

Columbia—Gateway to Nature

by Claude Milot

Columbia may not be the biggest town on the Albemarle Loop, with fewer than 1,000 people living in an area of only 0.5 square miles. The municipal marina, which has all the amenities except for fuel, is located at the foot of a Main Street bustling with art galleries, shops, and restaurants. Around the corner is a winery where you can sample the local wine made from



Scuppernong grapes, North Carolina's state fruit. But a short walk across Rte 64 takes you to two visitor's centers where things really get interesting.

The friendly folks in the first one will tell you all about Columbia and Tyrell County, but the second one happens to be next to the headquarters for the Pocosin Lakes Natural Wildlife Refuges, the gateway to the many natural habitats in this part of North Carolina. You get a hint of this in the Visitor's Center filled with exhibits of stuffed animals like the black bear, the red wolf, and the only fox known for climbing trees. For an introduction to the habitats, ask to see a 15-minute film that shows thousands of migrating birds like snow geese and swans taking up residence in the wetlands for the winter.

Your next step should be walking the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile Scuppernong River Interpretive Trail that starts just outside the Visitor's Center and guides you on a boardwalk loop through a bottomland swamp along the river. If this whets your appetite for more bird-watching and wildlife photography, look into exploring the 12,000-acre Pungo Unit of Pocosin Lakes. You can get all the information you need from the Visitors Center.

If you plan on sailing near Columbia in October, you might want to mark your calendar for the 25th Annual Scuppernong River Festival on October 14. It will have a Main Street parade, arts & craft and food vendors, all-day music entertainment, a culinary arts contest, water activities, fireworks, and a concert by the Original Rondells. For more information, call (252) 796-2781.

Additional Notes: Local knowledge for approach Columbia

Columbia lies along the upstream reaches of beautiful Scuppernong River. This stream cuts into the southern shores of Albemarle Sound east of Mackeys Creek, and well west of the AICW and Alligator River.

Early explorers were so enchanted with the beauty of Scuppernong River that they named it "Hearts Delight." This lovely body of water is narrower than its sister streams to the north and is lined by heavily wooded shores. Old, gnarled cypress trees with their

trailing beards of gray moss majestically guard the banks. Here and there, a few picturesque homes break the landscape.

The marked Scuppernong River channel holds minimum 7-foot depths to Columbia. The dredged entrance passage from Bull Bay is well outlined by aids to navigation, as is the remainder of the river.