


The Lesser Squawk

Newsletter of the 
Charleston Audubon &
Natural History Society

WWW.CHARLESTONAUDUBON.ORG

November-December, 2008

President's Note

By the time you read this note, Election Day may be past. There are many crises facing our nation, but I urge you to keep the environment in mind as you cast your vote on November 4 – and whenever the opportunity arises to make your voice heard. On the national level, we need to elect candidates who will invest in alternative energy strategies (and resist pressure to open protected areas to oil drilling), take serious measures to address the issue of global warming, and safeguard critical legislation like the Endangered Species Act. At the state and local levels, we should consider candidates who pay more than lip service to conservation and are willing to seek innovative ways to combat sprawl. You can learn more about all the candidates running in SC this year by exploring the Elections page of the SC Information Highway website —

<http://www.sciway.net/gov/sc-elections.html>.

Fall Adventures

Our September field trips were favored with clear weather and good birding (no American Golden Plovers, but we did see Common Ground Doves and Buff-breasted and Pectoral Sandpipers at the Orangeburg Sod Farms). However, our first-ever trip to Botany Bay Plantation WMA on October 12 had to be cancelled because of heavy rain and high winds. We hope to reschedule this trip, perhaps this coming spring.

Looking Ahead

Meanwhile, on November 15, Don Jones will lead an outing to Huntington Beach State Park, well known as one of the best birding spots along the SC coast. Also in November, on Thursday, the 13th, SC DNR Biologist Laurel Barnhill will speak to us about the Eastern Painted Bunting Population Monitoring and Assessment Project.

Christmas Bird Counts

The Christmas Bird Count seasons runs from December 14 to January 5, and there are many counts in the area to choose from – if you have never participated before and are concerned

— continued, see **President**, page 2

South Carolina's Painted Buntings

Thursday, November 13th, Laurel Barnhill will present details of two projects involving Painted Buntings in our State: The **Population Assessment Project's** objective is to generate a useful Painted Bunting population estimate for South Carolina, assessing how many birds are found in the state, and what areas and habitat they are using. This is a multi-state effort that was initiated in 2007 and data collection is on-going. The **Painted Bunting Observer Team** is a citizen science, feeder watch project that relies on volunteers to watch for buntings and submit their data on-line. This on-going project is a collaboration including SCDNR and the University of North Carolina, Wilmington. More information online at PAINTEDBUNTINGS.ORG

Laurel Barnhill is the Bird Conservation Coordinator for the SCDNR. She manages statewide programs delivering bird conservation of nongame bird groups found in South Carolina. Laurel is the Department's representative for numerous bird conservation efforts including: the South Atlantic Coast Migratory Bird Initiative, Painted Bunting Working Group, Swallow-tailed Kite Working Group, Ivory-billed Woodpecker Recovery Team, SC Audubon Important Bird Area Steering Committee and many others.



pbot
painted bunting observer team

January 14 Talk Addresses SC Conservation Issues

Ann Timberlake, director of S.C. Conservation Voters headquartered in Columbia will speak to us in January. She will talk about strategies to advance the conservation community's Conservation Common Agenda in the 2009 legislative session: promoting water conservation, adopting surface water permitting, protecting land through the Conservation Bank, improving air quality (especially around our ports), establishing renewable energy goals and reducing the energy use. Conservation Voters of South Carolina's mission is to make conservation and environmental issues a top priority among elected leaders, candidates, and voters.

» Learn more from their website: CONSERVATIONVOTERSOFSC.ORG

» OUR PUBLIC LECTURES: We meet in the 2nd floor auditorium of the main branch of the Charleston County Library, 68 Calhoun St. in Charleston. Lectures are free, and open to Audubon members and guests, as well as the general public. We gather at 6:30 p.m. for a reception and speakers will begin at 7:00 p.m.

Upcoming Events

Details in this issue

Nov 8 – McAlhany Workday

Nov 8-17 Bird Seed Pick-up

Nov 13 – Lecture: Painted Buntings

Nov 15 – Huntington Beach trip

Dec 7 – Oyster Roast

Dec 20 – Fort Moultrie birding

Dec TBA – Christmas Bird Count

Jan 14 – Lecture: SC Conservation

Why I Bird – Reflections on a Birding Life

by Andy Harrison

Despite growing up with two biologists as parents and having maintained an interest in natural history all my life, I didn't take birding "seriously" until about five or six years ago. That was when I started becoming active with CNHS and occasionally helping to lead field trips, and I quickly realized how little I really knew about birds and bird identification.

During 1999-2001 I had done some breeding bird survey work in the bottomland hardwood swamps of the Coosawhatchie River as part of my job with the USDA Forest Service, and I had worked hard on my birding skills for that project (birding by ear in particular) – but it didn't help me much with shorebirds, seabirds or many others. I knew that I needed to get out in the field (ideally with more experienced birders) and practice! My dad and I started a friendly, annual competition to see who could compile the largest SC bird list, but over time I also began to discover a real joy in observing birds in nature and learning more about their behavior, plumages, etc.

About that time I was invited by Craig Watson, US FWS Biologist with the At-

lantic Coast Joint Venture, to participate in some bird survey work at Sewee Preserve, a residential development north of Mt. Pleasant (most of the 500-acre property is protected by a conservation easement granted by Ducks Unlimited). Our approximately quarterly surveys there have continued to the present, and since fall 2002 we have documented more than 160 species using the site.

In addition to helping conduct these seasonal surveys at Sewee Preserve, I started visiting birding "hotspots" in SC to look for uncommon species and to work on basic bird identification. I also began more intense participation in local Christmas Bird Counts and spring migration counts, including the Charleston Spring Bird Count. Because of this regular experience in the field, my confidence in my birding ability has gradually risen. Whenever I travel, whether on vacation or for work, I try to include some birding activities. In 2005 I had the opportunity to visit the Asa Wright Nature Center in Trinidad, and I jumped at the chance! It was a wonderful birding experience, and I added many new species to my life list.

I have also come to realize just how important "Citizen Science" is to identifying trends in bird numbers. In particular, long-term data from Audubon's Christmas Bird Counts, combined with information from the Breeding Bird Surveys organized by the US Geological Survey, have shown that over the past 40 years the populations of some of our common birds have declined by more than 50 percent (Common Birds in Decline, an Audubon State of the Birds Report released in 2007, <http://stateofthebirds.audubon.org/cbid>).

For example, the Northern Bobwhite (a species I grew up listening to in the woods behind my house on James Island) has experienced an 82% crash during this period. Once common species around the world are also suffering severe losses, as reported by BirdLife International in its 2008 State of the World's Birds report (<http://www.birdlife.org>). Strained federal and state budgets make the contributions everyday birders can make to "Citizen Science" all the more important in helping to monitor common and rare species. The SC Shorebird Project and the Eastern Painted

— continued, see *Why I Bird*, page 5

President *continued from page 1*

about your skill level, don't worry! It's a great way to learn about birding and help contribute to "Citizen Science."

McAlhany Work Day, Saturday November 8

On November 8 we are holding a Work Day at the McAlhany Nature Preserve (MNP). Join us for a few hours and help make improvements to this beautiful property on the Edisto River! A carpool from Charleston will meet at 7:00 a.m. behind the Burger King in West Ashley, corner of Sam Ritenburg and Hwy 61. Or, meet at the property at 8:45. For directions, see CharlestonAudubon.org. For a map you can type "McAlhany Nature Preserve" in Google Maps (not Google web search). If you would like additional information contact Joe Cockrell at 607-1070 or cockrelljoe@cs.com.

Joe, our MNP committee chairperson, showed-off progress on the longleaf pine/native grass restoration project to a field tour from the Eastern Native Grass Symposium on October 9. Joe has invested a tremendous amount of effort into directing this project (and working on all aspects of the management of MNP), and sharing its success with scientists, natural resource managers, growers and other interested persons was a distinct honor.

Bird Seed Sale

The Fall Bird Seed Sale has been another great success! Many thanks to everyone who bought seed this past month. Remember to pick up your purchases at Wild Birds Unlimited from November 8-17. Our chapter is very appreciative of the support that Chris Wood and Patty Montgomery, owners of the West Ashley and Mt. Pleasant WBU stores, respectively, have given us over the past several years. They have helped make this "kick-off" fundraiser an annual CNHS event.

Bowen's Island Oyster Roast

Speaking of fundraisers, make plans now to attend our second Holiday Oyster Roast at Bowen's Island from 2-5 p.m. on December 7! Last year we had a great time enjoying oysters, chili, desserts and beer on the deck overlooking the marsh. What better way can you think of to spend a winter Sunday afternoon in the Lowcountry?

As always, if you are interested in volunteering at a CNHS event, or have suggestions or comments, please contact me. Thanks,

-Andy Harrison, Chapter President
parula23@aol.com 795-6934



Mark Your Calendars

FIELD TRIPS, LECTURES & LOWCOUNTRY EVENTS

Workday — McAlhany Preserve

» Saturday, Nov. 8

Come help with trails and property maintenance. Details page 2, President's note. Contact Joe Cockrell (cockrelljoe@cs.com) with question -- Lunch for those who register early!

Bird Seed Sale — Pick-Up Your Seed

» Nov. 8 thru 17

Did you order seed? Now is the time to pick up your order from the West Ashley or Mt. Pleasant Wild Birds Unlimited -- be sure to go to the store you chose on your order form.

Lecture — Painted Buntings in SC

» Thursday, Nov. 13, 6:30 p.m.

Our public lecture for November features Laurel Barnhill, Bird Conservation Coordinator for SCDNR. She will discuss Painted Buntings and citizen science conservation efforts in our state. (More on p.1). Talk to start at 7 p.m., 2nd floor auditorium of the main branch of the Charleston County Library, 68 Calhoun St.

Field Trip — Huntington Beach

» Saturday, Nov. 15, 7:00 a.m.

On Saturday Nov. 15th we'll be going to one of the premier birding locations on the East Coast, where more than 300

species of birds have been recorded. The park features a large freshwater marsh impoundment as well as many acres of tidal salt marsh. Wading birds and ducks may be seen from several boardwalks and observation platforms. In addition there is a nature trail and a large rock jetty accessible from the ocean beach. In past years we have seen Eagles, Reddish Egrets, Piping Plovers, Purple Sandpipers, Northern Gannets and numerous species of loons and grebes. Last year we saw 11 species of ducks. **The entry fee to the park is \$5.00, \$3.25 for seniors.**

We will meet in the Lowe's parking lot in Mount Pleasant just off of Rt. 17 at 7 a.m. and car pool from there. Comfortable walking shoes are a must. Bring a lunch; there is a covered picnic shelter and rest rooms. **To register please contact Don Jones by November 14 at 572-8232 or Birdfrogdjlj@aol.com**

2nd Annual Bowen's Island Holiday Oyster Roast

» Saturday, Dec. 7, 2-5 p.m.

Last December we had a great time eating oysters, drinking beer and watching the sun set from the deck of the famous Bowen's Island Restaurant, and we planning to do it again! This year's event will run from 2-5 p.m. on Sunday, December 7. Details and a form for reserving admission on the back of this page — Early ticket sales save you money; tickets will cost \$15 in advance, but \$20 at the door.

Please make your plans to attend with

family and friends. And visit our website to download our flyer, or send others there so that they can reserve their spots early and save them selves a few dollars.

Field Trip — Ft. Moultrie, Breach Inlet

» Saturday, Dec. 20, 7:00 a.m.

Let's go to the beach!! A phrase not often heard in December, but for birders winter is an ideal time to check out the many species of birds that can only be seen at this time of year. Scoters, Greater and Lesser Black-Backed Gulls, Purple Sandpipers, Grebes and Loons to name only a few. In addition, in back of the Fort Moultrie Visitor center there is a dock on a tidal creek which provides viewing access to mud flats, oyster bars and extensive salt marsh. A few miles up the road, at Breach Inlet, good views of the water, beach and rocks may be had from the parking lot.

We will probably bird until noon or a little after so bring a snack or lunch, or you may want to eat at one of the many local restaurants. We'll meet in the parking lot next to the Fort Moultrie Visitor Center at 7 a.m. Bring a scope if you have one and dress for the weather. **Please register prior to 12-20 by contacting Don Jones @ 572-8232 or Birdfrogdjlj@aol.com**

Lecture — Conservation Issues

» Wed., Jan. 14, 2009 - 6:30 p.m.

With Ann Timberlake, director of the SC Conservation Voters. An impressive array of conservation issues face the state and the nation, come learn about efforts to make sure our voice is heard. Details, p.1

Join Audubon's Citizen Science Team To Tell the World Why Birds Count

From December 14, 2008 through January 5, 2009, tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas will take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. Grandmothers and students, soccer moms and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists will head out on an annual mission -- often before dawn. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of

nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house in the middle of winter.

These Citizen Scientists are taking action for conservation. By participating in Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, they help scientists understand how birds are faring amid unprecedented environmental challenges. The data they collect informs the world about the State of Birds, and provides the information we need to

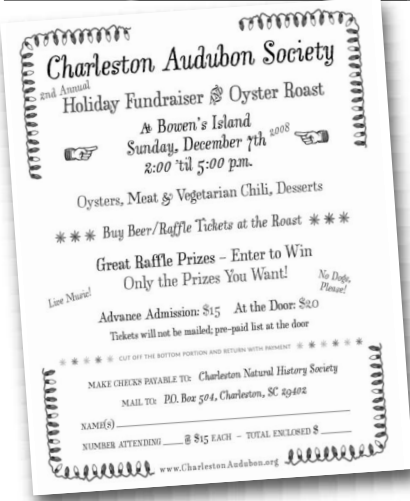
shape their future and ours.

For information about the dates and contact information for the counts in our area, please visit the Carolina Bird Club website where count status is updated regularly:

» CAROLINABIRDCLUB.ORG/CHRISTMAS

For background and past results:

» WWW.AUDUBON.ORG/BIRD/CBC



Event flyers are available on our website. Help us advertise by posting some or just passing them out to your friends.

Bowen's Island Oyster Roast, 12/7

Last December we had a great time eating oysters, drinking beer and watching the sun set from the deck of the famous Bowen's Island Restaurant, and we planning to do it again! This year's event will run from 2-5 p.m. on Sunday, December 7. Make plans now to attend, and bring a few friends along too.... The cost of admission is the same as last year - \$15 in advance or \$20 at the door (see order form, below). For advance admission purchases, please mail the names of those attending and your checks (made payable to the Charleston Natural History Society) to P.O. Box 504, Charleston SC 29402 no later than December 1, 2008. That way we'll be sure to have your reservation at the door.

In addition to oysters and beer, we will also offer chili (regular and vegetarian), desserts and soft drinks. We hope to have a local musician on hand to provide entertainment, but at press time this had not yet been confirmed. However, we will once again sell raffle tickets for some great prizes contributed by local businesses. Just like last year, tickets for the raffle prizes and beer will be sold at the door. We are also recruiting volunteers to help set up or perform other chores during the event (you'll have plenty of time to enjoy the oysters, etc.), and we would welcome desserts from anyone willing to bring them.

If you are willing to help in either capacity, please call or e-mail Andy Harrison at 795-6934 or parula23@aol.com. See you at Bowen's Island on December 7!

We Need Your Help to Thrive, to Meet Our Goals

Each month our local Audubon chapter, known for decades as the Charleston Natural History Society, hosts public lectures and birding field trips. We publish this newsletter and are developing content for the chapter web site (charlestonaudubon.org). And when conservation issues arise, we mobilize to educate the public and ensure that our opinions are heard by our elected officials. Our chapter also oversees and maintains the McAlhany Nature Preserve, and participates in a variety of area events and citizen science projects.

Our chapter has over 1,000 members on the rolls, which speaks to the strength of our local chapter and National Audubon Society. And as we look ahead, it is important that we get more members involved in our day-to-day activities. We always have a good response when we ask for help with specific projects - this time we're asking you to consider becoming involved in the chapter's ongoing activities. It only takes an hour or two a month to make sure that we continue to offer strong programs, raise operating funds, reach out to the public, monitor public policy

and continue our stewardship of the McAlhany property.

Will You Help?

Please contact one of the currently active board/committee members if you'd like to help -

- » Planning and conducting outdoor work at McAlhany
Joe Cockrell: 607-1070 or cockrelljoe@cs.com
- » Writing or locating stories for the newsletter/website
Steve Bleezarde: 406-2061 or steve@charlestonaudubon.org
- » Joining the board to support all our ongoing activities, or expand our chapter's conservation, education, or membership activities
Andy Harrison: 795-6934 or parula23@aol.com

Of course we need need to ensure that ALL or activities continue, so if you're interested in outings or programs, fundraising, or anything we do - please let us know. And thanks to all those who help as well as all who will help in the future.

Second Annual Holiday Oyster Roast - Admission Reservation Order Form

----- CUT OFF THE BOTTOM AND RETURN WITH PAYMENT -----

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: *Charleston Natural History Society*

MAIL TO: *P.O. Box 504, Charleston, SC 29402*

NAME(S) _____

NUMBER ATTENDING _____ @ \$15 EACH - TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

NOTE: NO TICKETS WILL BE MAILED - YOUR RESERVATION WILL BE HELD AT THE GATE ON THE DAY OF THE ROAST

Support Funding thru Migratory Bird Act

As a birder, do you ask yourself what you can do to help ensure that populations of the birds you take so much pleasure in seeing survive and thrive? Well here is the perfect opportunity for us all to act. With very little effort, we can make a real difference for birds.

Senator Benjamin Cardin (D-MD), has introduced legislation (S. 3490) in the Senate to reauthorize the existing Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA). This bill is companion legislation to H.R. 5756, which was introduced in the House of Representatives earlier this year. You can help these bills pass by taking action in the **Act for Songbirds Campaign**.

Originally passed by the U.S. Congress in 2000, NMBCA establishes a competitive matching grants program that supports public-private partnerships carrying out projects in the United States, Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean. These programs promote and foster the long-term conservation of Neotropical migratory birds and their habitats.

NMBCA has a proven track-record of success. More than \$21 million in NMBCA grants have leveraged over \$97 million in required matching partner contributions for projects in 44 U.S. states/territories and 34 other countries.

In 2006, Congress reauthorized the with funding of \$6.5 million over the next five years, but appropriation is still well below that at \$4.5 million for 2008. Currently, many more grant applications are received than can be funded, and so, many worthwhile projects go unsupported.

In response to this need, American Bird Conservancy and other members of the Bird Conservation Alliance have formed a coalition that is working in a coordinated effort to achieve early reauthorization of the NMBCA funding levels to reach \$20 million per year by 2015.

We can all take part in this campaign by going to www.actforsongbirds.org and, through the automated system, tell our representatives to support the proposed legislation in the House and Senate. This is one thing everybody can do for birds, so Act for Songbirds today - visit www.actforsongbirds.org.

Got Birds? New Guide for Kids

Getting kids outdoors, away from computers, DVDs, iPods and all of the other indoor distractions, can be difficult. And if your goal is to convince them that one of YOUR hobbies is fun and rewarding, then the battle can certainly seem all up hill. That might just be where this book comes in.

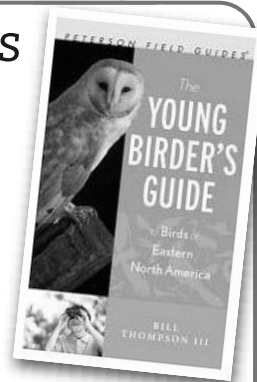
New from the Peterson line, written by *Bird Watcher's Digest* editor Bill Thompson III, with illustrations from Julie Zickefoose, this book is aimed at children ages 8-12 (although younger children may enjoy it with some help from their parents.) "The Young Birder's Guide - Birds of Eastern North America" covers 200 of the more common birds children will encounter if they take up birding. The selection is well thought out, and while serious children will soon discover they need a "real" guide to keep up with their sightings, this book has wonderful artwork and interesting facts to make learning about birds generally, and species in particular, fun and engaging.

Color photographs are used for identification purposes, and black-and-white line drawings by Zickefoose illustrate interesting behaviors or characteristics.

There are "Wow!" facts on many species, a durable "wipe-clean" cover, an even space for young birders to check off birds they have spotted and the date the species was seen.

From the clear identification tips to the engaging quick facts, the book is very-well designed to grab the younger reader's attention and maintain their interest as they take to the outdoors and begin making their own identifications. For the child who shows some interest and wants a book to call their own, you can't ask for a more suitable, useful book than this one.

— REVIEW BY STEVE BLEEZARDE



Why I Bird *continued from page 2*

Bunting Population Assessment and Monitoring Project both rely on coverage provided by volunteers (although requiring a little more experience and better equipment), and CNHS members are active participants in each of these projects.

On a windy, overcast Saturday morning in October this year I visited Patriot's Point to do some fall migration birding. Having walked along the trail and seen and heard many of the usual suspects (American Redstarts, Gray Catbirds and Palm Warblers, among others), I entered a clearing behind the former brush pile site and scanned the upper branches of the surrounding trees – mindful of the distant thunder and incipient raindrops. Then I spotted a strange bird foraging in a fruit-laden branch high in a Chinaberry tree – I could tell it was something new, but what? Despite the poor light I was able to pick out some distinctive field marks and (with the help of my trusty *Peterson Guide*) confirmed that I had an immature Cape May Warbler. This is not a rare species (although its numbers are declining), but I

had previously seen only one other individual in SC.

The excitement of observing such a bird, combined with the enjoyment of figuring out what I saw, is one reason that I am a birder. There are other, more sentimental reasons, but a second factor that motivates me is helping to make sure species like the Cape May Warbler (and Northern Bobwhite) continue to appear in SC. The Christmas Bird Count is an ideal way for novices to learn from more experienced birders and at the same time make a valuable contribution. The Carolina Bird Club website (www.carolinabirdclub.org/christmas) provides location and contact information for many of the local counts. Another "Citizen Science" event, the Great Backyard Birdcount, takes place in February – and you don't even have to leave your home! (GBBC information is available at www.audubon.org/gbbc). So break out your binoculars this winter, and start counting – you never know what you might see!

The Charleston Audubon & Natural History Society

P.O. Box 504

Charleston, South Carolina 29402

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Charleston Audubon – serving Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties, founded as the Charleston Natural History Society in 1905, and a chapter of the National Audubon Society since 1970 – 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 at www.CharlestonAudubon.org.

Global Warming: Making Ourselves Part of the Solution

All of us use fossil fuels every day — for heating and cooling our homes, driving our cars, generating the electricity to power our lights and appliances, and more. In the process we produce the greenhouse gases that are primarily responsible for global warming. Fortunately, each of us also has the power to reduce our consumption of fossil fuels. Here are some of the most important ways we can all make a difference:

- Consider driving less by taking public transportation, walking, bicycling, or carpooling. Drive a more energy-efficient vehicle.
- Try switching from conventional incandescent bulbs to energy-efficient compact fluorescents. Or better yet, try to maximize your use of natural sunlight for daytime lighting needs.
- Take every step possible to reduce excessive use of home heating and cooling. Try turning up the thermostat in the summer and turning it down a few degrees in the winter. Try installing better insulation throughout the house. Seal up windows, close vents, and clean filters.
- New refrigerators use about 50% less energy than those made just 10-15 years ago. That's a big deal, considering that refrigerators account for between 10 and 15% of total home energy consumption.

- You can reduce your energy consumption a lot by using less hot water. Run your dishwasher only when full, and wash clothes in cold or warm water, never hot. Look for Energy Star appliances when it is time to replace yours.
- Almost everything we buy requires the consumption of fossil fuels. Manufacturing, packing, and transporting all use huge amounts of energy. When shopping, ask, "Do I really need this?"
- Stay informed, write letters to your leaders, and support those candidates who promise to take the aggressive and farsighted actions necessary to curb global warming. **LEARN MORE:** www.audubon.org/globalWarming/



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

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BOULDER, CO 80323-1003

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