



FEBRUARY 2017

No. 370

Ecobon

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

FEBRUARY PROGRAM by: *Kathy Greider, Program Director*

Thursday, February 9, 2017 3:00 pm

Location: Palmetto Electric Cooperative's Community Room on 111 Mathews Drive in Hilton Head
(entrance and parking in the rear)

Take a Photographic Journey to South Georgia Island, the Falklands & Antarctica with Charles Miner, of Hilton Head Island, as your guide

Charles moved to HHI from Ohio in 2007 where he worked for Cleveland Clinic as president of the community hospital system east. He also started the Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, UAE. Charles is an amateur birder. In 2015 he and his two sons and nephew (all good birders) joined him on a 19-day trip to South Georgia Island, the Falklands and Antarctica aboard a Russian research ship chartered by a Canadian adventure travel group, Oceans One. They were fortunate to have mostly good weather which allowed them to land at some spectacular penguin rookeries like Gold Harbor where 300,000 King Penguins were raising their brood. They were also escorted by a variety of Sea birds. His presentation is a compilation from several excellent photographers. Charles will have some advice for anyone contemplating this kind of trip.



FREE.

Open to the public
without registration.

VISITORS WELCOME!

For More Information Contact:
404.313.8208

Website: <http://www.hiltonheadaudubon.org>

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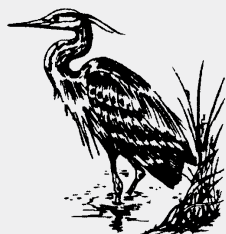
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Direct inquiries to P.O. Box 6185, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina 29938 or call one of the above officers or chairpersons.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *by Robert Rommel*

Correlation vs Causation

In the realm of science, while we often care about 'what' happened, it is usually the 'why' it happened that is most important. If we know the underlying reason 'why', then we possibly can change things in the future. In trying to determine the reason 'why', the single biggest pitfall we can fall into is mistaking correlation for causality. Causality is the underlying reason why something is happening. Correlation is merely something that is associated with the phenomenon - it may be causing the phenomenon but it also may have nothing to do with it.

An example may help to explain. In Europe during the Middle Ages, children of the wealthy had higher rates of mental illness than children of the poor. Perhaps you might think that's because the rich are just crazier. Attributing wealth as the reason behind mental illness is a case of mistaking correlation for causation. Next you might think that it's because the rich lived in towns and cities whereas the poor lived mostly in rural settings. Again it would be another case of simple correlation. What really was the cause was that the rich were buying pottery that had colorful glazes that were made with lead and their children were sometimes suffering from lead poisoning.

Pulling apart correlation from causation can be very difficult. In science the traditional approach is to carefully devise experiments so that the only thing that is changing is the single factor you suspect causes the phenomenon. But in many cases we can't do that. In medicine, for ethical reasons we obviously can't perform experiments on humans in most cases. In social issues there may be no way to only vary a single factor. Consequently one approach is just to collect a preponderance of data in hope that you will have enough cases where you can rule out correlating factors. It can get even more difficult when multiple factors can be causing a phenomenon.

The Christmas Bird Count is a great example of this. On our 2016 count, we saw fewer birds and fewer species than we have seen in most recent years. It wasn't much fewer, but it was definitely fewer. The first explanation might be that Hurricane Matthew was the culprit, but the data didn't seem to support this. Many of the species that we might expect to be most affected by a hurricane had either normal numbers or higher than normal numbers. We did have fewer people counting and this has an enormous impact on the number of birds that we see. I think that this is the predominant reason we saw fewer birds. This is why the CBC keeps track of the number of counters and person-hours of counting to correct for fluctuations in the number of counters. Fortunately, we will be able to test my hypothesis later. We can look at other CBCs in areas that the hurricane affected and if they had normal numbers of counters and saw normal numbers of birds then we'll know that the hurricane didn't have much of an effect.

There are other factors going on. We did have much lower numbers of Dunlin, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Yellow-rumped Warblers which are three of our most common birds and can dramatically skew the results. We also had very few ducks. The ducks has been a trend that we have been observing for a number of years now. It seems that because of warmer winters our ducks are arriving later than they used to. Again we can look at counts in other CBC circles to see if there are more ducks in the midatlantic states and fewer in South Carolina and Georgia.

This problem of correlation vs. causation is a huge one. Our instinct is to see a correlation and think we have found the culprit. This is a reason why scientists are slow to equivocally state the reason behind something. You can see on both sides of politics where people are constantly declaring causality when there is nothing more than evidence of correlation and sometimes barely even that. Hopefully this will open your eyes to being more careful to separate true causation from correlation in all facets of life. For the CBC, you might even make the point that because of Hurricane Matthew we had fewer people on Hilton Head to count, so perhaps even though it didn't affect the birds, the hurricane was an indirect cause of our low count numbers!

Robert

RECENT AREA BIRD SIGHTINGS

by Jack Colcolough

Winter birding and reporting has been very active during the last month in our area. Most of our Winter ducks, shorebirds and songbirds have arrived but not yet here in larger numbers as usual. We also had another successful Christmas Bird Count and include some of those birds here.



Bullock's Oriole

Black-bellied Whistling Duck, American Avocet, Rusty Blackbird, migrant Baltimore Oriole, Pine Siskin, Dark-eyed Junco, Long-billed Dowitcher, Greater Scaup, American White Pelican, White-winged Scoter, Peregrine Falcon, Nelson's, Saltmarsh and Seaside Sparrows, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Loggerhead Shrike, American Kestrel, Merlin, Stilt Sandpiper, American Pipit, Mottled and American Black Ducks, Glossy Ibis, Red-throated Loon, Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Eurasian-collared and Common Ground Doves, Sedge and House Wrens, Orange-crowned Warbler, migrant Yellow-throated and Blue-headed Vireos, Hairy Woodpecker, Field and Vesper Sparrows, White-breasted Nuthatch and Golden-crowned Kinglet.

Arriving Winter birds and "Good Finds" reported this month include: Red Knot, Wilson's Snipe, Northern Gannet, Bonaparte's Gull, Sora, many Bald Eagles, Red-headed Woodpecker, American Goldfinch, Red-breasted Merganser, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, both Teals, Northern Shoveller, both Scaups, Bufflehead, Gadwall, many Hooded Mergansers, American Coot, Horned Grebe and others.

Many thanks to all reporting your bird sightings: Jane/Abe Hester, Dottie Bass, Carol Clemens, Fran/Denny Baer, Joanne McMenamin, Cindy/Ken Groff, Shelia/Roger Johnson, Dorothy Mosior, Kathy/Grant Greiger, Mark Hyner, Doreen Cubie, Miho Kinnas, Diana Churchill, Steve Calver, Buddy Campbell, Mary Alice Tartler, Dick Phillips, Kay Grinnell, Ellen/Tom Lebeouf, Bob Speare, all our CBC birders and many visitors.



Redhead Duck

Rare species reported this past month include: Bullock's Oriole in Hilton Head Plantation, Sandhill Crane at Savannah Coastal Refuge, Ross's and Snow Geese, Short-eared Owl, White-crowned Sparrow and Virginia and King Rails all at Savannah NWR and Roseate Spoonbill on Tybee Island.

Out-of-season species reported were: Painted Bunting, Summer Tanager, migrant Northern Waterthrush, Cattle Egret and a good number of 'over-wintering' Ruby-throated Hummingbirds.

Many Uncommon species reported this last month include: Common Goldeneye, Redhead (duck), Northern Pintail, Ruddy Duck, endangered Piping Plover, American Bittern, Reddish Egret,



Common Goldeneye

To report a bird sighting that is Accidental, Rare, Out-Of-Season, Uncommon, 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 other pertinent information. Keep up the good work of reporting your "Good Find" finds!

It's a great time to go birding ... and find some of our interesting and unusual Winter ducks, shorebirds and songbirds!

2016 Christmas Bird Count

by Susan Murphy, CBC Coordinator



We kicked off the Christmas Bird Count with our meeting on December 8th. Robert Rommel gave an informative presentation, challenging the audience of over 100 enthusiastic birders to make increasingly difficult species identifications.

We had pleasant weather for the count on December 15, 2016. Temperatures reached the low 60's and skies were clear. Our count of species and the total number of birds were lower than in many years past. So, pleasant weather for us means the birds may be more dispersed and harder to find. In addition, what impact did Hurricane Matthew in October and ongoing beach renourishment have?

As compared to our 10-year averages, we are low on total numbers and species this year. Our total birds counted were 25,353, with 131 species. Our biggest numbers were Semipalmated Plovers and Double-crested Cormorants. On species, we are missing some we have normally seen, such as Eastern Meadowlark, Painted Bunting, Seaside and Saltmarsh Sparrows, Marsh and House Wrens, Eurasian Collared Dove, Red-throated Loon, Green-Winged Teal and Mallard. Our numbers were lower than usual for Red-breasted Merganser and Blue-winged Teal. The biggest change this year was that we did not have the thousands of Red-winged Blackbirds that we normally see. Also, Yellow-rumped Warbler numbers were about a third of our average.

A nice find was a total of eight Baltimore Orioles, the most we've had in 10 years, and reported in four different areas. I am still seeing some at my feeders for the past month and maybe you have seen them too. Another nice surprise was an increase in Piping Plovers, even with the disruptions on the beach. Other rare finds were a Reddish Egret, a Broad-winged Hawk and a small flock of Pine Siskins. Some photos of these and other birds on count day accompany this article.

Our number of participants was down this year, with a total of 253. Last year, we had 296, which was the 4th highest number in all of the 2,505 count circles in the Western Hemisphere! We actually had 62 feeder watchers and 204 field observers, but our total is reduced by the number of feeder watchers who also did field work. So, our total is 204 in the field and 49 at feeders. Even with 32 fewer field observers this year, our field party number has remained at 70 or 71 for the past four years.

I hope many of you will take a look at the 10-Year History report on the HHIAS website and do your own review. You'll see that some species counts are very consistent over the 10 years too! The bird numbers are now finalized at our level, and once we submit our report, it will be a while before we get feedback from the Regional Editor.

Click on Ten Year CBC History for the data:
<http://www.hiltonheadaudubon.org/audubon-christmas-bird-count>

Thank you to all who participated and to the Area Captains who spend a lot of time and effort organizing and tabulating to make this count happen! Thanks to our panel, Robert Rommel, Jack Colcolough and Pauline Jones, who met with each Captain to discuss and review the reports.

We hope you will all join us again in mid-December for the 2017 count!

Baltimore Oriole Photo by Dick Phillips





American Oystercatchers
Photo by Carol Clemens



Black-crowned Night Heron
Photo by Cindy Wilson

Christmas Bird Count Sightings



Piping Plovers in the midst of beach renourishment Photo by Fran Baer



Recovery Progress at Newhall

NOTES FROM THE NEWHALL PRESERVE and Conservation Committee

by Jack Greenshields

Audubon Newhall Preserve Update

The Audubon Newhall Preserve continues its slow recovery from the damage incurred from Hurricane Matthew and remains closed to the general public.

A timber sales agreement has been executed to salvage damaged trees and conduct selective thinning of slash and pond pines on the property. This process was started and much progress has been made. However, the water table is high and soil conditions not dry enough to continue timbering efforts at this time. It is hoped that by the end of February salvage timbering operations can resume. Larger diameter pines are cut to a specified length for export to China while the remaining wood is shipped to Georgia for the manufacture of pulp for the paper making industry.

Upon completion of timbering operations the front entry gate project led by Tom Hennessey can be implemented. If all goes well, the Audubon Newhall Preserve will reopen to the public in April.

Any questions or comments can be directed to Jack Greenshields at jackg308@gmail.com.



Pinckney Island NWR Accessibility Program

Due to a generous grant from the Community Foundation of the Lowcountry, the non-profit Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges and the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) has expanded programs and accessibility services for visitors.

The Friends are currently offering 1.5 hour tours of Pinckney Island using a multiseat electric cart on Tuesdays. Binoculars are available for loan and water is provided on warm days. Unfortunately there are no bathroom facilities available. There is no charge for this tour but donations are appreciated.

Please refer to the Friends website for the schedule of programs and to make reservations. The website is www.coastalrefuges.org.

For those that are able and prefer to walk, the Coastal Discovery Museum conducts excellent docent led programs. Additional information may be obtained from Jack Greenshields at jackg308@gmail.com.

February Field Trip

Saturday, February 4 at 8:00 am
Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, Laurel Hill Drive
Meeting Spot: The Refuge entrance
(or Neo's to carpool)
Limit: 20
Leader: Cindy Groff

We will be setting up a carpool at the refuge to try and limit the number of cars going through the refuge. Anyone wishing to carpool over to the refuge should meet at Neo's Restaurant in the parking lot at Moss Creek Village by 7:15 am. Please contact Bob Speare to sign up at bobspeare@gmail.com or 843-715-9772.



Hog Island Audubon Camp
SEABIRD RESTORATION PROGRAM

Register Today!
<http://hogisland.audubon.org>
843-340-8673

Membership Report for February 2017

Hi fellow birders!

Please welcome the following new members who have joined us since our last Ecobon was published.



Carolyn Schmidt
Deborah Stange

Do you know we have a number of members who are part-time residents of the area? Here are where some of our members live when not in the area: Canada (2), Georgia, Indiana, Maryland (2), New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio (2), Pennsylvania, and Virginia. We appreciate the support of our part-time residents! Remember that dues are based on a rolling calendar. For example, if you joined or renewed in March 2016, you are a paid member through March 2017. You will get an email reminder during the quarter you should renew. Have a question about your membership? Have you changed your email? Please contact Carol clemens318@roadrunner.com or Fran at seatwo@roadrunner.com



Check out our new HH birding app!
<https://www.hiltonheadislandbirdingtrail.org/>
and the State Birding app:
<https://www.southcarolinabirdingtrail.org/>
You can go to the App store and download them for free or use them on the above web sites.



Audubon

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

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Hilton Head Island, South Carolina 29938

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FEBRUARY ~ MARCH 2017 Calendar

FEBRUARY CALENDAR 2017

Thurs. Feb. 2 Board Meeting at CCHH.....10:00 am
Sat. Feb. 2 Field Trip8:00 am
Thurs. Feb. 9 Monthly Meeting at Palmetto Electric3:00 pm

MARCH CALENDAR 2017

Thurs. Mar. 2 Board Meeting at CCHH10:00 am
Thurs. Mar. 9 Monthly Meeting at Palmetto Electric.....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 Newhall 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.