Greetings fellow Skimmers!

It’s been a tough year to say the least. I hope that you all have found ways to bring birding-joy into your lives in some way. Whether backyard birding, out on the beaches and trails, or online via Zoom, I hope you managed to keep your connection with nature in some way.

For the foreseeable future, we’ll continue to meet via Zoom, and hope to be able to continue to offer you interesting speakers and programs. Eventually, I’m quite sure, we’ll get back to our walks and field trips!

Until then, please take care of yourselves and your loved ones!

Wishing you a peaceful and nature-filled holiday season!

Krys
Birding During the Pandemic
By James Parnell, PhD

A retired UNCW biology professor, research ornithologist, dedicated conservationist, award-winning photographer and longtime CFAS member inspires us all during these Covid times.

Birding is an avocation perhaps not affected as much as some by the pandemic. I still go out on a regular basis, usually with camera in hand, and do not worry very much about either getting or passing the bug while out. I am usually alone or sometimes with one other person. I visit wide open sites and am seldom close to other folks.

I do like to visit the Tern and Skimmer colony at Wrightsville Beach in Spring and Summer, but even there, where there are usually other people enjoying the birds and the beach, it is easy to stay well separated. I also like to visit Ft. Fisher, especially during the Fall migration, but here too it is easy to avoid close encounters with the many fishermen, sightseers, and other birders in this open environment.

Aside from these two rather public places, I usually travel country roads in isolated places such as the Holly Shelter Game Land, the Green Swamp, and other rural back roads where I seldom encounter other folks. I feel safe and I surely cannot pass the virus to others.

When I am out, it is usually to photograph as well as to see, and I do a lot of my photography from the front seat of my truck. I enjoy the birds, the out-of-doors, and have felt little of the feeling of isolation we hear so much about.

Birding is a great way to leave the Pandemic behind — as least for a few hours. I strongly recommend it.

Birdwatching in Winter in Southeast North Carolina
By Jill Peleuses
Owner, Wild Bird & Garden

Birding in the winter is one of my favorite times. It is always a fun challenge to remember those species we haven’t seen for months returning to our area. Fall migration is wrapping up and now we are finding our wintertime residents choosing their yards and locations for the season. Birding in different habitats for the winter can be very rewarding. I enjoy checking our woods and neighborhoods for songbirds. I love seeing American Robins, Cedar Waxwings and Yellow-rumped Warblers swarming around the yaupon holly, dogwoods and redcedar berries. For our area, robins are a sign of the coldest times; I usually see the most in January.

Yards can remain a constant area to watch for wintering hummingbirds. We typically get Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, but some folks will also see the Rufous Hummingbirds in the winter. Hummingbirds can enter a slow metabolism state called torpor that helps them make it through cold nights. If you do keep feeders out and temperatures drop into freezing, remember the birds will need to drink at first light. Set your alarm to put out a feeder first thing in the morning or rig up a heated light to keep the feeder from freezing overnight.

Lakes and ponds are great places to check for wintertime waterfowl. I like to drive around town and check retention ponds. Freshwater lakes can be a great place to see Hooded Mergansers, Gadwalls, American Wigeons and American Black Ducks. Greenfield Lake and Airlie Gardens can be good places to look for wintering ducks. There are different species that prefer the ocean. I enjoy stopping by the rocks at Fort Fisher to watch for Buffleheads, Northern Gannets and Common Loons.

For winter birding in SE NC, don’t forget to dress in layers, bring a good pair of binoculars and a bird book. Just enjoy the opportunity to get outside, and do not feel overwhelmed if you cannot identify every bird. Just remember, many of these species only come once a season!
Now in its 121st year, the Christmas Bird Count, administered by the National Audubon Society, has been called the world’s longest-running citizen-science survey.

Each winter, volunteer birdwatchers in communities like ours send their observations to compilers, who in turn contribute to an updated census of the birds of the Western Hemisphere.

Traditionally, this well-coordinated effort runs from December 14 to January 5. Although this year’s CBC dates will remain the same, the COVID-19 pandemic will affect participation in ways that vary according to local safety guidelines.

The Wilmington and Southport Counts are being modified due to Covid-19. The Wilmington Count will be 2 Jan (Saturday) and Southport will be 3 Jan (Sunday). Compilers’ emails appear below.

Sam Cooper (Wilmington)
dmcooper2@juno.com

Ron Clark (Southport)waxwing@bellsouth.net

Potential participants can go to https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/christmas/ regarding Christmas Bird Counts and then click on the “MAP” link to see an interactive Google map. Click on the red pin and the count circle will appear along with contact info; zoom-in and click on satellite view to see details.

There will be no count-compilation gatherings this year. Potential participants should email with a contact phone number and indicate their interests and experience, and/or if they want to count in their neighborhood or yard (if in the count circle) or count somewhere else.
**Programs:**

**DOWNLIST the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker?**

*The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed plans to downlist the Red-cockaded woodpecker from Endangered to Threatened under the Endangered Species Act, saying the species has shown sufficient evidence of population recovery to justify the change.*

The species, long endemic to the once-extensive longleaf pine stands of the Southeastern U.S., has suffered major population reduction over many decades due to habitat loss.

Our CFAS virtual program on November 17 featured two presenters with expertise on this controversial issue.

Biologist Carson Wood, of Coastal Plain Conservation Group, led with a “State of the Species,” a comprehensive report on the RCW, its habitats, and findings based on his own extensive research.

Ramona McGee, attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center, discussed her organization’s efforts to persuade the USFWS to retain the woodpecker’s endangered status. Both speakers detailed continuing threats to the species, including ongoing habitat loss and impacts from severe storm events.

The sessions’s Zoom audience totaled 67. The presentation was introduced by CFAS president Krys Ochota, program coordinator Nancy Buckingham, and Audubon NC Coastal Biologist Lindsay Addison.

CFAS Advocacy Chair Johanna Hamilton has written to USFWS on our behalf, urging reconsideration of the downlisting proposal.

*(See Page 5)*
Meet Our New ADVOCACY CHAIR

By Nancy Buckingham

Johanna Hamilton has rejoined our board in a new and exciting position: Advocacy Chair.

Her role will be to keep us informed on current conservation issues and to communicate with lawmakers and decision-makers to urge support for (or opposition to) specific policy decisions.

Her first mission: Opposition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's proposed downlisting of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. She has submitted a letter on behalf of the chapter, giving reasons the bird's status should not be changed from "endangered" to "threatened."

When she was with us previously — on both the Education and Publicity Committees--we knew her as Johanna Colburn. She has since married, and now she and Bobby have a three-year-old daughter. Johanna also works part-time as marketing coordinator for The Children's Museum of Wilmington.

Originally from the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Johanna moved to the area for graduate school in 2013 and never left! Her master's degree from UNCW is in Coastal and Ocean Policy.

She is honored and excited to take on the role of Advocacy Chair, filling a gap in the work of our chapter. In her spare time, she loves gardening, traveling, reading, and playing with their two “very large” dogs.

WEBSITE GETS A FACELIFT

Have you visited the CFAS website lately? If not, be prepared for a pleasant surprise.

Our beloved webmaster, Dick Daniels, has worked long and hard on a design upgrade intended to better showcase who we are and what we do.

The new site includes sections and pages that focus on our committees, opportunities for volunteers, and recent accomplishments.

Be sure to check out the section for our Discover the Wonders of Birds videos for homebound schoolkids.

www.capefearaudubon.org
**WILMINGTON YOUTH BIRDING**  
By Shirin Jenkins

**On a sunny, warm October day** in Wilmington, a small group of elementary-schoolers, each with a pair of binoculars, gathers in Maides Park. There is no mistaking, I’ve found my band of young birders.

Together with six other adults, we all set off to find birds. Though we’re walking the same park the kids often play in after school, we now have the opportunity to explore with them the wildlife they might miss if they aren’t looking for it. This young, enthusiastic group is the **Wilmington Youth Birding Group**. It’s designed to encourage children in urban settings to take an interest in the outdoors and, more specifically, what’s flying around them.

We make our way to the walking trail and stop to listen. The children point to the sky. High above us is a hawk, backlit, and too high for us to make out the species. But the children make loud bird calls and laugh. It’s an excitable group of kids and we appreciate the way they turn most things into a game. We spot a group of Bluebirds on the construction fence along with a Yellow-rumped warbler and a few others. The children fumble with the binoculars and some choose not to use them, but all are eager to see each bird, confidently announcing it when they do.

Evan Buckland and Marae Lindquist are the creators of this special group, the product of many hours discussing their mutual desire to develop a program to engage local children to explore nature in their surroundings. The program is made possible by funding from UNCW’s Marine Quest and Sue Kezios, their director of youth programs.

Evan Buckland is a two-time UNCW alumna with an MS in Marine Biology and a passion for birds. Her thesis focused on the winter survival and abundance of saltmarsh and seaside sparrows. She strives to make Wilmington a more bird-friendly city.

Marae Lindquist is a PhD student at UNCW and received her BS from Appalachian State University. Prior to graduate school Marae worked for the City of Wilmington in the recreation department. Her dissertation focuses on the winter-space use, habitat use, and population densities of saltmarsh and seaside sparrows, and the impacts of sea level rise on these avian communities.

I asked Evan and Marae what they hoped to accomplish with this initiative and how they see it developing. Both expressed the hope that it will become a permanent fixture in Wilmington, inspiring kids to explore nature and become interested in science and conservation. “We are taking it one step at a time, especially due to COVID, in order to ensure we can establish this program for the long term,” said Evan. “We need resources such as educational videos and fun activities to implement as we grow in schools.”

As we ended our birding adventure at Maides park I couldn’t help feeling nostalgia for my own childhood and the fond memories of the first time someone gave me a pair of binoculars to look through. I am grateful to hear that Marae and Evan share similar sentiments about these kids and their enthusiasm. All of us have enjoyed witnessing the speed at which the children have been able to learn the fundamentals of birding.

The Wilmington Youth Birding Group meets every two weeks. I look forward to those days.

For more information about this program, or to learn about volunteering, please email Marae Lindquist at mcl6280@uncw.edu or Evan Buckland at elb9021@uncw.edu
Rescuing the Rails

In October, Cindy McBride rescued a young Virginia Rail that was being harassed by crows on a lawn near a Hickory Knoll marsh.

On the advice of her neighbor Nancy Buckingham, Cindy took the bird—with its minor pecking wounds—to Skywatch Bird Rescue in Castle Hayne. That bird is pictured here.

Thankfully, the little guy recovered and was released. Speaking later to Mary Ellen Rogers, Clinic Director of another local bird rescue, Sea Biscuit Wildlife Shelter, on Oak Island, Nancy learned more about the "plight of rails." She asked Mary Ellen to write about it for our newsletter. Here’s her story:

HELP for the ‘MARTIANS’

By Mary Ellen Rogers

In a sporting goods store, I overheard a customer asking for ammo. The clerk asked “What are you shooting?” His response was “Martians!” (Marsh hens are the common name for the various species of rails.)

Our Clapper Rails are hunted every year. They are secretive, mostly flightless, and well camouflaged by their dull colors and laterally compressed bodies. They live in salt marshes near the coast, eating things like shrimp and fiddler crabs.

But each fall, there are big tides with full moons that force the rails up to the tops of the grasses that they normally slip through—they rarely fly above the vegetative line.

This autumn brought some huge storms, and very excessive rain. The rising waters not only flushed out the rails, but strong currents brought them downstream to ocean beaches. We coastal rehabbers were getting many injured, bedraggled or dead rails. They aren’t designed to withstand heavy surf and big fish predators.

I had 21 clapper rails wash up from Aug 4-Sep 21 and Amelia, at Skywatch, had 20, plus 3 Virginia rails. I suspect one was the McBride rescue!

Altogether, only about 25% recovered to be released into the marsh again.
Beach Nesting Successes

Despite the pandemic, beach-nesting birds on the North Carolina coast had a pretty good year, thanks in large part to the conservation efforts of Audubon and its volunteers.

Oystercatchers were very successful on Lea-Hutaff Island during this spring & summer’s nesting season. (Photo: Kathy Hannah)

The announcement, from Ben Graham, communications director for Audubon North Carolina, appeared in the Wilmington Star-News on Nov. 26. Our board member, coastal biologist Lindsay Addison, is quoted in the article:


Thankful to Still Be at Your Service

With Multiple Ways to Serve You Safely This Winter

- Evan Buckland

Serving our community, serving you, has been one of the best things this small, family owned business has had to buoy our spirits in 2020. Keeping the health of our community in mind, Wild Bird and Garden now offers several convenient and safe ways for us to serve you: curbside service (call, pay, and drive up!), online shopping for seed, and now limited in-store shopping (5 customers or fewer with masks)! All of your favorite bird-friendly supplies, houses, feeders, optics, and nature-themed gifts are available and, if you cannot decide because you love it all, you can always purchase gift certificates in any amount.

Southport Schedule:
Monday through Saturday 10:00 - 2:00
For Southport service call:
910 457-9453

Wilmington Schedule:
Monday through Saturday 10:00 – 4:00
Sunday 12:00 – 4:00
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 continuing in safe operation in support of birds during current coronavirus restrictions. ~ CFAS

2 Rescue Centers Join Forces

Skywatch Bird Rescue and Cape Fear Raptor Center have recently announced a merger.

Details of the collaboration were covered by the Star-News on Dec. 1.

A rescued Bald Eagle at Cape Fear Raptor Center. (Photo: Grethcn Schramm)

(Link to Star-News Merger Story Below)

“And the Nominations Are...”

By Jack Mannock, CFAS Nominating Committee Chair

The Nominating Committee contacted individuals who have been active in the Cape Fear Audubon Society, to request their interest in serving as members of the Board or officers for the organization. For the consideration of the membership the Nominating Committee is pleased to present the following slate of individuals who have agreed to serve, if elected.

**President** – Jim Nesbit  
**Vice President** - Shirin Jenkins  
**Board Members** - Evan Buckland, Miles Buddy, Marae Lindquist, Kristen Rhinehart

A brief introduction to these individuals as their experience relates to the Audubon Society:

**Jim Nesbit** - He helped restart CFAS by serving on the board from 2006-10 and was President 2019. He helped develop and present centers for our Discover the Wonder of Birds Program. He has volunteered with the banding of pelicans and with wife Catherine volunteered at the Audubon Camp at Hog Island Maine.

**Shirin Jenkins** - For the last four years she has served on the Wilmington Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, including most recently as Vice Chair. She joined the Cape Fear Audubon Society about three years ago and has been volunteering with the Discover the Wonder of Birds program since that time. She is also a volunteer with the Urban Youth Birding Project.

**Evan Buckland** – Evan is a local bird enthusiast with a passion for avian conservation. During her undergraduate years at UNCW she helped found the Seahawk Audubon club, did an internship with the Smithsonian’s Neighborhood Nestwatch, and volunteered as a Wrightsville Beach Bird Steward. Before entering graduate school, she was a biological technician for the National Park Service at Cape Hatteras National Seashore where she monitored beach nesting birds and sea turtles.

(Continued)
Nominations (continued)

**Miles Buddy** – He is a second-year Biology major at UNCW and a work-study student in Ray Danner's lab. Following an initial interest in lepidopterans, Miles transitioned to birds at a young age upon obtaining a copy of the Kaufman Guide. A serious conservationist, he looks forward to working with Audubon, especially with CFAS at the local level.

**Marae Lindquist** - Marae is a resident of Wilmington and enjoys researching avian conservation and birding in her free time. After receiving her bachelor’s degree in Biology/Ecology from Appalachian State University, she moved to Wilmington and worked for the City of Wilmington Recreation Department. During that service, she worked at Halyburton Park and then the Boxing Center, where she gained a deep appreciation for the local community. Marae is currently a PhD student at UNCW. Her dissertation research focuses on the overwinter space use, habitat use, and densities of saltmarsh and seaside sparrows as well as understanding the impacts of sea level rise on these avian populations in southeastern North Carolina. She is currently NOAA’s Margaret A. Davidson Fellow for North Carolina. Along with a fellow sparrow researcher she started a youth birding program in town to help get kids get outside and gain an appreciation for birds and other wildlife.

**Kristen Reinhart** – She is a sophomore at UNCW studying environmental science and currently serves as the UNCW Audubon chapter president. She is actively working to grow the Seahawk Audubon Club.

If a CFAS member chooses to nominate an individual for an office, who has agreed to serve if elected, the member should send the name of that nominee to Jack Manock, manockj@gmail.com, before January 1, 2021. At the annual meeting scheduled for January 18th, the members will elect the officers and board members for two-year terms, 2021-22.
A bird-friendly Christmas tree on the Nesbit deck. With a necklace of popcorn and fresh cranberries and a pine cone rolled in peanut butter and sunflower seeds, it’s a holiday treat for birds.

Some feathered friends did partake, but the squirrels and raccoons got there first, say Catherine and Jim.