Summer Musings

By Jim Nesbit
CFAS President

I am still in awe of Charley and all that he accomplished while he was our leader.

I keep finding things that he did, even after I thought I’d learned everything. Since he passed the mantle on to me, I have recruited most of the board members to take on some aspect of his work.

So far this year: Dick Daniels has revised the website, after review and suggestions given him by the board. (Be sure to check out the “Slide Show” and “Calendar.”)

Krystyna Ochota, our vice president, has led the board through revising our by-laws and aligning them with strategic plans that we started in the fall of 2018.

Bob Roush has taken over editing of The Skimmer, getting everyone to submit articles on time. As you can tell by the first issue and this one, his work is outstanding.

Regina Poldolskis, our treasurer, has helped the board and committees to build budgets that align with their goals and plans.

And, again with Krystyna’s guidance, we have just finished working with our committee chairs on planning and budgeting.

Our secretary, Lynn Rupp, after doing such an outstanding job with our minutes and sending emails about programs and walks, had to resign due family commitments. We will miss her and her great work.

Debbie Downey (CJ’s mom), after many long years of priceless service to CFAS, has retired to spend more time with her many duties and interests, including CJ. We dedicate this issue to Debbie for all of the energy and time she gave to CFAS.

We would like to invite you to add your energy and ideas to our board and/or one of our working committees. Please send us an email or letter if you are interested in promoting our mission and goals.

See a list of our board members and working committees, p. 12
**Gretchen Schramm** arranges more than 20 group outings a year for our chapter. She coaches new leaders, takes gorgeous photos, and often tempts us with yummy homemade treats.

She makes it fun and easy for members and non-members alike to get outdoors and learn about birds.

*(See schedule of upcoming walks. P.10.)*

*Here’s Gretchen’s roundup of recent field trips.*

*(Photos here are Gretchen’s, unless otherwise noted.)*

### Thomas Property, April 16 & 29

This is an expanse of privately held land in Pender County along the Northeast Cape Fear River. Diane Butzin, our Audubon member of barn-owl-box placement fame, was asked by the owners to conduct a bird species survey within its boundaries.

Sherry Lane, Dave Weesner and I were joined by Diane and the property manager, Andrea Meissie, to begin the initial survey on the 16th. Subsequent visits, through fall, will round out the study.

The property was developed primarily to train field-trial dogs. Large ponds were installed, along with berms and other features to enhance the dogs’ training experience, but otherwise the area has been left in its original, pristine condition.

These first two visits yielded a total of 65 species. Among them: Blue Grosbeak, Eastern Meadowlark, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Little Blue Heron, Orchard Oriole, Wilson’s Snipe ....

It was truly an honor to be asked to conduct this survey for the owner. I am hoping the property will be available for a limited number of Audubon members to visit at some time in the future.
OUT and ABOUT (cont.)

River Bluffs, April 20 & 24

Two walks at this 350-acre gated residential community on the Northeast Cape Fear River near NC 133. One outing was for River Bluffs residents, the other for Audubon folks. Both were hosted by Burrows Smith, the project's managing partner.

In developing the site, Burrows has gone to great lengths to keep the land as pristine as possible, enlisting the expertise of Lara Berkley, our local native-plant guru and past president of the Southeast Coast Native Plant Society.

The goal was to create gardens and river embankments that blend with the existing natural environment. One third of the development has been preserved as parks, open space, and trails.

A splendid environment for birds and birders!

The weather both days could not have been more perfect! After a week of stormy and unpredictable weather, we enjoyed clear skies, cool temperatures, and light breezes.

Burrows Smith brought in native-plant specialist Lara Berkley to help with planning and design of the landscapes at River Bluffs.

Lara and Gretchen served as co-leaders of both walks.

Total participants, 22. Bird species, around 30 each day. Checklists included Wood Duck, Red-tailed Hawk, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Barn Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Warbler, Laughing Gull, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler, Osprey, Killdeer, Eastern Bluebird, Belted Kingfisher, Fish Crow, House Finch, Blue Jay, Turkey Vulture, Carolina Chickadee, Great Egret, Great Crested Flycatcher Yellow-rumped Warbler, American Robin, Tufted Titmouse …
**OUT and ABOUT (more)**

**Holly Shelter, April 27**

David Weesner led this one, first along a trail paralleling the Northeast Cape Fear River and then through the impoundments along Lodge Road, east of Shaw Highway.

Lots of birds seen and heard, as well as a spectacular display of spring native wildflowers, including fields of pitcher plants, kalmia, orchids, sundew, and cinnamon ferns gracing the sides of the ditch banks.

The morning boasted spectacular weather, with a cloudless sky and enough breeze to keep the bugs away.

It was a real treat to once again have Lara Berkeley along to help identify the many plants encountered along the way.

There were nine in our group, and many were exceptional birders who made song identification easy and the walk a delight for all.
OUT and ABOUT! (even more)

Huntington Beach State Park, S.C.

This was John Sutton’s debut as a bird walk leader, and he went out of his way to ensure a stellar occasion for our group.

Remember, Huntington Beach is a four-hour round trip from Wilmington, and John drove there several times prior to our walk, scouted the best birding and nesting sites, contacted other birders to learn their “hot spots,” calculated tidal flow, walked off the distances — doing everything possible to make the morning perfect. With 17 people in tow, that’s quite a challenge.

We viewed Painted Buntings ("lifers" for many in our group), lots of Green Herons with eggs and nests clearly visible, a flock of Glossy Ibis flying overhead, and a myriad of other birds, some so close you could almost hear their hearts beat.

Such a joy to have several new people, from novitiates to experienced birders. Thank you all for your support of CFAS!

Thank you, John Sutton. Great job! You get an A+!
Moore’s Creek, May 18

Moore’s Creek meanders into the Black River near Currie, a small rural community about an hour north of Wilmington. Today’s walk explored bird habitats within the boundaries of a small National Park there, one that commemorates a pivotal battle of the Revolutionary War.

It was a banner day for birding. The habitat at the Battlefield ranges from pine savannah to riparian woodland and blackwater swamp. The weather was sunny with a slight breeze, and no bugs!

Bob Roush is another of those leaders who likes doing his homework! He not only scouts out the location in advance, but strives to keep participants attentive and entertained with a myriad of facts, trivia, and jovial bird-banter.

We were fortunate to have CJ Downey on the walk, as he is knowledgeable about birds, plants, bugs — you name it! John Sutton and David Wilson contributed great photographs, and Howard Ferguson was exceptional in identifying birds and their calls.

Bob sets the tone for a convivial walk, encouraging people to share stories, point out birds, and direct others so they can spot them as well.

Moore’s Creek is always an enjoyable outing and I am sure it will be on our calendars for next year! Again, thank you Bob! Always a pleasure to have you lead one of Audubon’s walks.
Shelton Herb Farm, June 2

"We grow what we sell. We support a healthy, sustainable environment."

That’s what this lovely five-acre setting in Brunswick County is all about, and Margaret (Meg) Shelton graciously opened the place to our Audubon group on a Sunday, when they are normally closed. Her efforts on our behalf were much appreciated.

We enjoyed perfect weather for a leisurely stroll through Meg's farm and the surrounding woods. The birds were not as much the highlight here as Meg’s knowledge of the property, and her charm and skill as a storyteller complemented our hunt for avian species.

Meg’s family has owned this pristine tract for more than 200 years. Her recall is remarkable. She took us on a journey through time, encompassing people, historic places, childhood memories and photographs of the way things were, so long ago.

For a bonus, Meg showed us a shaded spot in the forest where she and her crew have begun propagating shiitake mushrooms on specially prepared logs.

Our group went on to tally 14 species while picking our way through the site’s variety of wildlife habitats. Of course it’s always a delight to behold the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Pine Warbler, Northern Parula and Prothonotary Warbler, to name just a few.

"This is some of the most beautiful elevated land between Southport and Leland," said Meg. Her grandfather was a country doctor here, and her father, also a doctor, knew the author Robert Ruark (The Old Man and the Boy and others), whose own father lived in Southport but who himself resided in Wilmington.
\textbf{OUT and ABOUT (yet more)}

\textbf{Wrightsville Beach, June 17}
\textbf{Shorebird Nesting Colonies}

\textbf{Today's walk: A long-anticipated, especially tailored tour for our Cape Fear Audubon Chapter.}

This location is one of 19 nesting areas monitored by Audubon North Carolina during the breeding season — from the end of March till Labor Day.

NC Audubon's volunteer bird stewards lead a walk here every Monday morning, to help visitors learn about this crucial time in the life cycle of migratory shorebirds.

On this walk we were not much concerned with the number of species we could list; we focused instead on nesting Terns, Oystercatchers and Black Skimmers. And we were not disappointed!

We learned that this year there are 60 \textbf{Least Tern} nests here on the south end of Wrightsville Beach. Multiply 60 nests by two adults per nest, for a total of 120 Least Terns. After eggs hatch, add the chicks.

(Least Terns are true to their name: they're our smallest. One of Kathy's fun facts is that a least tern weighs about the same as five quarters!)


\textbf{Black Skimmers} number 184 nests, or 368 birds. This is the largest colony in the state of North Carolina. The Skimmers usually hatch two to three chicks per nest.

\textbf{Oystercatchers}, three nests, six birds.

\textbf{(Continued on P. 9)}
Wrightsville Beach (cont.)

Around 70 trained volunteer bird stewards watch over the nesting area this year. Their training begins with an orientation meeting, then moves on to "learning the ropes" — on-site tutelage from experienced hands like Kathy and Marlene.

Jackson Travis, now 14, started as a junior bird steward when he was eight or nine. Well camouflaged chicks around nesting "scrapes" can be hard for us to see. Jackson lines them up in his viewing scope to help visitors get a better look.

Kathy uses replicas of birds and eggs to show relative sizes.

She also simulates the birds' nesting "scrapes" in the sand.

The real scrapes, near the dunes, are barely recognizable to us as nesting spots, but they work just fine for the birds.

After this introductory demo, Kathy leads visitors around a protective perimeter. All along, we smile at the many informative, people-friendly signs, most of them designed by children from Wrightsville Beach Elementary School.

A Common Tern takes a break atop a sign designed by local schoolkids.

Mac Main, a retired professional golfer, new to the Wilmington area from Virginia. Mac is now well into his first year as a Wrightsville Beach volunteer bird steward helping visitors see and learn about nesting Terns, Black Skimmers, and Oystercatchers.

**FUTURE BIRD WALKS, Page. 10**
Birding at Home
Backyard diary notes. (Send us yours!)

April 28: Have this marvelous first-year Summer Tanager in my garden as a visitor. I felt he was really out of place, habitat-wise, until I read in Sibley’s that one of their favorite foods is ... **BEES!** And that’s exactly where I found him ... right above my beehive. I’m thrilled!

-- Gretchen Schramm

WREN NEST RELOCATION

**April 22:** I just removed a Wren nest from our dryer vent. Dryer works lots better now, but the nest has about 6 eggs. The vent is high up on the house, so I scooped the nest into a small birdhouse and hung it from the top of the ladder, about a foot from the original location. Hopeful that mama might return ...

**April 24:** When I went back up the ladder to move the box, mama wren flew out! She had already found, and claimed, the nest. Very exciting! Now I either have to find a better way to keep the box up there, or give up on using the ladder for a month...

-- Bruce Kenney

Future 2019 Bird Walks

Would YOU like to lead a bird walk? (No, you DON’T have to be an expert.) Contact Gretchen to learn about this fun way to volunteer.

(See the Calendar section of our website for details and confirmations of these outings. Some events (*) require reservations.)

**SCHEDULE:**

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<td>Aug 4</td>
<td>*Breakfast with the Birds – (Wilmington Water Tours)</td>
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<td>Aug 27</td>
<td>Fort Fisher 4-Wheelin'</td>
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Upcoming PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Nancy Buckingham schedules speakers and programs for the CFAS monthly meetings held at the Halyburton Park Events Center from September through May. Charley Winterbauer coordinates a special Brunswick County summer series, held at Brunswick Community College. See our Calendar for details on remaining summer programs in Brunswick County.

CFAS Programs are usually scheduled for the first Monday evening of the month, from 7-8:30 p.m. Each begins with brief remarks about our latest projects, upcoming bird walks, and other events. All programs are free and open to the public.

September 9 - Bird Migration and Radar - Tim Armstrong, Senior Forecaster with the National Weather Service. Radar may be used to track storms, but flocks of birds can show up too.

Interested in learning how to use Doppler to maximize your birding experience and learn where birds can be "found" during a hurricane? Ever heard of "roost rings?"

October 7 - Cape Fear Audubon Annual Meeting- (See Calendar for details.)

November 11 - Pelagic Birding - with Brian Patteson and Kate Sutherland of Seabirding Pelagic Trips out of Hatteras, NC. The program will explore the dynamic ecosystem formed by the combination of the Continental Shelf and the Gulf Stream Current and the fascinating birds that spend most of their lives at sea. Petrels and Shearwaters and Gannets, oh my!

December 2 - Sharing the Vision of Audubon - Andrew Hutson, Executive Director of Audubon North Carolina. As the head of our state organization, he oversees conservation strategies spanning North Carolina's mountains, coasts, working lands, and bird-friendly communities.

'WONDERS' NEVER CEASE!

Our Discover the Wonders of Birds program, so successful with fourth-graders during the school year, goes 'lite' at other times, bringing learning to audiences of all ages.

In mid-June, Charley Winterbauer took "DTWOB-Lite" to the folks at Plantation Village, a 56-acre retirement community near Porters Neck. Instead of our usual seven learning stations, he brought a PowerPoint packed with punchy slides covering a variety of bird wonders (example above). Plus, of course, a box of feathers and an eyedropper, to demonstrate water repellency.

After a quickie quiz, the group headed onto the surrounding walking trails for some real-life birding, with Catherine Nesbit and Gretchen Schramm as leaders. Catherine pointed out many native plants, mentioning their benefits for birds, butterflies and other creatures.

What an enthusiastic group," said Catherine. "And very knowledgeable about the birds and plants in the area."
The Skimmer is a quarterly newsletter of the Cape Fear Audubon Society (CFAS), a local chapter of the National Audubon Society.

The MISSION of the Cape Fear Audubon Society is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems within our region, focusing on birds and other wildlife for the benefit of humanity and the earth’s diversity.

President: Jim Nesbit
Vice President: Krystyna Ochota (3)
Secretary: (OPEN*)
Treasurer: Regina Podolskis

Board Members (& Committees):

Lindsay Addison (2)
Nancy Buckingham (1, 6)
Dick Daniels (1)
Catherine Nesbit (3)
Robert Roush (1)
Gretchen Schramm (4,5)
Beth Sheppard (2)
David Weesner
Sara Meissner, President
UNCW Seahawks Chapter

Working Committees:*  
1 - Communications
2 - Conservation
3 - Education & Outreach
4 - Field Trips
5 - Membership
6 - Program Planning

*VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES!  
Interested in serving on our board, or one of our working committees? Want to lead a bird walk, or teach kids about birds? Contact us to find out how you can …

MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR BIRDS!