

The LESSER SQUAWK

Newsletter of the
Charleston Audubon Society

www.CharlestonAudubon.org

November-December 2006

President's Notes:

Fall migration season is drawing to a close, but there is still time to participate in the Fall Hawk Migration Survey that CNHS is partnering with the International Birds of Prey Center to re-open this year (through November 30). Survey sites are located at both the ICBP in Awendaw and at North Tibwin Plantation near McClellanville, and it only requires a few hours of your time. Bug spray, data sheets and helpful raptor identification materials are all provided. Contact Dr. Maria Whitehead at maria.whitehead@citadel.edu or the ICBP office at (843) 928-3494 to sign up for a slot or for more information.

We've got a great lecture and two excellent field trips planned for November, too (see inside for details).

Thanks to all who purchased bird seed in our fall fundraiser – and don't forget to pick up your seed between November 3-12 at either the West Ashley or Mt. Pleasant *Wild Birds Unlimited*



(whichever you indicated on your order form). Contact organizer Mike Hutchinson (h: 884-7746, mhutchinson15@comcast.net) if you'll be unable to pick-up your order. Many thanks also to both Chris Wood and Patty Montgomery at the two stores for helping make this fundraiser possible!

In December we take a break from regular membership meetings. However, please join us for our annual Holiday Picnic and Party at our McAlhany property in Dorchester County, near *continues – SEE President, pg. 2*

Quick Calendar – CNHS Events:

- 11/3-12 Bird Seed Pick-Up
- 11/4 Dewees Island Fieldtrip pg 3
- 11/15 Wednesday Lecture: Bats... pg 1
- 11/18 Huntington Beach Fieldtrip pg 3
- 12/2 McAlhany Picnic pg 2
- 1/11 Film: Watching Sparrows pg 1

Learn About Life on the Edge: The Extreme Diets of Bats



On Wednesday, November 15, 2006, we welcome Coastal Carolina University assistant professor Dr. Wendy Hood. Dr. Hood's talk will focus the extreme diversity of diets found among bats and the consequences that these diets have on social behavior, reproduction, and the life spans of bats. Bats are truly wonders of nature. They represent the only flying mammals (flying squirrels glide but cannot fly).

Her research focuses on how animals adapt to the nutritional limitations of specialized diets. This work includes the consequences of low calcium diets on lactation in bats, how diet influences mating coloration in bluegill sunfish and finches, and the effect of fat intake on over-winter survival in hibernating ground squirrels.

Dr. Hood will welcome questions on her work and related issues. Visit Dr. Hood's personal website at <http://www.wendyhood.com> for more information about her studies and photo galleries of some of her travels.

Lectures are held 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. Drinks, plates and napkins provided – please consider bringing a snack to share!

January Program Brings Sparrow Watching Indoors!

At our Thursday, January 11, 2007 program we'll enjoy "Watching Sparrows," an extraordinary film over three years in the making. Watching Sparrows "is awesome. It is just like watching sparrows in the field, only the views are better, the sound is cleaner, and there's someone helpfully explaining what you are watching," says Chris Elphick, editor of *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*. Close-up filming and state of the art sound recordings create an exciting way to enjoy birds and to polish your identification skills. The sometimes strange, often beautiful songs of sparrows are frequently the defining sounds of North America's most dramatic landscapes. This guide spans the United States and Canada to explore the lives and breeding habitats of 46 species of sparrows, towhees, juncos and longspurs. This film is by award-winning filmmakers Michael Male and Judy Fieth.

Visit www.birdfilms.com to learn more.

February Brings Ivory-Bill Researcher to Charleston

We haven't locked in our February program date (the 7th or 8th,) but mark your calendars anyway for this joint meeting with the Nature Conservancy with guest speaker Scott Simon, director of TNC in Arkansas and co-leader of the search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Hear first-hand about the incredible hope and effort that he and others have poured into the Big Woods. Mr. Simon calls the ivory-bill's rediscovery a "call to action." Come hear his story and learn about the ongoing effort to locate ivory-bills and preserve the Big Woods.

Migration Connection Highlighted by New Species Discovery

Although most of the world's bird species have long been recognized and described, some unknowns still inhabit the few remaining unexplored and often virtually inaccessible places left on Earth. This was made clear recently when the description of a new species, the Yarigües Brush-Finch (*Atlapetes lat-inuchus yariguierum*), was published in the journal *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists Club* (Vol. 126: June 2006). The colorful finch – a likely nonmigrant species – was discovered in Columbia in a remote portion of the Serranía de los Yarigües mountain range in the eastern Andes by a team of Fundación ProAves biologists led by Thomas Donegan and Blanca Huertas. This fairly high elevation area (around 10,000 feet above sea level), named – as is the new bird – for the native people who once inhabited it, is so remote that the team and their equipment had to be dropped in by helicopter. Significantly, the location of the discovery was adjacent to the 500-acre Cerulean Warbler Bird Reserve.

The Cerulean Warbler Bird Reserve is the first reserve ever created in South America to protect wintering habitat for a songbird that breeds exclusively in North America. Fundación ProAves and the American Bird Conservancy used donated funds to establish the reserve in 2005. The Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*), a Neotropical migrant species, has experienced dramatic losses in breeding populations during the last half-century – an estimated nearly 80% overall decline, according to Audubon's *The State of the Birds* (2004). In North America the bird prefers mature, older deciduous forests with an unbroken canopy, and it has probably suffered most from habitat degradation and forest fragmentation in both its breeding and wintering ranges (they were historically very

common breeders in the vanished old-growth bottomland forests of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley). The Columbian government recently boosted hopes for the survival of both the Yarigües Brush-finch and other species such as the Cerulean Warbler by designating 193,698 acres of grassland and mountain forests as the Serranía de los Yarigües National Park.

In most of South Carolina, including the Lowcountry, Cerulean Warblers are a transient species seen only rarely in fall or spring migration (they breed in very low numbers in the SC mountains). Other migrants do spend significant amounts of time along our coast, however, including shorebirds such as the Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*), Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) and Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*). In moderate numbers, Red Knots use our beaches from fall through spring to feed and rest during their amazing 10,000 mile journey between the low Canadian Arctic and the southern reaches of South America. Some studies report that a 50% drop has occurred over the last 30 years in the numbers of Red Knots observed at key migration stopover points (such as Delaware Bay). The Piping Plover, a federally-listed threatened species in SC, winters in low numbers here and is also in serious decline. Wilson's Plover is an uncommon breeder along our coast in the summer months. All three species have suffered from accelerating coastal development and the resulting increase in human and canine disturbances to shorebirds.

How can you help conserve our shorebird visitors? Sidney Maddock, who works with Audubon NC, has secured a grant to study the status of the SC populations of Piping Plover, Wilson's Plover and Red Knot – and he and his partners

continues – see MIGRATION pg 4.

President – continued from pg. 1

St. George (see story this page).

The Christmas Bird Count season also arrives in mid-December and lasts into early January. There are a number of local counts to choose from (again, see story, pg. 3), and I encourage you to participate in at least one of them. By doing so you help generate data that is extremely valuable in detecting long-term trends in wintering bird populations. Not to mention the fact that taking part in a CBC can be a lot of fun and a great learning experience, especially for younger birders. Don't worry if your birding skills aren't well developed yet – the compilers will pair you with an experienced leader. So get out and do some birding with your kids over the holidays!

Finally, before voting on November 7, check out the candidates' record on the environment. For example, do they favor putting a brake on sprawl and requiring planned, sensible growth? Think green, and vote – you can make a difference! Thanks.

– Andy Harrison phone: 843 795-6934
Email: parula23@aol.com

Bring Family and Friends to Cookout at McAlhany

A Fall cookout at McAlhany Nature Preserve is a great chance to get out and experience this wonderful property we own and manage.

Our 4th Annual BBQ and Pot-Luck at McAlhany will be held Saturday, December 2, 2006. 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 and the development of the nature trail. 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. 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). See pg. 3 for directions.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

Upcoming Programs, Outings & Lowcountry Events

(Please note that this is the Nov./Dec. issue of The Lesser Squawk: the next issue will cover Jan./Feb. 2007. Please mark upcoming events on your calendar now!

Up-to-date calendar items will also be posted online: www.charlestonaudubon.org)

LECTURES:

Wed. November 15

- » Dr. Wendy Hood
 - » Coastal Carolina University
 - » Bats! Their Extreme Diets & More
- See story, pg 1.*

Thurs. January 11, 2007

- » Reception & Film
 - » Watching Sparrows
- See story, pg 1.*

NOTE: We do not hold a program meeting in December. Please join us at our December 2nd McAlhany Picnic - see story, pg. 2

FIELDTRIPS:

Sat. November 4th, 6:45 a.m.

» Dewees Island Fieldtrip

On Nov. 4th Charleston Audubon will have a rare opportunity to visit Dewees Island. The size of the group is limited to 25 and we must have the names of those planning to attend by Nov. 1st. There is a \$12 per person charge for the round trip ferry ride. Transportation will be provided to various birding locations on the island.

We'll meet at the ferry parking lot which is at the end of 41st Avenue, Isle Of Palms prior to 7:00 a.m., at which time we will collect the \$12 (exact change, or check made out to Dewees Island POA). After a morning of birding, we'll all leave the island at the same time, on either the 12:30 or 1:30 p.m. ferry.

Learn more about Dewees Island online:
<http://www.deweesisland.com>
<http://www.deweesislandpoa.org>

Note that we MUST register in advance for this trip. Please register with Andy Harrison by Nov 1st: (843) 795-6934 or parula23@aol.com

Sat. November 18th, 7:30 a.m.

» Huntington Beach State Park

Join Andy Harrison and Don Jones 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.

In recent years unusual visitors such as the Cave Swallow, Lapland Longspur and Common Merganser have been spotted here in November. 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; \$3.25 seniors; \$3 children aged 6-15; free for kids 5 and under).

Meet Andy and Don at 7:00 a.m. Saturday, November 18 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 email at parula23@aol.com by Friday, November 17th.

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.)

» Christmas Bird Counts

107 Years of Citizen Science

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is the oldest and largest citizen science event in the world. For over a hundred years, people have gathered together during the winter holiday season to count birds. For many people, this is an annual tradition that has passed from one generation to the next. Contact one of our area leaders and join the fun!

Due to scheduling conflicts, two area counts are both scheduled for Sunday, December 31st: the Charleston count, led by Burton Moore (days at 853-1100, or bemiii@yahoo.com), and the ACE Basin area count organized by David Chamberlin (843-884-0019).

The McClellanville count is scheduled for Sunday, 12/17 and will be led by Nathan Dias (offshorebirder@yahoo.com 607-0105).

As we go to press, details of other area counts are not yet available. Learn more about these counts, leader contact information, etc., by visiting <http://www.carolinabirdclub.org> (follow the link for Christmas Bird Counts). We will also post additional information on our website as it becomes available. Area leaders you may wish to contact for details include:

→ Santee N.W.R. - Lex Glover (home (803) 438-9855, work (803) 419-7747, and email bglvr@clemsun.edu)

→ Litchfield-Pawleys Island - Jack Peachey (ppaw@sccoast.net)

Learn more about the CBC and results from years' past online at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc>



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The Charleston Audubon Society
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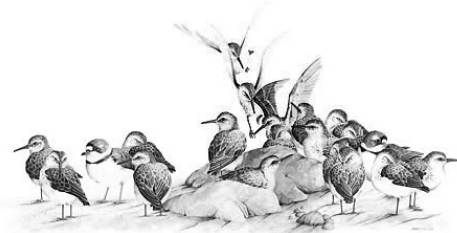


The Charleston Audubon Society – a SC chapter of the National Audubon Society since 1970, founded as the Charleston Natural History Society in 1905, and serving Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties – is a nonprofit environmental organization that actively promotes awareness, appreciation and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

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(including Coastal Carolina University, SC DNR and others) will be examining other associated shorebirds, too. Our chapter has signed on to support this effort. If you are interested in participating in these shorebird surveys, contact Sid at smaddock@audubon.org. SC Audubon has also sponsored an effort to distribute informational cards to coastal businesses and organizations that explain why keeping shorebird disturbance to a minimum is so important.

Contact me (at parula23@aol.com or 795-6934) if you can help.
Thanks! – *Andy Harrison*



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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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10th Annual Backyard Bird Count

Count for the Birds in
America's Great Backyard:
February 16-19, 2007

- No Fee or registration required
- All ages and skill levels welcome
- Track results in real time online
- Count in your backyard, balcony, schoolyard, park, wildlife refuge
- Be a part of the network

Join with thousand of others to find out how many birds are being seen in your area and across the continent this winter. By participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count, you help document where birds are, and track changes in their numbers compared to previous years, helping scientists paint a picture of the state of birds this winter.

For more information, and to view past results, go to <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>