



**Wood Ducks are the rock stars
of Greenfield Lake**



**Landing cormorant gets a
bill-snapping “welcome”**

Brunswick Wildlife Greenfield by the Hour

Last week I had two appointments in Wilmington that were almost two hours apart. I try to double or triple up appointments to save fuel cost and reduce my carbon footprint.

Also, not wanting to place my fate in the jaws of the green, demonic dragon that lies in wait, I always stay in Wilmington instead of returning to Brunswick between appointments. I often spend an hour or two watching nature at the lake during my wait.

If you don't think Memorial Bridge is possessed just try running a few minutes late for an appointment or meeting.

For years, I have used my one-hour-at-a-time approach to birding Greenfield. On this trip I parked on the west side of the amphitheatre and was immediately welcomed by a bluebird and a pair of Wood Ducks that swam by.

It was 54 degrees and a strong northwest wind made it seem colder. The day, however, was destined to be a sunny, spring-like day that warmed up quickly. The chorus of birdsong was loud, especially the thrashers and mockingbirds that seemed to be competing in a “battle of the bands” contest.

A Chipping Sparrow flew in from the feeders at Elderhaus across the street and joined Yellow-rumped and Pine Warblers in a longleaf pine. Yellow-rumped Warblers are nearing their alternate (breeding) plumage. Except for their “butter butt”, they are so plain when they arrive for the winter and so colorful as they head north in the spring.

Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers quickly found me and, from across the lake, I heard the bird sound frequently but inappropriately used in old jungle movies. Yes, the loud, rapid

series of “kuks”, that rise and fall in pitch, of the Pileated Woodpecker. The huge woodpecker is sometimes seen around the amphitheatre area since they may breed in the dead trees to the left of the observation deck just below.

I watched many other birds including nesting Canada Geese, Pied-billed Grebes that dotted areas of the lake, and a raft of American Coots. I saw my first (and last) migratory waterfowl of the day, two Gadwalls, given most had flown north. Just before leaving, I was startled by the blood-curdling squawk of a Great Blue Heron flying away from me.

On previous winter visits, I have seen American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Hooded Merganser, and Northern Shoveler. Most winters a rare Eurasian Wigeon shows up and Wood Ducks may be seen year-round.

My other favorite sightings include Brown Creepers during winter and a Louisiana Waterthrush during last fall’s migration. A couple of Wood Storks stayed most of the winter of 2006-07 and while observing them I once counted ten Anhinga...both birds expanding their range northward as the climate warms.

A couple of days later, I returned to witness a “must-see” Greenfield event. Double-crested Cormorants by the hundreds fly in for roosting, starting an hour or two before sunset.

Those coming in with the wind at their backs seemed to fall out of the sky then bank into the wind, finishing with a landing flare for touchdown. Those coming in against the wind made powerful low-level approaches and then rode the lift of the wind into their flared landing.

As the trees began to fill and space was limited, newcomers were treated to hostile bill-snapping and aggressive behavior until the original occupant understood the incoming bird was not attacking it. Then all settled in peacefully and began to preen...until the next returnee landed. I left around 6:30 PM and, with an hour of daylight left, many were still streaming in.

Most of my life I have had relatives in Wilmington so Greenfield Lake is a special place...an obligatory stop on family tours of the past as much as brick streets with trolley car tracks and moth-balled liberty ships.

Greenfield is a large millpond ringed by tall bald cypress trees and decorated with Spanish moss and azaleas. On this trip, the azaleas had begun their spring transformation into eye candy for tourists and residents alike.

I greatly enjoy my Greenfield visits and recommend them to anyone, whether or not you actively watch birds. I sometimes take my newspaper, bag lunch, and binoculars and spend a peaceful lunch hour at the amphitheatre.

Hour by hour you can bird the lake by stopping at different points along the five-mile Lakeshore Scenic Drive. The lake, a site on the North Carolina Birding Trail, really deserves more birding attention on longer, more intense visits.

The Cape Fear River Watch offers nature tours by a canoe equipped with an electric motor. These trips are probably good for big guys like waders, Anhinga, cormorants, geese, ducks, and alligators.

To also see the little guys you need to work the perimeter either by walking the jogging path around the lake or participating in the Christmas Bird Count or field trips held occasionally by the Lower Cape Fear Bird Club and Cape Fear Audubon.

For more information on Greenfield and its birding trips just Google the birding trail and the above organizations.

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