

Chapel Hill Bird Club Bulletin

Winter 2018-19 – Volume 46 number 7

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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.

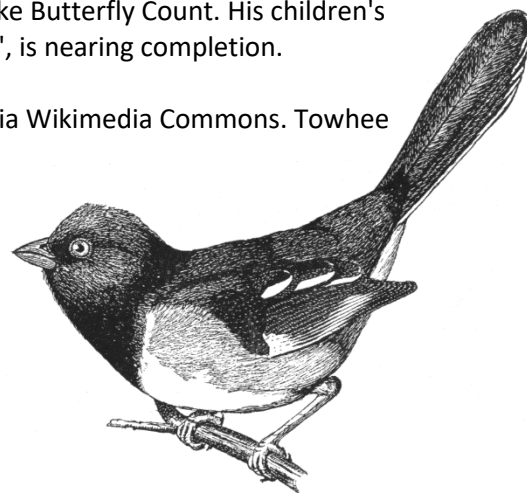
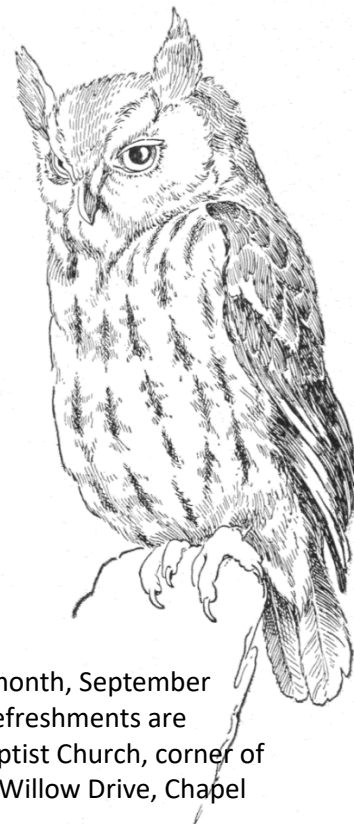
1/28/19

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 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. Towhee by Edward Howe Forbush.)



2/25/19



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/>

(Illustration of Steller's Jay by Allan Brooks, from Dawson's *Birds of California*, 1923. Harlequin Duck by Louis Agassiz Fuertes, from *Harriman Alaska Series*, 1904.)



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.

5/20/19

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.



Jordan Lake Christmas Bird Count—2018

The Jordan Lake CBC was held on December 30, 2018. Though there was a little drizzle around dawn, that quickly passed, and the rest of day was rather mild with moderate temperatures (46-60 °F), overcast skies, and no wind.

However, even though rain was not a factor, water certainly was. Jordan Lake was at 230 feet, which is 14 feet above normal. Central North Carolina had a record year in terms of rainfall, with Hurricane Florence and Tropical Storm Michael and wave after wave of fronts coming through that kept us very wet. With the lake level being so high (to prevent flooding in communities downstream like Fayetteville and Wilmington), areas where our parties usually count became inaccessible. Despite that, we actually had an above average count in several ways, except perhaps for Ring-billed Gulls.



Our soggy-footed counters reported 98 species, well above our 10-year average of 92 and just a few species less than our record of 102. Brian Bockhahn reported 13 species of ducks, seen while paddling his kayak around Vista Point in areas that would normally be dry land. That's called foresight. He threw his kayak on his truck at the last minute. We also reported 26,018 individual birds. This number requires some explanation. It is well below our 10-year average of 52,345. As in past years, the number of Ring-billed Gulls have a profound effect on our totals. If we subtract the gull numbers from our total, we get 15,814. Our 10-year non-gull average is 15,117. So, not counting gulls, we had an average count!

The Ring-billed Gull story is fascinating (at least to this compiler). Since the opening of the South Wake County Landfill in 2008, a significant source of food for these consummate scavengers, the gulls have spent their days at the landfill and then fly to Jordan Lake to roost each night. They have typically gathered in numbers ranging from 30,000 to 45,000 gulls (with a high of 65,000 in 2011) in the deep part of the lake between Ebenezer and Vista Points. This year that roost was estimated at only about 2,000. That number is an order of magnitude less than what has become 'normal' for the lake in winter. I have gathered some information to make sense of what might be going on. The following is a short summary.



The total estimate for the entire count circle was 10,000 gulls. They were dispersed to various areas as follows: about 2,000 near Ebenezer Point, about 5,000 from Farrington south to White Oak Creek, and about 3,000 on Harris Lake. Brian Bockhahn reports that there were about 4,000 gulls on Falls Lake on January 4th. Roy Baldwin, the Solid Waste Facilities Manager for Wake County responded to my inquiry about the number of gulls at the landfill as follows: "We have just as many [gulls] as ever on our working face." When we did this same count on January 3, 2016, the lake level was 232 feet, or 16 feet above normal—2 feet higher than this year. That year, we estimated the Ebenezer roost at 30,000 gulls. Except for about 1,000 gulls near Farrington, there were no other significant concentrations elsewhere on the lake or at Harris Lake.

Jordan Lake CBC (continued)

If the total number of gulls at the landfill is essentially unchanged and the combined number of gulls at Jordan and Harris Lakes is significantly decreased, where are all those other gulls? Inquiring minds would like to know. If the lake level returns to normal next year, or even later this year while the gulls are still in the area, we might get more insight into possible explanations. Stay tuned.



Fifty-nine birders (10-year average: 56) in 23 parties (average: 23) put in 114 party-hours (average: 123). Leaving out the gulls, that's approximately 139 birds per party-hour, a bit above our 10-year average of 123 birds per party-hour. (Including gulls, those numbers are 442 and 423 b/p-h, respectively.) We had several new high species counts:

- Red-headed Woodpeckers—73 (previous high was 39 in 2014)
- Red-bellied Woodpeckers—242 (206 in 2007)
- Red-winged Blackbirds—3,252 (3,204 in 2007)
- Brown-headed Cowbirds—71 (70 in 2011)

The only misses of regularly occurring species were Wilson's Snipe, Savannah Sparrow, and Palm Warbler. Observers also found some relatively unusual species:

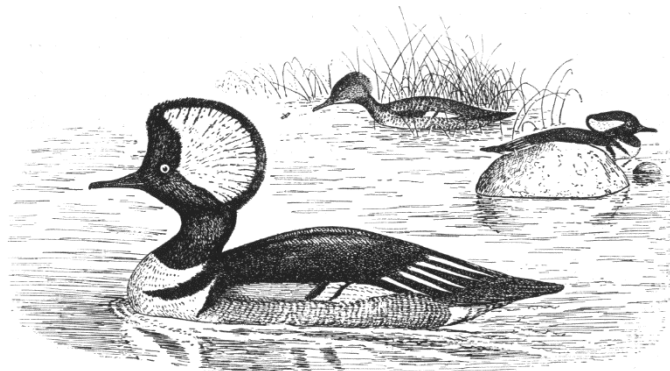
- Canvasback (1)—Brian Bockhahn
- Greater Scaup (6)—Brian Bockhahn
- Merlin (1)— Andy Upshaw, Mark Owens, Rouse Wilson
- Common Raven (1)—Norm Budnitz (very close to a stone quarry where one was reported in 2016)
- Red-breasted Nuthatches (18)—various parties in this irruption year
- Gray Catbirds (2)—Bishop party, Patsy Bailey, Gene Kingsley
- Rusty Blackbirds (10)—Tom Driscoll, Elizabeth Keating, Elizabeth Lago, Don Pelly
- Common Yellowthroat (1)—Brian Bockhahn



Brian Bockhahn reported 69 species this year, while Jonathan Cantrell and Fuz Sanderson found 59 species. It was the 13 species of ducks that carried the day for Brian: Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, American Black Duck, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Hooded Merganser, and Red-breasted Merganser. Perhaps he was really at Lake Mattamuskeet!

We had 59 birders in 23 parties. We put in 114 party hours (91 on foot, 19 by car, 4 by kayak), 182 party miles (70 on foot, 107 by car, 5 by kayak), and 3 hours nocturnal birding.

—Norm Budnitz, compiler



Birding, money and game lands

Not so long ago, I read a Facebook discussion about possible expansion by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission of hunting on game lands to include Sundays. Some participants commented that birders would like one day a week in these reserves when they do not have to worry about wearing orange, watching out for hunters or hearing gunshots while they search for and watch birds. Another person commented that “hunters pay for use of the gamelands and everyone else benefits from free access...anyone that wishes to have access to gamelands and also have a say in the management should have to pay for a permit.” He felt that there should therefore be no restrictions on hunting there on Sundays.

Aside from the question of whether only people who pay specifically for a public good should be able to have any say in its management (e.g., should those with incomes too low to pay taxes but who have children in school not be allowed to have a say about school policies?), it made me wonder how much birding contributes to the general economy (and thereby ultimately to tax dollars that provide some support national and state parks, etc.). I researched reports on birding and economic impacts online and found the following data.



- Back in 1993, an article by Paul Kerlinger pointed out that birders were spending some \$20 billion/year on birding paraphernalia, travel and bird seed, averaging \$1500-3400 per active birder.
- In North Carolina in 2006, 2.6 million wildlife observers (not only birders) spent \$916 per person in the state.
- In 2014, the NC Birding Trail’s Birder Travel Decisions Survey in 2014 found that the average per person expenditures for a birding trip in the USA came to \$645.
- In 2006, 48 million people aged 16 years and older (about 21% of the US population) considered themselves birders. They spent \$36 billion on trip and equipment expenditures, generating \$82 billion in total industry output across the country (including \$11 billion in state and federal taxes, 671,000 jobs and \$28 billion in employment income).
- In 2011, there was a slight decrease in the number of people considered birders – 47 million or about 20% of the US population. They spent almost \$41 billion on trip and equipment expenditures, however, generating \$107 billion in total industry output (including \$13 billion in state and federal taxes, 666,000 jobs and \$31 billion in employment income).

The 2016 US Fish and Wildlife Service survey on Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation distinguished sportspersons (people who fish and/or hunt) and wildlife watchers (persons who fed, observed and photographed fish, birds and other animals).

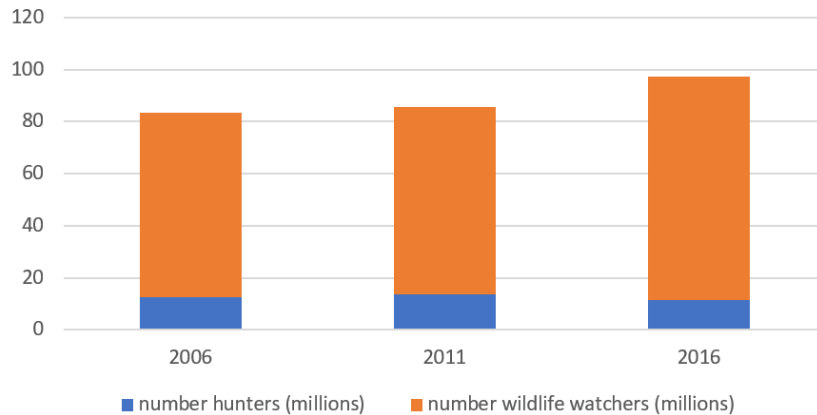
- From 2011 to 2016, the number of people engaged in wildlife-related recreation increased 16%, primarily among those who observed wildlife. Of the 86 million wildlife watchers, 45.1 billion were birders.
- 39.6 million sportspersons spent \$81 billion on wildlife-related recreation; of this, \$26.2 billion was spent on hunting.
- 86 million wildlife watchers spent \$75.9 billion on wildlife-related recreation (about 48% of all expenditures).

These are interesting findings and it was very nice to see how the number of people engaged in wildlife observation have been increasing over time.

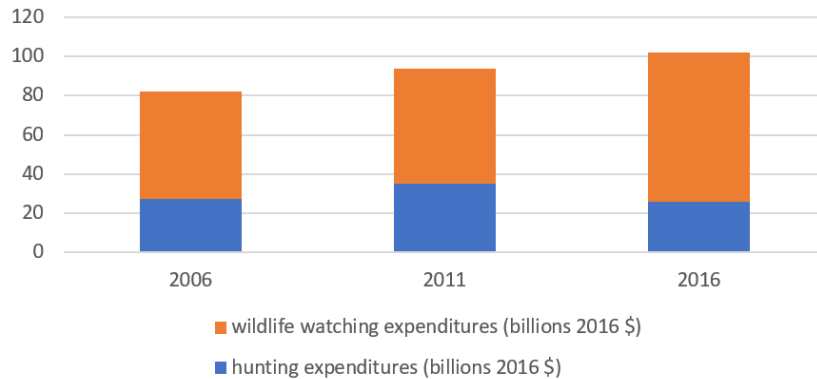
It may be surmised that the sportspersons are contributing more money to game lands specifically in the form of permits and fees (e.g., licenses, reserve entry fees) than wildlife observers. The latter could contribute directly to game lands by purchasing duck stamps, of course, but I wonder whether many birders are doing that. So perhaps it would be valuable if some way were found to ask wildlife watchers/birders to contribute to game lands in a more direct manner. What do you readers think?

—Maria de Bruyn

US hunters & wildlife watchers



US Economic Impact: Hunting & Wildlife Watching



Links to cited literature

- <https://www.fs.usda.gov/treearch/pubs/22885>
- <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/usfwspubs/164>
- <https://riverlink.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/EconomicImpactsOfBirdingFactSheet.pdf>
- https://tourism.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/NCBT-2014-Birding-Study-Infographic_112414.pdf? fwd=no
- <https://digitalmedia.fws.gov/digital/collection/document/id/1874>
- https://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/NationalSurvey/nat_survey2016.pdf

Speakers/presenters for the 2019-2020 season

After two years, Maria will be stepping down as the Club's co-VP for programming in June 2019. If anyone would like to take on this role, please let Jim Capel or another Club officer know.

In the meantime, it would be helpful if readers could also pass on the names of people whom you would like to see make a presentation during the Club's next season. Alternatively, if there is a topic about which you would like more information, that could be passed on as well and efforts could be made to find a presenter with knowledge about that.

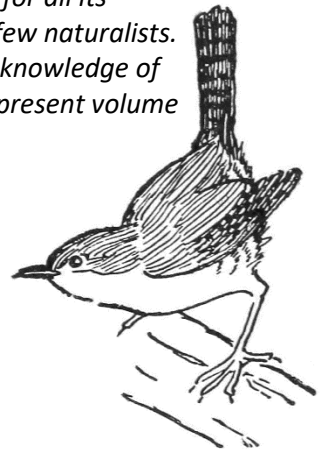
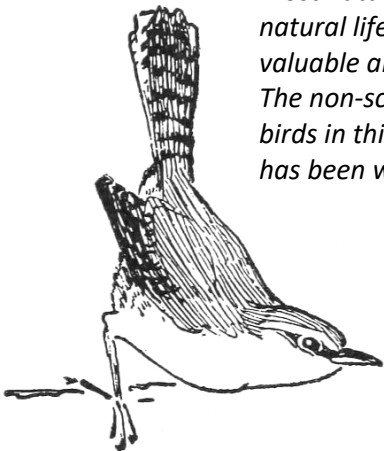
Notes on this issue's art

Featured in this issue are illustrations from *Our Southern Birds* (1922) by Emma Bell Miles (1879-1919). Though born in Indiana, Bell (later Miles) spent much of her life on Signal Mountain in Chattanooga, Tennessee. As a child, she wrote poems as well as sketched the local scenery. With help from friends, she began publishing works in national magazines. Her most important book, *The Spirit of the Mountains*, was published in 1905, and brought her some measure of fame, if not wealth.

Though they had five children, her marriage to local Chattanooga man Frank Miles was tempestuous, and the family struggled financially. Worn out by hardship, Emma died of tuberculosis at age 39. Her only work of natural history, *Our Southern Birds*, was published posthumously. She had other books planned, including a work on wildflowers, but no manuscripts are known. Some of her flower sketches are available online through the University of Tennessee and various libraries. *Our Southern Birds* is available through the Biodiversity Heritage Library. A sample of the Introduction:

While the scientific study of birds is beyond most of us, yet an intimate understanding of them and their ways is within reach of everyone, and may enrich life with a new depth of interest. No line of study opens a more fascinating vista to the mind which wants to know, in the best and truest sense, in what kind of world we are living.

Most nature study books are written for the latitude of New England. While the sub-tropical natural life of Florida has received considerable attention, it is a strange fact that for all its valuable and richly various fauna and flora the Middle Southern States have had few naturalists. The non-scientific student, in search of a popular work that will help him to some knowledge of birds in this section, is at a loss what to read. It is to help meet this need that the present volume has been written.



Officers of Chapel Hill Bird Club – 2018-19

Elected officers

President

Mary Kay Robinson
marykayrobinson47@gmail.com

Co-Vice President

Jim Capel
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Co-Vice President

Maria de Bruyn
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Treasurer

Patricia Bailey
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Secretary

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Bird count supervisor/compiler

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Field Trip Chair

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Winter 2019 – Volume 46 number 7 (Winter 2018-19)

Publisher

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Durham NC 27717
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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 spring 2019. A new volume will start each fall, and individual issues will be numbered 1-4, starting each fall.

Document updated: 1/27/19

