

# Chapel Hill Bird Club Bulletin

Fall 2018 – Volume 46 number 6

## In this issue...

- Membership meetings 2018-19
- Field trips 2018-19
- Spring bird count results (Chapel Hill and Jordan Lake)
- Birding by ear walk
- Officers for 2018-19



## Upcoming meetings (2018-19)

Chapel Hill Bird Club membership meetings are held the fourth Monday of each month, September through May. (No meeting in December; May 2019 meeting on third Monday.) Refreshments are available at **7:15 pm**, meetings start at **7:30 pm**. **Location** is the Olin T. Binkley Baptist Church, corner of Highway 15-501 Bypass and Willow Drive, behind University Mall. **Address:** 1712 Willow Drive, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

Members and guests are welcome to gather for dinner at the K & W Cafeteria (University Mall) at 6:00 pm before the meeting. Go to the back room of the cafeteria to join the group after making your dinner selection.

9/24/18

### *Mary Parker Sonis — Warbler migration in North Carolina*

Naturalist and photographer Mary Parker Sonis focuses on "capturing" warblers that migrate through North Carolina's Triangle region. She will share with us some beautiful photos of warblers, tell us about her favorites and their interesting behaviors and answer your questions.

Sonis is the author of an email blog called *Crittercam*, which currently has more than 700 subscribers. She has authored wildlife columns in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, *Carrboro Citizen*, *Chapel Hill News* and the *Durham Herald Sun*. Recently, she has co-taught nature photography courses and she gives a yearly talk at the Chapel Hill Public Library sponsored by the Friends of Bolin Creek. A video of a Carrboro radio interview with her in June 2017 can be seen at

<https://vimeo.com/220139217>

Her photos are online at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/63124036@N06/>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/51226707@N06/>



10/22/18



*Norm Budnitz, Cape to Cape — Birding the Southern Atlantic Ocean*

On an expedition cruise from Argentina to South Africa, Norm Budnitz spent three weeks birding the southern Atlantic Ocean, including the Falkland Islands and South Georgia Island. He observed penguins, albatrosses, a variety of other seabirds, and marine mammals, too. He endured gray skies, cold temperatures, and high winds. Norm will share his adventures and pictures with us.

A science and math teacher at Carolina Friends School for 22 years, Norm Budnitz is well-known to local birders. He has been involved with the New Hope Audubon Society since its inception, serving in numerous capacities including president and treasurer. He has overseen numerous Christmas and Spring bird counts, breeding bird censuses and surveys, Bald Eagle counts and nest-monitoring, and has compiled the Jordan Lake counts since 2000.

11/26/18

*Ellen Tinsley — Monitoring the eagles at Jordan Lake*

“Doc Ellen” has spent many mornings at Jordan Lake sites observing and recording eagle behavior since 2011. In 2012, she joined the Eagle Nest Monitoring Group and began her work as an active advocate for the raptors' welfare, including researching and testifying before the NC Wildlife Resources Commission on how prescribed burns can be done for the good of the land while protecting the eagles' welfare. Doc Ellen will share information on the eagle nest monitoring project, "eagle etiquette" and other interesting facts about these raptors.

Tinsley is a retired equine veterinarian who became a wildlife photographer in 2009 after a serious car accident made it impossible for her to continue her practice with horses. She is a volunteer ambassador for the Audubon Society and writes a nature photography blog (<https://docellensjourney.com/>). Her photos can be found at:

<https://www.dreamingsongsphotos.com>  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/dreamingsongs/>



1/28/19

*John Connors — American Woodcock, Mysterious Bird of the Twilight*

Scientists and naturalists alike have long been trying to understand what makes a Woodcock tick. The bird doesn't make it easy. John Connors, who has conducted decades of research on this species, will discuss the life history of the species, some of the curious things he has discovered, and mysteries that remain.

John Connors, retired from the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences where he was the Coordinator of the Naturalist Center, is a founding member of the Wake Nature Preserves Partnership. He is a very active and engaged member of the Wake Audubon Society where he has twice served as president. In 2013, he was the recipient of the Audubon





2/25/19

*John Connors (continued)*

NC Bird Lore Conservation Education Award. John stays busy leading nature hikes, giving presentations, and compiling the Wake Audubon Christmas Bird Count and the annual Wake Butterfly Count. His children's book, entitled "The Pear-picking Contest", is nearing completion.

(Illustration of Woodcock by Jos Zwartz via Wikimedia Commons.)

*David and Judy Smith — Birds of Namibia*

Namibia is a sparsely populated country in southwestern Africa that consists mostly of deserts and dry, rocky, mountains. In fact, it's the driest country in sub-Saharan Africa, with much of its area falling within the Namib or Kalahari Deserts. But even so, there are some remarkable birds and other animals that live there. In March of 2018, David and Judy Smith visited Namibia, as well as neighboring Botswana, and they will share their photos of the scenery and wildlife.

David and Judy Smith retired from careers at GlaxoSmithKline in 2010, and since then have devoted even more of their time to bird travel than they did when they were working. Having birded in about 45 countries, they have accumulated lots of photos, which they are always happy to share. In between trips, David managed to be our president for seven years, and they both remain active and involved with the bird club.

3/25/19

*Mike Dunn — The Birds of Yellowstone*

When you think of Yellowstone, most think of the unusual thermal features, the incredible scenery, and the abundance of charismatic megafauna like bison, grizzlies, and wolves. But Yellowstone is also home to an amazing variety of bird life. Almost 300 species have been recorded with about 150 species nesting in the park. Join naturalist Mike Dunn as he shares stories and photos of some of the birds observed on his many trips to America's first national park.



Mike Dunn is currently a natural science educator with the North Carolina Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill. He has worked with the state for 33 years helping people of all ages to understand and appreciate the natural world. He has designed and conducted hundreds of workshops on natural history throughout the state and beyond, on subjects ranging from wildlife to wildflowers. Yellowstone has always been one of his favorite places and has proven to be a great location to introduce people to the wonders of nature. You can peruse his blog about the natural world at

<https://roadsendnaturalist.com/>



04/22/19

*Johnny Riley — Accommodating birds and birders at Cane Creek*

Orange County's Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA) manages two reservoirs, University Lake and Cane Creek Reservoir, that have become recreational sites. Cane Creek Reservoir in particular has become a destination site for birders and Senior Lake Warden Johnny Riley takes pains to manage the site as an accommodating place for observing wildlife. Johnny will share with us how he and his crew achieve this and the measures they take to observe and monitor birds, including his own yearly project to band mourning doves.

Before accepting his position as Senior Lake Warden in May 2013, Johnny Riley worked as a wildlife biologist for the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. He was instrumental in opening Cane Creek during off-season months to birders for one morning a week.

*Neville Handel — Managing Mason Farm*

Mason Farm Biological Reserve, a 367-acre natural area owned and managed by the North Carolina Botanical Garden (NCBG), is a popular destination for birders in the Triangle Region. Maintaining it as a biological reserve supporting a wide range of habitats and high species diversity requires ecological knowledge, extensive planning, and a lot of labor. Neville Handel, Land Manager for the NCBG, oversees stewardship activities at Mason Farm and other NCBG-managed reserves (including the Parker Preserve and Penny's Bend Nature Preserve in Durham). In this talk, Neville will describe his work in both the field and the office and discuss the considerations and planning that guide management of the reserve.

Neville Handel has lived in North Carolina since 1999. He earned a Bachelor's Degree in Anthropology from Kenyon College and a Master's Degree in Ecology from UNC Chapel Hill. Before coming to the NCBG in late 2014, he worked with The Haw River Assembly and The Nature Conservancy's NC Sandhills Program.

Field trips (2018-19)

The Chapel Hill Bird Club conducts regular field trips during fall, winter, and spring, usually on Saturdays. The general schedule for field trips can be found at:

<http://chbc.carolinanature.com/fieldtrips.html>

Specifics for any given trip will be posted on the Carolinabirds e-mail list and the Chapel Hill Bird Club Facebook page one or two days beforehand. Specifics will include the destination, meeting details, need for special gear, lunch, etc. Most trips are to areas within 25 miles of Chapel Hill and finish by noon, but they may range further afield and return later. The field trip chair is open to suggestions for new locations. Birders of all skill levels are welcome on field trips.



5/20/19



## 2018 Chapel Hill Spring Bird Count

The 2018 Chapel Hill spring count on Sunday, May 13, 2018, was on the same date as last year's count, but what a difference! Last year's count was spectacular, one of the best ever with 130 species, while this year's 111 species was our lowest in four decades. The weather made a huge difference. Last year's count had perfect weather: calm, cool, cloudy. This year's was sunny and hot, with the high of 93F tying the record high for this date, more like a mid-July day than a mid-spring day; the birding was also reminiscent of mid-July. The extreme heat made both the birds and the birders lethargic, so many teams put in less time than usual.



This year's species total of 111 is eleven below the 10-year average of 122. This is the lowest since 1974, before the filling of Jordan Lake, when we had 109 species. The total number of birds, 6508, is well below the average of 8289. Effort on the count was also quite low, with 96.55 party hours (average 121.8). However, the number of birds per party hour, 67.4, is surprisingly close to the average of 65.7. Perhaps the low count wasn't because the birds were lying low from the heat after all, but more instead the birders!

The star of this year's count was a Peregrine Falcon at Maple View Farm, seen flying north over Dairyland Road by Roger Shaw. This is only the second for the count; the first was way back in 1965. Roger also had a Grasshopper Sparrow there—normally not notable, but they are getting more difficult to find in recent years. Other goodies included Hooded Mergansers still breeding at Sandy Creek Park in Durham (Kent Fiala), a Great Egret at Jordan Lake (Bruce Young), and a King Rail at University Lake (heard by Ginger Travis from her kayak).

We set one record high this year, unexpected considering the low number of party hours: Acadian Flycatcher (107 beats the old record of 88 set in 2006, average 64). Yellow-billed Cuckoo were also found in unusually high numbers (40 is the highest since 2000, average 15).

The big miss this year was White-throated Sparrow, the first miss of this lingering winter bird in the more than 60-year history of the Chapel Hill count. We did have it in count week, though. Many other species were remarkably scarce this year: Canada Goose (82 is lowest since 1990, average 199), Wood Duck (15 is lowest since 1990, average 35), Red-tailed Hawk (12, average 22), Rock Pigeon (7, average 21), Eastern Kingbird (12 is lowest since 1973, average 23), Purple Martin (10 is lowest since 1974, average 52), Tree Swallow (3 is lowest since 1998, average 23), American Robin (130 is lowest since 1975, average 245), Ovenbird (78, average 107), Prothonotary Warbler (14, average 35), Common Yellowthroat (50 is lowest since 1969, average 107), Common Grackle (96 is lowest since 1969, average 187), and Orchard Oriole (7 is lowest since 1995, average 18). Total number of warblers (505, average 792) is the lowest since 1996.

Team honors: Will Cook's team, covering Mason Farm as well as the SW Durham sewage plant, recorded 77 species, edging past the team of Shelley Theye and Jill Froning with 75. Tom Driscoll got the highest individual count with 765. Weather in brief: low 67F, high 93F; wind variable 3-9 mph; mostly sunny, no rain. We had 37 field counters in 17 parties (average 41 in 20 parties), with 1 feeder watcher. Thanks to all participants for braving the heat to count some birds!

For detailed results, see:

<http://chbc.carolinanature.com/chsbc2018res.html>

—Will Cook, compiler



## Jordan Lake (NC) Spring Bird Count 2018

May 5, 2018 was a mild day with temperatures ranging from 63°F in the morning to 76°F in the afternoon. Winds were calm, and the sky was overcast in the morning to partly cloudy in the afternoon.

Fifty observers in 21 parties participated (our 10-year averages are 45 and 21, respectively). We tallied 6,982 individual birds (avg. 8,008) in 112 species (avg. 120) in 106 party hours (avg. 124).

Although we recorded all the usual suspects with no notable missed species, we found very few waterfowl (ducks) and very few passage migrants—neotropical migrants that pass through our area but don't stop to breed here. For example, we had the usual cast of our breeding warblers—Ovenbird, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler, etc.—but no Blackpolls, Bay-breasted, or Cape May Warblers. It's hard to say if there is any significance to that conservation-wise, or whether it was just a matter of timing—that we simply counted on a day when those birds were not on the move through our area. I prefer to think it was the latter; I worry that it might have been the former.

We did have a couple of new record high counts. We reported 86 White-eyed Vireos (our previous high was 83 in 1979) and 202 Summer Tanagers (189 in 2003). And we almost tied an old record with 79 Eastern Wood-Pewees (80 in 2015).



Brian Bockhahn found a couple of notable species from Vista Point: 1 Ruddy Duck and 2 Herring Gulls.

Again, this year there was plenty of competition in the area with two bicycle events and a motorcycle rally. The first Sunday in May is a popular time to get out into open spaces.

Sebastian Burgess, Tom Driscoll, Elizabeth Keating, Don Pelly, and Susan Pratt, working Hank's Chapel and Gum Springs Roads, reported 81 species of birds, while Patsy Bailey and Gene Kingsley found 77 species in the area on the east side of

the Jordan Lake Dam.

If you would like to see a spreadsheet of this count and a cumulative spreadsheet of all our counts, please visit the Bird Counts page on the New Hope Audubon website at:

<http://www.newhopeaudubon.org/get-outdoors/bird-counts/>

—Norm Budnitz, compiler



## Birding-by-ear walks continue

On 30 August 2018, Jim Capel and I led a small group of low-vision adults from Chatham and Orange Counties on a birding-by-ear walk at the paved paths behind the Chapel Hill Public Library. Many people who lose vision enjoy the outdoors but their opportunities for enjoying some activities may diminish along with their sight. Offering them the chance to get to know some birds by the sounds they make gives these persons the opportunity to learn and/or practice a new outdoor activity skill.

We wondered whether many birds would be calling but had no worries on that account. A few species were flying about without making any sounds: house finches, mourning doves and Northern mockingbirds. But others were calling indeed: American goldfinch, brown-headed nuthatch, Carolina chickadee, Carolina wren, downy woodpecker, red-bellied woodpecker, Northern cardinal, pine warbler and tufted titmouse.



There was a good deal of sound competition from the numerous cicadas in the trees around us but some birds made it easier by calling loudly. Jim Capel's excellent sound identification skills also were in evidence and by the end of the outing, some walkers had become adept at identifying the chickadees and nuthatches. Since the species we heard live here year-round, they will be birds that the walkers may learn to identify well if they have the chance to practice listening, either online or a future bird walk. If you would like to help guide during an upcoming walk (not yet scheduled), let me know.

—*Maria de Bruyn*

## Local birding links of note

Triangle Birders' Guide

<http://tbg.carolinanature.com/>

Will Cook's sites:

<http://people.duke.edu/~cwcook/>



Officers of Chapel Hill Bird Club – 2018-19

*Elected officers*

President

Mary Kay Robinson  
[marykayrobinson47@gmail.com](mailto:marykayrobinson47@gmail.com)

Co-Vice President

Jim Capel  
[jim.capel@mindspring.com](mailto:jim.capel@mindspring.com)

Co-Vice President

Maria de Bruyn  
[maria\\_debruyn@yahoo.com](mailto:maria_debruyn@yahoo.com)

Treasurer

Patricia Bailey  
[pbailey\\_489@yahoo.com](mailto:pbailey_489@yahoo.com)

Secretary

Karen Hogan  
[karenhogan@gmail.com](mailto:karenhogan@gmail.com)

*Appointed officers*

Bulletin Editor

Patrick Coin  
[patrickcoin1@gmail.com](mailto:patrickcoin1@gmail.com)

Webmaster  
Bird count supervisor/compiler

Will Cook  
[cwcook@duke.edu](mailto:cwcook@duke.edu)

Field Trip Chair

Bob Rybczynski  
[rob.rybczy@gmail.com](mailto:rob.rybczy@gmail.com)

Chapel Hill Bird Club Bulletin

Fall 2018 – Volume 46 number 6

*Publisher*

Chapel Hill Bird Club  
PO Box 51969  
Durham NC 27717  
<http://chbc.carolinanature.com/>

*Editor*

Patrick Coin  
Durham NC  
[patrickcoin1@gmail.com](mailto:patrickcoin1@gmail.com)

Editorial notes

Artwork in this issue is in the public domain—details available from editor for any particular work.

Newsletter will now be published quarterly (fall, winter, spring, summer). Next issue will be winter—December 2018.

Document updated: 9/17/18

