

The Charleston Audubon Society – a SC chapter of the National Audubon Society since 1970, founded as the Charleston Natural History Society in 1905, and serving Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties – is a nonprofit environmental organization that actively promotes awareness, appreciation and conservation of the natural environment through educational programs, field trips, conservation projects, sponsored research and social activities.

## Rummage Sale Planned For Saturday, April 23

The Charleston Audubon Society will hold our third annual fundraising rummage sale, Saturday, April 23. Money raised through the sale of goods and refreshments will support our general fund for conservation and education programs, community grants and this newsletter.

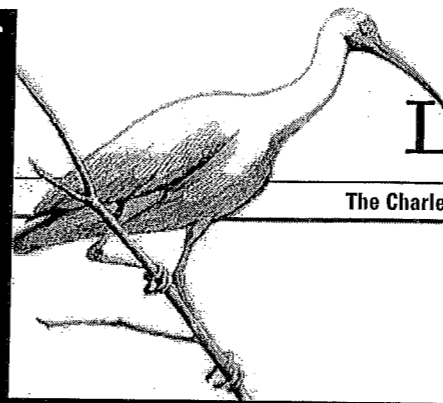
We're seeking items to sell, so start thinking about what contributions you might be able to make—working appliances and electronics, furniture, tools, clean clothes, crafts, books, etc. Clothes on hangers are much easier to display than those that come folded or in a bag. It's also helpful if you have the opportunity to mark goods with prices before the sale.

We're also looking for folding tables we can use on the day of the sale, and volunteers to help staff the event and to help us set-up on the 22nd: contact Cornelia if you're able to help. Last year we were able to have items dropped-off a day before the sale and we're hoping to do that again this time.

There will be more details in the March *Lesser Squawk*. Until then, start gathering all that clutter you want out of the house and direct your ideas, thoughts or questions to organizer Cornelia Carrier: 577-6437. (She's out of town in early February, so please contact her after the 15th.)

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Charleston Audubon Society



# THE Lesser Squawk

The Charleston Natural History Society, Celebrating 100 Years, 1905-2005

February 2005 • Vol. LI • No. 5

## Help Promote Our Society at SEWE

After a long hiatus, our Society has decided to participate again at this year's Southeastern Wildlife Exposition (February 18-20, 2005). CNHS will share a booth with Audubon SC in the Conservation Tent on Marion Square, and we will be offering information on our activities

(lectures, field trips, conservation, stewardship of the McAlhany and Wannamaker properties, etc.) and are hoping to increase awareness of and build membership in the Society. In order to do this we need your help!

We need volunteers to answer questions and hand out literature at our table for half day shifts (about 4 hours, either 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. or 2 to 6 p.m.). If you've attended a lecture that you really enjoyed, or been on a memorable field trip, share that experience with your Charleston neighbors (and yes, a few folks from out of town, too)! Contact Andy by phone at 795-6934 or email at parula23@aol.com if you think you'd like to volunteer. Thanks!



## Lecture Series at County Library

Our lecture series is being held in the second floor auditorium of the main branch of the Charleston County Library, 68 Calhoun Street in Charleston. Lectures are free, and open to all Audubon members, guests and to the general public. We gather at 6:30 p.m. for a reception and speakers will begin their programs at 7:00 p.m.

## Song and the Secret Lives of Sparrows

Wednesday, February 9, 2005

Why do birds sing? How does song help them decide where to live, with whom to mate? How do individual differences in behavior (what, in people, we would call their "personalities") affect their lives?

College of Charleston assistant professor Melissa Hughes has been studying a banded population of Song Sparrows for 7 years. She knows the birds as individuals: what songs they sing, how long they have lived, and their successes and failures as mates and parents. This sparrow soap opera reveals surprising complexity in the lives of these little brown birds.



## Red Wolves, Southern Wolves

Wednesday, March 9, 2005

Join Patricia Lynch, a park ranger for Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, for a presentation on red wolves. Nearly extinct, this southern species of wolf is one of the most endangered mammals in the world. (It is considered extinct in the wild except for "experimental populations" in TN and NC.) Patricia will explain how wolf pups from Cape Romain are helping to expand the free-roaming population of red wolves at North Carolina's Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge.

Using a new technique called "fostering," biologists are taking captive-bred red wolf pups and placing them in wild dens at a very young age. The pups are accepted by their foster parents and are raised within the pack, which gives them the survival skills needed to mature and reproduce. Last year, two female pups born at Cape Romain were taken from their den on Bull Island and successfully transferred to a wild den at Alligator River NWR.

## President's Message

We plan to have a table at the Southeastern Wildlife Exposition from February 18-20, 2005. This is a good opportunity for the public to learn more about our organization. If you are available for a few hours to help at the table, please get in touch with me or Andy Harrison.

- We are beginning to put together a list of officers and committee member for next year. Please consider serving in some capacity. We need people to help with programs, publicity, newsletter, membership and outings, etc. Please consider volunteering, these positions only require a few hours of your time per month.

- Rudy Mancke will speak at our April meeting. Please note that the meeting will be on Thursday, April 14 at the library. Please plan on coming and help to celebrate our 100th anniversary.

- The McAlhany Nature Sanctuary will be open on Sunday February 6th. Please join us for a hike along the Edisto River. The sanctuary will open at 9:30 AM and the walk should start around 11:00. Directions: Take I-26, Hwy 78 or Hwy 61 to US 15. Go to the small town of Grover, which is 10 miles south of St George. Take Wire Rd. west about 8 miles until you see the sign on the left. Questions? Call me.

- Don't forget to check us out online too: reports, updates and calendar information are available thanks to Bob Chin's efforts: <http://cnhsaudubon.homestead.com>

Tom Snowden PH: 843.875.3445  
EMAIL: toms@myexcel.com

## UPCOMING EVENTS – details in this issue

Feb. 6	McAlhany Open House	p. 2
Feb. 9	Lecture: <i>Secret Lives of Sparrows</i>	p. 1
Feb. 18-20	Wildlife Expo: <i>Volunteer!</i>	p. 1
Feb. 18-21	Great Backyard Bird Count	p. 2
March 9	Lecture: <i>Red Wolves</i>	p. 1
April 14	Thursday Lecture: Rudy Mancke	p. 2
April 23	Chapter Rummage Sale	p. 4

## How to Contact Your Elected Officials

Whether your concerns are about something you read here or about any other issue you think is important, it's up to you to make sure your representatives in government what you think. Take the time to contact their offices – voice your opinions – learn what legislation might mean for you, your family and your community.

Email addresses for Charleston's County Council are online: go to [www.charlestoncounty.org](http://www.charlestoncounty.org) and follow the links to Elected Officials, County Council and then Contacts. Information for Berkeley and Dorchester Counties can be found at [www.co.berkeley.sc.us](http://www.co.berkeley.sc.us) and [www.dorchestercounty.net](http://www.dorchestercounty.net).

For House and Senate Members go to: [www.scstatehouse.net](http://www.scstatehouse.net) and follow the links to House or Senate and Email Addresses. The mailing address for all House Members is: P.O. Box 11867, Columbia SC 29211; for all Senate Members it is: P.O. Box 142, Columbia SC 29202.

## New Members, Renewals, Gift Memberships

For only \$20\* you get one-year subscriptions to *Audubon* magazine and *The Lesser Squawk*, and all the benefits of local and National Audubon Society membership. Renew for just \$35/year. \*\$15 for Sr. Citizens and Students



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Checks payable to National Audubon Society. Include our chapter code on your check: U-51 7XCH



## MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

### Upcoming Programs, Outings & Lowcountry Events

#### ■ Sunday, Feb. 6 – McAlhany Open House

The McAlhany preserve is located in upper Dorchester County on the Edisto River. On the first Sunday of each month we usually hold an Open House for members and the public. This Sunday we're going to take a short hike along the Edisto. The gates will open at 9:30 a.m. and the hike should start around 11 a.m. Dress for the weather, bring your fieldguides, binoculars – snacks and drinks are a good idea.

**Directions to McAlhany:** Take Hwy. 61, Hwy. 78 or I-26 to Hwy 15. Go to the small town of Grover which is about 10 miles south of St. George. Turn west on Wire Road, cross over I-95 and continue for several miles and look for our signs on the left (the main sign is set-back somewhat, so look carefully.) More detailed directions to McAlhany are on our website, or contact Tom at 875-3445.

## Bird Counts Serve Science And Answer Our Questions

*Something to Crow About?* – We've heard a lot about West Nile virus ever since it marched across the continent after an outbreak hit New York City in 1999. Although humans can get the illness, it's much more devastating to some bird species, including American Crows. However, severe outbreaks tend to be confined to localized areas, so the effects are scattershot.

For example, Christmas Bird Count data show crows counted dropped by as much as 90 percent in some areas of New York City but parts of Long Island just to the east showed no discernible declines. Overall in New York State, Great Backyard Bird Count data show that sightings of American Crows were at a five-year low in 2004. American Crows also showed striking declines in the Chicago area following an outbreak of West Nile virus there in 2002, according to surveys by Audubon-Chicago Region and the Bird Conservation Network. Statewide in Illinois, Great Backyard Bird Count data came in at a five-year low in 2004.

In South Carolina crow reports were down almost 20 percent from 2003 to 2004. In other states, crow numbers were up, but there were fewer reports continentwide. Usually crows rank fourth or fifth as the most commonly spotted species during the GBBC, but last year they dropped all the way down to tenth. Will numbers rebound this year? Are the drops occurring primarily in areas that have been hit by West Nile virus? Only years of data collected by bird

watchers can help us determine what is happening to crow populations.

#### Will Carolina Wrens Bounce Back?

Carolina Wrens are most often found in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, where they are consistently among the top 10 most commonly reported species during the Great Backyard Bird Count. The species makes the top 20 in at least 8 other eastern states. The 2004 GBBC found Carolina Wren populations dropped dramatically, with 50 percent fewer reports than in 2003. In some states the drop was even larger: In Massachusetts the number of checklists reporting the species dropped from 252 to 99. Why? Carolina Wrens do not migrate south in winter, and yet they are sensitive to extreme cold and severe weather. Under such conditions, birds at the northern edge of their range die off in large numbers and that causes the species range to shift. Eventually, populations increase enough so that the range will move northward again. What will this year's Great Backyard Bird Count data tell us about the distribution of Carolina Wrens? What will their numbers be like?

#### ■ 2005 Backyard Bird Count – Feb. 18-21

On the weekend of February 18–21, people across the North American are encouraged to count the birds in their backyards and report them over the Internet, as part of the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), one of the world's largest volunteer efforts of its kind. In addition to its value as a research study, the GBBC allows people of all ages and backgrounds to celebrate birds and provide vital information about North America's birds.

This year's theme, "North America's Great Backyard," was chosen as a way to celebrate the beauty of birds found across the continent. People are encouraged to enjoy the birds around them by going out into the "Great Backyard" during any or all of the count days and keeping track of the bird species they see.

"Taking part in the Great Backyard Bird Count takes as little or as much time as participants wish," says Audubon's director of citizen science Paul Green. "The important thing is to just take part, count for the birds, and enjoy North America's Great Backyard."

Instructions for participating can be found at [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc). There's no fee or registration. Those who would like to participate but who aren't online can try their local library, and many *Wild Birds Unlimited* store owners will be accepting observations made by their customers.

## THE LESSER SQUAWK

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## Keeping a "Secret" Safe – Making Our Voices Heard

by Conservation Chair Andy Harrison

Many of you probably followed the story of Pale Male and Lola, the red-tailed hawks whose nest high atop the 927 Fifth Avenue co-op building fronting New York's Central Park (where Pale Male and his mates had fledged more than 20 chicks over the past 11 years) was removed early in December and then restored a few weeks later after a storm of protest. This was a high-profile case that attracted worldwide media attention, but it symbolizes the kind of action that Norm Brunswig advocated in the latest Audubon South Carolina newsletter when he wrote, "Today, more than ever, people must take the step from just admiring and watching birds to speaking out for the conservation of these amazing animals."

In a January 22 article in *The Post and Courier* ("Roosting ibises at pond pay the price of progress"), reporter Bo Peterson described recent construction work at a drainage pond near Citadel Mall that could have severe repercussions for hundreds of white ibis and other birds that have used the site as a roost for many years. Although some considered the roost a neighborhood "secret," nearby residents (and local birders) appreciated the ibis and often came over at dusk to watch them flood into the trees surrounding the pond. The construction work involves raising the levees around the pond and installing drainage pipe for a new store, and it has required the removal of a fence and some trees (and other dense vegetation) that provided a buffer between the pond and the adjacent movie theater parking lot.

Chapter members Ron Hyder and Merle Shepard observed hundreds of birds return to the roost site on the evening of January 22. I visited the site with Ron and Merle around 5 p.m. on January 23 (we were joined by a few other folks who knew about the roost), and over the next hour we watched about 400 birds fly in (mostly snowy egrets and double-crested cormorants, but at least 100 ibis also sought refuge in the trees). This was an impressive sight, but Ron and Merle estimated that about 1000 birds had arrived the previous night. The disturbance caused by increased exposure to automobile headlights and noise – not to mention fewer roost trees – may force the birds to seek a new place to spend the night.

White ibis numbers have dropped significantly in SC over the past five years (from 20,000 nesting pairs to around 2000). Roost sites such as the one near Citadel Mall represent a precious commodity that is becoming more and more scarce as development in the Lowcountry continues at a rapid pace. Mall manager John Ryan, who watched the birds himself, admitted that they weren't considered when the work was planned. In contrast to the removal of the NYC hawk nest, this construction was obviously not intended to harm the roosting ibis, only to serve the needs of the mall. However, it's our responsibility to encourage Mr. Ryan and others to recognize the value of the roost to these birds.

By planting trees and restoring something of a buffer between the pond and the parking lot, mall management could help repair the damage to the roost site and win some points with the local environmental community (as well as good general publicity). On January 24 I called the mall office and spoke with Lee Burnett, Marketing Director at Citadel Mall, about the situation. I asked her whether or not

another fence would be erected after the work was completed (yes) and if management would consider restoring a vegetation buffer on top of the levee (it had not been planned, but Ms. Burnett was receptive to the idea). I plan to follow up on this conversation in a week or two, and I urge CNHS chapter members and others who love birds to call in support of restoring the buffer (Citadel Mall Management office: 766-8321). As Norm pointed out, it's our job to speak out for "those who can only sing," or in the case of ibis, croak.

## ANWR Fight Continues

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) is among the last pristine wilderness areas in the U.S. and the only conservation unit that protects the complete spectrum of arctic ecosystems in North America. The proposed drilling area is small relative to the full size of the refuge, but it is one of the most biologically productive areas in ANWR and a center of wildlife activity. By raising fuel economy standards or encouraging consumers to purchase gas-electric hybrid vehicles, we could save much more oil than can possibly be extracted from this unspoiled gem.

With a stronger Republican majority in the U.S. Senate, it is likely that those who support the opening of ANWR to drilling for oil will be successful when such a proposal comes to a vote early next year – and it will probably be attached to an omnibus budget bill that will be impossible to filibuster. A pro-drilling bill has already passed in the House of Representatives. Despite the odds, we still need to let our Senators know that a majority of Americans oppose this plan.

Please call or email our two Senators from SC and let them know you oppose such short-sighted energy policy. Contact information for Lindsey Graham is available at [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov), while to reach newly-elected Jim DeMint you should access [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov).

## Winter Hummingbirds

For years, ornithologists believed ruby-throated hummingbirds were the only hummers found east of the Mississippi River. But Gary Phillips and other bird banders have discovered that a number of western species—including rufous, black-chinned, and calliope hummingbirds—regularly spend the winter in South Carolina and other southeastern states.

If you leave your hummingbird feeder up during the winter, there's a chance you will attract one of these rarities. And you will also be helping researchers learn more about these birds. Last April, Gary spoke to our chapter and he is continuing his study this year and asks you to get in touch with him if you see a hummer in your yard anytime before March 1. With your permission, he will come to your house and band the bird.

Gary recommends hanging your hummingbird feeder where you can see it easily. Be sure to keep it clean. (When the weather is cold, the sugar water should be changed every two weeks.) If you notice the nectar level going down, watch the feeder early in the morning or late in the day to see if you have a hummer.

You can reach Gary at (843) 833-8748 or email him at [carolinensis@yahoo.com](mailto:carolinensis@yahoo.com) or [gary\\_m\\_phillips@fws.gov](mailto:gary_m_phillips@fws.gov).