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<http://chbc.carolinanature.com>



Brown-headed Nuthatch by Doug Pratt

## Chapel Hill Bird Club Bulletin

April, 2016

Volume 45 No. 4

### Next Meeting

**Monday, April 25, 2016**

**Time and location:** 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, NC

Members and guests are welcome to gather for dinner at the K & W Cafeteria (University Mall) at 6 pm before the meeting. Go to the back room of the cafeteria to join the group after making your dinner selection.

**April 25, 2016 Program**  
**Conserving Breeding Habitat for Grassland Birds in a Changing Agricultural Landscape**  
**Speaker: Jessie Birckhead**

Jessie Birckhead, Conservation Coordinator for the NC Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, will discuss challenges facing grassland birds in agricultural landscapes and how the cattle industry can better accommodate breeding grassland birds by using native warm-season forages.

Birckhead's love of birding, which she took up while in high school and cemented on a high school graduation trip to the Galapagos, led her to the University of Tennessee where she received a Master's Degree in Wildlife Science. In her work at the Conservancy, she is known as the go-to person when it comes to identifying a snake or a bird, information that she usually follows with a birdcall or an interesting piece of trivia.

### Welcome New Members

Ellie and Tim Sullivan, Chapel Hill  
Ken Goldsmith and Ashley Overman-Goldsmith, Raleigh

### Spring Bird Counts

April 24 (Durham), May 1 (Jordan Lake), May 7 (Chapel Hill) and others. See <http://chbc.carolinanature.com/countsched.html> for more information.

# Sandy Creek: Trail Improvements Coming

by David Smith

Sandy Creek Park is one of the best birding spots in the city of Durham. It's located between Sandy Creek Drive and Pickett Road, near the Durham Academy Upper School. Although it's surrounded by homes and apartments and within earshot of US 15-501, it's a wetland oasis that attracts some great birds. Formerly a wastewater treatment plant serving Duke University, the site was used as wetlands mitigation for the construction of the Martin Luther King parkway twenty years ago and turned over to the Department of Parks and Recreation as a city park. In recent years, grants from the state and from Durham County, augmented by private donations and volunteer labor, have provided a new bridge across the creek, a wildlife observation platform, improved landscaping, and picnic facilities.

Now a new \$18,000 grant has been received from Durham County, administered by the Durham County Open Space and Trails Commission, that will, when enough matching money is raised, result in improvements to two trails: one goes from the bridge westward through the woods to the back parking lot of the Church of the Good Shepherd on Garrett Road; and the other trail continues past the observation deck, circling east and north of the main pond and back to the paved trail. One complication with this work is that parts of the park are within floodplain, floodway, and several conservation easements, and those areas have different requirements and

regulations that must be met, with associated higher costs. For example, in some parts of the trail, simple boardwalks might not be allowed, and the strict regulations may mean that professional trail builders, rather than volunteers, must be used. The bottom line is that the Friends of Sandy Creek will need to raise at least \$12,000 in cash in order to take advantage of the grant and complete the work



Observation platform at Sandy Creek Park  
Photo credit: David Smith



Snapping turtle  
Photo credit: David Smith

## Sandy Creek (continued)

If you have birded in Sandy Creek Park and seen for yourself both the great habitat that is there and also the opportunities for improvement, you might want to make a donation. You can send a check to the Durham Parks Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization, at  
Durham Parks Foundation  
c/o Durham Parks and Recreation  
400 Cleveland St.  
Durham, NC 27701.  
Be sure to designate your donation for Sandy Creek Park.

For more information, visit the website for the park  
(<http://www.sandycreekparkdurhamnc.com>).  
There you will find a checklist of the birds of the park, compiled by our own Kent Fiala. You can also check out the Facebook page for the Friends of Sandy Creek  
(<https://www.facebook.com/Friends-of-Sandy-Creek-Park-276128112404691>).



Tricolored Heron (seen in September 2015)  
Photo credit: David Smith

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## North Carolina State Parks Centennial

Throughout 2016, North Carolina's state parks system will celebrate its centennial. One of the nation's first state parks was created 100 years ago at the summit of Mount Mitchell, and since then, the system has grown to nearly a quarter-million acres set aside for conservation, recreation and education. Every state park will hold a special event to mark the centennial. To learn about centennial events at a park near you, go to <http://www.ncparks.gov/100/centennial-events>



## Spring Bird Counts by Kayak

Article and photo credits by Ginger Travis

I started birding in the mid-90s and in 1998 also bought my first kayak, a 10-foot plastic job. I loved it!

The 1999 Jordan Lake spring bird count was my first in the new kayak, and I had a sighting that hooked me: an immature Little Blue Heron in what my bird guide called "calico" plumage, white with patches of gray-blue coming in. (Who even knows what calico is anymore?!) Barbara Roth, then the count compiler, singled out my sighting for a long paragraph in her report on the Jordan count, and I swelled with pride like a little pufferfish.

Ever since, bird counts at Jordan have given purpose to my kayak trips there, averting some of the boredom of paddling the same old water.

I have seen several paddlers become birders. I'd love to see more birders become paddlers, to just get in a canoe or kayak and slowly poke around looking for birds. It's good for the soul and can add something valuable to bird counts, too.

So a few quick words about paddling safety and then about the rewards.

As paddlers we have choices that directly affect our safety. We choose our body of water (big, little, moving, still), we choose our equipment (including the life vest we ALWAYS wear), we choose our day by the weather, and we choose to learn what the risks are so we can mitigate them -- especially those of us who enjoy paddling alone.



2015 spring count: rest stop in the shade

(Cold water is THE great risk. Most fatal paddling accidents are capsizes in cold water. We can mitigate that risk by avoiding paddling when the water temperature is below 70 degrees -- roughly November through mid-April -- or by dressing for cold-water immersion in a wetsuit or dry suit.)

Safety-minded paddlers can start on a small, sheltered body of water. I am a very cautious paddler. I chose a pretty safe but birdy patch to learn my way around: University Lake in Chapel Hill. It and similar local reservoirs deserve to be birded much more often by boaters. I first heard a King Rail at University Lake. I learned that some birds like nesting near or over water, such as Eastern Kingbirds. Years later I did one Chapel Hill spring count on University Lake, and my count partner Marty McClelland spotted a hen Hooded Merganser with four babies paddling after her. Big rewards on small water!

## Spring Bird Counts (continued)

These days my local paddles are mostly at Jordan Lake. The Chapel Hill count circle includes the very birdy northernmost prong of Jordan where Morgan Creek flows in. So I do both the Chapel Hill and the Jordan Lake spring counts in my kayak at Jordan unless bad weather scares me off. Usually it's just sunny and hot.

In 2015 on the Chapel Hill count at Jordan I was alone for the first time in years, as my count partner, Marty, was out of town. Around noon, when we usually would be starting for home, I was tempted by high water to paddle a little way up into Morgan Creek. It's a maze of beaver dams and streamlets and willows up there, messy but birdy. I was sitting quietly in my boat when a bird flew over that seemed different -- buoyant in flight and rather falcon-shaped. It took me a minute of puzzlement until I got it: Mississippi Kite! The foraging kite flew circles nearby for a couple more long minutes while I got great looks with my binoculars. This species, also seen that day by David and Judy Smith on Big Woods Road, turned out to be a first for the count in 59 years, according to the compiler, Will Cook.

The other big thrill these past few years has been repeatedly hearing King Rails at Jordan along marshy edges. Marty and I have heard them calling from grass, from cattails, and from brushy spots with willow and buttonbush. This is a species not often reported on our local counts -- sometimes only by Marty and me -- so it feels special. (Norm Budnitz, the current Jordan count compiler, helped establish that the vocalizations we heard were, in fact, rails.)



Binoculars tied to boat and a peanut butter sandwich for lunch!

And, of course, on our Chapel Hill and Jordan counts there are always the eagles. And, scads of Prothonotary Warblers. And every few years a calling Common Loon. And once a Common Gallinule. You just never know!

Where can you go to find a quiet patch on the water? How about University Lake? Part of the lake is currently counted quite capably from legal spots on land such as the lake office lawn. But the great majority of the shoreline is closed to walkers and thus not visible -- except from the water. The lake has canoes, kayaks, and jonboats for rent. A fee is charged on-water users; it's less for Orange County residents, more for non-residents. Extra added attraction: a Bald Eagle has been frequenting the lake this spring.

## Spring Bird Counts (continued)

Jordan Lake also has some quiet corners that are promising for birders. I'm not talking bird counts here so much as just birding from a boat for pleasure. (For reference, normal lake level is 216 feet above mean sea level. I'd advise scouting any launch site on foot before the first time you commit yourself to carrying a boat to the water. Also a lake map is very handy.)

\*\*The small Weaver Creek arm of Jordan, south of Pea Ridge Road, is off-limits to motorboaters. Very nice!

\*\*Northeast Creek flows into a little bay on the east side of the Hwy 751 bridge; there is parking and access by a path just north of the bridge. You need high water, though, to get up Northeast Creek over beaver dams and deadfall. Note that Northeast Creek is outside the Jordan count circle.

\*\*A pretty spot is the Roberson Creek canoe access site with parking, at the end of a dirt road, off of Hanks Chapel Road. The put-in is just below the last rapid on the Haw River. (Avoid this spot in high water!) The lake here is fairly narrow and interesting to explore, though motorboaters from the Roberson Creek boat ramps (a separate access) can be present. Once I heard a Hooded Warbler singing near the canoe access parking lot.

\*\*Crosswinds Marina rents kayaks that could be used to explore the White Oak Creek lake arm. There is a lot of weekend motorboat traffic here, and it is open to the wind. The Farrington Point Road bridge next to the marina should have nesting Cliff Swallow nests by May 1.

If you go, have fun. Be careful. See birds!



2015 Jordan Lake spring count, up in the White Oak Creek marsh where the rails hang out

## Getting the nature photos you want

by Maria deBruyn

Many birders are more than happy to restrict the equipment they take on outings to binoculars and perhaps a field scope. Others enjoy taking along a camera to capture portraits of the birds they see or to document special finds – either to complement their eBird sightings or to ask for help identifying species.

The cameras vary from small point-and-shoot models to DSLR (digital single-lens reflex) cameras with multiple lenses to “bridge cameras”, that combine features of both. For example, bridge cameras have a fixed (non-interchangeable) zoom lens but allow you to set and change the shutter speed. Nowadays, more and more people are also using their phone cameras to get shots – and managing to get far-away birds by combining their phone and a scope.

Regardless of the equipment used, bird photographers can take courses, get instruction and seek feedback from other photographers to improve the photos they take. One way is to join a camera club where people comment on one another’s photos and/or enter photos in competitions to get feedback from judges. The clubs also may feature presentations by (semi-)professional photographers or hold their own mini-classes; the Chapel Hill Camera Club recently held one on phone photography, for example. Here are a few of the local camera clubs you can check out.

- Carolinas’ Nature Photographers Association: <http://www.cnpa.org/>
- Cary Photographic Artists: <http://www.caryphotographicartists.org/>
- Chapel Hill Camera Club: <http://www.chapelhillcameraclub.org/>
- Durham Photography Club at Duke Gardens:  
<https://www.facebook.com/Durham-Photography-Club-at-Duke-Gardens-159919810739435/timeline>

In addition to locally offered courses, there are online classes and workshops. Creative Live (<https://www.creativelive.com/>) courses can be pricy, but if you have time during the day, it’s possible to participate in one of their free workshops. I was able to view a class led by [Thomas Mangelsen](#) which was very instructive.

There are also commercial groups that offer free email newsletters with links to online tutorials on various aspects of nature photography, such as Nature TTL (<http://www.naturettl.com/>), dPS (<http://digital-photography-school.com/>) and Digital Camera World (<http://www.digitalcameraworld.com/category/beginners-guides/>).

Learning to look at your own photos more critically can also be useful. For example, you can pay attention to whether there is a branch or dark patch behind a bird’s head; moving to the side a bit can result in a clearer background. (People who do photo editing sometimes erase such things but not everyone wants to or can spend time editing.)

## Nature Photos (continued)



Looking at how the sunlight falls on a bird can also result in markedly different photos.

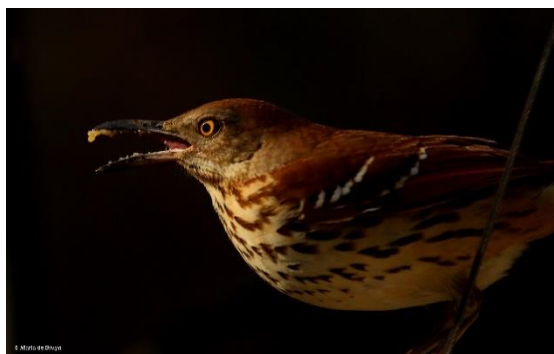
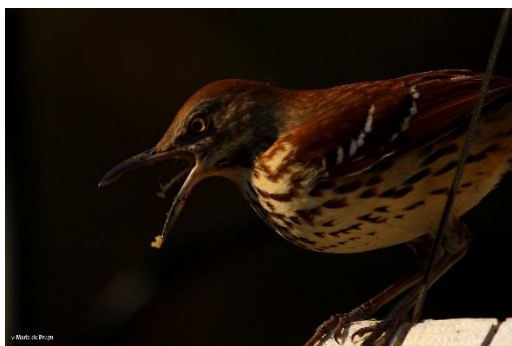


Photo credits: Maria deBruyn

Learning which features to watch for can come with experience or by getting feedback from other people. In any event, capturing photos of the birds (and other elements of nature) you see can expand your enjoyment – and sharing photos through the Internet (e.g., Flickr) can be fun as well. Some groups have many members who will comment and give feedback, tips and information on how they got a good shot. Others can give you views of birds you might not have seen before. The Carolina Birders Photo Sharing Group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/708417055887995/>) on Facebook is one such group. Others include Birds of the Eastern United States (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/BirdsoftheeasternUnitedStates/>) and Bird Photography (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/254907561306402/>). And even posting not great photos can help you identify what you see if you consult the group What's This Bird? (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/whatsthisbird/>).



## Upcoming Meeting – May 23 Last Meeting of the Season!

**David Smith: Birds of New Zealand and Tasmania.** The wildlife of New Zealand encompasses everything from fabulous endangered endemics to horribly misguided introduced species. Natural and un-natural selection have led to a precarious balance, but the country offers great opportunities to the traveling birder. David and Judy Smith will share photos and memories of their trip to New Zealand and also to the Australian island-state of Tasmania. Expect everything from Albatross to Wallaby, with a couple of devils thrown in.

### Officers of the Chapel Hill Bird Club

#### Elected Officers

**President:** David Smith  
([davidjudysmith@frontier.com](mailto:davidjudysmith@frontier.com))

**Co-Vice President:** Eddie Owens  
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**Co-Vice President:** Anne Dayer  
([annedayer@gmail.com](mailto:annedayer@gmail.com))

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

**Secretaries:** Sue and Fred Schroeder  
([fschroed@mindspring.com](mailto:fschroed@mindspring.com))

#### Appointed Officers

**Bird Count Supervisor/compiler:**  
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**Field Trip Chairman:** Bob Rybczynski  
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