

January 2011
No. 315

ECOBON



Newsletter of the Hilton Head Island Audubon Society
Audubon Refuge Keepers

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Bill Nicol

January kicks off our Annual Bird Seed Sale under the direction of Ed Nash. The proceeds from this sale support the purchase of Audubon Adventures which are used by our local schools as part of their environmental education program. The Audubon Adventures Program shows how the birds fit in the environment and how our conduct can impact their survival. We are all aware of the various attacks on the environment through out the country and the world. Educating our children on the importance of the environment and the impact of the most dangerous animal, man, can have on either harming or protecting it is very important. The more resources we have, the more students we can reach and the better educated they will be. The January program will focus on all aspects of our education efforts including the Great Backyard Bird Count and what you can do to help. Please do what you can.

Joan and I wish you and yours a healthy and prosperous New Year. See you at the meeting and bring a friend.



JANUARY PROGRAM

by Marianne Currie and Mary Jane Major

Wednesday, December 8, 2010, 7:00 p.m. at the Seabrook Center

As we often say, Audubon is “for the birds.” Those who join the organization are committed to the preservation and nurturing of birds, and the protection of their environment. To sustain that effort, it is critical that future generations appreciate the challenges our changing environment poses, and the impacts it will have on all wildlife. Fortunately, Audubon chapters across the country have available to them a sophisticated natural science program, *Audubon Adventures*, which is produced by our national organization to help teachers tell the story of the birds, wildlife and the environment. The program includes newsmagazines for the students and sophisticated lesson plans for the teachers.

Since 1984 our HHIAS chapter has made the commitment to provide this excellent material to students and teachers. Over sixteen thousand students in Beaufort County have received Audubon’s award winning program. In addition, we have taken our enthusiasm and love for the birds, and our knowledge about them, “on the road” just before Backyard Bird Count, giving short “bird fact and id information” programs for classes whose teachers have used *Audubon Adventures* and have asked us to come. This month we will provide a firsthand account of these educational efforts. You will have a chance to see the materials the teachers receive, and hear from four of us who are involved in the program – two teachers, a writer, and an engineer. We look forward to sharing this wonderful program with you.

FIELD TRIPS *by Kay Hodnett*

On Monday, January 24, we will visit Donnelly Wildlife Management Area. Donnelly and adjacent Bear Island WMA contain richly rewarding habitat ranging from fresh-water impoundments (once rice fields) to tidal marshes, maritime woodland, and open fields. Last year we saw tundra swans and white pelicans at Bear Island and whooping cranes at Donnelly. Bear Island itself will be closed to the public during January, but we can see a lot from the main road bordering Bear Island.

Our guide will be Marvin Bouknight, the naturalist at Oldfield and author of a recently published book on birding and nature viewing in the Low Country. Marvin's charge will be \$5 per person (with a minimum of ten people), which will not go much beyond covering his costs.

Those wishing to carpool will meet at Moss Creek Village, departing from there at 7:30 AM and meeting up at the Donnelly office parking lot and kiosk. (See directions below). We should finish birding about 12:30 and be back to Hilton Head no later than 2 PM. Bundle up, take a snack, water, and binoculars (scopes will also be useful). Stop at a restroom enroute to Donnelly.

To sign up for the trip call Kay Hodnett (after December 28) at 342-7485 or cell 338-1445 or email sallyportk@gmail.com.

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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.



WHAT DOES WILDERNESS REALLY MEAN?

“Untrammelled by man.”

Maybe that’s the phrase from the Wilderness Act that most fully embodies the vision that Congress had in mind when it designated wilderness under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act – ANILCA – passed 30 years ago this year.

Certainly “wilderness” is almost synonymous with Alaska – and for good reason. The Refuge System alone manages about 18.6 million acres of Congressionally designated wilderness in 21 areas within 10 national wildlife refuges in Alaska. Ninety percent of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s total wilderness acreage is in Alaska.

As a former manager of Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, which has more than 1.3 million acres of wilderness, I know personally and professionally what wilderness means to Americans who enjoy it. “I just like being away from the white noise of town,” said one resident as he recalled recently why he travels to Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, upgraded to a wildlife refuge from its designation as a “moose range” with passage of ANICLA.

Longtime Soldotna, AK, resident Guy Bruni camps in the wilderness once the cold weather has persuaded less hardy folk to move inside. “It’s more difficult to access,” he says, “but you get a different experience.” Says another Alaskan: “The stars are much more vibrant out there. I like being closer to nature and wildlife.” They’re lucky: They live near an Alaskan national wildlife refuge that has wilderness.

But what does wilderness designation in Alaska mean for the millions who live in highly urbanized America – people who can neither afford hefty airfares nor time away from the job to get to Alaska? What does it mean to people in sunny Florida – where they have their own wilderness land – that more than 8 million acres are designated as the Mollie Beattie Wilderness in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the largest refuge in the system that is celebrating its 50th anniversary in the same year that ANICLA turns 30? What does it do for most Americans who may never see Alaska?

The very concept of wilderness embodies freedom. The thought of wilderness allows all of us to dream, whether the wilderness is just outside our front doors or thousands of miles away. The designation of wilderness on an Alaska national wildlife refuge means our grandchildren might yet have a chance to see polar bears, caribou, musk oxen, tundra and boreal forests – and a whole range of wildlife – thrive for new generations.

The purpose of wilderness designation is to secure an enduring resource, to protect the character of special lands. Because of the sweeping provisions of ANILCA, the Fish and Wildlife Service has dedicated a whole chapter in its management manual to stewardship of Alaska refuge wilderness areas. Thousands who have worked for the Service over past decades have dedicated their professional careers to that cause – for the betterment of not only wildlife and its habitat but of all Americans.

*“The very concept of wilderness embodies freedom.
The thought of wilderness allows all of us to dream.”*



NOTES FROM THE NEWHALL PRESERVE

by Joan Shulman

Thank you to Fran and Denny Baer for their service as Trail Monitors in December. We appreciate their faithfulness as regular volunteers.

Individuals and families from a variety of states have been signing the visitor's book and picking up the trail guides. I receive about one or two calls a week from visitors who want to know more about the Preserve. We hope that the bitter cold won't keep visitors away. Many who walk the trails do drop donations into the Money Post but not at the rate common a couple of years ago.

This time of year, I always look forward to seeing the various holly trees along the pond trail. The bright red berries against the dark green leaves emphasize the holiday seasonal colors for me.

The pine needle covered trails can lead you to quiet spots where you can escape the busyness of everyday life and observe the effect of the changing light on the trees and the pond. If you visit toward the end of January, check the red maple by the pond to see if the colorful buds are starting to show.

We need Trail Monitors in February and March. Please call me at 842-9246 to volunteer.

May the beauty of the Preserve help you start off the New Year on a positive note.

NEW PIPING PLOVER BEACH AREA AT PORT ROYAL

by Ed Nash

The Port Royal beach has a newly-defined area next to Fish Haul Creek for the protection of the migratory Piping Plovers. These tiny birds enjoy resting and refueling here as they go to and from the Bahamas each year. This area has been documented and recognized by the US Fish and Wildlife Service who provided and installed the 9 new signs identifying this specific area. This is a culmination of a 3 year study by our Audubon Chapter and the Natural Resources Dept. of the Town of Hilton Head and the Port Royal Landowners Association. The PRLA also reminds all folks each year to enjoy watching all birds without disturbing their activities and to keep dogs on a leash when near birds on the beach.



RECENT AREA BIRD SIGHTINGS

by Jack Colcolough

Cold winter weather has boomed into our area and most of the winter ducks, shorebirds and songbirds have arrived and are being sighted.

Our HHI Audubon has just completed its best ever annual Christmas Bird Count with a record 165 bird species and 36,014 birds found by 152 bird counters. A few highlights of this CBC were: accidental migrant Whooping Crane, rare migrant Sandhill Crane, rare Brown Creeper, a flock of uncommon American White Pelicans, eight winter Hummingbirds, many flocks of uncommon Ruddy Ducks, out-of-season rare Nashville Warbler and Summer Tanager (whopping 12) and forty Bald Eagles. Complete results of all birds found on our 2010 CBC will be published in the Ecobon next month.

Another accidental migrant, the Cave Swallow, was reported on both Pinckney and Skidaway Islands.

Rare sightings reported this month include: Virginia Rail on Pinckney Island NWR, Red-Breasted Nuthatch in Hilton Head Plantation, White-crowned Sparrow in Port Royal Plantation and Purple Sandpiper on Tybee Island.



Uncommon sightings reported were: Pine Siskin, Orange-crowned and Prairie Warblers, Nelson's, Vesper and Field Sparrows, Hairy Woodpecker, Sedge Wren, Canvasback, Loggerhead Shrike, White-breasted Nuthatch, Dark-eyed Junco, Lesser and Greater Black-backed Gulls, American Kestrel and Piping Plover. Other good FOTS finds included: Red Knots, Northern Gannets, American Goldfinch, Yellow-throated Warbler and Wilson's Snipe. Also two separate out-of-season Painted Buntings were reported.

Thanks to all those reporting their sightings: Roger Johnson, Miriam Waterhouse, Barry Lowes, Dottie Bass, Diana Churchill, Richard Shulman, Fran Baer, Rita Kernan, Susan Thomas, Carol Clemens, Kathy Long, Carlos Chacon, Amy Tressler, several visitors as well as the many CBC birders.

To report a rare, uncommon, first-of-the-year or season or out-of-season bird sighting, please e-mail: Birding-Friends@yahoo.com or call 715-0540. Please state your name, date and location of your sighting and any appropriate comments.

BIRD SEED SALE STARTS JANUARY 2, 2011

The new bird seed sale starts January 2 and runs thru Saturday February 12, 2011. We feature the same prices as last year (NO increases) and the Best bird seed available.

Every one can place their order NOW and then pick up their bags of fresh seed at ANY time when needed. To get this service you must use the new order form which is attached to the January Ecobon printed copy. This form is also available directly at Wild Birds Unlimited, and by the HHI Audubon Web home page.

This bird seed sales event is the primary funding source for the Audubon Adventures school program that reaches elementary and middle students throughout Beaufort County.



Photo by George H. Harrison ©

CHICKADEES ARE COLD WEATHER MACHINES

by George H. Harrison

Though any bird that survives winter in the North amazes those of us that depend on furnaces and warm blankets, the black-capped chickadee may be the most incredible of all winter survivors.

“Black-capped Chickadees have a wonderful assortment of adaptations for the winter,” said biologist Susan M. Smith, who has studied the black-capped chickadee as long as anyone. “Carefully hidden food items, dense winter coats, specially selected winter roost cavities, and perhaps most remarkable of all, the ability to go into nightly hypothermia, thus conserving large amounts of energy, greatly increases the chances of survival,” she said. The ability to go into regulated hypothermia actually lowers the chickadee’s body temperature in a controlled manner, down to about 12 or 15 degrees (F.) below their normal daytime temperature of 108 degrees (F.). This remarkable adaptation allows the bird to conserve almost 25 percent of its hourly metabolic expenditure when the outside temperature is at freezing. The lower the outside temperature, the more energy conserved, Smith found.

“Chickadees are not the suburban wimps that some people think they are, said wildlife ecologist Margaret Clark Brittingham. For three winters in Wisconsin, she kept track of 576 black-capped chickadees. She found that every winter morning chickadees had to replace the fat they used overnight. As the small birds struggled against starvation and stinging cold, they earned her respect, too. “They are tough survivors that live close to the edge of life,” she observed.

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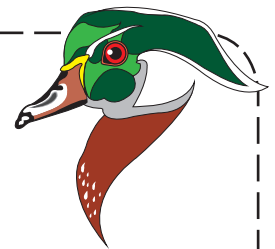
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Rusty Blackbird Hotspot Blitz

Audubon South Carolina, in conjunction with The Rusty Blackbird Technical Working Group, Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon invite you to participate in a citizen science project, The Rusty Blackbird Hotspot Blitz.

In 2009 and 2010, birders scoured the countryside for wintering Rusty Blackbirds to increase understanding of their distribution and find important local concentrations (hotspots). Much was learned from the last two year's efforts. Already, the information gained is being used to implement research and conservation efforts! However, there is still more to learn. The Rusty Blackbird Hotspot Blitz will be repeated for the last time in 2011 to locate more hotspots and determine how stable known hotspots are from year to year. Don't miss your chance to contribute to this monumental survey effort for this declining species! Mark your calendar now!

The Rusty Blackbird has been steeply declining with estimates of an 85-99% population drop over the past 40 years. The cause for this alarming decline is not known and the increasingly sparse and patchy winter distribution of the Rusty Blackbird makes it challenging to learn more about distribution, abundance, and ecology as a basis for conservation efforts. Collaborating with the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's and National Audubon Society's e-Bird project, the Rusty Blackbird Technical Working Group (RBTWG) needs your help to find local, but predictable wintering concentrations of Rusty Blackbirds by participating in the 2011 Rusty Blackbird Hotspot Blitz. The Blitz will occur, **January 29th – February 13th, 2011**, throughout the Rusty Blackbird winter range in over 20 midwestern and southeastern states.

Participants will simply be asked to visit locations where they have previously sighted or would expect to encounter Rusty Blackbirds and submit their observations via e-Bird.

Results from the past year's Blitzes, **instructions and information on identification**, habitat preferences, etc., are available on the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's Rusty Blackbird Blitz website:

http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/research/rusty_blackbird/blitz.cfm

For more information on identifying Rusty Blackbirds, visit http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Rusty_Blackbird/id.

For songs and call go to http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Rusty_Blackbird/sounds


Song consists of two or three notes, followed by a higher, rising note, like the creak of rusty hinges. Call note is a harsh "chek."

If you are not connected with an Audubon Chapter or a bird club in SC, please contact Ann Shahid (ashahid@audubon.org or 843-462-2150) for how you can participate.

Any time you see Rusty Blackbirds during the winter, please post your sightings at <http://ebird.org/>



Female (l) Male (r)



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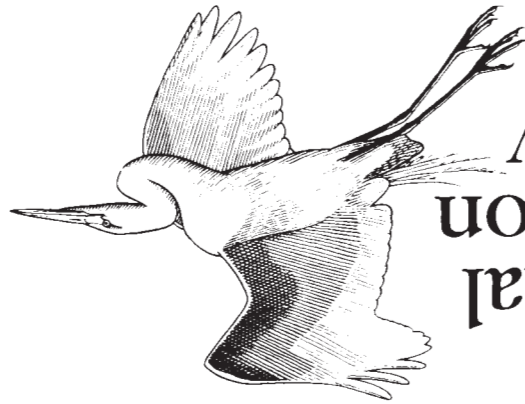
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January ~ February 2011 Calendar

JANUARY

- Thurs. Jan. 6 **Board Meeting** 1:30 pm
at the Jarvis Room, Old Coastal Discovery Museum
- Thurs. Jan. 13 **Monthly Meeting** 3:00 pm
at Honey Horn in the Sea Island Room
- Mon. Jan. 24 **Field Trip** to Donnelly Wildlife area 7:30 am
Donnelly

FEBRUARY

- Thurs. Feb. 3 **Board Meeting** 1:30 pm
at the Jarvis Room, Old Coastal Discovery Museum
- Thurs. Feb. 10 **Monthly Meeting** 3:00 pm
at Honey Horn in the Sea Island Room
- Fri. Feb. 18-21 **Great Backyard Bird Count** Weekend

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, at the Sea Island Room at Honey Horn. Members and guests welcome!



BEQUESTS

If you wish to honor a family member or friend with a memorial gift, or remember the Audubon N-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.