

Chapel Hill Bird Club

Bulletin

Vol 40, No 4; April 2012

<http://chbc.carolinanature.com>

Next Meeting:
Monday, 23 April 2012

Dr Margaret Lowman
"Canopy Towers and Walkways"

Do you love canopy walkways and towers? Dr Lowman of NCSU is a tropical rainforest canopy biologist. She is also director of the Nature Research Center at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences and Research Professor at North Carolina State University. "Canopy Meg" will discuss canopy walkways including the ACEER walkway in Peru, the world's longest.

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

Saturday Field Trips Trips are led by Doug Shadwick and depart from Glen Lennox Shopping Center

parking lot off HWY 54 promptly at 7:30 Saturday mornings. All skills are welcome. Trips are usually over by noon. Dress for the weather and for walking. Details? call Doug at 942-0479. It's useful to call Doug the night before in case the trip is not a local one and leaves from another location.

Chatham County Fall Bird Count
Will Cook

The mudflats at Jordan Lake and the outstanding numbers of shorebirds lured by the mudflats helped make the 15th annual Chatham County Fall Migration Count on 9/17/2011 one of our best counts ever. The cool, cloudy, drizzly weather also kept landbirds active all day and we had a great count for warblers and thrushes. The lake level was 213.2 feet above sea level, 3.0 feet below average for the count, so there were plenty of mudflats (they begin to appear at about 214 feet) and shorebirds. Shorebird numbers and diversity on this count were only surpassed by the 2007 and 2009 counts, which

not coincidentally were the only counts with a lower lake level.

We ended up with our third best tally, 122 species, far above the average of 104.2 and only 8 below the record mark of 130 on the 2009 count. Observer effort was a low 51.5 party-hours (average 67.6), but because birding was outstanding, with a the record high 97.6 birds per party-hour (average 54.6), we counted a high total of 5026 individual birds (average 3610).

The mudflats drew in huge numbers of shorebirds (11 species, 850 individuals), but with only a few rarities. The boldface highlight was our first American Avocet, which graced the New Hope Creek mudflats and was enjoyed by Jeff Phippen's and Will Cook's teams. One other species was new to the count: a Gray-cheeked Thrush found by Andrew Thornton at the White Pines Nature Preserve in southern Chatham. This is an overdue addition, but more common a little later in the season.

We had our second count record of Wood Storks, with 13 found by Peter Perlman at the 751 bridge mudflats the week before the count and 8 seen on count day. An even larger group of over 50 Wood Storks has been seen this fall at nearby Falls Lake. Also second for the count: Snowy Egret (Phippen, Cook), Peregrine Falcon (Cook, Phippen), Bank Swallow (Cook, Phil Warren), Barn Swallow (Cook, Thornton, Warren), and Prothonotary Warbler (Thornton). Three rarities seem to pop up only in big mudflats years - new to the

count in 2007, made another appearance in 2009, and found again in 2011: Merlin (Phippen, Thornton), Black-bellied Plover (Phippen, Cook), and Marsh Wren (Cook). Other goodies found on the count include Black Terns, Eastern Kingbird, Tree Swallow, Worm-eating Warbler, Canada Warbler, and Yellow-breasted Chat.

We set a great number of record highs, as we often do in mudflats years: 146 Mallard (average 26), 18 Wild Turkey (5), 180 Great Blue Heron (68), 308 Great Egret (121), 4 Snowy Egret (0.1), 8 Wood Stork (0.3), 2 Peregrine Falcon (0.1), 18 Sanderling (1.9), 345 Least Sandpiper (27), 42 Eastern Phoebe (18), 23 Tree Swallow (0.4), 21 Bank Swallow (0.1), 61 Barn Swallow (1.3), 12 Swainson's Thrush (2), 16 Wood Thrush (5), 24 Northern Parula (13), 7 Cape May Warbler (2), 138 Chipping Sparrow (24).

One species set a record low this year: 2 Gray Catbird (14 average). There were no unexpected misses.

Shorebirds covered the New Hope Creek and Northeast Creek mudflats: this year's 851 individuals in second only to 940 in 2007 and well above the average 171. Diversity was not as great -- though 12 species is well above the average 7, it doesn't approach the record 20 in 2007. Warblers had a fantastic showing, with a record high 24 species (average 18). Overall warbler numbers were normal, with 359 individuals (average 336), but subtracting the Pine Warblers better reveals the

migrant warbler picture: 203 non-Pines (average 131), our best since 1999.

Highest counts: the team of Will Cook, Carl Rothfels, and Peter Perlman, covering the mudflats both east and west of the NC 751 bridge, came in first in both species (90, the highest team total in the history of the count, surpassing by 1 the total for the same area 2 years ago) and individuals (1645). Andrew Thornton, covering White Pines, Vista Point, Seaforth, and Town Lake Park, came in second for species with 72; Jeff Pippen's party of 4 came in second for individuals with 1230.

Effort: 13 counters in 7 parties; 51.5 party hours (44.25 on foot, 7.25 by car); 134.75 party miles (29.75 on foot, 105 by car). Owling 2.5 hours and 12.1 miles.

Weather: temperature 56-61° F, wind NNE 5-10 mph. Light rain, overcast. Lake level 213.2 feet.

Thanks for all your help, counters – it was a great day!

Can't Beat Birding by Boat! Ginger Travis

On April 3, a beautiful day – sunny and low 70s, not too much wind – I went out to Jordan Lake with a kayak to check on an eagle's nest that I have been monitoring for the Corps of Engineers (several CHBC members are eagle monitors). It was a great day for eagles! As I drove into the Farrington Point parking lot, an immature eagle flew

over. And in a nice bit of symmetry, another immature flew over the parking lot 5 hours later as I was leaving!

As I paddled north along the lefthand (west) side of the lake, I soon started to see eagles perched in the shoreline pines. Two adults and four youngsters flew out of the pines as I went by, and two more youngsters sat tight in the trees. One of the adults, seen through binoculars, seemed to have the streaky crown and dark tail band of a "first plumage adult" in Clark and Wheeler's *Photographic Guide to North American Raptors*. Exciting to see. And one immature bird that I followed with my binoculars circled low over the water, then gently dipped down and snagged a really big fish! The fish dangled from one foot as the eagle flew 25 yards, then dropped its prey. The youngster circled back round, dipped down again, and pulled up the same or another fish! And immediately dropped this one as well. And gave up and flew away. Eyes bigger than claws?

The nest I'm monitoring is the fifth one I've been assigned since 2005. It is also by far best hidden and most difficult to view, and it is all but impossible to reach on foot. So on this trip I took a scope with me and then looked for a spot where I could see at least part of the nest through the branches of the nest tree and the leaves of other trees in my line of sight. Not much luck. I saw only one adult flying by in a way that suggested it was still guarding the site. I'll go back and try again this weekend!

Since 1999 when I started doing bird counts by kayak, a lot of other birders have figured out that a kayak is an easy way to see great birds up close – Prothonotary Warblers and Eastern Kingbirds, Red-headed Woodpeckers and tons of other cavity nesters, and under-counted species such as King Rail. And don't forget sandpipers! For instance, in mid-August every year Dave Lenat paddles up to the Falls Lake mudflats at I-85. He's looking for – and often finds – such gems as Baird's, White-rumped, and Buff-breasted Sandpipers, in addition to the more common species. He posts his finds on the Carolinabirds listserve. Other birders go up in their kayaks too; Mark Kosiewski saw Wood Storks and a Black Tern in the same area of Falls last August. I'm sure they'd agree that paddling sure beats foot-slogging along a muddy shore!



A kayak will get you into habitat where you'd never want to walk. The water here, at the north end of Jordan Lake, ranges from a couple of inches to a foot deep, with a malodorous mud bottom. Lots of birds in those trees, though!

I'd encourage anyone to give birding-by-kayak a try. Paddling a boat is a great way to relax – to empty your mind and open up your

senses and enjoy nature. There's always something interesting out there on the water and occasionally something rare.

Don't get hung up on what kind of kayak. Any boat will do. In fact, some of the area lakes provide canoes for rent. University Lake in Chapel Hill rents both canoes and rowboats – and there are King Rails at the south end of the lake just waiting to be heard and counted! (ULake was my first patch before I moved on to Jordan. I loved it there.)

If you decide to get yourself a small kayak – a plastic rec boat, an inflatable, or a folder – or even a solo canoe, here are some tips for safe, happy birding.

- Wear your life vest. Carry a whistle or horn. Not many people know that the Coast Guard requires you to have a sound-producing device with you in addition to a lifevest.
- I strongly recommend that you tie your binoculars to your boat or to your life vest. I have dropped my bins overboard twice – once in the Everglades and once at Jordan – and fortunately was able to fish them out again by the line that secured them. (For convenience I like to carry my binoculars stuffed into the top of my life vest. A safer alternative would be to carry them in a deck bag with a line tied to the kayak's perimeter line or bungees. I do wear a sheathed knife on my life

vest to deal with the possibility of entanglement.)

- Check the weather, for example on WRAL, one last time before you leave home. You want to know what the wind forecast is. If you're a beginner, 10 mph should be your limit. Even if you're an accomplished paddler, it's pretty hard to bird in a lot of wind and not much fun. If you do find you enjoy paddling, teach yourself the Beaufort scale for estimating wind force by eye. (See Wikipedia for a good description.)
- Finally, for safety's sake be aware of water temperature and dress properly in case you get wet. There's a lot of info online about what to wear – too much to discuss here. Hypothermia isn't a threat at Jordan Lake in summer, when the water temperature reaches 88 degrees. But in spring and fall – and in winter for sure – hypothermia is something you should understand and know how to avoid. (Try <http://epcc.saw.usace.army.mil/bejrept.txt> to reach the Corps of Engineers' automated web site for Jordan Lake.)

Local lakes, beaver impoundments, fresh and saltwater marshes, black-water creeks and slow brownwater rivers, cypress swamps – don't these sound great? Borrow or rent a paddle craft and give them a try! I hope you have fun.

Book Review

Jonathan Trouern-Trend *Birding Babylon: A Soldier's Journal from Iraq*. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 2006

This little book (79 pages) was given to me by Jon Rouse (who "hosted" the Mountain Bluebird in Fayetteville). It is a reformat of the author's blog from Iraq and Kuwait starting in 2004. Many of you will be familiar with that blog. The author, a National Guardsman, birded places much in the news like Fallujah and Mosul as well as places of historical interest – Babylon, Ur, the great rivers Tigris and Euphrates. But mostly he birded mundane places like the laundry pond and dump associated with his base. He birded on foot, from a helicopter, from a Humvee (often in a convoy with no chance to stop. On one occasion the helicopter in which he was a riding hit a bird, a Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, which of course didn't survive the event. He did not see a living (i.e. countable) one in spite of searching for it.

While he saw 122 species of birds in Iraq and Kuwait, he also mentions non-avian species and is a good all round naturalist. But perhaps most remarkable is the sense of serenity that this personal journal conveys. Though he mentions having to bird in body armour and helmet, and juggling binoculars with weaponry, he birded through it all and I have to believe that it contributed in no small way to his wellbeing and psychic survival.

Read a good book about birds or birding recently? Share it with CHBC Bulletin readers in a book review of (almost) any length. E-mail it to me and it will appear in print as soon as there is space. It may be edited.

Don't forget!



The Next Meeting (last before summer break)

21 May: Tom & Barbara Driscoll
"Birding Australia".

Chapel Hill Bird Club Officers

President: David Smith,
davidjudysmith@frontier.com

Vice President: Judy Smith,
davidjudysmith@frontier.com

Vice President: Thierry Besançon,
thi.besancon@gmail.com

Secretary: Edith Tatum,
ektatum@nc.rr.com

Treasurer: Patsy Bailey,
pbailey_489@yahoo.com; 919 933
5850

Field Trip Coordinator: Doug
Shadwick,
dougshadwick@nc.rr.com

Webmaster: Will Cook,
cwcook@duke.edu

Bulletin Editor: Judith Fortney,
jafortney1@aol.com,

2011 TRIANGLE AREA FALL BIRD COUNTS

9/17

— Chatham County observer parties —

Species	FL	KL	CC	ovlp	notes	WC	NF	JP	ATh	ATu	AU	PW
Canada Goose			141	48		57	34	49			1	48
Wood Duck			20			7	10		3			
Mallard			146	20	H	42	49	75				
Blue-winged Teal			48	6		37	11	6				
Wild Turkey			18		H	2			3		1	12
Northern Bobwhite			0									
WOOD STORK			8		R,H	8						
Double-crested Cormorant			91			60	12	10	2	1		6
Great Blue Heron			180	24	H	39	15	60	9	2	1	78
Great Egret			308	130	H	185	6	168	3	8		68
Snowy Egret			4	4	R,H	4		4				
Green Heron			1						1			
Black Vulture			48	2		2		6	4	24	3	11
Turkey Vulture			59			2	1		33	6	2	15
Osprey			23		H	1	4	5	9	4		
Bald Eagle 15 ad., 20 imm.			35	3		8	7	3	10	2		8
Sharp-shinned Hawk			2			1	1					
Cooper's Hawk			1			1						
Red-shouldered Hawk			16			5	3	1	3	1	2	1
Broad-winged Hawk			0									
Red-tailed Hawk			3			1		1	1			
American Kestrel			3					2				1
Merlin			2		R,H			1	1			
Peregrine Falcon			2		R,H	1		1				
Black-bellied Plover			1	1	R	1		1				
Semipalmated Plover			10					10				
Killdeer			160			70	6	75				9
AMERICAN AVOCET			1	1	NC	1		1				
Greater Yellowlegs			62			21		41				
Lesser Yellowlegs			150			150						
Solitary Sandpiper			1			1						
Spotted Sandpiper			0									
Sanderling			18		H	12		6				
Semipalmated Sandpiper			25			5		20				
Western Sandpiper			0									
Least Sandpiper			345		H	285		60				
White-rumped Sandpiper												
Pectoral Sandpiper			77			57		20				
Wilson's Snipe			1					1				
<i>sandpiper, sp.</i>			0	200				200				
Ring-billed Gull			1				1					
Black Tern			3	1		3		1				
Caspian Tern			5	2		2		5				
Rock Pigeon			19						4		15	
Mourning Dove			111			10	14	13	7	20	26	21
Yellow-billed Cuckoo			2						1		1	
Eastern Screech-Owl			2									2
Great Horned Owl			0									
Barred Owl			4			1					2	1
Whip-poor-will			0									
Chimney Swift			111			75		6	30			
Ruby-throated Hummingbird			15							1	8	6
Belted Kingfisher			14			2	2	2	5	2		1
Red-headed Woodpecker			27			14	4	4				5
Red-bellied Woodpecker			43			4	13	3	13	5	3	2
Downy Woodpecker			46			6	14	4	17	1	2	2
Hairy Woodpecker			10			1	7		1	1		
Northern Flicker			20			4	5	4	5	1		1
Pileated Woodpecker			15			3	5		3	1	2	1
Eastern Wood-Pewee			17			3	5	2	4	1	2	
Acadian Flycatcher			2						2			
Eastern Phoebe			42		H	8	7	12	4	3	2	6
Eastern Kingbird			2			1						1
Great Crested Flycatcher			1							1		
White-eyed Vireo			11			3	2		1	2	2	1
Blue-headed Vireo			1						1			
Yellow-throated Vireo			0									
Red-eyed Vireo			15			6	4	1	3	1		

2011 TRIANGLE AREA FALL BIRD COUNTS

9/17

— Chatham County observer parties —

Species	FL	KL	CC	ovlp	notes	WC	NF	JP	ATh	ATu	AU	PW
Blue Jay			92			3	19	12	26	13	15	4
American Crow			365			65	27	160	32	23	25	33
Fish Crow			31			3		26				2
Tree Swallow			23		R,H	2						21
Bank Swallow			21		R,H	20						1
Barn Swallow			61		H	5			1			55
Carolina Chickadee			154			23	32	12	57	11	11	8
Tufted Titmouse			159			17	38	6	69	8	8	13
White-breasted Nuthatch			34			7	3	2	13	5	2	2
Brown-headed Nuthatch			56			11	23	7	5	3		7
Carolina Wren			125			34	29	10	39	7	2	4
House Wren			2			1	1					
Marsh Wren			2		R,H	2						
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher			43			6	19	4	9	4		1
Ruby-crowned Kinglet			0									
Eastern Bluebird			116			12	11	12	30	9	4	38
Veery			4						4			
Gray-checked Thrush			1		NC				1			
Swainson's Thrush			12		H				12			
Wood Thrush			16		H			1	14		1	
American Robin			5					3	2			
Gray Catbird			2		L				1	1		
Northern Mockingbird			23			5	2	2			10	4
Brown Thrasher			16			7	5	1	2			1
European Starling			84			25	12					47
Cedar Waxwing			0									
Ovenbird			3			1			2			
Worm-eating Warbler			1				1					
Northern Waterthrush			10			6	1	2	1			
Blue-winged Warbler			1			1						
Black-and-white Warbler			27			4	9		11	3		
Prothonotary Warbler			1		R				1			
Tennessee Warbler			6			1		2	3			
Common Yellowthroat			19			2	4	8	4			1
Hooded Warbler			3						3			
American Redstart			40			8	12	1	12	7		
Cape May Warbler			7		H	2	3	1	1			
Northern Parula			24		H	4	8		9	2	1	
Magnolia Warbler			10			3		2	2	2		1
Blackburnian Warbler			5				3			2		
Yellow Warbler			1								1	
Chestnut-sided Warbler			2			1			1			
Black-throated Blue Warbler			3				1		2			
Palm Warbler			31			8	1	16	6			
Black-throated Green Warbler			1				1					
Pine Warbler			156			20	28	28	59	15		6
Yellow-throated Warbler			1						1			
Prairie Warbler			4		H	2	1		1			
Canada Warbler			1		R	1						
Yellow-breasted Chat			2							2		
Summer Tanager			15			3	2	2	6		2	
Scarlet Tanager			6			1			5			
Eastern Towhee			23			4	3	8	1	4	1	2
Song Sparrow			0									
Chipping Sparrow			138		H		5		48	25	6	54
Field Sparrow			2							2		
Northern Cardinal			209			31	51	16	51	24	25	11
Rose-breasted Grosbeak			4			1	1		1		1	
Blue Grosbeak			19			15	1		3			
Indigo Bunting			122			40	4		14	64		
Bobolink			0									
Red-winged Blackbird			10			10						
Eastern Meadowlark			0									
Common Grackle			11			10		1				
Brown-headed Cowbird			0									
Baltimore Oriole			1			1						
House Finch			18				12				4	2
American Goldfinch			88			5	2	1	1	50	16	13

2011 TRIANGLE AREA FALL BIRD COUNTS

9/17

— Chatham County observer parties —

Species	FL	KL	CC	ovlp	notes	WC	NF	JP	ATh	ATu	AU	PW
House Sparrow			5								5	
TOTAL SPECIES	0	0	122			90	61	65	72	44	36	48
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	0	0	5026	442		1645	617	1230	749	374	215	638

CC = Chatham County fall bird count totals, FL = Falls Lake, KL = Kerr Lake
 Weather: temp 56-61F, wind NNE 5-10 mph, light rain, overcast, lake level 213.2'
 Notes: H = Record High, L = Record Low, NC = New to Count, R = Rare

ovlp = estimated overlap (birds counted by 2 parties)

Start			600			720	715	800	600	800	630	600
End			1730			1630	1555	1530	1645	1045	1730	1530
Parties			7			1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Individuals			13			3	1	4	1	1	2	1
Regular Party Hours: Total	0	0	51.5			9	8.5	7	9.75	2.75	6	8.5
Party Hours: On Foot			44.25			9	7	7	8.5	2.75	3	7
Party Hours: By Car			7.25			0	1.5		1.25		3	1.5
Party Hours: By Boat			0									
Party Miles: Total	0	0	134.75			8	17	3	39	0.75	26	41
Party Miles: On Foot			29.75			8	5	3	6	0.75	1	6
Party Miles: By Car			105			0	12		33		25	35
Party Miles: By Boat			0									
Owling Hours			2.5						1		0.5	1
Owling Miles			12.1						0.1		2	10

Area

751 bridge, NH Creek mudflats
 Ebenezer Point, Tody Goodwin Road
 Old Hope Valley Farm Rd., NH Creek mudflats
 White Pines Preserve, Vista Point, Seaforth
 Big Woods Road
 Jay Shambley Rd, Rocky River, etc.
 Hank's Chapel Road, Morgan Creek mudflats

Party Party Members

WC Will Cook, Carl Rothfels, Peter Perlman
 NF Nick Flanders
 JP Jeff Pippen, Katie Rose Levin, Natalia Ocampo, Jameson Clarke
 ATh Andrew Thornton
 ATu Amalie Tuffin
 AU Andy Upshaw, Rouse Wilson
 PW Phil Warren

Shorebirds vs Lake Level

