

THE BULLETIN

Chapel Hill Bird Club

c/o C. W. Cook
418 Sharon Rd.
Chapel Hill, NC 27514



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March 1999

Monthly Meeting

Monday, March 22, 1999, at 7 pm

Program — *Monitoring Bird Populations*

Presented by Harry LeGrand, NC Natural Heritage Program

Location — *Binkley Baptist Church, the Lounge.*
Binkley is on Willow Drive at 15-501 in Chapel Hill, near University Mall.

March Meeting Program

by Ginger Travis

Are North Carolina's songbird populations in decline? On the rise? Holding their own? How do we know? You can hear Harry LeGrand, one of our state's leading experts on monitoring bird populations, speak on monitoring methods when the Chapel Hill Bird Club meets Monday, March 22 at 7 pm at Binkley Baptist Church in Chapel Hill. This topic is of growing interest to a lot of us who may do feeder counts but want to do more — and do it right. So come get an overview from Harry about different methods for monitoring birds.

Field Trips

Saturday morning trips leave the Glen Lennox parking lot (on the north side of 54 just east of the intersection with 15-501 in Chapel Hill) at 7:30 am sharp and return by noon. Reservations are not necessary. Beginners and visitors are welcome! Bring binoculars, boots (or old tennis shoes), a scope if you've got one, and be prepared for a hike. Contact Doug Shadwick (942-0479) for more details.

March 20, 27; April 3, 10, 17 - destinations to be announced. Call Doug to make a request. No trips on April 25, May 1, or May 8 because of the spring bird counts.

Christmas Bird Count Results Are In

See pages 2-4 for the results of the 1998 Chapel Hill CBC, as well as Raleigh, Durham, Jordan Lake, and the new count at Falls Lake. Some of the sightings this year probably will be a bit too shaky for Harry to accept — I'll try to update you when his verdict's in.

Spring Bird Counts

It's that time of year again — the local count organizers are looking for fresh recruits. Birders of all ages and skills are welcome — beginners will normally be paired with more experienced observers. Contact the folks listed below to sign up.

DURHAM	Apr. 25	Mike Schultz	490-6761
CHAPEL HILL	May 2	Maury Graves	933-4561
RALEIGH	May 8	Bob Hader	782-1898
JORDAN LAKE	May 9	Barbara Roth	967-4732

Book Review

Red-tails in Love, by Marie Winn

Pantheon Books, 1998, 305 pages
review by Maury Graves

The Chapel Hill Public Library has a very respectable 12 feet of bird books in the section on nature. Three more inches will be added when the 3 volumes of *Red-tails in Love* are moved there from the new books section.

The author, Marie Winn, is a nature writer for the *Wall Street Journal*. In this book she relates a wildlife drama wherein pairs of hawks build nests on the 12th story ledge of a building at 5th Avenue and 74th Street, not far from Central Park. However, more than half the volume is devoted to birding within the park, with its varied habitats.

The birders can be classified as regulars, weekenders, experts, specialists, and merely curious. The specialists may be independent or they may form small

Membership Information

Calendar-year (Jan.-Dec.) dues for most individuals and families are \$15; for students, \$10. If you wish to renew for more than one year, multiply the annual dues rate times the number of years. Please send your check (payable to the *Chapel Hill Bird Club*) to club treasurer Fran Hommersand, 304 Spruce Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27514. If you have questions, please call Fran at 967-1745.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: (_____) _____ - _____

E-mail _____

groups to keep a careful watch on the hawks, the owls, or other novelties. The male Red-tail, dubbed "Pale Male," mated with a succession of females, finally raising fledglings on the third and fourth attempts.

One might criticise the author's obvious intention to include the names of all her friends involved in birding in the park, all 115 of them, many of them repeatedly! However, one may put up with this nuisance in order to read about the Bird Register kept meticulously at the park, the fascinating birding experiences within the park, and of course the "hawkwatch maintained for months on end from various vantage points.

Anyone who has birded Central Park will surely want to read this true account. Others will also gain much pleasure from reading this insightful description of the joys of birding in a unique locale surrounded by "urbanity."

Numbers of California Condors in the Wild Continue to Soar

American Bird Conservancy Bird Calls Newsletter, 11/98

One of the California Condors bred and released by The Peregrine Fund traveled all the way along the Colorado River to Flaming Gorge, Wyoming recently, then returned to its Vermilion Cliffs, AZ release site. Three others also went up the same river drainage to Grand Junction, Colorado, where they stayed around a visitor's center on Grand Mesa for a few days. One of the birds actually went inside the visitor's center, toddled around a bit, and then emerged without comment. Peregrine Fund specialists are not happy when the released birds behave like this, since bad things eventually happen to condors that become acclimated to humans. Nevertheless, it was decided to let matters take their own course, and the birds eventually soared back "home" to the release site, covering a distance of 250 miles in part of a day. Survival of the Arizona birds has been wonderfully good so far: Fifteen of the nineteen birds released to date survived for over a year until one was found dead the first week of October. The remains are being necropsied at the San Diego Zoo to determine the cause of death.

The Peregrine Fund now has nine condors at the new Hurricane Cliffs site in Arizona to be released this month. Other birds will be released in California this fall, bringing the total number of condors in the wild to nearly 50 individuals the most since the early 1970s. Contact: Lloyd Kiff at 208-362-3716 or <lkiff@peregrinefund.org>.

Update on Bird Collisions at Towers and Windows

American Bird Conservancy Bird Calls Newsletter, 11/98

On three days at dawn this fall, nocturnal-migration researcher Bill Evans organized surveys of nine New York State communications towers ranging from 185 to 1,019 feet in height. Although adverse overnight weather had been predicted, it didn't always materialize, resulting in lower-than-expected kills. The 16 casualties covered the phylogenetic spectrum from Common Moorhen to American Goldfinch, including eight warblers. Meanwhile, Michael Mesure of the Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP) says the season has been fairly quiet in Toronto, apparently due to favorable nighttime weather. However, three new species have

been added to FLAP's list of birds killed from collisions with Toronto's tall buildings: Yellow Rail, White-eyed Vireo, and Peregrine Falcon. In rural Maine, Mary Burnell is leading the charge against a proposed broadcast tower. At 1,667 feet, the tower is taller than the Empire State Building and more than twice the height of the mountain on which it would stand. There has been no movement on the proposed Federal Communications Commission rules to preempt state and local zoning and land-use laws for digital TV tower-siting decisions. Action on the request for an Environmental Impact Study on the FCC rules requested by ABC and others is likewise dormant. In New York City, volunteers surveying the mirror-like glass walls at the Metropolitan Museum of Art have found some 40 birds, mostly thrushes, kinglets, warblers, and sparrows. While birds reportedly crash into the windows throughout the day, volunteers can make only brief surveys, but are confident their documented toll represents only about 10 percent of the total number of birds killed at the Met each fall. For more information, visit <www.towerkill.com>, <www.flap.org> and </www.clickandgo.com/towerstop>. Contact: Rebekah Creshkoff, 212-493-3525 or <rcreshkoff@mindspring.com>.

Review: "The Large Gulls of North America" video

Video narrated by Jon L. Dunn and produced by John W. Vanderpoel. Review by Bob Lewis, Sleepy Hollow, NY (former CHBC member)

The video covers 13 species of "large white-headed gulls" that one may reasonably expect to meet in North America, although several of them occur rarely at best in North America and would take a lot of effort to find. The smallest gull covered in the tape is *L. fuscus fuscus*, the Scandinavian form of Lesser Black-backed.

The format of the tape is that the viewer is shown film clips and stills of the species one after another, narrated by Jon Dunn, with occasional flashbacks for comparisons with similar forms. Given that this is a video designed for television and VCR, that is probably the best way it could be done. There is probably no way to duplicate in this medium those field guide pages with side-by-side images of many immature gulls in flight.

The video begins with a discussion of nomenclature, such as primaries, tertials, mirrors, primary tip extension, etc. It is nice to have the camera zoom in on these features and have them highlighted. That is probably more effective for beginners than just seeing arrows pointing to them in a book. Similarly, a good review of the age plumage cycle is given with images of various species in the successive age groups. Effective use is made here, and later, of stop-action techniques to point out the salient features. I liked it that already this early in the video, Jon is emphasizing the variation that one encounters in plumages, such as two second winter Herring Gulls showing different amounts of gray and brown on their mantles and coverts.

The heart of the tape is the series of video clips and descriptions of each of the species. The birds have been photographed in the wild in typical situa-

tions (although I don't think I saw any dumps anywhere). Jon's voice-over narration covers the field marks of the birds being pictured. All ages are covered for all species, which is quite an accomplishment, especially for Slaty-backed and Vega. Almost every species-age class is shown both standing and flying. The quality of the video images is excellent, both as to size and sharpness, which is especially impressive for the flying birds. The rarer species, like Yellow-legged and Thayer's, are constantly being compared to *smithsonianus* with informative flashbacks and side-by-side images.

I am not going to try to critique every segment, or even every species — there are far too many! Instead, I will concentrate on three species that I know pretty well, Lesser Black-backed, Herring, and Great Black-backed.

The "chapter" on Herring Gull has plenty of images of all age groups, and further, has shots of different looking second winters and different looking first winters. There are even images and discussion of the European forms *argenteus* and *argentatus*, though not every age is covered for those. Relevant to some recent posts on this listserve, I was interested to see what the authors had to say about the primary pattern of adult *smithsonianus*. They agreed with my own opinion that the usual situation is for one mirror on each of P10 and P9. However, there was no discussion of the extent of black on the primaries P7, P6, and P5, and no mention was made of variation in the shade of gray of the mantle of adult *smithsonianus*. Along the same line, the authors state that adult *L. a. argentatus* is darker than *smithsonianus*; however there is much variation in the mantle shade of *L. a. argentatus* and it's not that simple. I would also question the authors for repeating a statement that one often hears, that the underwing of adult *smithsonianus* shows no contrast between the secondaries and the underwing coverts, that it is just all uniformly white. In my experience this is usually not true, there is some contrast and the secondary region usually seems slightly grayer. Later in the video, during the segment on Thayer's Gull I believe, there is footage of *smithsonianus* to support this.

For Great Black-backed, I was looking for two things: what the authors said about adult eye color, and whether they had any good images of second year birds. On the latter I was not disappointed; they had an excellent segment on telling second winter from first, which is often tricky. On the former, I was a bit disappointed that they repeated the usual line that the iris is pale, but sometimes one must look very closely to see it. In my experience, the eye looks dark under the large majority of field conditions. What my ophthalmologist could see with his instruments is not really relevant.

Lesser Black-backed is a species I have spent a lot of time photographing and writing about. I was pleased that the authors covered well the field marks for distinguishing adults of the three classic races. How-

ever, they neglected to point out that there is considerable variation in the mantle color of adult *gracillii*, even though one scene shows individuals of noticeably different shades. Typically for this video, there are wonderful shots of a Lesser right next to a Herring right next to a Great Black-backed, as if they had been posed. As a photographer, I can appreciate how much work goes into producing such scenes. I was especially pleased to see some footage of *L. fuscus fuscus*, as I have never seen one in the wild.

As I mentioned above, I was really impressed to see so much great footage of Slaty-backed and Vega. This alone makes the tape worth buying. On top of that, there are shots of the Kelp Gulls from the Chandeleur Islands, the only images I have seen for those birds.

Hybrids are covered too, especially the West Coast hybrids. But I did think that more could have been done with Herring x Glaucous, in that no adults are shown.

The comparison of Thayer's and Iceland is very complete. Again, that alone would make the video worth buying. I was especially interested in the comparison of tail bands in these two forms.

This is just my personal opinion, but Jon Dunn was a great choice for the narrator. I love listening to his voice. One more bonus for me was hearing Jon pronounce all those Latin names I have been reading for years! *wymani? occidentalis? argenteus? birulai?* It was great to find out what those names sound like.

All in all, this is a very impressive video. I learned a lot. The authors have managed to hit a good level. The quality and thoroughness are first rate. There is plenty here for all gull watchers, no matter how many years they have been at it.

The only real flaw is not a failing of the authors at all, it is rather a flaw of the nature of video tape, and television. One wishes for a format in which the viewer had complete control to "flip" from one place to another, as in a book. Maybe in a few years when we all have 500 Meg of RAM and 1000 MHz computers....

Sightings

Correction: Winter Orchard just a Baltimore?

I haven't had a chance to study the photographs closely, but Harry LeGrand reports that the photographs of Tom Krakauer's oriole look like a female Baltimore to him...

Club officers

President: Monica Nees (968-8549)
Vice President (CH): Magnus Persmark (933-2255, emp34157@glaxo.com)
Vice President (Dur): Ginger Travis (942-7746, Ginger.Travis@unc.edu)
Secretary: Judy Murray (942-2985, jmurray.uncson@mhs.unc.edu)
Treasurer: Fran Hommersand (967-1745)
Field Trip Chairman: Doug Shadwick (942-0479, dshadwick@man-env.com)
Publicity Chairman: Ginger Travis (942-7746, Ginger.Travis@unc.edu)
Bulletin Editor: Will Cook (967-5446, cwcook@duke.edu)
<http://www.duke.edu/~cwcook/chbc.html>