

c/o R. Gluck, 451 Melanie Ct.
Chapel Hill, NC. 27514
thrush@hotmail.com



THE BULLETIN...
Chapel Hill Bird Club
May 2006
<http://chbc.carolinanature.com>

To :

Vol. 35

No. 5

>> Last Get-together of Year: Monday, May 22
-- Annual Potluck Picnic --

When/Where: ~ 6:30 pm., NC Botanical Garden,
off Hwy 15-501 in Chapel Hill (meet in parking lot)
(NOTE: NEW location from past several years)

Who/What: You, your friends, family, nieces, nephews, and Gene Sparling if we can get him (...just kidding), and a food dish to share. Also, please bring your own drink, plate, and utensils. A good time to be had by all, closing out another successful CHBC season. THANKS to all our officers, speakers, organizers, refreshment helpers, and loyal members for making it so.

This is also the occasion for voting on the new slate of officers for the CHBC season beginning next fall, which tentatively looks as follows:

- Pres. -- Ruth Roberson
- VP -- Karen Bearden
- VP -- Ginger Travis
- Secretary -- Amalie Tuffin
- Treasurer -- Patsy Bailey

THANKS to all who have stepped forth!

Ready For Some Popcorn and Soda

First there was "Winged Migration" and then "The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill," and "March of the Penguins." This season's film offering for birders may be "Hoot," just out, the story of three middle school students who save the homes of some Burrowing Owls in Florida from the big bad developers. Looks like a real crowd-pleaser for birders and the whole family alike.

>} *Thought for the Day* >} >} >}

"The earth I tread on is not a dead inert mass. It is a body, has a spirit, is organic, and fluid to the influence of its spirit, and to whatever particle of that spirit is in me."
~ Thoreau

Saturday Morning Field Trips

....are OVER for this season (occasional summer outings sometimes occur and are usually announced on 'Carolinabirds' or call Doug Shadwick if you want to be informed of any, 942-0479 -- otherwise, see you in late summer/fall).

For some alternatives, Cynthia Fox generally leads local birdwalks from her Eastgate Wild Bird Center every other Saturday at 8 am. And on the first Saturday of each month at 8:30 am there is a birdwalk at Lake Crabtree Park off Aviation Parkway.

Hints From Heloise... er, uh, Helmut

For all the dog and bird lovers out there, CHBC member Dr. Helmut Mueller offered this simple suggestion in a post to "Carolinabirds" last month:

"We have a German Shepherd who sheds copious amounts of hair. When we comb him, we place some of the hair next to our feeder in a large paper clamp, so that the wind does not blow it away. So far this spring, we have had Chickadees, Titmice & Carolina Wrens take hair for nesting material. It is fun to watch, and since the birds fly directly to their nests, it also helps in finding nests. If you don't have a dog, they also use human hair trimmings."

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

Many of you know Cynthia Fox as the proprietor of the Wild Bird Center in Eastgate Shopping Center, which just celebrated its 10th anniversary and which offers a wide variety of bird and nature-related items to its loyal customer base (including one of the widest selections of binoculars around locally). What you may NOT know about Cynthia is that she was once part of a dance group that performed the Viennese waltz on the White House portico as part of a National Geographic documentary! But hey, back to birds....

Cynthia grew up in Lexington, MA. where birds were an early part of her experience and her mother was an active bird feeder, including putting out cracked corn in the winter for pheasants, which Cynthia could watch and notes as her "first listing experience." She took up birding more seriously while living in Virginia in the 70's, and moved to N.C. in 1986.

Cynthia follows the Pete Dunne rule-of-thumb that the best bird is the one you're looking at now, and can't single out one species above others as a personal favorite. Similarly, she doesn't pinpoint one place as a favorite local birding spot, but enjoys several areas at different times, which she leads people to on bi-weekly Saturday morning birdwalks from her store. The Bynum Bridge in Chatham County is just one of her many favored destinations.

Among the worldly birds she would like to see at some point are Puffins, Murres, Dovekies, Ross's Gull, and Black Rail (good luck!).

When she's not birding or helping out customers Cynthia enjoys gardening and reading, and cites Kenn Kaufman's "Kingbird Highway" as a favorite and inspiring read.

One of her past birding thrills came one cold morning when a Carolina Wren hopped into her hand to take mealworms she was about to dispense and she briefly "experienced his sharp toenails and beak." Nice to know that even some of our most common birds can still move us deeply when we're lucky enough to experience them in such a direct 'hands-on' way.



Some April Sightings Highlights

4/9 - 6 White Pelicans seen flying over Jordan Lake by multiple birders out for an official Bald Eagle count (also, see 4/16 entry). Same day, R. Gluck reports a lone adult **Little Blue Heron** at the Horace Williams Tract in Chapel Hill.

4/11 - On the coast at Cape Hatteras a **Yellow-nosed Albatross** is reported near the same spot one was observed exactly one year earlier!

4/14 - S. Cash finds a **Yellow-throated Vireo** and **Great Egret** at Northeast Creek Impoundment.

4/15 - S. Shultz reports a number of **Caspian Terns** at Harris Lake in Wake County. And at Jordan Lake Gamelands, J.M. Lynch reports **Red-headed Woodpeckers, an Anhinga**, and now 72 Great Blue Heron nests!

4/16 - R. Davis spots 5 **White Pelicans** at Falls Lake.

4/20 - **Grasshopper Sparrows** and at least 1 **Warbling Vireo** reported by J. Phippen at Anilorac Farm on Dairyland Rd.

4/21 - Highlights of a 62-species day at Mason Farm for A. Kneidel were a **Brewster's** and a **Blue-winged Warbler** foraging together.

4/23 - N. Swick and N. Brit report an **Anhinga** and several **Worm-eating Warblers** at Yate's Mill Pond in Raleigh.

4/28 - Yet another **Anhinga** reported, this time by D. Kaplan in east Durham.



Our National Emblem

In the 1980's, a lone canoeist returned from an afternoon paddle on Jordan Lake to report seeing a Bald Eagle along a shoreline. Some didn't believe her, but it was true, and Bald Eagles were just one of the more magnificent of the new bird species that the man-made reservoir attracted to our area. Surveys and counts for our national bird were soon underway and the summer population of eagles rose to several dozen (more immatures than adults). It was only a matter of time before nesting took place.

This year there are 6 eagle nests around Jordan being monitored (by the time you get this, most or all chicks may have fledged). Additionally, there are 2 nests at Falls Lake and one at Lake Crabtree in Morrisville.

Osprey nests are even more common on our local lakes (including on man-made platforms placed there specially for them), and are sometimes confused with eagles by the uninitiated.

Down Memory Lane...

Speaking of Ospreys, they hold a special place in my childhood memories: Growing up in the 1950's in central Illinois my best friend and I were birders at a young age. On the first day of joining a Little League baseball team our coach naturally asked what the team name should be. One eager youngster piped up, "the

Homers,” and other team members chimed in, “yeah, yeah, let’s be the Homers” (...it didn’t have the ‘Simpsons’ connotation it would have today!). My friend Freddie said, “Wait, how about ‘the Ospreys,’ and everyone... except me, looked at him and said, “huhhh, the WHAAAT!?” as Freddie tried unsuccessfully to explain what an Osprey was. The coach said it was time to go home but we would vote on the team name the following week. At that next meeting, Freddie brought along a vibrant Louis Agassiz Fuertes print of an Osprey in flight carrying a fish in its talons, and after much oohing-and-ahhing we voted. Needless to say, for the next three winning seasons we were the Fairview Park Ospreys, which meant little to the other league teams, but a lot to Freddie and I!

(If you have a special memory/story from your childhood that relates to your interest in birds send it in. I’ll bet there are lots of interesting ones...)

Paddling Jordan...

The following information is synopsized from a fuller, more detailed piece written by our own Ginger Travis for the local “Community Sports News” publication (spring 2006 edition -- still available for free at several locations around Orange County, including the Public Libraries):

Ginger Travis began birding by canoe and kayak about a decade ago and appropriately writes, “any day on the water beats a day at the desk!” From her experience, she offers the following “Top 5” birding/boating spots around Lake Jordan:

Most beautiful “hands down”: the Haw River at Robeson Creek canoe access, with rock outcroppings and rich deciduous woods on shore; especially good for spring warblers. Off Hanks Chapel Rd. (SR 1943) 1 mile south of Dee Farrell Rd. (SR 1944).

Quietist (no motorboats allowed): Weaver Creek (south side of Pea Ridge Rd.; access from SR 1008); good for beginning kayakers and good for “peace, quiet, and privacy;” nice variety of birds as well, including nesting Ospreys.

Quickest (for an after-work paddle): Bush Creek; small arm of lake northwest of Farrington Point boat ramps on SR 1008. Relatively close to Chapel Hill. Ends in a small bay next to Lystra Rd. where Prothonotary Warblers and Green Herons breed.

Ginger’s favorite: White Oak Creek; 2.5 mile-long lake arm on SR 1008 south of Bell’s Baptist Church

(landmark: fishing pier); Ginger routinely gets 50-60 bird species on the spring bird count here.

Best for seeing eagles and good overall: north end of lake up to Morgan/New Hope Creeks; access at Farrington Point boat ramps on SR 1008. As Ginger says, no matter how many times she sees them, she “never gets over the majesty of an adult Bald Eagle.” And summer droughts may create ideal conditions here for migrating waders and shorebirds as well.

These sites are all written up in more detail in Will Cook’s Triangle Birding Guide on the Web below (or in the CSN issue referenced earlier):

<http://tbg.carolinanature.com/jlcanoe.html>

also, see more information about Jordan Lake at:

<http://ils.unc.edu/parkproject/visit/jord/home.html>

or, for more info/detail contact Ginger at:

ginger_travis@bellsouth.net or ph. 942-7746

Happy summer paddling!

Attention, Bird Voyeurs

The internet has brought more information and knowledge to the fingertips of the masses than we could’ve imagined a few decades ago. One of the most delightful and exciting developments for birders has been the proliferation of live webcams focussed on the family habits of a variety of nesting birds worldwide (often cavity-nesting species little witnessed before, and sometimes in real-time). Cornell Lab of Ornithology links to several such nest cams on their site:

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse/nestboxcam/>

or, for a more extensive listing of sites, see:

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dziadosz>

(If there is a particular species you’re interested in viewing I suggest you type in either “nest cam” or “bird cam” into a search engine and add “+ _____”, filling the blank in with the species of interest).

....and I’ll warn you ahead of time, some of these sites can be downright addictive!

Book Looks

A new practical book recently out is **The Audubon Society Guide To Attracting Birds** by Stephen Kress. There are many similar volumes available on how to make your yard bird-friendly, but this appears

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to be an especially comprehensive guide on such topics as plantings and landscaping, bird boxes and nest sites, bird baths, and of course bird-feeding, for luring our feathered friends into our own domain.

And for fans of Laura Erickson's work, her latest book (which she calls her "*magnum opus*"), **101 Ways To Help Birds**, is now out detailing how our human actions can help out both individual birds and/or bird populations.

Finally, **Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion** is newly out. It is supposed to be an adjunct to other field guides, focussing on bird identification through GISS (general impression of size and shape) and behavioral cues, and no doubt a lot of birders will want to add it to their libraries as a reference. But it is too thick for easy use in the field and much of the information does overlap customary field guides. Moreover, UNlike what we've become accustomed to, the volume has NO pictures whatsoever(!), and though I like Pete Dunne a lot it's probably not a volume that will have a really broad audience.

..... The Ivory-bill Update???

Soon Cornell is supposed to produce a summary report on the 2005-6 search season for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in the Big Woods of Arkansas assessing the various sight and sound records collected, but so far as we know, lacking any stronger glossy photographic or video evidence to convince skeptics. And so the Ivory-bill debate continues.

..... -- Avian Research --

Though often-maligned, the European Starling has long been known to be among the most intelligent of birds, and new research from the Univ. of Calif. at San Diego (published in *Nature*) recently gives further indication. "Recursive center-embedding," involving creating new sentences by inserting words or clauses into other sentences, is a grammatical feature which many linguists believed was unique to humans -- examples: "Bob is a top-notch birder," "Bob, who saw a Yellow-breasted Woo-Woo bird, is a top-notch birder," "Bob, who saw a Yellow-breasted Woo-Woo bird while out walking his dog Fido on a sunny afternoon, is a top-notch birder," etc.

Researchers (led by Timothy Gentner) cut and spliced starling songs in a manner to replicate this grammatical feature and then were able to teach starlings to recognize songs that were formed in this way (vs. songs that were jumbled more randomly). If starlings can learn certain simple grammatical rules, possibly the underlying neural features that allow humans to learn language are not unique to our species.

~~ Membership Form ~~

Name _____

Address _____

ph _____

email _____

new member: ____ or, RENEWAL: ____

dues: \$15/yr. individuals/family, \$10/yr. students
send checks payable to Chapel Hill Bird Club to:

**Ruth Roberson, 38 Stoneridge Pl., Durham, NC.
27705**

CHBC Contacts (ph., email) :

- >President: *Joe Bearden*, 884-9050, chickadeebirders@earthlink.net
- >Vice-Pres.(RDU): *Karen Bearden*, 884-9050,
chickadeebirders@earthlink.net
- >Vice-Pres. (Chapel Hill): *Judy Murray*, 942-2985,
jmurray@unc.edu
- >Secretary: *Amalie Tuffin*, 641-8072, amaliat@post.harvard.edu
- >Treasurer: *Ruth Roberson*, 489-4888, ruth-roberson@nc.rr.com
- >Field Trip Chairman: *Doug Shadwick*, 942-0479,
dougshadwick@aol.com
- >Refreshments Chair: *Karen Piplani*, 929-6553,
k_piplani@alumni.unc.edu
- >CHBC webmaster, checklist, and CH Xmas count compiler:
Will Cook, 382-9134, cwcook@duke.edu
- >Newsletter Editor: *Rob Gluck*, 967-3134, thrush@hotmail.com

Will Cook's homepage is an excellent general source of birding and nature-related links/resources (and also the place to learn about 'Carolinabirds' internet listserv group):

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

.....
~~ With Bird Club activity winding down, this will be the last newsletter edition until August or September.
Have a great summer all! ~~

..... Parting Words...

"A bad day birding is better than any good day at work..."



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