



Ecobon

The Hilton Head Island Audubon Society is a Chapter of National Audubon Society, Inc.

JANUARY PROGRAM *by: Kathy Greider, Program Director*

Thursday, January 14, 2016 3:00 pm at Coastal Discovery Museum/Honey Horn, 70 Honey Horn Dr in Sea Island Room

Prothonotary Warblers and Project PROTHO: Audubon's Role in Conserving the Swamp Canary



The Prothonotary Warbler is a cavity-nesting songbird that breeds in forested wetlands of the eastern United States. Each fall, this species migrates more than a thousand miles to Central and South America, where it spends the winter in coastal mangroves, before migrating back to North America each spring. The National Audubon Society has played a key role in emerging research on this iconic wetland bird. This talk will focus on recent work being done on Prothonotary Warblers at Audubon's Francis Beidler Forest and beyond.

Matt Johnson is the Education Manager at the Audubon Center at Francis Beidler Forest. A native of South Carolina, Matt grew up in Columbia and attended Clemson University from 2003-2009. After receiving his Master's in Biological Sciences in 2009, Matt worked as a producer at Clemson for an Emmy award-winning nature documentary entitled "Expeditions with Patrick McMillan." In 2011, he took a position as a Lecturer in the Department of Biological Sciences at Clemson, and then in 2013, he began his current job with the National Audubon Society. Through his work at Francis Beidler Forest, Matt's main focus now is to raise awareness for bird conservation through environmental education and community outreach. This should be a great program to learn more about this beautiful and elusive bird.

FREE. Open to the public without registration. SNOWBIRDS WELCOME!

Info: Coastal Discovery Museum at 843.689.6767 or HHI Audubon's Website: www.hiltonheadaudubon.org

Christmas Bird Count

by Susan Murphy, CBC Coordinator

Over one hundred and forty people came together for some snacks and a wonderful presentation on December 9. The room was full of good fellowship and enthusiasm. Robert Rommel described the top 70 most-seen birds in our previous counts while sharing his stunning photography.

On Monday, December 14th, count day temperatures rose up to the low seventies! Skies were changing by the hour, going from overcast to light rain to partly cloudy, with winds 10-15 mph. The panel met with the captains on December 17th to review the results. Most Captains reported that the teams saw fewer birds than expected.



Thank you to our panel, Robert Rommel, Jack Colcolough and Jack Greenshields for their insight and expertise. Shelia Johnson served as our scheduler and we finished on time!

At the time I am writing this article, I have just finished the preliminary tally of the numbers. Our total number of birds is slightly higher than last year, with about the same number of species. Only one species was seen by every team (teams on the water and on land) - the Great Blue Heron. The highest totals (over 1,000) were Red-winged Blackbirds, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Double-crested Cormorants, American Crows and White Ibises. There will be lots more information in the February Ecobon.

Thank you again to our Captains, who bring so much experience and enthusiasm to the count. You make the count happen! We hope all of the participants enjoyed the experience. Thank you and we hope you will join us again for the count in December 2016!

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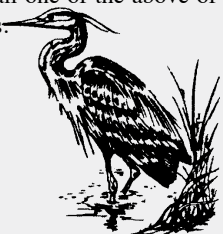
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The *Ecobon* is a monthly publication (September through May) of the Hilton Head Island Audubon Society. Subscription is a benefit of membership. Direct inquiries to P.O. Box 6185, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina 29938 or call one of the above officers or chairpersons.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *by Robert Rommel*

New Year's Resolutions

Every year as the New Year rolls around I make a list of resolutions for the upcoming year. I am notoriously bad at following through on all of them, but I do achieve some and just creating the list helps me to set goals for the upcoming year. Many of the resolutions have to do with family, personal growth, career or daily life but a few of them reflect on wildlife.

Our world and the wildlife in it is changing. We're losing species and others are dropping in numbers. A few we're rescuing and can once more be seen flying, running, or swimming in our skies, lands, and oceans. I'd like to get a chance to see some of the great marvels we have in North America while we still have them and while I have an opportunity.

I'd like to witness the courtship routine of Western or Clark's Grebes. These two birds pair up side by side, raise themselves mostly out of the water, outstretch and curve their long necks, and then run across the water's surface in perfect unison. I'd also like to see the Sage-Grouse call on the lek. These birds transform themselves from a chicken-like bird into something that looks like an Aztec headdress as they puff up large air sacs on their breast, fan out their tail feathers into a spiky fan, and hold their wings down at their side. It looks impressive enough and combined with the sound is breathtaking.

There are other resolutions for non-avian wildlife. I'd love to see the mass nesting events when nearly ½ a million Ridley turtles will come ashore all at once on single beach to lay their eggs. Last on the list is the bubble feeding of Humpback Whales. The Humpback Whales will gather together and swim in circles. They blow bubbles up the water around a school of fish. They swim in tighter circles until they finally come to the surface with mouths wide open to eat the fish trapped in this "bubble net".

Realistically, I'll likely only be able to see one of these marvels in 2016 and hopefully I'll be able to see others in future years. That's ok, because it gives me a head start on making the next list of resolutions. I have a few simpler resolutions – like doing a better job keeping my feeders stocked throughout the year or watching the Prothonotary Warblers raise a nest near our house. Just being out in nature will give me chances to see marvels that didn't make the list since I hadn't even dreamed they existed. I encourage everyone to make some resolutions for the new year even if they don't involve a single feather!

Happy New Year, Robert

RECENT AREA BIRD SIGHTINGS

by Jack Colcolough

What a terrific and very active start to our Winter birding! Over 130 reports of bird sightings were received during the last month. Most of our Winter songbirds, shorebirds and ducks have arrived in our area and have been sighted.



Baltimore Oriole

Baltimore Oriole, Merlin, American Kestrel, Rusty Blackbird, American Pipit, American Bittern, Blue-headed Vireo, Winter, Sedge and House Wrens, American Avocet, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Saltmarsh, Seaside, Field and Vesper Sparrows, Wilson's Plover, Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Greater Scaup, Long-billed Dowitcher, Whimbrel, American White Pelican, Loggerhead Shrike, Eurasian-collared Dove, Stilt Sandpiper, White-breasted Nuthatch, Hairy and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Orange-crowned Warbler, Sharp-shinned Hawk and Franklin's Gull.

Out-of-Season species reported were: Painted Bunting, Chuck-will's-widow, Wilson's and Prairie Warblers, Ovenbird and a number of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. Maybe, a few of these birds will overwinter in our area!

Arriving Winter and "FOTS" birds as well as "good finds" reported were: Cedar Waxwing, Bufflehead, Gadwall, Ring-necked Duck, Horned Grebe, American Goldfinch, Hooded Merganser, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flicker, Lesser Scaup, Wilson's Snipe, Sora, Common Loon, American Robin, Black & White Warbler, White-throated and Song Sparrows, Northern Gannet, Marbled Godwit, many Bald Eagles and too many Yellow-rumped Warblers plus others.

Many thanks to all reporting their sightings: Robert Rommel, Kathy/Grant Greider, Diana Churchill, Carol Clemens, Natalie Hefter, Fran/Danny Baer, Cindy/Ken Groff, Nan Lloyd, Joanne McMemamin, Dottie Bass, Jane/Abie Hester, Jim Grove, Mark Hymer, Carlos Chacon, Doreen Cubie, Steve Calver, Russ Wigh, Jeff Kidd, Dick Phillips, Annette Hausman, Gail Borruso, Mary Ann Lueckel, Mary Alice Cruise and a number of visitors.



Ross's Goose

Rare species reported during the month were:

Yellow-headed Blackbird, Virginia Rail and Western Kingbird at Hutchinson Island, Ross's Goose at Savannah NWR and Savannah, Snow Goose in Savannah and Skidaway Island, Tundra Swan, King Rail and Grasshopper Sparrow at Savannah NWR, Short-tailed Hawk in Beaufort, Purple Sandpiper on Tybee Island, Brown Creeper at Skidaway Island, Clay-colored Sparrow at Savannah Spoils Site, Common Ground Dove at Harbor Island and White-crowned Sparrow on Hilton Head Island.

Many, many Uncommon species were reported during the month including: Canvasback, Redhead, Ruddy Duck, American Black and Mottled Ducks, Northern Pintail, Glossy Ibis, Peregrine Falcon, endangered Piping Plover, Red-throated Loon, irruptive Pine Siskin, Dark-eyed Junco,



Yellow headed Blackbird

To report a bird sighting that is Accidental, Rare, Uncommon, Out-Of-Season, First-Of-The-Year (FOTY) or First-Of-The-Season (FOTS) or a species that you consider to be a "good finds" e-mail: BirdingFriends@yahoo.com or call 843-432-2661. Please state your full name, the bird species sighted, date and location of your sighting and any other pertinent information.

Although it is Winter and colder it is a great time of year to find many unusual birds in our area. Please continue reporting your "good finds".

Membership Report for January 2016

We'd like to welcome the following new members who joined the Hilton Head Island Audubon Society since the December Ecobon was published.

Welcome to:

Josie Barry

Gail Borruso

Anne and Jim Bourne

Dr. James Hale

Mary Jo Maffie

Nancy Mitchell

Lucia and Christian Mueller

Richard Vallero

Jody Robinson

Bobby and Karen Ryals

Jan Smith

Edna and Frank Wilcher



Some interesting tidbits....Did you know that we have several members with very similar names? For example, Jody Robinson and Judy Robinson are two different ladies. Also, if you are looking for a gift for someone, a local membership makes a great gift! In fact, we recently have two new members who were gifted memberships. Interested? Just fill out a membership form for the recipient and turn it in with your check. On the form please indicate your name and the reason for the gift (retirement, birthday etc). We will indicate that information when we send the recipient their welcome email.

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Raptors, Sentinels of Ecosystem Health

From BirdWatcher's Digest, H. Bruce Rinker

When the fledgling United States adopted the bald eagle as its national symbol in 1782, as many as 50,000 nesting pairs lived in the lower 48 states. By 1963, just after the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, that number had plummeted to 417 nesting pairs, due to pesticides, mass shooting, habitat destruction, and contamination of their waterways and food sources. Today, however, we have more than 12,000 pairs of nesting bald eagles in the Lower 48 and another 40,000 individuals residing in Alaska, thanks to legislation, public awareness, and habitat protection. Close to 700 pairs are active in Maine alone. Eagles embody a lot of the American character: fierce loyalty, resiliency, and resourcefulness are among our common traits. Yet, we have much to learn from eagles and their environment.



Eagles symbolize many unknowns about the world around us. - despite the fact that nearly every child in America can recognize adult bald eagles on sight. Today, the most telling lesson seems to be the species' role as a sentinel of ecosystem health.

Sixty to ninety percent of a bald eagle's diet consists of fish. As an opportunistic feeder and scavenger it will also consume gulls, crows, jays, small mammals and even turtles, especially if fish are not readily available. Researchers have found that bald eagles in Maine tend to have higher mercury levels than eagles anywhere else in North America. Mercury is a powerful neurotoxin from industrial pollution that biomagnifies in rivers, wetlands, and other ecosystems, concentrating in ever-increasing levels with each step in the food pyramid. If an eagle's nest tree is littered predominately with the leftovers of birds and mammals rather than the remains of chain pickerel and other fish species, then that might be a visual clue about the level of contaminants in eagle blood and about shifts in food availability in the region.

Much of humanity's enamored view of eagles is sacramental: For Native Americans, they carry prayers to the Creator; in Judeo-Christian scripture, they represent hope and renewal. In a measurable sense, the bald eagle is the quintessential indicator of ecosystem health in North America.

Impressions from a Costa Rica Birding Trip

by Paul Weatherhead

Last October 2015, a handful of Hilton Head Island residents went on a 10 day eco-tour of Costa Rica sponsored by the Coastal Discovery Museum. The trip was led by Coastal Discovery Museum naturalist Carlos Chacon who was born & raised in Costa Rica.

Of particular interest to Hilton Head Island Audubon Society (HHIAS) members was the outstanding birding in Costa Rica. There are as many bird species in Costa Rica as in all of USA and Canada combined, yet the land mass of Costa Rica is less than two-thirds that of South Carolina. Such a large concentration of bird life in Costa Rica promised great birding opportunities; and the eco-tour exceeded expectations.

Some random impressions of the trip ...

- It was very gratifying to see birds in the wild in Costa Rica that we only see in aviaries in the States. Such birds include the Macaws, Toucans, Aracari, Parakeets, Quetzals, and Motmots.
- At one point on the trip I was dazzled by the array of rainbow colors at a bird feeding site in Sarapiquí, Costa Rica.
- Red – The male Scarlet-Rumped Tanager provides a bright red rump in contrast to the jet black wings, head and tummy.
- Orange – The Flame-Colored Tanager is brilliant orange.
- Yellow – The Great Kiskadee and Social Flycatcher provide striking yellow tummies and necks.
- Green – The female Green Honeycreeper was bright green, and the male is a stunning turquoise.
- Blue - The Blue-Gray Tanager shows a brightly colored pastel blue for both the male and female.
- Violet - The Red-Legged Honeycreeper shows a brightly colored purple over most of its body.
- My wife's favorite bird on Hilton Head Island is the Kingfisher. In South Carolina we only see the Belted Kingfisher, but there are 6 species in Costa Rica. We added the Green, Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers to our life list.
- People in South Carolina see mainly one type of Hummingbird – the Ruby-Throated. However in Costa Rica there are close to 50 species. Some of the Hummingbirds are as big as a Carolina Wren, and as colorful as a Painted Bunting. We saw 22 species on this trip.
- Hilton Head Island residents are quite familiar with the range of Herons and Egrets in our wetlands and beaches, but Costa Rica provided an opportunity to also see Tiger Herons and Jacanas.
- Birds weren't the only wildlife we saw on the trip. We saw caiman, 2-toed and 3-toed sloths, boa constrictors, green sea turtles, spider monkeys, white-faced monkeys, howler monkeys, Jesus Christ lizards (so named because they can run on top of the water), glass frogs, poison-dart frogs, bats, iguanas, and more. Remember, on this trip these were seen in the wild, not in zoos.
- I must admit I got a little teary-eyed staying up in the middle of the night to see a Green Sea Turtle laying its eggs, covering the hole, disguising the nest, and struggling through the black sand back to the water. Mama green sea turtle struggled so hard to give life to the 100 eggs she deposited in her nest, and it was kind of sad to know that there were so many predators waiting for the opportunity to feed on the sea turtles when they hatched. Statistics suggest that only one out of 100 will make it to adulthood. Fortunately, Costa Rica authorities have a strong commitment to the environment, and strictly control human access to the sea turtle nesting sites.
- Carlos Chacon is an outstanding naturalist, and provided excellent spotting and identification of birds and other wildlife. Not surprisingly he is also a great leader during the annual HHIAS Christmas Bird Count on Hilton Head Island.

I have provided the Ecobon newsletter editor a handful of the more interesting pictures for publication, however HHIAS members are welcome to visit the HHIAS and/or my personal Facebook site for more pictures from the trip.

As much wildlife that we saw, we only scratched the surface of what Costa Rica has to offer the eco-tourist. Kathryn and I hope to travel to Costa Rica again in the future. We highly recommend the trip to other HHIAS members. Keep an eye out for future Coastal Discovery Museum eco-tours being planned for the near future.





Founded in 1974, the Hilton Head Audubon Society uses 100% of local membership dues for programs and activities in our own area. Your local dues provide support for the following:

- Monthly programs
- Field Trips
- Citizen Science projects such as the Christmas Bird Count
- Audubon Newhall Preserve
- Education Outreach programs
- Various learning opportunities

We need your help to continue these activities. All of the above are possible through our LOCAL DUES! We do NOT receive national funds for any of our local programs. Please join the Hilton Head Island chapter of the Audubon Society and support these local programs. Remember.....100% of the chapter dues stay LOCAL!

For membership information, contact: enews@hiltonheadaudubon.org

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Please detach and mail or bring to the next meeting.

Local Membership: select either 1 year individual \$15 or 1 year family \$25

I wish to make an extra donation of _____(amount)

Last Name _____ First Name(s) _____

Address: _____ city _____ State _____ Zip _____

For LOCAL residents, please indicate your plantation/neighborhood such as Sea Pines, Indigo Run, Bluffton, Sun City etc. _____

Preferred phone: _____

Email: _____ (please print clearly!)

Can you help us with any of these activities on an as needed basis? Please check any of interest to you. Audubon Newhall Preserve Help with Field Trips Conservation Education Christmas Bird Count Publicity/Programs other _____

Please mail to: P.O. Box 6185 – Hilton Head Island, SC - 29938 (Rev. 2/2015)



Audubon

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JANUARY ~ FEBRUARY 2016 Calendar

JANUARY 2016 - Bird Seed Sale!

JANUARY

Thurs. Jan. 14 Monthly Meeting at Honey Horn..... 3:00 pm

FEBRUARY

Thurs. Feb. 4 Board Meeting at CCHH.....10:00 am

Thurs. Feb. 11 Monthly Meeting at Honey Horn..... 3:00 pm

Monthly meetings of the Hilton Head Island Audubon Society are regularly scheduled at 3:00 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month, September through May. Meetings are held at the Coastal Discovery Museum, 70 Honey Horn Drive. Members and guests welcome!



BEQUESTS

If you wish to honor a family member or friend with a memorial gift, or remember the Audubon Ne-whall Preserve or the Hilton Head Island Audubon Society in your will, your gift may be in the form of securities, cash, life insurance, real estate, or other property.

Contact your own estate planner or our Audubon Chapter at P.O. Box 6185, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina 29938.

Sharing your estate with Audubon not only reduces the taxes on your estate but will help protect birds, wildlife, and their habitat in the years to come.