



North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Onslow Bight

#### 1 Croatan National Forest – Millis & Pringle Roads

**Owner:** USDA Forest Service

Millis and Pringle Roads, north of Ocean, NC  
252-638-5628

Carteret County

[www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc/recreation/croatan.pdf](http://www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc/recreation/croatan.pdf)

**Site Description:** These two roads present some of the best birding opportunities in the southern portion of the Croatan National Forest. After turning onto Millis Road, look for early successional species, including Blue Grosbeak and Indigo Bunting in nearby fields. Driving this same area at night, listen for owls and nightjars. A gated road on the right (Forest Service Road 3019), approximately 1.3 miles down Millis Road, leads 0.5 miles back to the headwaters of a tributary of the Newport River. Search for Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Northern Parula, Prothonotary Warbler and other breeding songbirds. Soon thereafter begins the Millis Road Savanna, which borders Millis Road on the left and makes this stretch of road especially appealing. Red-cockaded Woodpecker can be found here year round. At 1.4 miles look for a walking trail on the left, which leads past several cavity trees. Also present are Red-headed Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Bachman's Sparrow. Continuing along Millis Road, stop to listen for Prothonotary, Swainson's, Worm-eating and Hooded Warblers where the road crosses creeks and drains. Just beyond 5 miles on Millis Road, turn left on Pringle Road (Forest Service Road 123). This road passes by pine flatwoods and offers another opportunity to see Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Bachman's Sparrow.

**Species of Interest:** Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Prothonotary Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Swainson's Warbler, Bachman's Sparrow

**Habitats:** longleaf pine savanna, floodplain forest, early successional, moist shrubland

**Special Concerns:** Hunting is allowed within Croatan National Forest 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. Venomous snakes, including pygmy rattlesnakes and timber rattlesnakes, can also be found in the Croatan.

**Access & Parking:** There is very limited formal parking within this section of the Croatan; take advantage of road shoulders and turn-outs. These roads can usually be driven safely in all types of vehicles, however, sections of road can flood after heavy rainfall. The Croatan National Forest is accessible year round, day and night. Information and maps can be picked up at the Croatan National Forest District Office, located on US 70, approximately 8 miles south of New Bern.

**Directions:** To reach the start of Millis Road, travel approximately 8 miles west on NC 24 from where it splits from US 70 in Morehead City. Turn right on Nine Foot Road and travel north for approximately 3 miles, turning left on Millis Road (SR 1112), which quickly becomes Forest Service Road 128. Pringle Road, which connects to Millis Road, can be accessed from NC 24, 2.7 miles west of the Nine Foot Road turn.

Coordinates: N 34°46'16" W 76°55'50" (start of Millis Road) DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 78





North Carolina

**Birding Trail**

mountains • piedmont • coast

Onslow Bight

2

## Patsy Pond Nature Trail

**Contact:** NC Coastal Federation (manager), USDA Forest Service (property owner)

Directly across from the NC Coastal Federation headquarters, 3609 NC 24, Ocean, NC 28570

252-393-8185

Carteret County

[www.nccoast.org/education/pubed/naturetrail](http://www.nccoast.org/education/pubed/naturetrail)

**Site Description:** The Patsy Pond Nature Trail is part of the Croatan National Forest and winds through an open woodland of longleaf pine forest. Visitors have three trail options, a 0.75 mile trail loop, a 1.5 mile trail loop, or a 2.5 mile trail loop. Red-cockaded Woodpecker can be found here year round. Look for active cavity trees marked with blue bands. Also present are Wild Turkey, Red-headed Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Warbler and other species associated with longleaf pine forest. Signs along the 1.5 mile trail pertain to the self-guided tour brochure.

**Species of Interest:** Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch

**Habitats:** longleaf pine forest, isolated wetlands, moist shrubland, ponds

**Special Concern:** Hunting is allowed within Croatan National Forest 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.

**Access & Parking:** The parking lot is directly across the road from the NC Coastal Federation headquarters on NC 24. An informational kiosk at the west end of the parking lot marks the start of the trail; brochures are available here for a self-guided walk. The trail is open daily during daylight hours.

**Directions:** Take NC 24 west from Morehead City for approximately 9 miles. The parking lot is on the north side of the road, directly across from the NC Coastal Federation headquarters. The headquarters are open to visitors 8:30am to 5pm, Monday - Friday.

Coordinates: N 34°43'07" W 76°57'49" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 78





North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Onslow Bight

3

#### Cedar Point Tideland Trail

**Owner:** USDA Forest Service

Forest Service Road 153-A, Cape Carteret, NC 28584  
252-638-5628

Carteret County

**Site Description:** This 1 mile long loop trail provides opportunities to view salt marsh and upland pine/hardwood associated bird species. Walk the trail in either direction. A combination of raised boardwalks and paths cross the marsh and pine/hardwood communities as the trail winds around along the edge of the White Oak River estuary. Snags throughout the area offer good chances to view woodpecker species, including Red-headed Woodpecker. One short dead-end spur provides a nice view of the tidal marsh, with opportunities to view herons, egrets, and Osprey. On rare occasion, Painted Bunting can be spotted at this site. The best birding opportunities here are late April through early June.

**Species of Interest:** Red-headed Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Summer Tanager, Painted Bunting, wading birds

**Habitats:** pine/hardwood forest, wetland forest, maritime shrub, salt marsh

**Access & Parking:** The trail begins at the north side of the parking area and is accessible daily during daylight hours.

**Directions:** From the intersection of NC 24 and NC 58 in Cape Carteret, take NC 58 north for 0.7 miles. Turn left on VFW Road (SR 1114). Go 0.5 miles and turn left on Forest Service Road 153-A. Travel for approximately 1 mile to the parking lot.

Coordinates: N 34°41'30" W 77°05'11" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 78





North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Onslow Bight

4

#### Emerald Isle Woods

**Owner:** Town of Emerald Isle

Coast Guard Road, Emerald Isle, NC 28594  
252-354-6350

Carteret County

[www.emeraldisle-nc.org](http://www.emeraldisle-nc.org)

**Site Description:** Emerald Isle Woods is a 40 acre preserve that provides birding opportunities on the south shore of Bogue Sound. More than 2 miles of trails wind through both pine woodlands and maritime forest. Leaving from the parking area, the trail winds through thickets interspersed with several small wetlands. Look and listen for Wood Duck, Great Crested Flycatcher, Prothonotary Warbler and other songbirds. Heading north towards the sound, the habitat changes to maritime forest. Watch for Red-bellied Woodpecker and Pine Warbler. At dusk, listen for Chuck-will's-widow. A raised wooden boardwalk begins near the restroom facilities at the end of the main road. The boardwalk snakes across ancient dunes and offers views of Bogue Sound and the Intracoastal Waterway. Extending across broad tidal wetlands, the boardwalk leads to a floating dock where kayaks and canoes may be launched. Scan the wetlands and shoreline area for American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer, terns, shorebirds, wading birds, and wintering waterfowl.

**Species of Interest:** American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer, Great Crested Flycatcher, Prothonotary Warbler, wading birds, wintering waterfowl

**Habitats:** pine/hardwood forest, isolated wetlands, maritime forest and shrub, salt marsh

**Special Feature:** Emerald Isle Woods contains the highest paleo dune system on Bogue Banks. These ancient dunes were created during the formation and movement of former inlets, emphasizing the ever-changing nature of the barrier island systems.

**Access & Parking:** Parking is available on site for cars and special group buses. The site is open daily during daylight hours. Canoes and kayaks may be launched from the floating dock, but they must be transported approximately 1000 feet from the nearest vehicle accessible point. Trail maps are available from the information kiosk at the entrance.

**Directions:** From the intersection of NC 24 and NC 58 in Cape Carteret, travel south on NC 58 over the Intracoastal Waterway bridge. After crossing the bridge, make your first right-hand turn on Coast Guard Road. Travel 0.3 miles on Coast Guard Road to the park entrance on the right.

Coordinates: N 34°39'31" W 77°04'05" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 78





North Carolina

# Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

## Onslow Bight

5

### Hammocks Beach State Park – Bear Island & Huggins Island

**Owner:** NC State Parks

1572 Hammocks Beach Road, Swansboro, NC 28584  
910-326-4881

Onslow County

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

**Site Description:** A venture to Bear Island in Hammocks Beach State Park provides a unique opportunity to explore one of the most unspoiled and uninhabited barrier islands on the coast. Visitors must reach the island by ferry from the mainland visitor center or by private boat. The ride provides great views of marsh habitats, wading birds and shorebirds, especially at low tide. Painted Bunting may be seen near the boat dock on the island and a walk across the island to the ocean side will provide chances to locate birds in the beach and dune habitats. Once on the ocean side, turn left and walk about 1.5 miles to Bogue Inlet, where both migrating and nesting shorebirds can be seen seasonally. Rent a kayak to explore Huggins Island, which offers excellent opportunities to see shorebirds, wading birds, and maritime forest birds.

**Species of Interest:** Piping Plover, American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer, Painted Bunting, wading birds

**Habitats:** maritime forest and shrub, salt marsh, beach and dune

**Special Concern:** Nesting sea turtles and shorebirds are present during the summer. Please respect the posted areas for nesting birds and turtles.

**Access & Parking:** Parking is available at the mainland entrance. Access to Bear Island is by ferry from the visitor center (fee required) or personal boat. The park is open from 8am to 6pm, September - May; 8am to 7pm, June - August. Call the park office or check the web site for the Bear Island ferry schedule. The park has a floating canoe/kayak launch; the motorboat launch is only available to overnight campers.

**Directions:** From Swansboro, take NC 24 west to Hammocks Beach Road (SR 1511). Turn south and travel 2.1 miles to the park entrance on the right.

Coordinates: N 34°40'15" W 77°08'35" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 77





North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Onslow Bight

6

#### Onslow County Cow Horn – New River Paddle Trail

**Contact:** Onslow County Parks and Recreation Department

From Richlands/Steed Park, near Richlands, NC to New River Waterfront Park, Jacksonville, NC

910-347-5332

Onslow County

[www.co.onslow.nc.us/parks](http://www.co.onslow.nc.us/parks)

**Site Description:** This paddle trail begins near Richlands and meanders down Cow Horn Creek, a cypress lined black water creek, for 3 miles until it empties into the New River. Watch for beaver dams along the first few miles of the trail, and tall limestone cliffs at the confluence of the New River. The trail continues south along the New River for nearly 15 miles to the city of Jacksonville. The river is narrow until the last 0.5 miles of the trail, which crosses open water. Depending on the season, paddlers will have chances to see and hear migrating and breeding species typical of hardwood riverine forests, including Wood Duck, Barred Owl, Prothonotary Warbler, Northern Parula, and a variety of wading birds.

**Species of Interest:** Prothonotary Warbler, wading birds

**Habitats:** floodplain forest, river

**Special Concern:** Low water may make entry at some sites difficult. Paddlers may encounter fast-moving rapids near dams along Cow Horn Creek and at the New River confluence; downed trees are possible along the river. Abrupt changes in weather conditions can change the difficulty of paddling.

**Access & Parking:** There are four access points along the trail, all of which are marked with brown paddle-trail signs along nearby roadways: 1) Richlands/Steed Park Landing on Cow Horn Road near Richlands, 2) Henry McCallister Landing, on Rhodestown Road, 3) Onslow County Burton Industrial Park Primitive Landing, off of US 258/NC 24 South, and the trail end at 4) New River Waterfront Park. The third landing can be difficult to drive into after rain events; 4-wheel drive is necessary. Call the Onslow County Parks and Recreation Department to request the Onslow County Cow Horn - New River Paddle Trail map and brochure and to check river conditions.

**Direction:** To the put-in at Richlands/Steed Park: from the intersection of US 17 and Gum Branch Road in Jacksonville, take Gum Branch Road 10 miles north. Bear right on Cow Horn Road and travel for 1.3 miles to the put-in on the left.

To the take-out at New River Waterfront Park: From US 258 South entering Jacksonville, exit onto US 17 towards Jacksonville. As soon as you pass over the New River/US 17 bridge, turn right on Riverview Street. Drive straight ahead into the entrance of New River Waterfront Park.

Coordinates: N 34° 53' 39" W 77° 30' 47" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 77





North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

### Onslow Bight

7

#### Stump Sound Park

**Owner:** Onslow County Parks and Recreation Department

1771 NC 172, Sneads Ferry, NC 28460  
910-347-5332

Onslow County

[www.co.onslow.nc.us/parks](http://www.co.onslow.nc.us/parks)

**Site Description:** Stump Sound Park is a brief but productive stop to make while birding in Onslow County. A short loop trail, approximately 0.25 miles in length, begins just before the tennis courts on the left. The trail passes through longleaf pine forest with a dense midstory. Watch for Great Crested Flycatcher, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Prairie Warbler and Yellow-breasted Chat. Another nature trail, approximately 0.5 miles in length, begins just after the tennis courts, on the right-hand side of the road behind the playground area. This trail is marked with interpretive signs and passes through similar habitat.

**Species of Interest:** Great Crested Flycatcher, Brown-headed Nuthatch

**Habitats:** pine/hardwood forest, longleaf pine forest, isolated wetlands

**Access & Parking:** Daily hours of operation are 10am to 10pm, April - September; 10am to 5pm, October - March. Seasonal concessions available on-site.

**Directions:** From the intersection of NC 210 and NC 172 in Sneads Ferry, take NC 172 south for 0.8 miles. The park entrance is on the right.

Coordinates: N 34°32'57" W 77°27'00" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 85





North Carolina

## Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont •

coast

### Onslow Bight

8

#### Onslow County Public Beach Access #2

**Owner:** Onslow County Parks and Recreation Department

2950 Island Drive, North Topsail Beach, NC 28460  
910-347-5332

Onslow County

[www.co.onslow.nc.us/parks](http://www.co.onslow.nc.us/parks)

**Site Description:** This site offers both beach and sound side access. On the sound side, watch for Painted Bunting during the breeding season, in addition to Seaside Sparrow, Eurasian Collared-Dove and White Ibis. The beach side offers opportunities to see migrating shorebirds such as Red Knot and Dunlin. Black-bellied Plover are also a possibility in all but the summer months. During fall, watch overhead for migrating hawks. In winter, look for Common and Red-throated Loons, Horned Grebe and Northern Gannet just offshore.

**Species of Interest:** Red-throated Loon, Horned Grebe, White Ibis, Seaside Sparrow, Painted Bunting

**Habitats:** maritime shrub, salt marsh, beach and dune

**Access & Parking:** Ample parking is available in lots on both sides of the road. Daily hours of operation are 9am to 8pm, April - September; 9am to 5pm, October - March.

**Directions:** From the intersection of NC 210 and NC 172, take NC 210 3.5 miles east to the highrise bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway. Continue on NC 210 onto Topsail Island. Once on the island, follow NC 210 south for 4 miles to the beach access, a few hundred yards north of milemarker 12. Signs clearly mark the parking areas.

Coordinates: N 34°27'39" W 77°29'06" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 85

