



Prothonotary Warblers, named for the yellow robes worn by papal clerks in the Roman Catholic Church, are arguably our most beautiful breeder. This male sings to declare his territory off limits.



Red-spotted Purples, like other butterflies, derive needed nutrients not found in nectar from mud and dirt. This was my first-of-the-year purple!

Brunswick Wildlife Watchable Wildlife on the Cross-Brunswick Expressway

Over the last month my wildlife adventures have led me over Governors Road and Lee Buck Road through central Brunswick County to Brunswick Town. It was my way of welcoming spring from the ditches...and welcoming back our breeding birds returning from migration.

This time of year I catch my first glimpse of marsh rabbits, snakes, butterflies, spiders, birds, and many other first-of-the-season species as spring splashes across the landscape.

The Cross-Brunswick Expressway? It is my name for the backroads and dirt roads that connect the 17 with the 133. This is the expressway system of the Quad Cities Metroplex. You know...Leland, Navassa, Bellville, and Winnabow.

I picked a target bird each day, vowing to just take other wildlife as it popped up. I usually targeted Prothonotary Warblers since they are fairly predictable and fun to watch. In previous years, I had recorded them arriving between April 5 and 10 at Rices Creek Bridge.

By late April, there are usually two males doing aerial dogfights over the bridge. There are two separate territories, one on each side of the bridge, but that does not stop them from chasing each other. They seem to enjoy it! It is, after all, their role to protect the nest.

Prothonotary Warblers generally nest in tree cavities, readily available in bottomlands like those along Rices Creek. Being born in a cavity over water is certainly safer from predators than most nesting locations; however, when the young fledge, their first flight may include a splash down in water. Not to worry...the fledglings are able to swim forty plus feet using their wings!

Since they have specialized habitat needs, the greatest threats to their survival are habitat degradation and destruction such as the logging and conversion of bottomland to cropland.

Fortunately, Prothonotaries are tolerant of humans and will use artificial nest boxes. Nest box programs, similar to bluebird nest box programs, are being instituted to provide more cavities

Want to see these guys? Go to Rices Creek or other area creeks and rivers, such as Town Creek and the Lockwood Folly River. To locate them, listen for the male's song, four ringing notes, each sounding like "sweet". They sing from arrival on territory until late June or July.

In addition to the Red-spotted Purple in the photo, my species of observed butterflies included: Sleepy and Juvenal's Duskywings; Henry's Elfin; Silver-spotted Skipper; Falcate Orangetip; Sleepy Orange; Spicebush, Black, Eastern Tiger, and Zebra Swallowtails; Cloudless Sulphur; and Cabbage Whites. Over much of this route, the woods are close to the road and the narrow roadsides with nectar-bearing plants funnel butterflies along the road

There are a number of other strategies for finding butterflies including locating larval food plants, flowers that adult butterflies prefer for nectar, and "hill topping" butterflies nectaring in fields across the top of hills. Good butterfly field guides list larval food plants for each species and include photos of their caterpillars.

Butterflies may also be found in mud, on animal dung, and on rotten fruit because they provide sources of nutrients not found in nectar.

Anoles, marsh rabbits, dragonflies and many other insects were present plus dozens of funnel-web spiders. One of my best experiences occurred when I accidentally startled a marsh rabbit and watched as it "walk across the water" of the Daw's Creek bottomlands. They actually swim that fast!

Unfortunately, I do not have snake photos to show you. I saw a black snake and banded watersnake; however, they were too fast for me. Also, I found an adult, chocolate-banded Copperhead just past Rices Creek Bridge but it had been run over during the hour between the time I left and returned. Sure was beautiful. Wish I could have saved that one.

See in you in the ditches!

John Ennis

Caution: ditches are the home of danger...from snakes to ticks to bees. My worse fear is stepping on a fire ant hill. The roadsides are sometimes mush softer than they appear so use care when parking.

Use care when following in my muddy footsteps...and look for a future article "Sweat the Small Stuff". In the meantime, I recommend going in small groups and having multiple vehicles.



Patches of thistle along roadsides offer photo ops of amazing wildflowers plus some cool insects like this
Leaf-footed Bug



Pinewoods Gentian

My route starts from the intersection of US 17 North and Governors Road and proceeds about 3 miles to the first stop at Rices Creek Bridge.

In addition to my little yellow friends, Northern Parula, Great-crested and Acadian Flycatchers, and many woodpeckers nest close by. Barred Owls calling sometimes all day; Hairy and other woodpeckers

At 2.9 miles, take a left on Lee Buck Road and for the next half mile look/listen for breeding Hooded and Prairie Warblers; White-eyed Vireos; and Summer Tanagers.

Wide-cut, damp roadsides, great for wildflowers and insects, may be found at 3.9 miles. If wet enough, look for carnivorous plants on the roadsides. During my adventure I found two quarter-sized sundews.

Next up are large fields on both sides of the road which may contain, if unplowed, massive numbers of wildflowers, bees, and butterflies plus Savannah Sparrows, Indigo Buntings, and Blue Grosbeaks.

At 5.1 miles stop at Daw's Creek, the home of nesting songbirds, river otters, raccoons, and marsh rabbits. At 5.7 miles there are wooded wetlands good for anoles; snakes; Swainson's, Prothonotary and Northern Parula warblers; Wood Ducks; and woodpeckers.

The intersection with the Daw's Creek Turnpike (paved road) is at 6.1 miles. Turn right to Funston Farms, left to go to the 133, or turn around and retrace your route

Look and listen for birds at all points on this route. Most wetland areas good for dragonflies. Great in spring before leaves are fully out for early arriving warblers; after that know the songs of your target species. Most land is privately owned and posted or state-owned and may be leased to hunting clubs

Cross-Brunswick Birding Route

From US 17 south cross over to the left and take Governors Road

2.0 m changes to dirt road

2.7 m Rices Creek Bridge; Prothonotary, Northern Parula, GC Flycatchers, Acadian Flycatchers, Barred Owls calling sometimes all day; Hairy and other woodpeckers

2.9 m Lee Buck Road - do not park near homes which may have pit bulls

2.9 to 3.4 approximate area for Hooded and Prairie Warblers; WE Vireos; Summer Tanagers

3.4 interesting brambles; Marsh Rabbit

3.9 wide-cut roadsides great for wildflowers and insects

4.2 RR tracks; Yellow Breasted Chat and Prairie Warblers

4.3 Parula nest in moss

Most wetland areas good for dragonflies

4.6 Fields; massive number of wildflowers, bees, butterflies until field plowed; Savannah Sparrows; Kestrels; FOY Black and Zebra Swallowtail; Sleepy Orange;

5.1 Cross over Daw's Creek; Barred Owls, nesting songbirds, river otters, raccoons, marsh rabbits; flushed marsh rabbit and saw it run/swim/fly across swampy area in bottomlands;

since early April some of the area has dried out a little dust in roads; however, enough rain; there is no longer a drought; watch for fire ants

5.3 Begin heavy gravel

5.4 More fields

5.7 Wooded wetlands; anoles, snakes, Swainson's, Prothonotary and Northern Parula warblers; Wood Ducks; woodpeckers; stereo frogs croaking softly, intermittently like a contact call

6.1 Intersection with Daw's Creek Road (paved road); turn right to Funston Farms or turn around and retrace route

6.7 Cross Daw's Creek again; great stop but be very careful on shoulder; watch for traffic

6.9 Hog farms and meadows; meadowlarks, ibises, cattle egrets

8.0 Decision point: right down Governors Road (quickly cross RR tracks) back to start of Lee Buck Road, Rices Creek, and US 17; straight ahead to NC 87; left to BSL or Brunswick Town

Great wildflowers along Governors Road back to Lee Buck Road specially in late summer and early fall

Back to Lee Buck Road route

8.2-8.4 warblers

8.5 Begin sparrow territory

8.6 Pinewoods Gentian on right

9.6 Beaver Pond; Prothonotary Warblers; woodpeckers

10.1 Lee Buck Road

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