

New Hope Audubon Society Newsletter

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<http://www.newhopeaudubon.org>



My Two Cents Worth

by Tom Driscoll

Elsewhere in this newsletter, you can read about Norm Budnitz, the former President of the New Hope Audubon Society (Society), stepping down as President and what a hard act to follow for the next President. As you may know, I was elected President of the Society at the last membership meeting in early May. I will be writing a column, entitled "My Two Cents Worth", for each edition of the newsletter. In this column, I will discuss the current activities of our Society. We have a host of activities, such as bird walks, trail building, stream watch, and others, going on each month. Also in this column, I will answer questions that I receive from our membership. If you have a question or ideas about the Society, then please let me know. If you have an idea about some activity we should pursue, then please let me know. We are also looking for people to work with us on the Board of Directors in various capacities. If you are curious or might be interested, then I encourage you to attend one of our meetings to see if working with us is something you might do!

I look forward to meeting you at one of our meetings or outings soon. Because we take a break from most but not all of our activities in the summer, I hope to see you at our first meeting in September or maybe our Board of Directors' planning meeting in August. If you have questions or need information about the Society, then please feel free to contact me at spttdrdshnk@yahoo.com!

Kingfishers

by Norm Budnitz



Ceyx and Alcyone. I recently went back to my aging copy of *Mythology*, by Edith Hamilton, to learn the story of these two characters of ancient myth. Ceyx was a king, son of Lucifer the light bearer, and Alcyone, his wife, was the daughter of Aeolus, King of the Winds. The couple was deeply devoted to each other, so when Ceyx decided he needed to go to sea to visit the oracle, Alcyone was filled with dread. She asked to go with her husband, but he refused. When he set out on his voyage, she watched from shore until his ship disappeared over the horizon. While she awaited his return, she wove him a beautiful robe and another for herself so that she would be lovely for him when he came home.

Indeed, as happens in these mythical tales, a furious storm rose up,



Kingfishers by Norm Budnitz cont'd from page 1

capsized Ceyx's ship, and all hands were lost at sea. When Alcyone dreamed of Ceyx's fate (a dream sent by Juno, since this is the Roman Version), she was devastated, and went to the shore where she had watched her husband depart. There, on the water, she saw his body floating toward her. She ran and leaped into the water, but instead of drowning, she found herself flying over the waves, for the gods in their compassion had turned her into a bird—some say a kingfisher. As she flew over Ceyx's body, he too took flight and joined her as a bird. They flew off together and are now always seen flying as a couple over the waves.

And now to kingfishers. Two of the three major taxonomic groups of kingfishers are named after these devoted lovers. The water kingfishers are the Cerylidae and include a genus called *Ceyx*, and the tree kingfishers are the Halcyonidae, named after Alcyone. (There are also the river kingfishers, the Alcedinidae, but they are not part of our story.) All of these birds are characterized by their large heads, long, sharp bills, and short tails, and many of them are brightly colored or boldly patterned in black and white. Although as a group they are called kingfishers, a majority of the world's species do not eat fish, instead preferring insects, lizards, and other land-based prey.

Our local member of this group is the Belted Kingfisher, *Megaceryle alcyon*, and it is, indeed, a king fisher, in the sense that it feeds almost exclusively on small fish. (This photograph of a male Belted Kingfisher was taken by Jeff Pippen.) Visit the Eno River, New Hope Creek, or any of the other waterways and lakes in our area and you may be lucky enough to hear the rattling call of one of these birds as it flies past you. (If you are reading this in an electronic format, follow this link for a sample: <http://tinyurl.com/klp3u4r>.) Watch, and you may see the kingfisher land on an exposed branch hanging over the water. Keep watching, and you may see it lower its head as it searches in the water below for a minnow. Patience now, keep watching, because you may see it suddenly dive off its perch, plunge head first (SMACK) into the water, and come up with a fish in its bill, flying back to its original perch. Sometimes dinner needs a bit more work, and the kingfisher may shake the fish and hit it against a tree limb to kill it for easy swallowing.



The next time you go swimming slap your hand on the surface of the water. Though it's a liquid, the surface of the water will feel 'hard' and your hand may sting a bit for a few seconds. Now imagine making a living by diving head first into the water, smacking your skull with its precious cargo of brain inside. Kingfishers have strong skulls and their brains are surrounded by fluid so that they are protected from all that concussive force. Our Belted Kingfishers have another trait that is a bit unusual when compared to most other birds we know. The females are a bit more colorful than the males. While the males have one blue 'belt' across their breasts, the females have that blue belt plus a bright orange belt as can be seen in this photograph by Will Cook.





Cont'd from pg 2 Kingfishers

Many of the world's kingfishers are very brightly colored. Remember those beautiful robes that Alcyone wove for Ceyx and herself? But some, though they have less striking plumage, are spectacular in other ways. The Laughing Kookaburra (*Dacela novaeguineae*) of Australia is a case in point. Though mostly brown and white, this is one of the largest kingfishers in the world, measuring 16-18 inches long and weighing in at as much as 1 pound. (Photograph by Norm Budnitz.) It is carnivorous, eating small mammals, insects, lizards, and snakes. It feeds like our Belted Kingfishers, sitting on a branch and waiting for a tasty morsel to wander by on the ground below. That's right, on the ground, not the water. This kingfisher doesn't fish.



The Laughing Kookaburra is sometimes called the Laughing Jackass, with good reason. Those of you old enough to remember the Tarzan movies (and other jungle flicks of that era) might recall the sounds used to make the jungle sound wild and scary. Though Kookaburras do not exist in the wilds of Africa, moviemakers used their calls anyway in their sound tracks. (Here's a sample: <http://tinyurl.com/mtnvkne>.)



On the other end of the size scale is the Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher (*Corythornis madagascariensis*), one of the smallest kingfishers in the world, only about 5 inches long. Though tiny, its bright orange plumage is startling when it flies past and lights on a branch as this did for me. Its bill seemed bigger than the rest of its body.

The ancient myth-makers thought that kingfishers mated in the winter and built their nests floating on the ocean waters. The gods, as one more token of their compassion, calmed the seas for seven days so that Alcyone could brood her eggs. These 'Halcyon days' still occur sometime each winter when the winds die down and the seas grow calm. Or perhaps when you sit quietly on a bank and watch a kingfisher as she patrols her stretch of her little stream.

Eagle Count by Steve McMurray

Can you identify an eagle and enjoy being outside early in the morning? If so, try out our quarterly Eagle Counts. This is a great opportunity to enjoy Jordan Lake before the crowds! We have several sites around the lake that are in need of volunteers. On our past count on April 13, 2014, we saw a total of 20 eagles with 4 of them being immature. We had a total of 16 volunteers at 6 sites.

The weather was nice and it was a beautiful morning to be enjoying the lake.

If you would like to check out the quarterly eagle counts, fill free to contact me and join me at my location at Poplar Point Campground at the beach. Hopefully we will get you hooked to come out again and take over a vacant site around the lake! If you have any question fill free to contact me.

Next count will be held Sunday July 13th, 7:00 – 8:30am.



Norm Steps Down as President

By Tom Driscoll

As many of you know, Norm has stepped down as President of the New Hope Audubon Society . He has been President for 4 years and has threatened to step down as President frequently during the past year; he made good on his threats! We will miss Norm as President because he brought so many great attributes, such as leadership and organizational skills, to the job. He is very good with details and “reading the fine print”. He had a lot of energy for our activities and our projects. He participated in almost every one of them. He was very patient and had a good sense of humor, especially during meetings. He was also a mentor to many of us, helping us find our role in the New Hope Audubon Society. Primarily though, when the Society was floundering and a President could not be found to lead us, Norm stepped up to lead us!

During his tenure as President, the Society accomplished much due to Norm and his leadership and energy:

- Norm fixed and greatly improved our website
- We provided funding for materials and provided much of the labor for the North Carolina Botanical Garden’s bird blind
- Norm provided much expertise and assistance to Mark Kosiewski for the Piedmont Barn Owl Project
- Led by Norm, we reinstated the bird identification classes which we have taught for 3 of the past 4 years

Norm set a high standard for future Society Presidents. We will miss Norm. However, luckily for us he will stay on the Board of Directors as President Emeritus. Thanks Norm for all you’ve done and will continue to do for us!

Calendar of Activities



Saturday, May 33, **Stream Watch** with John Kent 9:00am

Saturday, July 5, **Stream Watch** with John Kent 8:00am

Sunday, July 13, **Eagle Count** with Steve McMurray, 7:00-8:30am

Saturday, August 2, **Stream Watch** with John Kent 8:00am



Feeder Watch

By Tom Driscoll



The temperatures are finally warming up and the trees are blooming! Some migrants have returned as well, although some of the winter visitors, such as White-throated Sparrows and Yellow-rumped Warblers, are still here and are still dining at my feeders. Have you heard them practicing their songs? I am hoping that the migrating Rose-breasted Grosbeaks will stop at my feeders to eat some of the sunflower seeds. Generally, the feeding has slowed down at my house. There are fewer Northern Cardinals and American Goldfinches eating seed.

I have seen Ruby-throated Hummingbirds this month, but rarely. They must be already nesting. Very little sugar water from my hummingbird feeders has been consumed. Are your hummingbirds coming to your feeders?

Have your birds molted into their breeding plumage yet? Most of mine have and the male goldfinches look especially yellow this year! It is fascinating how fast this transformation from drab to stunning occurs. Most of the birds in my yard are singing away all day now as well, although most of my birds have started to nest or have, at least, paired up. The woodpeckers are “drumming” and are filling up daily on suet. I can’t keep it stocked fast enough for them. The crows and the grackles are also fond of the suet.

I put up a Brown-headed Nuthatch nesting box on a Loblolly Pine tree in my yard early this month and a Carolina Chickadee built a nest in it! My bluebirds are nesting in one of the New Hope Audubon Society bluebird houses. The New Hope Audubon Society is selling both Brown-headed Nuthatch and Eastern Bluebird nesting boxes for only \$15. It is not too late to get yours and put them up and have bluebirds and nuthatches nesting in your yard! If you want one or two, then please contact me at spttdrdshnk@yahoo.com and I will deliver them!

Although I discuss the birds I am seeing or you can see at your feeders, I am hoping to receive reports and questions about the birds you are seeing. This will make the articles more interesting. If you have ideas about topics to discuss, want to report on the birds you are seeing, or have questions about the birds you are seeing, please send me an email at spttdrdshnk@yahoo.com.



New Hope Audubon Officers for 2014-2015

President	Tom Driscoll
Vice President	Robert "Bo" Howes
Secretary	Pat Reid
Treasurer	Jill Paul
Director	John Kent
Director	Mark Kosiewski
Director	Jim George

Committee Chairs and Special Projects

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