



# BIRDERS OF ST. JAMES



*Let's include our birds during this season of giving.*

## **The Birding Journey**

This month, our birding journey in St. James brings us to Bird Counts which we encourage all club members to participate. This will be my first bird count, which is a one day counting event with reporting by volunteers. Don't have a clue how to count birds? No worries, we have a general meeting on Wednesday, December 3rd at 7pm at the Homer Wright Event Center and we have two veteran bird counters who will guide us on the mission for our *Southport-Bald Head-Oak Island* area.

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC), a longstanding tradition, first occurred on that day in 1900. The CPC was proposed as an alternative to another popular tradition during that period known as a “side hunt.” In these “Christmas side hunts,” teams competed in shooting birds with the winning team producing the largest pile of dead birds. There are better ways to spend Christmas day, and let’s thank American Frank Chapman for founding the CBC.

Administered by the National Audubon Society, the purpose of the CBC is to provide population data for use in science. As a new birder, I joined some birding organizations and receive their Facebook postings with lots of local birding information. I’ve read postings from birders reporting fewer birds in our area, with some species not returning to the backyard feeders. Is there a noticeable drop in bird sightings? This is the type of data that we can collect and keep track by participating in the CBC. As our speaker last month Patrick McMillan noted, bird habitat is constantly changing and is reflective of the changes that we humans make to our living habits. Brunswick County has and is continuing to make many changes and our birds will reflect those changes.

And of course, we can make a sport of the CBC, this year occurring on January 4, 2026, by striving for more participation and possibly a large bird count. The greatest number of birds species ever reported by any U.S. location in a single count is 250 species in 2005 near Palacios, TX. In 2004, our *Southport-Bald Head-Oak Island* area reported 155 different species with just 18 participating in the count. As a group, let’s make the 2026 CBC the best yet for our area.

Trish Greene  
President  
Birders of St. James

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Our December Speaker, **Hugh Shaw**, is our regional expert on both the Christmas Bird Count and the Great Backyard Bird Count. Hugh will discuss everything you need to know about participating in these two bird counts and will

take your questions. Note: You don't have to be an expert birder to participate. And attending this program does not obligate you to participate in the counts.

The Christmas Bird Count is on Sunday, January 4th. The Great Backyard Bird Count takes place the following days; Friday, Feb. 13 through Monday, Feb. 16.



*Click on Flyer for larger view*

### What's the big deal with bird counts?

It's a very big deal. Over the past 55 years, North American bird populations have dropped by 3 billion. Comparing annual counts help to determine the stability, growth, or continued loss of specific species. We hope you can help. We've gathered interesting findings about the importance of these counts through the **button link** below.

**Why it's a big deal!**

**On Wednesday, Nov 12, 2025**, the Birders of St James hosted a presentation by botanist, biologist and naturalist Patrick McMillan. McMillan had hosted a nature program on PBS Carolinas titled "Expeditions with Patrick McMillan" from 2007-2019. For the Birders of St James, McMillan presented on "The Changing Nature of our Coastal Birds." About 100 people attended this informative lecture. McMillan used several examples of changing bird habits that are spurred by human changes.



One example noted by McMillan, is the Brown Headed Cowbird, known for riding on top of the bison and laying their eggs in other species' nests. Once present all over America, by the late 1800s, the bison populations were decimated to just a few hundred, with the vast majority of their historic range lost. The Cowbird is now found mainly among open prairies and cattle raising areas.



Another example is the decrease in the Atlantic Coast Red Knot shorebird which feeds on the eggs of Horseshoe Crabs. The Horseshoe Crab population is declining, and this hurts the Red Knot which needs the eggs and energy for its long migratory trip from the tip of South America to the Canadian Arctic. McMillan's presentation was food for thought as the Carolina coast has changed significantly in recent years and the birds tell that story.



### **Notable dates in the month of December:**

- Monday, Dec. 1 - Most pollinators are now overwintering. Don't cut back coastal grasses.
- **Wednesday, Dec. 3, 7PM: Birders of St. James Program - [Winter Bird Counts](#).** Put this one on your personal calendar now.
- Friday, Dec. 5 - World Soil Day - promoting the importance of healthy soil.
- Friday, Dec. 5-7 - Encore weekend for "Wings Over Water" in NC.
- Wednesday, Dec. 10 - Most reptiles are hibernating.
- Monday, Dec. 15 - Great Horned Owls begin nest building.
- Wednesday, Dec. 17 - Peak migration for Canada geese and Snow geese.
- Friday, Dec. 19 - Full Moon - Something special about a full moon just before Christmas.
- Friday, Dec. 19 - The 31/ATLAS interstellar comet will pass closest to Earth.
- Sunday, Dec. 21, at 10:03AM - Winter Solstice in the Northern Hemisphere.
- Saturday, Dec. 27 - Most overwintering lake & shore birds have arrived on our coast.
- Monday, Dec. 29 - Most Black Bear cubs have been born.

Our Featured Bird for  
December



#### About that Partridge in a Pear Tree.

The American partridge is the Gray Partridge—a chubby, rusty-faced little bird imported from Europe that loves farmland hangouts. It scurries around snacking on seeds and bugs, gathers in friendly coveys, and has been roaming North American great plains as a prized game bird since the 1700s. And it is a ground bird, nesting on the ground. Therefore;  
*♪and a Partridge that's rarely in a tree♪*

*Sorry, no Pear Tree involved!*

*All I want for Christmas is a bird book!*



## Bird Brains – Let's look at Books!

Considering the information that Patrick McMillan shared with us... that Bird Watchers spend more annually on their hobby than either Hunting or Fishing enthusiasts - \$107.6 billion in 2022... Welcome to the country's favorite past time!

You are ready to get started! All you need is a good book to help identify what you are seeing in your back yard. Hmm... Confused by the massive choices we have, including many available from Amazon. For instance:

- North American Bird Watching for Beginners (1.2K reviews)
- Smithsonian Handbooks: Birds of North America -- Eastern Region (2.6K reviews)
- National Geographic Backyard Guide to the Birds of North America (3.4K reviews)
- The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America (3.6K reviews)
- What It's Like to Be a Bird (6.6K reviews)

Is your head swimming yet? How about Amazon's #1 in the Bird Field Guides... The Field Guide to Dumb Birds of North America by Matt Kracht - 4,701 people reviewed and gave it a 4.5-star review!

H-E-L-P! Let's turn to our favorite birding expert, Hugh Shaw, for some smart recommendations. Hugh recommends having both a book with drawings of birds and one with photographs of birds. Hugh reported on the following books, which he always carries on his bird walks.

Hugh's favorites for books containing drawings of birds are Roger Tory Peterson's Birds of Eastern and Central North America or David Sibley's Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America. Favorite books which contain photos of birds are Donald and Lilian Stokes Field Guide to Birds (Eastern Region) or the National Audubon Society Field Guide to Birds of North America.

If you want to identify more than the birds on your walk, Hugh recommends National Audubon Society's Field Guide to the Southeastern States. This guide covers all the flora and fauna of our area and has seventy pages of birds found in our area.

Prefer to have your Smartphone in your hand rather than a book? You will want to download the app MERLIN. The Merlin Bird ID app is a free mobile application from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology that uses artificial intelligence to help identify birds by sight or sound. Merlin is powered by data from eBird, a large database of bird sightings, photos, and sounds. Merlin's sound identification is especially enjoyable in alerting you to what is out there to find or just enjoying figuring out what is singing in your backyard. Many Birders have found that Merlin is a reliable app to keep their Bird Life List. Life List??? Watch out! You are at risk of becoming a serious Birder! Check out YouTube for good videos on Merlin.

A personal recommendation..... on my recent bird walk with Hugh, my walking companion, Viviana, and I enjoyed using Hugh's Stokes Field Guide. I have a good collection of books, but most with photos have only one view. The Stokes guide had at least two, and we found that was helpful. So, just a few days later, my newly purchased Stokes book arrived, and I was impressed that I had gotten the latest version and most birds now included four photos. It is especially useful to see details from more than one vantage point, gender, maturity, or season for identification.

Be sure to check out the public library for birding books, as well as our local shop, or ask birding friends to look over their collections. Birds, Binoculars, and a good Book. Enjoy!

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Click: Your best choice for Birding Resources



*Hope to see you on December 3rd, 7pm!*

*Learn something new and support two conservation projects.*





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