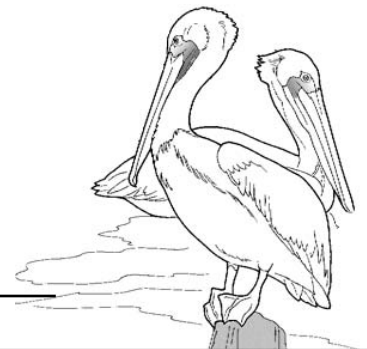


The LESSER SQUAWK



November-December 2005

www.CharlestonAudubon.org

Bits & Briefs

Bird Seed Pick-Up:

If you ordered bird seed through our Fall fundraiser, don't forget that now is the time to pick it up. Your seed is available at the area Wild Birds Unlimited store that you selected on the order form – in either Mount Pleasant or West Ashley – thru Sunday, November 13th. Contact sale organizer, Mike Hutchinson (h:884-7746, w:5293486, mhutchinson15@comcast.net) if, for some reason, you're unable to pick up your order.

Special Thanks:

To the Chris and the folks at *Wild Birds Unlimited* for making our sale possible.



No December Lecture/Meeting:

Mark your calendar – we don't meet for a speaker in December, so our next meeting at the Charleston County Library will be on Thursday, January 12, 2006, when we'll be joined by Jemima Parry-Jones from the International Center for Birds of Prey in Awendaw (*details page 3*).

And if the changes at the Bird of Prey Center interest you, be sure not to miss our November 12 fieldtrip to tour their new grounds and facilities (*details page 3, register with Steve 406-2061*).

Inside This Issue:

McAlhany Preserve: A Treasure pg 2

Operation Migration Needs You pg 3

FIELDTRIPS:

Int'l Bird of Prey Center Nov. 12

Huntington Beach State Park Nov. 19

Grove Plantation Jan. 16

JANUARY LECTURE:

Bird of Prey's Jemima Parry-Jones .. Jan. 12

Worldwide Travel Birding Is Simon Thompson's Business

This Thursday, November 10, our speaker is world traveler, natural history enthusiast and birder Simon Thompson. Simon has his own company out of Asheville, N.C. called Ventures Bird Watching and has led birdwatching trips all over the world. He will give a program on travel and birding with lots of beautiful slides of birds.

The business started 12 years ago in Tryon, N.C., and in the summer of 1998, Ventures, Inc. became an independent entity under Simon's ownership. Based in the Carolinas, he leads a wide range of popular day and weekend trip throughout the Carolinas, with a unique blend of birds, butterflies and wildflowers. His company also offers a wide range of tours both within the United States and many other countries.

Originally from Suffolk, England, Simon has lived in North Carolina for over 10 years. He has lived in Lebanon, Kenya, Yemen, and Ghana, where his interest in birds and natural history began. In addition to traveling extensively in the United States, Simon spent six months in China studying cranes and bird of prey migration as a member of the British "China CraneWatch" expedition. Please join us for what is sure to be a rewarding talk.

(Please remember that our lectures have moved to Thursdays – still in the 2nd floor auditorium of the Charleston County Library, 68 Calhoun Street, downtown Charleston. We meet for a reception at 6:30 p.m. – and our meetings – which are free and open to the public – start at 7 p.m.)

Bring Family and Friends to Cookout at McAlhany Preserve, 12/3

A Fall cookout at McAlhany Nature Preserve is a great chance to get out and experience this wonderful property we own and manage, about an hour from downtown in Dorchester County, near St. George. Be sure to learn about its history and current state in the article on page two of this issue.

Our 3rd Annual BBQ and Pot-Luck at McAlhany will be held Saturday, December 3, 2005. People are asked to bring a dish, a salad or a dessert. We'll have some hot and cold drinks, and some burgers and 'dogs to throw on the grill. The gate will be open about 9 a.m. for folks who'd like to take a walk, do some birding and see the progress on our native plant restoration project. Everyone else is invited to arrive about noon: We'll start the grill about 1 p.m. and plan to eat about 1:30 p.m. You are welcome to BYOB. Don't forget that family and friends are welcome!

If you're planning to come, please contact Steve (steve@bleezarde.com or phone 406-2061) so we can get a reasonable head-count. Directions for driving to McAlhany are on page two. And, if folks are interested we'll have a carpool/caravan leaving about 11 a.m. from behind the West Ashley Barnes & Noble (at Sam Rittenberg Blvd., and Hwy. 61).

McAlhany Nature Preserve – A Chapter Treasure *by Andy Harrison*

How is the Charleston Audubon Society different from most other Audubon chapters around the country? We own land – two tracts, in fact. The McAlhany Nature Preserve (MNP) near St. George, SC was the first property acquired by the Society. Mrs. Cleo T. McAlhany donated the 318 acres encompassed by the Preserve to our chapter in 1987 as a memorial to her husband, Marvin McAlhany. On December 19, 2001 we signed a conservation easement agreement with the Lowcountry Open Land Trust to ensure that the land remains undeveloped and in a natural state. Land ownership carries with it the responsibility for land management, however. Although we visit MNP regularly for field trips and open houses, over the years some necessary tasks were gradually discontinued because of lack of labor or interest. Now, thanks to the leadership of Joe Cockrell, Chair of the McAlhany Committee, our chapter is renewing its commitment to active management of the Preserve.

Many of you who have visited MNP are aware of its great natural beauty. For such a relatively small piece of land it includes an incredibly diverse array of habitats, beginning with 1.5 miles of frontage on the Edisto River and a nine-acre oxbow lake. Some other notable features include: a mixed Mesophytic hardwood bluff (great for spring wildflowers); a beech, magnolia and spruce pine hammock – a possibly unique plant association; upland oak-hickory forest; bottomland hardwoods forest (including many acres along Cattle Creek); freshwater marsh; a low water limestone outcrop; and of course the cabin and picnic area near the lake.

In addition to the forest communities, MNP has also harbored old fields on the parcel north of Wire Road. At times these fields were leased to a local farmer, other years we managed them for wildlife in an early succession stage, primarily by mowing. Later, nest boxes were erected and small numbers of trees and shrubs were planted. But, the mowing of the fields stopped in the mid-90s, and they grew up in dense thickets of young loblolly pine and sweetgum – poor quality wildlife habitat. In February 2005 Joe introduced a plan for habitat restoration in these areas, including the establishment of both grassland and longleaf pine communities. This plan was approved by the McAlhany Committee and the Executive Board, and implementation began this past summer.

The restoration plan is ambitious and will require a long-range commitment from our Society. The first stage of the plan involved clearing the thickets of loblolly and sweetgum that had overgrown the old fields (oaks and other hardwoods in the fencerows, riparian areas and bottomland forest were not harvested). On our recent field trip to MNP (October 9, led by Richard Porcher), Joe showed the cleared areas to the group and explained the next phases of the project. These included the construction of firebreaks and preparation of the site for planting. Since our October visit the firebreaks have been completed, and they subdivide the area into a number of smaller sections. Various portions of these sections will be planted in longleaf pine seedlings, native grasses, wildflowers and legumes (the central portions of three sections will be devoted to early succession and grassland habitat surrounded by stands of longleaf pine).

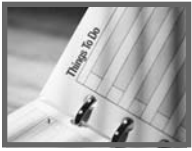
The plan also calls for the planting of Atlantic white cedar seedlings around the edges of the seasonally-saturated, former farm pond site. After the seedlings have become established, we will conduct prescribed burns in the smaller sections on a rotational or as-needed basis. Although we obtained some income from the harvest, the bulk of the funds (and technical support) for this work will come from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service's Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program. The SC Forestry Commission will also provide technical support. Projects like this are expensive, and we appreciate this assistance. Joe Cockrell deserves much kudos from the chapter for his efforts in devising the restoration plan, arranging for the financial and technical support, and overseeing the initial stages of its implementation.

One or a few people cannot bear the entire load for such a project, however. If it is to succeed we will need help from more chapter members. Volunteers will be needed for sowing seeds, planting trees, working on gates, brush-cutting, assisting with prescribed burns, boundary line marking, and many other functions. In the early stages of the project the site will look pretty ugly, to be honest. The work will not be easy. But by maintaining this initiative, years down the road we will have succeeded in making MNP even more valuable than it is now. Visitors to the sections north of Wire Road will be able to enjoy open, grassy wildflower fields set amongst tall stands of longleaf pines that gently whisper in the wind.

McAlhany Nature Preserve is a treasure that our chapter can take great pride in owning, but it also represents a huge responsibility. There are immediate needs beyond those involving the habitat restoration plan. For example, the cabin requires some major repair work – the roof leaks and the floor on one side is settling and needs to be jacked up. The trails need to be improved and marked, and the road to the cabin requires periodic clearing. Over the coming months (and years) we will be asking for volunteers to step forward to help – either on scheduled work days, or whenever possible. This may also involve helping to complete wildlife surveys of the property that were begun in the early years but never officially completed. Meanwhile please join us December 3 for our annual holiday cookout at the Preserve (see details on page 1). If you have never visited MNP before I think you will be impressed by what you see.

Directions to McAlhany: The McAlhany preserve is located in upper Dorchester County on the Edisto River, about an hour's drive from downtown: Take Hwy. 61, Hwy. 78 or I-26 to Hwy 15. Go to the small town of Grover which is about 10 miles south of St. George. Turn west on Wire Road, cross over I-95 and continue for several miles and look for our signs on the left (the main sign is set-back somewhat, so look carefully.)

We're having a picnic, December 3rd, so make plans now to come to McAlhany. (Cookout details page 1).



MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

Upcoming Programs, Outings & Lowcountry Events

FIELDTRIPS & OUTINGS:

- » Visit the Int'l Bird of Prey Center
- » Saturday, November 12, 8:30 a.m.
- » Please Call or eMail to Register



Join Steve Bleezarde and Melissa Hughes on a morning tour of the Center in Awendaw. We'll be

led on a tour of the new 152-acre site, see over 100 raptors and owls in the newly constructed habitat enclosures, and given a raptor flight demonstration (weather permitting).

Once known as the South Carolina Center for Birds of Prey, and primarily concerned with providing medical care to injured raptors, the International Center is now home to nearly 200 birds of prey representing 78 species from six continents. Once fully operational the it will combine medical care – including an oil-spill rescue unit – with on-site education programs, captive breeding and ongoing research and field studies. This trip is a chance for us to get a look behind the scenes before the Center opens to the public next year.

Meet at 8:30 a.m. Saturday, November 12 in the Lowe's parking lot near Mt. Pleasant Towne Centre (behind IHOP). Register with Steve at 406-2061 (or by email at steve@bleezarde.com) by Wed., Nov. 9 (we need an accurate count: if our group is large, the center will split us in two). Bring the usual: H₂O, guides, etc.

- » Huntington Beach State Park Trip
- » Saturday, November 19, 7:30 a.m.

Join Bob Chinn and Andy Harrison for a trip to Huntington Beach State Park. This park's variety of habitats – including a freshwater lagoon, saltmarsh, maritime forest, extensive beach and access to the jetty fronting Murrell's Inlet – make it one of the best birding sites along the East Coast. It also is the site of Atalaya Castle, former winter home and studio of American sculptress, Anna Hyatt Huntington, and her husband, Archer Milton Huntington. There is a fee charged for admission to the park (\$5 adults; \$4.25 seniors; \$3 children aged 6–15; free for kids 5 and under).

Meet Bob and Andy at 7:30 a.m. Saturday, November 19 in the Lowe's parking lot near Mt. Pleasant Towne Centre (behind IHOP). Bring binoculars/scopes, field guides, water, food/snacks, and sunscreen/insect repellent. Good walking shoes are recommended. Even in November the weather can be quite variable – it could be warm, or cold and blustery (especially on the open beach).

Register with Andy at 795-6934 or by e-mail at parula23@aol.com by Friday, November 18.

- » Birding at Grove Plantation
- » Saturday, January 14, 2006, 7:30 a.m.

Join Andy Harrison for a day of winter birding at Grove Plantation, headquarters of the ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge is a haven for wintering waterfowl, and we often see birds

such as the Red-headed Woodpecker and American Bald Eagle here.

Meet Andy at 7:30 a.m. Saturday, January 14 in the Food Lion parking lot in Ravenel. Bring binoculars/scopes, field guides, water, food/snacks, sunscreen/insect repellent, and weather-appropriate clothing.

Register with Andy at 795-6934 or by email at parula23@aol.com by Friday, January 13.

LECTURE SERIES, 2006:

Thursday, Jan. 12, 6:30 p.m.

- » Jemima Parry-Jones
- » International Center for Birds of Prey

Ms. Parry-Jones was the owner and Director of the National Birds of Prey Centre in England from 1982 until she moved with the bulk of the collection to South Carolina in November 2004.

She came with 185 birds of prey of 70 species – ranging from Stellers Sea Eagles to Burrowing Owls and in age from six months to thirty years-old – along with six dogs and – literally – a ton or more of equipment. And you thought your last move was complicated.

Her story fascinates us as much as the story of the center itself does. Come hear her speak about the 2004 trans-Atlantic move, the 2005 quarantine, her life with birds before the move and progress at the center's new facility since.

Learn more online:

» www.internationalbirdsofprey.org

An Open Letter from Operation Migration:

Dear Friends,

Every season since 2001 Operation Migration and its partners have achieved a wildlife miracle. Using ultralight aircraft, we have taught a migration route to four generations of one of North America's rarest birds, and last year 42 wild Whooping cranes migrated between Wisconsin and Florida. This fall's successful completion of a fifth migration will mean that we are half way to our goal of removing this incredible bird from the endangered species list. This year however, Operation Migration is facing its biggest challenge ever, and we're asking for your help.

When this year's twenty bright-eyed whooping crane chicks hatched we had no idea what the events of 2005 would bring; a shortfall in grants and the doubling of fuel costs.

Because this project has been such an amazing success, we thought that in addition to our long-time supporters, many new donors would rush to help. But with weather and other events elevating the need for support of many humanitarian causes, it is understandable that aid to an endangered species



– see *MIGRATION*, page 4

The LESSER SQUAWK

The Charleston Audubon Society
P.O. Box 504
Charleston, SC 29402

NON-PROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
CHARLESTON, SC
PERMIT NO. 349



The Charleston Audubon Society – a SC chapter of the National Audubon Society since 1970, founded as the Charleston Natural History Society in 1905, and serving Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties – is a nonprofit environmental organization that actively promotes awareness, appreciation and conservation of the natural environment through educational programs, field trips, conservation projects, sponsored research and social activities. Learn more online at www.CharlestonAudubon.org.

Birds of North America Online

The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, together with the American Ornithologists' Union, has recently released all 18 volumes of the Birds of North America (BNA) online. Following in the footsteps of Wilson, Audubon, and Bent, BNA makes a quantum leap in information beyond what these historic figures were able to provide. This series provides detailed scientific information (18 print volumes; 18,000 pages in total) for each of the 716 species of birds nesting in the USA and Canada.

It's \$40/year for unlimited access to individuals. And that's a great deal! Learn more online at <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu>

MIGRATION from page 3

may have been downgraded on many people's giving list – or even left off entirely. As a result, we find ourselves with the smallest ever amount of funding to cope with the biggest and most costly year of the project.

At this point, with so many birds, higher expenses, and soaring fuel costs, we can only get the birds as far south as Kentucky/Tennessee before we run out of gas...both literally and figuratively. For this reason we're writing to solicit your financial assistance.

The entire OM team is totally committed to the Whooping crane project and the 2005 Migration. Getting the 2005 cohort safely to Florida means the flock will be increased by a third! Whether from a foundation, corporation or individual, your contribution – small or large – is crucial to making this happen.

PLEASE be as generous as you can, and be assured your donation will help save a species.

» Our Society has donated \$100 to help offset rising fuel costs affecting Operation Migration and we encourage our members to consider making a donation of their own. Visit online to donate:

» <http://www.operationmigration.org>



New Members, Renewals, Gift Memberships

For only \$20* you get one-year subscriptions to *Audubon* magazine and *The Lesser Squawk*, and all the benefits of local and National Audubon Society membership. Renew for just \$35/year. *\$15 for Sr. Citizens and Students

CHECK ONE: NEW MEMBER GIFT MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

THIS IS A GIFT FROM:

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY STATE ZIP _____

MAIL THIS COUPON AND YOUR CHECK TO:
AUDUBON MEMBERSHIP CENTER
P.O. BOX 51003
BOULDER, CO 80323-1003

THIS MEMBERSHIP IS FOR:

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY STATE ZIP _____

[RENEWALS MUST INCLUDE THE 20-DIGIT MEMBER NUMBER FROM YOUR AUDUBON ADDRESS LABEL]

Checks payable to **National Audubon Society**. Include our chapter code on your check: U-51 7XCH