

# THE BULLETIN

## Chapel Hill Bird Club

May, 2001

(Vol. XXX, No. 5)

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

---

### May meeting – potluck picnic, y’all come!

#### Monday, May 21 6:30 p.m., Ebenezer Church State Rec. Area, Jordan Lake. (Free admission.)

Last meeting before the summer break. Your family members and significant others are welcome – bring them along. And bring a dish to share, plus your own plate, utensils and beverage. Let’s see how much we can recycle and how little trash we can leave behind!

Please note that the date and time of the potluck differ from our regular meeting schedule to avoid conflicting with the Memorial Day weekend.

Ebenezer Church State Recreation Area has a well marked entrance on SR 1008 (Beaver Creek Rd., which is the continuation of Farrington Rd.). The entrance is 2.3 miles south of Hwy. 64. Take the main road all the way to its end at the picnic area (not the boat ramp).

A couple of members’ kayaks should be available for folks to try out. Come a little early if you’re interested. See you there!

#### Special field trip, N.C. Zoo: June 16

Karen and Joe Bearden will lead the trip. Please RSVP with Karen: [chickadeebirders@earthlink.net](mailto:chickadeebirders@earthlink.net) or call 844-9050. Families welcome. **Departure time: 8:00 a.m.** Meet at Glen Lennox shopping center in Chapel Hill (north side Hwy. 54 just east of 15-501 Bypass). We’ll caravan to the zoo, near Asheboro. This trip is a followup to the excellent program on April 23 by Debbie Zombeck about the N.C. Zoo’s seabirds.

#### Thanks to Doug Shadwick, field trip leader extraordinaire

Neither rain, nor sleet, nor snow, nor heat wave . . . Regular Sat. morning field trips have ended, now that the spring bird counts are in full swing. Sat. trips will resume in the fall. Doug Shadwick has led these trips for years, offering the rest of us a chance to go out with a Triangle expert who spends a lot of time in the field and finds interesting birds in every season – note the story about the Warbling Vireos (“They’re back!”), which Doug found at Anilorac Farm. Doug also leads the January coastal trip – that’s where “nor

sleet, nor snow” comes in – at least, that’s what it feels like on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel in midwinter – until he points out a Black-tailed Gull or a Harlequin Duck. Our club is fortunate to have a great trip leader and a stable schedule of weekly field trips. Many thanks for your contributions, Doug.

#### Summer break

The Chapel Hill Bird Club does not meet in June, July and August. This is so members can have farflung adventures and come back to report on them at the September meeting – or in the Bulletin. Want to write up your summer birding travels for the newsletter? I’d love to hear from you. Just send your stories! Ginger Travis, editor, 5244 Old Woods Rd., Hillsborough 27278. Questions? Call me: 942-7746.

#### Wildathon 2001 – do it for the birds

Both Wake Audubon and New Hope Audubon are holding wildathons to raise money for Audubon’s coastal sanctuaries (New Hope’s fund-raiser also benefits the Mason Farm Biological Preserve). Dates: May 12 for New Hope Audubon and May 19 for Wake Audubon. Participants have a lot of fun, but if you miss the actual birding and botanizing, you can still send a check – it’s a great cause. Contacts: Kate Finlayson (email: [katefin@yahoo.com](mailto:katefin@yahoo.com)) for New Hope and Karen Bearden for Wake Audubon (email: [chickadeebirders@earthlink.net](mailto:chickadeebirders@earthlink.net)).

#### They’re back! A breeding colony? Maybe.

*by Will Cook, to Carolinabirds*

The Dairyland Road Warbling Vireos are back again, right on schedule -- yesterday (4/26) Doug Shadwick heard one singing at Anilorac Farm in the grove of trees surrounding the house, and a second one singing near the stream to the west of the farm house. Last year the colony (two singing males and at least one female) was first detected by Doug on 4/27 and remained at least through 7/4.

To get there, take Hwy. 54 west from Chapel Hill, turn right on Bethel-Hickory Grove Church Road, turn left on Dairyland, and look for the Anilorac Farm sign on the right, in a couple of miles.

Warbling Vireos are very rare around here. Here are all the sightings from the database: 1 on 5/8/92 in Chapel Hill, 1 on 5/4/96 at Eno River SP, 1 on 9/21/96 at Jordan Lake, and 1 on 4/29/99 at Anilorac Farm. That one apparently returned 4/27/00, and up to three were seen through July 4 (I don't think anyone went looking after that) -- may be a breeding colony. It's unprecedented here, but has happened in Greensboro -- their nearest normal nesting range is along the New River [Ashe and Alleghany Counties].

## **N.C. Mississippi Kites – on the increase**

*by Harry LeGrand, to Carolinabirds, 4/25*

For the record, and for those new to North Carolina: The Mississippi Kite has been around the N.C. coastal plain, and suspected of nesting, at least since the early 1970s. Numbers of 20-35 have been seen for decades along the Roanoke river, particularly near Scotland Neck. Smaller numbers have been found in more recent years along other brownwater river floodplains -- Neuse River, lower and central Cape Fear (even up to Lillington), Pee Dee in Richmond/Anson, Fishing Creek, etc. They seem to be absent from blackwater floodplains, for the most part, such as the Lumber River, Waccamaw River, etc. They also seem to be absent from the brownwater Tar River, for some unknown reason. Nests have been reported from the Laurinburg area, Roanoke Rapids, Goldsboro, Johnston County at Howell Woods, and even "out-of-range" near Newport in Carteret. The species is definitely increasing. The species has been present in the Meherrin River floodplain in adjacent Virginia for a number of years.

## **The Cane Connection**

*by Clyde Sorenson, reprinted with permission from Wildlife in North Carolina*

Though nonnative bamboos have been planted here for hundreds of years, North Carolina has but one native bamboo species. *Arundinaria gigantea*, or cane, is a remarkable native giant grass that many wildlife species depend on.

Cane is found throughout the state in many diverse habitats. In the mountains and the piedmont it is most associated with rich bottomlands and stream banks. Since it is well-adapted to fire, it becomes the dominant plant species in frequently burned drainages in the sandhills pinelands. On the coastal plain, it forms into large stands, called canebrakes, spanning many acres in the upper reaches of swamps and in the big river valleys. Cane often figures prominently in the understory of the forests of the region. On rich, well-watered soils in healthy, long-established colonies, cane has reached more than 40 feet in height, although most modern stands attain only 6 to 10 feet.

Our cane, like most bamboo, reproduces almost entirely by vegetative means. New stalks emerge from underground rhizomes at roughly 20-inch intervals. Shoots grow rapidly for one growing season, and then, although they don't get any taller, live for another 10 to 15 years. New rhizomes, and new canes, radiate from established stalks, and rhizomes can grow as much as 20 feet a season.

The sexual reproduction of cane, like that of most bamboo, is not well understood. Intervals as long as 50 years may separate bouts of seed set; all the colonies over a large region may flower, set seed and die simultaneously. This reproductive strategy floods an area with an unpredictable pool of more seed than seed predators can eat, enhancing the chances that some seed will germinate. The small proportion of viable seed germinates almost immediately. Most seedling plants start life under the dying stalks of their parents, since the seeds generally don't disperse well.

Wildlife species value cane for a number of reasons. The foliage is quite nutritious, and since the plant is a long-lived perennial, the leaves are a very reliable food source. Cane is the sole host plant for the caterpillars of at least six species of butterflies, including the pearly eyes and several of the tiny, exquisitely patterned roadside skippers. Another caterpillar (this one the larva of a moth) makes communal nests in the foliage by tying several leaves together with silks, and many other species of insects also feed on cane or the rich litter that accumulates under it. Three hundred years ago, cane was one of the preferred forages for the bison that used to roam the Southeast (and modern cattle still find it extremely attractive). The new shoots are nutrient-rich and were once an important food source for Native Americans.

Cane foliage is dense and evergreen, and it provides excellent cover for a variety of wildlife species throughout the year. At least three species of wood warblers--the beautiful Hooded, the elusive Swainson's, and the virtually extinct Bachman's--are very closely associated with canebrakes during the breeding season. The dense canopy, but relatively clear floor, in a cane thicket makes for almost perfect wintering habitat for American Woodcock. The timberdoodles can probe for earthworms in the thick leaf litter of the brake secure from attack by aerial predators. Swamp rabbits, or cane-cutters, are also closely associated with canebrakes; they feed on the young shoots as well as use the cane for refuge. Both bears and white-tailed deer occasionally use canebrakes for feeding and bedding sites. Perhaps the most famous denizens of cane thickets are the lowland timber rattlesnakes we call canebrake rattlers. These increasingly rare reptiles seek the small rodents that abound in the cane thickets.

Cane rarely reaches the impressive heights it once did, and some of the species associated with it

are declining, because of alterations we have made to the landscape. Cane thrives best in areas with rich soil, abundant sunlight, and disturbance about every 10 years. It can't tolerate heavy grazing by livestock, annual burning, or frequent mowing. Cane can also be shaded out or greatly reduced by hardwoods following the complete suppression of fire. The conversion of bottomlands to farmland and pine plantations has also reduced the presence of this valuable plant in the landscape. Once a canebrake is gone, another is not likely to replace it, and the wildlife dependent on it will also disappear.

## Colorado chicken-chasing slam dunk

by *Derb Carter, to Carolinabirds*

The Carolina Bird Club's Colorado spring grouse trip (a.k.a. chicken chase) was a great success. We observed all the target species displaying on leks: Greater and Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Greater and Lesser Prairie-Chickens. Bonuses included a displaying Blue Grouse and a flock of White-tailed Ptarmigan in snow white winter plumage. Adding Ring-necked Pheasant, Scaled Quail, and Northern Bobwhite, we had ten gallinaceous birds. We also found many "Colorado specialties" between the grouse encounters and were lucky with both early spring arrivals and lingering winter species. Weather was fantastic except for the near blizzard on departure day. It was an enthusiastic group to lead, anxious to get to the next grouse leks at 4:30 or so in the morning and tolerant of the nearly 2000 miles of driving required to see all the species. Some highlights of the trip follow:

Clark's Grebe

Northern Goshawk (pair at close range)

Ferruginous Hawk (one pair on nest)

Prairie Falcon

Greater Sage-Grouse

Gunnison Sage-Grouse (should be listed as endangered)

White-tailed Ptarmigan

Blue Grouse

Sharp-tailed Grouse (ask Jeff Pippen to show you how it dances)

Greater Prairie-Chicken (my vote, wildest vocalization)

Lesser Prairie-Chicken (becoming scarce)

Mountain Plover (becoming very hard to find)

Franklin's Gull (rosy breeding plumage)

Burrowing Owl

Lewis's Woodpecker

Williamson's Sapsucker

Red-naped Sapsucker

Pinyon Jay

Juniper Titmouse

Bohemian Waxwing

Harris's Sparrow

McCown's Longspur

Chestnut-collared Longspur

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (Rosy-Finch triple play!)

Black Rosy-Finch

Brown-capped Rosy-Finch

*Note: CHBC members on this six-day trip (April 17-22) were Judy Murray, Jeff Pippen, Bruce Young, and Rick Payne. Judy came back having seen 30 life birds, and Jeff is ready to liven up your party with his interpretation of a Sharp-tailed Grouse's mating dance. Just ask.*

## Unlikely bird rescue, UNC-CH campus

by *Ginger Travis, to Carolinabirds*

I got a call last Friday (April 13) from a man who found my name on the Chapel Hill Bird Club webpage. He had come across a "shorebird" on the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill campus in the brick courtyard between Lenoir (the dining hall) and Manning. It was under an orange bicycle, he said, and looked stunned. He also said it resembled a gallinule, which he'd seen when he worked at the N.C. Zoo years ago. And he wanted me to do something.

I arrived an hour later with absolutely no expectation of finding the bird. But there it was, crouching under an orange bicycle. It looked utterly exhausted and perhaps sick, with its bill tip resting on the brick patio to support the weight of its head. Its eyes were closed. I easily picked it up, and at that point it roused and struggled briefly, eyes open. I put it in a bucket, covered the top with a towel, and thought about what to do. I still didn't know exactly what the bird was. But I knew it was not any sandpiper or woodcock or gallinule. But something similar. The bird didn't seem to have obvious injuries, so my thought was to return it to appropriate habitat, where it might at least have a chance to rest and recover.

I took it to a silted, shallow little bay, inaccessible to boats, on the north side of Lystra Road opposite the end of the Bush Creek arm of Jordan Lake. The habitat there looked perfect: clumps of grass or sedge growing out of shallow water. No fishermen. I squatted on the edge of the muddy shore and lifted the bird out of the bucket. This time it pecked my hand once -- a great sign. Not dead and maybe not even dying. I took a good long look before letting it go -- at the red eye, down-curved orange beak, tawny breast, small chickenlike body and spidery toes of a lovely rosy color. Oh yes, and fine black and white barring on the belly -- something I suddenly remembered seeing once before. Virginia Rail! (My life bird was in Minnesota last summer.)

When I released the rail, it stalked away from me across three feet of mud until it reached the water. It waded toward the first clump of grass, stopped and drank, then worked its way along the

water's edge, stopping occasionally by other clumps. It behaved just the way I imagined a normal rail should. And then it disappeared in a thick stand of grass and didn't show itself again.

A happy ending? Yes, even for a confirmed pessimist like me. It just delighted me to see that rail walk away alive. I knew it had a chance. I also thought with gratitude of the polite young graduate student who took the trouble on a holiday weekend to search a website for someone to call. And I was glad I happened to be in my house and near the phone instead of out wandering around the yard.

Sometimes the stars do line up just right.

## Long-lived hummer recaptured

*by Bill Hilton, York, S.C. (to Carolinabirds)*

Just thought I'd let you know that Ruby-throated Hummingbird #T85914, which was banded as an adult female here at Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History on 30 May 1997, returned and was recaptured on 23 April 2001. This makes her an "After-Fifth-Year" bird, i.e., at least five years old. She has been captured at least once each year since the original banding. Thus she has made at least four round trips and two one-way migration trips to date; assuming she is wintering somewhere in Central America, she has probably put in about 12,000 migration miles, possibly more. Ain't it amazing?

*For more on Bill Hilton's hummingbird work, see the Internet site [www.rubythroat.org](http://www.rubythroat.org).*

## You know you've had a great day banding when . . .

*by Bill Hilton, York, S.C., to Carolinabirds*

You know you've had a great day banding when:

. . . your hand gets pecked by a male Downy Woodpecker

. . . you have to wash all your holding bags--twice

. . . a Tufted Titmouse cleans your cuticles, and then a Carolina Chickadee does it again

. . . a female Yellow-throated Vireo flashes you with her highly edematous brood patch

. . . three Gray Catbirds curse you in a way only their species has mastered

. . . a Great-crested Flycatcher clacks its bill at you--loudly, and with feeling

. . . a female Black-throated Blue Warbler shows why Audubon first thought she was a different species from the male

. . . the Brown Thrasher you banded yesterday but forgot to get a tail measure for was back in the same net today

. . . a six-year-old Northern Cardinal bites the hand that fed her all winter

. . . an Eastern Phoebe leads you right to her nest after banding

. . . you get pooped on by a Northern Waterthrush AND an Ovenbird AND a Carolina Wren

. . . the male Mourning Dove that has been cooing for the last three weeks flies gently into a mist net

. . . the last banded bird of the day is a brilliant male Scarlet Tanager.

It's times like these that make all those birdless net days seem so worthwhile!

Happy Birding!

*Bill Hilton, the self-described "Piedmont Naturalist," bands birds at the Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History. Visit his web site: [www.hiltonpond.org](http://www.hiltonpond.org). (Site has lots of photos.)*

## Goodbye and good luck to Janine and Jim

CHBC members Janine Perlman and Jim Fuscoe are moving to Little Rock, Arkansas this summer. They will leave behind the Orange County house in the woods where they've seen some wonderful birds -- from migrating Rose-breasted Grosbeaks chowing down at the feeder to a hungry Cooper's Hawk perched on the deck rail and staring hungrily through the windows at the birds in the house. The inside birds were patients of Janine, who is a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. She has tended to sick and injured avian creatures for several years and is now writing a book on bird rehabilitation. She gave an excellent program on this subject at our January meeting. Best wishes to Jim and Janine in Arkansas, where they surely will enjoy Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and other wonderful birds west of the Mississippi. Meanwhile their Orange Co. house and yard will stay in the family, so to speak -- CHBC member Kent Fiala is buying the place. (Yes, he knows that the yard list does not come with the house! He'll reset at zero.)

## Club officers

*President:* Magnus Persmark (933-2255, [emp34157@glaxowellcome.com](mailto:emp34157@glaxowellcome.com))

*Vice President (CH):* Judy Murray (942-2985, [jmurray@unc.edu](mailto:jmurray@unc.edu))

*Vice President (RDU):* Karen Bearden ([birders@aol.com](mailto:birders@aol.com))

*Secretary:* Karen Piplani ([karenpip@aol.com](mailto:karenpip@aol.com))

*Treasurer:* Fran Hommersand (967-1745)

*Field Trip Chairman:* Doug Shadwick (942-0479)

*Bulletin Editor:* Ginger Travis (942-7746, [Ginger\\_Travis@unc.edu](mailto:Ginger_Travis@unc.edu))

*Refreshments Chair:* Karen Piplani ([karenpip@aol.com](mailto:karenpip@aol.com))

<http://www.duke.edu/~cwcook/chbc>

## **Tick time for Tar Heel birders and butterflyers. What to do? Don't panic.**

*by Clyde Smith, to Carolinaleps, 4/16*

Those who are subscribed to Carolinaleps have seen Harry LeGrand's post on the CBF Sandhills butterfly field trip on 4/14. I was one of the "meager 5" who participated and thoroughly enjoyed the trip. However, perhaps it was on our 30 minute sweep through the brush looking for Frosted Elfin that I picked up a couple of unnoticed guests. As I was getting dressed the next morning to go to an Easter sunrise service, I noticed that there was a tiny speck on an itching spot on my arm. I easily removed a deer tick and treated the spot with a disinfectant. That evening as I was getting ready for bed I discovered a second speck on an itching spot high on the back of my leg. This deer tick had about 16 more hours to become more firmly entrenched. It proved resistant to every effort to remove it until I tracked down the American Lyme Disease Foundation web site ([www.aldf.com/templates/Lyme.cfm](http://www.aldf.com/templates/Lyme.cfm)) and followed their instructions. Because they are contrary to the conventional wisdom contained in such respected references as the Merck manual, I am pasting them here for the benefit of those who run into these nasty little creatures.

If you DO find a tick attached to your skin, there is no need to panic. Not all ticks are infected, and studies of infected deer ticks have shown that they begin transmitting Lyme disease an average of 36 to 48 hours after attachment. Therefore, your chances of contracting LD are greatly reduced if you remove a tick within the first 24 hours. Remember, too, that the majority of early Lyme disease cases are easily treated and cured. To remove a tick, follow these steps:

1. Using a pair of pointed precision tweezers (see below), grasp the tick by the head or mouthparts right where they enter the skin. DO NOT grasp the tick by the body.
2. Without jerking, pull firmly and steadily directly outward. DO NOT twist the tick out or apply petroleum jelly, a hot match, alcohol or any other irritant to the tick in an attempt to get it to back out. These methods can backfire and even increase the chances of the tick transmitting the disease.
3. Place the tick in a vial or jar of alcohol to kill it.
4. Clean the bite wound with disinfectant.

Keep in mind that certain types of fine-pointed tweezers, especially those that are etched, or rasped, at the tips, may not be effective in removing nymphal deer ticks. Choose unrasped fine-pointed tweezers whose tips align tightly when pressed firmly together. Then, monitor the site of the bite for the appearance of a rash beginning 3 to 30 days after the bite. At the same time, learn about the other early symptoms of Lyme disease and watch to see if they appear in about the same timeframe. If a rash or other

early symptoms develop, see a physician immediately.

We in North and South Carolina are not in great danger (NC reported 74 cases in 1999 and SC 6), but you can't be too careful with a disease with such long-term serious consequences.

*Note: Bird banders in the Sandhills have been known to use the sticky side of duct tape to remove the swarm of miniscule baby ticks that can run up the legs of anyone unfortunate enough to step in a nest. This happens relatively infrequently in life but is an unforgettable experience. So wind a little roll of duct tape around a pencil and keep it handy when you're birding in tick country. G.T.*

## **Join the Chapel Hill Bird Club**

Membership is on the calendar year, Jan.-Dec., and costs \$15 for individuals or families, \$10 for students. Benefits include the newsletter, interesting programs, weekly field trips all over the Triangle and once-a-year trips to the coast and mountains, camaraderie with other birders, and easy access to the Carolinabirds listserv and the CHBC website (both maintained by CHBC member Will Cook). The club meets eight times a year: Sept. through Nov. and Jan. through May (fourth Monday of the month).

To join, please make your check payable to the Chapel Hill Bird Club and send it to the treasurer, **Fran Hommersand, 304 Spruce Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27514**. If you have questions, call Fran at 967-1745.