

# THE BULLETIN

## Chapel Hill Bird Club

November, 2000

(Vol. XXIX, No. 11)

c/o Ginger Travis

5244 Old Woods Rd.

Hillsborough, NC 27278

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### This month's meeting

**Monday, November 27, 2000 at 7:30 p.m.**

**Program – Are Birds Living Dinosaurs?** by Dr. Alan Feduccia, author of *The Origin and Evolution of Birds*

**Location – Binkley Baptist Church**, the Lounge. Binkley is on the corner of Willow Drive at the 15-501 Bypass in Chapel Hill, near University Mall.

### Are birds living dinosaurs?

In the mid-1990s several paleontologists got a lot of popular press by colorfully articulating their view that birds are descendants of dinosaurs; others emphatically disagreed. Our Nov. 27 speaker, Dr. Alan Feduccia of the UNC-CH biology department, is a very distinguished participant in the scientific debate on this subject. He's the author of *The Origin and Evolution of Birds* (Yale University Press) and is a terrific speaker – clear, highly informative, persuasive and entertaining. Our meeting offers a great opportunity to hear him. So bring yourself and your friends too! Refreshments at 7:15 p.m. – come early for your chocolate fix.

For more info on Dr. Feduccia, check out:  
[www.yale.edu/yup/books/064608.htm](http://www.yale.edu/yup/books/064608.htm)  
[www.bbc.co.uk/horizon/dinotrans/html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/horizon/dinotrans/html)  
[www.sigmaxi.org/amsci/bookshelf/Leads97/Feduccia97-03.html](http://www.sigmaxi.org/amsci/bookshelf/Leads97/Feduccia97-03.html)  
<http://research.unc.edu/endeavors/spr97/bird.html>

### Mark your calendars – winter CHBC meetings, speakers

#### No meeting in December

Jan. 22: Janine Perlman on rehabilitating injured birds

Feb. 26: Walker Golder on the Audubon coastal sanctuaries

March 26: Lena Gallitano and Brad Carlson on birding Attu

### Triangle-area Christmas Bird Counts

#### Sat. 12/16/00 - Raleigh

John Gerwin - [John.Gerwin@ncmail.net](mailto:John.Gerwin@ncmail.net) - 919-715-2600

Susan Campbell - [ncaves@utinet.net](mailto:ncaves@utinet.net) - 910-949-3207

#### Sun. 12/17/00 - Durham

Mike Schultz - [m Schultz@duke.edu](mailto:m Schultz@duke.edu) - 919-490-6761

#### Sun. 12/24/00 - Chapel Hill

Will Cook - [cwcook@duke.edu](mailto:cwcook@duke.edu) - 919-967-5446

#### Sat. 12/30/00 - Falls Lake

Brian Bockhahn - [birdranger@excite.com](mailto:birdranger@excite.com) - 919-676-1027

If you have yet to participate in a local count, don't be shy. Just call the organizer for the count(s) you're interested in for information. Beginning birders are welcome and will be assigned to teams with experienced birders.

### Saturday morning field trips

Destination is leader's choice. Trips leave the Glen Lennox parking lot (on the north side of Hwy. 54 just east of the 15-501 Bypass in Chapel Hill) at 7:30 a.m. sharp and return by noon. Beginners and visitors welcome! Reservations are not necessary, but if you want details on where you'll be going, call Doug Shadwick (942-0479). Bring binoculars, a scope if you have one, and boots or old tennis shoes, and be prepared for a hike.

### *A Birdwatcher's Guide to the Triangle* is hot off the press

by Karen Bearden

Wake Audubon Society has produced a book entitled *A Birdwatcher's Guide to the Triangle*. There are 21 local birders who contributed information on birds, habitat descriptions, and directions to 53 birding sites in the Triangle. Several of the birders are Chapel Hill Bird Club members. Plus, the club made a donation to help sponsor the printing of the book. The book will be released in November, so I will start selling it at the November 27th CHBC meeting for \$11, including tax. If you aren't able to

attend meetings, contact Karen Bearden at 844-9050 or [birders@aol.com](mailto:birders@aol.com) and I can mail it to you. The book will make a great holiday gift for birders and nature lovers! Happy birding!

## **Cormorants on the hunt at Jordan Lake**

*by Dave Murdock*

Stopping at the Highway 751 bridge over Jordan Lake yesterday afternoon [Oct. 26] about 3:00, I had great views of group-feeding behavior by a large flock of Double-crested Cormorants. It may have just been an illusion, but they actually appeared to be working together to herd a school of shad against the shoreline where the fish were concentrated for easy pickings. I first noticed roughly 150 birds swimming in a tightly packed group from the channel beneath the bridge. Individuals were constantly diving and emerging. At any one time perhaps half the birds were submerged. With binoculars, I could see that many were surfacing with palm-sized silver fish, which were quickly swallowed. Their forward progress slowed, and they spread out some, about 30 feet from the shore where they seemed to have the school trapped. Then for a few moments it looked as if every emerging bird had a fish. It was quite a sight. Splashing was audible from where I crouched about 50 yards away. The birds scattered and flew when I tried to work my way closer. I have been kayaking on the lake several times lately and always see plenty of cormorants but never anything like this. I think I had better views of the birds than I would have from my boat, because I was able to use the bank and roadside vegetation for cover.

## **Merlin just misses RCW dinner**

*by Paul Champlin*

New Ellenton, S.C.

Today [Oct. 24] while I was doing observations on Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (which had worked their way out into a peninsula of tall pine surrounded by 10 foot tall plantation on Rt. 278 in New Ellenton, SC), an adult male columbarius Merlin came screaming in from the north and penetrated the pine stand. One of the RCWs bolted from the stand and rose up above the plantation, a bit of panic in its call. The Merlin continued chase, the RCW, then climbing, decided it was not breaking away from the predator. As the RCW began a rapid descent, the Merlin gained on the woodpecker, nearly snatching it from the sky. Doing a quick calculation, I figured out that the woodpecker was about 1/150th of our population at the SRS. How many Merlins are there? (I asked myself). My hands came together in rapid succession, with such force as to make them tingle as though bordering on frostbite. The Merlin, prey at near armslength, had continued chase in a near circle, to just over the trees from which it had driven its morsel; just over my head! Immediately

overhead, it heard my claps (and I think a yell), pausing for just a moment; just enough time for the would-be breakfast to dash into the canopy from where it had been forced. The Merlin, thwarted, flew once over the stand and off to the south to perhaps another cluster of RCWs... But I hope not.

## **Red-headed Woodpeckers, Johnston Co.**

*by Harry LeGrand*

Yesterday [Oct. 19], I was working in Howell Woods along the Neuse River in Johnston Co. This is a fine bottomland area that I have worked in four or five times this year while conducting the Johnston Co. natural area inventory. Red-headed Woodpecker was just about the most common bird! I was constantly within hearing distance of at least one. All that I saw were immatures. Though a handful were here during the summer, it is obvious that most of these birds are fall migrants, and there is an excellent acorn crop at Howell Woods. We shall see if this is a banner winter for the woodpecker.

On a negative side, I had no Ruby-crowned Kinglets, even though I was in good habitat, with plenty of Golden-crowns, even though the area is mostly hardwoods and is better habitat for Ruby. Rubies have been relatively scarce in the Triangle this fall, which is what I predicted last spring, as Rubies apparently were hit hard in our area by the 20 inch snow that lingered for several weeks. (I presume that RCK have site fidelity in winter and return to winter where they spent the previous winter.) I expect considerably lower numbers of RCK on CBC's this winter at sites where the snow and deep freeze lasted for several weeks. (This does not apply to parts of SC and other places that didn't have the heavy snows, etc.).

## **Why it pays to leave early!**

*by Bruce Young*

[Shepherd Nature Trail, Duke Forest, Oct. 18, 4:30 p.m.] I was down by the stream watching chipmunks gathering food when I saw some movement on a log. All I could see was a green/olive back and shortish tail of a bird as it walked (emphasis on walked) down the log. When a chipmunk came near, the bird picked up his head and showed me a lovely gray hood with an eye ring you could see from orbit. A Connecticut Warbler! He of course flew off immediately but I had had a great close look at him. Considering I was just hoping for a Bay-breasted (which has eluded me this year), on this trip my day was made. I have actually had very good Connecticut luck, having seen 3 (two fall, one spring) in the Triangle in the last 5 years. It just goes to show that it pays to leave work early.

## **Black-throated Gray Warbler, Roanoke Island**

by Kent Fiala

Within 5 minutes of my arrival on Roanoke Island on Saturday (Oct. 7) I observed a Black-throated Gray Warbler in the park land immediately at the end of the Highway 64 bridge over Croatan Sound, on the north side of the highway. It was in the pines inside the short loop trail across the pond from the parking lot. The bird was moving rapidly from tree to tree but I managed to briefly regain view of it in several different trees before losing track of it. There were numerous other warblers in the area, predominantly Palm, with a few Parulas and Redstarts and single birds of a couple of other species, but at the time these birds were foraging mainly at low heights while the Black-throated Gray was at mid-height in the trees, so it's not clear whether it was really associated with a flock. I did not hear any vocalization from the bird.

Let this be a lesson to us all--at the time I was carrying neither a field guide nor anything to take notes with, so when I lost the bird I returned to my car for both. That probably reduced my chances of picking it up again. After more searching I continued down the trail and returned about an hour after the original sighting, at which time I met Jeff Lewis's group. By this time the number of warblers in the area was much diminished. We searched for the bird without success, and I heard that others searched for it throughout the rest of the day.

Black-throated Gray is an unmistakable bird, but for the record, features that I specifically noted included overall black, white and gray color pattern; strong head pattern of black cap, black throat, and white face crossed by a black band; yellow supra-loral spot; and black streaks along the sides and flanks. The only other species with any similarity is an adult male Black-and-White in breeding plumage, but this bird differed from a Black-and-White in many ways. The supra-loral spot by itself is diagnostic, but other differences from Black-and-White that I noted were that the cap was solid (as well as I could determine from a low angle), the throat patch was more distinctly set off as a patch rather than grading into the breast streakings, the black band across the face continued more solidly to connect with the hindneck, and the white marks above, and especially below, the band were more prominent, and the black of the head contrasted with the grayer color of the back. The bird's foraging behavior was like that of a "typical" warbler; it didn't do the distinctive "creeping" foraging behavior that is characteristic of Black-and-White. Ex post facto, I'm pretty sure that while the sides were streaked, the under tail coverts were not. In flight, the bird showed extensive white through the length of the tail, as illustrated in the flight picture in Sibley's guide, and unlike the more restricted white of a Black-and-White. How handy to be able to exploit that feature of Sibley on the very day I purchased the book!

I've seen only a couple of Black-throated Grays before, and none in fall, so I'm hesitant to guess the age of the bird. My initial impression was of an adult male because the black of the head seemed definitely black, not just dark gray, but the differences between adult and first-fall males may be more subtle than I had time to observe. It seems certain that the bird was not a female because it had a solid throat patch.

## **David Sibley responds to users' comments about *The Sibley Guide to Birds***

*picked up from Birdchat, Oct. 26*

[Note: Edited slightly for brevity.]

First, thank you! to all who have written to me privately or publicly with comments or suggestions on how to improve my guide. . . . I don't really consider the book done. To me it is more of a work in progress, a collection of my sketches, a summary of all the information I've gathered in thirty years of birding, and I look forward to adding to it. I will be working constantly to make corrections in each printing, and someday there will be a revised edition. To that end I ask anyone who has a comment or suggestion to please email me: david@sibleyart.com

In the next printing there will be some corrections to errors in "black ink," but there will only be a small number of corrections to the color plates. I've listed here a few of the more significant corrections that are being made in the next printing:

- \* "American" Magpie changed back to Black-billed Magpie
- \* "Northern" Caracara changed back to Crested Caracara
- \* There are apparently records of Cory's (dark morph) Least Bittern from Ontario and New York as recently as 1992, so that caption will be changed to read simply "very rare". I'm very excited by this news, as I had all but given up hope of ever seeing this color morph.
- \* The label for "2nd year" Reddish Egret will be changed to "adult nonbreeding" and the bright-billed "adult" will be labeled "adult breeding". The bright colors are worn by an individual bird for a few months when breeding, which can happen almost year-round, but mainly about Jan to June.
- \* The images of perched adult male and female Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks should be different sizes to reflect the sexual size dimorphism in those species. Scans were inadvertently re-sized during printing and will be corrected.
- \* The adult Clay-colored Sparrow image is too dark (apparently two scans are superimposed) and will be corrected.
- \* The too-bright rufous colors will be tweaked on many pages.

The following topics seem to have generated a lot of discussion . . .

Maps: There are certainly errors in the maps, and I'm anxious to hear about them. However, it is my

impression that a lot of the criticism of the maps centers on the placement and the presence or absence of the green dots. The dots are truly meant to show continental patterns, not local records (though in some cases they are carefully placed, maybe that was a bad idea!). In general the idea was to let people know that if they saw a bluebird, for example, in New York it was overwhelmingly likely to be an Eastern, but Mountain was at least a remote possibility and Western was essentially impossible. For that purpose a random scattering of dots in the eastern US would suffice, but I tried to get a little more detailed than that. I did not think it was important to place every dot exactly, or even to confirm that state records were accepted, as long as the reports fit the general pattern for each species. Nevertheless I'd like to hear of ANY problems with the maps. . . .

Subspecies names: I'll probably continue to take criticism for this, but I stand by my decision to avoid using Latin subspecies names. The reasons are spelled out in some detail on my website - [www.sibleyart.com](http://www.sibleyart.com) - and I'll reiterate here. While there are a few cases in which subspecies are well-defined and consistently named (such as Short-billed Dowitcher and Lesser Black-backed Gull) the vast majority are much less clear-cut. I spent weeks working solely on this problem, researching names and groupings of subspecies, and found the results frustratingly inconsistent and unclear. When I came up with the idea of using the natural ecological regions to define subspecies groups it made my work much easier. It also helped me to understand the variation I had been studying for twenty years! In a sense it was like taking a step back from the detail of subspecies names and looking at the larger patterns. I feel that most observers should NOT use Latin subspecies names, as the names imply a kind of precision that is lacking in field observations. It is much more realistic to label a bird as typical of a certain region than it is to try to give it an exact subspecies name. Anyone who wants to learn the Latin names has many options of other books for that purpose. . . .

Humphrey-Parkes molt terminology: My reasons for avoiding this terminology are similar to the subspecies argument. In both cases I believe that experts should discourage casual use of technical terms. My experience with birders is that most simply substitute the Humphrey-Parkes terminology for the more intuitive "life-year" system; thus breeding equals alternate and nonbreeding equals basic. This is certainly not the case and using the terms in this way clouds their meaning. The Humphrey-Parkes terminology is an important tool meant to aid in the study of molt, and that is how it should be used. I encourage anyone with an interest in molt to learn it, as understanding the terminology and learning the correct way to apply it can enhance one's understanding of molt cycles. Applying it broadly in a field guide (to many species whose

molts have never been studied) would be pointless. Finally, I suggest that anyone who disagrees should spend a few days trying to relabel all of the illustrations in the guide with HP terms (watch for "worn definitive basic male Snow Bunting" and "definitive basic/definitive alternate Marsh Wren"). Note also the recent, and very logical, suggestion by Steve Howell in *Western Birds* for a significant revision of the Humphrey-Parkes terminology.

. . . Finally, let me say again that I encourage any comments and discussion about the book, it can only lead to more knowledge and a better understanding of the birds. I have lots to learn about bird identification. If this book sparks us to go out and prove or disprove anything I've written, GREAT! Better still, I hope it sparks people to go out and learn lots of new stuff that none of us knows now.

Good Birding,  
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### **Members, what would you like to see . . .**

in the CHBC Bulletin? Any particular articles or listings that are not included now? Would you like to write something for the Bulletin? Just let me know what's on your mind. Call me at 942-7746 or email [ginger\\_travis@unc.edu](mailto:ginger_travis@unc.edu). I'd be happy to hear from you. (Don't ask me, though, what happened to the nuthatch on the masthead of the Bulletin. It'll be back when I get friendlier with Pagemaker software.)  
Ginger Travis, editor

### **CHBC membership – please renew early!**

And why not renew for 2 years or more? And, while you're at it, why not give a membership to a friend or family member to encourage their interest in birds? Calendar-year (Jan.-Dec.) dues for most individuals and families are \$15; for students, \$10. If you wish to renew for more than one year, multiply the annual dues rate times the number of years. **Please send your check (payable to the Chapel Hill Bird Club) to club treasurer Fran Hommersand, 304 Spruce Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.** If you have questions, please call Fran at 967-1745.

### **Club officers**

*President:* Magnus Persmark (933-2255, [emp34157@glaxowellcome.com](mailto:emp34157@glaxowellcome.com))  
*Vice President (CH):* Judy Murray (942-2985, [jmurray@unc.edu](mailto:jmurray@unc.edu))  
*Vice President (RDU):* Karen Bearden ([birders@aol.com](mailto:birders@aol.com))  
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*Bulletin Editor:* Ginger Travis (942-7746, [Ginger\\_Travis@unc.edu](mailto:Ginger_Travis@unc.edu))  
<http://www.duke.edu/~cwcook/chbc>