What's Ahead!

By Krystyna Ochota
CFAS President

Winter in our area brings us quite an assortment of migratory birds. To name just a few: Gadwalls and Wigeons, Sanderlings and Ruddy Turnstones, an assortment of warblers, and even a plethora of American Goldfinches.

Great birding areas to try: Airlie Gardens, Lake Mattamuskeet to the north and Huntington Beach State Park to the south. Grab a pair of binoculars, a bird book (or an “app”) and get out there!

Looking forward to seeing all of you at our monthly meetings, and perhaps some will volunteer for our various committees.

Happy Birding,

Krys
Now in its fifth year, our chapter's
*Discover the Wonders of Birds* (DTWOB) program still inspires 4th-graders to appreciate the natural world.

Jim Nesbit snapped these photos during our recent visit
to *Snipes Academy*, in Wilmington.

"Yes, an albatross is really THAT big!" Volunteer Emma Corbitt (L) guides youngsters during "sizing up birds."

Since the current school year began, our DTWOB volunteers have made day-long guest appearances in several New Hanover County schools, sharing seven interactive learning centers with hundreds of children. These hands-on activities help kids discover what's amazing about birds: Feathers, physiology, migration, survival strategies and much more.

"Ever touched an owl's feathers?" Catherine Nesbit helped design many of DTWOB's activities.

Volunteer Chuck Holden takes kids on a tour of hemispheric migrations.

New volunteers are always welcome! Would you like to become a DTWOB education facilitator? We'll help you learn how!

They're seeing how a pigeon's skeletal structure makes flight possible. This is Brenda Dixon's second year as a DTWOB volunteer.

Want to help with logistics? Serve on our education committee? Assist with volunteer coordination?

See Our Website for Details

Diane Bonney leads a hands-on intro to feathers and the many ways birds depend on them.
First, what IS a "native plant"? Very simply, it's a plant that occurs naturally in the place where it evolved.

As recently reported on several news outlets, North American bird populations have declined by nearly 3 billion, or 29 percent, over the past half century. On average, we are losing about 1 percent of our migratory land birds every year. What can we do to turn this around?

Consider this: 96 percent of our backyard birds need insects to feed their young during the nesting season. Here's an informal calculation, based on research: Four breeding pairs of common backyard birds require around 136,000 insects to feed their spring/early-summer hatchlings!

Because living things tend to stay and thrive where they've evolved (mankind is an exception), then the insects evolved right along with the native plants and the birds — all living together in harmony.

Additionally, migrating birds need to feed in the fall on the berries and seeds produced by natives, to be able to endure their long flights south.

With those points in mind, here's what we can do to help birds:

1. Avoid planting non-natives.
2. Whenever possible, replace non-natives with natives!

What a difference it would make if everyone in our southeastern coastal region took this advice!

Help our birds! Go with NATIVE PLANTS!

Charley's Recommended Reading:

Doug Tallamy's fascinating book, "Bringing Nature Home," tells us that all of the energy we earthbound creatures need is provided by the conversion of sunlight to simple sugars — and goes from there.
Going Native (more)

Gretchen Schramm offers this profile of a local native loved by birds, bugs — and gardeners! (Photos by Gretchen.)

GROUNDSEL BUSH

The Groundsel Bush (Baccharis halimifolia) is a prolific native in coastal North Carolina, and during its blooming period (August - October) it can be spotted everywhere along roadsides throughout the area.

With its attractive leaves, dainty creamy-white flowers and a hardy growth habit, it takes no special care whatsoever to propagate and thrive.

I was therefore delighted to find a volunteer in my garden one day, perhaps sprouting from seeds deposited by a bird or the wind. It has grown to over 10 feet in height in the past several years and is perfectly placed a few yards from my kitchen window, thereby easy to observe throughout the seasons.

Groundsel goes by a multitude of names: Groundsel-tree, Sea-myrtle, Consumptionweed, Eastern Baccharis, Salt Marsh-elder, Salt Bush, and Florida Groundsel Bush. It is the only native eastern species of the aster family reaching tree size.

The numerous branches from short trunks are densely covered with smaller branchlets. It bears gray-green, somewhat lobed, oval leaves; white to green flowers occur in small, dense, terminal clusters.

The nectar from the blossoms attracts butterflies, bees, moths and other insects. The seeds are consumed by granivorous birds. I have found many species of birds in my tree, hunting down the insects that are also attracted to Groundsel. Honeybees and carpenter bees gather pollen from this bush; carpenter bees are especially good pollinators.

Groundsel has also been utilized for erosion control and is an excellent choice for native plantings, as it has no disease or insect problems, is fast-growing and salt tolerant.
**NO, NO, NANDINA!**

*Do you know this plant? It goes by several names, including nandina, sacred bamboo, and heavenly bamboo.*

*It is bad news for birds, and for other animals as well.*

*Nandina domestica* was introduced to the U.S. more than 200 years ago as a garden ornamental, originating in China and Japan. It is now found throughout the lower 48 states, in yards and gardens, business landscaping, municipal plantings, and even in parks and "nature areas."

This non-native invasive is an evergreen woody shrub that can grow six to eight feet in height. (It is not related to bamboo, which is in the grass family.)

Nandina's flowers are white. Its fruit, in the form of red berries, is attractive to birds and other wildlife — often with tragic results when eaten; the berries, leaves and other parts of the plant contain chemicals that produce hydrogen cyanide.

This research article traces the death of cedar waxwings to ingestion of nandina berries. [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3005831/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3005831/)

**WHAT TO DO?**

1. If you have nandina, we recommend removing it and replacing with beneficial natives. Try to remove the whole plant, including roots, before seeds are produced. Seeds stay around for months, so prevent their dispersal. At least clip off the berries, so birds can't be poisoned by eating them.

2. Spread the word. Remind friends and neighbors about the danger of nandina, including its ability to escape from cultivation. Do what you can to discourage anyone from purchasing or planting it.
OUT and ABOUT!

Wrightsville Beach on a Winter Morning (Feb. 8)

Story & photos: Gretchen Schramm

If there are two things I love best in this world, it is early morning birding at Wrightsville Beach when you’re not shivering from cold blasts of wind (dearly wishing you were back in your warm bed), and having Sam Cooper as a walk leader.

This morning we had ten intrepid souls who “braved” a not-so-cold morning (36, warming to 50) who attended the bird walk at Wrightsville Beach with the wonderful Sam Cooper as our leader. What an amazing educator he is!

We began at the end of Johnnie Mercers Pier, where we scoped Loons, Scoters, Mergansers and many others. From there we carpooled to the north end, birding the marshes, dunes and beaches there.

We spotted 42 species, enjoying a windless day, calm seas and an absolutely beautiful morning.

It was nice to see new birders joining our group; that is always a special plus.

Looking across to Figure Eight Island we encountered a massive flock of Northern Gannets dive-bombing the ocean for fish. There were also many Common Loons viewed from the Pier, also having breakfast.

Nice morning. Good memory of what Cape Fear Audubon Society offers its members. Spring's just around the corner. We have a nice selection of bird walks coming up. Please join us! (See Schedule, p. 8.)
**OUT and ABOUT (more)**

For half a dozen years, Gretchen Schramm has been coordinating our bird walks, making it fun and easy for members and non-members alike to get out there with the birds. She recruits volunteers to lead each walk. What about YOU? You needn't be an expert. You can count on at least one or two top birders signing up. So …

**CONSIDER LEADING A WALK!**

Contact Gretchen: [gretchenschramm7@gmail.com](mailto:gretchenschramm7@gmail.com)

Here's a sampling of outings since our last issue.

(Photos by Gretchen unless otherwise noted.)

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**Greenfield Lake, Oct. 11**

Jim Holcomb led this great walk through one of Wilmington's richest birding locations.

Tons of birds, as expected: American Redstart, Black-and-white Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-tailed hawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo — to name just a few!

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**Fort Fisher, Oct. 5**

Jill Peleuses hosted this event. As usual, a great group of birders, including CJ Downey, who volunteered as our scribe. Today's total: 21 species!

Jill gives a wonderful, informative, running narrative, spotting birds and educating the group on identification traits, breeding/non-breeding plumage, and many other interesting facts that make the walk even more enjoyable.

The morning was blustery with some pretty strong winds and an overcast sky.

Due to the winds, we started out at the Fort Fisher boat ramp, did a brief walk toward the spit at Buchanan, then decided to try our luck at the Fort Fisher ferry terminal.

After a brief survey of the grassy area and surrounding dunes, we proceeded on to the Fort Fisher Museum grounds, then strolled the path down to the river. It was a bit calmer beneath the live oak trees, but still enough wind to keep the birds roosting and not active.
PLEASE NOTE:

- Times and details of outings are posted in the CALENDAR section of our website.
- Because times and dates are subject to change, be sure to check the Calendar before you depart for an event.
- The number of participants for some walks may be limited.

These events (*) will require preregistration.

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www.capefearaudubon.org
Gretchen Schramm is the type who's always ready to go gallivanting the globe, camera at the ready, in pursuit of birds.

But this past fall, Gretchen got to enjoy what she calls "the trip of a lifetime," spending several weeks exploring the cities, wildlife parks and country byways of Kenya, joined by CFAS friends Kathy Hannah, Bruce Smithson and Sherry Lane. (Sherry, owner of LifeBird Tours LLC, led the trip).

Gretchen returned with literally thousands of stunning photos of East African birds and wildlife, and she has written a fascinating narrative we wish we could include in its entirety here in The Skimmer. Instead, let us offer a few tantalizing samples that should tempt any avid birder to consider a similar trip.

Excerpts from Gretchen's narrative and photos:

The vastness of this country is hard to envision, let alone capture through a lens. Even the sunsets were spectacular as they stretched across the never-ending expanse of sky at twilight.

A humbling journey, with astonishing sights around every corner. The impact on my life is still unfolding.

Equally enchanting were many of the birds’ names — Beautiful Sunbird, Superb Starling, African Hoopoe, Bare-faced Go-away-bird, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu ...

Want to see more of Gretchen's Kenya photos? Peruse her self-published Africa travelogue by clicking this free link:

https://chatbooks.com/app/share/volume/eddf17db0fda4796a9adb71e375b43f3?id=11875870&key=LC6yFKNWQuHa4NJuk1p8sODnjmoY96RRXziY2SF

Sunset on the Masai Mara, Kenya

'Kenya, Trip of a Lifetime'

www.capefearaudubon.org
In Kenya with Gretchen (cont.)

Among the variety of places visited: Masai Mara, Siana Springs, and the highland forest of Garamaiyu ...

We toured the Great Rift Valley, Kerio Valley, and several wildlife preserves including Nairobi National Park (Kenya’s first, established in 1946), where potentially 400 bird species were to be seen....

And Lakes Naivasha and Baringo, on wonderful boat rides.

Our two native drivers, Peter and Julius, were fluent in English and exceptional birders. We were transported in two pop-topped safari vehicles, which afforded excellent views of the wildlife.

Most of our travels prohibited us from leaving the vehicles, for our own safety and for the protection of the flora and fauna at the many stops along the way.

Sporadic evening showers helped dispel dust on the unpaved roads during the day. Glorious sunshine and pleasant temperatures otherwise.

Kenya’s National Bird:
Lilac-breasted Rollers

Meals were usually served alfresco or under a canvas-tented roof. The variety and quality of food was exceptional — and plentiful.

After evening meals, we gathered to complete the day’s checklist of birds and animals we had seen. A thoroughly satisfying way to end the day.

Our accommodations were all outstanding, especially luxurious tent camps where you were required to padlock your quarter’s outside zipper to exclude marauding monkeys and baboons, both notorious for pilfering from unsecured tents.

What an amazing experience, to encounter a white rhino and her calf! (No, this wasn’t a 400mm lens — they were really this close!)
Our Yard Chosen
Instead of the Caribbean

By Nancy Buckingham
Photo: Jamie Adams

Cape May Warbler

When I saw this beautiful bird eating the grape jelly and orange slice I had out for the Baltimore Orioles last winter, I knew it was an unusual visitor. With the help of Cornell's Merlin app, the bird was identified through its photo as a Cape May Warbler. Several interested folks came over last year to see and photograph the deck guest, including Jamie Adams, whose photo is shown here. As it turns out, this suspected same individual bird showed up again this winter and was included in the Wilmington Christmas Bird Count.

eBird describes the Cape May Warbler as "a small warbler with sharp bill that is very slightly downcurved. Bright adult males are yellow below, with black streaks, orange cheek patch, and white patch on wing. Breeds in boreal forest of far northern U.S. and Canada. Winters in the Caribbean and Central America. Even in migration, shows a heavy preference for spruce trees."

I would say the cheek patch on "my" male bird is more russet than orange. And as far as I know, there are no spruce trees anywhere near our back yard.

Dr. James Parnell's book, Birds of the Carolinas, says during spring migration the bird is uncommon to rare throughout the Coastal Plain, but can be seen here during fall migration. In speaking to Dr. Parnell about this particular bird at my feeder, he said it could be present because it has been an unusually warm year, and one rare bird that has discovered a great place to eat one winter may want to return to the same yard the following year.

The warbler is named for the location where it was first collected by George Ord on an expedition with Alexander Wilson, in May of 1812.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

This report from Sam Cooper, coordinator and compiler of the Wilmington Christmas Bird Count:

The Wilmington, NC Christmas Bird Count was held on 4 January 2020. Final results are still being reviewed and confirmed, but preliminary data shows a total of 151 species, a little below the average from the past few years.

A very wet morning hampered the most productive portion of the day and likely contributed to a few missing species that are present in the area. The mild winter also likely contributed to the low numbers of wintering birds and the lack of many duck species/numbers.

Most unusual species found include:

- Black-headed Gull - Carolina Beach Lake - present before and after the count
- Yellow Warbler - Carolina Beach Lake - present before and after the count
- Cape May Warbler - returning bird to Wilmington feeder/yard
- Lark Sparrow - Ashley High School
- Yellow-breasted Chat - yard/feeder bird in Wilmington
- Summer Tanager - returning bird to Brunswick Co feeder/yard
- Parasitic Jaeger - off Carolina Beach
- Common Eiders (3 around Masonboro Inlet)
PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Nancy Buckingham schedules interesting programs and speakers for the CFAS monthly meetings. These are normally held at the Halyburton Park Events Center from September through May, on the first Monday of each month. (Note: March 9 is an exception.) Program time: 7 – 8:30 p.m.

In summer, Charley Winterbauer coordinates a special Brunswick County series.

RECENT PROGRAMS:


PROGRAMS AHEAD:


Nate serves as social media manager with the American Birding Association. Tonight he will go into a bit of taxonomy, how bird names change when species are lumped or split apart, the importance of colloquial or "local" names for birds, and the individuals for whom some birds (e.g., Wilson's Warbler) are named.

April 6, 2020 – Colonial Nesters at Wrightsville Beach and the Bird Steward Program

Presented by Marlene Eider, Audubon North Carolina's Bird Steward Program Coordinator.

She will give a report on this past nesting season's success, and find out who among those in attendance may be interested in becoming a Bird Steward at the posted south end of the beach.

May 4 – Holly Ferreira: eBird and Birding Apps Workshop

Holly is a wildlife biologist with Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune.

Bring your phone to this program; she will tell us all about eBird and the app's contributions to science.

Nate's fascinating blog can be found at http://blog.aba.org/author/nate-swick

Oystercatcher and chick at the south end of Wrightsville Beach. Photo by Kathy Hannah

The American Kestrel is also known as Sparrow Hawk and "Killi-killi."

A follow-up "in-the-field" workshop will be scheduled to try out what we learned on May 4.
Fourth-graders at Snipes Academy on January 24. Catherine Nesbit preps them for their first experience Discovering the Wonders of Birds. (See p. 2)

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.

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Vice President: Jim Nesbit  
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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