

The Lesser Squawk

Newsletter of the
Charleston Audubon &
Natural History Society

WWW.CHARLESTONAUDUBON.ORG

March, 2008



President's Note

Spring is definitely in the air! As I write this in mid-February, daytime temperatures are expected in the 70s. This has been an "incursion year" for winter visitors such as Red-breasted Nuthatch, Purple Finch and Pine Siskin, but so far I've only spotted one of these (a Red-breasted Nuthatch seen on our CNHS trip to Santee NWR). It looks like my chances for the latter two are dimming, but in just a few weeks I expect to hear the welcome sound of Yellow-throated Warblers singing.

Park Conservation on Folly Beach

One of the best birding spots over the years in the Charleston area has been the Old Coast Guard Station at North Folly Beach. Owned jointly by Charleston County PRC and the SC DNR Heritage Trust Program, this property has remained in a "semi-wild" state for a number of years – to the benefit of migratory and breeding birds. However, major changes are planned for the appearance and use of the park (which may seriously impact bird populations). See inside for more details about how we can help shape these changes.

Prescribed Burn Success

At the McAlhany Nature Preserve, Joe Cockrell and other volunteers (including Jason Ayers (US FWS) and CNHS members Tom Snowden, Carl Miller and Andy Harrison) have just completed prescribed burns in all the longleaf pine units. Joe is now overseeing the planting of wiregrass in about half of these units (the rest will be planted next year). This is a significant accomplishment in our continued work on this long-term restoration project.

Birdathon + Spring Count, May 4th

Our Spring Count will be held on May 4 this year. Once again we'll be combining the count with a fund-raising Birdathon – contributions will be used to help fund our Pitt Street Bridge kiosk project (a series of informative displays about bird species that can be seen from the bridge). Last year we raised over \$1,700 with the Birdathon, and we hope to do even better this year. Details and Birdathon forms will be available in the April/May Squawk and online.

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

More Than Just Pretty Songs: How and Why Birds Sing

Songbirds use song to communicate. A male uses its songs for the two most important things it does: defending its territory, and securing a mate. But what sounds deceptively simple – and often quite beautiful to our ears – is, in fact, remarkably complex.

Like people, most young songbirds learn their vocalizations from what they hear; and just as some of us may have a drawl, songbirds too may sing with a local "accent." While we can hear the differences between species, many factors determine what a given song sounds like, including physical constraints on the birds' abilities. Overall, it is amazing how many questions remain in our understanding of the role song plays in a bird's daily life.

Join Us at Our March Lecture

It has been two years since CofC Professor of ornithology and animal behavior Melissa Hughes spoke to us about the "Secret Lives" of the little brown Song Sparrows she studies. On Wednesday, March 12 she will return to tell us more about the Hows and Whys of those birdsongs we so often stop to hear, yet seldom pause to give more thought.

» 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 bring food for our receptions! Lately donations have dropped off, and we have had pretty meager fare at some recent meetings. 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!

Thank You,
Cornelia Carrier
PROGRAMS CHAIR



N.B. Illustration by Chris Thornley and Graham Shephard. Available on t-shirts from Threadless.com

Upcoming Events

Details in this issue

March 8 – Hampton Plantation
March 12 – Why Birds Sing
March 22 – Drayton Hall
April 9 – Audubon in Alaska

April 12 – Bonneau Ferry WMA
April 26 – Wine + Warblers
April 26-27 – Silver Bluff Trip
May 4 – Birdathon + Spring Count

Paper or Plastic? No. Choose Reusable Bags

Little things can mean a lot. And in the case of those little plastic bags most grocery stores are using, a lot turns-out to be a much bigger issue than we usually stop to consider:

- According to the EPA, over 380 billion plastic bags and wraps are used in the U.S. each year.
- Annually, an estimated 500 billion to 1 trillion plastic bags are consumed worldwide.
- An estimated 1 million seabirds, and hundreds of thousands of sea turtles, whales and marine mammals die every year from eating discarded plastic, mostly bags, mistaken for food.

Is Paper Better than Plastic?

No. It takes more than four times as much energy to manufacture a paper bag as it does to manufacture a plastic bag, and paper bag manufacture generates 70% more air and 50 times more water pollutants than plastic bags. The U.S. in 1997 alone used 955,000 tons of paper bags, consuming approximately 14.8 million trees.

So Q: "Paper or plastic?"

A: "Neither Because..."

1. Both use up valuable natural resources for a single-use, disposable product
2. Both have negative impacts on wildlife
3. Both create significant toxic by-products during their lifecycles
4. Neither is effectively recycled

Reusable Bags. A Simple Step.

By bringing reusable bags to the store, you can help the environment in several ways: You help to preserve the natural resources of oil and trees used to produce plastic and paper bags. You are

— continued, see *Bags*, page 4

Folly Bird Habitat Threatened At Old Coast Guard Station

Over the years the maritime forest and weedy, shrubby fields in the Old Coast Guard Station property at North Folly Beach have helped make this a favorite spot for local and visiting birders in the Charleston area. In the fall the area is a critical "stopover" site for migrant warblers, tanagers, vireos and other songbirds (and also migrating butterflies and moths). During spring and summer months it hosts breeding populations of Painted Buntings and Common Ground Doves. The Painted Bunting is listed as an *extremely high* priority species in Partners in Flight's *Bird Conservation Plan for the South Atlantic Coastal Plain*, while the Common Ground Dove is listed as a species of *regional concern* that requires management attention. Both species are accorded "highest priority" status by the SC DNR *Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy* (as are Loggerhead Shrike and American Kestrel, two species known to winter at this location).

The Old Coast Guard Station is jointly owned by the Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission (CC PRC) and the SC DNR Heritage Trust Program. For many years the property has been left in a "semi-wild" state, but recently observed landscape maintenance activity (cutting and trimming of the forested edge along the entrance road and mowing of the weedy fields near the building foundations) and subsequent inquiries have revealed that there are plans in the works to turn this site (in addition to Morris Island) into a Historic Battlefield Park by CC PRC. More information (but few real details) about these plans can be found in a PDF online at: <http://tinyurl.com/385bmm>.

Given the recent expansion of the parking lot (and resulting habitat loss) at Folly Beach County Park on the south end of the island, the prospect of a continually-manicured park and construction of associated parking facilities, restrooms, etc. at the Old Coast Guard Station represents a real threat to the limited wildlife habitat remaining on Folly Beach.

According to the CC PRC web site, public hearings on a draft plan for the Battlefield Parks will be held March 12 (11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Charleston County Library, 68 Calhoun St. and 4-7 p.m. at the Folly Beach Community Center, 55 Center St.). I strongly encourage our members to attend these meetings and to contact CC PRC (843-762-2172 for the Planning and Development Division, or e-mail them at customerservice@ccprc.com) to voice your concerns about the importance of the existing habitat for birds and other wildlife. The ideal management plan for the site would be to leave it "as is," but that seems unlikely. However, it may be possible for us to help shape the plans for the park so that the impacts to wildlife are minimal. Thank you for your help.

President continued from page 1

We've scheduled some excellent lectures and field trips for the coming months. In March we welcome Dr. Melissa Hughes to speak to us about her research on the function of birdsong. Our March field trips include visits to Hampton Plantation and Drayton Hall, while in April we'll be visiting Bonneau Ferry and the Silver Bluff Audubon Center. Silver Bluff will be our first overnight trip in many years, and it should provide great birding and a lot of fun!

CNHS is an all-volunteer organization, and keeping it going takes a commitment of time and effort – but is well worth the trouble! Right now we are actively recruiting new members for our Board. If you have suggestions or comments, or are interested in volunteering, please contact me or another Board member.

Thanks,
Andy Harrison, CHAPTER PRESIDENT
843-795-6934, parula23@aol.com

Editor's Notes

Correction

An error in the Piping Plover survey headline in the last issue may have caused some confusion: surveys have been conducted on Seabrook Island as correctly stated in the story – not Sullivan's.

Squawk Sports New Type, New Look

I am pleased to present a new look for *The Lesser Squawk* with this issue. My goal in switching typefaces has been to improve the overall legibility.

Have any comments or ideas for *The Squawk*? Please contact me: steve@charlestonaudubon.org

— Steve Bleearde, EDITOR + WEBMASTER



Mark Your Calendars

FIELDTRIPS, LECTURES & LOWCOUNTRY EVENTS

Fieldtrip — Hampton Plantation

» Saturday, March 8, 7 a.m.

March has been declared National Birding at Historic Plantations Month! Well not really; I made that up. But this month we'll be going to two low country plantations. On March 8th to Hampton which is on the banks of the Santee River in the northeast corner of the Francis Marion National Forest. The 322 acre property contains large open fields planted in native grasses (good sparrow habitat), old rice fields and a two and one half mile nature trail. The trail winds through mixed- pine/ hardwood forest, bottomland hardwood and longleaf pine forest.

There will be a ranger on site if anyone wishes to tour the plantation house. There is a \$4.00 fee for the tour. Our route to the plantation will be by way of the Old Georgetown Rd. in the Francis Marion Forest. There are several good birding spots along the way including a large group of Red-cocked Woodpecker nest trees. We can also stop at the St. James-Santee Parish Church (ca. 1768) for some photos of this historic building.

In addition to your birding stuff, bring a lunch. There are picnic tables and restrooms on site. We'll meet in the Lowes parking lot off of US-17 in Mount Pleasant at 7 a.m. and car pool from there. Please contact Don Jones before March 8th if you plan to attend: 572-8232 or Birdfrogdjlj@aol.com.

Why Birds Sing Charleston Audubon Lecture

» Wednesday, Mar. 12, 6:30 p.m.

» Dr. Melissa Hughes

See story, page 1.

Fieldtrip — Drayton Hall Plantation

» Saturday, March 22, 8:30 a.m.

The folks at Drayton Hall have graciously extended us an invitation to bird on their property. The house, circa 1738, is located on 500 acres along the Ashley River and is the oldest preserved plantation house

in the country which is open to the public. In addition to the river frontage there are several fresh water features and a half-mile nature trail.

We'll meet at the Drayton Hall EXIT gate on Rt. 61; Ashley River Road at 8:30 on Saturday, March 22nd. The EXIT gate is a few hundred yards west of the main entrance. There will be no charge to Audubon members for this outing. We should finish up in early afternoon so bring a snack in addition to your birding gear; binoculars, field guides, etc.

If you plan to attend please contact Don Jones before March 22: 572-8232 or Birdfrogdjlj@aol.com.

To learn more about Drayton Hall visit; www.draytonhall.org

Challenge & Chance in Alaska Charleston Audubon Lecture

» Wednesday, April 9, 6:30 p.m.

» Taldi Walter, Nat'l Audubon

National Audubon Society Public Policy Officer and Alaska Outreach Coordinator Taldi Walter presents "From Black Gold to the Black Oystercatcher: Challenges and Opportunities in Alaska." A discussion of the remarkable abundance of wildlife and critical habitat in Alaska, and of the unprecedented challenges posed by mining and oil exploration which threaten the wider ecology.

More details at www.charlestonaudubon.org and in the next, April/May issue of *The Lesser Squawk*.

Wine & Warblers Beidler Forest Event

» Saturday, April 26, 5 p.m.

Join expert birdwatchers for an evening on the boardwalk and explore the wide variety of songbirds that travel to Beidler Forest each Spring. Enjoy hors d'oeuvres and wine tastings as you explore this ancient swamp forest. Proceeds benefit Audubon South Carolina.

Reservations and advance payment are required. \$35 per person. Walks begin at 5 p.m. Please make reservations for your time slot by calling (843) 462-2150.

Fieldtrip — Bonneau Ferry W.M.A.

» Saturday, April 12, 7 a.m.

Last years trip to Bonneau Ferry in March may have been a little early for many of the spring migrants; still, we saw 57 species. This year's trip should afford us the opportunity to spot lots of warblers, vireos, thrushes and the elusive Red-cocked Woodpecker. There should not be much walking involved on this outing; for those of you who might have concerns. The site includes longleaf pine and mixed-hardwood forests, fresh water swamps and agricultural fields. For you history buffs who might have missed last year's outing, the ruins of the Comingtee plantation house and rice mill are easily accessible by car, and worth the visit.

We will meet in the parking lot next to the First Citizens Bank, in front of the Summerville Wal-Mart; near the intersection of I-26 and I-7-A, and car pool from there. It is about an hour drive to Bonneau Ferry. Bring a lunch, binoculars, scopes, field guide and yes, bug spray.

If you plan to attend please contact Don Jones before April 12th. 572-8232 or Birdfrogdjlj@aol.com.

Overnight Fieldtrip — Silver Bluff Audubon Center

» Sat.-Sun. April 26-27

On April 26-27 we'll visit Silver Bluff Audubon Center near North Augusta SC. We plan to leave Charleston midmorning on Saturday the 26th, bird for several hours in the afternoon, check into our motel and have dinner. We'll get up early Sunday, bird until midday and then start home. It's about a three and a half hour drive counting pit stops and wrong turns. Anyone interested should contact Don Jones (572-8232 or Birdfrogdjlj@aol.com) as soon as possible so we can make car pool arrangements etc. Don will also have motel information.

The center has fresh water impoundments, walking trails, mixed-hardwood/pine forest and some frontage on the Savannah River. Late April is prime time for migrating shore birds such as Spotted and Solitary Sandpiper in addition to warblers, vireos, thrushes, etc. We should also see lots of egrets, herons, Wood storks, Anhinga and Wood ducks.

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.

Bags *continued from page 2*

helping to decrease fast growing pollution on city streets, in the countryside and waterways. You are also taking a step in creating a safer and cleaner environment for marine life.

What We Can Do

- Bring reusable cloth bags to the store with you.
- If you are only buying one or two items, don't use a bag at all, but rather carry it in your purse, backpack, briefcase, or pocket.
- Encourage your market manager to institute a refund for customers who bring their own bags
- Give reusable bags as gifts and encourage friends and family to give up disposable bags
- Keep a stash of reusable bags in your trunk so you aren't caught without one.

Learn More

There is some great information online about the problems associated with paper and plastic bag use. There are also some websites dedicated to providing reusable bags of every shape and size: Google "reusable bags" for a start; visit ecobags.com, paperornorplastic.com and reusablebags.com.

For more links and information on the subject see the conservations section of our website – www.charlestonaudubon.org.

— Steve Bleezarde. Using cloth bags since 1997.

SCELP, Helping for 20 Years

In January our lecture was from Jimmy Chandler, Jr., founder of the South Carolina Environmental Law Project (SCELP). Since 1987 he has represented dozens of national, state and local environmental organization in hundreds of legal cases before state and federal courts. SCELP's goal is to protect SC's natural resources and environment through forceful legal advocacy. SCELP provides concerned citizens and environmental groups the services of an attorney with broad experience in environmental law. Our board chose to support SCELP with a financial contribution – and we encourage our members to consider doing the same. Learn more or donate online: www.scelp.org



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