

THE BULLETIN

Chapel Hill Bird Club

January 2001
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c/o Ginger Travis
5244 Old Woods Rd.
Hillsborough, NC 27278

January meeting

Monday, Jan. 22, 7:30 p.m.

Program: *What is the value of rehabilitating wild birds?* By Janine Perlman, rehabilitator.

Location: Binkley Baptist Church (in the lounge) at the corner of Hwy. 15-501 Bypass and Willow Drive next to University Mall in Chapel Hill. Enter the parking lot from Willow Drive.

Rehabilitating wild birds

There is controversy over whether the rehabilitation of injured and orphaned migratory birds is worth the expense and effort that it requires. Does rehabbing have any effect on the plight of songbirds? Does caring for and releasing exotic species such as European Starlings and House Sparrows harm native species? The answers presented in this talk may surprise you. Janine, a rehabber for eight years, specializes in avian nutrition; she has a Ph.D. in biochemistry/molecular genetics.

We'll have refreshments at 7:15 pm, so come early to hear and share your birding adventures.

Saturday morning field trips

The regular Sat. morning trips continue. They leave the Glen Lennox parking lot (on the north side of Hwy. 54 just east of the 15-501 Bypass in Chapel Hill) at 7:30 a.m. sharp and return by noon. Beginners and visitors welcome! Reservations are not necessary. Call field trip coordinator Doug Shadwick for details (942-0479). Sparrows and wintering waterfowl are staples of the field trips through February.

During the Jan. 13-15 weekend just past, Doug led a sizable group on the annual coastal trip to Lake Mattamuskeet, the Outer Banks and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. The group chased the Snowy Owl reported in Va. Did they find it? There are surprises every year – what were they in 2001? Details forthcoming in the Feb. Bulletin.

Birding Peru's rain and cloud forests

By Patsy Bailey and Cynthia Fox

In mid October, eight local folks ventured forth to Peru on a trip organized by Rainforest Expeditions and the Wild Bird Center in Chapel Hill. Peru is host to 1,700-plus species of birds, more than any other Latin American country except Colombia. One reason for the large number of birds is the wide variation in habitat: coastline, scrubby dry western Andean slopes, temperate forests of the east Andean slopes, subtropical forests and west Amazonian lowland rainforests. Our goal was to see as many bird species as possible without boring the nonbirders in the group! Our birding appetites were whetted on our first day by visiting Pantános de Villa, wetlands 45 minutes outside of Lima and the only protected ecological site in the area. The "best" birds included the Peruvian Thick-knee, well camouflaged in the sand, and the Croaking Ground Dove. Other birds seen in Villas or in Lima proper were Peruvian Booby and Pelican, Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, Roseate Spoonbill, White-tufted Grebe, White-cheeked Pintail, Cinnamon Teal, Kelp Gull, Peruvian Meadowlark, Puna Ibis, and a variant of the American Coot with a swollen white frontal shield.

From Lima we flew to Puerto Maldonado in southeast Peru, a busy frontier port where two large rivers (the Madre de Dios and Tambopata) meet. This was our entryway to the Tambopata Reserve, an area the size of Connecticut (3.7 million acres) that protects the watersheds of the Candamo and Tavera Rivers and most of the watershed of the Tambopata River, not far from Manu National Park, perhaps the best-known birding spot in Peru. We boarded long motorized canoes that would take us upriver to the Tambopata Research Center (TRC). Nonstop, the trip takes at least eight hours, but like most guests to TRC we split the trip over two days. As we motored upstream, the river was low and the rapids required some manual guiding of the boat in the shallow waters. Our return trip downstream was markedly different, as the rainy season began during our short stay at TRC, with the river rising 10 feet in less than two days, an amazing experience. Capybaras were seen on the banks with their young; Cocoli (White-necked Heron) and Capped Herons were plentiful as

were raptors: Plumbeous and American Swallow-tailed Kites, Roadside, Black-collared, and Red-backed Hawks, Great Black-hawk, King and Greater Yellow-headed Vultures, Black-and-White Hawk-eagles, and Black and Red-throated Caracaras. Other riverbank highlights were Horned Screammers, Orinoco Geese, Jabiru and migrant Picui Ground Doves.

The Tambopata Research Center was our home for several nights. Accommodations were about as nice as they could be, given TRC's remote location. Most of us were quite pleased at the intimate accommodation. Insects were plentiful at dusk so long sleeves and pants were necessary. The food was excellent and plentiful, as was cold beer. The Chicos, a small group of semi-wild Blue-and-Yellow and Scarlet Macaws, visited the open dining room daily and gave us photo opportunities and the chance to see their fine-feathered facial features.

One of TRC's main attractions is the world's largest known mineral clay lick, a 130-foot cliff. Hundreds of parrots and macaws (up to 15 species) meet daily to eat clay that counteracts the toxins of some of the seeds they eat. To see them we woke early, grabbed a cup of coffee and crackers, boarded the canoes and traveled 500 meters upstream to set up scopes and folding stools – all before the first parrots arrived -- to minimize disturbing the social birds. They flew in singly, in pairs or larger groups, usually squawking and calling. What a raucous display of color and sound! It was worth any hardship, even day after day. The macaws that visited the cliff included Blue-and-yellows, Scarlets, Red-and-greens, Chestnut-fronteds, Red-bellieds and Blue-headed. White-bellied, Orange-cheeked, Blue-headed, Yellow-crowned and Mealy Parrots were also there, along with the Dusky-headed, White-eyed and Cobalt-winged parakeets.

In addition to the macaws and parrots we saw Common Piping Guans and Razor-billed Curassows at the clay lick. Canoe outings later in the day took us to spots known to host other interesting species: Hoatzins, Speckled Chachalacas, Spix's Guan, Sunbitterns, and several species each of trogons, jacamars, puffbirds, toucans, fruitcrows, and tanagers. The list is long.

The many trails around the lodge offered the most difficult birding. From these narrow trails, with thick vegetation and little light, we struggled to see Tinamous, Antbirds, Antshrikes, Anthruses and Antwrens. Well, we never actually saw a Tinamou, but we became familiar with its calls. A favorite of everyone was the fanciful Lemon-throated Barbet.

Non-birding highlights began with a pink-toed tarantula at our first night's lodging in the rainforest. At TRC we watched the weasel-like Tayras and Brown Agoutis and several of the six species of monkeys: Saddle-backed Tamarinds, Dusky-titi, Brown Capuchin, Squirrel and Red Howlers, all seen from the dining area. Such comfort.

Late October was clearly postbreeding season for all the monkeys, as each group contained playful youngsters. We spotted a Short-tailed mouse opossum on a shrub branch on the western Andean slope; it was perhaps the group's favorite non-feathered creature. One species each of caiman and turtle and one unidentified snake completed the list. The butterflies were abundant and beautiful and didn't receive nearly the attention they deserved. Another trip.

Our last night in the rainforest was at Posada Amazonas, owned jointly by Rainforest Expeditions and the Ese'ejá native community. It is a large, comfortable place to stay (luxurious by rainforest standards), but we shared it with another 50 or so guests -- a small adjustment after the intimacy of TRC. Posada Amazonas has a 35-meter observation tower that provides a special vantage point on the forest canopy, where we looked down on birds. Paradise Tanagers and other equally stunning tanagers dazzled us.

From Puerto Maldonado we flew to Cuzco, met our high-altitude guide and drove immediately to the Urubamba Valley, the Sacred Valley of the Incas. Prior to reaching our hotel for the night, we stopped and shopped at the market in Písaq. We spent the night in Ollantaytambo, a fortress and town that defended Cuzco from jungle tribes. Thus, we began a long history and archeological lesson. Ideally, we would have spent another day at this altitude of 8,500 feet to further acclimate, but we woke hours before dawn and departed for Abra Málaga, a high pass of about 14,000 feet, famous for its high-altitude birds on both the eastern and western slopes of the Andes. We were all given *muña* to smell. *Muña* is a plentiful wild mint found on the roadside; it aids in opening airways and mitigating altitude-induced headaches. Some of us chewed coca leaves, but we all, including our lowland guide, suffered from altitude sickness to varying degrees.

On the western slope we traveled through the cloud forest, visiting the endangered and diminishing polylepis forest, the highest timberline in the world at about 12,000 feet. To the surprise of many, we saw spectacular hummingbirds on this leg of the trip: Green Violetear, Shining and White-tufted Sunbeams, Andean Hillstar, Great Sapphirewing, Sapphire-vented Puffleg, Black-tailed and Green-tailed Trainbearers and a Scaled Metaltail.

We took the train along the Urubamba River to Aguas Calientes, at the foot of Machu Picchu. Along the way we saw Torrent Ducks and White-capped Dippers, but the Andean Condor eluded us. After the relative hardships of the rainforest and the altitude, our stay at the Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel and at the ruins was extremely easy and pleasant. The hotel has an orchid trail with 180 native and exotic orchids and hummingbird feeders, where we saw another seven species of hummingbirds. The Pueblo Hotel advertises its Andean Cocks of the

Rock that inhabit the grounds, and we weren't disappointed.

The ruins of Machu Picchu are truly magnificent, and for a few hours birding became secondary. After two nights in Cuzco and more visits to ruins and obligatory shopping, we flew back to Lima and home to the Chapel Hill area.

The lack of a Peru-specific field guide was a constant reminder of just how fortunate we are in the U.S. with our widening choice of good field guides. Our best resources, besides the excellent guides, were Birds of Colombia, Birds of the High Andes, and volumes I and II of Birds of South America, none of which is a small, easy-to-carry book. James Clements' A Guide to the Birds of Peru is expected out in March 2001.

Cynthia at the Wild Bird Center has already started thinking about a possible trip to Venezuela next year. More about Rainforest Expeditions can be found at the website www.andeanrain.com. We came back with over 296 species recorded on our lists, but we have many more to see out of the 1700 in Peru! We plan on going back.

Productive Chapel Hill Christmas Count

By Will Cook

The Chapel Hill Christmas Bird Count on 12/24/2000 was one of our best, with 95 species and 14,653 birds on count day, far above the 10-year average of 82.5 species and 12,860 birds. Out of the 70 Chapel Hill counts going back to 1924, the only higher species total was in 1983, with 98. The high count is not due to a higher than normal level of participation -- the 125 party-hours is below average, the lowest since 1995 (the last time the count was held on Christmas Eve). We were probably helped by the cold

weather preceding the count, which may have brought us more ducks as they were frozen out up north, and by the low water level at Jordan Lake.

The boldface birds: New to the count is a blue morph SNOW GOOSE, which was seen by Kent Fiala, as it traveled with a flock of 31 Canada Geese in a field on Garrett Road in Durham and later near the pond at Emerald Pond Retirement Home on Pickett Road. Doug Shadwick found our second record of ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER in his territory near Jordan Lake. While this bird is not too unusual in winter as near as Raleigh, we haven't had one since 1946! Two RUFOUS/ALLEN'S HUMMINGBIRDS have been coming to Randy Bishop's feeder in Chapel Hill since about Dec. 16, and he saw them on count day. Last year we had our first CBC Rufous, identified and banded by Susan Campbell. Hopefully she'll have a chance to catch the Bishops' bird too. Three BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHERS, our fourth count record, were seen by Anson Cooke and Alan Johnston's parties near Jordan Lake.

Other goodies: Ducks are not as easy to find here as in Raleigh -- Northern Shovelers (2) are our fourth count record, all in the last 10 years, and Gadwall (18) turn up about once every 5 years. The Canvasback (2) and Common Yellowthroats (3) are both our first since 1983. Baltimore Oriole (1) is a good find, though they were annual from 1955-1976. Though they're not as common now as they were in the 1960s, they're much more common now than in 1924-1951, when none were found. Catbird is rare on some of our neighboring counts, but it's expected in Chapel Hill -- three different parties found one this year.

High counts: We set a bunch of record highs this year, which is surprising since party-hours were relatively low. The most stunning high, absolutely smashing the old record of 40 to bits, is the count of 87 Red-headed Woodpeckers. The average for the past 10 counts is just 19 and the past three years the counts were 5, 4, and 14. Five parties had more than a dozen each. Why are there so many here this winter? Other record highs: 18 Gadwall (tie), 146 Downy Woodpeckers (old record 108), 18 Pileated Woodpeckers (17), 397 Tufted Titmice (391), 115 White-breasted Nuthatches

(90), 71 Brown-headed Nuthatches (tie), 5 House Wrens (tie), 3 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers (2), 726 Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers (653), 107 Pine Warblers (78), and 363 Swamp Sparrows (247). We also had unusually high numbers of Turkey Vulture, Great Horned Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Carolina Chickadee, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, and Savannah Sparrow.

Only a few species were found in remarkably low numbers: 13 Chipping Sparrows (average 42), 36 Field Sparrows (119), and 3 Purple Finches (19).

Participation: 43 field birders in 21 parties, plus 11 feeder-watchers. 125 party-hours (100 foot, 25 car) and 327 miles (78 foot, 249 car) plus 4.5 hours and 12.5 miles owling and 27 feeder hours.

Weather: low 16, high 48; wind W 5-10; cloudy first thing, then clear; no precip; still water partly open; running water open.

Thanks to all participants for a great count!

And the Jordan CBC ends the true millennium!

By Norm Budnitz

The Jordan Lake Christmas Bird Count on 12/31/00 was certainly a beautiful, if cold, way to spend the last day of the millennium. Our counters identified 95 species, only a bit above our average of 93 for the preceding ten years. However, our total of 22,906 individual birds set a new record, beating our previous high of 22,580 set in 1998. Perhaps our 58 birders in 24 parties (1 shy of the record) and 147 party-hours (only 9 shy of the record) had something to do with this, but I suspect the very cold weather

(15F at dawn), frozen ponds and streams, and low water at Jordan Lake (213.7 feet vs. a normal 216 feet) played more of a role. It's interesting to note that our neighboring count in Chapel Hill also had 95 species, just a week earlier.

Will Cook, covering Harris Lake and Jordan Lake at Seaforth by himself, deserves special kudos for his accomplishments. First, it should be noted that this was Will's fourth CBC in four days. (I was on two of those earlier counts with him, so I know how hard he worked. But while I took a day off on Saturday, Will did yet another count!) For his efforts, Will not only had the highest species total for any party (61), he also found the one species that had never been seen on our count before, a carefully documented female Greater Scaup. Though Lesser Scaup have been fairly regular winter visitors in the Piedmont, Greaters have been much less common. And identifying a female is no mean feat. Will also found 2 Sedge Wrens, only the second time this species has been found in our circle. And Will estimated 1100 American Coots on Harris Lake. This more than doubled last year's previous high of 487. Finally, though Will officially turned in a count of only 1,500 Ring-billed Gulls, he stopped at the Rt. 64 bridge toward the end of the day and estimated some 5,000 Gulls in that area. It was a tough call on my part, but in the end I decided to report a total of 7,000 Ring-billeds (adjusting for some overlap), making this our second highest count for that species (8,600 in 1989).

Perhaps the rest of us might have just stayed home and let Will do all the work. But in fact, we all did our share of the work and did turn in what turns out to be some pretty impressive numbers. Doug Shadwick and Shelley Theye found only our second record for Long-tailed Duck (nee, Oldsquaw) and our fourth record for Common Goldeneye. And Steve Graves and Jane Lewis established our third record for Orange-crowned Warbler. The Canvasbacks seen by Brian Bockhahn, Tom Howard, and (of course) Will Cook were only the second record of this species in the past 10 years.

And we were all responsible for adding numbers to create many new record highs for our count. These highs, with previous highs and years in parentheses, include: 88 Horned Grebes (75 last year), 1075 Double-crested Cormorants (903 last year), 103 Great Blue Herons (100 in 1998), 353 Canada Geese (176 in 1996), 447 Hooded Mergansers (391 in 1998), 16 Bald Eagles (12 last year), 1113 American Coots (487 last year), 12 Barred Owls (10 in 1997), 25 Red-headed Woodpeckers (22 in 1989), 164 Red-bellied Woodpeckers (156 last year), 61 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers (59 last year), 365 Tufted Titmice (275 in 1998), 46 White-breasted Nuthatches (39 last year), 4 House Wrens (ties 4 in 1997), 27 Winter Wrens (ties last year), 2 Sedge Wrens (1 in 1980), 123 Hermit Thrushes (92 last year), 3455 American Robins

(3039 in 1981), and 243 Pine Warblers (226 in 1993). With the Greater Scaup, that's over 20% of the total species seen!

It should also be noted that our totals for Ring-billed Gulls and Downy Woodpeckers were our second highest, and for Herring Gulls and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, our third highest. Our total of 363 Golden-crowneds was below our average of 407, but apparently neither kinglet species seems to have suffered from last year's heavy snowfall as some had speculated. That is not to say that kinglets were not killed in that snowstorm. They may have been. But if so, they have been succeeded by good numbers this year. And as for speculations, how about this one: Could our record numbers for three species of woodpeckers (and relatively high numbers of Downys and Hairys) have anything to do with the 'ripening' of dead trees in the aftermath of our recent hurricanes (Fran, in particular)?

Of course, we did have some noticeable misses this year. No Harriers, Turkeys, Bobwhites, Woodcock, or Shrikes. No Common Yellowthroats or Baltimore Orioles. And this is clearly not a finch year: no Pine Siskins or Crossbills, and only a few Grosbeaks and Purple Finches. Also no Red-breasted Nuthatches.

We had 58 birders in 24 parties. They put in 147 party hours (114 on foot, 33 by car), 356 miles (101 on foot, 255 by car), and 9 hours and 18.5 miles owling. The weather was cold (15F to 36F) with winds increasing from calm at dawn to 10-15 mph in the afternoon. The sky was clear all day and there was no precipitation. Small ponds were frozen, as was water in shallow or slow-moving creeks. Jordan Lake and the Haw River were open.

Note: We'll squeeze Brian Bockhahn's Falls Lake CBC report into the Feb. issue. Stay tuned!

Join or renew? Now's the time.

If the top right corner of your Bulletin mailing label says 1/01 – or if you don't have a mailing label because you're not a member – what are you waiting for? It's time now either to join or to renew your membership in the Chapel Hill Bird Club. **Calendar-year (Jan.-Dec.) dues for most individuals and families are \$15; for students, \$10.** To renew for more than one year, multiply the annual dues rate times the number of years. **Please send your check (payable to the Chapel Hill Bird Club) to club treasurer Fran Hommersand, 304 Spruce Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.** If you have questions, please call Fran at 967-1745.

Virtual invitation: You're invited to visit the Chapel Hill Bird Club website for good info on the club, bird counts, and places to go birding in the Triangle: <http://www.duke.edu/~cwcook/chbc>