BUSY TIMES!

By Krystyna Ochota
CFAS President

Greetings fellow birders!

During this time, it may seem like we’re in a hiatus, but there’s actually a lot going on behind the scenes.

I’m happy to report that we successfully held our first Zoom meeting for members in July, featuring a presentation on eBird, with our guest speaker Holly Ferreira.

The session was recorded and will be posted soon to our website (see page 6). We’re looking forward to another Zoom meeting in August. STAY TUNED!

We’re also working on a fresh new look for our website, with more content and, hopefully, we’ll be able to include a feature for you to pay your membership dues online!

Lastly, our Education Committee has been hard at work developing video content for schools, in lieu of in-person presentations of Discover the Wonders of Birds.

More to come!

Happy Birding,
Krys

Roseate Spoonbill, p. 8
The COVID Summertime Birding Blues

By Gretchen Schramm

I know. I know…

Having our multitude of scheduled CFAS bird walks all of a sudden cancelled due to COVID-19 has been hard on yours-truly, as well as on each of the volunteers who’ve offered to lead walks. It’s been more than disappointing to lose the time and effort it took to organize and put these events in place, especially since it will be my last year coordinating the outings. I had wanted to make this one more than special.


SUSPENDING these trips has been a painful call, but I just could not envision a safe way for us to bird as a group. We are always pointing to a feathered friend over someone’s shoulder, sharing binocs, clustering into a tight core to avoid a bird being ‘surrounded’ — but it’s all just too risky now. So, no wavering: protecting health and life wins out over any enjoyable outing.

That being said (with a sigh), here are some thoughts on how you CAN make this year of birding just as rewarding.

First, a word of caution …

Due to a mild winter/spring climate, many creatures have taken advantage to produce young early and in abundance — talking about SNAKES here. We “warbler-necked” wanderers often don’t watch where we step. Please do, my friends.

I have seen more snakes in the past three months than I have in the 10 years I’ve lived in Wilmington.

Although most of our snakes are non-venomous, three local dangerous ones come to mind: copperheads, cottonmouths (AKA water moccasins), and rattlers. Just last week I encountered a copperhead in the road next to my driveway, recognizable by its distinctive markings.

This one’s bright yellow tail identified it as a youngster. Usually, copperheads are born in late summer and early fall, but this year they were early. Watch where you step!

Though the copperhead’s bite is less potent than that of our other venomous snakes, it strikes more people than any other. Stepping on one can ruin your day.

This beautiful, beneficial RAT SNAKE is non-venomous.

On to the GOOD NEWS, page 3
Now, the GOOD News:
The birds are still out there. They seem totally unaware of COVID-19. I’ve seen lots of them, and not just in my own garden.

If you choose to venture out, you can always wear a mask, stay distanced, and be sensible.

There are many parks and open spaces in and around Wilmington where you can bird without risking virus exposure, especially if you go early (or late), when crowds are not inclined to gather.

If you prefer to bird at home ...

There are birders’ websites that can add dimensions to your experience.

My dear friend and fellow CFAS member Sherry Lane directed me to the BirdTheFeckAtHome Facebook page. It is wonderful! Originating in Australia, this marvelous site now welcomes birders from all over the world, united by the pandemic. Their posted reports include ONLY birds recently seen in gardens. As of this writing, well over 3,600 species have been reported, with 81 countries participating.

The site has easy-to-follow instructions for signup and participation, beautiful photographs, amusing spin-off “threads” that venture into animals, funny bird pictures, anecdotes, and a warm sense of the worldwide birding community coming together in these stressful times. I highly recommend joining up as another way to enjoy birding while stuck at home. Here’s the link:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/205589647381934/
Raptors: A Road Trip

Story and photos by Jack Manock
CFAS Board Member

In March, my wife, Nancy, and I visited the Center for Birds of Prey, located 29 miles from Charleston, South Carolina, on Route 17 North. As we left 17 and traveled down a winding dirt road, the movie “Deliverance” came to mind. After approximately two miles we came to an opening where there were cages for nearly 50 species, including eagles, hawks, falcons, kites, vultures and owls. This is one of the largest and most diverse collections of its type in the United States.

We arrived in time for the 2 p.m. guided tour. On Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays throughout the year, the Center provides tours to visitors at 10 and 2. For the first hour we were guided on a walking tour by an enthusiastic staff member who shared stories about individual birds, including a female eagle protecting unfertilized eggs, a 44-year-old vulture who would not allow another bird in his cage, and a young owl who had imprinted on a person when he opened his eyes the first time — when it came time to mate he refused to accept that he was an owl.

Following the walking tour, flight demonstrations were held with free-flight owls, falcons, kites and hawks. The birds were released over 200 yards from the trainers and flew toward us untethered. Watching these birds of prey fly toward their trainers was most impressive. We were told it takes several months to train the birds, and they would respond to only one trainer.

We did not visit the Avian Medical Clinic, another component of the Center. The clinic averages 800 patients a year, representing a variety of birds of prey and shorebird species with injuries ranging from unknown to critical. The clinic relies on a network of trained volunteers located throughout South Carolina to help treat ill or injured.

The admission was $18 per person, and well worth it. The demonstrations and tour were exceptional, and I expect we will return for one of their photography workshops.

I recommend a visit to all our Audubon members. For details on the center’s activities and special programs, check out their website, https://www.thecenterforbirdsofprey.org/.
Are you a birder, a wanna-be birder, or someone who simply enjoys watching birds? Do you care what type of bird frequents your backyard or do you just marvel at their colors, shapes, and habits? Adding feeders, bird baths, birdhouses or nest structures can be a wonderful way to attract birds while helping to promote their numbers and longevity.

My husband and I are among those who simply enjoy watching birds and listening to their songs and chatter. We had received a gift of a birdhouse made from a gourd, and after researching the best place to mount it, we were thrilled to see birds surveying the new birdhouse and then building a nest there. We decided a worthwhile pandemic project would be to build and mount yet another birdhouse. Thus the research began.

Various birdhouse designs cater to different birds beyond those you see at your feeders or garden flowers, so adding one can increase the diversity of your backyard visitors.

Birdhouses can be purchased in many garden centers, bird stores, or large home-goods stores, but they can also be built at home. They can be as simple or complicated as you would like.

Many websites offer help for birdhouse builders. Cornell Lab of Ornithology has one entitled “Learn about Nest Boxes and Nest Structures,” with advice on how to attract the “Right Bird, Right House,” the types of birds likely to nest in your region, and even downloadable plans. They also list which species are in decline and may benefit from added birdhouses or nest sites.

Once you determine the regional birds you would like to attract, the next decision is the size of the entrance hole. Its diameter determines the types of birds who will fit into the birdhouse. But a hole too big deters smaller birds, since it puts them at risk from predators. Suggested diameters range from 1.5 to 6 inches.

Other important decisions include the height of the entrance hole, where to mount the birdhouse, and what to attach it to. With the exception of purple martins and bluebirds, most birds prefer birdhouses in a concealed area that adds camouflage and provides a branch or two so the parents can land near their young.

A little research will lead you to many helpful sites. Examples include Cornell Lab’s, mentioned earlier …

https://nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/

… and the SunCatcher Studio, where you can find general information, details, and plans for building your birdhouse:

https://suncatcherstudio.com/birds/bird-house-hole-size/

Remember, nesting birds will still need nesting materials, food for their chicks, and water for drinking and bathing. But building a birdhouse can be rewarding for adults and children alike. Watching a bird build its nest inside the birdhouse and then hearing and watching it raise its family can delight the whole family.
After three-month shutdown due to coronavirus closures, our chapter’s first-Monday public programs are back. But instead of meeting at a physical location (traditionally Halyburton Park), we’re now together on Zoom, the online video conferencing platform.

**Holly Ferreira**, conservation biologist at Marine Base Camp LeJeune, came well qualified to guide us through “**How to use eBird and Other Birding Apps.**” eBird is a free app, an online database of bird observations providing scientists, researchers and amateur naturalists with real-time data about bird distribution and abundance. It is a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon.

Ferreira, obviously comfortable with the technology of online discussions, walked us through eBird’s many dimensions and capabilities, explaining the variety of ways users can interact with — and add to — its massive and growing database. She finished with overviews of other apps, such as Merlin, Sibley, and Audubon.

Using a text-chat option, our audience of birders submitted their own questions and observations throughout the session. Most of these were addressed in open discussion near the end.

Nancy Buckingham, inveterate organizer of CFAS public programs, says she is delighted with the success of this one, and hopes to announce another in the near future. Lindsay Addison handled the Zoom session’s setup and its many nuts and bolts. She reports that 74 people had pre-registered for the session.

And of course we all look forward to convening again in person at Halyburton Event Center.

**WATCH A RECORDING OF THE PROGRAM! Go to:**
https://audubon.zoom.us/rec/share/_MdHN5bS2DxLbYXv92j9VY1MN9Xfeaa81CcaqKcPzkqCYEB8E2b6_J2KUt1vOIrZ

**Use this Password:** 3D&F@?5@
**Binocs for Budding Birders**
Submitted by Charley Winterbauer

Want to Donate?

CFAS has teamed up with students from UNCW to inspire disadvantaged urban kids to pursue birdwatching.

An important step is to gather the necessary birding equipment. **Binoculars**, mainly.

If any of you members (or others) have extra usable binoculars to donate for this endeavor, don’t hesitate to contact …

Evan Buckland, elb9021@uncw.edu

or Marae Lindquist mcl6280@uncw.edu

**At Your Service**

**Using Safe, No-contact Curbside Service**
- Michelle Frazier

Keeping the health of the community and the welfare of our local birds in mind, both Wild Bird and Garden locations offer a convenient schedule of curbside service. All of our favorite bird-friendly supplies, optics, and nature-lover gifts are available and, if you prefer to wait for the return of joyful browsing, you can still support the store now with the purchase of gift certificates in any amount.

Here’s how curbside works: Simply call ahead and place your order. The staff will get it ready and will meet you out front with your items. Or walk up curbside and staff can show and talk with you about specific items at a safe distance.

**Southport Schedule:**
Monday, Friday, Saturday 10:00 - 2:00

**For Southport service call:**
910 457-9453

**Wilmington Schedule:**
Monday through Saturday 10:00 – 4:00 (EXPANDED)

**For Wilmington service call:**
910 343-6001

The stores will be following the guidance of public health and government officials and we hope to eventually expand scheduling accordingly, so keep an eye on the website for news.

www.wildbirdgardeninc.com

Note: Cape Fear Audubon partners frequently with Wild Bird and Garden in efforts that promote birds, bird survival, and birding. We are pleased to see them back in operation in support of birds during coronavirus restrictions. ~ CFAS
Sightings
By Nancy Buckingham

ROSEATE SPOONBILL!

The rare appearance of a Roseate Spoonbill for several weeks in June along our neighborhood’s tidal creek brought a lot of new interest in birds for our neighbors young and old.

Several neighbors posted photos of the bird on our neighborhood Facebook page and one of the children had named our special visitor “Spooner Pinkerton” because of all the pink in Spoonbills.

In Memoriam

JOHN BERNARD ENNIS
December 28, 1945 - July 3, 2020

John’s passing, on July 3, will be mourned by the many Cape Fear Audubon Society members who knew him.

John was a fixture at our CFAS monthly meetings and frequently participated in the bird walks; his experience and knowledge of the natural world were always an inspiration to those around him. He contributed enormously.

A wildlife photographer and naturalist, member of Carolina Bird Club and CFAS, John had 30 years of experience in birding and photographing nature. His trips took him to 49 states in North America, as well as to Canada and Mexico.

John recently donated his lifetime of birding and nature books to CFAS, who in turn found a permanent residence for them at UNCW.

John’s obituary can be accessed at https://www.wilmingtoncares.com/obituary/john-bernard-ennis/

If you would like to leave a message for his family, or just express your condolences, it would be a kind thing to do for such a kind man.
Mississippi kite. (Photo by Gretchen Schramm). More of them have been seen in our area over the past few years.

The *Skimmer* is the quarterly newsletter of the [Cape Fear Audubon Society (CFAS)](https://www.capefearaudubon.org), 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.

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*VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES!*

Interested in serving on our board, or one of our working committees? We're currently in need of a new Field Trip Coordinator. Contact us to find out how you can …

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR BIRDS!**

**WEBSITE:** [https://www.capefearaudubon.org](https://www.capefearaudubon.org)