

A Couple Sought After East Coast Mammals

Fall, 2022
Aidan Place



Introduction-

I spent this fall as a field technician at the Kiawah Island Banding Station in Charleston County, South Carolina, and I was able to take advantage of a bit of free time before and after the season to go after two very sought after Eastern US mammals that have been high on my bucket list for a long time: **Red Wolf** and **New England Cottontail**. The Cottontail I have dipped on a number of occasions (as recently as this March) whereas the Wolf I have never had the opportunity to go for before. What follows is a quick report on my efforts for these two mammals. Hopefully this will be valuable intel for others.

Red Wolf-

I gave myself two evenings and two mornings to look for the Red Wolves at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in Dare County, North Carolina in August on my way to South Carolina. The first night, I drove along the Route 64 corridor as far west as the refuge entrance along Miltail Road. I also drove south along Route 264 up to Stumpy Point Bay (35.696429, -75.774574). I had a **Northern Raccoon** and a couple of **Virginia Opossums** along Route 64. On

Route 264, just north of Stumpy Point Bay I had a collared canid cross the road at high speed and disappear into some phragmites. As best as I had thought, common wisdom is that collared canids at Alligator River are wolves. However, this one seemed much too small. After a bit of googling and sorting through vague internet sources, I eventually found out that Fish and Wildlife is apparently collaring Wolves, Coyotes, and hybrids. *However*, the Wolves are apparently collared with orange collars whereas the others have grey-black collars. Now confident that this first canid had been a **Coyote**, I returned to Route 64 where I had a brief encounter with a canid sp. and then a prolonged encounter with an uncollared **Coyote**. By this point it was extremely late and I was exhausted from the 14-hour drive from Michigan that day so I retired to the Roanoke Welcome Center and Rest Area (35.886530, -75.667483) where I slept in my car. This is an excellent facility with an refreshing, cool sea breeze all night long. I

highly recommend it as a car camping location.

The following morning I was out at dawn driving around the National Wildlife Refuge itself (it is closed after dark). I quickly gained more evidence as to the presence of collared Coyotes as I encountered a collared and an uncollared individual together very quickly. I also finally got a taste of the ridiculous **Black Bear** densities in the NWR. Over the course of the whole day I would encounter 14 Bears and it seemed as if they were

in every field and around every corner. However, despite my best efforts, by 11am I could find no wolves. I headed to the Outer Banks for an afternoon of birding and then returned to Alligator River in the evening.

There is a garbage dump that directly borders the refuge (and has been cited as part of the reason for the high Black Bear densities). Right before sunset, while passing by a part of the refuge where you can see the dump (35.827841, -75.822186), I spotted a canid walking up the clipped grassy hill (35.830045, -75.817465) leading up to the



dump. I jumped out of my car and got the scope on it. It was large! It was lanky! It was red! And it had an orange radio collar!! **Red Wolf!!!** The Wolf soon dipped over the hill and disappeared, before reappearing about 10 minutes later. It gave prolonged views as it slowly worked its way down through the clipped grass before it vanished for good into denser foliage. There were also no fewer than six **Black Bears** present at the same time. I talked to some other refuge visitors a few minutes later who said they had seen it cross a side road (35.836414, -75.824930) a couple minutes after I had last seen it. It was a really, truly special experience to have seen such a rare and beautiful mammal. I had fully not expected to see one as their population has crashed in recent years (I keep finding conflicting numbers online, but it seems there are— at the very least— fewer than 12 left). Many better mammal watchers than I have spent way more time at Alligator River without seeing one. I definitely got incredibly lucky, but this shows that Red Wolf is still findable at Alligator River despite the population declines!



Red Wolf (showing orange collar). The Undisputed Highlight of my Time Mammal Watching

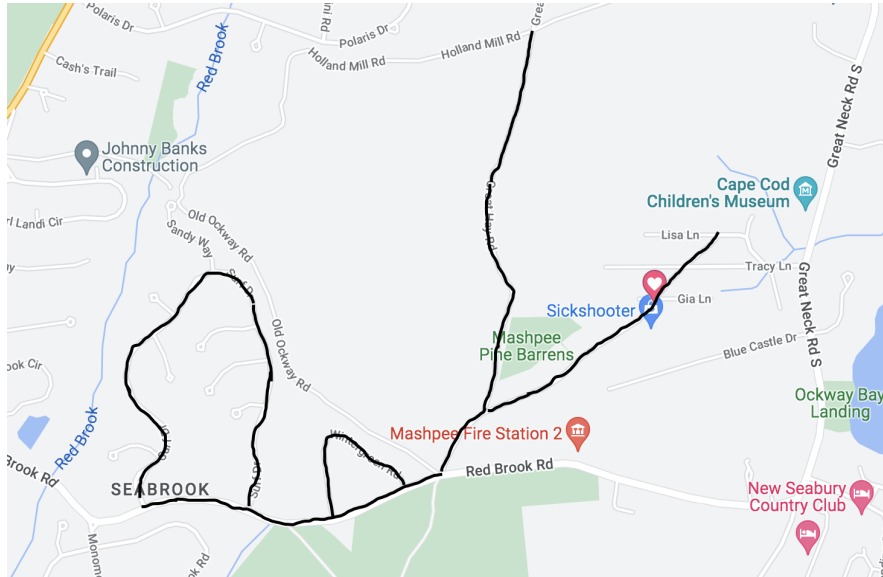
I was somewhat concerned, however, to see one of the Wolves attending a garbage dump site. Since the Wolves are all radio collared, hopefully they are being monitored for habituation to human trash. Given how quickly the Wolf came and went from the dump area, I am hopeful that habituation is not the case here.



Gorgeous Alligator River Sunset and a Very Fat Black Bear

New England Cottontail:

After my field job ended in early November, I headed up for a couple days of seawatching with friends on Cape Cod. While birds were the main focus, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to chase New England Cottontail again at the Mashpee Pine Barrens, Barnstable County, Massachusetts (41.586171, -70.487801). As is outlined by Jon Hall (<https://www.mammalwatching.com/places/massachusetts/>), the dirt road running through the barrens (Great Hay Road) and the roads running through the suburban cul de sacs both seem good for the Cottontail. A couple hours after dark, myself and (birders) Will von Herff and Cassie Ferri started driving along the roads highlighted on the map below and looking for Cottontails. After a pretty uneventful couple of hours, we turned a corner and our lights lit up a **New England Cottontail** in someone's yard. It lacked a white spot on the forehead, had a black spot between the ears, and had black on the edge of the ears— good enough for me to count!



Driving Route for New England Cottontail

14 hours of seawatching at Race Point spread over two days produced huge numbers of **Grey Seals**, but unfortunately no cetaceans.



New England Cottontail Doc Shot Creds to Cassie Ferri