

THE BULLETIN

Chapel Hill Bird Club

October, 2001

(Vol. XXX, No. 10)

c/o Ginger Travis

5244 Old Woods Rd.

Hillsborough, NC 27278

CHBC October meeting

When: Monday, **Oct. 22**, refreshments at 7:15 p.m., program at 7:30.

Where: The lounge, Binkley Baptist Church. Binkley is on the corner of Willow Drive and the 15-501 Bypass in Chapel Hill (next to University Mall).

What/Who: "Not in MY backyard!" Join us as Wayne Irvin shares his adventures in the Antarctic, the Arctic and Midway Atoll. Enjoy seeing icebergs, alcids, penguins, albatrosses and shags in parts of the world that most of us have never visited.

Wayne Irvin, though trained at UNC as a dentist, has dropped in and out of the profession while spending most of his life pursuing wild birds. He went back to college in the 1970s and got a master's degree in zoology from NC State University, then worked for a time at the NC Museum of Natural History as a collections manager and study skin preparator. In 1990, with a grant from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, he studied the status of the Loggerhead Shrike in North Carolina. He's a life member of the Carolina Bird Club, American Ornithological Union, Wilson Ornithological Society, and the Ornithological Society of the Mideast. He's a charter member of the North American Nature Photographers' Association. When not on the road, he lives in Southern Pines.

Service project: beginners' field trip

Want to help?

Nov. 11: CHBC will offer a special Sunday-morning field trip to Brickhouse Rd. (Durham Co.) for beginning birders from anywhere in the Triangle. This is a chance to introduce others to an activity we love and to show them one of the Triangle's wild places. Participants should meet for the trip at 9 a.m. in Durham at the Northgate Mall parking lot in front of Sears Tire and Auto. We'll carpool from there to Brickhouse Rd. If you want to help, contact Magnus Persmark (933-2255), Judy Murray (942-2985) or Karen Bearden (chickadeebirders@earthlink.net). This trip will be free.

Regular Sat. a.m. field trips continue

CHBC trips continue on Saturday mornings through October and into early November. We'll leave the Glen Lennox shopping center parking lot (on the north side of 54 just east of the intersection with 15-501 in Chapel Hill) at 7:30 a.m. sharp and return by noon. Reservations are not necessary, and trips are free. Wear sturdy shoes and be prepared for a hike. Beginners and visitors are welcome.

Call Doug Shadwick for details of the destination du jour (942-0479).

Intro. birding class at Lake Wheeler

Raleigh Parks and Recreation Department is sponsoring a daylong class (9 a.m. to 3 p.m.) for beginning birders. It will be taught by Kate Finlayson, who coordinated this year's Wildathon to benefit Mason Farm and the Audubon coastal sanctuaries. The class involves examining study skins of birds, looking at slides and at actual nests, playing games to learn birdsongs, hiking in search of migrants and resident species, enjoying a picnic lunch, and venturing up to Swift Creek in rowboats to look for waterbirds. Dates the class will be offered are **Oct. 20** and **Nov. 3**. There is a fee for the class: \$50 for Raleigh residents, \$57 for nonresidents.

To register, call 662-5704 or 662-5712. Lake Wheeler is south of Raleigh at 6404 Lake Wheeler Rd. See www.raleigh-nc.org/parks&rec/wheeler.

Broad-billed Hummer in N.C.!

summary by G.T.

Susan Campbell reported that on Oct. 7 a Broad-billed Hummingbird – yes, you read that right -- showed up at a feeder outside New Bern in Craven County. This is the first N.C. record for a Mexican species that is seen in southern Arizona and just occasionally in Texas. The New Bern bird is an almost-mature male, and Susan hopes to band it. If the bird stays, there will be a large crowd looking for it. (There already is!) The homeowners hosting this bird, Inge and Max Parker, live in a gated community, **so visitors MUST call ahead** so that their names can be given to the security people at the gate.

As a courtesy to the Parkers, before calling them please check the listserv Carolinabirds to make sure the bird is still present. If you are not subscribed to the list, you can easily check archived messages at the following Internet address:

www.virtualbirder.com/bmail/carolinabirds/latest.html

For directions to the Parkers' yard, see John Wright's archived Oct. 9 message to Carolinabirds.

Steve Shultz has posted his photos at:

www.broadbilled.homestead.com

The Parkers' phone number is **252-637-4966**.
Good luck!

N.C. mountain getaway, Sept. 27-28

by Karen Bearden

Fall is a bvely time to be in the mountains, so Joe and I decided to check out the birding at Ridge Junction Overlook, located at mile marker 355.8 on the Blue Ridge Parkway, just outside the entrance to Mount Mitchell State Park. We stayed at the Richmond Inn B&B in Spruce Pine, about a 30 minute drive to the site. Some of you have read Dwayne and Lori Martin's sightings on Carolinabirds. They have four years of records [at Ridge Junction] during fall migration. It's best to be there early so we dressed in our winter attire because the temps and wind were so cold that day! They said it was a slow day, but I was excited to see Tennessee (most abundant warbler), Blackburnian, Cape May, Bay-breasted and Black-throated Blue Warblers. Others got a glimpse of Black-and-white and Blackpoll Warblers. Swainson's Thrushes sounded their call note as they flew over, and we had nice views of Blue-headed Vireo. At least 3 Northern Flickers and 2 Red-headed Woodpeckers took a break to eat before flying on. There were numerous Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. They generally have a few Brown Thrashers each fall and we had a few that day. A Gray Catbird was calling in the bushes and American Goldfinches flew by. A Tufted Titmouse singing its "peter, peter, peter" song was unexpected and a first-time record for the Martins at the Ridge. It was a treat to see a few mountain specialties like Dark-eyed Junco, Red Crossbill, Common Raven, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Pine Siskin. We also saw two groups of Wild Turkeys along the side of the road on our way to the overlook. I highly recommend a trip to Ridge Junction Overlook during the fall. Happy birding!

CHBC field trip to the Blue Ridge

by Will Cook

Though raptor numbers were low this weekend (Sept. 22-23) on the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Chapel Hill Bird Club trip encountered waves of warblers of 19 species. We started off at my place in Fancy Gap

(milepost 203), birded the Parkway to the Mahogany Rock overlook (mp 235), hiking up to nearby Scott's Ridge and Mahogany Rock, and took the NC Audubon-sponsored side trip to Bullhead Mountain. (Our CHBC group was Elisa Enders, Jill Froning, Toni Rexrode, Shelley Theye and me. We were joined by Barbara Keighton and Amy O'Tuel. Barbara led us to a "secret" waterfall at the end of the day on Saturday.)

Here are our non-raptor migrant totals for Saturday 9/22 and Sunday 9/23 -- estimates of birds seen or heard singing (not counting a lot of miscellaneous chip notes and many warblers that were too fast for us).

1 BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO (NC; heard only)
1 Yellow-billed Cuckoo (h.o.)
3 Common Nighthawks
20 Chimney Swifts
5 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds
2 E. Wood-Pewees
1 E. Phoebe
1 Yellow-throated Vireo (seen and heard singing)
14 Blue-headed Vireos (seen and heard singing)
2 PHILADELPHIA VIREOS (VA; seen and heard singing)
2 Red-eyed Vireos
2 Ruby-crowned Kinglets
2 Swainson's Thrushes (didn't do any nocturnal listening)
1 Blue-winged Warbler
120 Tennessee Warblers (most common bird of any type)
1 Nashville Warbler
5 Chestnut-sided Warbler
15 Magnolia Warblers
10 Cape May Warblers (mostly imm. females, which are about as bright in plumage as female House Finches)
20 Black-throated Blue Warblers
25 Black-throated Green Warblers
2 Blackburnian Warblers
6 Pine Warblers
1 Palm Warbler
10 Bay-breasted Warblers
1 Blackpoll Warbler
5 Black-and-white Warblers
7 American Redstarts
2 Worm-eating Warblers
3 Ovenbirds
2 Common Yellowthroats
6 Hooded Warblers
5 Scarlet Tanagers
1 Rose-breasted Grosbeak

The hawk-watchers saw a few dozen Broadwings, the usual Red-tails, several Ospreys, some Accipiters, a Bald Eagle, a few Am. Kestrels, and a Peregrine Falcon (their first of the season).

It was a nice weekend!

Hawkwatching

by Jim Keighton (to Carolinabirds)

[Sept. 17] Hawks are suddenly crowding the skies at Bullhead and Mahogany Rock as well as at Pores Knob just southeast of Moravian Falls. . . . In summary, total hawks for each site on 9/15, 9/16, 9/17 are as follows:

Bullhead	231, 291, 731
Mahogany Rock	2310, 1397, 1906
Pores Knob	* * 2100

Almost all were Broad-winged Hawks, though Bullhead had 8 Ospreys and 3 Bald Eagles and Mahogany Rock had a Bald Eagle each day and 12 Ospreys for the period. The first two days the hawks were on northerly winds and the third day on south winds at all three sites. Today the big numbers came through between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. EDT at Bullhead and Mahogany Rock and between 3 and 5 p.m. at Pores Knob, 30 miles southeast of Mahogany Rock. More to come tomorrow? All of this is still a week ahead of the usual big push, so maybe there is even more excitement to come.

Note: CHBC member Jim Keighton lives just down the mountain from Mahogany Rock near Sparta, in Alleghany County, N.C. He is the compiler of both the Mahogany Rock and Bullhead Hawk Counts for the Hawk Migration Association of North America, which assembles and publishes data from hundreds of other similar hawk watches across North America. He says, "The hawk data assembled on Bullhead in recent years helped establish the necessity of saving it. It is appearing to be the most spectacular watch sight in the southern Appalachians -- most hawks are eyeball to eyeball with the watchers."

N. C. Goshawk sighting!

by James Coman (to Carolinabirds)

A Northern Goshawk was closely observed today, Saturday, 29 September, at Bullhead Mountain State Natural Area [Alleghany County]. This is apparently the first definite occurrence of this species on either the Bullhead or Mahogany Rock hawkwatch lists. Observers were Betty O'Leary and James Coman. Little else was moving, with only a handful of Red-Tails, Sharpies, and Kestrels noted, before shifting wind and cold drove us off the peak.

Note: According to Harry LeGrand, there is as yet no public access to Bullhead Mountain, whose ridgeline was recently acquired by the state -- so don't rush up there! For now, access is only for an official hawkwatch and the occasional organized field trip (see Will Cook's and Jim Keighton's reports above). If you want to try for hawks on the Blue Ridge Parkway, the public location is still Mahogany Rock overlook (milepost 235). G.T.

Magnolia Warbler (laissez-faire in the garden)

by Shantanu Phukan (to Carolinabirds)

[Sept. 13] As I was sitting in the kitchen having breakfast and looking longingly out at the cardinals I saw my first really good (relatively) yard bird. A warbler came in and hovered around the Abelia bushes that I have allowed to simply go wild in the back. Much peering through the window revealed it to be a fall plumage Magnolia. I have never seen Magnolias in North Carolina, so this new yard bird was also a new state bird for me!

Incidentally, I have been discovering that letting the Abelia bush grow as it will has proven fantastic for attracting birds. Normally these bushes are pruned into all sorts of unnatural shapes and are also overly used in local landscaping. Thus for a whole year I have pooh-pooed the bush but been too lazy to uproot it. In the meanwhile it has grown into a graceful thing, with the new branches forming elegant arching loops. It is, as you all know, a prodigious bloomer and so attracts hummers in some numbers. But what I have noticed is that the gracefully arching branches have made the bush very user-friendly for foraging birds, since the open form that the unpruned bush has taken on provides small birds with space to maneuver and forage in its midst. It is quite clear when I see small birds forage in it and larger ones (like mockers) perch in it, that this would never have happened in the tight little balls of bushes we see in most local landscaping. So far I have had hummers poke at the flowers when they come by to feed on the salvia, goldfinches and house finches have been eating the spent blossoms (or seeds), mockers perch on it to survey the yard, and towhees forage under it on the ground. Now let us see what use the juncos and white throated sparrows make of it when they show up. Well, another argument for letting the yard go its own way.

At Carol Woods, a rocky year for Eastern Bluebirds

by Audrey Booth, Bluebird trailmaster

Fourteen of Carol Woods' resident monitors partnered to observe the 31 Bluebird boxes at weekly intervals in 2001, the seventh year of our Bluebird trail. Although our Bluebirds this year produced 130% of eggs laid in 2000 (192 vs. 147), the ultimate number of 2001 birds that fledged was less than the 136 that fledged in 2000. We were shocked that we fledged only 66% of the largest number of eggs laid throughout our 6 years of record keeping. But more on the cause for that in a moment.

Bluebirds occupied 23 of our 31 bird boxes. There were 192 eggs laid; 139 hatched; and 137 of the hatchlings fledged. As is often the case, the same (presumed) pair of Bluebirds has more than one

hatch per season in the same bird box. This year 6 boxes held one set of eggs; 10 boxes housed 2 sets; 6 boxes housed 3 sets; and 1 box had 4 sets, although 2 of those sets were destroyed soon after they were laid. Three sets of eggs are usually the maximum number, and this was the first year that we have ever recorded a fourth set.

The big news is that the “House Wren Wars” raged all season. Twelve Bluebird nests, containing 43 eggs and 8 hatchlings, were destroyed. Six Chickadee nests containing eggs were also decimated, for a total of 18 of our nests ruined. Last year, the 2000 season, we had our best production year when 89 percent of the laid eggs actually resulted in fledglings; this came after steady gains in each of our previous 5 years of records.

Many but not all of our bird boxes are located at the woods edge to facilitate grass mowing on our campus; the woods edge is not the optimal place for a Bluebird box. House Wren destruction has occurred in all locations, however. We experienced some House Wren destruction in previous years, and it has been documented by others in the literature. We sought consultation about our predators from Mr. Jack Finch (“Mr. Bluebird of North Carolina”), the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, the North Carolina Bluebird Society, and the North American Bluebird Society – but we did not receive any useful advice. We did receive emails of sympathy.

Jay Rabb, Carol Woods Bluebird trailmaster emeritus, was the first Orange County consultant for the North Carolina Bluebird Society. I succeeded him in that role, and we respond to requests for Bluebird consultations. We have assisted Eagle Scouts and others in design and location of Bluebird nesting boxes. We hope that we will have no requests for consultations about “House Wren Wars.”

Early Evening Grosbeak? Q&A

by Sheila Denn and Will Cook (Carolinabirds)

Q. (*Denn*) I had my first-ever Evening Grosbeak in my yard 10 days ago [late Sept.]. . . . I didn't think anything of it. But when I mentioned it to my dad this weekend he was very surprised and said he didn't think he'd ever seen an Evening Grosbeak in northern Chatham County this early in the season. So I was wondering if this was early for Evening Grosbeaks to show up. . . .

A. (*Cook, 10/9*) Yes, it's very early – I don't know any previous September reports for the Triangle area (I assume your sighting was on 9/29?). The usual early arrival date is around November 10. The earliest fall report is 10/17 1977, but there is also a puzzling report of a male on 7/26 1978 (seen by an experienced observer). A quick scan of rare bird alerts didn't turn up any other reports, so [yours] could be a rogue individual. :-) I've been hearing

reports of cone crop failures up north this year, so we could be in for a winter finch invasion.

One baaaaaddd hummer

by Gary Phillips (to Carolinabirds)

[Sept. 10] This evening shortly after 5:00, I observed two most impressive birds in our backyard. Perched in a bare branch at the very highest point of a 50+ yr. old sycamore was a bird that looked to be about the size of a male Common Grackle (my view was toward the WSW.) From a prudently chosen perch a few feet away, a Ruby-throated hummer was flying sorties, apparently with the intent of dislodging this being that would be so foolish as to enter his domain. After watching the hummer make a couple of passes, I thought I'd get my binos and take a closer look. The object of the tiny tyrant's wrath wasn't a grackle, but a young Merlin trying to get started on its House Sparrow-looking dinner! This continued for a minute or so (hummer buzzing up from behind, Merlin turning its head to see what the heck that thing is on its nape) 'til a pair of Blue Jays and a small contingent of grackles helped convince the Merlin to vacate the premises. As it did so, you-know-who was hot on its tail 'til they disappeared from my field of view.

Shortly afterwards, I got the in-your-face, back-away-slowly-and-nobody-gets-hurt treatment from the miniature monster. I wanna be a hummingbird when I grow up....

Review: new shorebird video

by Steve Shultz (to Carolinabirds)

I have not seen many of my favorite shorebirds in the Raleigh area this fall due to full lake and pond levels as a result of the copious amounts of rain we have enjoyed recently. My despair was lightened somewhat when I was loaned a copy of "Shorebirds: A Guide to the Shorebirds of North America" created by Richard K. Walton and Greg Dodge. You may recognize Walton's name as the voice over on the Peterson's Backyard Bird Song recording.

The 70 minute video explains identification of 38 species of eastern North American shorebirds. Each species receives close up video footage along with a voiceover from Durham's own Greg Dodge. Video action is frozen at various times to exemplify particular characteristics such as the black axillaries of the Black-bellied Plover, the white rump of the White-rumped Sandpiper, and the long primary extension of the Baird's Sandpiper. There is even a section on one of my favorite shorebird haunts, sod or turf farms.

Some features that I found particularly useful are the side-by-side comparison of basic and alternate plumaged birds of the same species, video of mixed shorebird flocks allowing the viewer to see similarities and differences between similar species like the Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and an

excellent discussion of dowitcher identification. I thought the quality of the film footage was quite good with most birds in good light and in sharp focus. Several species which can be identified by voice, such as the dowitchers, are accompanied by sound clips of calls.

Unlike flitting warblers and skulking sparrows, shorebirds frequently allow the viewer a reasonably leisurely look at plumage, silhouette, and bill shape and length. The video format seems to be especially useful in learning each of these characteristics for the covered species.

The video is available from ABA sales, some local wild bird stores, or directly from the manufacturer at brownbagproductions.com.

Hope you enjoy!

Future destinations: Palmetto Peartree Preserve

by Jeff Lewis

The Palmetto Peartree Preserve is a new wildlife sanctuary being managed by The Conservation Fund. The preserve is located 35 to 40 minutes west of Manteo in northern Tyrell County and contains the pine-forest habitat so critical for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. There are approximately 150 RCW cavity trees on the 9,732-acre preserve, many of which are near roads and thus easily accessible. The preserve also contains many acres of non-riverine swamp forest and several miles of shoreline along the Albemarle Sound and Little Alligator River. The Palmetto Peartree Preserve has been birded very little and will be exciting for us birders to explore!

Note: Palmetto Peartree is so new that there are as yet no signs marking it; however, Wings Over Water (Nov. 2-4) is offering field trips there. The preserve is north of Hwy. 64, somewhere off old Hwy. 64. Maybe by next spring, it'll be more easily findable!

Chatham County fall count highlights

by Will Cook

We had a record turnout of counters for the 2001 Chatham County Fall Migration Count on September 15, but strong winds kept the birds lying low for the most part. The 37 counters in 17 parties easily beat the old record of 27 in 13 parties, and the number of party-hours, 132, beats the old record by 50%. Not surprisingly, we counted a record number of birds, 4895, in an average 103 species.

The number of birds per hour confirms the feeling most people had that this was a slow day - 37.1 bph is the lowest by far of the six Chatham counts, well below the average of 49.5. The day following a cold front is reputed to be good for migrants, but the cold front that passed the day before the count apparently blew more birds out than

it blew in. We set a large number of record highs due to the high level of participation. Ones that are more than 50% above previous record highs are Double-crested Cormorant, Black Vulture, Bald Eagle, Broad-winged Hawk, Sanderling, Northern Waterthrush, Hooded Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Brown-headed Cowbird, House Finch, and American Goldfinch.

The highlight for many groups was seeing lots of Bald Eagles. No great rarities or species new to the count were found. Ones we don't get every year included Sanderling, Ring-billed Gull (only our second!), singing Whip-poor-wills, Bay-breasted Warbler, and Yellow-breasted Chat.

You can see the full results in the last three pages of this newsletter.

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Join the club – we want you!

Membership is \$15 per year for individuals or families, \$10 for students. (Multiply by the number of years you want.) The CHBC has friendly people and lots of benefits -- interesting speakers, weekly field trips, notice of upcoming bird counts, the newsletter, public service projects, and the club website. Please make your check payable to the Chapel Hill Bird Club and send it to the club treasurer, Ruth Roberson, 3406 Ogburn Court, Durham, N.C. 27705.

Lend a hand?

We need folks who are interested in bringing refreshments to meetings. If you would like to volunteer to provide the eats once or twice, please call Karen Piplani at 929-6553.