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Doug Pratt

Chapel Hill Bird Club Bulletin

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Next Meeting: Monday, March 23

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.

Birds and Islands

Judith Fortney will discuss the importance of islands to birds, and not only seabirds. Though only a tiny fraction of the earth's land mass, islands account for a majority of avian and mammalian extinctions. Challenges include natural disasters as well as the usual suspects of introduced species, habitat loss, isolated populations and disease.

Saturday Field Trips

Rob Rybczynski leads field trips for the Chapel Hill Bird Club. The trips leave from Glen Lennox Shopping Center on Highway 54 in Chapel Hill at 7.30 Saturday mornings except for the summer hiatus. All skill levels are welcome. Trips usually end by

noon. If the trip is not local and/or leaves from another location, the change will be posted to CarolinaBirds (readable also at birding.aba.org/maillist/NzC) and at the Chapel Hill Bird Facebook page www.facebook.com/groups/chapelhillbirdclub/. For yearly schedules see <http://chbc.carolinanature.com/fieldtrips.html>). Need more details? Call Rob at 919 460 9383.

Welcome New Members!



Eric and Patrica Decker of
Durham

The Status of Doug's Bench



The bench is complete, the plaque is made (see above) but not yet attached. All that remains is to set a date for the unveiling. Watch this space for time and date.

Citizen Science

A few weeks ago CHBC President David Smith circulated a request for participation in a "citizen science" project. What is citizen science? A relatively recent term, the OED defines it as *scientific work undertaken by members of the general public with or under the direction of professional scientific institutions*. It also defines citizen scientist in a similar manner. A second definition of citizen scientist not wholly compatible with these definitions is *a scientist whose work is characterized by a sense of responsibility to serve the best interests of the wider community*.

Examples of citizen science range from Audubon Christmas Counts to SETI@Home which provides software to enable citizen scientists to hunt for signs of extra-terrestrial activity. Some projects involve data processing on a scale that would not be feasible without extensive unpaid labor.

Among birders, Cornell University is perhaps the best known institution to make widespread use of citizen-provided data. Its projects include The Christmas Count (in conjunction with Audubon and one of the oldest ventures of its kind), the Great Backyard Bird Count, Project Feeder Watch, Nest Watch and, of course, eBird. More than 60 scientific papers have been published using the collaboratively collected data. The numbers of impressive: eBird –

more than a million observations are reported each month: The 4-day GBBC got 97,331 checklists in 2010: 150,00+ nesting attempts were reported to Nest Watch since 1997: there are 80 million observations in the Avian Knowledge Network.

The vast majority of these data were collected with no scientific underpinnings – no stated hypothesis, no random selection of areas for observation, little evaluation of data quality. A project by the The Peregrine Fund did have a scientific basis for design – it examined the impact of abundance of food (small rodents), exposure to rodenticide and disease, and quality of habitat on randomly selected urban and rural habitats for Kestrel nesting boxes. The independent variables were % of occupancy of the boxes and nestling survival. For information go to peregrinefund.org

Other scientific areas that take advantage of citizen scientists are astronomy, lepidoptery, herpetology and climate. Citizen science is especially important in astronomy where many important discoveries have been made by amateurs.

There are clear limitations to citizen science. Observations are limited in distribution and are not randomized. For example, Christmas Counts occur in only a dozen or so North Carolina counties (out of 100) and occur only where there are willing observers. Accuracy of data is always in question. While eBird tries to confirm unusual sightings, it is as likely to reject true unusual sightings as it is to accept false ones.

Nevertheless, data collected by "untrained" citizens are often the only data available and are widely used by policy makers and "real" scientists alike.

Future Meetings

27 April 2015 – Lindsay Addison:
Audubon North Carolina Sanctuary
system)

18 May 2015 – Dave Gammon: Vocal
Mimicry in Northern Mockingbirds.

Officers of the Chapel Hill Bird Club

Elected Officers

President: David Smith

(davidjudysmith@frontier.com)

Vice President (Durham area): Eddie

Owens (banjoman_57@yahoo.com)

Vice President (Chapel Hill area):

Kent Fiala (kent.fiala@gmail.com)

Treasurer: Patricia Bailey

(pbailey_489@yahoo.com)

Secretary: Edith Tatum

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