

THE BULLETIN

Chapel Hill Bird Club

September 2004

(Vol. XXXIII, Nos. 6-9)

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

Next meeting: Monday, Sept. 27

When: 7:15 p.m. refreshments; 7:30 p.m. meeting

Where: The lounge, Binkley Baptist Church, corner of Hwy. 15-501 Bypass and Willow Drive next to University Mall, Chapel Hill

Who: Susan Campbell will give a program titled "The History and Status of Hummingbird Research in North Carolina." Susan is a research associate with the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences and is a licensed hummingbird bander – the only one resident in North Carolina. She will summarize her five years of hummer banding (mostly in winter) and relate it to other research efforts conducted in the past. Her 45-minute PowerPoint program will include a description of the extensive range of winter hummers across our state and relate their presence to some key habitat variables. In the winter of 2003-2004, Susan traveled 7039 miles through North Carolina and banded 50 hummers, the majority of them Rufous. (Her work last year was supported in part by a gift from the Chapel Hill Bird Club, which Susan used to purchase a very fine cutter for making the tiny bands she places on hummingbirds' legs.)

Welcome, new members!

The following people have joined CHBC in the last nine months. We're glad to have you.

Toni Rexrode (Durham)

Michael Szpir (Apex)

David Chambers (Greensboro)

Edward Dombrowski (Cary)

George & Wendy Painter (Chapel Hill)

Carl Delamar (Apex)

Andrea Muller (Bahama)

Jonathan V. Hays (Raleigh)

Saturday morning field trips

In September, the free Saturday morning field trips, organized by Doug Shadwick, will be held Sept. 4 and Sept. 11. There will be no trip on the 18th (Chatham Fall Count) or the 25th (annual CHBC mountain field trip). Trips will be held

weekly throughout October. All are welcome. Field trip participants should gather in the parking lot at the Glen Lennox Shopping Center for a prompt 7:30 a.m. departure. Trips are over by noon. Participants should plan to do some walking and wear suitable shoes. Bring binoculars and a scope if you have one. The destination depends on what birds are moving through our area. For details of the destination du jour, call Doug at 942-0479. Glen Lennox Shopping Center is on the north side of Hwy. 54 just a few yards east of the Hwy. 15-501 Bypass around Chapel Hill.

Chatham fall count, Sept. 18, counters needed

by Will Cook

If you're interested in participating in the Chatham County Fall Bird Count on Saturday September 18, please let me know. It can be the most fun count of the year. As usual, assignments, forms, and more are at the Chapel Hill Bird Club site:

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

Will's phone: 382-9134

Will's email: cwcook@duke.edu

Mountain field trip, Sept. 25-26

Will Cook organizes this annual ramble along the Blue Ridge Parkway and through the fields and forests of Ashe and Alleghany Counties in N.C. and Grayson County in Va. Lots of migrant warblers and vireos are the highlights, plus whatever raptors turn up at the Mahogany Rock Overlook hawk watch site. Will has a house in Fancy Gap, Va. where some folks can stay, if they don't mind rolling out a sleeping bag on the front deck under the stars. Nearby B&Bs include Wedden's Farm B&B (336-372-2985), and in Sparta there's the Alleghany Inn (336-372-2501). Call Will to sign up (382-9134).

Or email: cwcook@duke.edu

Note: This trip is free for CHBC members; \$15 for nonmembers.

CHBC Bulletin seeks editor

by *Ginger Travis*

I plan to step down as editor of this newsletter after the February issue. The club needs someone to take over the Bulletin. Ideally, if someone expresses interest early in the fall, you and I could do a couple of issues together. It's easy and fun – editing the Bulletin has never seemed like a chore to me. Please contact me if you want to know more about it – I'll be glad to answer questions: 942-7746 (home) and gtravis@email.unc.edu (work).

Arizona birding, a different experience

by *Bruce Young*

There it was, right in front of us. I had heard about it for years but never thought I would actually see it. Big Ben? The Taj Majal? Mount Fuji? No, the Patagonia rest area picnic table! A small cement table with benches under a huge cottonwood tree that is the source of the eponym “Patagonia-picnic-table-effect.” That's the idea that if a good bird is found somewhere, birders will come see it, and they will see more good birds, which brings yet more birders, who see more good birds, and so on. The Patagonia, Arizona, rest area is only a few miles from Mexico along a riparian corridor, and so hosts many birds hard to find elsewhere in the U.S. (Its most famous specimens, a pair of Rose-throated Becards, apparently did not nest this year.) We saw Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Common Black Hawk, and Phainopepla, among more common birds, in our morning there.

Rick Payne and I had decided early this year that it was time to go see southeast Arizona. The Southwest Wings Birding Festival held in Bisbee, Arizona in early August seemed a good fit. Famous names such as the Patagonia rest area, Madera canyon, Ramsey canyon, the Chiracahua and Huachuca mountains, the Patons' house, the Beattys' house, and more were dancing in our heads as we pulled out of Tucson airport and made it a full 100 yards before being stopped for 15 minutes by Vice-President Cheney's motorcade. Starting off again, we went to the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum nearby. This was my first time in the desert so it was wonderful seeing saguaro “forests” covering the hillsides and all kinds of cacti spread across the landscape. At the museum, Cactus Wrens worked the parking lot like House Sparrows. Inside we got our first chance to put our studying to work when we ran into our first Myiarchus flycatcher. The large bill and other marks gave me my first lifer, the Brown-crested Flycatcher. Soon we added Gila Woodpecker, Hooded Oriole, and Verdin to our list, not to mention all

kinds of cacti, butterflies, and lizards. When we were done there, it was on to Bisbee. Bisbee, as we were told several times during the festival, was the largest city between Kansas City and San Francisco around the turn of the century. Now it's mostly famous for the big hole (the old copper mine) that separates the old town from the new.

The second day started at the rest area, and from there we went to the Patagonia Nature Conservancy Preserve. From the main shelter we watched Broad-billed and Black-chinned Hummingbirds at the feeders, Acorn Woodpeckers flying back and forth, a Thick-billed Kingbird calling from atop a snag, and a Canyon Wren hopping around. The big attraction was a pair of Gray Hawk chicks preparing to fledge. They were able to hop around in the nest tree but had not yet flown. Unfortunately today wasn't the day. We saw one of the parents a little later, a personal milestone because that was my 500th life bird, not a bad #500.

Remarkably, at the preserve we ran into John Dole, a North Carolinian whom we had gone to Oklahoma with just a few months ago. John, who is writing a bird-finding guide to the state, led a CBC trip to Oklahoma in May. I mention this because when we left the preserve we went to Patagonia Lake to look for a Black-capped Gnatcatcher that had been seen there earlier in the day. At the lake we ran into Judy Murray, who also was on the Oklahoma trip! Within an hour we ran into two other North Carolinians in Arizona, and we were all there independently. We failed to find the gnatcatcher but we did see Dusky-capped Flycatcher and Bell's Vireo.

The next day turned out to be our best. We drove up to Madera canyon and hiked up a steep trail along a rocky streambed. At the bottom we found Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, a Canyon Wren working the rocks right at our feet, and Lesser Goldfinches tweeting. A couple of hundred yards up the hill we had one of those amazing periods that only come along once in a while and make birding the exciting pastime it is. It started when I noticed a Painted Redstart across the wash near some sulphur-bellies. A moment later one red and one yellow bird flew to the top of a nearby tree. The colors and the dark ear patches showed they were a pair of Hepatic Tanagers. A Plumbeous Vireo called and made a brief appearance, as did a Black-throated Gray Warbler. Then we heard a barking call from almost right overhead. Perched on a low, horizontal branch was a long-tailed bird with green upperparts, red belly, silver wings, and a red eye ring – an Elegant Trogon, *the* southeast

Arizona specialty! It was almost, but not quite, an anticlimax when we found a pair of Red-faced Warblers even further up the trail. Other birds in the canyon area that morning were Zone-tailed Hawk, Magnificent Hummingbird, Varied Bunting, and Cordilleran Flycatcher.

After such a morning, we decided a relaxing afternoon was the way to go. Possibly the greatest thing about Arizona in August is that you can have a relaxing afternoon and still have an exciting time birding, seeing wonderful birds it's hard to find elsewhere. How? you might ask. By watching hummingbirds. We decided to stop by Ash Canyon Bed and Breakfast, a.k.a. the Ballator house. Nothing like sitting in comfortable lawn chairs under a shady tree on a warm afternoon, watching 20-30 Broad-billed, Black-chinned, Broad-tailed, Anna's, Rufous, and Lucifer Hummingbirds chase one another around the 14 or so feeders in the yard. Added bonuses were Gilded Flicker and Mexican Jay.

The next day it was back to more active birding. We drove up a spectacularly bad road to the top of Carr Canyon in the Huachucas. At 8000 feet in a large, beautiful, completely empty campground beneath 100-foot tall trees, we noticed that we couldn't hear anything other than nature. No cars, planes, air conditioners, or people. It was wonderful. Grace's and Hermit Warblers, Hutton's Vireo, Greater Pewee, and a baby Yellow-eyed Junco complemented the view of Tucson 75 miles away. A fairly quick stop at the Beattys' farm got us White-eared and Blue-throated Hummingbirds amid a swirl of at least 50 birds around 12 feeders in their apple orchard. In the afternoon, a drive north to Wilcox Playa got us many shorebirds that we didn't have any chance of seeing elsewhere. The experience of a water treatment pond in 95 degree heat under a baking sun is always unforgettable. On the way back, we stopped at a wonderful place called Whitewater NWR. It's a permanent wetland in the middle of a very dry valley. In the winter it is supposed to be a spectacular area for raptors. We enjoyed the Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Cinnamon Teal, Black Terns, Vermilion Flycatchers, and White-faced Ibis that make it their summer home.

We also experienced exciting weather. The land out there is wide open. You can generally see 30 miles in every direction, and mountains 50 miles away are easily seen. Of course that means you can see storms coming. For several hours when we were in the valley, we watched a thunderstorm develop over the Chiricahuas 15-20 miles away. In the late afternoon it swept down into the plain. It kicked

up a tremendous cloud that at times nearly filled the valley with blowing dust.

The festival started the next morning. We were finally going to make it up into the Chiricahuas for some high-altitude birds. Eight people were in our van and when we started, the guide asked us all what we hoped to see. One person wanted Pine Siskin, but the guide said they were hard to come by. Another wanted Red Crossbill, and he said we'd have better luck with the siskin. So of course we saw lots of both. Other specialties we saw in the mountains included Mexican Chickadee, Olive Warbler (including a father feeding babies), Band-tailed Pigeon, lots of Yellow-eyed Juncos, Pygmy Nuthatch, Virginia's Warbler, and Olive-sided Flycatcher. At a feeder stop on the way back, we found a familiar easterner, a female Painted Bunting, feeding among a family group of Gambel's Quail. A Curve-billed Thrasher saw us out as we left.

For those of you who remember my previous story about Oklahoma, fear not. We saw Roadrunners almost every day on this trip: perched in trees, running along the roads, and disappearing into the desert much more easily than a bird that large should be able to.

Another vanful of people went up into Ramsey canyon the next day. The Nature Conservancy preserve has a naturalist on staff who took us on a hike up the canyon. It was a fairly slow bird day with only Arizona Woodpecker added to the trip list, but we learned all kinds of interesting things about the natural history of the area. You should definitely ask for Mark Pretti if you ever find yourself in Ramsey canyon. That night we returned to Ramsey to hunt for owls with a man named Weisel (pronounced just as it looks). With a lot of coaxing we saw Whiskered and Western Screech Owls and the Mexican race of the Whip-poor-will, which sounds completely different from our familiar night bird.

On our final day, we wandered around the area looking for things we had missed (a remarkably short list). We succeeded in teasing out Botteri's and Cassin's Sparrows, but never got good looks at either, even though they are quite common in the area. We also visited a nest box with a pair of full-sized, but not quite independent Barn Owls, and finally managed to find our last specialty of the trip, a Black-tailed Gnatcatcher.

Overall, in 7 days, I saw 166 species including 43 life birds. Definitely the last time I will ever get that many lifers in the U.S. in a week, or likely a year. If you go out there, do

your studying ahead of time, and be ready for a great time.

Cape Verde Shearwater (poss. North American first record)

by Magnus Persmark (to Carolinabirds, 8/16)

A friend from D.C., Bill Kunze, and I went to Cape Hatteras this past weekend [Aug. 13-15] for Brian Patteson's pelagic trip. On the way out we stopped at the Pea Island visitor's center about 6:30 pm on Friday. At the feeder we found a single bird and, lo-and-behold, it was the Shiny Cowbird. It stayed at the feeder for a couple of minutes and even gave us a trilly call before taking off for the reed bed, and the company of mainly Red-winged Blackbirds, where we were able to briefly view him. A gratifying observation, as I had missed the bird on both the 22nd and 24th July.

Saturday's pelagic trips was cancelled, though in retrospect it likely could have run. Sunday's trip produced a good number of birds with the highlight being a very well seen Cape Verde Shearwater, expertly called and described by Brian and George Armistead. Among the excited observers was Wayne Irvin, who this year alone has obtained two first North America records (pending acceptance) of pelagic species off the N.C. coast. Way to go, Wayne!

Ed. note: And way to go, Magnus!

Is the Cape Verde Shearwater a full species?

by Harry LeGrand, chair, NC Bird Records Committee (to Carolinabirds, 8/18)

Folks:

Now that Cape Verde Shearwater has been seen and photographed, the next question is: "Is this a full species [*Calonectris edwardsii*] or a subspecies of Cory's Shearwater [*C. diomedea edwardsii*]?"

The American Birding Association generally follows the Clements' Checklist, which is now in its 5th Edition. That edition, when published, did NOT give Cape Verde full species status, but a subspecies of Cory's.

HOWEVER, checking the Clements' updates on the website:

<http://www.ibispub.com/updates.html>

one should scroll down to November 1, 2000 updates, Page 11 – [and] there one sees that Clements has elevated Cape Verde Shearwater (*C. edwardsii*) to full species status.

According to the following information, it is a full species:

<http://www.surfbirds.com/phorum/read.php?f=54&i=538&t=538&v=t>

All of the references I have at home -- Clements' Checklist, 5th Edition, Sibley and Monroe, and slightly older Harrison pelagic books -- list Cape Verde as a subspecies of Cory's.

The following is not clear if a species or not:

<http://www.oceanwanderers.com/CapeVerde.Shear.html>.

Thus, I think the information on hand NOW is that one can count Cape Verde Shearwater on his/her life list as a valid species. Clements' update in 2000 has elevated it, and I think some other recent lists PROBABLY have -- as there are several other world checklists out there (which I do not have).

The NC Bird Records Committee will vote on the record regardless of whether a full species or a subspecies of Cory's. Of course, for tallying the number of species in the state, and for folks counting a bird on their life lists, we all would like Cape Verde to indeed be considered by the birding and scientific community to be a valid species.

Ivory-billed Woodpecker books are in the stores

by Rob Gluck (to Carolinabirds, 8/4)

. . . [W]hile ambling through Barnes and Noble, to combat a depressing week, I ambled right into Jerry Jackson's long, long-delayed volume, "In Search of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker," \$25 (or cheaper via the Web). Made my day! And cheaper than Prozac!! Jackson writes mostly for academic journals so his style won't launch the book on the NY Times bestseller list, but finally a single authoritative work on the history and science of the bird along with Jackson's previously-argued notions for their possible continued existence.

[More from Rob, 8/23]

. . . [A]nd hey!, Phillip Hoose's "The Race to Save the Lord God Bird" now available in bookstores – inexplicably, being promoted as a volume for "young adults" (to teach them about ecology and extinction), but this is a book for all BIRDERS -- wonderful pics and side notes, and the most detailed account of the Cornell and Tanner expeditions at the Singer Tract I've seen in print, as well as a good account of the more recent Cuban searches; won't be the standard reference that Jerome Jackson's book will become, but a far more engaging, inspiring piece of writing with several details I've not seen elsewhere (and, interestingly, Hoose never once mentions Jackson in the text; professional

jealousies????). [By the way], 3 of the enthusiastic endorsements on the book's back cover come from David Sibley, Paul Ehrlich, and Scott Weidensaul; not bad company!

Ed. note: Year before last, Rob gave a great talk to the CHBC on the status of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and the search in Louisiana to find one.

Widespread shorebird breeding failure in the Arctic?

(forwarded to Carolinabirds, 8/10)

This sad message is from ID-Frontiers (Frontiers of Bird Identification LISTSERV) . . .

Nathan Dias - Charleston, SC

Subject: Few Juvenile Shorebirds - Failed Arctic Breeders

From: [Ron Pittaway]
<jeaniron@SYMPATICO.CA>

Date: Tue, 10 Aug 2004 6:49am

*Note to Europeans: Expect fewer vagrant North American shorebirds (waders) this summer and fall. See below.

Very few southbound juvenile shorebirds from the arctic are currently migrating through southern Ontario indicating a failed nesting season for many northern species. For example, at Townsend Sewage Lagoons near Lake Erie on 8 August, Kevin McLaughlin saw 400-500 adult Semipalmated Sandpipers and only one juvenile. He saw only 5-6 juvenile Lesser Yellowlegs among 200-300 adults and had few juvenile Least Sandpipers. Juveniles of all these species should be common by now. This spring and summer have been exceptionally cold, wet and windy in much of northern Canada from James Bay to the High Arctic Islands. Here are reports from six biologists and birders, five of whom were in the north this summer.

1. Ken Ross, waterfowl and shorebird biologist, Canadian Wildlife Service: "It looks to me that there has been a general failure of breeding shorebirds from the Hudson Bay Lowlands north. Certainly goose productivity was well down along the Hudson Bay coast where it was still winter in late May. And I have heard that the Arctic was even worse. Ken Abraham was telling me that shorebirds appeared to be migrating earlier than usual in the James Bay area, probably reflecting a large proportion of failed breeders."

2. Ken Abraham, biologist and research scientist with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR), studies waterfowl and shorebirds

around James Bay and Hudson Bay: He reports, "Strong indications that the extremely late year spring (May/June) and cold/wet summer (June-July) was indeed a poor year for breeding shorebirds. My student Linh Nguyen had a fair number of Semipalmated Plover nests this year, but a ragged nesting season with very high egg predation, really asynchronous timing and changes in nest density among areas, compared to his two previous summers. While banding 12-23 July we witnessed increasing numbers of Pectoral Sandpipers, a few Ruddy Turnstones, hundreds of both species of yellowlegs and a very early massing of Marbled Godwits (in my experience). We had Marbled Godwits in flocks alone and mixed with Hudsonian Godwits at several locations from the extreme south end of James Bay (Hannah Bay) up to Lake River and including Akimiski Island (largest island in James Bay). I suspect that Marbled Godwit, in particular, had a poor year, but possibly so did Hudsonian Godwit."

Note: isolated James Bay population of Marbled Godwits is probably about 3000 birds.

3. Don Sutherland, zoologist with the Natural Heritage Information Centre of the OMNR, reported: "My guess is that there was widespread nest failure of shorebirds and many other arctic-subarctic bird species in eastern Canada. When we arrived at the Pen Islands (Ontario/Manitoba border of Hudson Bay) on June 23rd, things really hadn't started yet. There was still substantial ice on many of the larger lakes, large snowdrifts in the lee of ridges and spruce copses, hardly a hint of plant growth anywhere, and several inches of water on the wet tundra. Many of the local species including the common shorebird species (Stilt Sandpiper, Dunlin, Least Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Short-billed Dowitcher, Hudsonian Godwit, Whimbrel, Red-necked Phalarope, American Golden-Plover) were displaying, but weren't behaving as though they had initiated nests. After a few days we started flushing more birds from scrapes and partial clutches and by the time we departed on July 7th there were even some clutches starting to hatch (e.g., Least Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper). More telling though were the large flocks of shorebirds present throughout the period. These were either failed breeders or birds which had just opted not to try. Among these were substantial mixed flocks of Hudsonian Godwits and Short-billed Dowitchers (which breed more commonly in the taiga-tundra transition) and large mixed species aggregations including large numbers of Stilt Sandpipers (150 in one flock). Many of these flocks were concentrated in ponds

along the coast, but were also present six or more kilometres inland. Also of interest was the near absence of both Semipalmated Plover and Semipalmated Sandpiper. These should have been present and not uncommon (as they have been in other years) on the gravel ridges bordering wet tundra near the coast, but we saw very few of either and found no nests. Other species which typically breed further inland (e.g., both yellowlegs and Bonaparte's Gulls) were also loafing in ponds near the coast. Waterfowl also had a poor time of it. Large numbers of scap of both species just hanging around and no evidence of breeding even by Long-tailed Ducks which were just sitting in pairs on ponds. There was a total failure of the Snow Goose colony and near total failure of locally breeding Canada Geese. This phenomenon wasn't restricted to the Ontario coast as Churchill apparently was a bust as were other places in the eastern Canadian Arctic. Just one of those years!"

4. Farther north, Jim Richards of Orono, Ontario, spent 27 June - 13 July at Cambridge Bay on Victoria Island in Nunavut Territory. He reported, "That overall numbers of birds present at the end of June was down by at least 60%. Of those there only a small percentage were actually nesting. In past years species such as Semipalmated Sandpipers were usually found at a rate of 4-6 nests per day with normal walking. This year I found one nest in 16 days! Needless to say, it was very cold, very wet and very windy."

5. Glenn Coady of Toronto, Ontario, was atlassing in the Hudson Bay Lowlands and was in contact with other groups in the north: He summarized, "Discussing shorebird nesting success with all the Ontario Hudson Bay atlas groups, Mark Peck's experience on Southampton Island in Nunavut, Jim Richards' experience at Cambridge Bay in Nunavut, as well as one of my birding friends who was at Churchill this summer, it would appear very few shorebirds were able to successfully breed in the frigid conditions across the arctic this summer. Many didn't even attempt to nest, and a lot of those that did likely failed in the horrific windstorms. Jim Richards told me that areas he covered at Cambridge Bay that normally would have resulted in sightings of 70 Semipalmated Sandpipers and 30 Baird's Sandpipers per day, proved this summer to be lucky to find more than one or two birds. He found only one Semipalmated Sandpiper nest the entire trip, and it only had a clutch of two eggs. The fact that it also was a poor year for small mammals (and

Canada Geese and Snow Geese failed en masse too) in much of the arctic meant what few shorebirds that were going to nest successfully probably encountered heavier than normal predation from foxes, jaegers, gulls and owls."

6. Alvaro Jaramillo of California on 6 August reported: "Juvenile shorebirds are down here already, but not the main push. It seems like a lot of the north was suffering from very bad weather. Alaska was very cold and rainy this season, I hope I am wrong and you begin to see a ton of juvenile shorebirds, but my guess is that it will be a weak year for them."

*I hope that birders will report the numbers and age ratios of southbound arctic shorebirds during August, September and October. This will give us better information on the nesting success of northern shorebirds in 2004.

Acknowledgements: The following biologists/birders were very helpful with information: Ken Abraham, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources; Glenn Coady, Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas; Bill Crins, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources; Michel Gosselin, Canadian Museum of Nature; Jean Iron, Toronto, Ontario; Andrew Jano, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources; Alvaro Jaramillo, Half Moon Bay, California; Kevin McLaughlin, Hamilton, Ontario; Mark Peck, Royal Ontario Museum; Jim Richards, Orono, Ontario; Mike Runtz, Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas; Ken Ross, Canadian Wildlife Service; Don Sutherland, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources; and Ron Tozer, Dwight, Ontario.

Happy shorebirding,

Ron Pittaway

Ontario Field Ornithologists

Minden and Toronto ON

E-mail: jeaniron@sympatico.ca

Yellow-headed Blackbird at Cane Creek Reservoir (Orange Co.)

by Doug Shadwick (to Carolinabirds, 8/23)

On Saturday morning [8/21] about 9AM, I saw a Yellow-headed Blackbird in what appeared to be 1st winter male plumage. The bird was associating loosely with a flock of 50 or so actively feeding cowbirds by the side of the road. The exact location was on the overlook to Cane Creek Reservoir on Stanford Road – this is the portion of Stanford Road where the main parking lot and the gated [back] entrance road are in view. If this bird is seen again, the individual can probably be identified by an orange tag at the bend in the wing on the right side of the body. I

last saw the bird as it flew alone across the open fields toward the lake. . . .

Two more local raven sightings

(from *Carolinabirds*)

1. From Kent Fiala (8/16): Driving down I-40 this morning between the New Hope Church Road and Airport Road exits in Orange Co NC I overtook a large black bird that was flying above my lane. In the nick of time it occurred to me "That could be a raven," and I was able to get a quick glimpse confirming the distinctive long wedge-shaped tail of a raven as it disappeared above my roof. This was within several miles of a few other raven sightings in recent years, the most recent ones that I know of being last December.

2. From Charles Boyer of Raleigh (8/18): "Saw them again today, this time flying. I estimate the wingspan at 40-50 inches, or roughly as wide as an average woman can spread her arms. The birds I saw glided extensively. Their tails had a diamond shape, with the middle feathers clearly longer than the ones on either side. They also made unanswered calls somewhat infrequently. It was far deeper and more resonant than a crow, and also the call was longer and did not have the same attack and decay (to use music synthesizer terms) as a crow. A crow seems to "caw caw caw" in their callouts (they have a pretty extensive language set) and these birds "rrronk rrronk rrronk" Even from the sky, you could tell that they have very thick bills, and since I also saw some crows as well today, that's what I am basing my comparison on (our plant has a flock that loves the trash.) . . . [T]he specific area is a golf course and wetlands off of NC 55 between Fuquay-Varina and Angier. I won't make the mistake of not having my trusty Nikon digital SLR with it's 1200mm telephoto tomorrow."

And turkeys too . . .

by *Amalie Tuffin* (to *Carolinabirds*, 7/24)

Last night I saw a flock of 8 Wild Turkeys just off of St. Mary's Road near the Durham/Orange County line. (I was driving on the road, but if I had been out in my back yard I could have seen the birds from there - way cool!) Anyway, it was 2 adult females, 2 younger birds about 2/3 the size of the adults, and 4 real young ones, about 1/4 or 1/2 the size of the adults. It was neat!

Birds blown in by tropical storm Gaston?

by *Will Cook* (to *Carolinabirds* 8/31)

I checked out the Hickory Hills boat ramp (on Redwood Rd.) and the Cheek Road causeway at Falls Lake from about 4-5 pm today. I wasn't expecting much, so I was pleased to find:

1 Caspian Tern

5 Laughing Gulls

The Caspian Tern may or may not be storm-related, but I think the gulls (4 together plus one loner) almost certainly were. I don't remember seeing a Laughing around the Triangle since Hurricane Fran (9/6/96). I didn't make it to Falls Lake for Fran, so Laughing Gull is Durham County bird # 211 for me!

Chapel Hill spring count results

by *Will Cook, compiler*

The 2004 Chapel Hill spring count on May 9 was a fairly average count, bringing us back to ground after a great one last year. We found 121 species (near the 10-year average of 122) and 9529 birds (slightly below the average of 10067). The number of birds per party-hour, however, was a very high 76.8, well above the average 67. This is the second highest in recent history, behind last year's 82.6. The reason this year's count was only average was the relatively low level of participation, the lowest since 1996. This year's 37 counters in 17 parties is well below the average 49 counters in 23 parties, and we had only 124 party-hours (average 156).

As usual, we did have a few goodies. The best bird was the beautiful breeding-plumaged male Ruddy Duck at Clark Lake in Chapel Hill, found by the team of Betty King, Barbara Roth, and Judy Teague. He was still present the next day when I went to look, but disappeared later in the week. This is only our second Ruddy on a spring count, our first since 1958! Another great find was a group of 4 Hooded Mergansers seen by Doug Shadwick at Jordan Lake - only our third, as well as a record high. Kent Fiala also had an outstanding day, hearing a Greater Yellowlegs at the former sewage plant off Sandy Creek Road in Durham (our first since 1988) and flushing an American Woodcock near Hollow Rock, New Hope Creek (our first since 1990). Another party reported 3 Anhingas in flight, but the details were not convincing enough to include in the final report.

Record highs were very few. In fact, the only one we set, apart from the Hooded Mergs mentioned above, was for Carolina Wren. The astounding total of 495 smashes the previous

record of 447 in 2002. This is even more astounding considering this year's low number of party-hours. That works out to 4.0 Carolina Wrens per party hour; the next nearest total is just 2.4. Why were there so many Carolina Wrens this spring? Also high, but not record counts, were Least Sandpiper (18, average 5) and Acadian Flycatcher (78, average 49).

We did set a record low, thought not an unexpected one. Continuing a long decline, this year's paltry showing of 12 Field Sparrows (average 38) beats the low of 15 we had in 1960. I couldn't find even one at Mason Farm. We also counted just 12 Eastern Meadowlarks (average 31), matching the record low set last year. We also had remarkably low numbers for Red-shouldered Hawk (19, average 29), Red-tailed Hawk (11, average 32), and European Starling (227, average 406).

Honors this year for highest species count goes once again to Doug Shadwick with 80, who covers the excellent Old Hope Valley Farm Road area nestled between the New Hope Creek and Morgan Creek arms of Jordan Lake. Top individual count goes to Bob Chase with 781 birds, barely nudging out three other parties who were within 10 birds.

Next year we may change the count day to the first Saturday of May, to keep the count on a fixed schedule (instead of alternating weekends with the Jordan Lake count) and to avoid having the count on Mother's Day, which may help with the participation level. Stay tuned.

Weather in brief: low 63, high 85; no precipitation; wind SW 5-15 mph; cloudy in morning, sunny in the afternoon.

Thanks, counters!

New split – Cackling Goose

from Will Cook (to Carolinabirds 7/23)

The AOU has officially split off the small subspecies of Canada Goose into a new species called Cackling Goose. There's at least one sight report for NC – one seen by Brad Carlson at Lake Mattamuskeet on 12/12/99 and 1/8/00:

<http://www.ibiblio.org/pardo/birds/archive/archive3/msg00034.html>

Double-dipped!

by Steve Shultz (to Carolinabirds 7/25)

I'll warn everyone in advance. DO NOT BIRD WITH ME. In some way I have offended the birding god(s), and until I can figure out what the correct sacrifice may be, I'm big time bad luck. It started last weekend when I missed the Falls Lake Frigatebird because I had to attend a funeral. (Double bad luck there) I missed the SC kite CBC field trip Saturday because Tracy had

to work late, but I thought that was actually good because then I heard about the Pea Island Shiny Cowbird. That would be a lifer, NC bird and ABA bird, what could be better? Well, suffice it to say, the Shiny Cowbird did not show up all day yesterday, and I got the pleasure of sitting in the rain watching for it to not do so. You say, "Idiot, there is a perfectly good picture window in the air conditioned visitor's center looking right out to the feeder, plus there is a shady porch. What could be an easier stakeout?" Well, when the rain is slanting in from the SW, you can't see out of the window, and the porch is just as wet as being outside. Rain, you say? It didn't rain yesterday, did it? Apparently Pea Island was the only place it actually rained ALL DAY. Then the little *&#\$ shows up this morning. Great.

The second big dip of the weekend would be the Upland Sandpipers at Cherry Hospital. There were 3 yesterday, right? And it was cloudy and drizzly all night so they would not continue migrating, right? You'd think. Normally when Uppies are reported at Cherry Hospital I stop by and find them before the first security truck rolls up to see why I'm hanging around the prison with a spotting scope. Well not today, my friend. After two visits from the po po and careful glassing of every pasture and mown field in the area, no Uppies. Oh I'm sure they are there, just hiding.

If you decide to go look for either of these finds, or anything else in the near future for that matter, might want to drop me a line and make sure I'm NOT going to be there too. You'll have better luck.

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