

THE LESSER SQUAWK



BACKYARD BIRDER By BRUCE KRUCKE

There are a lot more "Where are the birds?" calls than the "Guess what I've got!" variety lately. Only two people have seen any goldfinches and that was only a few briefly. One person had a junco and I've had one occasionally. We need another rotten winter up North! I know my bird population has been affected by the five new cats next door. I have just installed a sonic cat and dog repeller aimed at the feeder area. The birds don't notice it at all. We'll see how the cats feel about it.

A nice note from Walt Swanson on Indigo Point, West of the Ashley, bemoans the cats and the blackbird hordes. Crows have eaten all the dogwood berries which usually are the favorites of cedar waxwings. Walt says that the crows don't even scare away well. His neighborhood has boat-tail grackles eating from the dog food bowls and the grackles bring the pellets over to Walt's bird bath to soak and soften.

Posters in Summerville have great numbers of house finches. Ash Wellings reports on December 9, a female rufous songbird that has been lingering since early October in a meadow. On that same day I had a painted bunting. Haven't seen her since. We did have five hooded mergansers on the creek. Those males are really spectacular! Scott Hall saw a peregrine falcon from his Lamboll Street home downtown and you may have noticed a letter to the editor of *The Post and Courier* in which Arthur Ravenel reports at least two peregrine falcons wintering on the Cooper River bridges.

In case you plan any trips in the near future, here are the most popular birding spots in the U.S. Maybe you can convince your non-birding travel companion that near one of these places would be interesting. In order of popularity: Southeast Arizona, Rio Grande Valley, Everglades, Texas coast, Cape May, Point Pelee, Big Bend Nat'l Park, Point Reyes, Forsythe (formerly Brigantine) Refuge in NJ, High Island in Texas, Hawk Mountain, and Cheyenne Bottoms, Kansas. We should start pushing the good birding places we have here. The economic impact of birding tourists is apparently awesome. For example, Cape May in 1993 figured that the 100,000 birders that came from 40 states and 10 foreign countries spent more than ten million dollars. Too bad the Navy Base isn't a bird sanctuary!

Continue to see articles recommending against mixed bird seed. Cheap filler seed that birds don't eat is a very inefficient use of your money. The corn attracts blackbirds and the milo and red millet attracts rodents in the night. (Sounds like a song --- scoobie, scoobie doo!) To discourage rats and mice, keep your bird seed in

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metal cans with tight lids and clean up the ground under the feeders regularly. And feed sunflower seed and white millet -- all of which is eaten. We once had a feeder on a deck that was over the pen where the dog was in the daytime so the birds couldn't get the fallen seed. The dog was in the house at night and we didn't realize the rats were cleaning up the seed. You should have seen the luxurious coats on the rats when we caught them! Basically, you can't do better than black oil sunflower seed in hanging feeders and millet on the ground or platforms. The extras would be hanging suet and niger in winter. If mixed seed is on the ground it attracts unwanted species and most ground feeders can't handle sunflower seed. If mixed seed is in a hanging feeder, the birds who want the sunflower seed just have to waste time and energy throwing out the fillers and the millet to get to it. Cardinals are one of the few species who feed on perches and the ground and which eat both millet and sunflower seeds. Of course, if you can afford it, feed hulled sunflower bits to everyone. They all love it and there's no mess left over.

Only owls give a hoot anyway. Good evening grosbeak! ... Bruce.

Part two: Can you imagine how hard it is to write your ninetieth column when there aren't even any birds around to watch? This is certainly the weakest feeder watching winter in the twenty years we've lived here. If it weren't for cardinals and chipping sparrows we wouldn't have to buy any seed at all. And all the correspondence that I've gotten seems to say the same thing. I've seen one goldfinch, a few people have house finches, and that's it. I know the Yankees are enjoying this winter, especially compared to last winter, but we sure aren't. One reader called to report hundreds of white-throated sparrows on a wire, but further inquiries make us feel they were probably something else -- so large a group and so far off the ground. There have also been reports of large flocks of robins, but not even many of those. I took some Middleton guides on a bird walk on the plantation and we saw about 25 species where we normally spot 50 to 75.

Well, not to worry -- it's not a silent spring sort of thing, just no problems finding food where the birds already are. So, on that note, I'll leave you with two things to ponder and hopefully write me a thought on: Where do the three or four hundred black and turkey vultures that roost on the radio tower on route 165, south of Summerville find enough road kill to eat -- and if they don't, what else do they eat? And, how do feather follicles know to put out one color feather in the spring and a duller one in the fall? Wouldn't it be fun if our hair did the same thing?

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will stay all day. Your editor recommends the fried oysters and crabs at The Inlet Kitchen, Murrell's Inlet, on the way home. For more trip information you may call David Huff at 886-6911.

CNHS FEBRUARY MEETING
Quincy's Steakhouse
North Charleston

Thursday, February 16, 7:00 PM
Ecology of the Sea Turtle

CNHS GOES NORTH. Our February program will be held at the Quincy's Steakhouse, 2320 Ashley Phosphate Road, just off I-26 West. The Society, in an effort to take our programs to the membership is having its evening programs in four different locations around to city. This program on Sea Turtles will be our third of the year and will be held in the North Area. This is a chance for our Summerville, Goose Creek, and North Charleston members to demonstrate their interest in our programs. Please try to attend.

The program this month will be on the ecology of the Sea Turtle, especially the Loggerhead Sea Turtle. Elizabeth King, who has made literally hundreds of these presentations, will be our speaker. Ms King is on staff at USC-Beaufort Coastal Zone Education Center and lives in nearby Bluffton. Her presentation is reported by some CNHS Board members to be of the highest quality. We hope you can be there

Quincy's Family Steakhouse, 2320 Ashley Phosphate Road, North Charleston.

6:00 Dinner You select, you buy--we all visit.

7:00 Program Ms Kings presentation lasts about one hour.



Charleston Natural History Society
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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

CNHS FIELD TRIP

Winter Birding at Huntington Beach
Sunday, February 12

Well, yes, to follow Bruce Krucke's lament, it has so far been a rather dispiriting winter for birding. Still, there are some fancy birds out there in the deep woods, on managed impoundments, and at a few classic wintering sites along the beach. One favorite CNHS birding venue, combining all three habitats, is Hunting Beach State Park. Here there are fresh and salt water flats for winter waders and ducks; tidal creeks and marshes; thick pine/oak maritime forest; miles of dune scrub and surf; boardwalks; even a foot path atop the stone jetty running a half mile to sea.

Check your copy of the *CNHS Birding Guide to the South Carolina Lowcountry* for an impressive list of probable winter sightings at this park. Meanwhile, your editor has recently hatched this theory to account for Huntington's remarkable sightings list: Flying low along the beach one can see that the first hospitable bird habitat in S.C., that is from the N.C. border at Little River, through the Grand Strand of Myrtle Beach and all the other developed beaches, Huntington Park is the first place that would attract a bird migrating down the coast.

Whether or not you agree with that theory, meet for the drive to Huntington at our usual northbound rendezvous, Gregorie's Texaco, Hwy 17 N & Hwy 41, north of Mount Pleasant. 8:00 AM. Bring a lunch, many

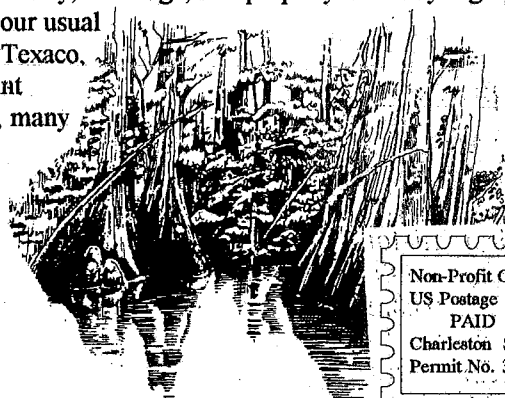
CNHS FIELD TRIP

Flood Stage at the McAlhany Preserve
Saturday, February 25

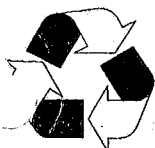
Every winter CNHS members look forward to the flooding of the Edisto River. At our 350 acre McAlhany Nature Preserve, flooding refills the ox-bow lake, refreshes the cypress swamp, clears the understory of mixed hardwood stands, and raises the water table so that our cabin water pump works better. Of course, we're all going up on the 25th just to see the beauty of a black water river over its banks in an entirely wild and natural area.

The cabin is on a high bank of the old river channel (the circa 1690 channel), what is now an ox-bow lake. The cabin never floods and makes a perfect base for exploring the beautiful riverine landscape in all directions. There are lovely paths and sandy old two rut roads to explore.

If you need to convoy, meet in the parking lot of Aviation Movie Theater at 8:30 AM. If you know the way, meet at the property. Gate will be open by 10:00 AM. Bring your lunch. The higher your rubber boots are the more adventurous you can be, but even in full flood stage, this property is mostly high ground.



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