

North Carolina Pelagics & Pineywoods Itinerary

[Link: North Carolina Pelagics & Pineywoods](#)

Tour Overview

The North Carolina: Pelagics & Pine Savannas birding tour is a short but bird-filled exploration of coastal North Carolina, combining two of the Southeast's most distinctive birding experiences: the legendary pelagic waters off Cape Hatteras and the species-rich longleaf pine savannas of the Coastal Plain.

We'll spend two full days venturing into the Gulf Stream, where warm tropical waters meet the continental shelf and create some of the finest pelagic birding in North America. Black-capped Petrel is a headline target, alongside Cory's and Audubon's Shearwaters and Wilson's and Band-rumped Storm-Petrels. Jaegers, Bridled Tern and other offshore specialties are also possible, while these famously productive waters always hold the potential for something truly unexpected. Short-finned Pilot Whales, Atlantic Spotted Dolphins, Common Bottlenose Dolphins and other marine life add another dimension to our days at sea.

Back on land, we'll explore North Carolina's Outer Banks before continuing south to the longleaf pine savannas and forests of the Coastal Plain. Here we'll search for Red-cockaded Woodpecker—a signature species of the longleaf pine ecosystem—along with Bachman's Sparrow and Brown-headed Nuthatch. A rich supporting cast of southeastern breeding birds may include Swainson's, Prothonotary, Kentucky, Worm-eating, Prairie and Yellow-throated Warblers, Acadian Flycatcher, Blue Grosbeak and Painted Bunting.

Coastal habitats provide yet another change of pace, with opportunities for Wilson's Plover, American Oystercatcher, Least Tern and a variety of other shorebirds, terns and wading birds. From Black-capped Petrels over the Gulf Stream to Red-cockaded Woodpeckers among towering longleaf pines, this compact tour showcases the remarkable diversity of North Carolina's coast.

Itinerary

Day 1: Norfolk, Virginia

Arrival in Norfolk, Virginia. We will meet that evening at the hotel for a welcome dinner, where we'll get to know one another and discuss the exciting week of birding ahead. Night in Norfolk, Virginia.

Day 2: Outer Banks



After breakfast, we'll make our way south through North Carolina's famous Outer Banks toward Hatteras Island. We'll spend much of the day birding this remarkable chain of barrier islands, with potential stops at locations such as Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, Bodie Island and Cape Hatteras National Seashore. We'll search beaches, saltmarshes, impoundments and other coastal habitats for birds such as American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer, Least, Gull-billed and Royal Terns, Wilson's Plover and Seaside Sparrow, along with a variety of herons, egrets, shorebirds and other coastal species. By late afternoon we'll continue to Hatteras, where we'll have dinner and turn in early in preparation for our first pelagic adventure. Night in Hatteras.

Day 3: Pelagic



Today is the first of our two back-to-back pelagic trips! We'll be up before dawn and make the short trip to the docks, where we'll board the Stormy Petrel II for a full day exploring the productive waters off Cape Hatteras. Here the warm Gulf Stream meets cooler continental-shelf waters, creating one of the premier locations for pelagic birding in North America. Black-capped Petrel, Cory's and Sargasso Shearwaters and Wilson's Storm-Petrel are among the species we hope to encounter, while Band-rumped Storm-Petrel is another important target. These waters are also famous for producing exciting rarities and you never know what might show up. Past trips have encountered species such as Trindade and Fea's Petrels, South Polar Skua, tropicbirds and Brown and Masked Boobies. After a full day offshore, we'll return to Hatteras in the late afternoon, enjoy dinner and get some well-earned rest before doing it all again tomorrow! Night in Hatteras.

Day 4: Pelagic



We'll return to the Gulf Stream today for our second full day offshore. Conditions on the ocean can change dramatically from one day to the next, and changes in wind, currents and water temperature can bring a very different selection of seabirds within reach. We'll have another opportunity to search for the regular Gulf Stream specialties while keeping a constant watch for something unexpected. Marine mammals are another highlight of these trips, with Short-finned Pilot Whale, Atlantic Spotted Dolphin and Common Bottlenose Dolphin among the species we may encounter. Having two consecutive days offshore greatly increases our chances of experiencing the diversity and unpredictability that make Cape Hatteras pelagic birding so exciting. We'll return to the docks in the late afternoon and celebrate our adventures over dinner. Night in Hatteras.

Day 5: Hatteras to the Crystal Coast



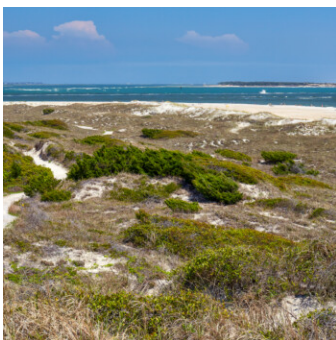
After two early starts, we'll enjoy a somewhat more relaxed morning before beginning our journey south. We'll take the vehicle ferry from Hatteras to Ocracoke Island and continue across this beautiful barrier island before boarding the longer ferry across Pamlico Sound toward Cedar Island. The journey itself offers excellent opportunities for wildlife watching. We'll keep an eye out for Royal and Sandwich Terns, Brown Pelicans, American Oystercatchers and other coastal birds, as well as Bottlenose Dolphins. Time and ferry schedules permitting, we'll make additional birding stops along the way. After reaching Cedar Island, we'll continue to the Morehead City/Atlantic Beach area, our base for exploring the forests of North Carolina's Coastal Plain. Night in Morehead City/Atlantic Beach.

Day 6: Pineywoods



Today we'll explore the diverse habitats of Croatan National Forest. Extensive longleaf-pine forests, pocosins, wetlands and hardwoods support a distinctive community of southeastern birds. Our primary targets in the open pineywoods will include Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow and Brown-headed Nuthatch. As we explore other habitats, we'll search for species such as Swainson's, Prothonotary, Worm-eating and Kentucky Warblers, Acadian Flycatcher, Northern Bobwhite, Blue Grosbeak and Painted Bunting. We'll spend the day moving between habitats according to bird activity and our success with the various specialties. If conditions and group energy allow, we may head out again after dinner to listen and look for nocturnal species such as Chuck-will's-widow and Eastern Screech-Owl. Night in Morehead City/Atlantic Beach.

Day 7: Pineywoods & Fort Macon



We'll have one final morning to enjoy the birdlife of North Carolina's Coastal Plain. Depending on our successes the previous day, we may return to Croatan National Forest for another opportunity to find any elusive Pineywoods specialties, or visit Fort Macon State Park and nearby coastal habitats for a change of scenery and a final selection of coastal birds. Later in the morning, we'll begin our drive north to Norfolk, birding opportunistically along the way as time permits. We'll gather that evening for a final dinner and recap some of the highlights of our week—from southeastern pineywoods to the deep waters of the Gulf Stream. Night in Norfolk.

Day 8: Departure

Our North Carolina: Pelagics & Pine Savannas birding tour concludes today. Transfers to the airport and flights home can be arranged according to individual schedules.

What to Expect

Overview

This is a moderately paced tour combining two full days of pelagic birding with exploration of the Outer Banks and the longleaf pine savannas and forests of North Carolina's Coastal Plain. Participants should be prepared for several early starts (5am) and some long days (10-12 hours on pelagic), particularly during our two long days at sea.

Accommodation

We stay in comfortable hotels throughout the tour. Hotels are comfortable and provide private bathrooms and standard amenities.

Food

Breakfasts will generally be at our hotels or at nearby restaurants, although early starts may occasionally require a packed or takeaway breakfast (especially during our pelagic days). Lunches will often be taken in the field or at convenient stops during the day. Dinners will normally be at local restaurants.

Walking

Walking on this tour is generally easy and over flat terrain. Most birding involves short walks along beaches, boardwalks, trails, forest roads and other relatively level surfaces. We may occasionally walk on sand or uneven forest trails, but there are no strenuous hikes or significant elevation changes. The pace will generally be dictated by bird activity, and we will spend considerable time standing while watching and listening for birds.

Boat Trips

Two full-day pelagic trips off Cape Hatteras are a major focus of this tour. We will depart very early in the morning and may spend 10-12 hours on the water each day, travelling well offshore to reach the productive waters of the Gulf Stream. Sea conditions can vary considerably, and participants should be comfortable spending long periods aboard a moving vessel. Those susceptible to seasickness should come prepared with appropriate preventative measures.

All pelagic trips are weather and sea-condition dependent. Safety is the first priority, and the captain will make the final decision on whether conditions are suitable to go offshore. Trips may be delayed, altered or cancelled if winds, seas or other conditions make it unsafe to operate. If a pelagic trip cannot run, we will make the most of the day with alternative land-based birding where possible.

There is some protection from the elements aboard the boat, but participants should be prepared for sun, wind, spray and changing temperatures.

Our itinerary also includes vehicle ferry crossings between Hatteras, Ocracoke and Cedar Island. These are much larger vessels operating in protected waters and are generally considerably calmer than our offshore pelagic trips.

Driving

There are a few longer drives, particularly between Norfolk and the Outer Banks and on our return to Norfolk at the end of the tour. Much of our travel between birding sites involves shorter drives with frequent stops. Our journey from Hatteras to the Morehead City area includes vehicle ferries via Ocracoke and Cedar Island, making this a scenic travel day with opportunities for birding and wildlife watching along the way.

Climate/Weather

Early June in coastal North Carolina is typically warm and humid, with daytime temperatures generally around 24-29°C (75-85°F) and overnight and early-morning temperatures around 18-23°C (65-73°F). Temperatures can occasionally climb above 30°C (86°F), particularly inland in the pine savannas.

Conditions offshore can feel significantly cooler than the temperature suggests because of wind and spray, especially during the early-morning run out to the Gulf Stream. Participants should bring a warm layer and windproof or waterproof outer layer for the pelagic trips even when warm conditions are forecast.

Strong sunshine and high humidity are common at this time of year, while showers and thunderstorms are also possible. Lightweight, breathable clothing, sun protection and rain gear are recommended. Mosquitoes, ticks and other biting insects may be encountered in forested and wetland habitats, so insect repellent and appropriate clothing are also advisable.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- 2 full-day pelagic tours
- Good quality accommodation
- Includes all meals
- 4 - 8 participants with one guide, 9 - 12 participants with two guides and two vehicles
- Gratuities for pelagic tour
- All park, conservation and entrance fees

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Flights to and from start of tour
 - Travel Insurance
 - Alcoholic beverages
 - Items of a personal nature
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