



# Birds of a Feather Flock Together

by Warren Hughes

Some of the widest variety of winged creatures can be found right here in Lake Murray Country and the Saluda, Broad and Congaree River areas. Saluda Shoals, along the banks of the beautiful Saluda River, is a 480-acre area park operated by the Irmo-Chapin Recreation Commission. That's not to mention the Congaree National Park in Richland County, which is internationally famous for birding enthusiasts. Along with Saluda Shoals Park, although not claiming to be complete, top birdwatching spots in our local area include Congaree Creek Heritage Preserve and Timmerman Trail, Fourteen Mile Creek Trail, Gibson Road Soccer Complex, Lake Murray Dam and Bomb Island, Cayce and West Columbia Riverwalks, Gibson's Pond Park and Shealy's Pond Heritage Preserve.

You don't have to go far to witness some of the best birdwatching experiences in the country. Right here in South Carolina we are fortunate to have a truly world-class opportunity at Lake Murray's Bomb Island. During the summer, more than a million Purple Martins roost for the summer on the island, traveling from their winter home in South America from late June to early August, with numbers peaking in July. Many of us have seen their huge cloud of black dots in the distance as they descend on the island each evening in a feeding frenzy. Many times they will disperse into a 100 mile radius.

Congaree National Park is known to be home to some 200 bird species. Although that number is not considered high for a particular area, the park is known for the sheer number of birds present at any given time of year. In addition, the national park is an ideal habitat for migrant birds, especially for populations looking for a suitable nesting site or wintering grounds. Almost all of South Carolina's woodpeckers have been recorded at Congaree National Park, including the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and the Red-cockaded Woodpeckers.

Artist and ornithologist James Audubon received much of the inspiration for his renowned paintings in South Carolina. In 1831 he went to Charleston where he began painting his famed edition, "The Birds of America." In 1905, the National Audubon Society was formed to protect birds and preserve their habitats, a role more critical than ever as species become more endangered. Today, Audubon South Carolina in Charleston has more than 26,000 support-

ers, including an active Columbia chapter. The state society has two major conservation areas, Francis Beidler Forest and Silver Bluff, and oversees some 22,000 acres.

In the birding world, there is a distinction between a “birder” and a “birdwatcher”. A birdwatcher may be content to enjoy avian observations from the kitchen window or an outside deck. Birders are noted for their dedication, patience and expertise; including the ability to recognize birds for their songs and calls. One of the most enthusiastic local birders is Patricia Voelker, who conducts birdwatching walks at Saluda Shoals Park.

Although she has always appreciated birds, Voelker says she did not become a birder in the accepted sense of the word until 2005. “I met several others who were long time birders and began birding more intentionally, buying my first pair of binoculars. Meeting other birders led to my joining the Carolina Bird Club, attending annual conferences and getting on ebird, the free app from Cornell University of Ornithology,” she explains. Voelker recommends that those who have a genuine interest open an ebird.org account. “That website keeps your life list updated, shows where good bird spots are, and teaches so much.” A birding life list is typically a list of all the species a person has seen over a lifetime.

Voelker has a long list of recorded rare sightings and is willing to traipse long distances and endure inclement weather for the rare opportunity to spot a particular bird. In her own words, she describes some of her most memorable experiences:

– “I have watched the last hawk chick sit in the nest while its parents and siblings fly back and forth, encouraging the last one to hop out onto a limb from which it will fly.

– “I have watched with a broken heart as Red-headed woodpecker parents tried to get help for their babies when their nest tree fell, splitting apart at the nest, tossing the too-young-to-make-it youngsters out. I have held one of those youngsters as our bird walkers tried to find a way to get them reunited with their parents. I have mourned



## Birding Tips from Patricia Voelker:

- Anywhere you are, you can find birds, if you just be still and watch. Watch the sky for Turkey or Black Vultures circling, or for a Great Blue Heron on its way to a lake, or a flock of robins, or blackbirds, or grackles or Cedar Waxwings just moving from tree to tree.
- Watch shrubs for sparrows or juncos and towhees in winter. When you see a branch move, check it out. Notice an odd lump in a tree or unexpected color? It could be a sleeping owl or watchful hawk or crows gathering to torment a hawk in another tree. Watch and you will be rewarded.
- If you are a beginner, simply open your eyes and ears. Expect to see and hear birds and you will. Check out guidebooks and buy the one you like best. Get a free app for your cell-phone or computer.
- Become a regular on Cornell’s ebird site, which tracks birds through your posts. You can find good local birding sites listed there and which birders in this area have seen certain breeds and where. Sign up for the emails that notify you of unusual birds.
- Reach out and network with others who enjoy birding. Start talking about birding and you’ll meet others who bird. If you’re on social media, check for birding groups you can join. Carolina Bird Club has a newsletter and a website and holds regular conferences with guided walks.

**For upcoming bird walks with Patricia, visit ICRC.net.**

Saluda Shoals Park  
5604 Bush River Rd., Columbia, SC 29212  
ICRC.net • 803-772-1228

Congaree Creek Heritage Preserve  
634 Old State Rd., Cayce, SC 29033  
SCtrails.net

Timmerman Trail  
Cayce Riverwalk  
201 Naples Ave., Cayce, SC 29033  
Cityofcayce-sc.gov

West Columbia Riverwalk Park  
109 Alexander Rd., West Columbia, SC 29169  
Westcolumbiasc.gov

Fourteen Mile Creek Trail  
1104 N. Lake Dr., Lexington, SC 29072  
Lexsc.com

Gibson’s Pond Park  
241 Gibson Rd., Lexington, SC 29072  
Lexsc.com

Gibson Road Soccer Complex  
Duffie Dr., Lexington, SC 29072  
LCRAC.com

Bomb Island, Lake Murray  
Lexsc.com

Shealy’s Pond Heritage Preserve  
1060-1014 State Rd. S-32-279, Lexington, SC 29073  
SCtrails.net







## Backyard Birding Tips from Zach Steinhauser:

- **Elevated Feeders:** Some birds like the Tufted Titmouse, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Brown-headed Nuthatch like to feed on food sources they can find in the trees. People can mimic this behavior by installing Tube Feeders, Hopper Feeders, or Suet Feeders.

- **Suet Feeders:** Suet is a formulation of animal fat and other ingredients, like insects, to attract birds and provide a food source high in energy. Birds like Woodpeckers, Warblers, Chickadees, Titmice, Nuthatches, and Wrens all incorporate suet into their diets. We have various types of suet here at Wingard's Market that cater to different birds and their requirements.

- **Ground Feeders:** While some species of birds feed exclusively in the trees, there are some that venture to the ground to feed. Birds like Cardinals, Mourning Doves, various Sparrows, and even Ducks will come to Ground feeder trays or platform feeders that are set on the ground in a place close to cover if it's needed.

- **Insect Feeders:** Some birds will feed primarily on insects and worms, like Eastern Bluebirds. To attract them, place hanging tray feeders full of mealworms, which provide a high source of energy and protein.

**For details regarding tours with Zack, visit [carolinasafarico.com](http://carolinasafarico.com).**

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the loss of those birds every time I pass the site where it happened.”

– “I have seen the problems caused by a young Blue Jay getting focused on people, following us, calling to us, needing parents who were no longer there. The Rangers had to relocate him to another part of the park where fewer people would be.”

– “I have watched Blue Grey Gnatcatchers building their nests and watched the hawks bringing nesting material to create theirs. I have watched these nests be filled with baby birds as their parents take turns feeding them. Then the babies fledge, dropping to the ground where they mimic the parent, even as they scream for food they are now grown enough to catch on their own.”

Birders not only treasure their sightings, but they also value the camaraderie enjoyed with others who share their interest. Voelker points specifically to John Myers and mentions Myers and John Tjaarda as recognized members of the local birder circles. Myers is a board member of the Columbia Audubon Society and an active volunteer at Lexington Museum, where he recently led a session on “Protecting Birds in Your Own Backyard” at the museum’s “Great Outdoors Day.”

Tjaarda, a West Columbia native, who is also active in the Columbia Audubon Society, is a gifted photographer. Congaree Creek Heritage Preserve in Cayce is one of his favorite areas for birding. “There have been some real special birds to pop up there over the past few years like a Grasshopper Sparrow, a Sedge Wren and tons of migrating Warblers,” he says. “If you want good looks at Red-headed Woodpeckers, Wood Thrush, or Prothonotary Warblers, then this is one of the best spots to go.”

Local bird enthusiasts frequently “flock” to the the wild birds department (Wings and Things) at Wingard's Market in Lexington. It is a regular destination for shelters, feeders, seeds, accessories, observation tools and other items. Zach Steinhauser, continuing in the footsteps of his grandfather, Judson Wingard, is actively engaging his degree in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation from the University of Florida. Steinhauser offers guided tours through his recently opened Carolina Safari Company (CSC). He realized his passion for connecting people with nature firsthand during one of his guided excursions to Bomb Island to see the Purple Martins.

As for attracting birds to your home,





Steinhauser advises there are four necessities: food, water, cover, and space to raise young. Although natural food sources can provide sustenance, people can greatly supplement nutrition through feeders. “There is surprisingly a lot more to bringing birds to your backyard feeder than you’d think,” he says. “Some like to feed on the ground, some like to feed off the ground, some like insects and some like a special sort of seed.”

“Food alone is not sufficient to attract and retain wildlife to your yard,” he stresses. “A habitat needs water in order for wildlife to remain. Natural sources of water include lakes, ponds, puddles, rivers, and creeks, while you can establish artificial water sources such as birdbaths, fountains, and Koi or regular ponds, he notes. Wildlife will first be attracted to the water source and then begin to look for food sources.

Various birds also require different types of nesting boxes which require special features such as roofing, drainage and ventilation. Native plants, those that occur naturally in a landscape and are native to a particular area, also help in attracting wildlife, he emphasizes. Also, he cautions, pet owners need to be aware of the threat dogs and cats pose to birds and other wildlife. ■

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