



SOUTH CAROLINA: SOUTHERN CHARM

October 18-23, 2016

Guides: Pat Lueders & Carlos Sanchez

Local Guide: Glenda Braxton-Brown

Participants: Ruth, Anita, Marie, Anne, Dave & Nancy

Tuesday, October 18: Arrival in Savannah

Our group assembled at the charming Planters Inn, located at the center of the historic district of Savannah, Georgia, arriving from Arizona, Missouri, Wisconsin and Florida. We walked the cobblestone River Drive along the Savannah River, the scene of Civil War battles and a major shipping port for the rice and cotton crops of the old South. Cranes that load containers onto ships now dot the landscape along the river.

Savannah is known as America's first planned city with wide open streets intertwined with shady public squares. We visited many of the squares that are the mainstay of the city's plan designed by General James Oglethorpe in the 1700's.

The group convened at the Planters Inn for happy hour to become acquainted and enjoy the beverages and piano player in the lobby. Dinner next door at The Olde Pink House brings back memories of a traditional dinner in the antebellum South. Our table was in what was originally the guest bedroom, a cozy room with a fireplace and an oil portrait of an unknown Southern aristocrat.



Wednesday, October 19: Tour of Savannah National Wildlife Refuge & ACE Basin

Our alarm clock this morning was a fog horn sounding from the Savannah River warning shipping craft of the limited visibility. After breakfast, we crossed the river in dense fog to visit the Savannah NWR and bird the wildlife drive. Hurricane Matthew caused major damage in this area and the refuge had resumed visitation just 2 days before our arrival.

We began at the brushy entrance to enjoy numerous Palm Warblers feeding on the ground and small migrant flocks vocalizing in the Live Oak trees. We got good looks at a



colorful Yellow-throated Warbler, a Northern Parula, Yellow-rumped Warblers, noisy Boat-tailed



Grackles, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers. As the fog lifted, we drove through the wetlands finding Common Gallinule, Little Blue and Snowy Egret, and our first American Alligator, lurking in the brackish water. A tree in the distance has roosting White Ibis, and a flock of Glossy Ibis flew close by. Stately Great Blue Heron and Great Egret stood along the shore.

Another Live Oak area contained feeding Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher, Carolina Wren, Eastern Towhee, many Gray Catbird, and Common Yellowthroat. Anita spotted a Loggerhead Shrike in a small tree very close to the edge of the drive. A Northern Harrier skimmed low over the marsh, and a Red-shouldered Hawk gave its signature scream from a tree.



After lunch at the visitor's center, we visited a store near the ACE Basin specializing in all food Southern including boiled peanuts, grits, ciders, and pralines. It will take months for many of the basins' areas to reopen after Matthew's damage, but we were able to bird at the gated entrance to Donnelly Wildlife Management Area, finding here our first Pine Warbler, Red-headed Woodpecker, an American Redstart, and the busy Brown-headed Nuthatch.

Driving north, we arrived at our destination for the next two days, the charming beach town of Folly Beach, happily free of major storm damage. Here we enjoyed a delicious dinner on the beachside patio of the Tides Hotel. The sound of nearby waves was soothing as we dined, and later slept, to their rhythm.

Thursday, October 20: Birding on Folly Island



The Folly Beach fishing pier stretches 1,045 feet into the sparkling waters of the Atlantic Ocean and is beautiful at sunrise. We saw Laughing Gull, Royal & Caspian Terns, Brown Pelican, Sanderling, and a Willet as we walked to the end where fishermen gathered to catch drum, mackerel, sea bass and flounder. We saw the fins of Bottlenose Dolphin, as Double-crested Cormorant dove for fish, and shrimp boats dropped their nets. Dave asked how Laughing Gulls got their name; and, on cue, the one at the top of the pier's cupola responds with the typical Laughing Gull vocalization so true to its name.

We walked the trail to the Morris Island Lighthouse, finding many mimics including Brown Thrasher, Gray Catbird, and Northern Mockingbird. A mixed feeding flock included a surprise Red-breasted Nuthatch, a sign that this year is an eruption year for roving species. On a sandbar near the lighthouse, Carlos spots a group of terns including Sandwich, Forester's, Caspian and Royal for nice size comparisons. The tide is high, so we find hundreds of birds sitting on the piers near the slot beach, including Ruddy Turnstone, many Black-bellied Plover, and all the previous terns for close studies of their field marks.



After lunch, we walked the beach at Folly Island County Park as the tide receded, and heard numerous Clapper Rail in the marsh. A small group of Sanderling landed on the beach and this flock included a larger, darker shorebird. Carlos quickly yells "Purple Sandpiper", an early arrival and a life bird for most! Many pictures are taken of this rare shorebird.



An evening walk on beautiful Folly Beach looking for shark teeth, or a swim in the ocean side pool, ends this enjoyable day on the Atlantic Ocean in South Carolina.

Friday, October 21: Birding Caw Caw Interpretive Center & Walking Tour of Charleston



Water was high at Caw Caw, which had just reopened after the hurricane, but the levees are elevated and were dry. We had our first sighting of Bald Eagle and Osprey, both species nest here. Good habitat produced a sighting in the open of the elusive Clapper Rail from 15 feet, again a life bird for many. Many Belted Kingfisher were seen and heard, and a pair of Pileated Woodpecker was found in the lush Cypress and Tupelo swamp.

We visited the Angel Oak Tree after lunch, estimated to be in excess of 400-500 years old and 187' from tip to tip. Our local guide, Glenda, joined us to share the

history of Charleston as we toured and walked the battery area of this historical Southern city. Horse drawn carriages passed in front of mansions dating back to the 1700's and the Revolutionary War.



Dinner from our hotel's restaurant on the 14th floor, with a view of the city of Charleston at night, completes this exciting day!

**Saturday, October 22: Visit to Magnolia Plantation/ Cruise to Ft. Sumter / Horse-drawn Carriage
Tour of Downtown Charleston**

Founded in 1676, Magnolia Plantation has been selected as one of "America's Most Beautiful Gardens". Camelia were in bloom as we began birding at the Audubon Swamp Trail, named for John James Audubon. Audubon birded this plantation and collected his Anhinga specimen here, where they breed and can be found year around. We found a handsome Wood Duck, especially requested by western-based Ruth, and Blue-winged Teal, Pied-billed Grebe, Common Gallinule, and a lone male Gadwall. Four Anhinga were seen drying their wings near the historical rice fields on the Ashley River.



The cruise to Fort Sumter included a historical narrative of the Civil War and the involvement of the Charleston harbor. On the island, we found many shorebirds including 4 Wilson's Plover, Dunlin, and Semi-palmated Plover for comparison with the Wilson's, Ruddy Turnstone, Western Sandpiper, and one Least Sandpiper. A large flock of Black Skimmer was sighted from the ship on our return.

During the horse drawn carriage ride, our driver delivered a colorful narrative of the history of many of the mansions, churches, historical buildings, and hidden gardens that make Charleston the #1 city in the United States. We toured the City Market for handmade crafts to take home to remember this historical area.

Dinner at Fleet Landing, Charleston's only restaurant on the harbor, was a memorable ending to this exciting visit to the downtown area.

Sunday, October 23: Birding at Francis Beidler Audubon Center / Ft. Moultrie & Pitt St. Bridge

The Francis Beidler Audubon Center sits within the Four Holes Swamp, a major tributary of the Edisto River, a blackwater creek system. The preserve was established to protect 1800 acres of old-growth swamp forest, the largest virgin stand of these trees in the world, some over 1,000 years old. We walked the 1.75 mile boardwalk trail guided by Matt Johnson, the Education Manager, who shared with us the history and ecology of the swamp. We see Golden-crowned Kinglets for the first time and get good looks at a Hermit Thrush. Anita spotted the resident Barred Owl sleeping on a low branch for our first owl of the trip. Many souvenirs were available and purchased by our group in the center's delightful gift shop. Good to support the conservation cause!



A target bird in the Southeast Pine forest is the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Many can be found in the nearby Francis Marion National Forest, our next destination. As we slowly drove the forest roads, Anne requested a quick stop, and we soon heard the distinct vocalization of these woodpeckers. We found a family unit of four and got good scope views of this endangered species of concern.



We returned to the ocean area and visited Ft. Moultrie and the Visitor's Center. Many Palm Warbler were on the ground and several Eastern Bluebird sat on the signs and walls around the fort's remaining Civil War cannons. We visited the old causeway at the Pitt Street Bridge to find another specialty of this habitat, the Seaside Sparrow. We got many quick views of this elusive sparrow as well as Yellow-crowned Night-heron, White Ibis, American Oystercatcher, and our first Wood Stork.

The day ends with our farewell dinner along the water at Shem Creek as shrimp boats are seen returning to the creek with their catch. Nice!

Monday, October 24: Birding at Patriot's Point & Departure

Sadly, our tour was coming to an end, but we had the morning still available to explore Patriot's Point at the Mt. Pleasant end of the impressive Arthur Ravenel Bridge.

On the nature trail, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo finally sat quietly for all to see. In a pond near the trail we had our second, and much better look, at a Wood Stork, getting a feel for the immense size of these birds.

Walking the causeway under the bridge, we heard many Clapper Rails, and look down on one walking the grassy shore below us.



As we drove to the airport, we all agreed that we've enjoyed a memorable week of birds, nature, history, culture, spectacular scenery, and delicious food that none of us will ever forget!



Photo Credits:

Planters Inn Front Entry, courtesy of the hotel; Tour scenics, sunrise, sunset and group photos, Pat Lueders; Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Tom Dove; Wood Duck, Richard Becker; Woodstork, Peg Abbott; Great Egret, James Schafer.