

# New Hope Audubon Society Newsletter

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<http://www.newhopeaudubon.org>



## NHAS Officers for 2013-2014

The New Hope Audubon Society has elected the following slate of officers for the 2013-2014 year. They were voted in at the May Membership Meeting.

- President - Norm Budnitz
- Vice President - Robert "Bo" Howes
- Secretary - Pat Reid
- Treasurer - Jill Paul
- Director - Robin Moran
- Director - John Kent
- Director - Mark Kosiewski

## Nesting Materials—Birds Use the Darnedest Things

By

**Norm Budnitz**

Sticks and twigs, hair and fur, spit and spider silk—these are just a few of the strange and wonderful things birds use when building their nests. And while birds have certainly always used natural materials, many species seem to be willing to use human-made materials as well, as long as they meet the appropriate criteria of strength, flexibility, and texture—for example, thread and fishing line, plastic wrap and aluminum foil.

Small, fragile eggs are helped by a soft surface to rest on so that they don't break, and many birds provide bits of hair, thread, or fur, if they can find them. But the key, of course, is where to find such bits of softness. My friend Darlene was sitting at her kitchen table recently playing with her camera. Her dog, Jodie, was lying out in the grass, basking in the sun. Suddenly, a Tufted Titmouse flew down and landed



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on Jodie's back. Darlene, fully in the moment, started shooting a video. Jodie, completely unperturbed, simply lay there in the sun. The titmouse, on a mission, began plucking fur. Hard to believe? Here's a snapshot from the video. Need more proof, here's the video—only a few seconds, but it's all there: <http://youtu.be/WzlhIR-8QFs>



A number of years ago I was monitoring the construction and use of a huge nest by a pair of Bald Eagles near Jordan Lake. I was sitting in my car, using it as a blind, with a spotting scope mounted on the driver's side window. There wasn't much action, so I was looking through the scope at the nest, marveling at the interweaving of large sticks. Suddenly I heard a LOUD CRACK and nearly banged my head on the roof of the car as I jumped up in my seat. Heart pounding, I watched as one of the adult eagles flew by carrying a pine limb in its talons as big around as my wrist and perhaps three feet long. It then fiddled with that limb until it had pushed and prodded it into place in the basic structure of the nest. The cracking sound? As I continued to watch, the eagle took flight, circled a couple of times, got up a head of steam, and then flew feet-first at another pine limb, snapping it off with a crack like a gunshot. Power! Amazing power in those wings and talons.

On another occasion, I was canoeing solo down a black water river in the Florida panhandle near Tallahassee. After paddling all morning, I pulled to the bank, grabbed my lunch, and sprawled out on a comfortable fallen tree that seemed to be shaped just for easing my aching back. As I lay back quietly munching my peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird approached, twittered, and hovered about 3 feet away just above and to my left. I watched her, and she watched me. I stayed stock still, so as not to frighten her. She approached, twittered, and hovered again. I watched. She came closer still. I watched. She then moved in very close to my left arm, which was resting on a limb of the fallen tree. In the angle of that limb where it emerged from the tree, there was an old, untidy bundle of spider webbing. The hummer flew in and began plucking strands of spider silk with her beak. When she had a mouthful, she backed off, hovered again for a second or two, looked me directly in the eye, and flew off to points unknown. When my heart stopped pounding (as loudly as when I had been watching that eagle, I thought), I went back to quietly eating my sandwich. The true joy for me was that the hummingbird returned two more times to collect more spider silk.

I had suspected it was the case, and later confirmed, that hummingbirds use lichens and spider silk to construct their tiny nest that looks much like an old corn cob pipe. They also add saliva to the mix to glue everything into place. But there's more. Several years later, when I was working on a bird census along New Hope Creek, I found a hummingbird nest in a beech tree along a river bottom flood plain. I found the nest because I noticed the female hummer fly in and settle herself in for incubating her eggs. Over the next few weeks, I returned to that spot and watched her as she fed her babies. Finally, one day she and her brood



were gone. Toward the end of that summer, when I knew the breeding season was long over (and knowing that hummingbirds build a new nest each year), I went back and collected the nest by cutting off the small limb upon which it was firmly perched.

I was a biology graduate student back then, and one day I took the nest to a couple of my professors who were having their morning tea break. The ornithologist was pleased to see the nest, but the botanist was particularly intrigued. He pulled out his hand lens (all good botanists always have a hand lens within reach) and began scrutinizing that nest intently. Though his tea was getting cold, he asked if he could take the nest back to his lab for a few minutes. When he returned, he had a big grin on his face and simply said, “Just as I thought. Trichomes.” This arcane statement obviously needed further explanation, so with some prodding and a new, hot cup of tea, he filled us in. First, he showed us the inside of the little nest. There, on the floor of the tiny cup, was an even tinier pillow made out of some very soft, hair-like material. “Trichomes,” he repeated. He then told us to look very carefully with his hand lens at the midrib on the underside of one of the beech leaves still hanging from the branch. There, lined up along the midrib, was a phalanx of teeny, tiny hairs, known in the botanical world as, you guessed it, *trichomes*. After weaving and pasting together all those lichens and spider silk, mama hummer had plucked hundreds of these teeny, tiny hairs and fashioned a wondrously soft pillow for her eggs and babies to sit upon.

From the ridiculously large branches to the tiniest little bitty hairs, birds surely do find the darnedest things for their nests.

## Calendar of Activities



Thursday, July 4 & 6 **Eno River Festival**

Saturday July 6 **StreamWatch** with John Kent 8:00am

Sunday, July 14, **Eagle Count** at Jordan Lake, Steve McMurray. Coordinator

Saturday August 3 **Stream Watch** with John Kent, 8:00am



## *Summer Field Trips*

There are no regularly scheduled field trips during the summer; usually the birds start nesting and the temperatures rise so we normally take a break from field trips until late August when the fall migration begins. I sometimes schedule field trips though so look for notices on our Facebook page or our list serve or on our website. You can sign up for our list serve on our website at [www.newhopeaudubon.org](http://www.newhopeaudubon.org). Also, some of us conduct breeding bird surveys on predetermined routes. If you are interested in participating in the surveys, then please contact Tom Driscoll, at [spttdrdshnk@yahoo.com](mailto:spttdrdshnk@yahoo.com)!

Also, I am always looking for new field trips. If you have an idea for a field trip (such as butterflies, for example) or a new area to take a trip, then please contact me at the email address above. Have a great summer and see you in August or September!

## *Membership Meetings*

We don't have regularly scheduled membership meetings in June, July, and August. We take a break during the summer to allow for vacations and other pursuits. We start up again on September 5 with our annual pot luck dinner. At this meeting, everyone brings a dish to share with 6 or more people and we meet earlier at 6:30 pm. This meeting is held at the North Carolina Botanical Gardens as always. Remember to bring your own plate, silverware, and cups so we can cut down on trash sent to the landfill. We also invite members to bring 10 to 15 slides of flora and/or fauna from the local area or abroad to show in place of a regular speaker.

If you have any questions or ideas for speakers, then please contact Mark Kosiewski at [beltedcowbird@gmail.com](mailto:beltedcowbird@gmail.com).



# ***FEEDER WATCH***

By Tom Driscoll

When you receive this article, you should notice that there may be more activity around your feeders. The babies are hatched and are hungry! Already I have noticed juvenile cardinals at my feeders. The colors of the hatchlings are often duller and you may have noticed the parents feeding them. I have noticed an increase in the feeding which leads me to believe that the parents are feeding young in the nest. I have also noticed my male Ruby-throated Hummingbird feeding more often. The female may be on the nest.

Remember to provide water if you can. Although it is rainy now, later in the summer there is usually less rain and the birds may need a water source; both to bathe in and to drink.

I received another inquiry about an apparently abandoned bird house. The house had a nest or two in it, was very dirty, and no birds were attending it. She asked what she could do. I responded that since the house was not being used, she should clean out all the nesting materials and then clean out the box using a weak bleach solution. This will get rid of mites and ticks. Because Eastern Bluebirds and other birds (i.e., Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmice) that use these boxes usually have more than one brood per nesting season, this box could very well be occupied this summer. We shall see!

I received another inquiry about squirrels getting into feeders. This is a problem that all of us who feed birds have encountered and there are no easy solutions. Squirrels are very smart and they seem to go to great lengths to get bird food. At our house, I have seen them jump 7 or 8 feet from the roof to land on our platform feeder. I use baffles on my bird feeders and place them far enough away from trees so they can't jump on the feeders. They still don't give up. There are electrified bird feeders that shock the squirrels or spin them around, but I don't have any experience with them. Do they work well? I recently read about a trick someone has used successfully for a year to deter their squirrels. They attached a slinky to the top and bottom of the pole. The squirrels do not climb up the pole. I haven't tried this approach yet. Please let me know if you do and it works. Also, let me know of other ways you have deterred seed stealers!

If you have photos to share or feeder stories to recount, then please send them to me at [spttdrdshnk@yahoo.com](mailto:spttdrdshnk@yahoo.com). Have a great summer and see you in September!





## New Hope Audubon Officers for 2012-2013

<b>President</b> .....	<b>Norm Budnitz</b>
<b>Vice President</b> .....	<b>Robert “Bo” Howes</b>
<b>Secretary</b> .....	<b>Pat Reid</b>
<b>Treasurer</b> .....	<b>Jill Paul</b>
<b>Director</b> .....	<b>John Kent</b>
<b>Director</b> .....	<b>Mark Kosiewski</b>
<b>Director</b> .....	<b>Robin Moran</b>

## *Committee Chairs and Special Projects*

<b>Bird Seed Sale</b> .....	<b>Mary George</b>
<b>Christmas &amp; Spring Bird Counts</b> .....	<b>Norm Budnitz</b>
<b>Conservation Chair</b> .....	<b>Mark Kosiewski</b>
<b>Eagle Count</b> .....	<b>Steve McMurray</b>
<b>Education Chair</b> .....	vacant
<b>Hospitality Chair</b> .....	<b>Mary George</b>
<b>Important Bird Area, Eno River</b> .....	<b>Tom Driscoll</b>
<b>Important Bird Area, Jordan Lake</b> ...	<b>Bo Howes</b>
<b>Membership Chair</b> .....	<b>Jim George</b>
<b>Newsletter Editor</b> .....	<b>Pat Reid</b>
<b>Program Chair</b> .....	<b>Mark Kosiewski</b>
<b>Publicity Chair</b> .....	<b>Tom Driscoll</b>
<b>Stream Watch</b> .....	<b>John Kent</b>
<b>Webmaster</b> .....	<b>Norm Budnitz</b>
<b>Wildathon Chair</b> .....	vacant
<b>Wildlife Observation Platform</b> .....	<b>Bo Howes</b>