee for when I returned, hoping that the flamingos would still be there. Many birders had already been out to see the flamingos, and by the time I went to Bull's Island, there was only one bird left. Would there be one left for us birders on this trip? Coastal Expeditions loaded people into the truck and tour trailer and off we went in search of the remaining flamingo. On our first stop it wasn't apparent that the flamingo was still present, but sharp-eyed Pamela Ford spotted the bird on the far side of the pond! What a relief!

We observed the bird for a while from the far side and then moved to a more strategic point. Coastal Expeditions was taking great care not to spook the remaining bird and parked the truck and trailer several hundred yards from the bird and led birders to within 150-200 yards using surrounding vegetation as cover. The single flamingo continues on Summerhouse Pond and was last reported on September 28, and CE is still providing the ferry 4 days per week. The ferry only runs four days per week, so unless one travels by personal boat to the island, reports of the bird will only be known on the day of the trip. The whereabouts of the other flamingo is not known, and we can only hope the flamingos gain enough nutrition and find their way back home, like the Yucatan Peninsula.

Many birders have been out looking for American Flamingos in other parts of South Carolina. There have been several observations. One is photo of a single American Flamingo that someone took over a duck hunting pond, and that observation remains anonymous, yet the photo is unmistakable. Another observation occurred at Botany Bay Plantation WMA in Charleston County on Edisto Island. Botany Bay hosts a volunteer hawk watch and during that hawk watch, the observers were amazed to observe 6-8 American Flamingos fly between their observation area and the ocean just above treetop level. It is not known where these birds are now or where they came from. This observation is documented in an eBird report for Botany Bay. Most recently, a single American Flamingo was observed at DeBordieu, a gated community in Georgetown County. That bird has been documented in eBird, but left shortly after these observations. The following day and in subsequent days, a single American Flamingo was videoed on the Santee Coastal Reserve south of DeBordieu, and there was one report of two birds being present. Other than the video, no other documentation or reports indicate the flamingo is still present at the Santee Coastal Reserve.

As observations of American Flamingos began popping up all over the eastern United States, I began researching how many American Flamingos had been observed in North and South Carolina previous to this current event. In eBird, there are four (4) observations recorded, three in North Carolina and one in South Carolina. In searching records of The Chat and Briefs for the Files, there are at least 11 reports

from North and South Carolina, none of which have made it into the eBird data. Excluding the observations of 2023, all (4) eBird records also show all observations with the escapee/exotic designation. The first observations for the Carolinas were in 1977 with a flock of 5 observed near Morris Island in Charleston County. All observations have been coastal in nature and generally in the summer months, although there are two winter records from North Carolina. There are some references to earlier observations from the Carolinas in other literature, but there is not much detail and represent only 2-3 additional occurrences. (*South Carolina Bird Life*, Alexander Sprunt, Jr., E. Burnham Chamberlain, 1949, 1970) (*Status and Distribution of South Carolina Birds*, William Post and Sidney A. Gauthreaux, Charleston Museum, 1989) (*Birds of North Carolina*, North Carolina Department of Agriculture, State Museum, 1959, Revised Edition).

A CBC Birding Scholarship Experience in Maine

Photos and Story by Gus Messinide

It's Sunday, June 25th and I'm on Hog Island in Bremen, Maine. There stands a small sound in between the island and the mainland, where you can see some small clustered buildings and some small forested hills. I am standing at the edge of the island, the ocean lapping at the sand a few feet below me. There is a group of about fourteen terns constantly in motion, soaring, diving, and emerging seconds later with a fish. Eleven of them are Common Terns and the other three are Roseate Terns.

For someone who hasn't had much experience. The two species can be differentiated with some amount of difficulty. Roseate Terns are decidedly lighter, with shallow, rapid wingbeats, forked tail, and at this time of year, darker bills. Apparently, they had been recorded getting closer and closer to the island at larger numbers, and this particular sighting seemed to cause excitement among the instructors.



Roseate Terns are one of countless species that are teetering on the precipice of extinction in North America. Historically they were hunted for their feathers, but in present times they are suffering from gull predation, habitat loss, disturbance by humans, and declining fish populations. By 2010, only 170 nesting pairs only were using a handful of over three-thousand islands in the state of Maine. Now there are believed to be 240 nesting pairs. One of the most important islands is Eastern Egg Rock, which is estimated to host over half of Maine's nesting Roseate Tern population.

The next day (Monday) at about 7:30 we started the roughly eight-mile boat ride to the island. Not long after we departed, we saw the first of many Common Terns also flying to Eastern Egg Rock to feed its young with the fish that were caught eight miles away. It will completely outstrip the boat and be at the island in about twenty minutes, beating us by half an hour. We also see many Common Eiders, Black Guillemots, Wilson's Storm-petrels, a lonesome Northern Gannet, and when we had almost reached our destination, one Atlantic Puffin. Once at the island, it felt so empty and eerie. The minefield of buoys that surround the mainland were now long gone and we are by far the only boat in the area.

Instead of the bustle of the fishing boats farther inland, we were surrounded by birds - dozens of puffins and guillemots floating in the water, female eiders followed closely by adorable chicks, male eiders

sitting on the rocks, laughing gulls flocking on the island, and the occasional Great Black-backed Gulls. Out here I learned that differentiating between the Roseate Terns and Common Terns is a walk in the park compared to Arctic and common Terns. After about ten minutes of observation time, one of the instructors yells out in excitement, "Black-Headed Gull!". It was fighting with the Laughing Gulls on the rocks. This was a smaller gull with more restricted hood and a pale leading edge on the wings when it showed their underside.

This was by far the best bird that I would see the whole week. Black-headed Gulls are an Old-World species of gull that is a rare but regular visitor to the northeastern United States and eastern Canada. Earlier this year there had been one individual near Wilmington, North Carolina that I had tried and failed to see, which made this sighting even more special. Fifteen minutes later, my mind still thinking of the gull, I spotted the American Oystercatcher that had been sighted on the island for the last couple of weeks. A regular bird where I live, I had to be told that this was an unusual bird for the state. It stayed on the island for a few seconds before taking off and flying directly above the boat.



By ten o'clock, we'd made it back, concluding one of the best birding experiences of my life, even though we had less than twenty species and had lasted for less than two and a-half-hours. This was one of the many special experiences that occurred that week, and I can't thank the Carolina Bird Club enough for granting me a scholarship.



Opportunities for Young Birders

Carolina Bird Club offers scholarships for birders 18 and under living in the Carolinas, who are members of the Carolina Young Birders Club.

Scholarships provide assistance in attending bird-related events, such as camps, workshop, training programs or CBC seasonal meetings.

For more information, visit www.carolinabirdclub.org

North Carolina Groups Recive a Grant for Wildlife Tracking Systems

By Susan Campbell

The Cape Fear Bird Observatory (CFBO) and University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) proudly announce being awarded \$200,000 from NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) Science Collaborative. This grant funds a one-year project with aims of "Developing a Collaborative Community for Motus Wildlife Tracking Systems within NERRS."

This initiative seeks to leverage the Motus Wildlife Tracking Systems, currently deployed in over half of the NERRS, to gain vital insights into the presence and movements of volant animals. The project aims to



foster a collaborative community within NERRS, supporting research, education, and conservation efforts using Motus data. The approved actions include creating a dedicated webpage for Motus data display, developing educational resources for students and visitors, implementing in-person educational experiences, constructing new Motus systems at priority locations, and promoting collaboration among NERRS staff to ensure long-term success of this technology. These projects align with the NERRS' mission to advance estuarine research, education, and conservation efforts. Together with existing multi-year projects, the NERRS Science Collaborative will allocate more than \$3.5 million in program funds this year to support crucial collaborative science initiatives.

This grant opportunity allows CFBO to work with other researchers and organizations, including Dr. Ray Danner, Associate Professor in the Department of Biology and Marine Biology at UNCW, who is a sub awardee on the project. "We are excited about this opportunity to expand the collaborative community of Motus users in the NERRS which exemplifies the NERRS' commitment to advance science, conservation and education," said Marae West, Chair of the Board at the Cape Fear Bird Observatory. "This project will enhance national and international monitoring networks with a goal of making data accessible to many people and organizations. We hope this project will lead to exciting scientific discoveries, from scientists testing hypotheses to conservationists planning how to manage their lands, and the public exploring migratory routes of their favorite bird species!" said Dr. Ray Danner, Associate Professor of Biology and Marine Biology at UNCW. For more information about this project and the NERRS Science Collaborative, please visit <https://nerrssciencecollaborative.org/resource/2023-funding-announcement> or contact Marae West at marawest@capefearbirdobservatory.org. To learn more about CFBO visit www.capefearbirdobservatory.org.

WINGS OVER WATER - 2023

Mark your calendar for North Carolina's only wildlife festival which will be celebrating its 25th Anniversary on October 17-22, 2023 at the Outer Banks in North Carolina. Plan on joining us for special events as well as the return of Julie Zickefoose as our guest of honor. Julie is a world-renowned natural history writer, artist and wildlife rehabilitator. Julie will be with us for most of the week, and her keynote speech is entitled - ***Baby Birds - An Artist Looks Into the Nests***. In addition to being our keynote speaker on Saturday evening, she will be involved with several birding trips. Registration is now open at: <https://2023wingsoverwater.my-ttrs.com/>



CBC Needs a New Headquarters Secretary!

After ten years of service, our current Secretary, Carol Bowman, is retiring. She has been very dedicated to the Club during her tenure. But the time has come for her to step down. So, we are now advertising for a candidate to step into Carol's shoes. Individuals who are interested in this part time position should be detail oriented, have a basic knowledge of Google Docs, Microsoft Word, Excel and Quick Books. Time required is approximately 25-30 hours a month, with obviously more necessary around and during the (three) seasonal meeting times. Compensation is \$600 a month.

If you are interested and would like more specific information about the responsibilities and the application deadline, contact Susan Campbell (susan@ncaves.com). We hope to have the position filled before the end of the year.

Carolina Bird Club Grant Awards and Updates for 2022 and 2023

By Craig Watson

The Grants Committee of the Carolina Bird Club has been active for the past two years, with eleven (11) grants funded: seven for avian related research (R), three for conservation (C), and one for a regional bird festival (C,E). These are outlined below by year (*R=research, C=conservation, E=education*):

2022

1) Award of \$1772.73 to Audubon South Carolina to conduct workshops to establish new “landlord” for new colonies of Purple Martins, and to study pre-migration roosts. Young birds will be captured and outfitted with nanotags to determine departure dates, routes of migration, and stop-over locations. **(R,C,E)**

2) East Carolina University (Carol Gause, Biology Dept.) was awarded \$4500 to fund research titled: Effects of land management on breeding success, dispersal, and population genetics of a threatened freshwater marsh bird, the King Rail. This study will provide land managers up to date information on population status, breeding habitat use, and inform managers on how best to manage marshes for this species. **(R,C)**

3) (2022) Cape Fear Bird Observatory, Susan Campbell, \$500 for start-up materials for this new bird observatory. (C,R,E)

4) (2022) Three Rivers Land Trust-donation of \$3500 for the acquisition of 20 acres in Anson County, NC called the Flatrock Tract. This is part of the ongoing conservation efforts of the Three Rivers Land Trust in the Yadkin River corridor. **(C)**

5) Morrow Mountain State Park – award of \$5000 to the Three Rivers Land Trust to add 216 acres to Morrow Mountain State Park. The addition conserves priority bird species and habitats in that region of North Carolina. **(C)**

6) Breeding Biology of Hermit thrushes in the Southern Appalachians of NC - Vanessa J. Merritt and John A. Gerwin, North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. Project is to complete data analysis and prepare data for publication and linked to previously funded project by the CBC. Award is \$1200. **(R)**

2023

7) Wings Over Water Festival (WOW), \$2000, with increasing costs of operation, the CBC has decided to solidify and establish a firm relationship with WOW by providing them with \$2000 for operations funds, and without these funds WOW would not be as successful in its mission to promote birding and bird conservation. Funds were awarded to the Coastal Refuge Wildlife Refuge Society. **(C,R)**

8) University of Georgia, Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources - \$4565.00 was awarded to Wayne Ryan, graduate student at the university, for research titled, “Ecological Effects of Watershed Manipulations on Avian Populations in the Southern Appalachian Mountains”. This insightful research will address effects of accelerating climate change and how it may affect avian communities and will be focused on avian species and communities in the Southern Appalachians, where many high priority species and habitats are under threat from current and future impacts of climate change. **(R,C)**

9) Agape Center for Environmental Education, University of Miami - Passive Population Monitoring Using Audio and Visual Sampling Methods in Bird Species, \$2093.63. This unique project will focus on passive monitoring of Eastern Bluebird and Eastern Screech Owl and how it relates to disturbance to birds. The educational component is targeted toward diverse audiences and participation of those audiences. Other technologies such as YouTube, eBird, and BirdNET-Pi will be used to store, analyze, and disseminate data and results. The study will be conducted at the Agape Center in Harnett County, North Carolina. Data will be entered in eBird, NC Bird Atlas, and results will be distributed widely upon completion of the project. **(R,C,E)**



Northern Bobwhite. Photo by Steve Dowlan

10) Movement, Habitat Use, Dispersal, Home range, and Survival of the Northern Bobwhite on The Indian Creek Wildlife Area of Sumter National Forest. Midlands Quail Unlimited (QU), partnering with US Forest Service, Carolina Bird Club, and other partners to study habitat and movements of Northern Bobwhite in response to varying types of timber harvests, prescribed fire regimes, and hunting pressure, and site index. Study will document dispersal, survival, and nest site selection. QU wanted significantly more funds than the CBC has ever awarded, yet were

pleased with our contribution of \$2000. The primary expense will be tracking equipment, and the project will be conducted on the Sumter National Forest in South Carolina. **(R,C)**

11) Three Rivers Land Trust, \$2000 for acquisition of 55-acre Eastwood Preserve Connector Tract. Total acquisition costs are approximately \$660,000. The project connects two highly important NC Heritage Preserves in the Sandhills region, Nick's Creek and Eastwood Sandhills. This acquisition will consolidate ownership and enable the entire area to be managed on a more landscape scale. Species benefiting will be Northern Bobwhite and other sandhill specialties. Non-avian species benefiting are several rare and endangered plants. **(C)**

Approximately \$29,000 has been awarded to these 11 grants, with an average expenditure of ~\$14,500 annually for research/educational grants and conservation actions. The conservation actions have been for land acquisitions by the Three Rivers Land Trust for acquisitions for various properties within the Piedmont and Sandhills Region of North Carolina.

The CBC has approximately \$10-15K annually to award toward research/educational grants and conservation actions. Exceeding these amounts requires Executive Committee approval.

The Grants Committee is working with Kent Fiala to add a section to the Grants/Scholarship pages for reports that have been submitted by the awardees for each of the projects. Awardees are required to submit a final report. This is an ongoing process, and that page should be available in the near future.

Current CBC Grant Committee members are Craig Watson, Mac Williams, Barbara (Kitti) Reynolds, and Julie Lee. If any members are interested in becoming an active member of the Grants Committee, please contact Craig Watson.



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