



North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Albemarle Peninsula

#### 1 Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

**Owner:** US Fish and Wildlife Service

NC 45, south of Plymouth, NC

Tyrrell, Washington, and Hyde County

[www.fws.gov/pocosinlakes/](http://www.fws.gov/pocosinlakes/)

Refuge headquarters: 205 South Ludington Drive, Columbia, NC 27925

252-796-3004

**Site Description:** Named for the Algonquian word meaning “swamp on a hill,” Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is home to thousands of wintering waterfowl that graze farm fields by day and roost on lakes by night. The Pungo Unit of the refuge is the most accessible and reliable for waterfowl. During late fall and winter months, more than 80,000 Tundra Swan and Snow Goose can be seen leaving Pungo Lake in huge flocks at dawn and returning at dusk. Roads leading to the lake pass open fields and impoundments that provide opportunities to view foraging waterfowl and raptors. Canals lined with shrubby vegetation along the roads are home to Wood Duck, sparrows, and other breeding songbirds. The observation tower on the south edge of the lake is a good place to view the lake; waterfowl are typically seen at a distance. The Pungo Unit is most productive in winter but more than 200 species have been listed on the refuge. In other seasons, watch for Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Kingbird, Indigo Bunting and in the woods by the lake, Prothonotary Warbler. The remainder of this vast refuge can be explored from the many roads. Black bear can be seen on the refuge and red wolves have been reintroduced. It is strongly recommended that you have a refuge map when visiting.

**Species of Interest:** Snow Goose, Tundra Swan, wintering waterfowl

**Habitats:** moist shrubland, wetland forest, lake

**Special Concern:** If visiting after heavy rains, some roads will require 4-wheel drive. Hunting is allowed on the refuge during certain times of year. Birders should be aware of current hunting regulations and seasons and take adequate safety precautions during those times. For more on hunting season safety precautions, see the hunting season information at the beginning of this guide.

**Access & Parking:** The refuge has more than 100 miles of roads that run through a variety of habitats. The best access point for birding is at the Pungo Unit on the south shore of Pungo Lake. It is strongly suggested that visitors pick up a brochure and map at the refuge headquarters in Columbia or at the field station on Shore Drive. The refuge is open during daylight hours, year round. Unimproved roads may be accessed on foot.

**Directions:** To reach the Pungo Unit, take NC 45 south from Plymouth. NC 45 merges with NC 99 for approximately 11 miles before they split again. When the NC 99/45 split occurs, bear left on NC 45 and shortly thereafter, look for the refuge entrance on the north side of the road.

Coordinates: N 35°39'30" W 76°35'31" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 47





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### Pettigrew State Park

**Owner:** NC State Parks

2252 Lake Shore Road, Creswell, NC 27928  
252-797-4475

Washington and Tyrrell County

[www.ncsparks.net](http://www.ncsparks.net)

**Site Description:** Pettigrew State Park includes 1,278 acres of land around Lake Phelps, 16,600 acres of water (Lake Phelps) and over 2,600 acres on the Scuppermong River. From the park office, take the Bee Tree Trail through a sweetgum forest; watch and listen for breeding songbirds, including Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Acadian Flycatcher, Northern Parula, Ovenbird, and Indigo Bunting. This trail leads to a wooden overlook offering a view of Lake Phelps and a place to observe wintering waterfowl. A variety of woodpeckers can also be spotted here. Moccasin Trail leads northwest from the park office for 3 miles to Moccasin Canal. This trail passes through cypress and hardwood forests before reaching a 350 foot boardwalk, which leads to Moccasin Overlook, another view of Lake Phelps. Watch for hawks and Peregrine Falcon perching in the limbs of Pettigrew's giant trees to feed in adjacent fields. The Red-cockaded Woodpecker has been spotted on the park's river property.

**Species of Interest:** Tundra Swan, Snow Goose, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, wintering waterfowl

**Habitats:** floodplain forest, moist shrubland, lake

**Special Feature:** Pettigrew is also home to award-winning big trees - several species in the park are national or state tree champions! Learn more about these trees at the park's annual Big Tree Walk in November.

**Access & Parking:** Parking is available at the park office on Lake Shore Road, Pocosin Overlook, and at the Cypress Point access area. The park is open from 8am to 6pm, November - February; 8am to 7pm, March and October; 8am to 8pm, April, May, and September; 8am to 9pm, June - August.

**Directions:** Pettigrew State Park is located seven miles south of Creswell off US 64. From US 64, take the Alligood Road exit and travel south. Follow the directional signs to the park office.

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#### Eastern 4-H Environmental Education Conference Center

**Owner:** NC State University

100 North Clover Way, Columbia, NC 27925  
252-797-4800

Tyrrell County

[www.eastern4hcenter.org](http://www.eastern4hcenter.org)

**Site Description:** Take any of the Center's numerous paths and trails to look and listen for birds. These paths cross through both upland pine and hardwood areas, as well as open fields and along tree lines - these areas provide a good opportunity to watch for wintering sparrows. An early morning visit during the spring or fall migration may provide the best birding opportunities. Also watch and listen for Ovenbird, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher during the breeding season. A boardwalk extends along the shoreline west of the Conference Center; this area may present good opportunities to see or hear wetland associated species such as Prothonotary Warbler and Northern Parula, along with other migrating or breeding songbirds. In the winter, head toward the pier on the Albemarle Sound to scan for wintering waterfowl and be on the lookout for a Bald Eagle overhead.

**Species of Interest:** Bald Eagle, Great Crested Flycatcher, Prothonotary Warbler, wintering waterfowl

**Habitats:** pine/hardwood forest, early successional, sound

**Access & Parking:** This site is open year round, but it is accessible only by appointment. Call ahead to schedule your visit. Primary access is during spring and fall; most trails are inaccessible during summer camp season. Birding club and group accommodation reservations are seasonally available. Park in the Conference Center lot. The boardwalk, paved, and wooded trails can all be accessed on foot from the main building complex. Daily hours of operation are 8am to 5pm. Some amenities are only available Monday - Friday.

**Directions:** From US 64 just west of Columbia, take exit 562 - Travis Road/Bay Post Office Road. Travel north approximately 3 miles, where the road ends at Albemarle Church Road. Turn right on Albemarle Church Road and travel for 1 mile. Turn left on Bulls Bay Road and the Center's entrance is on the left.

Coordinates: N 35°56'08" W 76°21'24" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 47





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#### Scuppernong River Interpretive Trail

**Owner:** US Fish and Wildlife Service and The Partnership for the Sounds

205 South Ludington Drive, Columbia, NC 27925  
252-796-3004

Tyrrell County

**Site Description:** The Scuppernong River Interpretive Trail boardwalk begins directly behind the Walter B. Jones Sr. Center for the Sounds and the Tyrrell County Visitor Center. It follows along the edge of the Scuppernong River for a short distance before entering a cypress swamp. Watch for wintering waterfowl and various wading birds along the river's edge. As you enter the cypress swamp, listen for Northern Parula, Prothonotary Warbler, Hooded Warbler and other breeding and migrating songbirds. Fourteen interpretive signs along the trail explain the unique features and characteristics of the area. The boardwalk splits shortly after entering the cypress swamp; either pathway will bring you to an observation deck a short distance down the Scuppernong River shoreline. The entire boardwalk is 0.75 miles in length.

**Species of Interest:** Prothonotary Warbler, Hooded Warbler, wading birds, wintering waterfowl

**Habitats:** floodplain forest, river

**Special Feature:** The boardwalk is designated as a National Recreational Trail by the Secretary of the Interior and contains the NC Champion Big Tree for the Carolina Ash.

**Access & Parking:** Park in the lot shared by the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge headquarters, the Walter B. Jones Sr. Center for the Sounds and the Tyrrell County Visitor Center. The boardwalk begins directly behind the refuge headquarters building, along the river. The boardwalk can be accessed year round during daylight hours. The Walter B. Jones Sr. Center for the Sounds is open at varying times during the week, depending on volunteer staff availability.

**Directions:** From points west, enter Columbia by crossing the Scuppernong River on US 64. Make the first right turn at the Tyrrell County Visitors Center, which is easily visible from the road. The Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge headquarters and the Walter B. Jones Sr. Center for the Sounds, where the boardwalk begins, are adjacent to the visitor center.

Coordinates: N 35°54'55" W 76°15'12" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 47





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### Palmetto-Peartree Preserve

**Owner:** The Conservation Fund

Pot Licker Road, northeast of Columbia, NC  
919-967-2223 or locally, 252-796-0723

Tyrrell County

[www.palmettopeartree.org](http://www.palmettopeartree.org)

**Site Description:** This 10,000-acre preserve, locally known as P3, is in a remote location along the banks of the Albemarle Sound and Alligator River. Designated as an Important Bird Area by Audubon NC, it is home to the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, with more than 100 nesting cavities and 28 clusters of birds. A map on P3's website shows the locations of some accessible cavity trees, which are marked with a painted white circle. P3's habitat is a diverse mix of bottomland swamps, hardwood-pine forest and marsh. Birders can look and listen for more than 100 species of migratory and breeding birds that use the preserve each year, including Prothonotary, Worm-eating, and Swainson's Warblers. Several boardwalk trails and an extensive network of dirt logging roads provide easy access throughout the preserve. Two sections of the Shoreline Trail have interpretive signage and take you through a wetland forest to Albemarle Sound. The 0.75 mile Woodland Trail has two wildlife viewing stations and winds through pine forest. A paddling trail and camping platform on Hidden Lake adds another dimension to this site. P3 is also home to American alligators, red wolves, and black bears.

**Species of Interest:** Bald Eagle, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Prothonotary Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Swainson's Warbler

**Habitats:** pine/hardwood forest, floodplain forest, isolated wetlands, sound

**Special Concern:** The federally endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker can be found on site year round. Observe all interpretive signage and do not disturb the birds. Hunting is allowed on the preserve during certain times of the year; hunting areas will be posted on the preserve's website. Birders should be aware of current hunting regulations and seasons and take adequate safety precautions during those times. For more on hunting season safety precautions, see the hunting season information at the beginning of this guide.

**Access & Parking:** From the preserve entrance, follow the signs to the boardwalk and canoe launches. The preserve is open from dawn to dusk, year round. Reservations to use the canoe camping platform on Hidden Lake can be made through Roanoke River Partners ([www.roanokeriverpartners.org](http://www.roanokeriverpartners.org)). The boat ramp can only accommodate canoes and kayaks.

**Directions:** From Columbia, travel 5 miles east on US 64. Turn north onto Old US 64 (SR 1229). After approximately 2 miles, turn north on Newfoundland Road (SR 1221) and continue for several miles to the dead end at Soundside Road (SR 1209). Turn west on Soundside Road, travel approximately 0.8 miles, and turn right onto Pot Licker Road (SR 1220). The marked entrance to the preserve is on the right.

Coordinates: N 35°59'17" W 76°08'03" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 48





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### 6 Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge

**Owner:** US Fish and Wildlife Service

US 64, west of Manns Harbor, NC  
252-473-1131

Dare County

[www.fws.gov/alligatorriver](http://www.fws.gov/alligatorriver)

**Site Description:** Over 150,000 acres in size, and with 250 bird species documented, this refuge offers many opportunities for birders in a diversity of coastal plain habitats. From April to June, most of the refuge's breeding birds can be found along the two-mile Buffalo City Road that ends at the Sandy Ridge Wildlife Trail. There you will find an observation tower overlooking Milltail Creek. This location is also the put-in for the refuge's four paddle trails. Listen for Swainson's Warbler and other breeding songbirds in this area. At the refuge entrance on Milltail Road, Creef Cut Trail provides access for viewing wintering waterfowl on the flooded impoundments. A Short-eared Owl is a possibility at dusk. Milltail Road traverses extensive farm fields and impoundments where raptors and waterfowl can be seen, but often at some distance from the road. Along the roadside, check for winter sparrows. Beyond the farm fields, birding is best during the breeding season. In early morning, black bear can likely be found in this area. Continue on Milltail Road to exit the refuge on US 264 and travel west to access the southern portion of the refuge. This area offers excellent birding during spring and summer.

**Species of Interest:** Short-eared Owl, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Swainson's Warbler, winter sparrows, winter waterfowl

**Habitats:** pine/hardwood forest, early successional, moist shrubland, managed waterfowl impoundments

**Special Concern:** Hunting is allowed on the refuge during certain times of year. Birders should be aware of current hunting regulations and seasons and take adequate safety precautions during those times. For more on hunting season safety precautions, see the hunting season information at the beginning of this guide.

**Access & Parking:** The refuge contains more than 100 miles of roads that run through a variety of habitats. The main access points are Milltail Road and Buffalo City Road. Parking areas are designated at three sites in the refuge: the Milltail Road entrance, farther south on Milltail Road where it crosses Milltail Creek, and at the Sandy Ridge Wildlife Trail, off of Buffalo City Road. It is strongly suggested that visitors pick up a refuge brochure at the Milltail Road kiosk for a detailed site map and trail information. The refuge is open during daylight hours, year round.

**Directions:** Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge covers an extensive area with multiple access routes. To find the main trail and visitor opportunities, travel west from Manns Harbor on US 64/264. Approximately 4 miles west of the US 64/264 split, turn south onto Milltail Road. This entrance serves as the trail head for Creef Cut Wildlife Trail and is the north entrance of the road designated as the Wildlife Drive. Here you will find refuge brochures and an information kiosk. Continuing west on US 64, approximately 3.2 miles past Milltail Road, turn south on Buffalo City Road to access the Sandy Ridge Wildlife Trail and paddle trails at the end of the road.

Coordinates: N 35°51'50" W 75°51'38" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 48





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#### Gull Rock Game Land

**Owner:** NC Wildlife Resources Commission

Outfall Canal Road (SR 1164), east of Swan Quarter, NC  
252-482-7701

Hyde County

[www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org)

**Site Description:** Gull Rock Game Land can be a nice additional stop on a visit to Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge, especially in winter and during the breeding season (April-June). The birding opportunities here are mostly by car, along the primary road in the Game Land, Outfall Canal Road. Drive along Outfall Canal Road and watch for early successional species in the nearby fields, including Indigo Bunting, Blue Grosbeak, and various sparrows. Listen for Chuck-will's-widows and various warblers in the wooded sections. Loop Road and West Green Road offer additional driving opportunities, if access is permitted. Otherwise, walk these roads on foot. Loop Road leads 0.5 miles to a managed waterfowl impoundment. Near the boat ramp at the end of Outfall Canal Road, scan for marsh birds, including Marsh Wren and rails.

**Species of Interest:** Chuck-will's-widow, Marsh Wren, Blue Grosbeak, wintering waterfowl

**Habitats:** early successional, moist shrubland, salt marsh, managed waterfowl impoundments

**Special Concern:** Hunting is allowed on Game Lands during certain times of year. Birders should be aware of current hunting regulations and seasons and take adequate safety precautions during those times. For more on hunting season safety precautions, see the hunting season information at the beginning of this guide.

**Access & Parking:** Parking is designated at both ends of the waterfowl impoundment on Loop Road. However, the Game Land entrance gate to reach Loop Road is closed March 1 - September 1. During this time period, park along Outfall Canal Road, near the Loop Road turn. It is highly recommended that visitors request a current Game Lands Map Book from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission before visiting. Visitors can park on roadsides but should be aware of conditions and stay on roads that are in passable condition. Road conditions can vary greatly depending on the amount of recent rainfall and use on the Game Lands.

**Directions:** Take US 264 east of Swan Quarter to New Holland, just south of Lake Mattamuskeet. Turn right on Outfall Canal Road (SR 1164). The Game Land boundary begins at 4.3 miles. Loop Road, which leads to a managed waterfowl impoundment, turns off to the left at approximately 5 miles.

Coordinates: N 35°22'41" W 76°06'44" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 68





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### Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge

**Owner:** US Fish and Wildlife Service

NC 94, just south of Fairfield, NC  
252-926-4021

Hyde County

[www.fws.gov/mattamuskeet/](http://www.fws.gov/mattamuskeet/)

**Site Description:** Lake Mattamuskeet, the largest natural freshwater lake in North Carolina, is the refuge's main feature. Its shallow depth creates a magnet for wintering waterfowl. Nearby marsh, swamp forest and cropland attract a diversity of songbirds. Although birding can be good at Mattamuskeet year round, it is most productive from mid-November thru January, when wintering waterfowl are present in large numbers. The entrance road, Wildlife Drive, and the NC 94 causeway, as it crosses the lake, offer some of the best and most accessible birding opportunities. Wooded areas along these drives are productive for migrating and breeding birds. The NC 94 observation platform just north of the entrance drive offers unobstructed views of the lake. The New Holland Trail boardwalk from East Canal Drive provides access to a cypress swamp and marsh. Additional points on the east side of the lake offer access but some require extensive walks to reach the lake. Lake Landing is one of the most accessible. The west side of the lake provides seasonal boat access and access to additional impoundments and forest habitats. Paddling this area in early spring can provide good birding and views of lingering waterfowl. A winter trip to Mattamuskeet is not complete without a sunset view from NC 94 as thousands of Tundra Swan return to the lake from a day of foraging in local farm fields.

**Species of Interest:** Tundra Swan, Snow Goose, Bald Eagle, migrating shorebirds, wintering waterfowl

**Habitats:** pine/hardwood forest, wetland forest, isolated wetlands, lake

**Special Concern:** Hunting is allowed on the refuge during certain times of the year. Birders should be aware of current hunting regulations and seasons and take adequate safety precautions during those times. For more on hunting season safety precautions, see the hunting season information at the beginning of this guide. A total of 30 miles of levees and 15 miles of roads are available to the public on the refuge. However, some levees and roads are closed to public use from November 1 - February 28, restricting winter visits to 8 miles of levee and 12 miles of roads.

**Access & Parking:** There are multiple access areas on the refuge. The main access points are the entrance road, East Canal Drive (behind refuge headquarters), and NC 94 as it crosses Lake Mattamuskeet. Observation areas are designated along the entrance road and on NC 94. It is strongly suggested that visitors pick up a brochure at refuge headquarters for a detailed site map. The refuge is open during daylight hours, year round.

**Directions:** From US 264 between Swan Quarter and Englehard, turn north onto NC 94. The refuge entrance is 1.5 miles north of the intersection, on the right.

Coordinates: N 35°27'07" W 76°10'38"

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### Swanquarter National Wildlife Refuge

**Owner:** US Fish and Wildlife Service

On Pamlico Sound, west of Swan Quarter, NC  
252-926-4021

Hyde County

[www.fws.gov/swanquarter/](http://www.fws.gov/swanquarter/)

**Site Description:** Mainland access to the refuge, the Bell Island Unit, is gained via a gravel road that extends from US 264 south to the Pamlico Sound. This road provides visual access to the marsh, estuarine loblolly pine forest, and Pamlico Sound. Swanquarter National Wildlife Refuge is most noted for wintering waterfowl, particularly diving ducks. The two mile drive from US 264 to the fishing pier is worth a few stops for migrating songbirds; Brown-headed Nuthatch is a year round possibility. The 1,000 foot fishing pier provides views to the upper portion of Rose Bay for waterfowl. Waterfowl are most abundant in late winter and lighting is best in early morning. At the fishing pier, Bufflehead, Canvasback, and Hooded and Red-breasted Merganser are possibilities. The marsh around the parking lot should be checked for Sedge Wren and winter sparrows.

**Species of Interest:** Canvasback, Hooded Merganser, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Sedge Wren

**Habitats:** pine/hardwood forest, wetland forest, salt marsh, sound

**Special Concern:** Hunting is allowed on the refuge during certain times of year. Birders should be aware of current hunting regulations and seasons and take adequate safety precautions during those times. For more on hunting season safety precautions, see the hunting season information at the beginning of this guide.

**Access & Parking:** Swanquarter National Wildlife Refuge is open during daylight hours, year round. Parking is available at the fishing pier at the end of the entrance road. Most of the refuge is accessible only by boat, except for the Bell Island Unit. Pedestrian access is permitted if the gate is closed but parking is very limited and the gate should not be blocked. It is strongly suggested that visitors pick up a brochure and site map at the Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge headquarters, located east of Swan Quarter.

**Directions:** From the intersection of NC 45 and US 264 west of Swan Quarter, continue west on US 264/45 for approximately 1.5 miles. Turn south on the gravel road marked by the refuge sign. The road ends on Pamlico Sound in the Bell Island Unit.

Coordinates: N 35°26'35" W 76°22'35" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 67

