


# The Lesser Squawk

Newsletter of the   
Charleston Audubon &  
Natural History Society

WWW.CHARLESTONAUDUBON.ORG

May, 2009

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Participate May 10th. Help us raise funds –  
Make a donation - Recruit donors!

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Mark your calendars now! We take June-  
August off: We're back in September!

### Wilson's Plover Survey .....page 2

Are you a shorebird enthusiast? Can  
you ID Wilson's plovers? Join in this  
important breeding season survey.

## President's Notes

Spring has arrived in the Lowcountry, and the trickle of migrant birds and incoming summer residents we saw in March has increased to a flood. I heard my first-of-year Prothonotary and Hooded Warblers last week, and while at my parents' house about two weeks ago I got a nice look at a female Black-throated Green Warbler gleaning insects in the shrubs around their bird bath.

### Passing the Torch

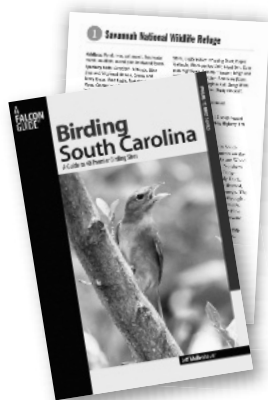
This is generally an exciting time of year for birders, but it has been a bittersweet season for me. Among other reasons, I will be stepping down as President after the election of officers at our May 13 membership meeting. My experience has been both rewarding and, at times, frustrating, but overall I am glad that I agreed (after much arm-twisting) to serve back in 2005.

I want to take this final opportunity to thank all the board members and other volunteers who contributed so much time and effort for CNHS while I was President, including: Steve Bleezarde, Norm Brunswig, Cornelia Carrier, Joe Cockrell, Jim Cubie, Julian Harrison, Kevin Hart, Mike and Kathy Hutchinson, Don and Lois Jones, Cathy and Carl Miller, Jeff Mollenhauer, Steve Moore, Paul Nolan, Donna Robertson, and Tom Snowden. I have enjoyed working with you all.

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

## SC Audubon's Mollenhauer Authors SC Birding Guide Book

May Lecture: Wednesday May 13th



**Birding South Carolina** provides detailed descriptions of forty premier birding locations across the state. In addition to numerous migrating and breeding songbirds, shorebirds, and seabirds, a number of highly sought-after-species — such as the Wood Stork, Swallow-tailed Kite, Purple Gallinule, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, and Swainson's Warbler — are easy to find with this guide. Inside you'll find:

- Accurate bird-finding information for the entire state —from the Atlantic coast and coastal plains to the piedmont and the mountains
- A description of each site, with easy-to-follow directions and information about key species
- More than 30 color photos of select birds found in the state in addition to site-specific bird photos and landscapes
- A birding calendar to ensure you're in the right place at the right time
- A list of 175-plus sought-after species, with the best habitats and areas to look for them

Author Jeff Mollenhauer, Director of Bird Conservation for the South Carolina Audubon, will discuss writing the book, visiting the state's best birding spots, and collecting the local knowledge necessary to fill its pages.

» 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, guests and the general public. We gather at 6:30 p.m. for a reception and speakers will begin at 7:00 p.m.

### » Refreshments for Reception

Please consider bringing food to our next reception! Bring anything: Cheese and crackers, fruit, chips and dips, nuts, cookies, cakes, whatever. We supply the drinks and ice but depend on our members to provide the spread!

### Getting the Book —

Signed copies of Jeff's book are available from the Beidler Forest Audubon Sanctuary for \$21.95. You can stop by the visitor center and pick up a copy or they will ship copies (for an additional \$3-4 shipping, depending on location). Orders will help support Audubon and bird conservation in South Carolina. If you would like to order a copy, call 843-462-2150 or email Jeff: [jmollenhauer@audubon.org](mailto:jmollenhauer@audubon.org) and he will arrange to send you a copy!

### Final Spring Field Trip — Mepkin Abbey, May 16th

Our last field trip until we start-up again in September. Details on pg. 3

# Birdathon & Spring Count

## This Sunday, May 10th

Get out your binoculars, checklists... and checkbooks! The Charleston Spring Bird Count and Birdathon will be held this year on Sunday, May 10. Our chapter has conducted the Spring Count for many years, and the data we collect is extremely valuable in detecting long-term trends in bird populations. The money we raise during this year's Birdathon will be used to support ongoing work at our McAlhany Nature Preserve and other local chapter activities. For example, at our November 8 MNP work day we laid out more than two miles of new trails, and small footbridges are needed at several points to cross seasonal wet spots. We also need additional equipment (extra drip torches, etc.) to help conduct the prescribed burns required by our long-term longleaf pine/native grass 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. 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.

**How to make a pledge:** You can pledge a fixed amount (\$10, \$25 or \$50, for example) or pledge a specific amount per species identified. We generally observe between 150 and 170 species on a typical Spring Count. Don't hesitate to ask friends, relatives and neighbors to support the Birdathon! Use the pledge form included in this newsletter or send your pledge via e-mail to Andy Harrison at parula23@aol.com (put Spring Bird Count in the subject line).

Our birding party with the highest species total and the donor making the largest contribution to the Birdathon will receive recognition in *The Lesser Squawk* 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!

## Communication Committee

### Forming for 2009-2010

Are you interested in helping produce *The Lesser Squawk*? Do you have ideas for our website, an eNews letter or other ways of reaching out and staying in touch with our members?

If your answer is "yes," then please contact me (406-2061 or [steve@charlestonaudubon.org](mailto:steve@charlestonaudubon.org).) I plan to have our group meet once or twice this summer. Any suggestions are welcome – even if you don't want a seat on the committee, please consider attending one of our "brainstorming" sessions. I look forward to hearing from you.

## President's Notes from page 1

Running for President, for 2009-2010, in May is Paul Nolan; for Vice President, Steve Moore; for Treasurer, Tom Snowden; and for Secretary, Cathy Miller. And while I will no longer be an officer, I plan to stay active with CNHS next year. We are looking hard for new board members, too —

### Communications Committee

In particular, we're looking for help assembling and distributing *The Lesser Squawk* and considering new ways of communicating with our membership (eNews, the website, alternate mailings, etc.) We hope to form a committee to ease the burden on our editor, Steve Bleezarde. If you have a couple of hours every two months or so to review copy, or transport materials to our printer and/or mailer, let Steve ([steve@charlestonaudubon.org](mailto:steve@charlestonaudubon.org)) or myself know. (And if you are interested in writing articles or submitting photos for publication, all the better!)

We are also seeking assistance with the planning of programs for next year. Cornelia Carrier has done a great job for a number of years, but she plans to travel more in the near future and could use help contacting potential speakers and making arrangements for their appearance.

### Birdathon & Spring Count - May 10th

Don't forget that our Spring Count and Birdathon will be held this year on Sunday, May 10. Why on Sunday? Well, a good bit of our 15-mile diameter count circle falls within the Francis Marion National Forest, where hunting is prohibited on Sundays. Participating in a Spring Count is a great way to learn birds – many are in bright breeding plumage now, and male resident songbirds are setting up territories and singing their hearts out. We'll have ten or more parties in the field, each led by an experienced birder. The meeting place will be the same as in past years – the parking lot for the KFC at the intersection of Hwy 41 and Hwy 17 at 7:00 a.m.. If you can't make it on the count, consider making a pledge to the Birdathon! Contributions will help us carry out critical management activities at the McAlhany Nature Preserve, as well as funding other basic chapter functions.

It's been an honor serving as CNHS President for the past four years. I hope that in the future I can continue to lead field trips and help keep CNHS involved in conservation projects and other endeavors that make a difference to the natural world and our communities. As always, if you have comments or suggestions please don't hesitate to contact me.

— Andy Harrison  
[parula23@aol.com](mailto:parula23@aol.com)



## Mark Your Calendars

FIELD TRIPS, LECTURES & LOWCOUNTRY EVENTS

After our May programs, we take the hot summer months off — Programs, lectures and field trips will resume in September, 2009

### Spring Bird Count and Fundraising Birdathon!

» Sunday, May 10

In the Spring Count, everyday birders collect important data used by conservation groups and scientists tracking bird populations. We make the event even more special by asking you to make a donation – in support of those who give of their time in the count — and in support of our Natural History Society.

Please take a look at the enclosed flyer and do what you can to help.

— Thank You

See story, page 2 + insert.

### Birding South Carolina Charleston Audubon Lecture

» Wednesday, May 13, 6:30 p.m.

» SC Audubon's Director of Bird Conservation, Jeff Mollenhauer

See story, page 1.

### Field Trip — Mepkin Abbey

» Saturday, May 16, 7:00 a.m.

The last trip of the 2008-2009 season will be to Mepkin Abbey. The 3,000 acre property has many diverse habitats including stands of old live oaks, meadows, fresh water ponds, frontage on the Cooper River and wooded natural areas. In addition the monks have undertaken an extensive project to reintroduce native flowers and grasses.

After a morning of birding we will, of course, visit the gift shop where jams, jellies and ceramics are available – as well as mushrooms grown by the monks.

We will meet in the First Citizens Bank parking lot in the Wal-Mart shopping center in Summerville at 7:00 a.m.. From there we'll car pool to the Abbey which is north of Monks Corner along the west branch of the Cooper River. Bring your birding gear, a lunch and comfortable walking shoes. Please register with Don Jones prior to May 16th: 572-8232 or Birdfrogdjlj@aol.com.

## 2009 Wilson's Plover Survey

### Volunteers Sought for Breeding Season Survey: May 1 – June 15

Attention shorebird enthusiasts! SCDNR, USFWS and Audubon Society are asking for assistance to survey for Wilson's plovers during their 2009 breeding season. The survey will be conducted from May 1 through June 15, which coincides with the period of peak Wilson's plover nesting. If you can identify Wilson's plovers and would like to survey an area, or assist in covering an area, or can help us access a beach; please e-mail South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Biologist Felicia Sanders (SandersF@dnr.sc.gov) and let her know what area you are interested in. Instructions and a data collection sheet are posted as PDFs on the left side of our homepage ([www.CharlestonAudubon.org](http://www.CharlestonAudubon.org)).

Wilson's plovers are listed as threatened in South Carolina. The U. S. Shorebird Conservation Plan has identified Wilson's plover as a "species of high concern." Wilson's plovers nest on beaches in the Southeast U.S. Human disturbance can modify nesting behavior, resulting in nest abandonment and increased susceptibility of eggs and chicks to predation and overheating. Because of coastal development, habitat destruction and disturbance from beachgoers and their pets, officials and naturalists fear Wilson's plovers are declining in South Carolina.

Annual counts provide important information on distribution of Wilson's plovers. Counts also are used to estimate population size and are needed to evaluate population trends. In 2006 and 2007, Kerri Dikun and Dr. Chris Hill at Coastal Carolina University, coordinated surveys for Wilson's plovers in many parts of the SC coast.

Dikun and Hill's research on nesting Wilson's plovers in SC found the density of Wilson's plovers was higher at undeveloped sites than at developed sites. Yet they observed Wilson's plovers at beaches that were developed, such as at Pawley's Island. They also described preferred habitat used for nesting. Wilson's plover nests are often in dunes near an area that is flat and overwashes at higher tides. They will also nest in flat, sandy areas created by overwash at spring high tides. Thus, entire dune systems that are fairly open, free from excessive vegetation (shrubs), are suitable nesting habitat and should be surveyed. With the help of concerned birders, 2009 data will expand our ability to protect and manage these and other shorebird populations.

Wilson's plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*), like the more often reported upon Piping plover, is a species threatened by development and human activity throughout its coastal breeding habitat.



# The Charleston Audubon & Natural History Society

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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](http://www.CharlestonAudubon.org).

## Upcoming Spring Events at Beidler Forest

Beidler Forest is offers a variety of activities through the spring that they hope will allow even regular visitors to experience the old-growth, cypress-tupelo swamp in a new way! **Reservations required: Call 843-462-2150 for information.**

» **Swamp Stomps** – Audubon naturalist-guided OFF-boardwalk treks deep into the swamp. See the sanctuary's largest Cypress Tree. Expect to get waist deep in the swamp!  
Cost \$8/person. No on under 16 please.  
May 9 at 9:00 a.m.

» **Hard Core Beidler Bird Walks** – For the serious birder, this walk will take participants to several off-boardwalk sites in search of the elusive Swainson's Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, and Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Led by Jeff Mollenhauer, author of the *Falcon Guide to Birds of South Carolina*. Dress for woods trail walking.  
Cost \$8/person. **May 30 at 8:30 a.m.**

» **Night Walks** - Audubon naturalist-guided moonlit walk along the boardwalk through virgin section of Four Holes Swamp. Shine for gators, talk to owls, listen to bats.  
Cost \$8/person. **May 9th at 8:30 p.m.**

» **Canoe/Kayak Trips** - Starting at 1:00 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays through May. Audubon naturalists lead 4-hour guided excursions deep into the old growth interior of the swamp. 2-hour trips on Saturday mornings at 9:00 a.m. Participants paddle their way through meandering black water creek trails, past ancient cypress trees, observing wildlife along the way and experiencing part of the swamp that few see. Some canoeing experience is suggested. All equipment provided.  
Cost \$30/adult, \$15/child (8-18) for 4-hour trip and \$20/adult and \$10/child (6-18) for 2-hour trip.



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