

CBC Spring Meeting Wrap-up Fletcher, North Carolina – April 25-27, 2025

By Steve Dowlan

Our Spring Meeting was held in Fletcher NC, just outside of Asheville in western North Carolina. Sixty-two enthusiastic birders participated in five half-day trips on Friday, April 25, twelve half-day trips and two full-day trips on April 26, and three half-day trips on April 27, plus other excursions for the rarities roundup on Sunday. A total of 131 species were observed in Buncombe, Henderson, Transylvania, Haywood, and Madison Counties, including a few surprises. Because of damage to roads and infrastructure from Hurricane Helene in September, 2024, some sites along the Blue Ridge Parkway and Green River Game Lands were not open for travel, so everyone had to adapt to a real-time plan for field trips. Friday morning began with a fairly heavy downpour around the hotel, but the weather improved for late morning and afternoon birding activities.



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So, what were those surprises... those “good birds?” Opinions may differ, but I think Forster’s Tern, (Western) Willet, Upland Sandpiper, and Short-billed Dowitcher are great candidates. Three Forster’s Terns made a brief appearance at the Mills River Water Treatment Plant before the first field trip left the hotel. Just two birders got to see them in during a heavy downpour before they left the site. It is quite possible that the Willets were at the same pond at the same time, but were not noticed until another birder reported them a couple of hours later. Fortunately, the Friday morning half-day trip to Mills River Park diverted to the Water Treatment Plant and participants got to see the Willets.



Female Blackburnian Warbler carrying nest material on 26 April at Pink Beds, Pisgah National Forest, Transylvania County, NC. Photo by S. Dowlan

In addition to the six Willets, one Upland Sandpiper, and one Short-billed Dowitcher, the shorebird list included Killdeer, Semipalmated Plover, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Greater Yellowlegs, all of which were at Hooper Lane. Although very few boreal migrants were seen, songbirds were on breeding territories and singing with gusto at many locations, including at high elevation spruce-fir forests in the Great Balsam Mountains. A Ruffed Grouse was drumming at Mount Pisgah Campground, which was a treat for the birders on that trip. Birders were also happy to see and

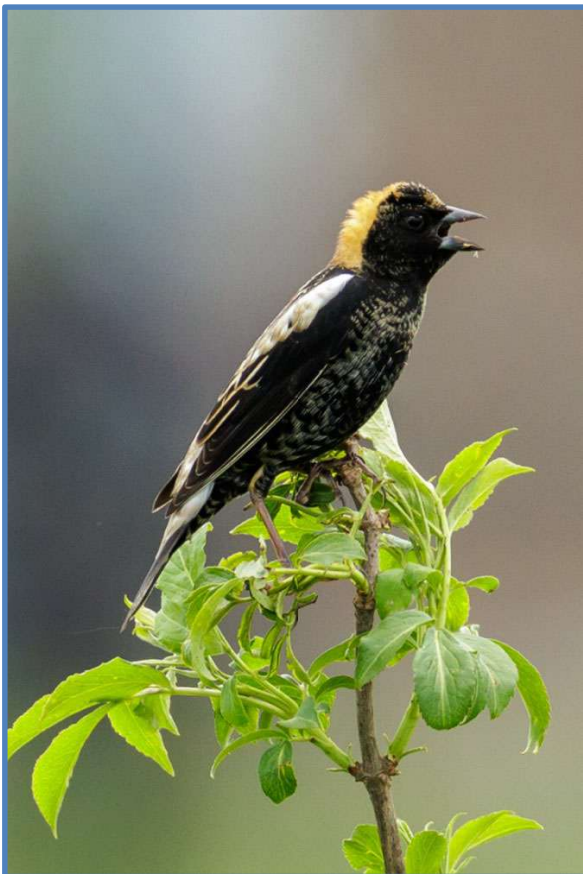
hear Golden-winged Warblers singing at Max Patch in Madison County. Check the web site for a complete species list from the meeting.

The Clarion Inn Asheville Airport, in Fletcher was our host hotel, and provided a fairly convenient jumping-off point for the various field trips... CBC greatly appreciated your use of the host hotel. Fletcher and the surrounding area were well worth the time we spent there, and I’m sure we will arrange a meeting there again.





The shorebird puddle along Hooper Lane, Henderson County, North Carolina on 26 April 2025. Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitcher and Semipalmated Plover were present at that time. Photo by S. Dowlan



One of several Bobolinks seen at Mills River Park in Henderson County during the Spring Meeting weekend. Photo by I. McDonald.



Scarlet Tanager seen on 26 April at Westfeldt Park in Fletcher, Henderson County, North Carolina. Photo by I. McDonald.



This Worm-eating Warbler was seen on 27 April at Westfeldt Park in Fletcher. Photo by Ian McDonald

Fall Meeting Teaser

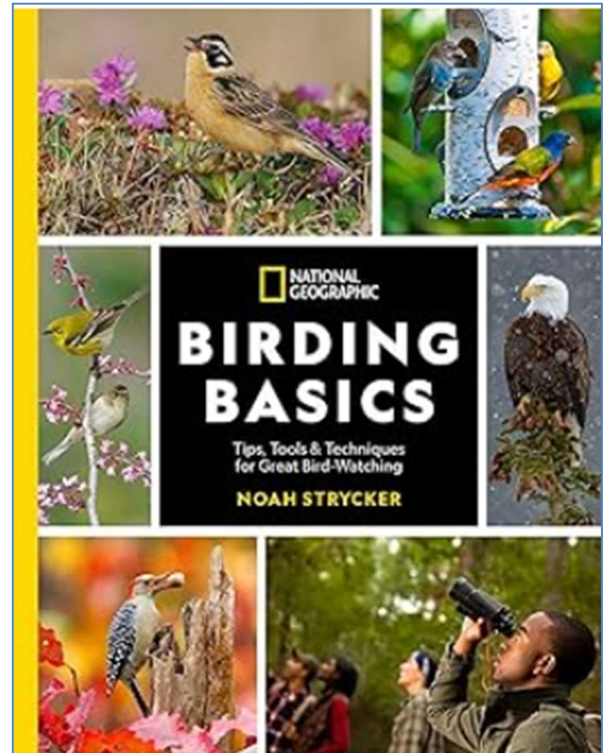
We are going to Beaufort, South Carolina for our Fall Meeting, October 2-5, 2025!!! Picturesque Beaufort offers some of the best birding along the South Carolina coast. Previous meetings in Beaufort we have tallied 203 species, which is a close second to the Outer Banks (204 species). Then, think of the field trips to Bear Island... Donnelley... Savannah NWR... Botany Bay WMA... These sites are hallowed ground to Lowcountry birders, and we will visit them all and more during the upcoming Carolina Bird Club 2025 Fall Meeting! We are staying at the Holiday Inn & Suites Beaufort -- Plan NOW on going!

Birder's Book Review
Birding Basics: Tips, Tools & Techniques for Great Bird-Watching
By Noah Strycker
254 pages; paperback; 2022; \$24.99
ISBN 978-1-4262-2219-1

National Geographic and jet-setting around the world birder Noah Strycker have teamed up to produce a slick, glossy tome targeted at beginning birders, those curious to see beyond the realm of backyard feeders, and anyone who enjoys National Geographic style photographs of birds from around the world.

I'll admit, I cracked the book's cover with a bit of trepidation. This genre already bursts with excellent titles including Sibley's *Birding Basics*, by the eponymous author, and various installments in the "Stokes Beginner's Guide to..." series well-penned by Lillian and Donald Stokes. Would this new entry be additive, or derivative? Does *Birding Basics* deserve a slot between the Peterson's, the Dunne's, and the rest? In short, would I choose this to offer a new birder?

As noted, the cover is pure National Geographic, bright, colorful, and attractive. One's eye is immediately drawn to a birder raising binoculars to take in some glorious, feathered treat, but I suspect he will have trouble getting a good view since he is using only one hand to hold the glass, and peering not into the lenses, but at the lenses. And yes, I realize that this photograph was chosen for its attractiveness, not for accuracy of the behavior depicted. But it made me wonder, was this book function or fashion? Bauhaus or Art Deco? The inclusion of a breeding plumaged Smith's Longspur on the cover, not a bird any new-to-birding enthusiast is likely to see due to its remote breeding territory, furthered my concern.



Over 254 pages, Strycker covers numerous topics including "Essential Gear", "Choosing Binoculars", "Landscaping for Birds" and "Hot Spots", this last section divided into eastern and western North America. But essential gear spans just five paragraphs, choosing binoculars rates the same, landscaping for birds garners seven, and the "hots spots" sections note just four locations each for the east and west, with the four in the east essentially spring migrant traps, and two in the west located far afield in Alaska and Hawaii.

By trying to pack a lot into this book, each topic receives superficial gloss without much in the way of in-depth review or discussion. Digging deeper into any of these topics requires navigating to external resources. In contrast, Sibley's *Birding Basics* conveys more information in nearly a hundred fewer pages. But, in typical Sibley style, that volume is somewhat matter-of-fact and contains no photographs, only drawings. (It could, however, be taken into the field due to its pocket size, while *Birding Basics*'s large format precludes easy use in the field).

Birding Basics could be considered a picture book draped on the premise of a beginning birder's guide. Every page is richly endowed with (usually multiple) photographs, sidebars, "did you know?" insets and other margin fillers. In fact, about half of the space on each page is consumed by photographs, white space, and captions, leaving less room for text, which runs in just a single column on each page in order to make space for visual eye candy.

And no doubt the result is attractive. Filled with some of the best photographs in National Geographic's catalogue, readers enjoy wildlife photography at its apex, and these pages turn like a good coffee table book. But could some of the photographs teach and not just impress? Do we need spectacular photos and drawings of Montezuma Quail, Bar-tailed Godwit, Boreal Owl, Whooping Crane, Bluethroat, and Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise, or could we replace some of those with the species beginners are most likely to encounter? While those other species are beautiful, there is also similar beauty in the birds we see every day.

So where does this leave us? Birding Basics provides those new to birding, or who think they might be interested in birding, with a skim of information on a wide variety of subjects, from life lists to pishing, from eBird navigation to optics selection. But it is this same skim, light and creamy, that leaves the reader hungry at the end. For sufficient information on how to choose binoculars, separate a House Finch from a House Sparrow, understand seasonal molt, or choose the best hummingbird feeder, readers will have to source additional, more in-depth information. And maybe that is the author's point, provide a glossy pamphlet extolling the virtues of birds and birding without delving into great detail. Just set the hook and folks will seek out more knowledge if they feel the itch. And from this perspective it does that job well. Lots of glossy pretty pictures, looks great sitting on the parlor table, generates smiles when flipping through the pages. Hey kids, look at these filoplumes! And I cannot help but feeling that the audience is more middle school than middle America, owing to large font, extensive use of pictures, and generally simple language.

So, in answer to our original question, would I offer this to a new birder? I think this book might help hook those with a budding or superficial interest but would need to be quickly replaced by one of the existing new-to-birding guides that provides more substance and less gloss.

Steve Shultz

The Carolina Bird Club Is Creating a Merchandise Committee!

Based on our recent survey of the membership, it is clear many are interested in purchasing (once again) cool hats, shirts, stickers, etc. Therefore, the club is looking for a few members to get involved with developing new merchandise. Whether you are a graphic artist, have experience in sales or just want to get more involved with the CBC, we'd love your help!

Contact Susan Campbell (suan@ncaves.com) for more information.

Bonus Trip to the NC Sandhills May 31-June 1

By Steve Shultz

Join us for a quick weekend getaway to the Sandhills of central North Carolina the weekend of May 31-June 1, 2025 to enjoy spectacular scenery and great birds as we explore the beautiful pinewoods. We'll explore the diverse 58,000-acre Sandhills Preserve and fire-managed 930-acre Weymouth Woods, focusing on pine savannah specialist birds such as Northern Bobwhite, Bachman's Sparrow, and the regionally endemic Red-cockaded Woodpecker, to name a few. Spring migration will be at the tail end, and we will be on the lookout for any northbound migrants as well, anything and everything from warblers, tanagers, buntings and more.

Longleaf pine forest once stretched from the Carolinas to eastern Texas but today only 3% remains. The focus of this trip is a birding visit to one of the best examples of this now rare habitat in North Carolina. Managed with carefully prescribed burns and the thinning of trees, the Sandhills Game Lands area boasts some of the world's most diverse plant communities (up to 40 species per square meter!) and some of North America's rarest birds. The oldest Longleaf Pine tree in the world is found in Weymouth Woods. We will attend nature programs with the Weymouth Woods' rangers, visit a banding station, and explore the forest with a focus on pine savannah specialists.

If you've never spent time birding in this part of NC then you are certainly missing out – it's one of the most beautiful and unique places in the state! A few of the birds we hope to see: Bachman's Sparrow, Red-Cockaded Woodpecker, Chuck-Wills-Widow, Common Nighthawk, Mississippi Kite, Loggerhead Shrike, Prairie Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Northern Bobwhite, Red-headed Woodpecker, Summer Tanager, and a whole lot more!

Itinerary in Brief:

Saturday, June 1 — Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve and Local Hotspots

Our first couple of hours birding in the area will give us a nice introduction to these special habitats and the birds that reside here. If we miss Red-cockaded Woodpeckers this morning, we'll have other chances this evening and tomorrow.

Sunday, June 2 — Sandhills Game Land

We expect to encounter more Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and Bachman's Sparrows as we drive through acres of restored Longleaf Pine managed by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission less than an hour south of Southern Pines. We should also have a good chance of finding Northern Bobwhite, Common Nighthawk, Loggerhead Shrike and maybe even a Lark Sparrow. Additionally, the group will visit McKinney Lake to tick some bottomland forest passerines and a few wetland species. If time permits, we will make a stop in an agricultural area known to produce Mississippi Kites.

Logistics:

The fee for this field trip is \$75 and advance registration is required. Participation is limited to 8. Participants are responsible for lodging and meals. Detailed information including directions, lodging choices, dining opportunities and more will be provided to registrants. Leaders for this outing are Susan Campbell and Steve Shultz.

To register for this field trip, please contact Steve Shultz at sshultz@nc.rr.com or call 919-629-7226. Upon confirmation of your slot on the trip you will be sent a registration form/waiver that can be submitted with your trip fee.



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Banner Elk, NC 28604

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Winter Meeting at the Outer Banks, NC – January 23-25, 2026

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Cost for CBC bird checklists, including postage: 10@\$5.45, 25@\$13.40, 50@\$27.00, and 100@\$54.00.

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