

THE BULLETIN...



Chapel Hill Bird Club

March 2005

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

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Vol. 34

>>NEXT MEETING: Monday, March 28 Program: "Birds Of Ecuador"

When/Where: 7:15pm./refreshments; 7:30pm./meeting
The lounge, Olin T. Binkley Baptist Church, corner off Hwy. 15-501 bypass and Willow Dr., behind University Mall, Chapel Hill.

Who/What: Tom Driscoll (Pres. of New Hope Audubon Chapter) will tell us about his birding excursion to Ecuador last year. Club member Helmut Mueller also visited Ecuador a few months back and his report, that ought to whet your appetite for Tom's talk, is on page 3.

~ Saturday Morning Field Trips ~

Local field trips, generally led by Doug Shadwick, leave from Glen Lennox Shopping Center parking lot off Hwy 54 promptly at 7:30 am. most Saturday mornings. All skill levels welcome. Trips are usually over by noon. Dress for the weather and for walking. For further details call Doug at 942-0479.

The 'Good Deeds' Dept.

Last November, stalwarts Judy Murray and Rick Payne, helped clean up litter along New Hope Valley Farm Rd. on behalf of the Bird Club, despite a heavy hunter presence. This March (maybe 19th), the Club will try again to have a cleanup day along this often-birded Chatham County roadway. Lend a hand if you can. (call Doug for more info).

Minnesota Redux

The February *Bulletin* made brief mention of the fantastic owl irruption occurring in Minnesota this winter (Great Greys, Northern Hawk, Boreal, Snowy), little knowing that several local birders would soon be off on a Carolina Bird Club trip to that very state. 22 CBC members saw almost two dozen trip-targeted birds including 5 owl species, both Redpoll species, Gyrfalcon, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Rough-legged Hawk, Pine Grosbeak, Gray Jay, Bohemian Waxwing, Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers, among the many highlights.

No. 3

>} Thought for the Day >} >} >|

"...birding is not a hobby, any more than sneezing is, or Presbyterianism is, or liking the color blue is. It is not something that one chooses to do so much as something one cannot help but do. It is an action that springs from the deepest parts of the human soul, uncontrolled by propriety or convenience." ~ Peter Cashwell

DON'T Make Me Spank You!!

....nor make Will Cook scratch you off the membership rolls. Twenty-or-so folks are *still* tardy on their Club dues. Please check your mailing label and if you're one of 'em send \$15 (\$10/students) along to:

Chapel Hill Bird Club
c/o Ruth Roberson
38 Stoneridge Pl.
Durham, NC. 27705

(...and if you'd like to get the *Bulletin* off the internet, from Will Cook's webpage, rather than taking your chances on a bedraggled, coffee-stained, mangled, snail mail copy ; -) let me know your email address so I can move you onto our e-subscriber list.)

On Their Way



Before the end of the month be on the lookout for the following passerines returning to our area:

Swallows, Chimney Swifts, Purple Martins, Whip-poor-wills, Blue Gray Gnatcatchers, Yellow-throated and Parula Warblers, La. Waterthrush, Ovenbirds, White- and Red-eyed Vireos, and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds.

Hey, I knew THAT

In early Feb., Duke neurobiology professor Erich Jarvis received widespread press coverage for his work showing empirically what most Club members already knew: birds are smarter than most folks give them credit for! The actual studies, of course, are complex and partly theoretical, but the new view emerging is that avian intelligence is often akin to, even if different from, that of many mammals.

Who's Who -- Getting To Know Your Fellow Club Members

This month's first profile is of Raleigh birder **Steve Shultz** who has only been a CHBC member for 4-5 years, but is one of the most frequent names to subscribers of 'Carolinabirds' listserv, where he is known as someone who will hop in a car (...or plane!) on a moment's notice to chase a rarity:

Many will be surprised to learn that Steve's birding interest began only 10 years ago when, while visiting the wild ponies of Chincoteague, he picked up a bird field guide and checklist, and as he says, "the rest is history;" Steve notes further that "as a result, I have Bald Eagle on my life list before Rock Dove." Soon thereafter he picked up a very rare bird, the Nene, in Hawaii, on his way to his current life list of 649 (ABA=563, NC=334).

His favorite local avians are Canvasbacks and brilliant Prothonotary Warblers [aka Golden Swamp Warbler per 'Carolinabirds' : -)], while the Curlew Sandpiper sits atop his wish-list. Steve enjoys birding Lake Jordan and Crabtree areas, but may be best known to many folks for his regular reporting on several Raleigh ponds. The Birds and Birders of Cape May by Jack Connor is one of his favorite reads [editor's note: The Complete Birder, also by Jack Connor, is a favorite instructional volume of this editor].

Steve's job with a national financial services firm affords him time to combine 2 of his favorite pastimes: travelling and birding. And speaking of travelling, Steve recounts 2 of his greatest birding thrills being seeing the Elegant Trogon in Madera Canyon, AZ., and watching Greater Prairie Chickens booming on a lek in CO. in a quiet pre-dawn setting that was 'magical.' I suspect all of us can appreciate that.

(On page 3 of this issue of the *Bulletin*, Steve offers his own take on "listing.")

Even though he is one of our longest-term members (close to 40 years) most folks likely wouldn't recognize **James Coman III** if he walked into one of our meetings. Why? Because he hasn't lived in the Triangle for almost 28 years, choosing instead to abide in a log cabin in Alleghany County where some know him as "the Curmudgeon of Piney Creek;" yet diligently each year he renews his Club membership and here's more about this long-standing CHBCer:

James' interest in birds was sparked at the age of 9 or 10 when he was ill and housebound in his childhood Hillsborough home, and a flock of Red Crossbills appeared at his feeder (not a bad bird to start off with!).

While receiving two forestry degrees from Duke,

James has spent much of his life as a farmer (especially sheep farming), and for the last 12 years has both talked-the-talk and walked-the-walk as a professional director for 2 different land conservation groups, striving to preserve land, wildlife habitat, and water quality.

He says his main "hobby" besides birding, is "using/maintaining/repairing/cussing at obsolete farm equipment." So it's not too surprising he names Charles T. Flugum's Birding From A Tractor Seat as his favorite bird-read.

And for one of his most memorable birding "thrills" he mentions "discovering at a quite inappropriate time that I was sharing an outhouse with a Barred Owl" [uhh yeah, I suspect THAT might stick in most of our memories!].

Most of us in the Club may never meet James, but clearly he is out there doing the day-to-day hands-on-work that makes us proud to call him a member.

(CBC and CHBC field trips have stopped by James' farm in the past, so if you're headed out Blue Ridge Parkway/New River/Grayson Highlands way for some birding, James welcomes you to call ahead and drop in on him - 336-359-2909, or hillshepherd@skybest.com).

~~~~~ 2004 Chapel Hill (NC) Christmas Bird Count Summary

-- from compiler Will Cook
(full tabular data attached at end)

We did fairly well on the 2004 Chapel Hill Christmas Bird Count, held on December 26, with an above-average 90 species (10-year average 85) and 15,800 individual birds (average 14,550). Observer effort was near normal. The weather was frigid, with a cold north wind, but fortunately this didn't seem to hinder the birding much. The count circle received almost complete coverage, missing only the NC Botanical Garden area (the counters couldn't make it because of snow in Raleigh) and sections of the downtown area (it's hard to find someone to count Starlings and Pigeons).

The rarest bird was a small tern seen at Jordan Lake by Edith Tatum. She thought it looked more like a Common Tern than the expected Forster's Tern, but we'd probably need good photographs to be able to count it as a Common, since that would be unprecedented at this time of year. So, it's going down on the count as *Sterna* sp., still a first for the Chapel Hill count. The other major rarity was the hatch-year female Rufous Hummingbird at Jill Froning's feeder, which was identified and banded by Susan Campbell a couple of months earlier. Jill was out of town on count day, but she thoughtfully arranged for her neighbor Maggie Jackson to count her yard birds. Other goodies: Northern Shoveler (Derb Carter), Wild Turkey (Carter), Northern Harrier (Sam O'Kane), Common Yellowthroat (Will Cook), Baltimore Oriole (4 parties had one!), and Evening Grosbeak (Cynthia Fox, at her feeder). Jill's White-crowned Sparrow was a great bird for the count week.

We set several record highs: Derb's 7 Northern Shovelers at the Maple View Farm pond beats last's year's count of 6 at the same pond. And his nice flock of 13 Wild Turkeys handily beats the old record of 5.

Field trips, counts, meetings/talks, webpage, newsletter, checklists, fun, knowledge... your Chapel Hill Bird Club!

Five parties counted 8 Cooper's Hawks, doubling the previous high! We counted 1108 Ring-billed Gulls, mostly as they were flying by in large flocks, besting the previous high by 30%. We never get large flocks of gulls sitting on the water in the northern reaches of Jordan Lake, unlike slightly further south in the Jordan Lake count circle. We had an amazing count of 381 Chipping Sparrows, more than twice the previous high of 181 set just last year. What's going on with them? Other unusually high counts: Wood Duck (highest since 1986), Red-breasted Nuthatch (h.s. 1985), Golden-crowned Kinglet (h.s. 1993), Northern Mockingbird (h.s. 1980), Dark-eyed Junco (h.s. 1983), Northern Cardinal (h.s. 1980), Baltimore Oriole (h.s. 1976), and Pine Siskin (h.s. 1987). Only two species had unusually low totals: Eastern Phoebe (lowest since 1992) and House Finch (lowest since 1984).

Teams with highest totals: I had a great day at Mason Farm (plus a couple of minor uncovered spots), with 62 species (1570 individuals). Helping my totals were 7 species of water birds on the Mason Farm pond, which is often devoid of waterfowl. Once again Jeff Phippen's team - this time Jeff was assisted by Jacob Socolar - had the highest count of individuals with 1717 (52 species), with large numbers of birds hanging out at the Orange County landfill. Their most abundant bird was Dark-eyed Junco (315); on the overall count, Junco also came out on top (2089), followed by White-throated Sparrow (1394), then Ring-billed Gull.

Weather was much colder than average: Low 25 F, high 38 F, wind from the north at 5-10 mph, cloudy to clear, no precipitation, still water partly frozen. Effort: 38 observers in 22 field parties, 141.7 party hours (106 by foot, 35.7 by car), 373 party miles (84 by foot, 289 by car), 7.25 hours and 24 miles owling, 9 people and 16 hours watching feeders.

Full count results are available at the Christmas Bird Count web site.

<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>

Special thanks to Derb and Anne Carter for hosting the countdown party to end a great day of birding. And thanks to all counters - your efforts are appreciated!

N.C. Partners In Flight -- Annual Meeting

The yearly meeting of NC Partners In Flight will take place 9:30am - 4:30pm, March 23, at the Howell Woods Environmental Learning Center in Johnston County. If you are unfamiliar with this group here is an intro to PIF from their website:

"Partners in Flight was created in 1990, and is a dose of preventative medicine designed to save species and habitats before they become endangered. The goal of the program is to maintain populations of forest and grassland neotropical migratory birds, birds that breed in the United States and Canada then migrate to spend! winter in the tropics throughout the Americas. This important initiative brings together government and non-government agencies and organizations at the federal, state and local levels. It also includes dozens of universities and the forest products industry, as well as numerous Latin American participants. Biologists, educators and policy makers from all of these groups are working cooperatively to help keep migratory bird populations stable and conserve the breeding, wintering and migration habitats they use."

If this sounds like something you'd like to help with visit their website for more info:

<http://www.faculty.ncwc.edu/mbrooks/pif/>

or, contact Coordinator Mark Johns at:
johnsme@mindspring.com

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-- On Listing --

by Steve Shultz

The habit of keeping lists is a somewhat unique component of the birding world. Many other hobbies provide the hobbyist with something tangible, a collection of postal stamps or miniature trains for example. Birders, being in the business of collecting sightings instead of objects, have nothing to place in a box or store in the family curio cabinet. Of course one may need storage space for their gear, books, optics and the like, but these are only devices to bring us closer to the goal of birding... encountering and experiencing birds. Frequently lists are the tools used to capture sightings.

A birder's list (or in most cases lists) can perform many functions. Comparison of lists with other birders often leads to story swapping of particularly rewarding finds, tough misses, and all night drives to track down a rarity. On an individual basis, lists allow individuals to track their education and experience. In some cases birders may even be able to detect trends in bird populations by noting patterns of sighting over long time periods.

For whatever the purpose, most birders keep lists because they are fun. After all, birding is a hobby for many, not an occupation. If it's not rewarding why do it! Lists are fun for many reasons. Even the lowly cowbird slinking around my backyard is elevated to an almost (but not quite) respectable level when it represents another tick on the year list or an entry in the "birds seen at the birdbath when it's raining" list. "Now wait!", you may say, "That last list seems a little farfetched!" Maybe. Consider though that birders have been known to keep the following:

Birds seen while at sporting events

Birds identified by song while being used as background audio on TV

Birds seen while inside an aircraft (the birder not the bird)

Birds seen on wires

Birds seen while underwater (!)

Birds seen in dreams

Many birders are not quite this aggressive at listing, but some are. In addition to the diagnosed cases of "listitis" there are many, many undiagnosed persons happily birding their local patch without knowledge of their affliction.

How about you? You may wish to make a list of your lists (a symptom in and of itself, especially if it takes more than one sheet of paper) and see how you shake out. I currently have a state list for each state I visit, a life list, year list, monthly yard lists, a master yard list, an ABA list, and a list for the various foreign areas in which I have birded. Just keeping track of all the lists can require a list, this activity usually being a symptom of advanced listitis.

For me one thing is for sure, the New Year holiday is a lot more fun now that I am a birder. The chance to see every bird as a new opportunity and build a list from a clean slate fits nicely with the idea of a "new" year. Hope yours is filled with many rewards!

Ecuador Report

Dr. Helmut Mueller sent along the following report of a very successful Ecuador trip he and wife Nancy took, arranged by Ecuador tour agency Neblina Forest, with first-class accommodations. (For space reasons I've shortened Helmut's report but hopefully it will stimulate folks to come hear Tom Driscoll's presentation on Ecuador this month... without stealing too much of Tom's thunder.):

We were in Ecuador for three weeks in late November to mid-December 2004 and saw only a fraction of the country. Ecuador is slightly more than twice the size of North Carolina... rapid changes in

altitude provide for a very diverse avifauna... more than 1,600 species of birds occur in Ecuador. We flew into the capital city, Quito (9,360 feet elevation). First we went to Yanacocha where we saw 13 species of hummingbirds, including the Sword-billed (with a bill as long as the rest of the bird). We also caught a glimpse of an Ocellated Tapaculo, a spectacular very vocal but seldom seen bird... At Bellavista Lodge we found with our flashlights a Common Potoo, a large-headed distant relative of our Whip-poor-will, sitting on a stump. The following morning we saw Plate-billed Mountain Toucans, a Masked Trogon, and Andean and Sickle-winged Guans (distant relatives of pheasants) and the Booted Racket-Tail (a hummingbird with little "booties" and long outer tail feathers, narrowed to only the vane, but with "rackets" at the ends). We then spent three nights at Septimo Paraiso Lodge in Mindo, and it was like "seventh heaven."... At Volcan Antisana we had excellent views of Andean Condor, Aplomado Falcon, Cinereus Harrier, Andean Gull, Black-faced Ibis, and Ecuadorian Hillstar and Giant Hummingbirds. The following day we flew to Coco and took a 50 mile motorized canoe ride down the Napa River, a tributary of the Amazon, to Sacha Lodge in the Amazonian jungle... Highlights here were a long morning spent in a 140 feet high canopy tower built around an enormous kapok tree, visits to two "parrot licks" where thousands of parrots come to feed on clay (which neutralizes the acids in the fruit they consume). We saw 164 species, including Amazonian Umbrellabird, Great Potoo, Hoatzin, 4 Kite species, Bat Falcon, 8 species of parrots and 5 species of toucans.... At San Isidro, a lodge on the east slope of the Andes run by birders for birders... highlights included a Crested Quetzal, a number of Rufous-bellied Nighthawks at dawn, and an incredible scene of a male Torrent Duck with three small, downy offspring, all leaping on and off rocks into the raging stream, and finally settling down on a rock when the young crawled under him for brooding....

We saw a total of 520 species of birds including: 2 tinamous, 6 herons, 5 vultures, 14 hawks, etc., 3 caracaras, 4 falcons, 3 guans, etc., 4 rails, 14 pigeons and doves, 13 parrots, 7 cuckoos, etc., 7 swifts, 56 hummingbirds, 7 trogons, 4 kingfishers, 2 motmots, 5 jacamars, 4 puffbirds, 4 barbets, 11 toucans, 15 woodpeckers, 22 ovenbirds, 10 woodcreepers, 15 antbirds, 3 antpittas, 2 tapaculos, 69 flycatchers, 8 cotingas, 6 manakins, 4 jays, 5 vireos, 9 thrushes, 1 dipper, 9 swallows, 10 wrens, 10 warblers, 72 tanagers, 6 cardinals, etc., and 22 finches.

Our photos can be seen at: <http://www.pbase.com/helmutnc>

OLF -- Outlying Landing Folly

On Feb. 18, in a case that many *Bulletin* readers have followed, a Federal district judge stunningly ruled against the Navy (noting that it "acted capriciously and arbitrarily" in its environmental impact studies) regarding the Navy's plans to construct a practice outlying landing field (OLF) for pilot-training in eastern NC. With persistence and uhhh... simple rationality, an unusual coalition of environmental groups and eastern NC locals have successfully blocked the Navy's efforts for the moment, though the Navy plans to appeal the decision. Chapel Hillians Derb Carter (lawyer with the Southern Environmental Law Center) and Chris Canfield (Exec. Director of Audubon North Carolina) are among those at the forefront of this ongoing struggle, who believe far better/safer sites are available for the Navy's use. OUTSTANDING JOB guys.

Some Area Sightings



- Jan. 31 -- 2 Ravens** reported at Horace Williams Airport in Chapel Hill; seen again in same area on Feb. 6.
- In Feb.** an unusual overwintering **Great Egret** continued to be seen at West Lake Pond in Raleigh, and an apparently overwintering **Spotted Sandpiper** was observed at Lake Crabtree Park in Cary.
- Feb. 8 --** Clyde Smith hears a **Fish Crow** in his Raleigh neighborhood (by end of month they were much more prevalent).
- Feb. 18 --** Mike Skakuj has a female **Cape May Warbler** at his feeders. also Feb. 18, Lena Gallitano reports a remarkable **3 Rufous Hummingbirds** and at least **14 Baltimore Orioles** through the winter months in her Raleigh backyard.
- Feb. 19 --** G. Gordon Brown spots a **Little Gull** and an **Eared Grebe** off Ebenezer Pt. (Jordan L.).
- Feb. 20 --** G. Gordon Brown reports **2 Brewer's Blackbirds** at the NCSU Farm Pond in Raleigh, and Shelley Theye reports **12 Redheads** off Seaforth Recreation Area of Jordan L.
- Feb. 21 --** Clyde Sorenson sees a likely (brief look) female **Western Tanager** at his Raleigh backyard feeder.
- Feb. 26 --** An **Osprey**, **Red-throated Loon**, and several **Tree Swallows** were among the birds reported by Shantanu Phukan following an outing on Jordan Lake (with S.Shultz and W. Cook).

The Top Ten List of SILLIEST Dang Bird Names

(...with apologies to David Letterman)

- #10. Wagtail
- #9. Cuckoo
- #8. Hoopoe
- #7. Chuck-will's-widow
- #6. Bulbul
- #5. Ouzel
- #4. Bushtit
- #3. Cock-of-the-rock
- #2. Loon
- #1. Booby

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Visit the CHBC on the Web at:
www.duke.edu/~cwcook/chbc

Parting Words...

"Thanks to the Interstate Highway System, it is now possible to travel from coast to coast without ever seeing anything."

~ Charles Kuralt

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