

## North Carolina: Alligator River NWR Trip Report

March 7th-9th, 2025

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Visiting Alligator River NWR to try and see Red Wolves has been on my radar for a while now - mostly thanks to inspiring reports on [mammalwatching.com](https://mammalwatching.com). I finally made it happen, and had a very productive weekend.

## Friday

I flew to Norfolk, VA, picked up a rental car and made it to the refuge on Friday around 3pm. The first couple of hours driving around the refuge were uneventful. I spotted my first **American Black Bear** shortly after 5pm near the intersection of Milltail rd. and Sawyer Lake rd. (see [map](#)).

As I was taking pictures of the bear, a lady joined me and mentioned that there is a Bobcat in a tree about 2 minutes drive up Sawyer Lake rd. I immediately left the bear and drove until I saw a car with another lady photographing a large **Bobcat** sitting up a tree.

I stayed with the Bobcat as the sun set, joined by several other spectators, among them was [Eve Turek](#) - a local wildlife photographer who is very knowledgeable about the resident Red Wolves. The Bobcat mostly just sat there, but occasionally moved not-so-gracefully between the branches.



A very chonky bear

At sunset, it was time to part ways with the cat and I drove down the Wildlife Drive towards the Borrow Pit exit, seeing two more bears on the way as well as a **Great Horned Owl** in last light.

After exiting the refuge, I drove around routes US-264 and US-64 that surround the refuge for another hour, but only saw a single **White-tailed Deer**. I felt that looking for wildlife on those roads wasn't very comfortable as there were quite a few cars and driving slowly or stopping wasn't really an option.





A bobcat in a tree

### **Saturday**

I was at the refuge by 6am - about 20 minutes before sunrise. I entered through Borrow Pit rd. and drove up the Wildlife Drive. Just at sunrise, I noticed a large canid sitting far away in the middle of the field, just before the intersection of Long Curve rd. and Link rd. The canid then quickly walked into a grove of reeds, only to come out a few minutes later with a rabbit in its mouth! It then disappeared with the rabbit back into the reeds and exited from the other side, walking in the opposite direction from me until it could no longer be seen. The canid looked like a **Red Wolf** to me, but since the photos were from so far away and at very low light, I couldn't confirm the presence of an orange collar. All Red Wolves at the refuge have an orange collar. A canid with a black / white or no collar is a Coyote.

I showed the photos to Eve, and through her network we were able to confirm that the canid was indeed a Red Wolf - a breeding female known as 2225, who's collar was just faded.



Red Wolf #2225

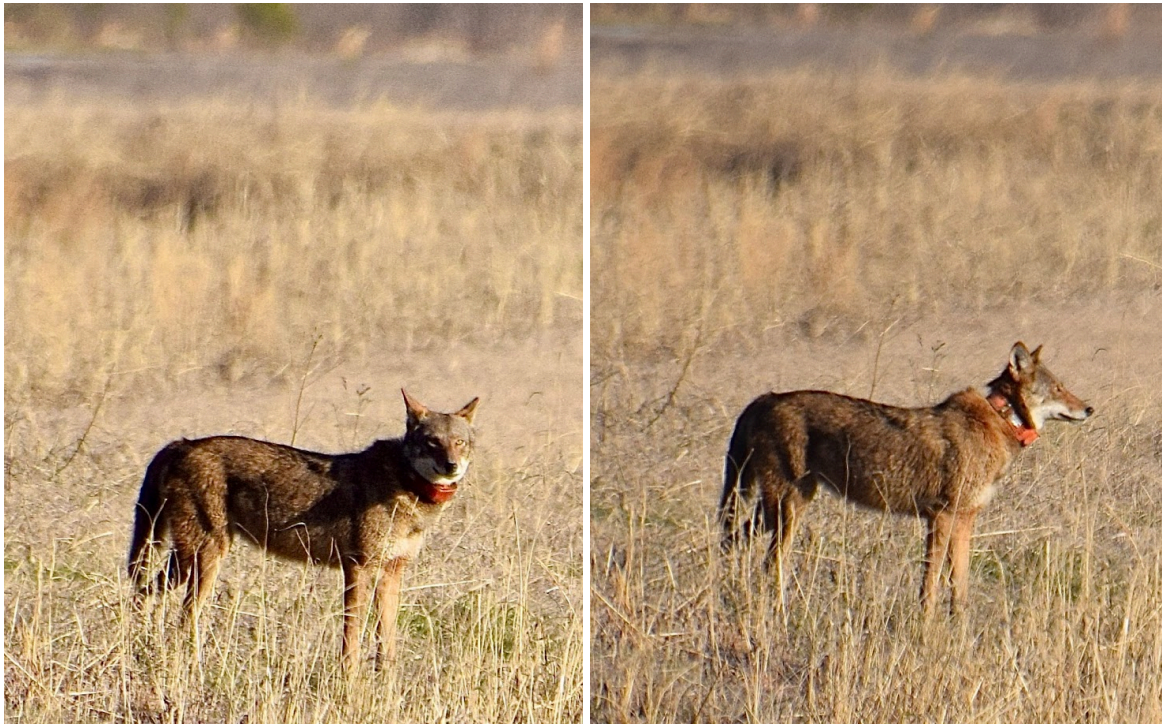
I continued driving around, and shortly after 8am I saw a few cars stopped by the most western field by Sawyer Lake rd. In the field was another Red Wolf - this one was identified as 2412. It was an absolutely stunning animal, and I watched it for a few minutes until it left.

The rest of the morning was very quiet with the main attraction being an endangered **spotted turtle** crossing the road. I needed a break from all the driving so I walked the Sandy Ridge wildlife trail by Sawyer lake. I didn't see any mammals there but did see a couple of chewed trees, indicating Beaver presence.

I left the refuge to get lunch in Manteo, and then decided to go explore the coast. On the way to the beach I stopped at Bodie Island March Blind and saw two **North American River Otters** (probably mother and cub) in the reeds by the lagoon.

I didn't see any marine mammals by the coast, but did see some nice birds.





Red Wolf #2412

I returned to the refuge in the late afternoon, where I had multiple sightings of otters and one distant bear. The highlight was a large group of anywhere between 5 to 8 otters, playing and fighting in and out of the water that drew a crowd of spectators right around sunset. After leaving the otters I headed out of the refuge.

### Sunday

I made it to the reserve again about 20 minutes before sunrise, but early morning was not as exciting as the previous one. I saw one distant bear and several otters.

Having seen all of my mammalian targets, I decided to drive to Pocosin Lakes NWR further inland for a couple of hours before my flight back in hopes to see more bears at a closer distance as well as waterfowl. When I arrived at the visitor center I found out that the actual NWR is another 45 minutes from the visitor center in the opposite direction from the airport. I settled for just walking the boardwalks around the visitor center which was lovely. The only mammals seen there were **Eastern Gray Squirrels** but the highlight was a low-flying **Bald Eagle** scaring a cormorant below.

The bridge on route US-64 that goes west of Alligator River NWR was teeming with bird life with hundreds of gulls, marine ducks, cormorants, and brown pelicans.

I drove back towards Alligator River NWR only to find out my flight back home was delayed, which gave me another couple of hours at the refuge. I first visited Pump rd. on the western side of the refuge (not a part of the Wildlife Drive) where I didn't see much other than squirrels, but did see several chewed trees and I believe it's possible to see Beavers in the waterways along this road if one visits at dusk.

I then walked the two walking trails - Creef Cut wildlife trail and Sandy Ridge wildlife trail (this time seeing an otter in the lake by the trail) and drove the Wildlife Drive one last time, seeing a few more otters and a white-tailed deer before heading to the airport.



North American River Otter

### **Species List**

#### **Mammals**

1. American Black Bear
2. Bobcat
3. Red Wolf
4. North American River Otter
5. White-tailed Deer
6. Eastern Gray Squirrel

#### **Birds**

- |                 |                      |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1. Tundra Swan  | 7. Common Merganser  |
| 2. Canada Goose | 8. Brown Pelican     |
| 3. Wood Duck    | 9. White Ibis        |
| 4. Mallard      | 10. Great Blue Heron |
| 5. Surf Scoter  | 11. Great Egret      |
| 6. Black Scoter | 12. Snowy Egret      |

13. Wild Turkey
14. Mourning Dove
15. Killdeer
16. Wilson's Snipe
17. Great Black-backed Gull
18. American Herring Gull
19. Ring-billed Gull
20. Black-headed Gull
21. Double-crested Cormorant
22. Pied-billed Grebe
23. Turkey Vulture
24. American Kestrel
25. Osprey
26. Northern Harrier
27. Red-shouldered Hawk
28. Red-tailed Hawk
29. Cooper's Hawk
30. Bald Eagle
31. Great Horned Owl

32. Belted Kingfisher
33. Downy Woodpecker
34. Pileated Woodpecker
35. Eastern Meadowlark
36. Northern Mockingbird
37. Eastern Phoebe
38. Yellow-rumped Warbler
39. Black-and-white Warbler
40. Eastern Bluebird
41. Carolina Chickadee
42. Gray Catbird
43. Hermit Thrush
44. American Robin
45. American Crow
46. European Starling
47. Common Grackle
48. Song Sparrow
49. Swamp Sparrow
50. Northern Cardinal

### **Reptiles**

1. Spotted Turtle
2. Pond Slider
3. Painted Turtle
4. Northern Red-bellied Cooter





Great Horned Owl



Cypress trees at Pocosin Lakes NWR visitor center



Sunrise at Alligator River NWR



An Otter crossing the road





An Otter enjoying a snack



Bald Eagle



Spotted Turtle