

# THE BULLETIN

## Chapel Hill Bird Club

c/o C. W. Cook  
418 Sharon Rd.  
Chapel Hill, NC 27514



Vol. XXIX, No. 1

January 2000

### Monthly Meeting

Monday, January 24, 2000, at 7:30 pm

Program — *Longleaf Connections*, presented by Scott Hartley of Weymouth Woods

Location — Binkley Baptist Church, the Lounge. Binkley is on Willow Drive at 15-501 in Chapel Hill, near University Mall.

### Longleaf Connections

by Ginger Travis

What do Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Fox Squirrels and Carolina Wiregrass have in common? Join us at the next meeting of the Chapel Hill Bird Club to find out. Scott Hartley of the Weymouth Woods-Sandhills Nature Preserve will give a slide presentation on this fascinating place. Learn about one of the best/easiest places to see Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in the state and about resource management efforts to restore the Sandhills Longleaf Pine forest. And come a few minutes early to enjoy some refreshments and bird chat. See you there!

*Upcoming programs:*

Feb. 28 — John Connors — American Woodcock

March 27 — Susan Campbell — hummingbirds in NC

### Dues Notice

If the date on your mailing label says 01/00, your membership expires with this newsletter -- please fill out the form at right and send it in ASAP.

### Field Trips

Saturday morning trips leave the Glen Lennox parking lot (on the north side of 54 just east of the intersection with 15-501 in Chapel Hill) at 7:30 am sharp and return by noon. Reservations are not necessary. Beginners and visitors are welcome! Bring binoculars, boots (or old tennis shoes), a scope if you've got one, and be prepared for a hike. Field trips are scheduled for January 22 and 29 and February 5, 12, 19, and 26. Destinations have not yet been set. Contact Doug Shadwick (942-0479) for more details.

### PACIFIC-SLOPE FLYCATCHER at Jordan Lake First North Carolina Record!

by Will Cook

At about 11:15 am on Saturday, 15 January 2000, Harry LeGrand and Jeff Phippen discovered a "Western" Flycatcher on Big Woods Road at Jordan Lake. The old Western Flycatcher was split several years ago into Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*) of the west coast and Cordilleran Flycatcher (*Empidonax occidentalis*) of the Rocky Mountains. They are nearly identical in plumage but can be told apart by Male Position Notes (distinctive call notes that only males make).

Between 1 and 1:30 pm Derb Carter, Ricky Davis, and I relocated the bird and, with the aid of the National Geographic tape, it came right in and responded, first with 'seet' notes, then with Male Position Notes (MPN). The MPNs we heard were indistinguishable from those of the Pacific-slope on the tape. We played both Pacific-slope and Cordilleran vocalizations to it. While it seemed interested in the latter, it responded aggressively and repeated MPNs only after the former. Derb got photos and unsuccessfully attempted to record a call note. We tried again to get a good recording on Sunday 16 January 2000. The bird had not been seen for four hours, but we pulled it in by playing the tape. Eventually, between 12:00-12:30, Derb got decent recordings of this bird's vocalizations (as it responded to the Pacific-slope Flycatcher tape) and Mike Tove also got photos using his gunstock-mounted telephoto.

### Membership Information

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.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Again we played the Cordilleran to it, but it didn't respond.

**Description:** The bird is quite distinctive for an *Empidonax* flycatcher — nice and bright yellow with a bold teardrop-shaped eye-ring. This description is from notes taken in the field by Jeff Pippen, Harry LeGrand, and me as we watched it through 10 power binoculars and a 30 power scope: "Small flycatcher, noticeably smaller than an Eastern Phoebe, which was nearby for comparison and larger than a nearby Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Head slightly crested; Bill fairly broad, blackish above, orangish-flesh below; mouth interior orange; Eyering pale yellow, wider and nearly pointed in back, very thin above, widened in front but not pointed and not quite as wide as in back; Upperparts olive, slightly more yellowish/richer around nape and head; Underparts pale yellow with greenish tint and a brighter yellow in center of belly; Upper flanks slightly dingier than rest of underparts; Undertail coverts pale yellowish; Wings dark sooty; Wingbars present (two), buffy/pale yellow with upper wingbar slightly thinner and duller; Wings short, barely reaching base of tail with short primary projection; Tail medium length, appearing long due to short primary projection. The habitat was along the margin of medium growth mixed pine & hardwoods with tangles of honeysuckle and a nearby weedy field. The bird spent most of its time along the grassy edges, but it also fed in sunlit openings just inside the woods. Most of its foraging was at or within 3 feet of ground-level."

**Directions:** Big Woods Road runs along the west side of Jordan Lake, north of US 64. Follow Big Woods 4.9 miles north of the intersection with 64 (or if coming from the north end, take Big Woods 1.5 miles south). There is a road off to the right labelled "Public Fishing Area". The bird has most frequently been seen near this intersection (northeast corner) though it has been seen a little further along the gravel road, down the first trail to the left. The bird was seen at the edge of the woods, almost always stayed near the ground (usually 2 feet up), and occasionally made forays to the grass. It often perched on the wire fence. It seems to spend more time on the edge when it's cold and the sun is out. The bird is much easier to locate with the aid of a tape. For more birding spots on Big Woods Road, see the description in the Triangle Birder's Guide at <http://www.duke.edu/~cwcook/tbg/bigwoods.html>

If you would like to hear the bird, I transferred Derb's recordings of the bird's vocalizations to .wav format and put them on the web at:

<http://www.duke.edu/~cwcook/psfl.html>

## Red Crossbills at Jordan Lake!

by Will Cook

On the Jordan Lake Christmas Bird Count (1/2/2000), our party encountered a flock of about 20 Red Crossbills feeding on pine cones in the top of a Loblolly Pine tree. This is one of the most memorable sights I've seen on a CBC, with the crown of the 70' tree lit

up like a Christmas tree with bright rosy-red birds! Harold Carter, a veteran of New England CBCs where crossbills are not as exciting, first spotted them and nonchalantly said "look up there," so Sterling Southern and I gazed at the crown of the pine tree and were puzzled by what we saw. For a split second I thought "what's a flock of Scarlet Tanagers doing up there?" — the weather was certainly appropriate for that — but soon saw the field marks of Red Crossbills, down to the crossed bills. Their call notes (described as 'pipity' or like one of the call notes of Carolina Wren) were unfamiliar to me — undoubtedly they were a different race of Red Crossbill than the one I've seen in the NC mountains. We counted 6 crossbills (4 male, 2 female) in the tree, but when the flock took off, their true number became apparent.

The flock was not in the same tree later on, but probably is somewhere in the area. If you want to go looking for them, take 1008 south from US 64 past Ebenezer SRA, take the first right (Pea Ridge Road), and 0.4 miles after you pass Lower Thrift Rd. (on left), turn right into a small gravel parking space by a gated road leading into the open pine woods. There's a sign telling you that this is a Turkey hunting area. The crossbills were less than 100 yards past the gate in a tree on the right. Watch out -- it's muddy! Also in the area were 2 Purple Finches and 10 Evening Grosbeaks.

This flock of Red Crossbills has been relocated almost daily since, always around lunchtime. The last report I've heard was on 11 January by Russell and Ruth Roberson:

"Today at 1130 Ruth and I started checking the path off Pea Ridge road for the Red Crossbills. At noon we were joined by Sandy Cash and his father, Hartzell, and Judy Murray. The wind was well above 15 mph with higher gusts which made the birding difficult. Sandy and Hartzell left at 1245 but at 1300 Judy and I saw a small flock of small birds but were not able to identify them or to locate again. Judy had to leave but before she got to her truck, Ruth and I located at least 7 of the Red Crossbills. They were in two pine trees at the bottom of the path just after it makes the first right turn. We had a scope and with Judy were able to watch these 7 or so for almost 15 minutes. Five of them dropped down out of the pine (and wind) and sat in a small tree with no leaves during most of this time. The sun was just right and we were able to look at one of the young males (more orange than red) for over 5 minutes at 40x — couldn't have been better. At 1325 they dropped down to a small pond in the path and finally flew east over Pea Ridge road."

Another flock of Red Crossbills was found on Sunday, 9 Jan. 2000 by Ron Silverman of Raleigh:

"Around 2:00pm on Sunday afternoon we found a flock of about 16 Red Crossbills feeding in an area off of Big Woods Road in Chatham Co. The specific location is 1.6 miles north of US 64 on Big Woods Road. On the right hand side (east) there is a small

gravel pull-off area. There is a gate with small yellow signs marked State Park which I assume is part of the Jordan Lake Educational State Forest. (The office for the Jordan Lake Educational State Forest is one mile further north on Big Woods Road.) You can walk around the gate and follow a path adjacent to a fence which runs along the north side of this forest area. The crossbills were seen about a 100 yards down the path. They were very active, flying and feeding among several trees. The birds were observed for about 10 minutes before they flew off. There were also many Fox Sparrows in the area. This location can also be reached from the north by going approximately 4.6 miles south of Jack Bennett Road on Big Woods Road."

As some of you know, there are seven different races of Red Crossbill in North America (and about 13 more elsewhere), which some people think should be split into different species. Two of the European races have already been split off (Scottish and Parrot Crossbills) Two of the seven "species" breed in NC and two more might get down here in the winter.

There's a website at <http://research.amnh.org/ornithology/crossbills/diagnosis.html> that has all the different types of Red Crossbill call notes for your listening pleasure. Types 1 and 2 are the NC breeders, types 3 and 4 might visit in the winter, and 5, 6, and 7 are western "species".

After listening to all the different types of call notes, I have NO CLUE which one is at Jordan Lake, or which one I've seen in the NC mountains. I also don't know whether I've heard flight, "toop", or alarm calls! If they split the races into species, we'll all have to carry portable sonogram machines in the field with us to be sure which ones we're seeing!

## Program Survey Results

by Magnus Persmark

The CHBC program survey generated a modest number of responses; 9 members out of approximately 150 returned the forms. This hopefully indicates that the current arrangement of meetings and field trips is satisfactory to a majority of the membership. It is perhaps also reflected in the overall positive and relatively uniform responses to the queries in these two categories.

Not surprisingly a varied program was desired by a majority of the responders; eight out of nine respondents indicated an interest in 5 of the meeting topics: "specific identification", "North American travel", "exotic travel", "bird science" and "conservation" all were indicated as interesting by eight of the nine respondents. "Hands on identification" received six votes, but was in the comments section also emphasized as an excellent tool. "Basic birding" (5) and "domestic birding" (5) had the weakest appeal, perhaps reflecting the fact that a majority of the membership is relatively experienced birders. This notion seems to be supported by the fact that none of the respondents indicated an interest in "beginner trips".

Also, either our field trip leaders are doing an excellent job or too few people are participating in these activities, as only three people wished to see more leaders per trip. Otherwise "farther afield", "focused trips" and "recurring" events were seen as desirable by four; these types of trips/activities occur relatively infrequently. Our main activities, local outing to Chapel Hill/Durham, Raleigh and longer one-day trips also drew the most favorable responses with 8, 7 and 6 votes, respectively.

In the category of service projects, particularly trail maintenance had strong support (7). This bodes well for our plans to continue the work during the past two seasons at Mason Farm and the Johnson tract, respectively. Beginner's workshops (2) and birding with schoolchildren (1) clearly had much less appeal. These appear to be areas where individual initiatives would be valuable.

It was very gratifying to see that all responded favorably to the newly introduced "social time". It should be obvious to all that attended a monthly meeting last fall that these fifteen minutes or so have created a wonderful opportunity for all of us to visit and get to know one another better. I was also pleased to read offers of help with refreshments for this purpose. All are welcome to contribute drinks or snacks; please contact Ginger Travis or me ahead of time when you feel so inclined. Clearly, we will make this an integral part of our agenda in the future.

Finally, one respondent commented that a published guide to the top birding sites in the areas would be a great resource. Will Cook has taken the initiative to just such a guide on the web, and a number of local birders are contributing their skills and time to submit entries for various areas in the Triangle (see below for more details). Also Wake Audubon has just compiled a similar guide in printed form (there is much overlap between the web and printed versions).

All in all the survey indicated that the current state of affairs is satisfactory to most members and that we are doing well in continuing with the traditional core activities. The responses indicate also, however, that some more recent program additions have had significant appeal and hopefully will serve to strengthen our club and support its future role in a variety of bird-related activities in the local communities.

## Triangle Birder's Guide

by Will Cook

I've been working to update the Triangle Birder's Guide web site at:

<http://www.duke.edu/~cwcook/tbg/>

Many new areas are now covered. It's still not complete, but it's much more comprehensive. If you have a favorite spot that isn't covered, please feel free to write it up and send it to me and I'll post it on the site. Comments and suggestions are also welcome. Thanks to Norm Budnitz, Bob Perkins, Jeff Pippen,

Josh Rose, and Ginger Travis for writing up some of the new areas. Here are the new areas:

*Chatham County (Jordan Lake):* 751 bridge, Big Woods Road, Birding by Canoe, Crosswinds Marina, Ebenezer Point, Farrington Point, Hank's Chapel - Gum Springs Church Road, Harris Lake, Haw River Canoe Access, Jordan Lake Dam, Morgan Creek mudflats, New Hope Creek mudflats, Old Hope Valley Farm Road, Parker's Creek, Poplar Point, Poplar Point Wastewater ponds, Seaforth, Vista Point, Wildlife Observation Site,

*Durham County (Falls Lake):* Butner Gamelands/Brickhouse Road, Knap of Reeds Creek (bushwhacking expedition), Rolling View, Duke Forest — Durham and Korstian Divisions (Shepherd Nature Trail and gates 4, 10, 25, 26),

*Orange County:* University Lake

*Wake County:* 1010 pond, Harris Lake, Lake Wheeler marshes, Lake Wheeler Road dairy pond.

### 1999 Chapel Hill Christmas Bird Count Results

by Will Cook

The 1999 Chapel Hill Christmas Bird Count, held on December 26, was the highest count in years, even though many observers thought that “birds seemed scarce” that day and it started off cold and windy. This is the 69th Chapel Hill CBC — the first one was in 1924 and it’s been held annually since 1929.

This year’s total of 88 species is the highest since 1990 and well above the average (for the past 10 years) of 81. The only higher counts were in 1979-1984, when Jordan Lake was being created and filled (the northern end of Jordan Lake is in the Chapel Hill circle). New to the count was Tom & Barbara Driscoll’s immature male Rufous Hummingbird, identified and banded by Susan Campbell. The other bold-face bird was our third Merlin, seen at the Chapel Hill dump by Les Todd’s party. We had two species of ducks almost worthy of boldfacing — 2 Northern Shovelers seen by Angelo Capparella and Betty King (3rd count record) and 4 Northern Pintail seen by Doug Shadwick (first since 1983). Other goodies on the count include 3 Ruddy Ducks (rare here), 18 Northern Bobwhite (often missed; highest count since 1984), 1 Herring Gull (first since 1994). Two other species were reported, but didn’t have enough details for what would be first count records.

We had a fair showing of winter irruptives, including 6 Red-breasted Nuthatches, 1 Pine Siskin, 2 Evening Grosbeaks, and an excellent 59 Purple Finches (the highest since 1988).

The total of 17563 birds is well above the average count of 11906. We set record highs with 90 White-breasted Nuthatches and 39 Winter Wrens and tied records with 28 Hairy Woodpeckers and 618 American Crows. Other species well above average — 103 Black Vulture (highest since 1977), 204 Turkey Vulture, 126 Ring-necked Duck, 176 Red-bellied Wood-

pecker (2nd highest), 80 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (2nd), 93 Downy Woodpecker, 1944 Eur. Starling (highest since 1981), 793 Cedar Waxwing, 56 Fox Sparrow, 1262 Red-winged Blackbird, 115 Rusty Blackbird, and 1669 Common Grackle.

The only species much lower than normal was Golden-crowned Kinglet — the 98 we found is less than half the average of 258.

Teams with highest totals: The team of Les Todd, Leto Copeley, and Bert Fisher had a great day, with the highest species total at 56 (with 1319 birds), including the only Merlin, E. Meadowlark, Brown-headed Cowbirds, Pine Siskin, and Evening Grosbeaks of the count. They counted in the Homestead Road - Eubanks Road area in the northwestern part of town. The team of Will Cook and Randy Emmitt at Mason Farm had the highest number of birds, a total of 2517 (in 50 species), including 1230 Red-winged Blackbirds and more sparrows than you can shake a stick at.

Weather/Effort: 51 counters in 25 parties; 153 hours (104 foot, 49 car), 534.5 miles (86.5 foot, 448 car); 25 feeder-hours; 1.5 hours and 2 miles owling. (All above average.) Temperature 19-50 F; wind SW 10-15 mph; no snow; still water partly frozen, moving water open; clear; no precipitation.

### Send in Your Bird List (as of 12/31/99)

Yes, for the listers out there, it's time to send in your life and 1999 annual lists of birds. Send me the following information (regular mail, e-mail cwcook@duke.edu, or phone 967-5446) and I'll put it in the March or April newsletter. (ABA area refers to North America north of Mexico.)

<b>Name</b>	_____	
<b>Region</b>	<b>Life</b>	<b>1999</b>
World	_____	_____
ABA area	_____	_____
N.C.	_____	_____
Triangle area	_____ (Chat., Dur., Orange, Wake)	
Chatham Co.	_____	
Durham Co.	_____	
Orange Co.	_____	
Wake Co.	_____	

### Club officers

*President:* Magnus Persmark (933-2255, emp34157@glaxowellcome.com)  
*Vice President (CH):* Ginger Travis (942-7746, Ginger.Travis@unc.edu)  
*Secretary:* Judy Murray (942-2985, jmurray.uncson@mhs.unc.edu)  
*Treasurer:* Fran Hommersand (967-1745)  
*Field Trip Chairman:* Doug Shadwick (942-0479)  
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*Bulletin Editor:* Will Cook (967-5446, cwcook@duke.edu)  
<http://www.duke.edu/~cwcook/chbc.html>