

# THE LESSER SQUAWK www.charlestonaudubon.org

Newsletter of the Charleston Audubon & Natural History Society

#### **DON'T MISS LECTURES!**

#### On the Trail of Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds

Join Doreen Cubie, **March 9th at 6pm** (snacks at 6pm, lecture at 6:30pm), as she describes her travels and research in a land of boreal forest and aspen parkland, where Ruby-throated Hummingbirds live in close proximity to moose, caribou, and many species of northern birds (such as Gray Jays, Boreal Chickadees, and Spruce Grouse). In the summer of 2010 Doreen began a multi-year research project to study Ruby-throated Hummingbirds at the northern and western edge of their summer range in three Canadian provinces: Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.



No one really knows how far north Rubythroats breed – and although they are usually considered eastern hummingbirds, Rubythroats also range far to the west in Canada, reaching the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Besides learning more about Canadian Rubythroats, Doreen would also like to determine whether these hummers are the same birds that migrate to the southeastern U.S. to spend the winter months. At this presentation, she will also talk briefly about her winter hummingbird studies.



Doreen Cubie, a master bird bander, lives in Awendaw, South Carolina and has been studying wintering hummingbirds in the southeastern U.S. since 2005. When not banding birds, Doreen is a freelance journalist and writes for National Wildlife, Wilderness, and other national magazines. Her work can be seen at www.doreencubie.com.

# Nature's Palette: the Wonders of Bird Coloration

The colors of birds delight us with their brilliance, captivate us with their subtleties, amaze us with their variety, and most of all leave us pondering their existence. Why are some birds so bright and gaudy they cannot go undetected, while others are so drab and cryptic they are very tough to spot? Why do House Finches lose their coloration when they fall ill while the colors of parrots are resistant to the effects of disease? Why do many female birds look different from males? Why aren't there any ducks with red feathers?

Ornithologist and author Geoff Hill will present a fun and informative program on bird coloration covering a range of topics from feather pigments to the functions of red and blue plumage coloration. Join us **April 13th, at 6:00pm**, for snacks and to socialize, then Dr. Hill will speak beginning at 6:30.







# Calendar of Events

#### March 9th, 6pm

LECTURE: "On the Trail of Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds: From the Southeast to Saskatchewan," by Doreen Cubie

See "On the Trail of Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds" article at left.

#### March 12th, 7am-1pm

FIELD TRIP: Pitt Street Bridge
Considered one of the best birding
spots in the Lowcountry, the Pitt
Street Bridge provides opportunities to
see shorebirds, herons, egrets,
oystercatchers, ospreys, gulls, terns,
and more. Carpooling available.
Gathering at Shem Creek for lunch. To
sign-up or for more information,
please contact Don Jones
843.572.8232 or birdfrogdjlj@aol.com.

#### March 26th, 7am-1pm

#### FIELD TRIP: Kiawah Island

Kiawah has beautiful ponds, tidal creeks, salt marshes, and beaches, providing opportunities to see wading birds, waterfowl, shorebirds, and more. The outing will be led by Kiawah Resort Naturalist Sarah Ernst. Moderate walking will be involved. Carpooling available. To sign-up or for more information, please contact Don Jones 843.572.8232 or birdfrogdjlj@aol.com.

#### April 7-12th

## **EVENT:** Swallow-tailed Kite Boat Survey

Participate in the Swallow-tailed Kite, citizen science project. This project gives us information on where the WatchListed Swallow-tailed Kites can be found in SC before they nest. You just need a canoe/kayak/motor boat and a friend (continued on next page)

# President's Notes

Even after living in the South for so long, it still surprises me to see trees beginning to 'green up' in February. Outside my home, and around the campus where I work, I already see trees showing signs of buds and new growth. Anxiously awaiting that new growth are the nearly-vegetarian house finches that, like me, came to this part of the country in the 1980's. Before long—and unlike me in this case—the finches will busily devour those tree buds as they prepare to nest. The hints of green we see in our yards and around the Lowcountry carry with them the promise of new growth, new birds, and shade from the summer sun that is just down the road.

In the 21st century, of course, "green" is no longer just a noun, or even an adjective to describe someone new to a task or an area, but a verb evoking attempts to become more environmentally conscious. Like the tree buds, you can see these efforts everywhere in the Lowcountry if you look for them. For example, the Sustainable Seafood Initiative supplies restaurants with information they need to purchase products caught at levels that will not exhaust the resource. Similarly, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs give individual consumers or families access to food grown organically. Perhaps more importantly, each of these movements focuses on food produced locally, reducing its carbon footprint by reducing the amount of energy needed to ship it to market. At institutional levels, the Kiawah Resort's annual marathon has made real strides (ok, pun intended) in reducing the amount of trash generated by the event and in numerous other ways to make the marathon more eco-friendly. The College of Charleston has an increasingly active Sustainability Committee, and has recently developed a Master's level program on the topic. Even The Citadel has eliminated the use of inefficient incandescent bulbs, installed motion sensors and low-flow water devices throughout the campus, yielding





energy savings estimated at over \$600,000 per year.

That last point is important, as groups including ours—realize that they can 'do well by doing good'. Our next significant step in making Charleston Audubon both 'greener' and more cost-effective is to eliminate the 5,000 sheets of paper (and ~\$700) involved in producing this issue of The Lesser Squawk. This is the penultimate paper copy we will produce for the foreseeable future, as we move to electronic production and distribution of the Squawk. This transition allows for new types of content, beginning with links like I've scattered throughout these Notes (visible in the electronic version). Rather than send paper copies, The Lesser Squawk will be available for download at www.charlestonaudubon.org. Check there periodically for new issues or, even more conveniently, to sign yourself up (preferred method) to receive email reminders that the new issue has been posted, or send an email to: membership@charlestonaudubon.org and you'll be added to the list. Eventually, we'll offer the ability to 'opt in' to other reminders. We already have some email addresses, provided when people became members, but they represent <10% of the membership; those people will soon receive notice that they are on our emailing list and will be offered an easy way to unsubscribe if they prefer.

Let me finish with just a few last points. First, and this is paramount to me, we will never ever sell our email list; it is only for our use as I described above. Next, this transition is technically challenging and wouldn't be possible without the skill and dedication shown to it by Steve Bleezarde, our webmaster, tech-guru, and freelance designer of numerous outstanding multimedia products here in the Charleston area. Finally, we're still green at this type of 'green', so please help us by signing up at our website, and bear with us as we 'green up' Charleston Audubon.

• Paul Nolan, paulnolancnhs@gmail.com

# Calendar of Events

#### April 7-12th, continued

who can help you with a shuttle. We will survey parts of the following rivers: Savannah, Edisto, Santee, Black/Black Mingo Creek, Little Pee Dee/Bull Creek and the Waccamaw. Your observations can help us improve our conservation efforts. To volunteer, please contact Ann Shahid at ashahid@audubon.org or 843-462-2150.

#### April 9th, 7:30am-1pm

#### FIELD TRIP: Briar's Creek

A large portion of Briar's Creek was left in its natural state and is maintained for wildlife. Fresh water swamps and nearby salt marshes provide habitat for many species. In the past, we've seen 55-66 different species. Bring snacks, lunch, binoculars, and insect repellent. Carpooling available. To sign-up or for more information, please contact Don Jones 843.572.8232 or birdfrogdjlj@aol.com.

#### April 13th, 6pm

LECTURE: "Nature's palette: the wonders of bird coloration" by Dr. Geoff Hill

See "Nature's Palette..." article.

#### April 30th, 7:30am-1pm

#### FIELD TRIP: Dewee's Island

Dewee's is a private community only accessible by boat. We will travel by ferry promptly at 8am and return on either the 11:30 or 12:30 boat. Golf carts will be provided. Last year, over 48 different species of shorebirds, gulls, pelicans, and more were seen. A limited amount of space is available. Registration ends April 26th. To sign-up or for more information, please contact Don Jones 843.572.8232 or birdfrogdjlj@aol.com.

#### More Information

For more information check out our calendar online:

www.charlestonaudubon.org/ calendar.html or join our gmail calendar by searching for CNHS. To attend field trips, please register with Don Jones prior to the scheduled dates: 843.572.8232 or birdfrogdjlj@aol.com.

#### **CNHS Board**

#### **President:**

Dr. Paul Nolan paulnolancnhs@gmail.com

#### **Vice President:**

Open (nominate someone!)

# Secretary & Citizen Science Coordinator:

Jenny McCarthey Tyrrell jmccarthey23@gmail.com

#### Treasurer:

Steve Moore

#### **Outings Chair:**

Don Jones birdfrogdjlj@aol.com

# Programs & Conservation Chair:

Andy Harrison parula23@aol.com

#### Webmaster:

Steve Bleezarde steve@bleezarde.com

#### Membership Coordinator:

Mary Kennerty

#### **Social Media Coordinator:**

Douglas Stewart

#### Lesser Squawk Editor:

Sarah Latshaw paintedbuntinglady@gmail.com



# Species Highlight: Swallow-tailed Kite

Swallow-tailed Kites (STKI) are on their way back to the Lowcountry again! This state endangered species has been declining for many years due to habitat loss. At one point STKIs occupied a range that covered 21 states, primarily up the Mississippi River Valley. Today they are known to occur in only 8 states, with the majority of the populations residing in South Carolina and Florida. During the nesting season STKI's will use bottomland hardwood forests along rivers to build nests and raise one to two



chicks. During this stage in their life, adults will glean prey items from the top of the canopy and bring food back to the nestlings. Typical prey items can include other baby birds, anoles, rough green tree snakes, and large insects. They've even been documented taking entire passerine nests full of chicks back to their nests like a happy meal of chicken nuggets! Once the chicks have fledged, STKIs change their foraging strategies and utilize different landscapes. Usually during July and August they travel to more open areas to forage for insects on the wing. These areas can include pastures, fallow fields, sod farms, and other human managed landscapes. Many times STKIs will mix in with Mississippi Kites at foraging aggregations and can reach huge numbers. Foraging aggregations have been recorded into the hundreds of individuals, creating the most elaborate aerial flight display in nature.

The Citizen Science for Swallow-tailed Kites Program is run by the Avian Conservation Center in collaboration with multiple governmental and non governmental organizations. To try to understand these birds better we've made an online reporting program where we allow the citizens to become scientists. Our online report site allows you to log exactly where you saw STKIs, what behaviors they were exhibiting, whether there was a nest present, and so on. Once you log your sighting it is loaded into our extensive online database. This database allows for researchers and scientists to see what habitats the STKIs are utilizing. Currently, there are multiple research programs using this database that include foraging studies, tracking programs, and transmitter placement on fledglings. With this information we hope to learn as much as possible about what the STKIs are doing and what habitats are critical to their survival, so that we can conserve their resources and help increase their population over time.

This breeding season, please be on the lookout for Swallow-tailed Kites and report your sightings at www.thecenterforbirdsofprey.org. When you click on the link it will take you to our report form. Please use the google map tool to find the exact location. Also please be as specific as possible when describing the location, i.e. street intersections, nearby businesses, landmarks, etc. Please do not use highway mile markers to report the location, as they are difficult to recreate using our mapping tool. Keep your eyes to the skies this spring and summer and report your kites!

• Jenny McCarthey Tyrrell, Secretary & Citizen Science Coordinator, jmccarthey23@gmail.com

### SC Conservation Bank Needs Our Support

If you enjoy birding on public lands in South Carolina, there's a good chance that all or part of one of the properties you like to visit was purchased with help from funds provided by the SC Conservation Bank. For example, on numerous occasions CNHS members have hiked the trails at South Tibwin Plantation near McClellanville. A Conservation Bank grant to The Nature Conservancy in 2007 facilitated the acquisition of the 900-acre Tibwin tract that lies between the Francis Marion National Forest and the Cape Romain Wildlife Refuge and serves as a buffer for both areas from surrounding intense development pressure.



The SC Conservation Bank was created in 2002, and it began funding grants in 2004. Its mission is "to improve the quality of life in South Carolina through the conservation of significant natural resource lands, wetlands, historical properties, and archeological sites," and it does this by working together with SC DNR, The Nature Conservancy and other eligible trust fund recipients and willing sellers of privately-held land. Since 2004 the Bank has successfully protected over 152,000 acres of significant lands in SC, at an average cost per acre to the Bank of \$534. The fair market value of the acreage was \$450 million, and so this represents a 6 to 1 return on investment.

Every day almost 200 acres of farm or forest land is converted to urban use in South Carolina. Thus the work of the SC Conservation Bank is critical to preserving the natural resources of our state. The Bank has added over 56,000 acres to the state Wildlife Management Area Program for hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation – lands that would otherwise not have been available to the citizens of SC. Sixty-two percent of all Conservation Bank Grant lands have general public access, while 32% have limited access that only requires the landowner's permission for the requested activity.

The SC Conservation Bank enjoys a high level of success and acceptance by the SC public. However, the annual budget for protecting significant lands in SC pales in comparison with those for most of the surrounding southeastern states. The Bank has also suffered sharp reductions in revenues in recent years – the Budget Recession Act of 2009 resulted in a 76% cut, for example. Because of these shortfalls, the Bank has been unable to fund 22 grants in the amount of \$6,114,263 that it had approved and to which it had made commitments.

Sadly, the future of the SC Conservation Bank is uncertain. It faces two primary threats: first, a "sunset clause" in the original legislation that created the Bank requires it to end in 2013; and second, in tight budget years a "death clause" strips the Bank of its entire budget. However, two State Senators have taken strong action in support of the Bank. Senator Glenn McConnell has introduced Bill S.48, which eliminates the "death clause" (replacing it with language that limits budget cuts to those experienced by other state agencies) and extends the "sunset clause" to 2023. Senator Chip Campsen has introduced two similar bills, S.138 and S.139, which not only call for removal of the "death clause" but also for making the Bank permanent.

Please call or write your SC Senator or Representative and ask them to save the SC Conservation Bank (and also thank Senators McConnell and Campsen for their initiatives). Contact information for members of the SC legislature is available at: http://www.scstatehouse.gov/. When an important natural area is lost to development, it is gone forever. If we don't protect these lands, who will? Now, more than ever, the Bank needs our support!

• Andy Harrison, parula23@aol.com

# Wine and Warblers, April 16th

Join an expert bird guide to search for returning warblers and other migrants along the boardwalk at Francis Beidler Forest. Wine and heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served at multiple locations along the boardwalk.

Groups will be limited in numbers and will leave the visitor's center every 20 minutes starting at 5:00 until 6:00 PM. The cost is \$50.00 for the 5:00 walk and \$40.00 for other walks. Plan to be here for at least 2 1/2 hours. Please call 843-462-2150 for reservations.





# BIRDATHON

# AND Spring Bird Count

Charleston's Natural History
Society Since 1905

May 1, 2011

www.CharlestonAudubon.org

#### PARTICIPATION

There are three easy ways to participate:

#### 1. MAKE A PLEDGE

You can pledge a fixed amount (\$15, \$30 or \$50, for example) or pledge a specific amount per species identified. (We usually observe between 130 and 150 species on a Spring Count). Use the small pledge form (see reverse) or send your pledge via e-mail to parula23@aol.com (please put Spring Bird Count in the subject line).

#### 2. SIGN-UP SPONSORS

Anyone donating \$20 or more, who is not already an member, is entitled to a one-year introductory membership in the National Audubon Society – which includes local membership and a subscription to *Audubon* Magazine.

Don't hesitate to ask friends, relatives and neighbors to support the Birdathon! You can distribute copies of the small pledge form for donations, or have sponsors sign-up on the larger form and collect their pledged amounts after the Spring Count (totals will be available 7-10 days after the May 1st Count.)

Extra forms can be downloaded from the website: www.charlestonaudubon.org.

#### 3. JOIN THE COUNT

Anyone, whether you're an experienced birder or just getting started, is encouraged to participate in the Spring Count. Groups – each led by an experienced birder – will record the numbers of species and individual birds they identify in their assigned territory over the course of the day. Afterward all of the team reports are compiled into a single report.

To join the count, please contact Andy Harrison who is coordinating this year's Count and Birdathon: Call **795–6934** or email parula**23**@aol.com

The Charleston Audubon Society Spring Bird Count will be held on Sunday, May 1. Our chapter has conducted this count for many years, and the data we collect is extremely valuable in detecting long-term trends in bird populations.

Once again this year's count will also be a fundraising effort through our annual Birdathon! The money we raise will be used to support on-going work at our McAlhany Nature Preserve (MNP) and other chapter activities. We just completed a prescribed burn on January 29 in two units of the Longleaf Pine Restoration Project at MNP, and work begins later this year on a new wetlands restoration project..

Our 15-mile diameter "count circle" (the same area used on the Charleston Christmas Bird Count) is divided into territories, and groups of observers – led by experienced birders – record the numbers of species and individuals they see or hear in their territory over the course of the day. This is birding with a purpose, but it is usually a lot of fun too!

Sign up for the count: Birders of all skill levels are welcome to participate on the Spring Count. And becoming involved in a count is a good way to improve your birding abilities! Contact the compiler, Andy Harrison, at 795–6934 or parula23@aol.com for more information.

#### AND AFTERWARD...

Our birding party with the highest species total and the donor making the largest contribution to the Birdathon will receive special recognition for their accomplishment. Please be patient when awaiting results – tabulating the data and verifying any unusual sightings after the count day may take a week or more (after all, we want to maintain a high-quality dataset for the long-term record).

Whether you join us for the Spring Count or make a donation in support of the Birdathon (or both), you will be taking part in a very worthy cause.

— Thanks very much!

Charleston Natural History Society 2011	Birdathon and Spring Count Pledge Form
NAME:	- CHECK MY PLEDGE
ADDRESS:	I would like to pledge \$ per species seen during the 2011 Birdathon. (i.e. if we find 135 species, a \$.25 pledge would equal \$33.75)
CITY: STATE: ZIP:  PHONE:	I would like to contribute \$ to the 2011 Birdathon effort. (i.e. \$25, \$50, \$75)
eMAIL:	<ul> <li>Please Mail all pledges/donations to:</li> </ul>
Sending your donation now?  MAKE ALL CHECKS PAYABLE TO:  The Charleston Natural History Society	Andy Harrison CNHS Birdathon Coordinator 35 Cross Creek Drive, APT. P-7 Charleston, SC 29412
L	Use the form above to make a place or denotes

Use the form below to sign-up sponsors and take their pledges. (You can use a pad or make your own form as long as you collect all the data.) Contact the Birdathon coordinator, Andy Harrison (at 795-6934 or by eMail at parula23@aol.com) and you'll be contacted after the count is compiled so that you can calculate and collect your sponsors' pledges.

Use the form above to make a pledge or donate a fixed amount. Donations may be sent immediately. If you return a pledge, you will be contacted, by phone or email, after the Spring Count totals have been compiled and asked to fulfill the pledge amount.

### Charleston Natural History Society 2011 Birdathon and Spring Count Pledge Sign-Up

NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE #	\$/per species	LEDGE INF fixed donation	TOTAL	PAID Y/N	NEW AUDUBON MEMBER?
		_					
		-					
		-					
		-					
		-					
		-					

After collecting all pledges and donations, please mail them, along with your name and contact information, and this form, to:

Andy Harrison, CNHS Birdathon Coordinator, 35 Cross Creek Drive, APT. P-7, Charleston, SC 29412

### Beidler Boardwalk

Since 1977, the 1.75 mile self-guiding boardwalk trail at the Audubon Center at Francis Beidler Forest has allowed visitors the chance to safely venture safely into the heart of the swamp to experience the peace and serenity that have characterized the area for millennia. Visitors can hear the sounds of birds, bugs, and breezes that have echoed through the 1000-year-old trees for ages, take a relaxing and informative walk back into time, and see a swamp the way nature intended it to be!

Unfortunately, the boardwalk is showing its age and needs your help. Please help us build a stronger, long-lasting, "greener" boardwalk by funding a portion of this new trail. We will be using three different

sustainably grown naturally durable tropical hardwoods. All three are incredibly rot resistant and should last 3 times longer than pressure treated wood. Costs will approach \$2 million. Your support will make it possible for people from all over the world to continue to experience this natural wonder of years gone by for many years to come.

You can mail your contribution to: Francis Beidler Forest, 336 Sanctuary Road, Harleyville, SC 29448 (put "Boardwalk Fund" in the memo line) or donate online at www.audubon.org/beidlerboardwalk

 Mike Dawson Center Director mdawson@audubon.org



#### Energy & Recycling Tips: Conserving Gasoline

With gas prices threatening to reach the \$4.00 point by June, here are a few tips to help you use less.

1. **Don't feel the need for speed:** The amount of drag your vehicle generates increases exponentially with each increase in speed; that is, driving a little faster generates a lot more drag, which requires more gas to overcome. So if you typically do 65 miles per hour (mph), throttle back to 60mph, and take the savings to the bank.

- 2. **Use the cruise:** Once you're out on the highway at cruising speed and traffic permits, use your vehicle's cruise control. You'll burn less fuel than if you're on the gas, then on the brake, then on the gas again.
- 3. Ease off the gas on hills: Maintaining your speed up a hill means opening your vehicle's throttle. A larger throttle opening means burning more gas. So you might want to think about backing down by a few miles per hour—maybe even 5 or 10—for climbs. Don't increase your speed until you get to the very top of any hill you climb this way. In fact, if there's a downgrade at the top of the hill, use that downgrade to help you increase your speed—let gravity help you to better fuel economy.
- 4. **Connect your gas pedal to your brain:** This one may seem to go without saying, but it's amazing the difference it'll make to really think about the gas (and the dollars) getting sucked into your car's engine when you put the pedal to the metal. Every time you accelerate, think, "Hmm, that just cost me some gas (and some money)." Do that, and you'll soon rethink this business of acceleration. You'll start accelerating only when you have to, and only as much as you need to.
- 5. Anticipate changes in traffic, and where you have to stop: When it's time to slow down or stop, get off of the gas as soon as you can. If you have to climb onto the brakes, that could mean that you've stayed on the gas longer than you needed to. Use your brakes when you need to, but allow aerodynamic drag, rolling resistance, and all the other forces working on your vehicle help you slow down.

Of course, carpooling and combining trips is your number one way to save on gas. Keeping tires inflated to their proper pressure is a big saver. Remember that every gallon you don't use keeps pollutants out of the air.

If you have tips you would like to share, please send them to Ann Shahid at ashahid@audubon.org

As Climate and Energy Outreach Coordinator (as well as Important Bird Areas Coordinator) for Auduhon South Carolina, I would like to share an energy saving or recycling tip in each "Lesser Squawk." If any readers have tips they would like to share, please email them to me. Learn more at www.CharlestonAudubon.org.

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.



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