



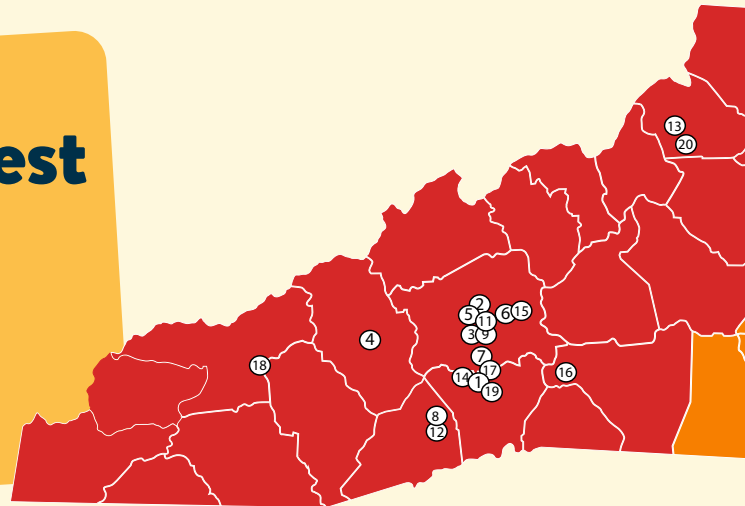
— GUIDE TO —

BIRDING

≈≈≈ IN NORTH CAROLINA ≈≈≈

North Carolina's Hottest Birding Regions and Species Counts

Listed by region and in order of species count according to eBird.

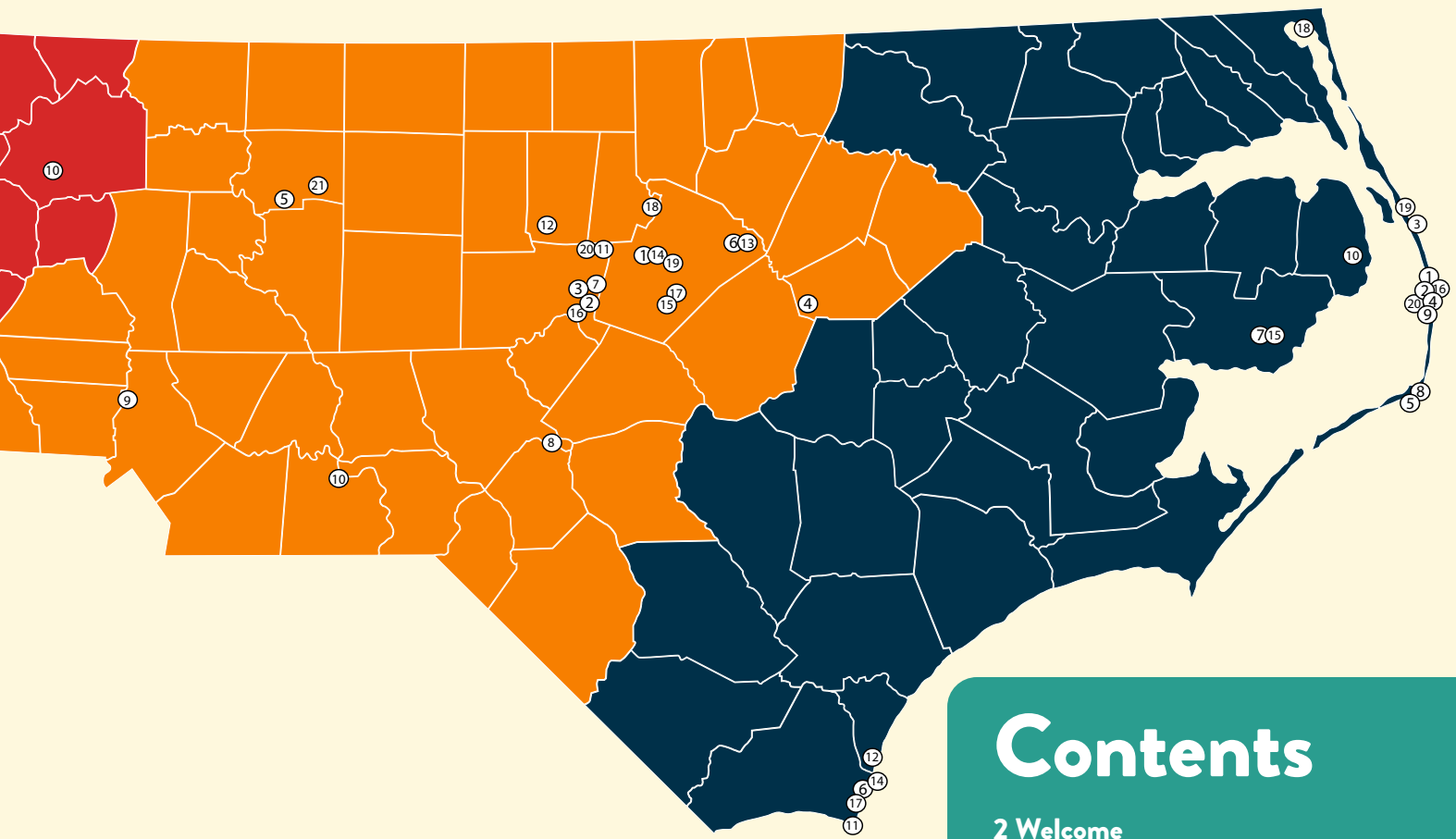


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Welcome

According to eBird, 488 bird species have been observed in North Carolina, from its mountain region in the west, through the Piedmont and out to the coast. We invite you to take a look over this birdwatching guide, head out into the state and see how many you can count.

With the state's varying topography, you'll see different species in Beech Mountain and Brevard than you will in Currituck County, Brunswick County and the Outer Banks. If you're traveling inland, be sure to check out Lake Norman, Lake Waccamaw and Dismal Swamp State Park.

Traveling across the state, keep your eyes peeled and binoculars uncapped for the American Kestrel—North Carolina's smallest falcon—as well as the Scarlet Tanager, Yellow-Billed Cuckoo, and the state bird, the beautiful Northern Cardinal.

New to birding or want to get your children or grandchildren interested? No problem—scroll down and check out the birding events scheduled throughout the year.

A big, big thank you to Visit North Carolina for giving us the opportunity to create this guide, and we hope you enjoy participating in this rewarding activity!

Happy Birding!



American Kestrel



Scarlet Tanager



Yellow-billed Cuckoo

North Carolina Birding Events



Egret

Birding festivals and events are organized to ensure that you visit the best birding spots at the best time of year, meet other birders, see a variety of birds, and learn from the experts. Below are some events that offer the best of birding around North Carolina.

Carolina Bird Club Winter Birding Weekend

January, Emerald Isle
carolinabirdclub.org

Great Backyard Bird Count

February, Various
birdcount.org

World Migratory Bird Day

May
worldmigratorybirdday.org

Flock to the Rock

September, Chimney Rock
chimneyrockpark.com

Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival

October, Outer Banks
wingsoverwater.org

Wings Over Water WOW Encore

December, Outer Banks
wingsoverwater.org

Sandpipers in the Outer Banks



The Mountains- to-Sea Trail

By Sean Dennis

The Mountains-to-Sea Trail spans the entire state of North Carolina, beginning at the Tennessee border, meandering up and down the mountains and through the Piedmont, and then curling south and back up through the coastal plain to the Outer Banks. Hiking the trail is a breathtaking and beautiful 1,200-mile adventure that provides opportunities to see a wide range of bird species. The time of year matters; some birds nest here and spend their winters elsewhere, and others visit for a spell as part of a longer journey. And remember that some species are North Carolina residents and can be found in greater or lesser numbers most anywhere. Of course, it's natural that you might prefer your vacation to be less rigorous and more relaxing, but this quick guide provides information on the birds you could spot in the parks, campgrounds, and towns and cities along the trail.

The Mountains

At the trail's starting point of Clingmans Dome, you'll be at roughly 6,600 feet elevation, and that means the chance to see species that like it a little bit (or a lot) cooler. Look for seed-eating Pine Siskins and Purple Finches in the woods, and American Goldfinches hanging out near patches of echinacea and similar coneflowers. Cedar Waxwings, with their Art Deco appearance and bright-red wing tips, feed on holly berries. If you are in an area with many insects, Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireos are little charmers that take the bugs down a notch. In the rivers and lakes, Mute



Swans are a graceful treat, as are the many ducks and duck-like species, including Blue-winged and Green-winged Teals, Northern Pintails, and Canvasbacks. Bald Eagles and Red-tailed Hawks rule high in the skies.

In Cherokee County, White-breasted Nuthatches (listen for their squeaky call!) are plentiful, and you will notice a variety of lovely warblers—all adorned with yellow—in the summer, such as Yellow-throated, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Hooded Warblers. As you descend through Nantahala State Forest and back northeast through Buncombe County, the number of species you can see increases due to the more moderate year-round climate. Pied-billed



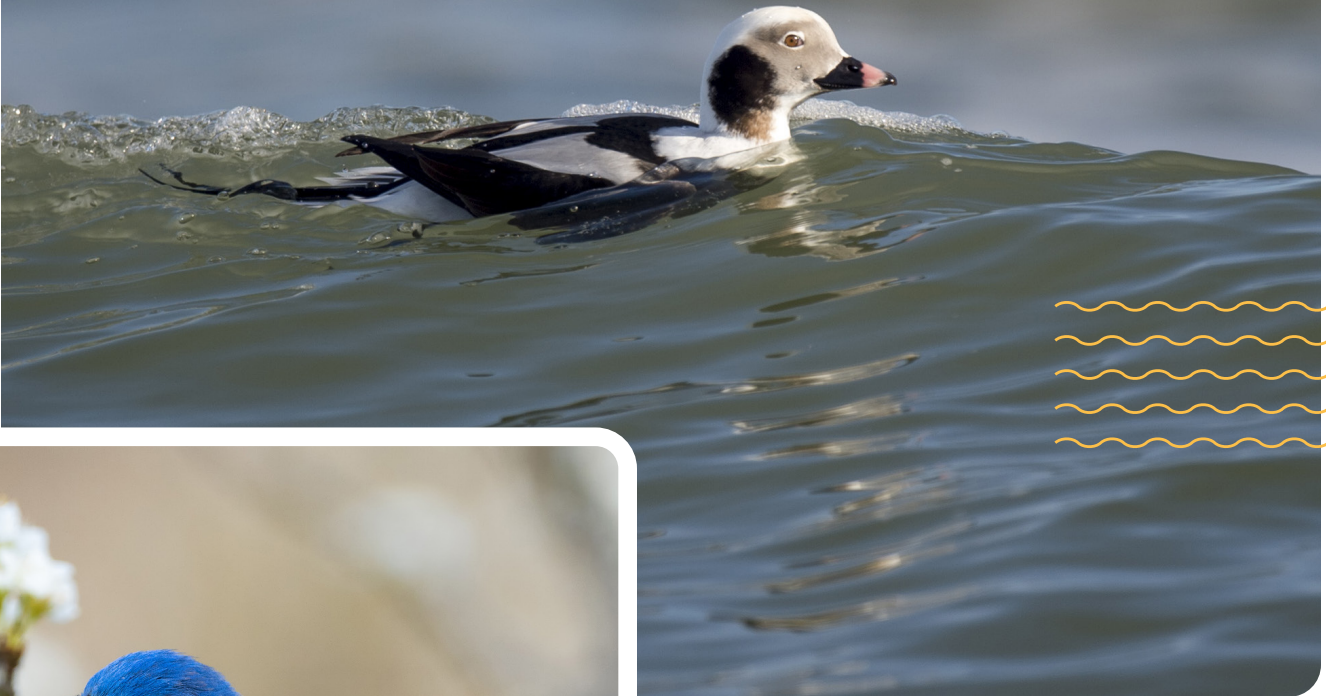
Eastern Towhee

and Horned Grebes will be in the waters, and you will chuckle at the odd walk of the American Woodcock at the forest's edge. Eastern insect-eating Wood-Pewees, Arcadian Flycatchers, and White-eyed Vireos can be seen in many parks and wooded areas. Especially in cities with older architectural elements, the sight of a large group of Chimney Swifts rapidly descending into and returning from a chimney is simply amazing. If you enjoy the power and precision of raptors, Cooper's and Broad-winged Hawks will display their skills as they hunt for the next meal, and winter-time Golden Eagles (they look like juvenile Bald Eagles) will use their six- to eight-foot wingspan to spiral up in the thermal currents.

The Piedmont

As the trail becomes more east-to-west after passing south of Boone, you'll be in the Piedmont, a region with two large metropolitan areas: Greensboro and the Raleigh-Durham-Cary combined statistical area. In neighborhoods and local parks, birds that are more accustomed to the human element will be an easy check for your bird list. Look for Eastern Towhees (you might hear them singing, saying "Drink Your Tea!" before you see them) and American Robins on the ground. Similar in size and coloration, these birds diverge at their dining choices: robins love worms and insects, and towhees enjoy seeds (notice the finch-like beak, above). Chipping Sparrows, smaller and gregarious,

Long-tailed Duck

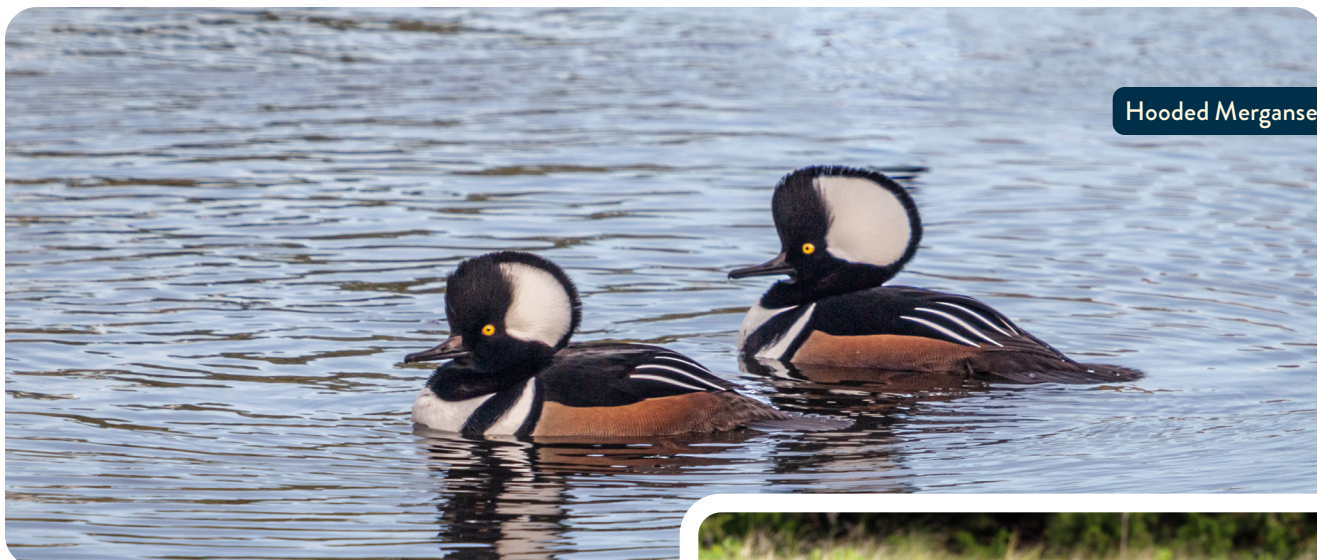


Eastern Bluebird

can also be found on the ground, either in the woods or mixed in with house sparrows at a café pecking crumbs. Two native and delightfully noisy species, Carolina Wrens and Chickadees, are everywhere.

In more forested areas, you might spy Eastern Bluebirds, but you are just as likely to see them in a nesting box in someone's yard. Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Great Crested Flycatchers, Blue Jays, Eastern Phoebe, and Brown Thrashers are common species in most parks. And spring through fall, your ears might tune into the ratcheting call of a Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

Lakes, ponds, and waterways provide chances to gawk at the increasingly funky hairdos (feather-dos?) of Red-breasted, Common, and Hooded Mergansers. Also, the slate-blue Belted Kingfisher plies his trade wherever there are fish. In the air, Mississippi Kites can appear to hover as they wait to divebomb and snatch moths, butterflies, beetles, and other large insects.



Hooded Merganser

The Coastal Plain and Outer Banks

As you approach the coast, your focus will naturally shift to the sights and sounds of the water. The Cape Fear River cuts a thin line between the mainland and the marshy introduction to the barrier islands, and the coastal plain is the home—temporary and permanent—to a host of shorebirds, gulls, and waterfowl.

All along the Coastal Plain, if ducks and similar waterfowl are your thing, you'll enjoy the paddles and waddles of Gadwalls, American Black Ducks, Redheads, Greater and Less Scaups, Common Eiders, Black- and White-winged Scoters, Common Loons, and, in winter on the Intracoastal Waterway, the fancy and monochromatically enticing Long-tailed Duck. Two species of long-necked diving ducks (they're not really ducks), Anhingas and Double-crested Cormorants, are hard to differentiate from a distance, even though they are not closely related. Watch them dive for prey, not returning to the surface for anywhere from 30 to 60 seconds.

The North Carolina coast is an important breeding ground for common, rare, and even endangered wading species. It's always fun to watch Clapper Rails; American Oystercatchers; Piping, Semipalmated, Black-bellied, and Wilson's Plovers; Killdeer; Ruddy Turnstones; Short-billed Dowitchers; and numerous sandpipers following the tide. But as you enjoy a walk on the shore, stay mindful that many of our feathered friends use the dunes and flats to nest. Look, enjoy, but don't disturb.

In the air, and possibly sneaking behind your back to nab a potato chip, are many gulls, such as Razorbills; Ring-billed, Herring, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls; plus Caspian and Forster's Terns sporting black caps. Finally, in the more inland sections of the trail, west of



Green Heron



Carolina Wren

Jackson and Emerald Isle and all along the Intracoastal Waterway, you'll have your color choice of herons: Great Blue, Snowy, Little Blue, Green, Tricolored, and Black-crowned Night Herons.

Regardless of where you are in the Tar Heel State, or what segment of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail you might explore, a variety of bird species awaits your eyes and ears.

Perched Amongst the Blue Ridge Mountains



Beech Owl
Image by Todd Bush

Beech Mountain, North Carolina, eastern America's highest town, is truly an ideal place for birdwatching. Approximately 127 bird species can be found on Beech Mountain throughout the year. Because of this great abundance of species, the High-Country Audubon Society has recognized the Buckeye Lake Recreation Area as one of a few "hot spots" in the High Country.

Birding enthusiasts are encouraged to visit the Buckeye Lake Recreation Area, which features a prime mid-to-high elevation forest and lake. Taking a leisurely stroll on the 1.5-mile Buckeye Lake Loop Trail, which surrounds Buckeye Lake, is a great way to enjoy nature and be on the lookout for a few of our feathered friends.

The open areas around the Buckeye Recreation Center host Tree, Barn, and Northern Rough-winged Swallows, Indigo Bunting, American Goldfinch, to name just a few. Also listen for Pine Siskin and Red Crossbill, which are often present, especially in good cone crop years on Beech Mountain.

The Falls Trail which follows along Buckeye Creek through a mature forest and leads to an 18-foot waterfall is another great place for birding during the breeding season. There you can find Cedar Waxwing, Wood Thrush, Veery and a very wide variety of warbler species.

Birding can be enjoyed in several other areas on the mountain. Many of Beech Mountain's natural bird habitats

are easily accessible thanks to the town's extensive network of trails. Over 27 miles of hiking and biking trails from low to high elevation provide easy access to enjoy the natural beauty of the mountain.

At the summit, you will find the Emerald Outback, a network of 9 connecting trails, some of which lead to overlooks with breathtaking views. These overlooks provide a unique place to watch Hawks sail over the valley below.

Some trails – such as the Upper Pond Creek Trail – even have interpretative guide stations at which you can stop to learn about the flora and fauna of Beech Mountain.

To pick up a free birding checklist, drop by the Beech Mountain Visitors Center at 403-A Beech Mountain Parkway. For more information visit beechmtn.com or call 828-387-9283.



Birding by buckeye lake
Image by Todd Bush



BEECH IS A RARE BIRD!

BEECH MOUNTAIN IS A TRULY UNIQUE HABITAT. HOME TO OVER 127 SPECIES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, THE BUCKEYE RECREATION AREA HAS BEEN DESIGNATED BY THE HIGH COUNTRY AUDUBON SOCIETY AS ONE OF THE "HOT SPOTS" FOR BIRDWATCHING IN THE REGION.

TO GET A FULL BRIDING LIST COME BY THE VISITOR CENTER • 403A BEECH MOUNTAIN PARKWAY



beechmtn.com



Find Your Trail in Elkin



Cedar Waxwing



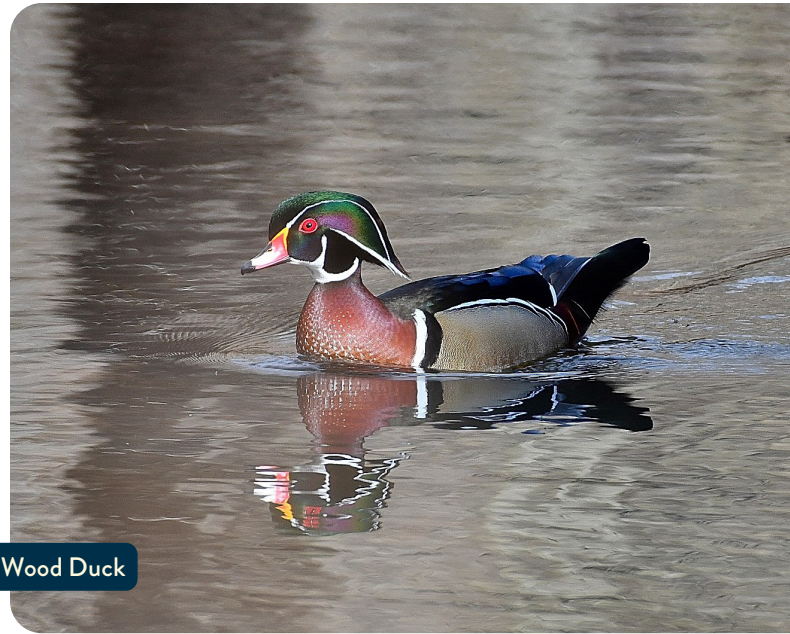
Great Blue Heron

Elkin's local trails are a fun and accessible place for observing many birds. With sections of the Mountains to Sea and Overmountain Victory trails, as well as the Yadkin River state Paddle Trail, there are numerous birding opportunities and settings to choose from.

The E & A Rail trail follows Big Elkin Creek for the most part, so waterfowl can sometimes be observed in addition to Songbirds, Hummingbirds and Woodpeckers. The hills surrounding the trail invite Hawks, Crows and Vultures.

Local residents report sightings on the ebird.com website. Several species of birds love the vines and trees along the creek. Several host berries at varying intervals throughout the year. Popular sightings include the Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird and seasonal Swallows.

Ron Storey, an expert birder who leads birding walks in California, Texas and North Carolina, enjoys the bird migration in May. "Elkin is a great place to find Warblers and Vireos during migration. They are some of North America's more colorful birds, especially in the spring when they are heading to their breeding grounds."



Wood Duck

Those interested in finding out more about birding in Elkin can contact the Elkin Valley Trails Association at elkinvalleytrails.org, and for general Elkin events and happenings, visit ExploreElkin.com

Photo Credit: Joe Mickey

FIND YOUR TRAIL
to great birding on Elkin's trails
ExploreElkin.com

EXPLORE ELKIN NC FIND YOUR TRAIL

Stay at Riversong Cabins along the Mitchell River and awake to a dawn chorus.

Use code Bird10 when you book to receive 10% off your stay at RiversongCalling.com



Birding Adventure on Lake Norman

Explore Lake Norman, North Carolina's largest inland sea, offering diverse activities such as watersports, fishing, hiking, and scenic waterfront strolls. The charming towns of Cornelius, Davidson, and Huntersville provide bountiful shopping, dining, and outdoor entertainment.

Lake Norman is home to Carolina Raptor Center (CRC) in Huntersville, the largest raptor treatment facility in the United States, featuring birdwatching trails in Latta Nature Preserve. CRC has been committed to bird conservation and education since 1984, showcasing over 30 raptor species, including the American Bald Eagle.

Latta Nature Preserve is the county's largest nature preserve with 16 miles of hiking trails, picnic areas, fishing, and kayak launches. Visit Quest for exhibits on clean water and bird inspiration, enjoy self-guided activities, or interact with a naturalist. The facility also features a gar aquarium, fishing rod rentals, and picnic areas to enjoy.

Next, take your birding adventure to the lake. Visit waterfront parks and restaurants, and go paddleboarding,

kayaking, or boating. Spot wild Osprey nests and protected islands such as Heron Island, home to numerous Blue Heron nests. NC Wildlife Federation streams a Heron Island nest camera during active nesting months.

Plan your visit to this lakeside destination just 20 minutes from uptown Charlotte at VisitLakeNorman.org.



Great Blue Heron

The Quest Center in Lake Norman



Lake Norman, North Carolina

CORNELIUS, DAVIDSON & HUNTERSVILLE

Lake Norman is home to the Carolina Raptor Center, the largest raptor treatment facility in the U.S. with popular birdwatching trails. Latta Nature Preserve is the county's largest nature preserve and is part of the Mountain Island Lake Important Bird Area, designated by the National Audubon Society due to its diversity of wintering waterfowl and breeding and migratory songbird species. Start planning your next birding adventure in Lake Norman.



Carolina Raptor Center

VisitLakeNorman.org

Tufted Titmouse

A close-up photograph of a Tufted Titmouse perched on a thin, light-brown branch. The bird has a grey crest, a black forehead, and a white breast with a yellowish-orange patch on its side. The background is a soft, out-of-focus brown.

Ample Birding Opportunities in Rockingham County

Birdwatching in Rockingham County offers a delightful experience, especially along scenic walking trails like the Chinqua Penn Trail and Smith River Greenway. These trails provide diverse habitats that attract a variety of bird species.

The Chinqua Penn Trail meanders through a mix of woodlands and open areas, making it a great spot for observing both forest-dwelling and open-country birds. Here, you might spot Eastern Bluebirds flitting among the trees, Red-bellied Woodpeckers drumming on bark, and the occasional Barred Owl perched silently. In the spring and summer, migratory songbirds such as Warblers

and Baltimore Orioles add vibrant colors and melodies to the landscape.

The Smith River Greenway, with its lush riparian zones and wetlands, is another prime location for birding. The diverse ecosystem supports species like Great Blue Herons and Belted Kingfishers near the water, while the surrounding forested areas are home to Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmice. During migration seasons, keep an eye out for transient species passing through.

Both trails offer an immersive birding experience, showcasing Rockingham County's rich avian diversity. Whether you're a seasoned birder or a casual observer, RoCo's trails provide ample opportunities to enjoy and study the region's birdlife.

For more information, visit www.visitroconc.com.



Barred Owl

Visit
ROCKINGHAM COUNTY
North Carolina

GORDON ALLEN

VISITROCONC.COM

GORDON ALLEN

LYNN M. CARTER

LYNN M. CARTER

LYNN M. CARTER



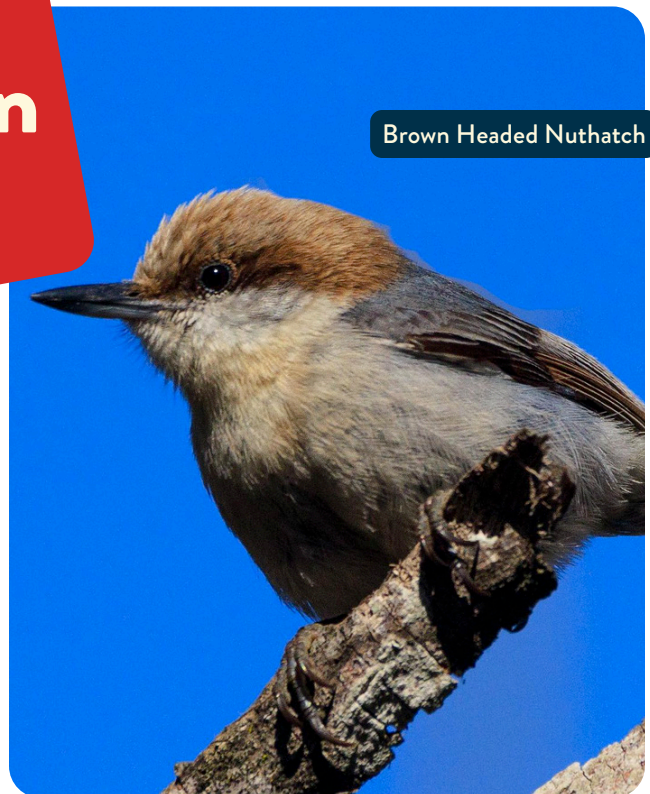
Cardinal

Birdies Not Just on the Golf Course



While the Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen Area is a globally recognized and world-class golf destination, you'll find plenty of birdies off the links, too.

The Sandhills region of North Carolina is a bird-watcher's paradise, and with locations like the Sandhills Game Lands and Weymouth Woods State Park, there are great opportunities to see a wide range of birds. The most popular species are the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, plus the White-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Warbler and the Bachman's Sparrow.



Brown Headed Nuthatch

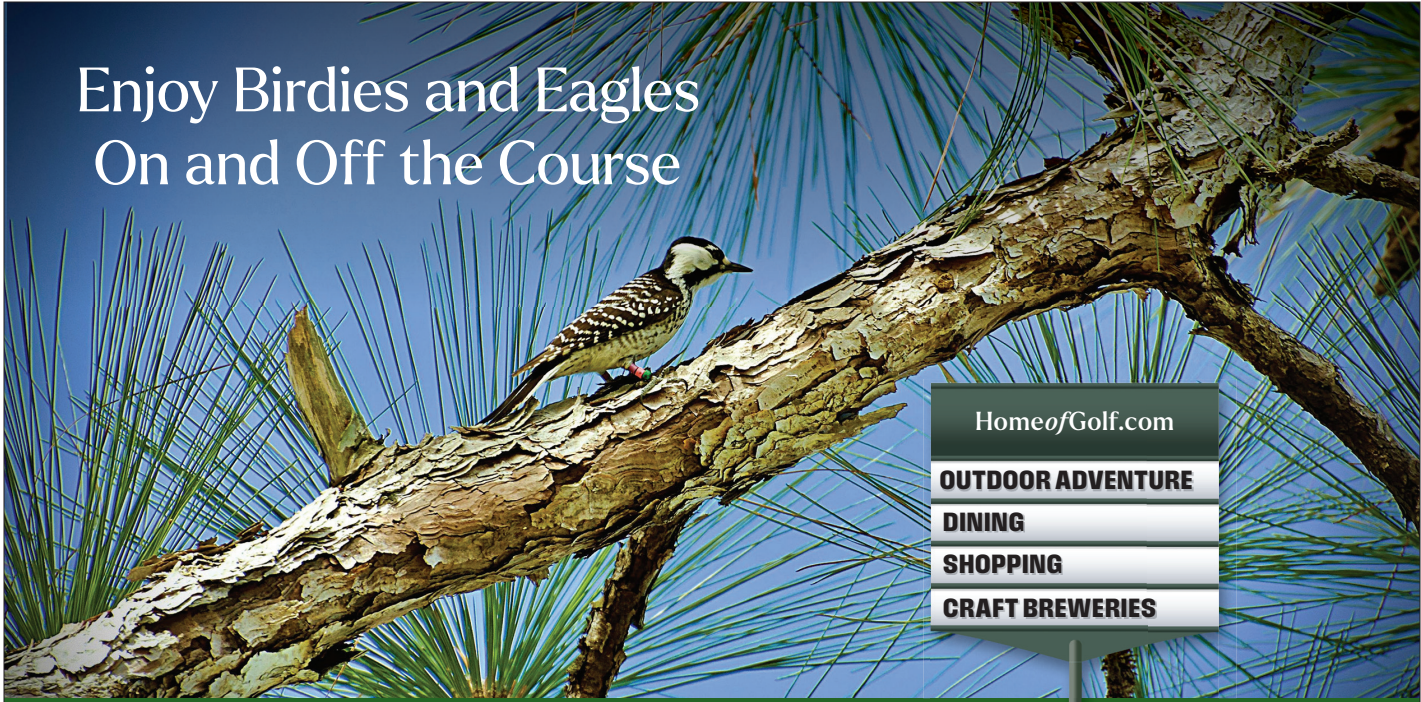
Bluebird



Inside the Game Lands many Warblers and other birds can be detected at the bridges where Drowning Creek crosses Thunder Road. Red-cockaded Woodpeckers are most easily spotted near a cavity tree marked by white bands for management purposes.

Weymouth Woods State Park has 4.5 miles of trails that give access to all the habitats found at the 515-acre Weymouth Tract. Two Red-cockaded Woodpecker colony sites are within 200 yards of the visitor center. Park staff can guide you and provide more information on seeing Red-cockaded Woodpecker and other birds of interest. The Pine Island Trail and Gum Swamp trail skirt the edge of James Creek and several beaver ponds. These trails provide opportunities to find Prothonotary, Yellow-throated and Kentucky Warblers, and other songbirds.

Enjoy Birdies and Eagles On and Off the Course



HomeofGolf.com

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

DINING

SHOPPING

CRAFT BREWERIES

📍 RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER

Here in Moore County, we are a globally recognized golf destination, but you'll find plenty of birdies off the links as well. Birds of a feather flock together to enjoy awesome outdoor adventure, unique dining, small town shopping and a gaggle of other fun things to do. Plan a visit and migrate like our seasonal birds and others like our beloved Red-cockaded woodpecker to our little cozy nest in the Sandhills. We guarantee: It's Moore than your expecting!



Birding in the Brunswick Islands: The Beach and So Much More

In North Carolina's Brunswick Islands, each new season brings fresh opportunities to make more beach memories and explore the outdoors. For birders, that means each new season offers opportunities to capture the action in a unique destination that sees a wide variety of birds at the shore: in the Intracoastal Waterway, saltmarsh creeks, swamps, and longleaf pine savannas. With 350 species spotted in the area, North Carolina's Brunswick Islands is one of the Southeast's premier birding destinations.

A trip to the Brunswick Islands starts with the beaches, of course, and there are six options to choose from—Sunset Beach, Ocean Isle Beach, Holden Beach, Oak Island, Caswell Beach, and Bald Head Island—each with its own unique charm and beauty. Whether you like to sit on the beach with a book, kayak in marshes and creeks, or hike around nature preserves with friends, there are plenty of ways to relax and enjoy the outdoors here.

But let's talk about the birds. North Carolina has its very own birding trail, and eight of the sites are in Brunswick County. It says a lot when the area includes a destination called Bird Island. Populating the area's gorgeous scenery, you'll find a variety of birds ranging from American Oystercatchers, Anhingas, Ibises and Wood Storks to many species of Plovers, Terns, Herons, and Sparrows. Sightings of the rare Red-cockaded Woodpecker have also been noted.



American Oystercatcher

Access to prime bird-watching areas is convenient and plentiful. You'll find nature trails and birding sites that dot the area from Sunset Beach and the Intracoastal Waterway to the Cape Fear River and the Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site. For bird enthusiasts who are vacationing with family and friends, there are endless opportunities to explore what Brunswick County has to offer. You'll be mesmerized by the natural beauty of the area and the rich variety of bird species that can be found in this very special coastal destination.

Check out the Brunswick Islands and enjoy pristine beaches, the best in seafood, and a birding trip you'll never forget. For more information go to NCBrunswick.com.



Wood Stork

Follow the birds to NC's Brunswick Islands. You'll follow them back again.



Like the swallows that return to Capistrano every year, birds flock to NC's Brunswick Islands, like visitors do, time and time again. It's the natural rhythm of the beach.
The sensory serenade of sun, sea, and sand.

Our tranquil beaches, Intracoastal Waterway, scenic swamps, magical marshes, and longleaf pine savannas offer a bird lover's diversity of 350 bird species that makes NC's Brunswick Islands one of the best birding destinations in the Southeast.

There's a feeling here that's hard to explain and easy to love. That's why, like the birds, you will visit and visit again.

Visit NCBrunswick.com.



north carolina's

brunswick islands

ncbrunswick.com

SUNSET BEACH • OCEAN ISLE BEACH • HOLDEN BEACH • OAK ISLAND • CASWELL BEACH
BALD HEAD ISLAND • LELAND • SHALLOTTE • SOUTHPORT • CALABASH

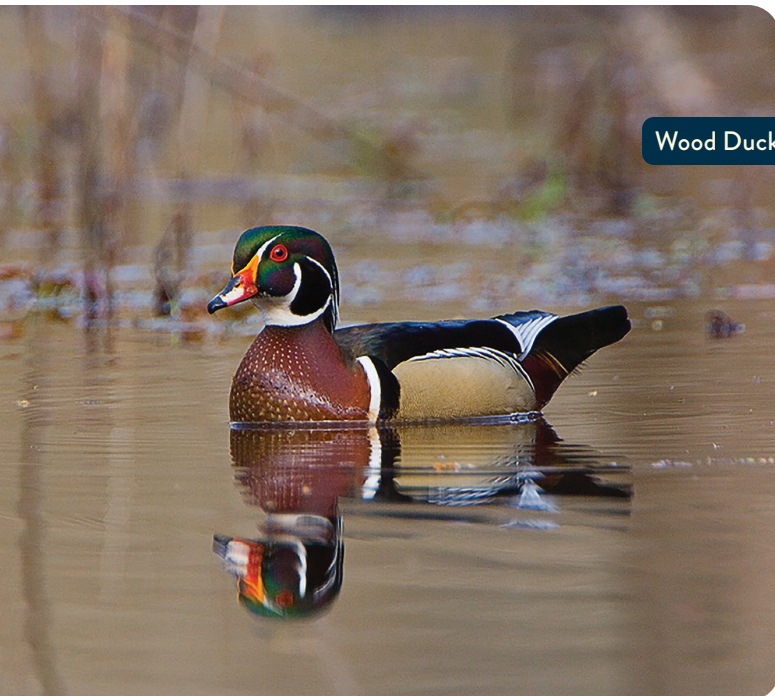
Biodiversity in the Let'Lones, Johnston County

Blue Bird

Howell Woods Environmental Learning Center in Four Oaks, NC contains a great diversity of habitats and wildlife species within 2,800 managed acres for hiking, biking, paddling, birding, and more. The property consists of bottomland hardwood forests, mixed hardwoods, and early successional habitat, plus a 60-acre lake surrounded by roughly 20 acres of marsh and wetland habitats.



Wood Duck



Howell Woods resides conveniently just a few miles off I-95, Exit 90 in a very unique area of the state. Between Smithfield and Goldsboro, along the banks of the Neuse River, stretches a 70+ square mile floodplain, remote and undeveloped for centuries.

This region is known by a few names, but most notably, the Let'Lones. It was given its name in generations past as a place you might want to "leave well enough alone" for many reasons—swamps, deep ponds, snakes, quicksand, and illegal moonshiners.

The Let'Lones is an extremely biodiverse micro-environment, and because of this, Howell Woods is known nationally as a great destination for birding. Hundreds of species can be seen throughout North Carolina's four distinct seasons including Thrushes, Finches, Sparrows, Warblers, Woodpeckers, and more.

Visit <https://www.johnstoncountync.org/birding/> for more information.



Western Meadowlark

Who's Watching Who?

Howell Woods features 15 separate trails on 2,800+ acres in Johnston County, NC., where avian observers can explore and discover native birds within a great diversity of habitats and wildlife species.



SIMPLY ENJOY THE JOURNEY.

Johnstoncountync.org/birding



Recharge and Reconnect in Greenville–Pitt County



Geese at River Park North

Greenville–Pitt County is a must-visit destination for bird enthusiasts! Explore Pitt County’s largest parks and the nearly 10-mile Greenville Greenway to find prime bird-watching spots along our waterways.

The 364-acre Wildwood Park, and trail-connected 324-acre River Park North on the NC Birding Trail, both hug the tranquil Tar River and its adjacent Cypress-Gum swamps. Find miles of trails and many scenic observation points to search for birds, from Prothonotary Warblers and Blue Grosbeak, a wide variety of waterfowl, including Wood Ducks, Great Blue Herons, and Ospreys, as well as majestic Bald Eagles and a variety of other woodland creatures!

Just south of Greenville, the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences at historic Contentnea Creek in Grifton, located on 380 acres of Bray Hollow Conservancy lands, not only features streams, forest, swamps, and ponds home to diverse flora and fauna, but an on-site visitors center with educational exhibits, a planetarium and dark-sky observatory as well!

Greenville–Pitt County’s lush, abundant woodlands and waterways offer many miles of paddling and hiking trails perfect for escaping into nature to recharge and reconnect, while having convenient access to culture, entertainment, local restaurants, breweries, farmers markets, and more. To learn more [VisitGreenvilleNC.com](https://www.visitgreenvillenc.com).

Great Blue Heron



Paddling in River Park North

BIRDWATCHERS' PARADISE AWAITS

Another hidden gem

Explore the Greenville Greenway System, Wildwood Park, and River Park North on the NC Birding Trail, all along the scenic Tar River. Find waterways and trails through Spanish moss-covered Cypress-Gum swamps and creeks with overlooks and observation points to watch waterfowl ranging from Great Blue Herons, Wood Ducks, Osprey, and Prothonotary Warblers to Bald Eagles and more!

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The Pender County Birding Trail



Flycatcher

The Pender County Birding Trail is a hidden gem for nature lovers and birdwatching enthusiasts. Located along the North Carolina coast, Pender County offers diverse ecosystems, from coastal marshes and estuaries to forests and wetlands, attracting a wide variety of bird species year-round. The trail is part of the larger North Carolina Birding Trail network, which connects birders with prime spots to observe both native and migratory birds.

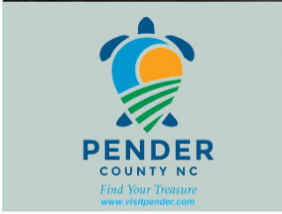
Visitors can explore several locations along the trail, including the Holly Shelter Game Land, which is home to rare species such as the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, and the Hampstead Kiwanis Park, where shorebirds and waterfowl are often spotted. The diverse landscapes provide an opportunity to see everything from wading birds like Herons and Egrets to songbirds and raptors.

The Pender County Birding Trail is not just for seasoned birders but welcomes beginners and families, offering a peaceful outdoor experience. Pender County boasts abundant natural resources, making it a prime destination for water sports, fishing, beach getaways, hiking, birding and outdoor exploration with its serene beauty and the opportunity to witness a variety of birdlife—a must-visit for anyone seeking a connection with nature.

Fly Trap



EXPLORE & DISCOVER PENDER COUNTY



THE COUNTY BOASTS IN ABUNDANT NATURAL RESOURCES, MAKING IT A PRIME DESTINATION FOR WATER SPORTS, FISHING, BEACH GETAWAYS, HIKING, BIRDING, AND OUTDOOR EXPLORATION.

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The Northern Outer Banks: From Elegant Swans to Sneaky King Rail


 A large flock of snow geese is shown in flight against a clear blue sky. The birds are white with dark wings and are scattered across the upper half of the image. Below them, a field of brown grass is visible, with some geese on the ground.

Snow Geese

Flying from distances as far away as the Arctic, the birds that make their home in The Northern Outer Banks during the winter attract birding enthusiasts nationwide.

If you've ever wanted to see elegant tundra swans, snow geese, and majestic American Bald Eagles, make sure to add Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge to your beach vacation bucket list. December and January mark a peak time for waterfowl at Mackay Island, which is part of the Atlantic Flyway. The marshes and wetlands within the refuge become a hub for thousands of migratory birds and waterfowl, including Mallards, American Black Ducks, American Widgeons, Green-winged Teals, Gadwalls and Northern Pintails.

Located on Knotts Island along North Landing River, the refuge spans roughly 8,500 acres. From mid March to mid October, visitors have access to the hiking and biking trails within the refuge. During the winter, access to the refuge is limited, but visitors can still hike a one-mile public road that leads to the front gate. This protects the habitat while still providing the public an opportunity to witness the thousands of ducks, geese, and swans that winter here.

Perhaps the biggest draw to Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge is to catch a glimpse of the elusive and secretive King Rail. Renowned for its population of King Rails, the refuge has the highest nesting density ever recorded of

the birds, according to a recent study. But you'll have to really hunt for these sneaky, chickenlike creatures, as they run around rather than flying, darting through slender gaps in the foliage. A good strategy to see the King Rails is to search for them in the morning on a day when the water is low. King Rails will stand on the mud flats, looking for crayfish to eat.

When you come to The Northern Outer Banks for your birding adventure, don't forget to mind all regulations set out in protected wildlife areas, and bring sunscreen and insect repellent... and your camera! Also, make sure you leave the areas you visit as you found them—keep the birds' home clean so that they may thrive.

For more information, go to TheNorthernOuterBanks.com.


 A King Rail is shown in profile, standing in a shallow, muddy wetland. The bird has a long, straight, orange-brown bill and a body covered in mottled brown and grey feathers. The background is a soft-focus green and blue, suggesting a natural habitat.

King Rail

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Only in The Northern Outer Banks



**NORTHERN
OUTER BANKS**

Only in The Northern Outer Banks will you find miles of unspoiled habitat, waters, marshes, and woodlands awaiting you at Mackay Island Refuge on Knotts Island, and the Audubon Sanctuary at Pine Island in Corolla, NC.

TheNorthernOuterBanks.com

North Carolina's Colorful Birds

By Sean Dennis



Roseate Spoonbills

Most of North Carolina sits squarely in the Atlantic Flyway, and the Western North Carolina mountains are part of the Mississippi flyway—two migration paths for many bird species—so it is no surprise that opportunities abound for seeing some exquisitely vibrant birds in this southeastern state. In addition, many beautiful birds reside yearlong here, making North Carolina a bird-watcher’s dream. But before we profile a few interesting species, let’s talk about the purpose of color in birds.

In most songbird species, the male is showier than the female. The generally accepted idea is that females select the bird who can display his colors better, usually via a courtship dance or other ritual, and that the most brightly colored males have a leg up on the competition. Bright colors also help birds of the same species to recognize each other. Finally, muted colors serve as protection for female birds, as they are less obvious roosting in a nest, perched on a branch, or pecking on the ground.



Northern Cardinals, male (left) and female

Northern Cardinal

For visitors from the West Coast who are accustomed to seeing the *Pyrrhuloxia*—the drab but charming cardinal of the west—the male Northern Cardinal provides a dramatic contrast. The male’s orange beak, black mask, and bright red plumage make him a treat to watch, while the female presents her own beauty in shades of buff, gray, and deep brown. One of the first species to arise



Painted Buntings, male (left) and female

just before dawn, and usually the final lingerers at dusk, Northern Cardinals are permanent residents throughout North Carolina. Plus, with their varied songs and calls—during summer, a “pew pew pew” that sounds like a child’s laser toy—Northern Cardinals provide a multisensory treat for birders of all ages.

Painted Bunting

If you guessed that a bird that looks this exotic must like it hot, you’d be right. Resplendent with a blue head, bright red breast and eye ring, and wings adorned with yellow, brown, and green, the male Painted Bunting and his green female counterpart spend their summers along the Atlantic coast to breed, but head south in the fall. These lovely birds’ primary diet is the seeds of various marsh grasses, so that’s your clue for finding them. Visiting the Outer Banks, Wilmington and the nearby barrier island beaches, and coastal towns near the South Carolina border will provide the best opportunity to marvel at their technicolor brilliance. But don’t try to get too close—they are notoriously shy.

Roseate Spoonbill

Formerly a rare visitor to coastal North Carolina beaches, the Roseate Spoonbill is still uncommon, but sightings are increasing each year. The name of this flamboyant bird points to its main visual attributes—rosy-pink wings and a long, thinly striped bill with a flattened, spoon-like tip. Their neck and underparts are white. You might surmise that they are related to the American Flamingo, but Roseate Spoonbills are in the same family as ibises. Although



Golden-crowned Kinglet

Spoonbills have been seen wading in both freshwater lakes and saltwater marshes, your best bet is visiting the coastal plain from April to August, when you might observe one or two hanging out with their kin, the White Ibis.

Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets

A pop of color against a plain background can be very eye-catching, and that's the story of these two very energetic and often inquisitive birds. You can see these kinglet species throughout the state from October to April. At first glance, they are rather unassuming: olive or gray, buff underparts, gray-and-white wingbars, and a short, dark-gray or black beak. And then... up goes the crown! This dramatic display is the male's response to something exciting—a female kinglet, a predator, a rival male, or perhaps you. The Golden-crowned male will flash yellow and fiery orange head feathers, while the Ruby version dons his red headdress for you. Although they are constantly on the move, in close quarters you might find one of these little charmers hovering in front of you, crown up, wondering, "What you are doing here in the forest?"



Wood Duck

The first time that you see a Wood Duck, you might rub your eyes and wonder if something has happened to your binoculars. There is nothing like them. Found all over North Carolina in spring and summer, these spectacular ducks live in and near freshwater marshes, ponds, and streams, and they nest in hollows in dead and live trees. How to describe them and how to begin? Starting at the front: a black, white, red, and orange beak. Bright red eyes. A blue, green, and turquoise crested head with purple cheek patches. Chestnut breast, tan underparts, white and black outlines... a picture of this bird is truly worth 1000 words! As for the female, she's cute as a button, with a white lore (colored band around the eye), and similar wing coloration (gray with patches of blue, green, turquoise, and sometimes pink). If you are planning an inland camping or fishing trip, watching these delightful ducks is a nice way to restore and revive.

Baltimore Oriole

Summertime for many is associated with baseball, and, just like Don Henley sang, Baltimore Orioles are the boys (and



Wood Ducks, female (left) and male

girls) of summer in the North Carolina mountains, and the Piedmont to a lesser degree. In other parts of the state, they are usually transient visitors seen in September and October—on the way to someplace warmer. The male’s black head, black wings with white wingbars, and bright orange breast are a treat for the eyes. Females have a lovely light-brown to yellow head and body, with a thin black eyeline, and, on occasion, are dabbed with flourishes of the male’s bright orange on the upper breast. Baltimore Orioles eat fruit, insects, and flower nectar and really enjoy dining on—yes, you guessed it, oranges!

Of course, these are just a few of the beautiful birds you can see in North Carolina. Local birding websites and tour guides can point you to any number of amazing tanagers, warblers, and other songbirds and shorebirds that will be sure to delight. Keep your eyes open, and your binoculars and camera at the ready!

For more information, visit ncbirds.carolinabirdclub.org, or nc.audubon.org/birds.



Baltimore Orioles, male (left) and female

— GUIDE TO —
BIRDING
IN NORTH CAROLINA



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