

The LESSER SQUAWK

Newsletter of the
Charleston Audubon Society

www.CharlestonAudubon.org

March – April 2007

President's Notes:

Winter is winding down, and what a strange winter it has been! The Lowcountry has been unusually warm for most of the season, and only recently have we had any really cold days. Wintering ducks and other waterfowl have been scarce, but we did observe a few on the CNHS trip to Bear Island and Donnelly WMAs in early February (and also at Santee Coastal Reserve later in the month). By the time you read this, however, Spring migration will be underway. It won't be long before we say good-bye to our millions of Yellow-rumped Warblers and start welcoming migrant warblers, tanagers, flycatchers, vireos and others.

Spring Count and Birdathon!

The Spring Count will be held on May 6 this year, and we are trying something new – combining the count with a fundraising Birdathon! Our goal is to raise money to support CNHS activities and to help pay for a warden and intern to monitor Deveaux Bank, Crab Bank and Bird Key Stono during the seabird nesting season – as you recall, our chapter (led by Jim Cubie) was very active in the fight last year to protect these islands from destructive human and canine disturbances. See the enclosed insert for more information on how you can participate in the count and/or contribute to the Birdathon.

We have an excellent program of lectures and field trips for the months of March and April. Our speakers will be Paul Nolan, a new faculty member at The Citadel, and Jemima Parry-Jones (in a return appearance – this time she will be speaking about the shocking

continues – SEE President, pg. 2

Quick Calendar – CNHS Events:

- 3/8 Thurs. Talk: *Penguins & Finches* . . . pg. 1
- 3/10 Fieldtrip: *Bonneau Ferry WMA* pg. 3
- 3/24 Fieldtrip: *Folly Beach 'n' more* pg. 3
- 4/11 Wednesday Talk: *Vulture Crisis* pg. 1
- 4/14 Fieldtrip: *Dungannon Plantation* . . . pg. 3
- 4/29 Fieldtrip: *Caw Caw Park* pg. 3

Citadel Ornithologist Studies Communication In House Finch Songs and Penguin Plumage

At our Thursday, March 8, 2007 program, Dr. Paul Nolan, Assistant Professor of Biology at The Citadel will present a lecture: "How Pretty-boy Penguins and Smooth-talking Finches Get the Girls" or, more properly, "Sexually Selected Communication in Penguins and Finches."

Animals have many ways to get their point across, from displaying brilliant colors to producing a variety of sounds or performing complex behaviors. This is especially true when an animal tries to attract a mate or defend a territory. Dr. Nolan will discuss a variety of communication strategies briefly and then will focus on the use of song by House Finches and the production of ornamental colors by King Penguins.

Dr. Nolan earned a B.S. from Penn State, an M.S. from the University of California at Davis, and a Ph.D. from Auburn University. His recent research includes studies of the influence of body condition on song development in zebra finches and on plumage in rockhopper penguins.

Learn more about his recent work online:

http://pao.citadel.edu/penguin_research

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. – talks are free, open to the public, and start at 7 p.m. Drinks, plates and napkins provided – We BYO refreshments. Consider bringing an item to share!

Extinction on Our Watch? The Vulture Crisis in India and South Asia

Since the early 1990s, over 95 percent of India's vultures, once numbering in the tens of millions, have died after feeding on carcasses containing diclofenac, a drug given to sick or injured livestock.

Wednesday, April 11, 2007, our lecture will be from Jemima Parry-Jones, MBE. She will discuss the source and history of the crisis and update us on the current status of efforts to save these magnificent birds. Among the world's foremost breeders of birds of prey, Ms. Parry-Jones will be leaving the Lowcountry this summer – returning to England, with her extensive bird collection, to open a new center – and we're please that she is able to speak to us before she departs.

Population decline of vultures in south Asia is one of the world's most pressing ornithological conservation issues and may soon result in the extinction of three species – the Indian White-backed Vulture, the Long-billed Vultures and the Slender-billed Vultures. These species are only found in south Asia and in the past 15 years their populations have declined by 95–99% throughout their range. In 2004 researchers identified veterinary use of the drug diclofenac as responsible for the catastrophic declines.

Ms. Parry-Jones has travelled to India to work with international scientists, conservationists and organizations to help raise awareness, see the drug banned, and to establish captive breeding programs which may provide a glimmer of hope for one day restoring these birds in the wild.

Western Hummingbirds Bring Color and Diversity Throughout South Carolina's Cooler Months

by Doreen Cubie

Year-round hummingbirds are no longer a rarity in South Carolina. We now have hummingbirds in our state during every month of the year, from the heat of summer through the coldest days of winter.

During the spring, summer, and early fall, we commonly see our familiar Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in our backyards. But in the late fall, several species of western hummers, including Rufous, Black-chinned, and Calliope, migrate to our area, where many of them spend the winter months.

I am now conducting a research project to document and track these western birds, as well as a small population of Rubythroats that also spend the winter along the coast. As a federal and state licensed bander, I capture hummingbirds, using cage traps, and place bands on their legs. These bands are extremely lightweight. It takes 5,500 hummingbird bands to weigh an ounce.

With these bands, which have a letter and five numbers imprinted on them, we can gather information about whether these hummers remain for the entire winter and whether they return in subsequent years. When banders in other states recapture my hummingbirds, we will gain valuable information on their migration routes.

During the 2006-2007 winter season, from November 14-February 12, I banded 29 hummingbirds: 18 Ruby-throated, 7 Rufous, 3 Black-chinned, and 1 Allen's. Of these birds, 19 were banded in Charleston County, 5 were in other coastal counties, 4 in the Piedmont (including 2 in the Augusta, Georgia area), and 1 in the upstate.

One of the highlights of the season was banding an Allen's Hummingbird. I banded this bird, a female, on January 9 in Lexington, just outside of Columbia. Allen's Hummingbird is a western species that has never been recorded before in South Carolina. If accepted by the SC Rare Birds Committee, it will be the first official state record for this Pacific Coast bird.

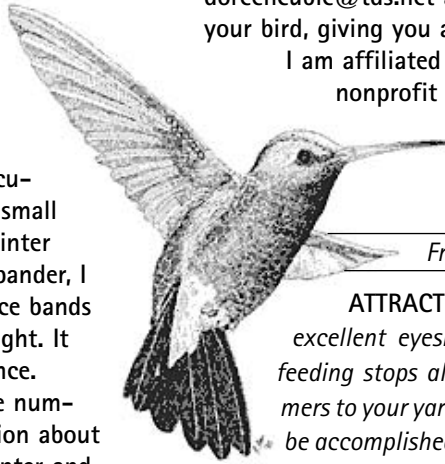
Another highlight was banding my first adult male Black-chinned Hummingbird in South Carolina. The day after Christmas, I left home at 4:15 a.m. to drive to Diane Marinaccio-Rand's home in Bluffton, near Hilton Head, where she had two hummingbirds coming to her window feeders. It was just barely light when I trapped and banded her Black-chinned. After news of this beautiful bird went out on the Carolina Birds listserv, Diane had lots of visitors coming to see her hummer.

I've also been surprised by the number of hummingbirds I have found on James Island. During the six weeks between December 10 and January 27, I banded a dozen hummingbirds at five homes on the island: 2 Black-chinned, 1 Rufous, and 9 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. Of special note is Julia and William Cain's home, where I banded all three of these species. Their yard is the only place in South Carolina where I've banded three species of hummingbirds.

You Can Help

I would love for people to help me with my research project. You can do that simply by leaving up one hummingbird feeder during the fall and winter months. If you see a hummingbird at your feeder, call me at 843-928-3702 or email me at doreencubie@tds.net and I will come to your house and band your bird, giving you an up-close look at a beautiful bird.

I am affiliated with the Hummer/Bird Study Group, a nonprofit organization, and you can get more information about this group and about wintering hummingbirds at:
<http://www.hummingbirdsplus.org>



From The Hummer Study Group Website:

ATTRACTING HUMMINGBIRDS: *Hummingbirds have excellent eyesight and have great fidelity to established feeding stops along their migration route. Attracting hummers to your yard will require a bright splash of color. This can be accomplished by selective plantings or by artificial means such as surveyor's ribbon or silk flowers. The ratio for your feeder is one part sugar to four parts water. Please NO food coloring. It is not necessary to buy ready-made nectar because the birds get all the vitamins, minerals and proteins they need from the natural nectar and insects they eat. Definitely, NO honey or artificial sweeteners in the feeders, this may be harmful to the birds.*

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decline in vulture populations throughout Asia). Among the places we plan to visit are Bonneau Ferry WMA (first ever CNHS trip to this newly protected area), Folly Beach, Dungannon Plantation Heritage Preserve, and the Caw Caw Interpretive Center.

Meanwhile, other chapter activities continue "behind the scenes." At our McAlhany Nature Preserve, Joe Cockrell has plans in place for planting native warm season grasses and wildflowers in the area of the Longleaf Pine/Old Field restoration project. Our Piping Plover survey team has completed two winter surveys at Seabrook Island (SC-10 critical habitat area) as part of the SC Shorebird Project. We have not observed any PIPL there yet (likely because of disturbance from ongoing renourishment activities), but we have seen other threatened species such as Red Knot and American Oystercatcher. We will be conducting more surveys in March and April as the birds begin to move during migration.

Please join us at one or more of our March/April functions, and consider participating in the Spring Count/Birdathon – we need your support! If you are interested in becoming more involved in other chapter activities, don't hesitate to contact me at 795-6934 or parula23@aol.com for more information. Thanks!



MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

Upcoming Programs, Outings & Lowcountry Events

(Please note that this is the March-April issue of The Lesser Squawk: the next issue will cover May-June 2007. Please mark upcoming events on your calendar now!

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

LECTURES:

Thurs. March 8

- » Reception & Lecture Program
- » Penguins & Finches
- » Dr. Paul Nolan, The Citadel
- See story, pg. 1

Wed. April 11

- » Reception & Lecture Program
- » A Threat of Extinction:
- » India's Vulture Crisis
- » Jemima Parry-Jones, M.B.E.
- See story, pg. 1

FIELDTRIPS:

Sat., March 10th, 7:00 a.m.

- » Bonneau Ferry W.M.A.

The 10,697-acre Bonneau Ferry Wildlife Management Area is located along the Cooper River, just outside Monks Corner, on route 402 between Cordesville and Huger. SCDNR only recently acquired this tract – making the purchase from MeadWestvaco in 2005. The area contains mixed hardwoods, longleaf pine, cypress swamps, several small lakes, and more than 1,300 acres of historic rice fields.

We might see Parula Warblers and other early spring migrants as well as Red-Cockaded woodpeckers, Brown Headed Nuthatch, Pine Warblers, Vireos, Kinglets, wading birds and waterfowl.

We will meet at the Summerville Wal-Mart Supercenter parking lot (take exit 199A off I-26, next to the bank, close to 17alt) at 7:00 a.m. and car pool to the location. Bring your birding stuff and a lunch, and dress for the weather.

If you plan to attend please register with Don Jones by March 9th: 572-8232 or Birdfrogdjlj@aol.com.

Sat., March 24th, 7:00 a.m.

- » Folly Beach, Nearby Marshes

Some early spring migrants should be moving through our area, so we might expect to see Northern Parula, Black-Throated Blue and Prairie Warblers in the woods behind the front beach at the north end of Folly. An early morning low tide will expose mud flats along Folly Road which should afford us an opportunity to look for plovers, dunlin, dowitchers, whimbrel, and godwits.

The group, on this outing last year, saw all five species of plovers that could be expected to be seen here in the spring including Wilson's and Piping Plover.

Our meeting place will be the Wal-Mart parking lot on Folly Rd., at 7:00 a.m. Bring your birding gear and lunch, and dress for the weather. Please register with Don Jones by March 23rd: 572-8232 or Birdfrogdjlj@aol.com

Sat., April 14th, 7:00 a.m.

- » Dungannon Heritage Preserve

Join Andy Harrison for a hike into the Dungannon Plantation Heritage Preserve (located along Hwy 162 on the way to Hollywood, SC). This 643-acre property protects both bald cypress-tupelo gum swamp (including freshwater reserves constructed in the 1800s to supply down-stream rice fields) and upland forest. At this time of year the Preserve is a great place to see migrant warblers, flycatchers, tanagers and thrushes (as well as breeding species such as Prothonotary, Hooded and Kentucky Warblers). Deep within the swamp we will pass close by an important Wood Stork rookery, where we may see Wood Storks, Anhingas and other water birds preparing nests. Early spring wildflowers should also be in bloom.

Meet Andy at 7:00 a.m. Saturday, April 14 behind Burger King in the West Ashley Barnes & Noble parking lot (at the intersection of Hwy 61 and Sam Rittenberg Blvd). Bring binoculars, scopes, birding guides, water, food/snacks, sunscreen/ insect repellent, and weather-appropriate clothing. Be

prepared for a long walk – it is more than 1.5 miles from the parking lot at Dungannon to the Wood Stork rookery.

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

Sunday, April 29th, 9:00 a.m.

- » Caw Caw Interpretive Center

On April 29 we'll return to the site of one of our Fall field trips. In September we observed some of our feathered friends moving South for the Winter. Now we can see birds in their breeding plumage, and heading for their nesting sites – some here in the low country, and others as far north as Canada.

There are nine different habitats in the Caw Caw Preserve including a 1,300 foot boardwalk over a Cypress Swamp where we might see Prothonotary and Hooded Warblers, Yellow Throated Vireos and Least Flycatchers. The several large old rice fields will have numerous species of herons and egrets and we'll look for swallows and Mississippi Kites overhead.

The park opens at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday and there is a \$1.00 charge for admission. We'll meet in the parking lot at Caw Caw which is adjacent to the headquarters building (5200 Savannah Highway [Hwy. 17-S], Ravenel, SC.) There are restrooms and picnic tables, so bring a lunch, your birding stuff and bug spray (yes, it's that time of year again.)

If you plan to attend arrive promptly at 9 a.m. and register with Don Jones at 572-8232 or Birdfrogdjlj@aol.com

OTHER GROUPS

SC Native Plant Society

- » Beidler Forrest: More Than Old Trees
- » March 20, 6:30 p.m.

Norm Brunswig, SC Audubon director, will look at the history and protection of the old-growth forrest. Meet at 6:30 in 101 Duckett Hall, Biology Auditorium on the Citadel campus. Take a look into the Society's fieldtrips – information online at: <http://www.scnps.org>

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The Charleston Audubon Society
P.O. Box 504
Charleston, SC 29402

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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.

IMAX® Film "Hurricane on the Bayou" Explores Value of Wetlands

A moving large format film, *Hurricane on the Bayou* carries audiences behind today's news headlines on a journey deep into the heart of Louisiana – before, during and after the unprecedented devastation of Hurricane Katrina. The film brings to the fore a silent catastrophe that started long before Hurricane Katrina, and contributed to the storm's relentless damage to New Orleans: wetlands loss, which is currently causing the state of Louisiana to lose an incredible 16,000 acres of land each and every year. This marshy land – home to an incredible, irreplaceable array of life with some 400 different species, many of

them endangered – boasts nearly as many fish as Alaska, while 40% of the US's migratory bird population relies on the area to spend the winter. And experts predict that, without any action, the Gulf of Mexico will have moved 30 miles inland by the year 2050 and that the millions of people who make the area their home will be completely vulnerable to future storms.

The film raises hard questions and insists that we face them – for wildlife conservation and our Nation's benefit.

45 minutes: Visit www.charlestonimax.com or phone 843-725-4629 for showtimes and location information.



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

Events at Beidler Forrest

» WINE & WARBLERS: April 27

Join Audubon SC and area birdwatchers for an evening of wine, hors d'oeuvres and warblers. Welcome Spring to the swamp by joining in this enchanting evening. \$35per person. Call 843-462-2150 by April 13 to register.

» SWAMPOLOGY DAY: May 12th, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Celebrate International Migratory Bird Day with your family, while learning "everything you always wanted to know about the swamp, but were afraid to ask!" Demos and programs by Audubon staff, US Fish & Wildlife, SC Aquarium and more...
\$7/adult \$6/NAS member \$3.50/Child