

Southeastern NC Hotspots
April 28-May 3, 2021

Itinerary

Day 1, April 28 – Arrival in Wrightsville Beach

We will plan on meeting at our hotel in the Wilmington/Wrightsville Beach area by 1 PM today. After dropping off our luggage, we visit Mason Inlet Waterbird Management Area, located at the northern end of the island. Managed by the local Audubon chapter, the area is an important nesting site for a variety of colonial waterbirds and shorebirds, such as Least & Common Terns, Black Skimmer, Wilson's Plover, American Oystercatcher and more. We will also be on the lookout for more interesting shorebirds such as Piping Plover and Red Knot, regularly seen here. Afterwards we head to the other end of the island and Masonboro Inlet, where we further study the regular assortment of sea and shorebirds on the beach and sandbars. Upon the jetty walls we hope to see both Great Cormorant and Purple Sandpiper, overwintering species that linger here well into May. All 3 species of scoter will still be possible as well as Red-throated Loon, and who knows what other goodies may turn up! **Night in Wilmington/Wrightsville Beach**

Day 2, April 29 – Fort Fisher & Carolina Beach SP

Today we head 45 min south to Carolina Beach and Fort Fisher, located in southern New Hanover County. Wedged between the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Ocean, this thin strip of land provides an excellent variety of habitats for birds year-round, from long-leaf pine savannah to riverine and maritime forests, coastal scrub thickets, salt marshes, and beach. We will spend most of our day exploring all the area has to offer, giving special attention to finding all 3 coastal marsh sparrows (Seaside, Saltmarsh, and Nelson's), both Marsh & Sedge Wrens, Painted Bunting, Red-headed Woodpecker, Sora, Clapper Rail, and any number of migratory warblers, vireos, and sparrows that may be passing through at the time. In addition to birding the woodlands at Carolina Beach State Park, we will do a short hike that takes us through a unique boggy habitat which features several carnivorous plants, including pitcher plants, sundews, and the Venus fly trap, which is endemic to the region. **Night in Wilmington/Wrightsville Beach**

Day 3, April 30 – Holly Shelter Game Land

North of Wilmington, in Pender County, sits Holly Shelter Game Land, an excellent example of the longleaf pine savannah which historically covered much of the southeastern US. While most of it is now gone, Holly Shelter remains a stronghold for the habitat with nearly 50,000 acres managed within its borders. This is the best spot in the area to see the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Bachman's Sparrow, two of our main targets for the trip. The mix of woods and wetlands here also hold breeding Prothonotary, Swainson's, Hooded, Black-and-white, Prairie, and Yellow-throated Warblers, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Indigo Bunting, Blue Grosbeak, and Summer Tanager. After lunch, we'll explore some of the countryside along the Cape Fear, where we hope to find Wood Stork, Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites, American Kestrel, and Barn Owl. **Night in Wilmington/Wrightsville Beach**

Day 4, May 1 – Greenfield Lake; Morehead City

After an early breakfast, we make a quick visit to the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial to look and listen for rails in the surrounding marsh. King Rail is our main target, but Virginia Rail and Sora are both likely here as well. We then spend some time birding at nearby Greenfield Lake, a historic millpond in Wilmington that has been allowed to grow into a mature cypress lake. Encompassing over 250 acres, it is a great spot to see Anhinga, Wood Duck, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Prothonotary Warbler,

Northern Parula, Great Crested Flycatcher, and Orchard Oriole. We may change our morning plans if there are any rarities around that need chasing! After lunch we drive up the coast to Morehead City where we stay the next 2 nights. After checking in to our hotel, we visit Cedar Island NWR, where with no short-supply of luck we will hear and hopefully see the near-mythical Black Rail. If we strike out this evening, we will have further chances tomorrow! ***Night in Morehead City***

Day 5, May 2 – Cedar Island NWR

Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge consists of approximately 14,500 acres of brackish marsh and woodland habitat. Sixteen miles of dirt roads and firebreaks provide access to the marsh and woodlands, as well as the bays and sound. We will spend most of our day exploring the refuge and other nearby hotspots for American Black Duck, Black-necked Stilt, Glossy Ibis, Least Bittern, King, Clapper and Virginia Rails, Seaside Sparrow, and many more. We will probably rest during the middle part of the day so that we are refreshed for taking another crack at finding Black Rails this evening (if necessary). ***Night in Morehead City***

Day 6, May 3 – Bear Grass VOA Site; Departure

Today we rise very early (it'll be worth it!) and drive an hour and 45 minutes north to the Voice of America Game Land in Beaufort County, arriving around sunrise. Previously closed to the public, the site was opened by NC Wildlife as a game land in 2017, allowing birders to further explore the tract. The grassland here has hosted a breeding population of Henslow's Sparrow since the 1980s, and this is by far the best place in the state to see them – a single high count of 41 individuals was recorded here on a single day last May! The sparrows are most active before 9:30 AM, so our early arrival will give us plenty of chances to see them. This is also a great spot for Northern Bobwhite, Common Nighthawk, Eastern Meadowlark, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Eastern Kingbird, and Loggerhead Shrike and Horned Lark are both findable in the general area as well. We will probably make a few more additional stops this morning before hopping on the road and driving back home.

You may opt to stay the night en route – it will be about a 5.5 hr drive back to the mountains from our last stop!