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Doug Pratt

# Chapel Hill Bird Club Bulletin

November 2015

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## Next Meeting: Monday, November 23

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

Some members gather for dinner at the K&W Cafeteria (University Mall) at 6 pm before the meeting. Go to the back room after making your selection.

## November 23 Kent Fiala: *Birding in Northern Peru*

On a visit to Peru in October, 2014 we saw birds from the sublime to the ridiculous (Hoatzin to Marvelous Spatuletail) as well as two recently discovered species (the Scarlet-banded Barbet and the near mythical Long-whiskered Owlet) that have been seen by no more than a couple of hundred – at most – birders.

A birder since the age of 7, **Kent Fiala PhD** graduated from the University of Nebraska, and from the University of Michigan with a graduate degree in zoology. Kent edited *The Chat* for several years, and continues to edit the CBC website. He has led trips at Wings of Water since its beginning. He recently retired from SAS, giving him lots more birding time.

## Welcome New Members!



Suzanne Johnson of Carrboro  
Margaret Pennybacker of  
Chapel Hill

## Saturday Field Trips

Rob Rybczynski leads field trips for the Chapel Hill Bird Club. The trips are every Saturday – **except in the summer** – and leave from Glen Lennox Shopping Center on Highway 54 in Chapel Hill at 7.30 am.

## **A Book Review: J. A. Baker, *The Peregrine.***

The New York Review of Books, by permission of the original publisher (Harper Collins) 1967.

This is an old book and I'm not sure why it escaped my attention before. It is beautifully written and full of fascinating information about the peregrine. The book was published soon after Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, and Baker sadly notes the decline of peregrines – " . . . the traditional wintering places, remembered and revisited by dynasties of peregrines, deserted now because there are no descendants, because the ancient eyries are dying, their lineage gone."

The author is absolutely obsessed with these birds which are winter visitors in Britain. For many years he<sup>1</sup> kept a diary recounting almost every winter day spent following the peregrines in his patch, recognizing individual birds by sight and sound, examining and tabulating their kills, watching them hunt. He locates the peregrines by watching the behavior of other birds which stop what they doing and watch the sky when peregrines are around.

A peregrine, weighing only 1.5 - 2.5 lbs, can kill birds as large as mallards, pheasants or even Great Black-backed Gulls. Baker lived in southeast England where the most common prey of the peregrines was pigeons and gulls, accounting for more than half of all kills. He also describes a pair of peregrines harassing a heron until it disgorged

its fish – which the birds then failed to catch.

There is a gripping description of a kill – "He was a skimming black crescent . . . sending up a cloud of dunlin dense as a swarm of bees. With a sudden stab he was of the swirl and was chasing a solitary dunlin up into the sky. The dunlin seemed to come slowly back to the hawk. It passed into his dark outline, and did not re-appear. . . The hawk's foot reached out, and gripped, and squeezed, and quenched the dunlin's heart as effortlessly as a man's finger extinguishing an insect." The peregrine kills with his hind toe which bends forward and pierces the breast.

On a safer note, Baker describes a bird taking a bath, wading out into a stream, with wings extended above, until up to her shoulders in water, then dunking her head repeatedly and splashing around for ten minutes before waddling out with her feathers heavy with water.

A male peregrine is called a *tiercel*, and the female a *falcon*. It seems odd to read the words "a falcon peregrine". Who knew?

The book is filled with elegant prose: "Freedom" has become such a politically loaded word these days, so I especially enjoyed this . . . "You cannot know what freedom means till you have seen a peregrine loosed into the warm spring sky to roam at will through all the far provinces of light."

<p><b>Editor's Note:</b> This is my last issue. There is no Bulletin in December. Mary George will be the new editor starting in 2016.</p>
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<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps "she". There's actually no way to tell.

## Future Meetings

**December:** No meeting, Happy Holidays!

**January 25 Caren Cooper: Citizen Science and Stewardship: Birds & Beyond.** Birds as indicators of environmental health. Caren Cooper is an avian ecologist and relies on citizen science to help communities use birds as indicators of environmental health.

**February 22 Lynn Mosely: Return of the Eagles.** There were only 8 nesting pairs in the state in 1994. Mosely documented one pair for 22 years.

**March 28 Robbie Fearn: Pine Island Audubon Sanctuary – Preserving Paradise.** The critical balance between a nature center & an Important Bird Area.

**April 25 Jesse Birkhead: Conserving Breeding Habitat for Grassland Birds in a Changing Agricultural Landscape.** Native forage improves the delicate balance.

**May 16 David Smith: Birds of New Zealand and Tasmania.** From fabulous endangered endemics to horrible misguided introductions. Natural and unnatural selection have led to a precarious balance.

## 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:** Sue & Fred Schroeder  
(fschroeder@mindspring.com)

### *Appointed Officers*

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

**Field Trip Chairman:** Bob Rybczynski  
(squawk510@att.net)

**Bulletin Editor:** Mary George  
(mcgeorge44@gmail.com)

**Webmaster:** Will Cook  
(cwcook@duke.edu)

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