



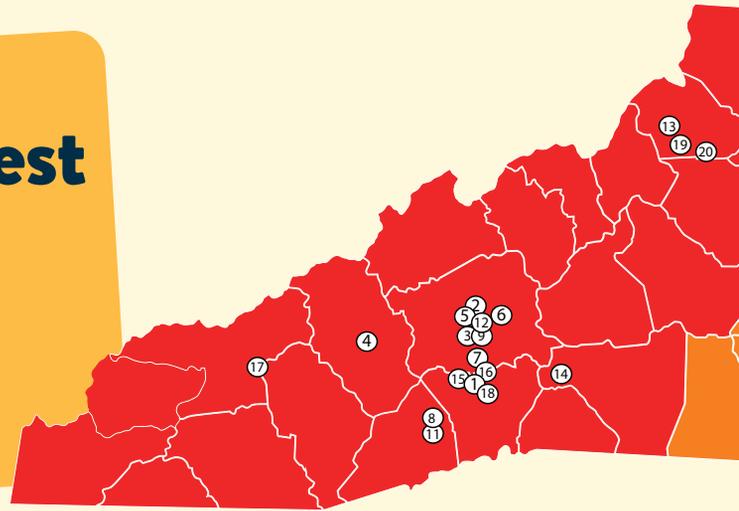
— GUIDE TO —

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.

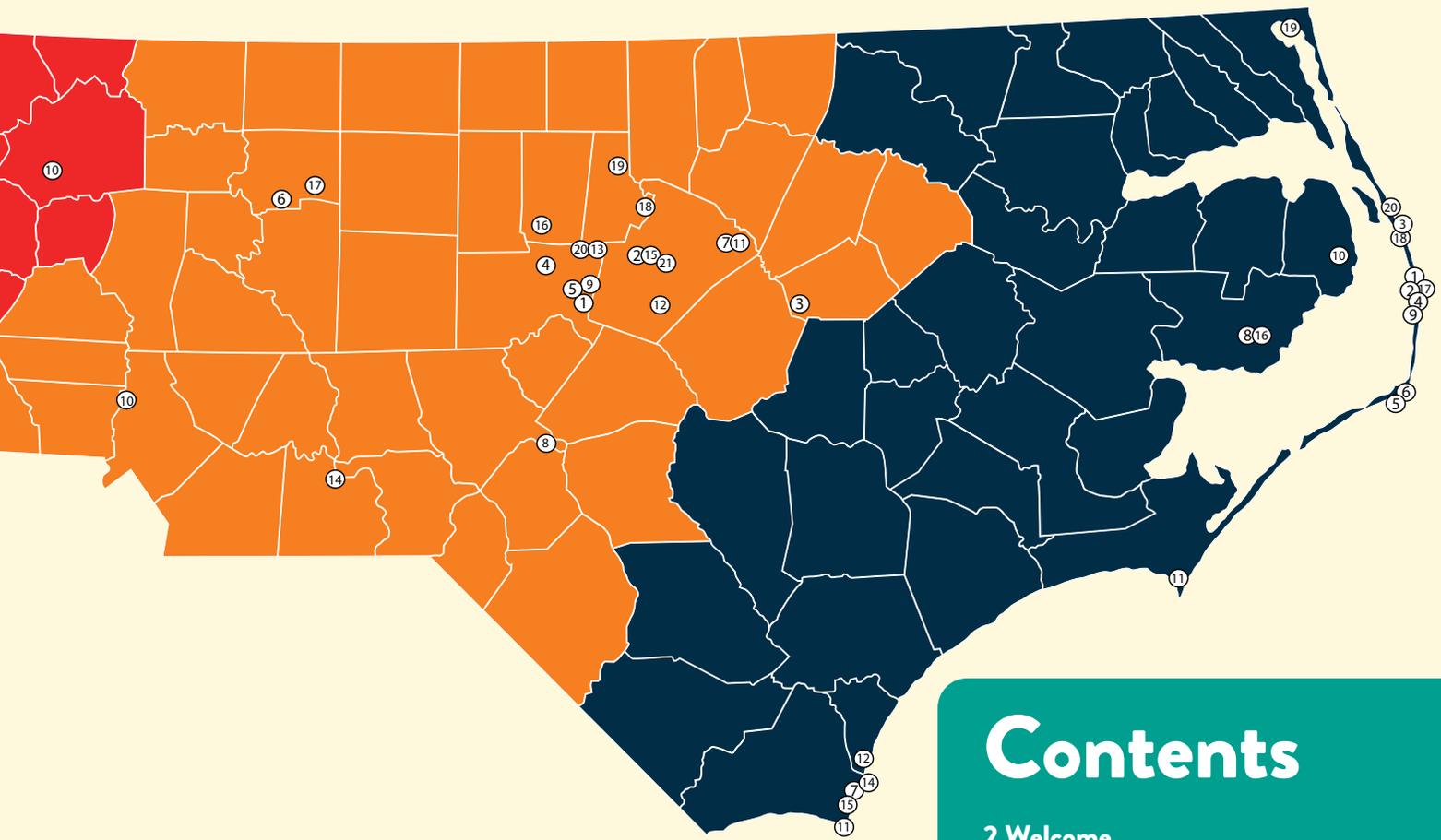


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Welcome

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, Nags Head
carolinabirdclub.org

Great Backyard Bird Count

February, Various
birdcount.org

World Migratory Bird Day

May and October, Global
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



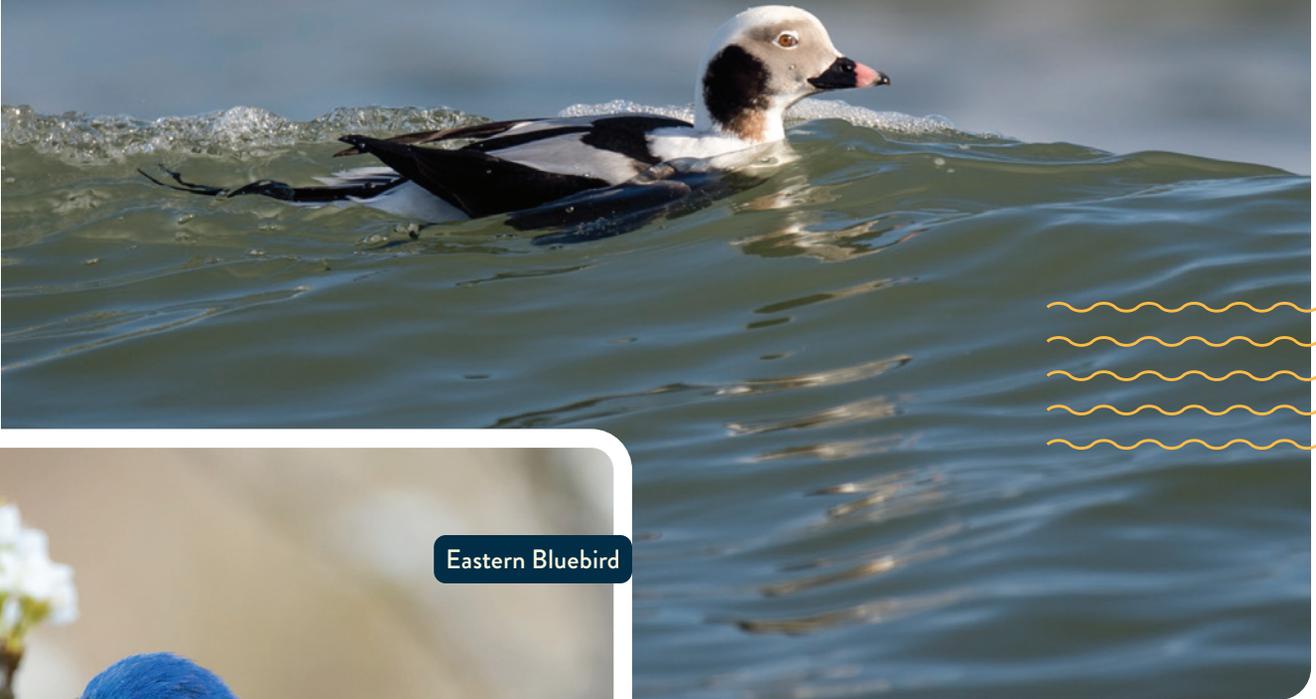
Eastern Towhee

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



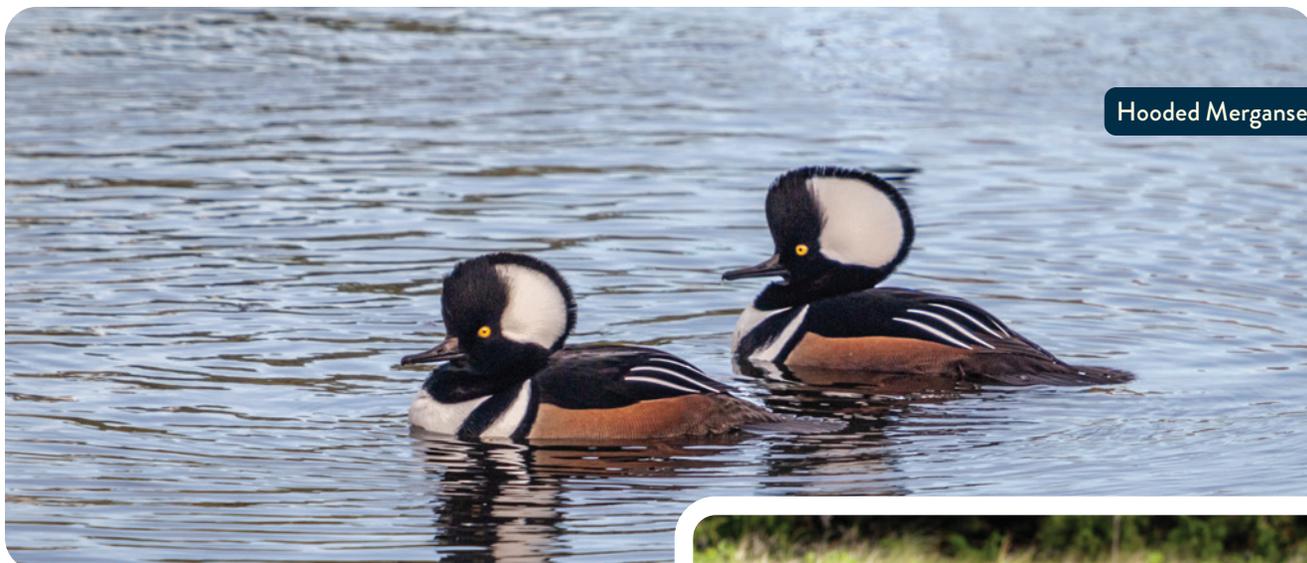
Eastern Bluebird



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 Phoebes, 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 Columbus, Brunswick, and New Hanover Counties on your way to 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.

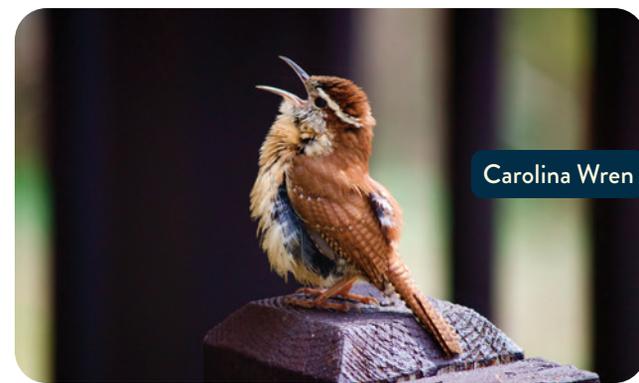
All along the Coastal Plain, if ducks and similar waterfowl are your thing, you'll enjoy the paddles and waddles of Gadwalls, American Black Ducks, Redheads, Greater and Less Scaups, Common Eiders, Black- and White-winged Scoters, Common Loons, and, in winter on the Intracoastal Waterway, the fancy and 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



Green Heron



Carolina Wren

inland sections of the trail, west of 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.

There's a Song in the Air



Woodpecker

Thanks to more than 100,000 acres of beautiful public lands, Brevard is truly for the birds. In all, Transylvania County is home to more than 270 different species of birds, ranking 19th out of North Carolina's 100 counties in bird species recorded, with over 60 species making their home here all year round.

Diverse populations thrive here, thanks to elevation ranges of 2,000–6,000 feet above sea level, abundant microclimates, and other significant features, including streams, deciduous and coniferous forests, and high mountain meadows. Expect to do a little hiking and a lot of watching, and to let your spirits soar when you spot a particularly beautiful new feathered friend.

Here are some great options when visiting:

Pisgah National Forest

The Pink Beds Loop Trail is fairly level and offers up an abundance of targets, such as the Appalachian Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Brown Creeper. You'll also find a wide variety of woodpeckers, Great Crested Flycatchers, and other cavity nesters.

Gorges State Park

Gorges is the perfect destination for those who want to combine their birding with dramatic scenery. Waterfalls abound on the western side of the park while the eastern

side (accessed from Frozen Creek Road), provides nice birding opportunities on the Auger Hole and Canebrake Trails, including the largest North Carolina population of Swainson's Warbler, along with many other breeding and migrating songbirds.

DuPont State Recreational Forest

Thanks to its varied topography and abundant water (Little River, multiple small lakes), DuPont is a birding gem. Here you'll see the usual suspects—Carolina Chickadee, American Goldfinch, Eastern Bluebird, Tufted Titmouse, Pileated Woodpecker, and Eastern Towhee—along with Belted Kingfisher, Great Blue Heron, Bufflehead Duck, Red-tailed Hawk and Bald Eagle.

Blue Ridge Parkway

From Devil's Courthouse (Milepost 422.4), check out performances by Peregrine Falcons that nest on the rock face. Because of the spruce-fir forest in this area, you'll also see Brown Creepers, Magnolia Warblers, Red Crossbills, and Hermit Thrushes. Breeding species in the area include Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, and Canada Warblers, and Veery and Winter Wren.

If you're looking to schedule a little bird-spotting on the fly, the Transylvania County Bird Club offers free field trips on Wednesdays and Saturdays unless there's inclement weather. For more specific tips and suggestions for birding in Transylvania County, go to [ExploreBrevard.com/birding](https://www.explorebrevard.com/birding) or Google search the Transylvania County Bird Club.



Flights of Fancy



WWW.EXPLOREBREVARD.COM

Lake Norman: Birding and More at the Lakeside

Discover North Carolina's largest inland sea—Lake Norman—and its abundant watersports, fishing, hiking and leisurely waterfront strolls. Bordering the lake are the charming towns of Cornelius, Davidson, and Huntersville, offering bountiful shopping (try Birkdale Village), cultural cuisines (try Kindred Restaurant), and plenty of great outdoor entertainment.

Lake Norman is home to Carolina Raptor Center (CRC) in Huntersville, the largest treatment facility for birds of prey in the United States, as well as popular birdwatching trails located within Latta Nature Preserve. Since 1984, CRC has been dedicated to environmental stewardship and the conservation of birds of prey through education, research, and the rehabilitation of injured and orphan raptors. This is one of the only centers in the Southeast that rehabilitates and exhibits the American Bald Eagle. CRC has more than 30 species on the unique Raptor Trail and Owl Forest, where you can take a journey alongside aviaries for an up-close and personal experience.

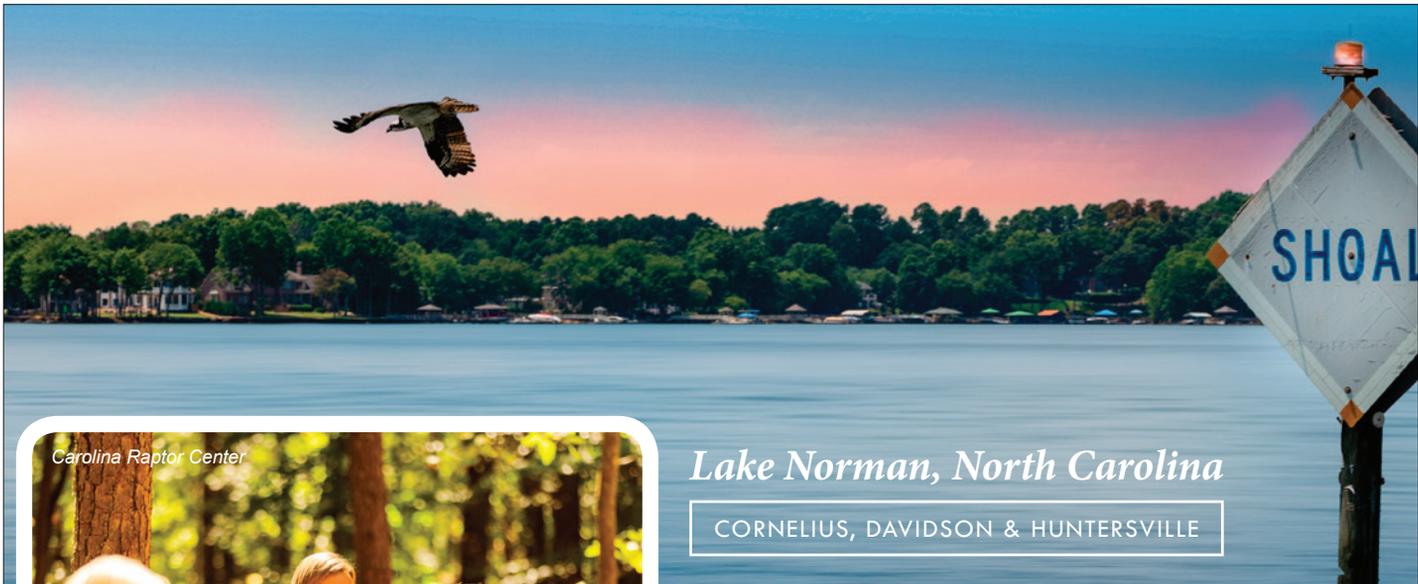
Latta Nature Preserve is the county's largest nature preserve, and is part of the Mountain Island Lake Important Bird Area, designated by the National Audubon Society due to its diversity of wintering waterfowl, and breeding and migratory songbird species. It has 16 miles of hiking trails, a picnic area with shelter overlooks, fishing opportunities and kayak launch areas. Also located in the Latta Nature Preserve is Quest Center—a facility hosting indoor and outdoor exhibits that focus on the importance of clean



water and the inspiration that birds bring to our lives. There, you can view the gar aquarium, borrow a fishing rod, and purchase bait in the gift shop to use during your visit on the preserve.

Next, take your birding adventure to the lake. Visit waterfront parks and restaurants, or get out on the water by renting a paddleboard, kayak, or boat. You may see wild osprey nests on shoal marker signs and designated osprey nesting platforms. Lake Norman has many protected islands, including one named Heron Island, where dozens of nests of Blue Herons are visible. North Carolina Wildlife Federation streams a Heron Island nest camera during active nesting months.

Start planning your next experience to the lakeside, only 20 minutes from uptown Charlotte, at [VisitLakeNorman.org](https://www.visitlakenorman.org).



Carolina Raptor Center



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., and 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.

VisitLakeNorman.org

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.


 An American Oystercatcher bird with a black head and neck, a long, bright orange beak, and brown and white plumage on its body, standing in shallow water.

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.


 A Semipalmated Plover bird with a white body, a dark band around its neck, and a dark cap, standing on a sandy beach.

Semipalmated Plover

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

Camden County: The Perfect Backdrop



Bald Eagle

The Dismal Swamp State Park and historic Dismal Swamp Canal, located in Camden County, offer bird lovers the opportunity to catch a glimpse of more than 173 species of birds. The Dismal Swamp State Park includes a Visitor Center sharing the history and mystery of the swamp, a half-mile boardwalk, over 20 miles of old logging trails, and ranger-led programs. Explore the swamp and its abundance of flora and fauna through activities like hiking, biking, birding, photography and kayaking. Bike and kayak rentals are available daily. For more information about the Dismal Swamp State Park's activities and programs, visit NCParks.gov.



Mallard Duck

Nature enthusiasts can also enjoy a leisurely hike on the Dismal Swamp Canal Trail, a three-mile, hard-surfaced trail that winds its way between US Highway 17 and the Dismal Swamp Canal. Benches and picnic tables are available along the trail, which also features interpretive signage describing the canal's history. An additional 1.5 miles are available to explore via NC Highway 343 into the village of South Mills.

Woodpecker, Red-tailed Hawk and Great Horned Owl on these NC Birding Trail designated sites.

Camden County's stunning nature, pristine waters and variety of trails and parks create the perfect backdrop to experience and reconnect with nature through outdoor recreation. To learn more about our wide-open spaces, farmers markets, eateries and lodging amenities, visit VisitCamdenCountyNC.Com.

Keep your eyes peeled for sightings of the Swainson's Warbler, White-Throated Sparrow, Great Egret, Bald Eagle, Prothonotary Warbler, Indigo Bunting, Red-cockaded

[Click here to view the Dismal Swamp/Camden County Bird List.](#)

A Birder's Paradise

Discover Birding at the Dismal Swamp in Camden County, NC

Explore our network of accessible outdoor parks, trails and waterways. The Dismal Swamp is home to more than 100 species of birds, big and small. Grab your binoculars and enjoy watching one of our beautiful feathered friends.



Visit <https://www.visitcamdencountync.com/> or phone 252-771-8333 to learn more about our popular birding spots.



Currituck County: From Elegant Swans to Sneaky King Rail


 A large flock of snow geese is captured in flight against a clear blue sky. The birds are in various stages of their wing strokes, creating a sense of dynamic movement. Below the flying birds, a field of waterfowl is visible on the ground.

Snow Geese

Flying from distances as far away as the Arctic, the birds that make their home in Currituck County 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 Currituck 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 visitcurrituck.com.


 A King Rail is shown in profile, standing in a shallow, wetland area. The bird has a long, straight, orange-brown bill and a body covered in mottled brown and tan feathers. The background is a soft-focus natural setting with green and blue tones.

King Rail

EXPLORE EXPECTANTLY



Currituck is a Native American word that means “the land of the wild goose,” and many bird lovers have discovered it’s not just a legend. Miles of unspoiled habitat, waters, marshes, and woodlands await you at Mackay Island Refuge on Knotts Island, and the Audubon Sanctuary at Pine Island in Corolla, NC.



Discover the First Peak of the Blue Ridge



Pearson's Falls

We welcome you to meet new feathered friends around the First Peak of the Blue Ridge, a beautiful area in Western North Carolina that includes rugged mountains, river gorges and gently rolling hills. This area in Polk County includes the southern escarpment of the N.C. Blue Ridge Mountains, creating a weather pattern known as an isothermal belt, moderating temperatures along some mountain slopes throughout the year.

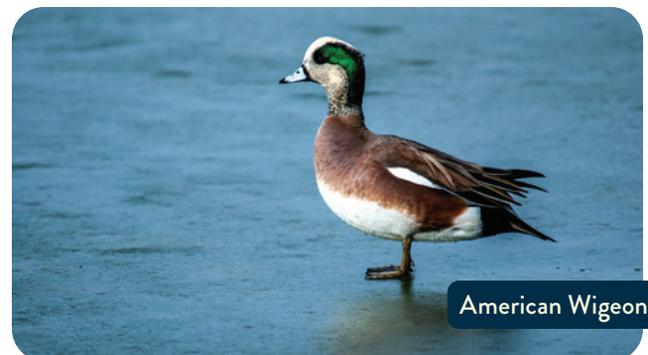
With just 20,000 residents, it's what we **don't** have that makes us special. This rural county has quick and easy access from I-26 and U.S. Hwy 74. Our three scenic small towns—Tryon, Saluda and Columbus—feature locally owned businesses, lodging and restaurants. This allows the majority of the area to remain natural, with habitat to support wildlife throughout migrations and breeding season during the mild four-season climate.

You'll discover a variety of hardwood forests, meadows, mountains, fields and wetlands throughout our four designated stops on the North Carolina Birding Trail: Pearson's Falls and Glen, the Foothills Equestrian Nature Center, Norman Wilder Forest and the Green River Game

Lands. There are more hot spots in the area like Lake Adger—high on the species count for the mountain region.

Our website is the best guide to these places and more—scan the QR code below or go to firstpeaknc.com and use the interactive map to find great places to eat and stay near our birding sites. Call or stop by the First Peak Visitor Center to plan your visit or your next stop. The foyer is open 24/7 with maps and information.

20 E. Mills St., Columbus,
NC 28722, 828-894-2324,
www.firstpeaknc.com.



American Wigeon



Polk County

237. Species *and counting...*

so bring your binoculars and
camera to Polk County today!



www.firstpeaknc.com Ph: 1-800-440-7848



Find Your Trail in Elkin



Cedar Waxwing



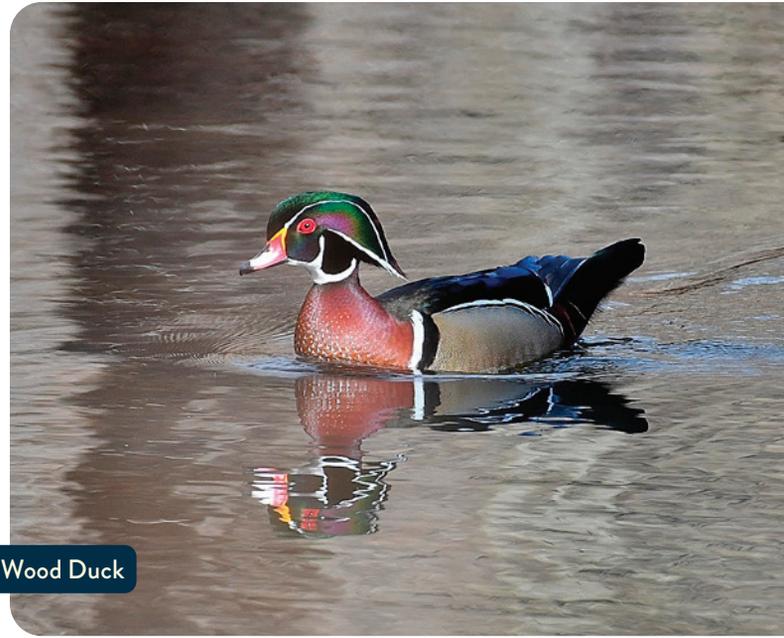
Great Blue Heron

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

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Pender County: The Perfect Mix of History, Land, and Sea

Pender County is a perfect home to many of the most-sighted birds and waterfowl that are native to Coastal North Carolina, specifically those that are found in the region's pine and hardwood forests, floodplain forests, longleaf pine forests, savanna, wetlands, and managed waterfowl areas.

The Moores Creek National Battlefield is a National Park encompassing 88 acres, accessible by nearly a mile of trails, footpaths, and raised walkways. Moores Creek has a beautiful blackwater stream that embraces old cypress swamp habitats and draws a great variety of Warblers, Woodpeckers, Vireos and Songbirds during migration and breeding periods.

The historic Poplar Grove Plantation is the oldest peanut plantation in the south, and is a restored site of period architecture and cultural attractions. Next door is the Abbey Nature Preserve, where visitors can walk a well-kept 2.5-mile-long trail past a millpond that draws Osprey, Belted Kingfisher, and wading birds.

Also located along Pender's segment of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail is Segment #14, The Holly Shelter Gameland. This is a birding gem of the state—an important player in the preservation of rare, threatened, and endangered species. The Gameland boasts public woodlands and wetlands on 75,000 acres, with areas for hiking, birdwatching and hunting.



Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher

Northern Cardinal



PENDER COUNTY

*Pender County is rich in natural resources.
We are a destination of water sports, fishing, beaches, hiking and exploring.*



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

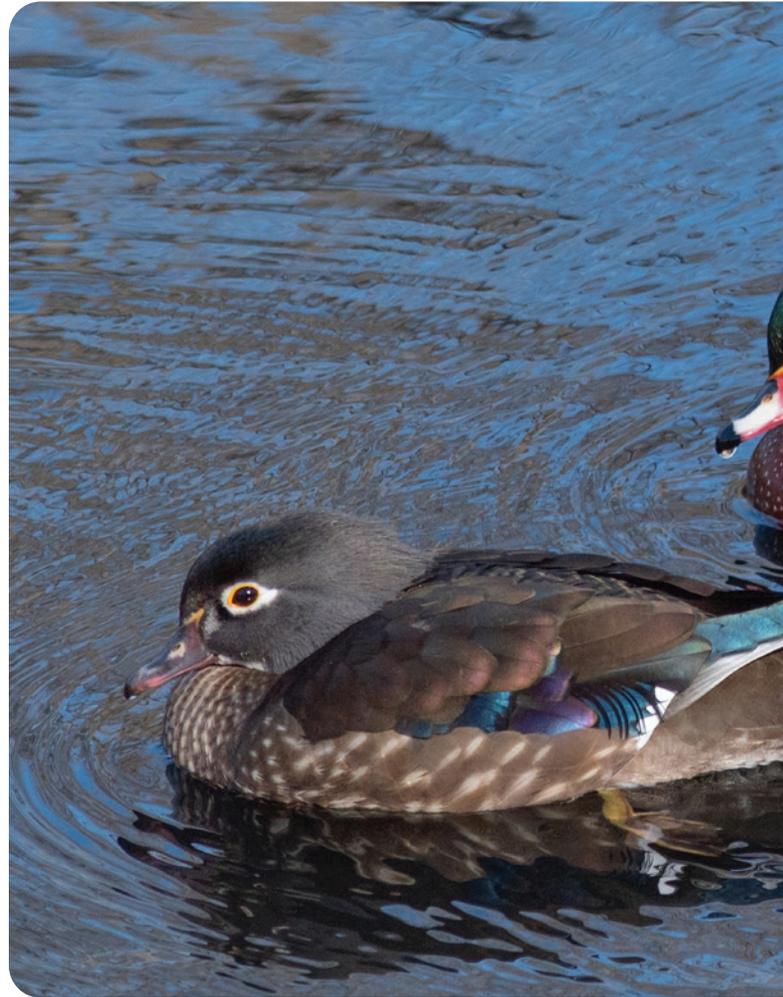


Golden-crowned Kinglet

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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