

CBC Newsletter

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

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Carolina Bird Club Donates Significant Funds to Bird Habitat Project in Western North Carolina

by Craig Watson, Martina Nordstrand, Karyl Gabriel, & Guy McGrane Photos by Travis Bordley



Karyl Gabriel & Martina Nordstrand at Wiles Creek

In August of 2020, the Carolina Bird Club (CBC) donated \$65,500 to the Southern Appalachians Highland Conservancy (SAHC) for the protection and management of bird habitat in western North Carolina, specifically for the management of habitat for Golden-winged Warbler and for the protection of other high priority habitats and bird species that occupy habitats from below 3000' to habitats above 5000'. Some of these species are Black-billed Cuckoo, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Least Flycatcher, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Alder Flycatcher, Canada Warbler, and Red Crossbill. Officially, the title of the project is "Land Protection and Conservation Measures for Golden-winged Warbler and Associated High Elevation Avian Species in Western North Carolina," and referred to hereafter as the Wiles Creek Project.

At its summer meeting in 2019, CBC President Lewis Burke charged the Conservation Committee with finding a high-quality project the CBC could provide funds to that would make a difference in the conservation of birds and their habitats in the Carolinas. Having donated a large sum to a coastal project in South Carolina several years ago, North Carolina Vice President Martina Nordstrand suggested the mountains of North Carolina, and specifically a project for the Golden-winged Warbler. That set the wheels in motion and after several months of working with the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture (a partnership for bird habitat conservation for the entire Appalachian Mountains) several very high-quality projects were identified to potentially fund. After careful consideration, the Executive Committee (EC) decided to investigate the Wiles Creek Project.

Shortly thereafter, the pandemic hit and delayed any site visits to the project area. However, in early August, Martina Nordstrand, Karyl Gabriel, and Guy McGrane visited the site with staff of the SAHC. A tour of the project area was given and discussions took place regarding the stewardship and management of the property. After



Marquette Crockett from SAHC, Guy McGrane, Karyl Gabriel, & Martina Nordstrand at potential Golden-winged Warbler habitat

further investigation and exemplary site visit reports from our three EC members, the EC decided to fund this project!

One hundred fifty acres will be protected and 67 acres will be managed for high elevation early successional species. The CBC funds will be pooled with other partner funds to completely fund the protection of the area, as the full purchase price of the property is \$400,000.

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Carolina Bird Club Donates Significant Funds to Bird Habitat Project in Western North Carolina (continued from page 1)

Our interest in the property is significant and discussions held at the site visit indicate that the project area could certainly be open to CBC members to conduct bird related activities, with one possibility being a new hawk watch. Other activities such as CBC visits, bird surveys, and other activities are possible.

The Wiles Creek Project is within the Roan Mountain Important Bird Area (IBA) and includes five contiguous tracts and one non-contiguous tract in Mitchell County, North Carolina. The following additional conservation values make this property a worthwhile investment by the CBC:

- Shares approximately 0.75 miles of boundary with Pisgah National Forest and is located just north of SAHC's Broad Branch Preserve.
- Within Audubon's Roan Mountain Important Bird Area (IBA) and within 5 miles of occupied Golden-winged Warbler habitat.
- · Within the Grandfather Unaka Priority Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area (PARCA).
- The eastern boundaries overlap the state-designated Roan Massif Natural Area (Ranked Exceptional as Flagship Conservation Area).
- Within TNC's Roan Mountain West Forest Matrix Block (Tier 1) for large contiguous forest blocks.
- TNC climate resilience rank of Above Average.
- Six streams, including Wiles Creek (NC DWR Trout waters) and three of its tributaries, which flow into Big Rock Creek (NC DWR Trout waters), and two headwater tributaries to Big Rock Creek.
- Contains two meadows that provide excellent early successional habitat one meadow is approximately 3.6 acres and the other is approximately 6 acres.
- There are five modest, historic wood frame structures in the lower portion of the property. These will be removed by SAHC as time and resources allow, with the exception of a small cabin, which will be used as a part of our "Connecting People with Nature" program, providing housing for researchers, members, and educational outings.

The Wiles Creek Preserve will be owned by SAHC in the long term as a nature preserve and will be managed for priority bird habitats, water quality, and other natural features. The property is a true gem to be protected and managed within the southern Appalachian landscape and Marquette Crockett of SAHC states, "The Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy is thrilled to accept a \$65,500 donation from the Carolina Bird Club for the protection and stewardship of our new Wiles Creek Preserve. The 166-acre Wiles Creek Preserve is exceptionally diverse in elevation and habitat types. It is rare that one property could be so valuable for pollinators and early successional species like Golden-winged Warbler, Field Sparrow, and Chestnut-sided Warbler, but also provide exceptional habitat for forest interior birds including species like Veery and Black-throated Blue Warblers - continuing right on up the slope into habitat for Canada Warbler, Brown Creeper, and who knows, maybe even a Saw-whet Owl. We cannot wait to partner with CBC to explore and utilize this property to promote birding, conservation, and environmental education."

Executive Committee member Karyl Gabriel, who visited the site, said of the property and proposal, "Wiles Creek is a beautiful property with exceptional habitat for many types of birds and SAHC is a proven, trusted partner. This is a remarkable oppor-

tunity to preserve important bird habitat in NC, consistent with the CBC's goals. In addition to bird species and habitat, the property supports a wide diversity of plants, amphibians, and other species. In the age of COVID-19, while the CBC temporarily cannot hold our seasonal meetings and field trips, it is nice that we can still be of value as an organization by making a significant investment in the future of our natural environment and challenged bird species. We hope that our members will take pride in this result of their commitment and, maybe, have the chance to visit the Wiles Creek property in the future."

The Wiles Creek Project is one that the CBC can be proud to be a part of, being a true conservation partner in a larger conservation community that strives to protect habitat for high priority species in high priority areas. The CBC looks forward to working with the SAHC and developing activities that further the mission of both organizations.



Martina Nordstrand, Karyl Gabriel, Marquette Crockett from SAHC, & Guy McGrane at the Wiles Creek Northern Hardwood Forest habitat

Hanahan Residents Recognized for Their Hospitality and Study of Limpkins in Berkeley County, SC

by Craig Watson



Craig Watson presenting Don & Barbara Alexander their recognition certificate, photo by Pamela Ford

Little did she know how the birding community would react, and what was to come! That day in August alone saw about 10 birders show up to her yard and see the Limpkin! Word spread through the birding community and birders flocked to the area to see the Limpkin. Just a few days later, a second Limpkin appeared, and we hoped it could be a possible pair!

Over the next few months dozens of birders were treated to seeing two Limpkins, and to being treated with great hospitality from the Alexander's that is difficult to describe. Barbara and Don established a texting network of the neighbors so that she could alert the neighbors of birders coming to see the Limpkins! Barbara and her neighbors came to know the birders and everyone enjoyed the fellowship and the birds! Barbara and Don offered their kayaks to birders, and they took birders on their pontoon boat to view the birds.

The Carolina Bird Club gratefully recognizes Barbara and Don Alexander of Hanahan, South Carolina for their hospitality and welcoming of birders to their yard and their neighbor's yards, for over a hundred birders to observe Limpkins at close range, and to be able to document evidence of the first known breeding of Limpkins in South Carolina.

Over a year ago on August 2, 2019, Barbara and Don welcomed a few of us birders to view a Limpkin that began showing up in their yard and the nearby small islands of Goose Creek Reservoir. Barbara had noticed that one particular bird that they had seen appeared different and she began posting the photos of the bird on Facebook, and some individuals told that it was indeed a Limpkin. Through birding and Facebook networks, and knowing this was a significant observation for the state, I contacted Barbara, and the next day, on my way to a family reunion to Tennessee, my daughter, granddaughter, and I stopped at Barbara's where we were able to view one Limpkin perched in a sapling on a small island behind her



Limpkin family, photo by Craig Watson

Barbara and Don talked and interacted with birders as often as possible and with birders coming and going at all hours of the day, they often came home to birders in their yard!

home.

Eventually one bird disappeared and the remaining bird called for hours at night for what seemed like months, and then a second Limpkin reappeared. In addition, as cold fronts moved through the area, we expected the Limpkins to leave, but through the winter, both Limpkins remained. Over the next few months, birders continued to visit the site and watching the Limpkins, and they began exhibiting breeding behavior. Once the pandemic came to be, Barbara and Don were often at home and interacting more with the birders and all were becoming excited about the possibility of the Limpkin pair nesting in South Carolina for the first time ever.

In early June, a brood of young Limpkins was found at the site, documenting the first known record of nesting Limpkins in South Carolina (detailed publication to be submitted for The Chat). Again, the news spread and birders continued to come to the area to view the Limpkin chicks and again, Barbara and Don were there to welcome birders and share in their excitement of the new discovery! Literally, over the past year, over a hundred birders have visited the site, hundreds of observations have been recorded in eBird, and countless hours of observation and enjoyment has fulfilled the lives of the local residents and birders!

Barbara and Don have welcomed birders to their yards, and their neighbor's yards for over a year now. Many of us have become good friends with them. Without their excitement for the birds and the good behavior of the birders, we would not have been able to experience these birds and their nesting here in South Carolina. For this, the Carolina Bird Club has provided the Alexanders with a free year's membership in the CBC and presented them with a Certificate of Appreciation for their unwavering enthusiasm for the Limpkins and their hospitality to birders!

(Continued on page 4)

Hanahan Residents Recognized for Their Hospitality and Study of Limpkins in Berkeley County, SC (continued from page 3)



THANK YOU BARBARA AND DON! YOU ARE OUR BIRD HEROES!

2020 Grants Update

by Craig Watson

In the June Newsletter, I provided an update on the grants awarded since late last year and the first part of 2020. To recap, several of those grants are on hold due to university policy not allowing fieldwork and these are American Oystercatcher research in North Carolina and Whimbrel and Red Knot research in South Carolina. The status of these projects remain the same and will be implemented next season (2021). Please see details in the June 2020 Newsletter (page 9) for additional information.

Two additional projects have been approved by the Executive Committee for 2020: Three Rivers Land Trust-Save the Yadkin Phase II – Alcoa Lands Acquisition (\$5000) and Migratory Connectivity of Eastern Painted Buntings, Aaron Given, Town of Kiawah Island (\$2,835). Both of these grants required approval by the Executive Committee (EC) since all allocated 2020 funds were already expended through the grants listed in the first section here. The EC unanimously approved both projects and agreed to revisit the annual allocation of funds for grants since high quality grants continue to be submitted. Grants submitted for the remainder of the calendar year will have to be of very high quality and very compelling to fund this calendar year and these will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Three Rivers Land Trust-Save the Yadkin Phase II – Alcoa Lands Acquisition

The goal of the Save the Yadkin Phase II lands is the purchase of 2400 acres and 31 miles of shoreline on Tuckertown Reservoir, which will be owned by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) for the purposes of wildlife habitat conservation, public recreation, and water quality protection. This property presents a wide variety of habitats and its protection will benefit a host of species, including a great variety of bird species that are both residents and migrants in the region. Some of the species are King Rail, Kentucky Warbler, Wood Thrush, Rusty Blackbird, Swainson's Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Eastern Whip-poor-will, Prairie Warbler, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Prothonotary Warbler, and Red-headed Woodpecker.

This project is adjacent to the 50,000-acre Uwharrie National Forest and therefore is a landscape scale project which builds off other conservation and recreational lands in the region. Immediately north of this project, is the 2,643 acres of the Save the Yadkin Phase I acquisition on High Rock Lake. The Phase I acquisition also adjoins 1,400 acres of land owned and managed by Three Rivers Land Trust which is also open to the public through our Sportsman Access Program.

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2020 Grants Update (continued from page 4)

Three Rivers Land Trust formed in 1995 and since that time we have conserved over 40,000 acres of land, transferred over 5,700 acres to the public trust, protected over 283 miles of streams and waterways, and conserved over 15,000 acres of farmland. Just last year, the Three Rivers Land Trust engaged over 1,000 people with the outdoors through outdoor programs, which includes our Sportsman Access Program for hunters and fisherman, our Uwharrie Trail Thru Hike for backpackers, our Leopold Society Youth Program, as well as other events including bird walks, hikes, paddle races, and more.

With the CBC contributing \$5,000, the Save the Yadkin Phase II Project conserves critical habitat, connects conserved areas and wild places, provides access for the public and helps sustain the local outdoor recreation and tourism economies. Our funding and that of our other private and public partners, we will ensure the permanent conservation of an incredibly important resource for both wildlife and the generations that will visit or call North Carolina home. Additionally, our contribution has recently been featured in three regional newspapers:

https://www.thesnaponline.com/2020/07/30/land-trust-receives-funds-for-save-the-yadkin/https://greensboro.com/life/club-happenings/article_2f69d168-0027-5f18-b693-74778784f0ce.html

https://www.salisburypost.com/2020/08/02/biz-roundup-yadkin-path-montessori-school-creates-co-working-space-for-k-4-students/



Overlooking the Yadkin River, Three Rivers Land Trust, photo by Craig Watson

Migratory Connectivity of Eastern Painted Buntings, Aaron Given, Town of Kiawah Island

This grant is in the amount of \$2,835 and it is a continuation of Aaron's work on Painted Bunting in coastal South Carolina. Funding will be used to purchase and outfit Painted Buntings with 30 nanotags. Tracking will be done through MOTUS Tracking Stations (www.motus.org) and tracking will focus on long distance movements that will help fill in critical data gaps for the movement ecology of Painted Buntings along the southeastern coast. With the addition of new Motus stations along the southeastern coast, detection rates should increase and provide more detailed information on migration routes, stopover areas, or key wintering areas. The data will help biologists, land managers, and potential developers to identify and preserve specific habitats that are important for Painted Buntings. Additionally, the Motus stations on Kiawah will likely detect birds from other research projects using nanotags, indirectly helping other researchers accomplish their objectives. The Town of Kiawah is providing approximately \$4000 for the purchase of this equipment.



Welcome New CBC Members!

Ann & Michael Smith Ed Corey Nathan Reeves Scott Younkin Barnardsville, NC Raleigh, NC Conway, SC Raleigh, NC

Theresa Rizzuto Paul Saffold Peter Kussin
Durham, NC Mebane, NC Chapel Hill, NC Durham, NC Chapel Hill, NC Durham, NC Chapel Hill, NC Leland, NC

Kathleen & Molly Quinn
Rich McLaughlin Ronald Shelton Michelle Combs
Janis McFand Fayetteville, NC Candler, NC Durham, NC

Mary Kimberly
Gavin MacDonald
Decatur, GA

Barbara Grimmer
Wilmington, NC

Michael Carlisle
Mount Pleasant, SC

Leucism in Brown-headed Nuthatches

by Mark Stanback, Dept. of Biology, Davidson College

Leucism is an abnormal plumage condition caused when pigment, particularly melanin, is not properly deposited on a bird's feathers during development. There is currently some disagreement as to whether leucism is strictly genetic or simply a product of pigment cells damaged during development. Regardless of its proximate cause, leucism, unlike albinism, affects only feathers.

Here I report on leucism observed in two of six nestling Brownheaded Nuthatches (*Sitta pusilla*) within a single nest. This nest was located in a nest box with a 26-mm entrance hole located on the Peninsula Golf Course in Huntersville, NC. The nest contained seven eggs, of which six hatched on 11 April 2020. I banded all six nestlings on 19 April when they were 8 days old. At that point the nestlings were not mature enough to exhibit their leucism. However, when I returned to the nest on 26 April, two of the nestlings were clearly leucistic (see Fig. 1). Because I did not make extensive observations at the nest, I do not know whether any of the adults attending the nest were leucistic. All six nestlings fledged successfully.



Fig. 1



Chapel Hill, NC

Opportunities for Young Birders

Carolina Bird Club offers scholarships for birders 19 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

NOTICE OF CHANGE:

CBC Winter Meeting – Outer Banks (OBX), NC From: Friday & Saturday, January 14-17, 2021 (Cancelled) To: Friday & Saturday, January 13-16, 2022



Short-eared Owl by David Alan, Flickr Creative Commons

The sad news is Covid-19 has claimed another event - the upcoming Winter Meeting at the always amazing Outer Banks. OBX Weekend is often the largest attended event we hold every 2 years. The current status of the pandemic has placed an unpleasant burden on the Board's shoulders in planning the CBC Winter Meeting. Comments from members have clearly confirmed the Board's unanimous consensus we would be placing members at risk throughout the Meeting activities at which social distancing is not practical or cannot be established.

The good news is OBX has been confirmed for the winter of 2022. We lament the need to wait another year for the anticipation of the oft discovered rarities and those up-close views of expected, over-wintering species. Place these new dates on your calendars. This should be after a vaccine has been tested in the general population and activity in the host hotel more secure and safe for attendees.

Mother Nature's shows will go on so get out and enjoy the migrants and seasonal treasures.

We expect the Comfort Inn to be CBC headquarters for the 2022 meeting.

Pandemic Birding in the Dominican Republic

Story & Photos by Steve Shultz

My, how things have changed. A year ago, birders hankering for a taste of the tropics had nearly unlimited choices in every price range imaginable. Cheap trip to Panama or Costa Rica? Sure. High-end experience in Trinidad or Belize? Sign right up!

This year? Not so much. Facing a long, hot Carolina summer with not much happening, a quick trip to the tropics seemed like a reasonably good idea. And when I say hot, I'm not talking about just the temperature, but the spiking number of pandemic-related cases here at home. Suddenly being somewhere else did not seem as crazy as it might have a few months before.

Scanning the countries south of us, only three welcomed American visitors without significant hoops through which to leap: The Bahamas, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. The Bahamas closed back down almost as soon as they opened and Mexico had their own troubles, so we settled on a long weekend trip to Punta Cana on the eastern tip of Hispaniola.

Hispaniola boasts a bird list of around 321 species with 29 endemics and even a trip to the highly modified environment of a Punta Cana resort offered the chance to visit with some of the island's endemic birdlife, as well as the chance to mix and mingle with Caribbean specialties, near endemics, and plain old fun birds. I had the privilege of notching a few local species in

Haiti years ago but birding the DR (as it's frequently called) opened the possibility of a number of life birds for my significant-other, Susan, including some newbies from her favorite family, the hummingbirds. Hispaniola sports three hummer species, the Antillean Mango, Vervain Hummingbird (the world's second smallest bird after Cuba's Bee Hummingbird), and the Hispaniolan Emerald.

So, after a quick connection in Charlotte, we touch down after a three-hour flight to the West Indies. And the birds greet us just steps off the airplane! Walking from the jet to the terminal, the clicking "songs" of Antillean Palm-Swifts draw attention to the little black and white bullets buzzing overhead. The palm-swifts nest in, you guessed it, palms, but also seem to really like thatched roofs like those atop the terminal buildings. Later on, at the resort we would sit under cabanas and watch as birds fed young just feet from, and apparently undisturbed by lounging guests.

Adding Susan's second lifer, Stolid Flycatcher, one of the species in the *Myiarchus* genus, outside baggage claim, we make our way to Barcelo's Bavaro Palace property. After temperature checks and health assessments, we're free to explore our surroundings for the next few days. Offshore breakers mark the location of a coral reef, while in the calmer waters near shore, Magnificent Frigatebirds patrol the skies overhead or loaf on nearby pilings. Manicured grounds on the property provide plenty of opportunities for



Bavaro Beach, Punta Cana

Gray Kingbirds to forage, endemic Hispaniolan Woodpeckers to nest, Antillean Mango Hummingbirds to sip nectar, Palm-Swifts to forage low over the pools, and Caribbean Martins to fly high cover. Palmchats, an endemic species that also repre-

sents the only species in its family, are conspicuous as they carry sticks to bulky nests stuck anywhere handy.



Bananaquit

Sandy paths lead through tropical hardwood forest surrounding maintenance areas, and in this dense foliage we find introduced Village Weavers weaving softball-like nests in loose colonies, the perfectly adorable endemic Broad-billed Tody snapping for insects, Greater Antillean Bullfinches doing whatever it is that bullfinches do, and our first "fall warbler" a Louisiana Waterthrush that may have followed a similar flight path to our own as we crossed the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos on the way to Hispaniola.

But much of our birding happens on or around the magnificent 18-hole golf course twisting between water features and stands of native vegetation. With the resort only at about 15% occupancy, the course is void of golfers, but full of birds. Black-

necked Stilts and migrant Spotted Sandpipers seem to prefer greens to the fairways, but groups of West Indian Whistling-Ducks and White-cheeked Pintails appear just as happy foraging in the rough as paddling about the reed-fringed golf-ball swallowers.

Pied-billed Grebe chicks stay close to mom while American Coot chicks (the white-shielded form previously known as Caribbean Coot) manage to keep in contact with the correct parent in spite of multiple coot and gallinule possibilities cruising about. Gray Kingbirds are a constant companion as we stop to photograph Purple Gallinules crossing lily pads, Northern Jacanas flashing yellow wings, and night-herons looking suspiciously at our "glass eyeballs."

Pandemic Birding in the Dominican Republic (continued from page 8)

Our routine becomes set fairly quickly, a morning bird walk, breakfast, pool/ocean/other pool, lunch, more ocean and pool,

an evening bird walk, and then dinner at one of the four specialty restaurants. Each day generated three eBird lists, one for each walk and one for the pool/ocean.

Each walk turns up something different, making the next one highly anticipated. One evening we alert to a screeching overhead and are treated to an uncommon sighting of endemic Hispaniolan Parakeets. On another evening, we are quite far from the room, at the far end of the golf course, thoroughly enjoying flocks of waterbirds. I decide to go just a tad bit father to eBird some pintails when I turn a corner and find myself staring at three beautiful, pink American Flamingos feed-

Purple Gallinule

ing in shallow water (and presumably not coughing up any stray golf balls).



West Indian Whistling Ducks

Our most vexing sighting must be that of an unidentified raptor. The list of choices is pretty small here, and thus far our only sighting is that of the local, and very pale, subspecies of American Kestrel. Walking a maintenance road along the edge of the expansive resort, I spot a quick flash of wings and think "Black Vulture," but there are no Black Vultures here. Dark wings with light crescents point to one of the Black Hawks, but those are not supposed to be here either. Later on, during the same walk, we inadvertently flush the bird, but again get only the briefest glimpse and hear a single vocalization. We see and hear enough to determine that the bird is not the expected Red-tailed Hawk, but its identify remains unknown. It would have been a good record if we had been able to get a diagnostic

We certainly enjoyed the opportunity to "get away" for a few days. Susan ended up with a decent list of lifers, and I came away up a pair myself, the whistling-duck and the parakeet. We found the resort to offer an excellent blend of amenities and

natural areas; although I must say that the lack of hummingbirds at the small feeder, we placed on the balcony was a bit disappointing. This disappointment was assuaged with excellent Dominican rum, so we can call that one even. Visitors without an aversion to the alcohol molecule might also enjoy the local firewater, Mamajuana, an interesting distillation aged with various local botanicals.

look! Every birding adventure has to include "the only that got away!"

Serious birders would no doubt head for the hills, literally, as the DRs high central mountains offer the chance to meet some of the island's least common endemics, but for the casual birder, a stay at one of the many enticingly-priced resorts of Punta Cana or Puerto Plata might satisfy the tropical birding itch, at least for a while. Or, the tantalizing taste may be enough to launch a full-scale birding venture in an attempt to collect all the island specialties, but we will leave that for another day and instead enjoy gentle tradewinds ruffling palm fronds, the kiss of the sea on a powder white beach, and that Greater Antillean Grackle that seems to always show up at the pool bar.



American Flamingos

Want to share your "How I Got Into Birding" story? Please send your completed story to newsletter@carolinabirdclub.org.



Carolina Bird Club, Inc. 1809 Lakepark Drive Raleigh, NC 27612 Periodicals Postage Paid at Pinehurst, NC 28374 and additional mailing offices

Upcoming CBC Meetings

Fall 2020 - Beaufort, SC - Cancelled Winter 2021- Outer Banks, NC - Cancelled Spring 2021- Black Mountain, NC - May 6 - 9, 2021

Fall 2021- TBD

Winter 2022 - Outer Banks, NC - January 13 - 16, 2022

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Deadlines for submissions are the 15th of December, February, April, June, August, and October.

www.carolinabirdclub.org

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