

Bits & Briefs

Birding Activities Gather Important Conservation Data:

There are many ways your birding can play a role in the conservation of the birds and their habitats, and in the science that informs our environmental policy:

» Christmas Bird Counts

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.

Will "winter finches" or northern raptors spread across the continent this December? Will observers along the storm-ravaged Gulf Coast discover the effects of this summer's hurricanes on their local birds? Tens of thousands of CBC participants will be outside counting birds to find out.

Among area counts this year are:

→ Santee N.W.R. 12/31/05 – Led by Lex Glover (home (803)438-9855, work (803)419-7747, and email bgivr@clemsun.edu)

→ Charleston 01/01/06 – Led by Burton Moore (contact at bemiii@yahoo.com)

→ Litchfield-Pawleys Island 12/29/05 – Led by Jack Peachey (ppaw@sccoast.net)

Groups are mostly organized already for this year, but you can still learn more about the CBC and results from years' past online at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc>

» Backyard Bird Count

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) returns for its ninth season February 17-20, 2006. For nearly a decade, the GBBC has kept tabs on the ever-changing patterns of birds in winter. The National Audubon Society and the

—BIRDING, continued, page 4

Amazing Story of Birds of Prey

Join us Thursday, January 12 at the Charleston County Library, 68 Calhoun Street, downtown, to learn how our area came to host birds of prey from across the globe at one of the world's premier raptor centers. We gather at 6:30 p.m. for a reception and our speaker will start about 7 p.m.

International Director of the International Center for Birds of Prey in Awendaw, Jemima Parry-Jones was the owner and director of the National Birds of Prey Centre in England from 1982 until she moved with the bulk of the collection to South Carolina in November 2004.

She came with 185 birds of prey of 70 species – ranging from Stellers Sea Eagles to Burrowing Owls and in age from six months to thirty years-old – along with six dogs and – literally – a ton or more of equipment. And you thought your last move was complicated!

Her story fascinates us as much as the story of the center itself does. Come hear her speak about the 2004 trans-Atlantic move, the 2005 quarantine, her life with birds before the move and progress at the center's new facility since.

Learn more online: » www.internationalbirdsofprey.org.

**** Special Note: Because we compete for the use of the Library auditorium, not ALL of our lectures can be on Thursday – When we are can't schedule the second Thursday of the month, we try for the second Wednesday of the month – In February we are meeting on Wednesday the 9th – The room is scheduled three months in advance, so two issues of the Squawk will generally list the correct date. All our meetings are free and open to the public ****

Charleston Audubon Returns to Southeast Wildlife Exposition

Our Society has decided to participate at this year's Southeastern Wildlife Exposition (February 17-19, 2006). Last year we shared a booth with SC Audubon and the event was a huge success.

As before, we will be offering information on the Society and its activities (lectures, field trips, conservation, stewardship of the McAlhany and Wannamaker properties, etc.) and are hoping to increase awareness of and build membership in the Society. In order to do this we need your help!

We need volunteers to answer questions and hand out literature at our table for half day shifts (about 4 hours, either 10 a.m. – 2 p.m., or 2 p.m. – 6 p.m.). If you've attended a lecture that you really enjoyed, or been on a memorable field trip, share that experience with your Charleston neighbors (and yes, a few folks from out of town, too!)

Contact Andy by phone at 795-6934 or via e-mail at parula23@aol.com if you think you'd like to volunteer. Thanks!



Wildlife – Escaping to the Islands

by Andy Harrison

As undeveloped waterfront property has become increasingly scarce in the SC Lowcountry, developers have begun showing more and more interest in the thousands of salt marsh islands, or hammocks, which line our coast. This is exemplified by an article in the December 11 edition of the *Post and Courier* (“Folly in tailspin over proposal”) in which reporter Robert Behre describes a proposal by the K&A Acquisition Group to construct 190 homes on Long Island (really a series of closely situated islands) near Folly Beach. In addition to providing a refuge for plant and animal species, Long Island contains the remains of a Union fortification and infirmary used during the Civil War. The fate of this island, like that of others facing development, likely depends on whether or not the developer can obtain a permit from the DHEC Office of Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) to build the necessary bridges to link the smaller islands to one another and to Peas Island – and thus to Folly Road.

Nearly 3,500 hammocks were identified in a recent Marsh Island Project directed by OCRM (described in *Saltmarsh Refuge*, by Pete Laurie, in the November/December 2004 issue of *South Carolina Wildlife*). The vast majority of these islands are small: 53% are less than one acre, and over 80% are less than five acres. However, the plant and animal diversity that can be found on the islands is surprisingly large.

Teams led by SC DNR biologists conducted intensive surveys of 25 hammocks located mostly in the vicinity of Charleston and found a total of 422 plant species (in at least 24 distinct community types), 111 birds, 17 mammals, 16 reptiles, and even 9 amphibian species (Whitaker *et al*, 2004, “An Ecological Characterization of Coastal Hammock Islands in South Carolina”)! Avian diversity was greatest on islands larger than five acres. The authors of the study suggest that marsh hammocks probably provide refuges from the effects of coastal development for many animal species.

For example, Painted Buntings were found on 15 of 16 islands during spring months and were confirmed to be nesting on several islands. The Painted Bunting has experienced a sharp population decline in recent years and is rated as a high priority species by Partners in Flight. This decline may be related to increased nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds, which invade open, cleared areas but tend to avoid woodlands. Wading birds such as Wood Storks also use hammocks as roosting areas, and these islands may provide important nesting habitat for Diamondback Terrapins and safe havens for deer, otter and mink.

About 2,400 hammocks currently have no vehicle access. Some of these islands will remain isolated by virtue of lying within the boundaries of protected areas such as the ACE Basin or Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. In September a special DHEC committee, the Marsh Island Advisory Committee (whose members included both environmentalists and developers), released a set of guidelines for permitting bridges over public marsh land to islands (“Marsh isle guidelines proposed,” by Brian Hicks in the September 14 issue of the *Post and Courier*). No bridges would be permitted to islands

less than two acres in size, and one-lane bridges would be allowed for islands larger than two acres, subject to a variety of conditions (especially concerning bridge length).

With about 140 acres of high ground, Long Island belongs to the class of hammocks that are 30 acres or more in size, and theoretically the developers could be allowed a bridge of up to 1500 feet in length. These regulations were accepted by the Board of Health and Environmental Control in October, and in the absence of any legislative action they will become law in June 2006.

Long Island, a relatively large hammock, is undoubtedly home to a rich assemblage of plant and animal species – some of which probably found a way to survive by “escaping to the islands.” Although Folly Beach City Council has recently begun working on a conservation subdivision classification (which could promote changes in the developers’ plans to allow for reserved green spaces), the refuge that Long Island provided for such species may soon be lost. Hopefully the outcry over its potential development (the plan is set to go before the Planning Commission on January 9) will focus attention on the need to conserve what remains of these biologically significant coastal habitats.

Faunal and Floral Surveys at McAlhany Nature Preserve

After a lapse of several years, Charleston Audubon will resume monthly surveys of the fauna and flora of the McAlhany Nature Preserve under the guidance of Julian Harrison. Initially we will emphasize birds, amphibians, reptiles, mollusks and mosses, though other species of animals or plants will obviously not be ignored.

Our first trip will be Saturday, January 28, 2006. Later during the year, some visits to the Preserve will be scheduled on Sundays for those who cannot attend Saturday outings. On this first trip in January, meet Julian in the West Ashley Barnes and Noble parking lot directly behind and below the Burger King restaurant at 7:30 a.m. We’ll carpool from there to the Preserve, a driving distance of about 60-65 miles, planning to arrive by 9:00 a.m. or before. Please telephone Julian (843-795-1694) or e-mail him (harrisonj@cofc.edu) by no later than Friday, January 27, 2005 if you plan to participate.

Please join us if you can – no special expertise is required. Be prepared for these trips to last from early morning to mid or late afternoon. Bring water, lunch or snacks, binoculars, guides and cameras if you have them. Digital cameras may be especially helpful for quickly transferring photographs to our website where they can be organized and catalogued.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

Upcoming Programs, Outings & Lowcountry Events

FIELDTRIPS & OUTINGS:

» Birding at Grove Plantation

» Saturday, January 14, 2006, 7:30 a.m.

Join Andy Harrison for a day of winter birding at Grove Plantation, headquarters of the ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge is a haven for wintering waterfowl, and we often see birds such as the Red-headed Woodpecker and American Bald Eagle here.

Meet Andy at 7:30 a.m. Saturday, January 14 in the Food Lion parking lot in Ravenel. Bring binoculars/scopes, field guides, water, food/snacks, sunscreen/insect repellent, and weather-appropriate clothing.

Register with Andy at 795-6934 or by email at parula23@aol.com by Friday, January 13.

» McAlhany Flora/Fauna Survey

» Saturday, January 28, 2006, 7:30 a.m.

Join Julian Harrison on the first of many trips to our McAlhany property as we work to develop a complete floral and faunal inventory. Everyone's welcome, and no special expertise is needed.

See story, pg. 2 for details.

» Santee Nat'l Wildlife Refuge

» Saturday, February 4, 2006, 7:30 a.m.

Join Andy Harrison for an all-day birding trip to the Bluff and Cuddo units of the Santee National Wildlife Refuge. Wintering waterfowl such as geese and ducks are sometimes seen in large numbers here, and in past years we have observed Sandhill Cranes and numerous sparrow species at the Refuge.

Meet Andy at 7:30 AM Saturday, February 4 in the Summerville Wal-Mart parking lot, off I-26 at exit 199A. It's a long drive up to the Refuge, so we'll try to carpool as much as possible. Bring binoculars/scopes, field guides, water, food/snacks, sunscreen/insect repellent and weather-appropriate clothing (layering is recommended).

Register with Andy at 795-6934 or by e-mail at parula23@aol.com by Friday, February 3.

» SEWE -Wildlife Expo

» February 17-19, 2006

We need volunteers to man our booth at the Southeast Wildlife Exposition. Meet a fascinating range of folks and tell them about our Charleston Audubon society. Contact Andy to sign-up. *See story, pg. 1, for details.*

LECTURE SERIES, 2006:

Thursday, Jan. 12, 6:30 p.m.

» Jemima Parry-Jones

» International Center for Birds of Prey

Ms. Parry-Jones moved to Awendaw with 185 birds of prey of 70 species – ranging from Stellers Sea Eagles to Burrowing Owls. And you thought your last move was complicated!

Complete story, pg 1

Wednesday, Feb. 8, 6:30 p.m.

» Eva Hernandez, Campaign Organizer

» The Dogwood Alliance

You may have heard the story: In June, 2005, Bowater, the largest newsprint manufacturer in the South announced that it would sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Dogwood Alliance committing to significant improvements in their forest management practices on all of their lands in the United States. Bowater owns approximately 380,000 acres of forestland in the southeastern U.S., of which about 100,000 acres are native hardwood forests located on the Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee.

It was a substantial victory. The press reported, in part, "this agreement represents a real precedent. It provides NRDC, the Dogwood Alliance and other environmental groups with enormous new leverage in challenging those industrial landowners who insist on practicing non-sustainable forestry on private forest lands in the southeast and, indeed, throughout the United States."

Join us to hear how the Alliance has worked to secure this and other victories in recent years – working to preserve

forest habitat and to minimize the environmental impact of one of this region's largest industries.



The Dogwood Alliance is a growing regional network, comprised of 70 grassroots organizations in 17 states and concerned citizens from across the nation. We share a mission of protecting Southern forests and communities by engendering broad-based, diverse support for ending unsustainable industrial forest practices.

According to the US Forest Service, the South is the largest wood producing region in the world, producing more wood than any other single country. Pulpwood – wood used in the manufacture of paper – is currently the number one wood commodity produced in the region.

With approximately 25% of the world's paper produced from Southern forests, the paper industry is driving unsustainable rates of logging and the conversion of diverse, natural forests to single-species tree plantations that are sprayed with chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. These practices have a devastating impact on our communities, wildlife and way of life.

That's why Dogwood Alliance works in the marketplace to change the way paper companies do business. We hold paper companies accountable for the environmental and social impacts of their current business practices while creating financial incentives for positive change by creating market demand for environmentally sound paper products. We do this by convincing the corporate customers of the South's largest paper companies to set environmental standards for their paper products.

Learn more at:

<http://www.dogwoodalliance.org>

The LESSER SQUAWK

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.

BIRDING from page 1

Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology encourage everyone to COUNT BIRDS WITH A BUDDY! Bird enthusiasts of all ages can share their love of birds with a friend, a child, a scout troop, a class, or a co-worker-opening new eyes to the joy of birding. In 2005, participants sent in more than 52,000 checklists, with a record-breaking 613 species and more than 6 million birds counted. These millions of sightings generate what would be impossible otherwise-continent-wide information about where the birds are and how their numbers compare with those of previous years.

Sign-up and learn more online: <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>

» Project FeederWatch, Winter '05-'06

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. Anyone with an interest in birds can participate. FeederWatch is conducted by people of all skill levels and backgrounds, including children, families, individuals, classrooms, retired persons, youth groups, nature centers, and bird clubs.

Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and Canadian Nature Federation.

Without the support of the participants, this project wouldn't be possible. There is a \$15 annual participation fee (\$12 for Lab members,) that covers your materials and newsletter subscription, staff support, web design, and data analysis. Project FeederWatch is supported almost entirely by participation fees.



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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