What a year this has been, and it's not yet over!

I am so proud of what we've accomplished! We have made great strides in many areas, and the CFAS Board has met a majority of the goals outlined at year’s beginning.

Our committees have met to clarify their missions and to identify member volunteer opportunities.

Dick Daniels, our webmaster, has updated and revised the CFAS website. Our outings coordinator, Gretchen Schramm, has given us a cornucopia of outstanding bird walks and field trips. Our programs coordinator, Nancy Buckingham, continues to bring us exciting presenters who inform and educate. The education committee, chaired by Catherine Nesbit, keeps carving out new successes with Discover the Wonders of Birds (DTWOB) — a program that helps hundreds of schoolchildren learn about birds and their survival.

Krystyna Ochota, our volunteer coordinator (and also CFAS VP) makes sure we have volunteers in place for all DTWOB programs and community outreach activities — no small challenge, I assure you.

Regina Podolskis, treasurer and membership coordinator, has updated our bookkeeping and revised membership processes. Skimmer editor Bob Roush does a superb job coordinating our newsletter.

As you'll see, member engagement is a major focus for this issue, and for our Annual Meeting for Members as well. I hope you'll join us on October 7, and find an exciting volunteer opportunity. See pages 2 & 3 for details.

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.

Annual Members Meeting is Monday, Oct 7. See p. 12
We all enjoy CFAS field trips and public programs. But did you know there are many ways you can help birds?

Each committee has fun, fulfilling opportunities for volunteers. Isn't there something here for you?

**Overview:**

**Conservation:**
- Project organizer
- Shorebird stewards
- Exotic-plant removal projects
- Attend community planning meetings

**Communications:**
- Help with press releases
- Social Media
  - *The Skimmer*, associate editor
- Advertising: layout, design, etc
- Webmaster backup
  - Audience research projects
  - Inventory of donated books

**Membership Committee:**
- Meeter, greeter, & signer-upper
- Give info at public events
- Help recruit new members
- Member support

**Education:**
- Become a *Discover the Wonders of Birds* facilitator
- Serve on the Committee
- Assist the Volunteer Coordinator
- Assist with Planning & logistics
- Help at Community Events

**Program Planning:**
- Help develop speaker list
- Coordinate bookings
- Get bios, photos, A/V needs
- Host a speaker on program day

**Walks & Outings**
- Volunteer to lead a walk (You needn't be an expert!)
- Suggest bird-walk venues
- Train to become the next bird-outings chairperson
Committees' Volunteer Needs

Cape Fear Audubon's continued success requires member involvement. Here are more details about each committee's needs.

To learn more, contact Volunteer Coordinator Krystyna Ochota (krystyna00@hotmail.com)

Conservation

This committee stays informed on conservation issues, and assists the Board in the planning and execution of relevant projects.

Currently, the committee is looking for an organizer to help develop a "Wilmington Lights Out" project — a local effort in concert with National Audubon's campaign to encourage building owners to turn off unnecessary lighting that disrupts bird migrations.

Volunteers are needed to assist county parks with exotic plant removal, an effort with direct impact on bird habitat. Additionally, volunteers are encouraged to participate in local zoning or planning meetings to support tree and habitat protection. Volunteers can advocate for more bird-friendly decision-making in local government, and even coordinate with other like-minded groups.

In addition, we will be working with the Master Gardeners from the Arboretum to help homeowners and neighborhoods make their yards more bird friendly by adding Native Plants.

The committee also encourages participation with the shorebird Bird Steward Conservation project, coordinated by N.C. Audubon.

Communications

Do you have writing skills? Layout and design experience? Social media savvy? Website know-how? Our communications team works hard to get the word out to media and the public, but volunteers can give CFAS an even more effective voice.

Our current and longtime web guru, now easing into retirement, would like an assistant webmaster — someone to help out at the helm.

The Skimmer's editor could use a backup as well.

We need a boost with press releases and ad design. Our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram presence could be elevated a notch.

Are you a communicator? Let us hear from you!

Membership

Currently, CFAS has around 200 active members. We need volunteers who can assist existing members and help brainstorm ways to attract new ones.

Specific duties include: Attending our monthly public program meetings to provide information to existing or prospective members; conducting campaigns to enroll new members; sending timely reminders as memberships approach renewal, or when dues are in arrears.

Education

Discover the Wonders of Birds (DTWOB) is this committee's crown jewel. Now in its fifth year, the DTWOB education program brings an appreciation of birds to hundreds of fourth-graders, all through the efforts of volunteers. (See website for more.)

Would you like to become a DTWOB education facilitator? Manage supplies and logistics? Serve on the Education Committee? Assist with volunteer coordination?

The Education Committee has lots to do, even beyond DTWOB. Just ask!

Program Planning

Our monthly public programs feature a variety of speakers throughout the year. Their presentations, always relevant to the Audubon mission, attract eager and attentive audiences. But their success requires significant effort in planning and coordination.

Volunteers are needed to help develop lists of potential speakers, and to coordinate bookings. We also maintain contact with booked speakers, acquire promotional information, photos, and A/V needs, and then host a speaker on the day of the program.

Walks and Outings

For many of us, field trips are the highlight of CFAS membership. But they do take planning and leadership.

Volunteers are needed to lead bird walks. You do not need to be an "expert birder" — just be at the designated time and place to organize the group (maybe have membership applications handy), and keep everyone together during the walk. You can choose the date, time and number of participants, and even suggest location.

Alas, we're also looking for a new field-trip chairperson for 2021. Gretchen, stalwart and beloved outings coordinator for the past seven years, insists "A new, fresh face would be good."
**OUT and ABOUT!**

**Gretchen Schramm** coordinates our chapter’s field trips — around 20 just this year. She recruits and 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 out there with the birds.

**CONSIDER LEADING A WALK!**

Contact Gretchen: ( gretchenschramm7@gmail.com )

Here’s her roundup of recent outings.

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**Cape Fear Raptor Center, July 12 & 19**

*Story & photos by Gretchen Schramm*

This time we enjoyed TWO back-to-back trips to the Raptor Center, in Rocky Point.

Each began in a classroom, where our host, Paul Osmer, introduced us to the center's educational birds.

Paul Osmer with "Archie," a 7-year-old Great Horned Owl

These are birds that can never be set free, due to permanent debilitating injuries. One by one, a Red-tailed Hawk, a Barn Owl, a Great Horned Owl, and Eastern Screech Owls (red morph and gray morph) were brought into the room on Paul’s gloved hand.

Next, we toured the interior cages (shared with a veterinarian's office) and then the outdoor enclosures (in rows, or “meows”) where releasable birds and permanent residents are cared for.

The birds that will eventually fly free are sheltered as much as possible from their human caregivers so they do not imprint. To survive, they must remain as wild as possible.

Paul explained that the center's purpose is to provide "compassionate and aggressive rehabilitation services" to injured raptors with the goal of releasing them back to their natural habitat when possible. Also, to ensure a brighter future for raptors the center works to educate the public about the importance of these marvelous birds in our ecosystem.

Paul is a volunteer. We were impressed with his knowledge, and with the sheer delight he takes in educating the public. His dedication and love for the birds is obvious.

"Opie," a beautiful Red-tailed Hawk, has permanent injuries. He is cared for as an educational bird.
OUT and ABOUT! (more)

Stories & photos by Gretchen Schramm

Breakfast with the Birds, Aug. 4 & 22
(Wilmington Water Tours)

August 4 was a sold-out cruise with a waiting list, so we scheduled a second morning on the river, September 22. Both days gave us gorgeous weather.

Captain Doug Springer took us up the Cape Fear, then into the Brunswick River, then back down again, past the Memorial Bridge and home.

There’s much to see on a Cape Fear River cruise

Our birding leaders were Sherry Lane, Jill Peleuses, Dave Weesner, and yours truly. We tallied around two dozen species for each cruise. Not bad, considering we began at 10:00 a.m., when most birds are done feeding for the morning and are less active.

The slow-paced birding didn’t seem to faze our passengers, as all were engaged in socializing and enjoying the food. We were delighted with our beautiful circumstances.

These cruises are always a learning experience. Doug offers up many new stories each time, about the history of the river and the people who lived here many years ago. He also throws in comments on current events. The time passes quickly!

Doug and the crew, along with Mary-in-Charge at the front desk, bend over backward to make these occasions special. Plus, WWT gives Audubon members a great discount on all of our outings with them!

Oh, we’ll be back!
Fort Fisher 4-Wheelin’, Aug. 27

Jamie Adams (L) and Dave Wilson, along the route to Bald Head Island.

Jamie led this day’s outing.

*Story & photos by Gretchen Schramm*

Just a slight breeze, sunny skies and a high tide greeted us at Fort Fisher Beach.

We encountered literally thousands of migrating birds, all feasting on ocean and tidal marsh bounty in preparation for their long flight southward.

There’s something very rewarding about birding by car, and Jamie’s careful timing, coordinating our trip with tides and migration patterns, paid off.

We piled into his 4-wheel-drive truck and drove all the way along the beach to the Bald Head Island boundary before returning to the parking lot.

It was also a thrill to linger long enough to see several common nighthawks swooping up insects, and to witness a lovely sunset.

At dusk we observed groups of turtle stewards releasing hatchlings into the surf.

*CAN’T WAIT TILL NEXT YEAR!*
OUT and ABOUT! (more)

Story & photos by Gretchen Schramm

Sunset Beach & Twin Lakes – Sept. 14

We enjoyed a beautiful weather along this barrier island just a mile or so north of the South Carolina state line, and around a duo of small freshwater lakes just across the Intracoastal Waterway.

We had a casual, easy-paced drive from one spot to another. The tide was unusually high in many spots, but we managed to get a Seaside Sparrow, and heard quite a few Clapper Rails in the marsh grasses.

(L-R) John Sutton, Dave Hughes, Dave Wilson

We saw a juvenile Red-tailed Hawk was just off the road, feasting on a new kill. Stunning bird!

A wonderful group of birders and an enjoyable event. Hope to schedule a similar trip in 2020.

More Outings in 2019

Oct 5   Fort Fisher/Buchanan
Oct 12  Greenfield Lake
Nov -   (TBA)
Dec -   Christmas Bird Count

Check the website’s Calendar for details and confirmations. Some events may require reservations.

CONSIDER LEADING A WALK!
(You DON’T have to be an expert!

Contact me at gretchenschramm7@gmail.com and learn about this fun way to volunteer.

As a bonus, we had three veteran birders as our leaders for this walk: Bruce Smithson, George Harrington and Doug Hughes. Because they’d done their homework, we were able to locate an amazing 46 species with no trouble at all!

Glossy Ibis — Just one of 46 species on our list for the day.

Snowy Egrets, White Ibis, Wood Stork

Gail Smith (L) Bruce Smithson

Wood Storks

(C) 2019 Gretchen Schramm
**Nature Notes**

**Dragonflies!**

Members reported seeing dragonflies in large numbers immediately after Hurricane Dorian.

**Note from Susan Savia:**

My husband and I had just returned to Pleasure Island after the mandatory evacuation expired. We took a late-afternoon trip down to the beach, and found the sand was now flat and smooth, shiny as a baby’s behind. Walking along, we thought it odd to see dragonflies buzzing over the dunes. The water was glorious for swimming — soft and rainwater-like, barely salty. We stayed until almost dusk. Then, walking back, we noticed many more dragonflies than before. I stood in amazement, watching hundreds over each dune, hovering, flitting here and there. A truly MAGICAL experience!

Later, on the Internet, I saw that dragonflies MIGRATE, like birds and butterflies! Perhaps the storm caused them to stack up and then all bust out together, once the coast was clear. I’m so grateful for the chance to experience a happy dragonfly party!

Nancy Buckingham found this Twitter feed:
https://twitter.com/NWSCLE/status/1171553273322463232

**Note from John Sutton:**

Driving near the Fort Fisher military recreation area after the storm, I noticed a dark-looking cloud ahead. It was about 30 feet off the ground, and slowly moving across the road. As I got closer I noticed it was a swarm of bugs. At first I thought “bees,” but then I saw it was dragonflies — thousands. They stayed together as I drove under them.

What a sight! Never before had I seen anything like it.

(Photo above contributed from John Sutton archives)

**At the FEEDER:**

**One Fussy Little Girlfriend**

By Jim Nesbit

Several years ago Catherine and I started putting out live mealworms for our birds. A little Carolina Wren discovered them and has since taken over the feeder where we put them.

When we wake up in the mornings, there she is, flitting around the deck, going in and out of the feeder, impatiently anticipating her fresh serving of live mealworms.

Anytime we try to sleep late and enjoy a slow wake-up, we are greeted by “Ms. Fussbudget,” jumping up and down and demanding that we get our act together and serve her breakfast!

The moral of the story? If you’re tired of quiet, peaceful mornings, just start spoiling your Carolina Wren with live mealworms.

Carolina Wren (Photo by Gretchen Schramm)
Barn Owls (Tyto alba), with a 42-inch wingspan, are beautiful to watch as they glide silently over fields in search of prey.

They live in open habitats, including grasslands, ranchlands, agricultural fields and marshes, and they nest in tree cavities, caves, and buildings. They are voracious consumers of rats, mice, and voles, especially during the breeding season. A single family can consume over 3000 mice or voles. They need a lot of space, a lot of food, and a cozy place to nest.

For the past seven years Cape Fear Audubon has been engaged in a nesting box project with the goal of attracting Barn Owls to our area by placing nest boxes in appropriate habitats.

Barn Owls are found almost everywhere in the world. Partners in Flight estimates a global breeding population of 2 million, with 7% living in the U.S. They are difficult to count because they are nocturnal and secretive, so population sizes are hard to estimate; however, they are noticeably declining in parts of their range. In the UK, populations declined by as much as 70% in the twentieth century. In Canada, the Barn Owl is listed as Endangered and is found in only a few southern outposts. According to the American Bird Conservancy, in the northeastern and north-central United States, 10 states list the species as Endangered and 11 others as a Species of Special Concern. Barn Owls are rare to uncommon and declining in most of North Carolina and in October 2017 this owl was added to our State protected list as a Species of Special Concern.

(Continued, p. 11)
BOXES for BARN OWLS (Cont.)

When North Carolina was dominated by small family farms and open fields of tobacco, corn, and other crops, Barn Owls were a common sight. These birds provided pest management for farmers while farmers provided a safe haven for nesting. They have become uncommon as wooden barns have become scarcer and many open fields have been covered by housing and commercial developments. In addition to loss of habitat, nesting sites, and food sources, modern farming practices, rodenticides, and road fatalities have taken their toll. Great Horned Owl predation has been suggested as another cause of declines in coastal areas.

Awareness of Barn Owl declines has sparked efforts to conserve remaining populations, including installation of nest boxes and maintenance of habitat favoring the owl and its prey. For example, in California, nest boxes have been placed in orchards and vineyards, and in Pennsylvania the State Game Commission is reestablishing many acres of wild grasslands throughout the state.

CFAS became aware of these issues and opportunities when the NC New Hope Audubon Chapter started their Piedmont Barn Owl nest box program in 2012. They were very helpful in sharing information about the installation process and recommended the molded plastic heat-resistant box made by the Barn Owl Box Company.

Since 2013 we have installed a total of 13 boxes in our area including four on the large Thomas property (see Gretchen Schramm’s article in the summer issue of The Skimmer), one at Ft. Caswell, one on a golf course, and seven on small farms.

(Ten boxes remain; two on the Thomas property were accidentally damaged beyond repair during mowing and one property was sold and is no longer accessible.)

The boxes have been cleaned out and restocked with hardwood mulch each year. More than 30 people have been involved in installing and maintaining the boxes.

"Spoiler Alert: There is no evidence that a Barn Owl has occupied any of our boxes."

The project presented several minor challenges, which were fairly easy to overcome:

• Obtaining funding to cover the cost of boxes and pole mounts. (Thanks to the Moore Charitable Foundation and CFAS.)
• Determining an efficient, affordable, non labor-intensive method of mounting the box, one that can be managed without a truck and with limited strength.
• Modifying mounting methods for greater stability, especially in wind.
• Adapting to circumstances. E.g., we built wooden boxes for the Thomas property, where the white commercial boxes distract the dogs being trained there.
BOXES for BARN OWLS (Cont.)

Yes, here is the spoiler alert: There is no evidence that a Barn Owl has occupied any of our boxes.

For several years on the Thomas property, we have found feathers and pellets indicating occupancy by American Kestrels. (Which is satisfying since these birds are also declining). We have also found nesting materials indicating that wood ducks and a few songbirds have used the boxes.

Four years ago, staff at Camp Lejeune installed three boxes on the base, and they continue to monitor those boxes. They have not reported any Barn Owls, but they find that the waterproof nest boxes are very appealing to freeloading fox squirrels. The Piedmont program reports two confirmed sightings but no observed nesting.

It is too easy to become discouraged when the goals seem elusive. But the beauty of these birds and their value to the ecosystem makes it worth continuing the effort to restore them to healthy populations.

Recently, Allison Medford, a bird and mammal specialist with NC Wildlife Resources Commission, has begun to expand efforts for Barn Owl conservation in the Piedmont, building on a similar project they implemented in the NC mountains. She is interested in working in the coastal area; however, she has not yet found a suitable property in our area.

Based on evidence from similar programs in other states, Medford believes that the chances of success are minimal unless there are already some Barn Owls in the vicinity (Catch-22). She is hoping to increase volunteer-based surveys for owls and other nocturnal species in the near future through a statewide bird atlas. With that information, they might know better what to do for the owls.

We keep trying.

Sources:

Websites:
Cornell Lab of Ornithology
https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Barn_Owl
Barn Owl Box Company https://www.barnowlbox.com/barn-owl-biology/
The Barn Owl Trust https://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/
Birds of North Carolina
http://nebirds.carolinabirdclub.org/accounts.php
The Piedmont Barn Owl Initiative
http://piedmontbarnowls.blogspot.com/
American Bird Conservancy https://abcbirds.org/bird/barn-owl/

Major and ongoing challenges remain:

• Locating willing property owners with suitable habitat (25 to 50 acres or more, open land preferably with grasses that are kept fairly low).
• Attracting owls where there are so few young owls looking for a new home.

Diane Butzin is retired from a career in teaching, library management, and administrative roles with the American Board of Pediatrics. Her volunteer work includes beach preservation, wildlife rescue, and Audubon projects. She is a hiker, kayaker, botanizer and, of course, a birder. She lives in Oak Island.
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.

Annual Membership Meeting
(See Calendar for details.)

All members of CFAS are invited to our annual meeting on Monday, October 7, at Halyburton Park Events Center, (where our regular monthly programs are held). The 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. event will feature a report on CFAS accomplishments over the past year and an introduction to future plans and volunteer opportunities.

We seek to enlist more input and engagement from our current members. All committees have developed specific line-item tasks, and we hope interested members will step up and sign on.

As is often the case with non-profits, several people have served in the same roles for years, but at this point we are hoping to "divvy-up" a range of definable tasks.

Light refreshments will be served, and a drawing at the end of the meeting will include several really cool door prizes.

Invitations were sent out via EVENTBRITE and are email-specific. Please REGISTER by clicking "Attend Event" in your invitation email so that we know how many members plan to attend! See you then!

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 head of our state organization, he oversees conservation strategies spanning North Carolina's mountains, coasts, working lands, and bird-friendly communities.


April 6, 2020 – Colonial Nesters at Wrightsville Beach and the Bird Steward Program. Marlene Eader, Bird Steward Program Coordinator, Audubon NC.


Meteorologist Tim Armstrong

It was a full house on Sept. 9, despite thunderstorms and a tornado watch, for a presentation by Tim Armstrong, senior meteorologist at the Wilmington National Weather Service. Tim showed us how modern radar sees birds in migrations, in morning "roost rings," and in the eyes of hurricanes. He also mentioned insect migrations visible on radar displays.
Members gathered Sept. 24 for Swift Night Out on the UNC Wilmington campus. Final score: Chimney Swifts 205, CFAS 23.

The Skimmer is the quarterly newsletter of the Cape Fear Audubon Society (CFAS), a regional 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)  
Regina Podolskis (5)  
Robert Roush (1)  
Gretchen Schramm (4)  
Beth Sheppard (2)  
David Weesner  
Sara Meissner, President  
UNCW Seahawks Chapter

Working Committees:* 
1. Communications  
2. Conservation  
3. Education  
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!

WEBSITE: https://www.capefearaudubon.org