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## Chapel Hill Bird Club Bulletin



Doug Pratt

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### Next Meeting: Monday, 28 April

**When/where:** 7:15 pm refreshments;  
7.30 pm meeting. The lounge, Olin T  
Binkley Baptist Church, corner of  
Highway 15-501 Bypass and Willow  
Drive, behind University Mall, Chapel  
Hill.

*April 28: Judy & David Smith:  
Birding Ethiopia.*

Ethiopia, that populous and ancient country in the horn of Africa, might not be top of your list of African birding destinations, but it is home to more than 30 endemic bird species, and several strange and beautiful endemic animals. The country's cultural history is also rich and distinctive and can't be ignored even on a birding trip. David and Judy Smith, our narrators of this tour of Ethiopia, have traveled to many parts of the world in search of birds, and they always return home with lots of photos. Join them for bee-eaters, sunbirds, turacos, hornbills

and weavers, as well as wolves, monkeys, and the Giant Root-rat.



Ethiopia's endemic Blue-winged Goose

### Saturday Field Trips

Trips are led by Doug Shadwick and depart from Glen Lennox Shopping Center parking lot off Highway 54 promptly at 7.30 every Saturday morning. All skill levels are welcome. Trips are usually over by noon. Dress for the weather and for walking. Details? Call Doug at 919 942 0479. Call Doug the night before

in case the trip is not local and leaves from another location.

**Welcome New Members!** 

Kara Reichart, Nicolette Cagle.  
both of Durham

## Woodcroft's Vulture Roost

In the late afternoon I like to take a pleasant loop walk among Woodcroft's many walking/biking trails. Woodcroft is a large subdivision in southwest Durham. When I'm a bit later than usual and the light is beginning to fade I notice vultures circling near the swimming and tennis area. There are many tall pines around and also a string of pylons some with cell phone gizmos on them. The birds circle for quite a long time and then begin to settle on one particular pylon. Later arriving birds may have to be quite pushy to find a space – sometimes the early birds shuffle over and make room, sometimes they stand their ground and won't let late arrivals perch; sometimes they get pushed off and then have to find space themselves. Late arrivals may have to go to another pylon, but the pylon nearest the tennis courts is clearly the most desirable space (do vultures enjoy watching tennis?). It is a mixed flock of Turkey and Black Vultures and there are often more than 50 birds cheek by jowl on the topmost perches. Lower perches appear to be less appealing.

Why do some birds roost together? Why is one roost preferable to another? Who gets priority for the

best spots? What are the best spots? Most of these questions will remain unanswered in spite of a little research on roosting behavior.

There are, of course, several theories. *Thermal regulation*: birds keep warm by huddling together.

*Decrease in predation*, at least for individual birds.

*Increase in foraging efficiency* by spending the night as close as possible to good forage (clearly not true for vultures whose "forage" is unpredictable).

Guy Beauchamp<sup>1</sup>, using many taxa of birds and logistic regression analysis, examined the *evolutionary* importance of these benefits. And concluded that there was little evidence to support them. He found, for example, that larger birds (needing less thermal assistance) are more likely to roost communally; but on the other hand, birds in colder places are also more likely to do so – think penguins, but also think parrots which are largish, don't live in cold places yet roost communally.

Corvids are particularly likely to have communal roosts, especially in wintertime (supporting the thermal regulation theory). Mark Cocker's book *Crow Country* describes rookeries that have been recorded in the same location for centuries – many recorded in Domesday Book a thousand years ago, are still there. Cocker's book is actually about Rooks and Jackdaws, but the word "crow" can be used for any corvid; even the Woodcroft vultures were once called common crows.

Birds tend to use the same flyways to commute to their rookery at

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<sup>1</sup> The evolution of communal roosting in birds: origin and secondary losses.. *Behavioral Ecology*, 1999, 10(6) 675-687.

sundown, and the Rooks arrive before the Jackdaws who roost lower in the tree. The size of roosts are greatest in the coldest months and disperse during the breeding season – though Rooks also have communal nesting sites.

Communal roosts are often seen as problems by humans, especially when they occur in urban areas. Noise, droppings and tree damage are the main problems. In Illinois in 1940, 328,000 roosting crows were killed ([www.crowbusters.com/facts.htm](http://www.crowbusters.com/facts.htm)), and 26,000 in 1937 in Oklahoma. The birds are now protected, but may still present a problem for some municipalities. No less an authority than J.J. Audubon reported that Passenger Pigeons roosted in such large numbers that they broke branches of the roosting trees, and many birds suffocated when others landed in great numbers on top of them.

It's hard not to anthropomorphize on this topic, but the phenomenon clearly needs more thought.

## Future Meetings

The vice presidents have enlisted a terrific cast of speakers for our monthly meetings this year. We meet the fourth Monday of most months – not in December or during the summer. The last speaker of this season is:

*May 19: **Brian Bockhahn:**  
Spectacular birds of NC  
state parks.*

More details in the next Bulletin.



Another of David Smith's lovely photos

## Officers of the Chapel Hill Bird Club

### *Elected Officers*

**President:** David Smith

([davidjudysmith@frontier.com](mailto:davidjudysmith@frontier.com))

**Vice President (Durham area):** Eddie Owens ([banjoman\\_57@yahoo.com](mailto:banjoman_57@yahoo.com))

**Vice President (Chapel Hill area):** Kent Fiala ([kent.fiala@gmail.com](mailto:kent.fiala@gmail.com))

**Treasurer:** Patricia Bailey ([pbailey\\_489@yahoo.com](mailto:pbailey_489@yahoo.com))

**Secretary:** Edith Tatum ([ektatum@nc.rr.com](mailto:ektatum@nc.rr.com))

### *Appointed Officers*

**Bird Count Supervisor/compiler:** Will Cook ([cwcook@duke.edu](mailto:cwcook@duke.edu))

**Field Trip Chairman:** Doug Shadwick ([dougshadwick@nc.rr.com](mailto:dougshadwick@nc.rr.com))

**Bulletin Editor:** Judith Fortney ([jafortney1@aol.com](mailto:jafortney1@aol.com))

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