

December 4-6, 2011

High Country Audubon Field trip to:

Lake Mattamuskeet, Alligator River, Stumpy Point, Bodie Island, Pea Island, Nags Head, Palmetto Pear tree Preserve, and points in between.

Six High Country Audubon members ventured down to the coast for some early winter birding around several National Wildlife Refuges, preserves, and coastal birding sites. The group included Van Joffrion, Bob Cherry, Houck and KB Medford, Mickey Shortt, and myself. Well, we picked up Houck and KB in Winston-Salem, and Mickey joined us at Lake Mattamuskeet on Monday, he is currently working at the Wright Brothers National Monument for the winter but will most likely return to work at Grandfather in the spring. Mickey was our local knowledge on Monday for the morning and early afternoon. We had hoped to catch up with Curtis Smalling on the trip as well, but due to unforeseen circumstances on a construction project at his home in Stumpy Point he couldn't join us. Too bad for Curtis, because we really did see some excellent birds!

The trip didn't start out very well, as I opened the back hatch of the vehicle at our first rest stop only to be greeted by Bob's famous home brew nicely packaged in a Sam Adams 12 pack box flying to the ground (photos on facebook and possibly on yahoo groups!). We managed to salvage about 6 beers. Luckily Bob didn't decide to leave me at the gas station! This year rather than stopping to do some birding along the way, we instead drove straight to Lake Mattamuskeet, well at least that was our intention! Along highway 64 we started seeing good numbers of birds in the agricultural fields and farm ponds around Williamston. We stopped several times watching great numbers of Bald Eagles. At one set of ponds we found several hooded mergansers, ruddy ducks, and 8 bald eagles!! We found several locations with multiple bald eagles in the fields and along the edges of ponds. Looking back it was good we stopped to check those areas out, because we didn't see Bald Eagles in those numbers anywhere else. Once we finally made it to Mattamuskeet we did get to see good numbers of waterfowl, but they were very far away from the causeway and other viewing points. We stayed in Washington, NC on Sunday night and enjoyed a great Mexican style meal and cozy accommodations.

The next morning, Monday, we decided to go back to Lake Mattamuskeet Lodge where we encountered a roosting site for egrets the night before. Curtis tipped us off to some other wading birds that are frequently found there so we had to check it out. We found black-crowned night herons, great egrets, great blue herons all hanging out in the trees. While birding around the canal at the lodge we also got great looks at an orange-crowned warbler and yellow-bellied sapsuckers. We birded several water impoundments on the south side of the lake before heading over to Lake Landing and eventually on to Alligator River.

At Alligator River we could barely get out of the car for all the mosquitoes that were mobbing us, so we did some limited birding from the car with a few stops along highway 264. We did stop at Stumpy Point briefly to find a common loon and a horned grebe out at the end of the point! That afternoon we went out to the Bodie Island lighthouse and boardwalk where we found probably the greatest number of waterfowl. We had great looks at gadwalls, northern shovelers, avocets, black ducks, northern pintail,

and several other species. Along the boardwalk on the way back to the car we found several brown-headed nuthatches in great lighting. Everyone got very good looks at them. We later went down to the Bonner Bridge over Oregon Inlet and birded the groin near the old coast guard station. We didn't find the purple sandpipers this year, but we did enjoy the walk out at near sunset. We killed a little time heading down to Pea Island NWR visitor's center to wait until it was completely dark to go look for northern saw-whet owls at Bodie Island. We didn't get to see them, but we did get to hear a great-horned owl, and possibly a n. saw-whet just as we were getting in the car. Only KB and myself heard the little bird, and neither of us could confirm for sure that it was in fact a saw whet.

The final day we started out at Pea Island, and were very pleasantly surprised at the diversity. The north pond was basically a puddle since the hurricane in September damaged the west impoundment wall. Salt water intrusion basically wiped it out for ducks, but it was incredible for shore birds. They were often at great distances from us but with binoculars and the spotting scope we could see that the ground was just crawling with shorebirds. It was somewhat overwhelming to try and identify all the birds that were there, but we did a pretty good job picking out some interesting birds. As we were looking over our species list we realized that we only needed to see a red-headed woodpecker and a Red-cockaded woodpecker complete the full list of woodpeckers in North Carolina. We made that our mission, as we headed to Palmetto Peartree Preserve, a known red-cockaded woodpecker hangout. We didn't have any luck finding the final two species of woodpeckers, but we did get to see a very neat natural preserve off the beaten path. It's well worth the trip out there if you haven't visited the site before. It doesn't really have any amenities, but some great bird habitat.

We had a wonderful time seeing 104 species of birds while experiencing some really nice weather as well. We did encounter quite a few mosquitoes, especially around Alligator River and Stumpy Point, but all and all we had a wonderful trip. For several of the members of the groups, we recorded new life birds for our lists. We didn't see the numbers of waterfowl that we normally see on the trip, but the diversity was actually pretty good. We did get lucky enough to see a very nice flock of snow geese swirling around before settling out of view on Lake Mattamuskeet from the Lake Landing access. I'm sure each of us on the trip has our own highlights, but mine was seeing the black-bellied plovers and red-breasted mergansers at Pea Island. Hope you all have a Happy Holiday season. Below is the species list and location information. The locations represent the first place we encountered the bird on the trip, and from memory where we saw them after that. We only documented the first place we observed them. Many of the birds were see multiple times and multiple locations, and I may have left of a place or two for some species.

Species	64	LM	AR	SP	BI	PI	NH	PP
Snow Goose		x						
Canada Goose	x	x		x	x	x		
Tundra Swan	x	x			x	x		

Gadwall		X				X		
American Wigeon						X	X	
American Black Duck		X	X			X	X	
Mallard	X	X	X	X		X	X	
Northern Shoveler						X		
Northern Pintail		X				X	X	
Species	64	LM	AR	SP	BI	PI	NH	PP
Redhead						X		
Ring-necked Duck		X						
Bufflehead	X	X		X	X	X		
Hooded Merganser	X					X		
Red-breasted Merganser							X	
Ruddy Duck	X	X				X	X	
Wild Turkey	X	X						
Common Loon			X	X				
Pied-billed Grebe	X	X		X	X	X		
Horned Grebe			X	X				
Northern Gannet							X	X
American White Pelican							X	
Brown Pelican		X		X	X	X	X	X
Double-crested Cormorant		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
American Bittern							X	
Great Blue Heron	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Great Egret		X	X			X	X	
Snowy Egret						X		



Sanderling						X	X	X	
Semipalmated Sandpiper							X		
Dunlin							X		
Wilson's Snipe		X							
Ring-billed Gull	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Species	64	LM	AR	SP	BI	PI	NH	PP	
Herring Gull		X		X	X	X			
Great Black-backed Gull		X		X	X	X	X		
Forster's Tern		X							
Royal Tern							X		
Rock Pigeon	X	X	X	X				X	
Mourning Dove	X	X	X				X		
Great-horned Owl						X			
Belted Kingfisher		X	X	X					
Red-bellied Woodpecker		X							
Yellow-bellied Woodpecker		X							
Downy Woodpecker		X							X
Hairy Woodpecker		X							
Northern Flicker		X		X					
Pileated Woodpecker		X							X
Eastern Phoebe		X							X
Fish Crow	X	X		X	X	X	X		
Tree Swallow		X							
Carolina Chickadee		X							
Tufted Titmouse		X							

Brown-headed Nuthatch		x				x		
Carolina Wren		x						x
Sedge Wren		x						
Golden-crowned Kinglet		x						
Ruby-crowned Kinglet		x						
Eastern Bluebird		x	x					
Hermit Thrush		x						
American Robin		x	x			x		
Gray Catbird							x	
Northern Mockingbird	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Species	64	LM	AR	SP	BI	PI	NH	PP
European Starling	x	x	x	x		x	x	
Orange-crowned Warbler		x						
Yellow-rumped Warbler		x			x		x	x
Pine Warbler		x						
Black-and-white warbler		x						
Common Yellowthroat		x						
Eastern Towhee		x						
Vesper Sparrow		x						
Savannah Sparrow						x		
Song Sparrow		x	x					
Swamp Sparrow		x						
White-throated Sparrow		x						
Dark-eyed Junco		x						
Northern Cardinal		x	x			x		

Red-winged Blackbird	x	x	x		x	x
Eastern Meadowlark		x			x	
Common Grackle	x	x	x	x	x	x
Boat-tailed Grackle				x	x	
American Goldfinch		x				

**Key**

64- Highway 64 in the trip down to Mattamuskeet on the first day

LM- Lake Mattamuskeet, including Enghard and surrounding land of the National Wildlife Refuge

AR- Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge and highway 264 towards Stumpy Point

SP- Stumpy Point, the road into the developed area

BI- Bodie Island lighthouse, boardwalk, observation deck, and surrounding areas

PI- Includes the impoundments, beach, old coast guard station, and around the Bonner Bridge including the north end at the marina.

NH- Nags Head, including the beach and roadside areas.

PP- Palmetto Pear tree Preserve