

*birding the triangle... and beyond, for over half a century*

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**The BULLETIN...**  
**Chapel Hill Bird Club**  
**October 2007**  
<http://chbc.carolinanature.com>

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>> **Meeting :Monday, Oct. 22 <<**  
**“Painted Buntings”**

**When/Where:** 7:15 PM/refreshments; 7:30/Meeting  
The lounge, Olin T. Binkley Baptist Church, corner  
of Hwy. 15-501 bypass and Willow Dr., behind  
University Mall, Chapel Hill.

**Who/What:** The Oct. 22 meeting talk is on "**Painted Buntings**" by **Jamie Rotenberg**. Painted Buntings are among the most strikingly beautiful of all North American songbirds. Join us as Professor Jamie Rotenberg, based at UNC-Wilmington, tells us about his research into breeding populations of this species, in light of the rapidly developing threats to their habitat."

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**Saturday Morning Field Trips**

Local field trips, usually lead by Doug Shadwick, depart from Glen Lennox Shopping Center Parking lot off HWY 54 promptly at 7:30 most Saturday mornings. All skills are welcome. Trips are usually over by noon. Dress for the weather and for walking. For further details, call Doug at 942-0479.

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**MEMBERSHIP DUES:** are always appreciated! Please check the upper right corner of the mailing label on your Bulletin to see if your membership is current. Those who need to update their membership,

**To :** \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete the following :

***Membership Form***

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

ph \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

new member:\_\_\_\_\_ or, RENEWAL:\_\_\_\_\_

dues: \$15/yr. individuals/family, \$10/year students  
send checks payable to Chapel Hill Bird Club to:

**Patsy Bailey, 277 Mint Springs Rd.**  
**Pittsboro, NC 27312**

**Thanks to Patsy Bailey, our own new projector!**

For many years we have borrowed a projector for use by our speakers. Now, because of Patsy’s hard work researching which brand and model would work best for us, and her asking for donations, we have a wonderful projector, with the expenditure of only \$200 of Chapel Hill Bird Club funds. Those of you who attended our first meeting on Sept. 24 know how well it projected Shiloh Schulte’s photos of American Oystercatchers. Great Job Patsy!

**Rare and Rarer...**

Last summer, great news came from USFWS that Kirtland’s Warblers were found nesting on private property in the state of Wisconsin, outside of their usual Michigan breeding grounds, boding further success for that particular recovery program.

Meanwhile, the 2006-7 search season for Ivory-billed Woodpeckers ended with scant evidence, and certainly nothing definitive, for the presence of the species in primary search locales. Interesting auditory evidence however actually came from nearby: South Carolina’s 20,000 acre Congaree region, where searches will increase next season (and at least one CHBC member will be among the official search team!). Also of local note, independent searchers are exploring the Green Swamp area of N. Carolina (where a sighter claimed seeing a pair in 2004), while widespread skepticism continues to grow. Finally, in August, the US Fish and Wildlife Service released its 170 page "Draft Recovery Plan or the Ivory-billed Woodpecker," adding to the controversy.

**A Couple of Summer Highlights**

Not local, but one of the biggest Carolina bird stories came last May when a first-ever Snail Kite, possibly pushed north by wildfires in Florida, appeared near Rimini, S.C. and promptly began feeding on crayfish. The bird drew a lot of attention not just from Carolina birders, but from national bird news outlets as well, and was observed for close to 3 weeks.

Meanwhile the Triangle’s nearest pair of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, in Southern Pines, successfully bred once again, raising at least three young.

Locally, Bald Eagles fledged young once again on several of our Triangle waterways, and in more recent exciting news (mid-Sept.) a Red Phalarope and 4 Wood Stocks have been ID'd at Jordan Lake mudflats off Hwy. 751.

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**On The Decline**

National Audubon reported last summer the results of their analysis of count data over the last 40 years showing a great many N. American birds in steep decline. The top 20, with declines of 50-80% by their estimation were:

- |                         |                            |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Northern Bobwhite    | 11. Snow Bunting           |
| 2. Evening Grosbeak     | 12. Black-throated Sparrow |
| 3. Northern Pintail     | 13. Lark Sparrow           |
| 4. Greater Scaup        | 14. Common Grackle         |
| 5. Boreal Chickadee     | 15. American Bittern       |
| 6. Eastern Meadowlark   | 16. Rufous Hummingbird     |
| 7. Common Tern          | 17. Whip-poor-will         |
| 8. Loggerhead Shrike    | 18. Horned Lark            |
| 9. Field Sparrow        | 19. Little Blue Heron      |
| 10. Grasshopper Sparrow | 20. Ruffed Grouse          |

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**CHBC Saturday Morning Field Trip to Jordan Lake- September 29, 2007**

It was a perfect day for the Saturday morning field trip that Doug Shadwick led to Jordan Lake. The sky was clear, and the temperature started out in the 50s. Our small group, Rick Payne, Bruce Young, Bob Rudszynski, Alex Schulz, and I, started at the Fearington Point boat ramp. We were fortunate to see mixed flocks of warblers working their way through the tree tops around the parking lot. The following were spotted: Cape May Warbler, Northern Perula, Black-and-white Warbler, Chestnut-Sided Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Yellow-throated

Warbler, Philadelphia Warbler, and a Worm-eating Warbler. Also spotted were an American Redstart, Fish Crows, Eastern Wood-Pee-wee, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, Brown-headed Nuthatch. White-breasted Nuthatch, Downy Woodpecker, Chimney Swifts, Black Vultures, Blue Jay, Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets and Double Crested Cormorants.

We went to the Hwy 751 Bridge where a Cooper's Hawk obligingly swooped by just after we arrived. It was rather quiet but a Common Kingfisher rattled across the stream, and Great Blue Heron, and Great Egrets were feeding in the shallow water. A Solitary Sandpiper probing the mud was spotted by scope. We went to the parking area just beyond the bridge, intending to go into the woods. A solitary hunter in camouflage gear was just leaving, and warned us that a pair of hunters was still in the second corn field, hunting Mourning Doves. There was very little activity in the area, but one of our number could not resist doing two quiet Mourning Dove calls before we left the area. KP

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### CHBC FALL TRIP 2007

The annual CHBC fall trip took place September 22-23 beginning at Fancy Gap and moving south along the Blue Ridge Parkway both Saturday and Sunday. In addition to veteran leaders Doug Shadwick and Will Cook, Rick Payne, Steve Schultz, Bruce Young, Gail Cox and ....., and Patsy Bailey joined us on Saturday.

The weather was good – starting with a brisk 39 F and warming up to another warm day of an unusually dry September and August.

At the hawk watch headquarters – BRP milepost 235 at Scott's Ridge with a view of Mahogany Rock – people commented that there were more people looking for hawks than there were hawks being counted. We arrived around noon and watched for about an hour, seeing a kettle of 12 Broad-winged, several Osprey, Coopers and Sharp-shinned. As usual Jim Keighton kept score.

We walked up Scott's Ridge and saw a handful of warblers: a Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blues, Cape Mays, Tennessees, a single Bay-breasted, Magnolias, Redstarts, several tanagers.... But the timber rattlesnake was no where to be seen.

We were chased into our cars by a short but welcome rain shower as we headed towards Piney Creek to James Coman's farm where we were welcomed and encouraged to wander. A beaver pond produced a few more birds but no surprises – a House Wren, Phoebes, an Ovenbird, ....

The non-migrant highlight of the day was certainly the potato scramble as James drove his small tractor through a field full of weeds, which up until recently had been dominated by potato plants. The furrows uncovered large and small organic potatoes and everyone carried home far more than s/he could eat in a week or even a month. This was a lovely ending to a nice day.

Other birds seen by one or more of the group over the weekend included Hooded Warblers, a single Chestnut-sided warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks...  
..... PB

### Saw-whet Owls and winter finches on the way?

“Mark Simpson wanted me to forward these messages to Carolinabirds, since he thought these would be of interest to Carolina birders. It looks like it's shaping up to be a big winter for northern finches and owls in the Carolinas because of the cone crop failure and the paucity of rodents this year up north. Red-breasted Nuthatches are already here, and an early Evening Grosbeak was reported from Chattanooga, TN, a few days ago. Will we get flocks of them this winter?”  
*(Will Cook's comments re the following item he forwarded to CarolinaBirds.)*

**(The following was sent Sept 30 to PABIRDS AT LIST.AUDUBON.ORG)** “Tomorrow night, we launch our 11th season of saw-whet owl migration research through the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art in Millersburg, at sites in Schuylkill, Dauphin and Cumberland counties. We'll be mist-netting and banding nightly through the end of

November, as well as continuing our radio telemetry and genetics work. But last night, I opened mist nets and turned on the audiolure on our property here in western Schuylkill County, mostly because we had a guest from out of town, one of Amy's former interns. Dan had never seen a saw-whet, and while I was a bit dubious -- I've never caught one in September, even when flight conditions were perfect, as they were last night -- I was game to try.

I'm glad we did -- the very first time we checked the nets, we had a lovely young-of-the-year female, followed 90 minutes later by two more. Dan, a Ph.D. candidate in herpetology, was so entranced it looked as though he might abandon salamanders for owls.

As many of you know, saw-whet migration is a cyclical phenomenon, tied to rodent populations in Canada and New England, where the bulk of the eastern population breeds. We had massive irruptions into the mid-Atlantic region in 1995 and 1999, and a bit of an upwards bump in 2003 (some suspect that West Nile virus, which hit many raptors hard that year, may have depressed the population and short-circuited the expected peak).

After two very poor seasons, it appears that the cards are right for another major irruption of saw-whets into this area this fall. Last year saw a remarkable crop of tree mast, from both conifers and hardwoods, across eastern Canada. That produced a bumper crop of woodland mouse and red-backed voles, and a great breeding season for owls -- few of which had to leave Canada, much to our dismay. This year the trees bore little food, the rodent population is crashing, and the owls appear to be heading south. -- The numbers of saw-whets reported the last week or two from southern Canadian banding stations has been eye-popping. Some stations have caught more owls in a night than they usually catch in a season.

I'll post periodic reports on the season. If you've always wanted to see a saw-whet, this may be the fall/winter for you, especially as we get into the peak of the flight around Halloween. Any tape, CD or MP3 player with the "toot" call, played

repeatedly and at volume in the woods, should lure a few in. Pick a chilly, calm, moonless night after the passage of a cold front, and be patient -- let the tape play for half an hour or more. Don't expect the saw-whet to respond with toots of its own; they are far more likely to make quiet mewing or wailing calls. (Cornell's new 'Voices of North American Owls' CD set is the only one I know of with these vocalizations)."

Scott Weidensaul  
Schuylkill Haven, PA

### **Red-breasted Nuthatch notes**

Seeing so many reports of Red-Breasted Nuthatch sightings so early this year, I was prompted to check the article on Nuthatches in "The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior". One paragraph in the article explained the origin of the bird's name.

"Nuthatches will often take a seed, fly to a tree branch, jam the seed into a crevice in the bark, and hack open the seed by pounding on it with the bill. The word 'nuthatch' originated in Europe and refers to this foraging technique; 'hatch' is thought to be a corruption of the Old English word 'hack'."

Also of note, the article was written by J. Michael Reed, who is currently an Assistant professor of Biology at Tufts. He has North Carolina connection as a PhD graduate of North Carolina State, where he worked on Red-cockaded Woodpecker population biology and conservation!

In the previous posting by Scott Weidensaul, he notes a poor crop tree mast this year in Eastern Canada. Might this also be a factor in the irruption of Red-breasted Nuthatches this year?

### **Christmas Counts Coming Up**

Just a reminder that next month's Bulletin will include dates and contact people for the annual Christmas Bird Counts. We can always use people to assist with this important project. Please keep this in mind as the holidays approach, and consider making a difference by taking part in one of the different count areas. KP