

THE LESSER SQUAWK

Newsletter of the
Charleston Natural
History Society

Affiliated with the
National Audubon
Society

charlestonnaturalhistorysociety.org



The 124th Christmas Bird Count (Space Limited!)

January 5th, 2024

Come join us for the 124th annual Christmas Bird Count. Each year, during a designated three weeks, chapters across the country participate in a winter bird survey. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this long-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations, and to help guide conservation action. The Charleston Natural History Society's count is centered near the town of Awendaw, consisting of a fifteen mile diameter circle, that is subdivided into twelve areas and led by area leaders. Our circle compiler, Jennifer Tyrrell, brings together those efforts for a comprehensive report that can then be compared with previous efforts both locally and nationally. Sign up is required, as space is limited, and may be done directly with Jennifer Tyrrell: Jennifer.Tyrrell@audubon.org



LECTURE: The new Angel Oak Preserve presented by Samantha Siegel of the Lowcountry Land Trust

January 10th, 2024, 6pm

Join us for a presentation by our Guest Lecturer, Samantha Siegel of the Lowcountry Land Trust, on the journey leading to the creation of the new Angel Oak Preserve which is slated for a 2025 ground breaking. Samantha Siegel is the Angel Oak Preserve Director at Lowcountry Land Trust. In 2008, she founded the organization "Save the Angel Oak" when the beloved, local landmark became threatened by a 600-unit development, ultimately leading a historic grassroots campaign to protect the tree in the heart of Johns Island. In 2013, Samantha teamed up with Lowcountry Land Trust, raising millions to purchase and protect the land once slated for development. Prior to joining the Lowcountry Land Trust team full-time in 2023, she worked for The Sierra Club and Oceana.

Calendar of Events

Friday January 5th, 2024

124th Christmas Bird Count

The Charleston Natural History Society's count is centered near the town of Awendaw, consisting of a fifteen mile diameter circle that is subdivided into twelve areas. Our circle compiler, Jennifer Tyrrell, brings together those efforts for a comprehensive report that can then be compared with previous efforts both locally and nationally.

Wednesday January 10th, 2024
6pm-8pm

Lecture: "The new Angel Oak Preserve"

Join us for a presentation by our Guest Lecturer, Samantha Siegel of the Lowcountry Land Trust, on the journey leading to the creation of the new Angel Oak Preserve which is slated for a 2025 ground breaking.

Saturday January 27th, 2024
9:30am-4:30pm

Bull's Island Field Trip

Waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds, raptors, and songbirds galore! We will be treated to a great diversity of species as we explore the Bull's Island as well as on the ferry rides there and back. Be prepared for 6 miles or more of hiking and a wonderful cornucopia of wintering birds.

FIELD TRIP: Bull's Island

January 27th, 2024, 9:30am-4:30pm

On Saturday January 27, 2024, David McLean will lead our group on another winter birding tour of Bulls Island, with transportation provided by Coastal Expeditions on their regularly scheduled ferry (\$55 per person). We've been treated to a great variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, raptors and songbirds, both on the island itself and on the 30-minute ferry rides there and back. A few years ago, a Tufted Duck, a rare Eurasian visitor, made appearances. Last year our group observed a bonanza of waterfowl on the Jack's Creek Impoundment. Be prepared for a lot of walking! The trip will likely involve a hike of 6 miles or more, requiring moderate to strenuous exertion and not to be taken lightly. The ferry will depart Garriss Landing at 10:00 AM (CEX strongly recommends arriving at least 30 minutes early) and drop us off at the dock on Bulls Island. The ferry will then pick us up again at the dock for a 3:30 PM departure. NOTE: you'll need to reserve a spot on the ferry ahead of time by following this link: <https://www.coastalexpeditions.com/product/bulls-island-ferry/>. The service is popular, and spaces may fill up! Please also register with David prior to January 24 at dcmclean@gmail.com. To keep our group manageable, this trip is limited to 20 people.



FIELD TRIP: Bear Island and Donnelley WMAs

February 11th, 2024, 7am-4pm

On Sunday February 11, 2024, Andy Harrison will lead us on our annual birding tour of the Bear Island and Donnelley WMAs. Managed by the SC Department of Natural Resources, these two properties in the ACE Basin have a combined area of some 20,000 acres and include a wide range of habitats. During the winter season they host numerous waterfowl and wading birds, in addition to various raptors and many wintering songbird species. We usually try to visit these WMAs soon after Bear Island reopens to the public, since by that time some ducks will already be starting to head north. There are often many Tundra Swans, American Avocets and American White Pelicans still on the water when we arrive at Mary's House Pond! This trip is limited to 20 participants. This will be an all-day trip so bring water, snacks and a lunch in addition to your birding gear, including a scope if you have one. Restrooms and picnic areas are limited. Please register with Andy prior to February 11 at parula23@aol.com or by phone at 843 327-3546.

Calendar of Events

February, TBD

Lecture: Birding 101

Details to come!

Sunday February 11th, 2024

7:00am – 4pm

**Bear Island and Donnelley WMAs
Field Trip**

Led by Andy Harrison, we will be exploring two properties of the the ACE Basin before many duck species head North: Bear Island and Donnelley WMAs.

Saturday March 9th, 2024

6:45am – 4pm

**Sandy Beach Waterfowl
Management Area Field Trip**

We return to the wetlands on the North shore of Lake Moultrie to see the usual suspects and perhaps some early Spring migrants. A good bit of walking is expected, and there are no bathrooms, so come prepared!

Wednesday April 10th, 2024

6pm-8pm

**Lecture: "Night Wanderers: The
Obscure Life of Bats"**

Join Lydia Moore, Research and Education Manager for the Palmetto Bluff Conservancy, as she discusses the endearing, beneficial, and inadequately represented side of bats. Learn why bats are essential components of ecosystems, why it is crucial that we study them, and about ongoing research at the Bluff.

FIELD TRIP: Sandy Beach Waterfowl Management Area

Saturday, March 9th, 2024 6:45am – 4pm

We make a return visit to the Sandy Beach Waterfowl Management Area. This 600-acre property on the north shore of Lake Moultrie is leased from Santee Cooper by the SC Department of Natural Resources for hunting purposes, but after the waterfowl season ends it's available for hiking and birding from early February through October. The area is dominated by wetlands (300 acres), but forest and plenty of lake cove habitat are also present. We can expect to see ducks, wading birds, raptors and songbirds – hopefully including some early spring migrants. A few years ago, we observed a leucistic Wild Turkey in a flock of turkeys crossing a large field along the entrance road leading to Sandy Beach.

We will do a fair amount of walking on this trip, and no restrooms or other facilities are present on the site. Bring food and water, your birding gear (including a scope if you have one) and dress for the weather. Afterwards we will likely visit the tomb of Francis Marion, the Swamp Fox. It's an interesting historical site located not far from Sandy Beach, and we've seen and heard good birds (including Northern Bobwhite) there before too!

The trip is limited to 20 participants. We'll meet at 6:45 AM in the small parking lot next to the First Citizens Bank in front of the Summerville Walmart, just off Hwy 17-A and not far from its intersection with I-26. As on many past outings to Sandy Beach, Bob and Monica Bradley have graciously offered to host us for a quick bite to eat and some birding from their deck (which overlooks a pond connected to the lake) before we head over to the WMA. If you plan to attend, please register with Andy Harrison prior to March 6 (so that the Bradleys know how much food to prepare) at parula23@aol.com or 843 327-3546.



LECTURE: Night Wanderers: The Obscure Life of Bats

Wednesday, April 10th, 2024

Bats are often portrayed as vile creatures that should be feared- a portrayal that fosters revulsion and misunderstanding. Lydia Moore, Research and Education Manager for the Palmetto Bluff Conservancy, will discuss the endearing, beneficial, and inadequately represented side of bats. Join us and learn why bats are essential components of ecosystems, why it is crucial that we study them, and about ongoing research at the Bluff. Lydia Moore became captivated by conservation and ecology as a child growing up next to a saltwater marsh in Charleston. She pursued this passion at Oberlin College where she double majored in biology and environmental studies. After spending several years in New Mexico, she returned to school and earned her master's degree at Auburn University studying bats in the coastal plain of South Carolina. Lydia is a community ecologist and has spent the last ten years studying bats in the coastal plains of South Carolina and Alabama



CNHS Board Introductions

This is the first Lesser Squawk in a while, so let's get to know the Board again!

President: Jennifer Tyrell, MS

Jennifer has resided in the Charleston area since 2007 when she arrived here to attend the Masters of Environmental Studies Graduate Program at the College of Charleston. Her background includes wildlife rehabilitation with years of work at Wild Bird Centers and Wild Birds Unlimited, and the Center for Birds of Prey. She came to our chapter in 2008 as a citizen science chair. Expanding that she became our Christmas Count Compiler, Vice President, and eventually President. Jennifer works full time for Audubon South Carolina as the Engagement Manager and Master Bird Bander. She loves all things nature, science, native plants, and bird related sharing her enthusiasm with her two children and husband.

Outings Chair: Andy Harrison

Past chapter President, Andy is taking lead on field trips and outings. Andy has a long history with this chapter that included his Father, a past prominent birder in the Charleston community who was also involved with the chapter. When Andy isn't out birding or organizing our Spring Count and Bird-a-thon, he's working as a Hydrology Technician with the USDA Forest Service.

Website: Michael Harold, MS

Michael is a 2019 transplant to Johns Island from the Detroit, Michigan area. His interest in birding began in the late 1970's, under the tutelage of Dr. Orin Gelderloos at the University of Michigan – Dearborn, Environmental Interpretive Center (EIC), and included participation in the docent programs, Christmas Bird Counts, and a brief volunteer banding stint at the Rouge River Bird Observatory (EIC).

Vice President: Emily Davis

Emily comes to us from the Great Lakes region and she is an avid birder and artist. She is drawn to people interested in birds, wildlife, and how we integrate into the web of all living things. Emily is the Center Manager at one of the most interesting birding hotspots, Beidler Forest Audubon Center and Sanctuary.

Treasurer: Whitney Schillerstrom

Whitney grew up in Mount Pleasant South Carolina and works at First Capital Bank in Downtown Charleston. She comes from a family of bankers working in the industry herself for over 10 years. Her interests include birding with her husband, Coastal Program Manager for Audubon South Carolina, Nolan Schillerstrom, yoga, hiking, climbing, and playing with their dog Piper.

McAlhany Preserve: Joe Cockrell

Joe is spearheading our activity at McAlhany Preserve, from building renovations to long-leaf pine habitat restoration and establishing new nature trails. Retired from the Fish and Wildlife Service, Joe has decades of experience in habitat management, restoration, and forestry. His extensive set of skills and experience have made McAlhany Nature Preserve the flourishing sanctuary it is today!

Lesser Squawk Editor: Hannah Martin

Hannah is a current student at the University of Virginia pursuing a bachelor's degree in conservation biology and music. She is a Charleston native who first gained a true fascination with birds in an ecoacoustics class, and when she isn't on the field with the Cavalier Marching Band she spends her time trying to convince her friends that birding is cool, actually.

From your Webmaster--An Introduction

As recent transplants to Charleston, my wife and I drifted to behaviors that were both comforting and familiar. In my case, it was a renewal of my passion for birding by simply going for a walk in an unknown area. It was impossible for me not to start searching for the birds hidden in the landscape. My mind drifted on my way home; surely there would be groups here that would feed my re-stoked need to be a birder. Once home, I found "you," and for the past five years I have had the pleasure of getting to know many of you. Your welcoming nature has inspired me to step out as I once did and to wander throughout the Lowcountry. I have had the opportunity to lead official Charleston Natural History Society (CHNS) events, Christmas Bird Count sections, and I am the data coordinator for the new Botany Bay Hawk Watch that was formed as an official count site in 2021. I have also been allowed the pleasure of being your new CNHS webmaster and, with a great deal of guidance from Stephen Bleazard, your former webmaster, we now have a new site at charlestonnaturalhistorysociety.org.

Putting together a new website led me to a project that Stephen had started. He had begun to catalog our out of production newsletter, "The Lesser Squawk." The limited availability of those editions hindered him in his endeavor, but he was able to locate, scan, and post over three dozen editions. With the unfortunate passing of our former President, Dr. Paul Nolan, came a treasure trove of documents passed along to him from previous presidents and those collected during his own tenure, that revealed hundreds of editions of the Lesser Squawk. Once sorted, it was found that over two hundred editions, dating back to the early 1960s, had been stored by him. I have scanned and attached them to the CNHS webpage in a continuance of Stephen's project. Those issues were found to be in a range of preservation from pristine to barely legible but all were placed on the website for us to revisit <https://charlestonnaturalhistorysociety.org/the-lesser-squawk/>.

The Lesser Squawk archival project, in turn, brought us a new editor for the newsletter. Hannah Martin, a Charleston native and University of Virginia student, came forward with the desire to resurrect it. Overcoming several obstacles, she produced this Winter / Spring 2024 edition of the Lesser Squawk. I would like to thank her for her efforts encouraging our membership to submit articles for future newsletter consideration. We anticipate a biannual publication with submissions being sent to cnhs1905@att.net no later than January the 1st for Winter / Spring editions, or June the 1st for all new Summer / Fall editions.

Michael Harhold - CNHS Webmaster

A Look Back - Reprinted from the July 1963 Lesser Squawk:

Editorial Change

Once again we have a change of editors and this time one who will need all the help she can get. There is plenty of competent editorial talent among our member but spare time seems to be the missing ingredient, and of that ingredient the present incumbent has plenty.

Under Robert's editorship the Lesser Squawk has been a well-rounded paper. Edwin Blitch and a Ted Beckett carried on the good work in spite of the pressure of their very busy lives. Now I take over and will do my best to keep up their find standard. As I belong to the "hunt and peck" school of typists and my knowledge of punctuation consists of Ana indiscriminate use of the commas, complete ignorance as to the semi-colon, and combined with a fondness for the split infinitive and dangling participle, I hope you will bear with me.

May I remind you, as has been said in the *past, taht (sp) this is your paper and the editor is supposed only to assemble and put into print items that are received from the members. Send all your bits of interesting observations of birds, beasts and things that crawl before the deadline, the 20th of each month, and they will be received with joy.

*

Wilhelmina M. Coleman, Editor.

past, taht this is your paper

Editor's Note: This still applies! I would love to see contributions to LS come in from the community and learn about what is fascinating everyone. - **Hannah**

Saying Hello to the Lowcountry Stargazers

Since this is our first contribution to your newsletter, a little introduction may be required. We are the Lowcountry Stargazers, an amateur astronomy club from Charleston and the surrounding area. We number about 95 members who enjoy learning about and sharing with others the wonders of the South Carolina night sky. We do public outreach every Wednesday evening at Brittlebank Park (185 Lockwood Drive-Charleston, SC) and the first Saturday of each month at John's Island Country Park (2662 Mullet Hall Road-John's Island, SC). We typically spend those evenings sharing our telescopes and the views to be had with anyone with an interest in the night sky.

The upcoming months are really the very best for observing as sunset is early and the dry atmosphere makes for excellent seeing conditions. Currently the planet Jupiter dominates the sky in early evening with its 4 Moons easily observed. January-April, the constellation of Orion is probably the easiest to identify with its 3 stars forming the belt of the Hunter. Below that belt is the Orion Nebula, a fabulous area of new star formation. Visible with binoculars or any telescope. The deep sky objects are best viewed from our John's Island County Park site but the Moon and planets are readily visible from the city along with a parade of satellites such as the International Space Station.

We love to point out the constellations of the seasons along with a bit of mythology connected to each. Prominent stars such as Polaris the North Star, Sirius the Dog Star, the twins of Gemini are all features of the winter sky. Anyone interested in attending our public events can find us on our Facebook page (Lowcountry Stargazers). All events are weather dependent; so a check of our Facebook page is always a good idea.

Thank you,
Cale Shipman
Lowcountry Stargazers

American Flamingos in South Carolina!

By Craig Watson

Photos by Pamela Ford

Many of us were anticipating finding storm blown birds from Hurricane Idalia, but we never expected to find American Flamingos. Idalia came across South Carolina as a strong tropical storm and as the weather cleared, guides with Coastal Expeditions (CE) of Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, made the voyage out to Bull's Island on Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge to assess the damage to the property regarding the plausibility of continuing nature tours on the island. Coastal Expeditions is the major vendor for an assortment of guided trips to the island, with ferry or private boat access the only way onto the island. While out assessing the damage, Annie Owen and Captain Richard Stuhr of CE saw two pink birds in Summerhouse Pond. Expecting to find Roseate Spoonbills a closer look revealed that they were not spoonbills, but two American Flamingos! Word went out late on September 1 and on September 2 a ferry full of birders, including Pamela Ford, who was on that first ferry trip (while I was in Tennessee!) and who took the accompanying photo of two American Flamingos was on their way to Bulls Island to look for the Flamingos. They were not disappointed! There were two present in the same area as the previous day. I was on my way to Tennessee for a family reunion when the news broke, and I was not able to take the first ferry out. However, I did reserve a ferry for the following Tuesday from Tennessee for when I returned, hoping that the flamingos would still be there. Many birders had already been out to see the flamingos, and by the time I went to Bull's Island, there was only one bird left. Would there be one left for us birders on this trip? Coastal Expeditions loaded people into the truck and tour trailer and off we went in search of the remaining flamingo. On our first stop it wasn't apparent that the flamingo was still present but sharp-eyed Pamela Ford spotted the bird on the far side of the pond! What a relief! We observed the bird for a while from the far side and then moved to a more strategic point. Coastal Expeditions was taking great care not to spook the remaining bird and parked the truck and trailer several hundred yards from the bird and led birders to within 150-200 yards using surrounding vegetation as cover. As of December 16, the single flamingo continued on Summerhouse Pond, although the bird has not been reported since the coastal storm of December 17. Coastal Expeditions continues to run the ferry to Bulls Island on the winter schedule, and unless one travels by personal boat to the island, reports of the bird will only be known on the day of the trip. This single Flamingo has been dubbed the name Jimmy, in honor of the recent passing of the great Jimmy Buffet. The whereabouts of the second flamingo is not known, and we can only hope that these flamingos gain enough nutrition and find their way back home, like the Yucatan Peninsula.



Many birders have been out looking for American Flamingos in other parts of South Carolina. There have been several observations. One is photo of a single American Flamingo that someone took over a duck hunting pond, and that observation remains anonymous, yet the photo is unmistakable. Another observation occurred at Botany Bay Plantation WMA in Charleston County on Edisto Island. Botany Bay hosts a volunteer hawk watch and during that hawk watch, the observers were amazed to observe 6-8 American Flamingos fly between their observation area and the ocean just above treetop level.

It is not known where these birds are now or where they came from. This observation is documented in an eBird report for Botany Bay. Most recently, a single American Flamingo was observed at DeBordieu, a gated community in Georgetown County. That bird has been documented in eBird, but left shortly after these observations. The following day and in subsequent days, a single American Flamingo was videoed on the Santee Coastal Reserve south of DeBordieu, and there was one report of two birds being present. Other than the video, no other documentation or reports indicate the flamingo is still present at the Santee Coastal Reserve.



As observations of American Flamingos began showing up throughout the eastern United States, I began researching how many American Flamingos had been observed in North and South Carolina previous to this current event. In eBird, there are four (4) observations recorded, three in North Carolina and one in South Carolina. All (4) eBird records show all observations with the escapee/exotic designation. This designation is an artifact of how eBird is set to show the presence of American Flamingos, and the eBird reviewer for South Carolina indicates the single observation in 2018 is a wild bird. This same scenario is likely for American Flamingo reports in North Carolina in eBird. In searching American Flamingo records in The Chat and Briefs for the Files, there are at least 11 reports from North and South Carolina, none of which have made it into the eBird data. Some of the first well documented observations for the Carolinas were in 1977 with a flock of 5 observed near Morris Island in Charleston County. All observations have been coastal in nature and generally in the summer months, although there are two winter records from North Carolina. There are some references to earlier observations from the Carolinas in other literature, but there is not much detail and represent only 2-3 additional occurrences. (South Carolina Bird Life, Alexander Sprunt, Jr., E. Burnham Chamberlain, 1949, 1970) (Status and Distribution of South Carolina Birds, William Post and Sidney A. Gauthreaux, Charleston Museum, 1989) (Birds of North Carolina, North Carolina Department of Agriculture, State Museum, 1959, Revised Edition).

Charlottesville's Swarms - An Anecdote From The Editor

During the academic year, I live in a house with several of my friends. In the fall, every night at dusk, the sky in our neighborhood specifically becomes full of flocks of starlings, along with some robins and cowbirds (who I can only assume felt left out). I don't know if they count as murmurations, but it sure is mesmerizing. We don't know why it only happens over our neighborhood--my friends who live only 10 minutes away had no clue what I was talking about when I told them about this nightly occurrence--but it has become a yearly harbinger of fall for us. My parents were slightly concerned when I came home for Thanksgiving break with a car covered in, well, excrement, but I told them that there's no use washing it until fall is over; it'll just get covered again tomorrow.



This is only a fraction of the amount of birds that will fly over our house in an evening.