

New Hope Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol 40 No 1 Jan/Feb 2015

P.O. Box 2693, Chapel Hill, NC 27515
<http://www.newhopeaudubon.org>



My Two Cents Worth

by Tom Driscoll

The New Year is quickly approaching (they seem to come quicker every year) and I am excited about the new projects and activities we have started planning for the upcoming year! Two new committees have been formed: the Bird Friendly Communities (BFC) Committee and the Education Committee. The BFC committee was formed in response to an Audubon North Carolina initiative to inform the public about the need for and benefits of having bird friendly communities. Two facets of this committee's efforts are to increase the number of nesting boxes for species of concern, such as the Brown-headed Nuthatch, and to inform the public about the benefits of using native plants in their yards, parks, greenways, and other areas! The Education Committee of the New Hope Audubon Society has been dormant for many years, but it is being restarted by a group eager to work with schools or other community groups.

If you are interested in participating in these committees, have ideas to share, or want to support our work, then I encourage you to look on our website: www.newhopeaudubon.org. If you are interested in donating to our efforts, there are links on our website for donations!

Pelagic Birding Part II

by Norm Budnitz

Birding at sea. In the last issue of our newsletter, I wrote about looking for seabirds from land, in particular from oceanic islands. ([Click here](#) to see that newsletter.) Birding on these islands may involve some adverse weather, but it also means no seasickness for those so inclined. Pretty good trade-off, I think. On the other hand, if you want to see pelagic birds doing their thing on the open ocean where they spend most of their time, then 'get thee down to the sea in ships,' as they say.

If ocean swells conjure up images of queasiness, nausea, or spilling your guts over the stern rail, there is an alternative you might find quite comfortable. Many cruise ships offer relatively cheap rates for what they call 'repositioning cruises.' For

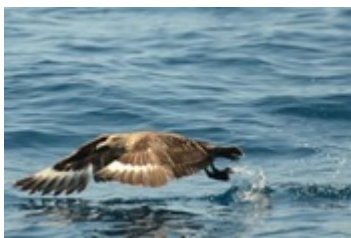


example, after spending all summer plying the waters from Vancouver, British Columbia, to Seward, Alaska, many cruise liners head south for the winter. For \$300-\$400, you can get on board in Vancouver, and after 3-4 days, debark in San Diego, California. The ships are so stable, computer driven stabilizers keep them so, you can actually set up a spotting scope and look for birds from on deck. Shearwaters, petrels, storm-petrels, and even albatrosses can be seen from such a perch. Whales, dolphins, and sea lions, too. Oh, and comfortable beds and all the food you can eat, as well. The problem, of course, is that you are in a great big ship and the birds are small and pretty far away. For a more intimate experience, a smaller vessel is called for.

Small boats that can cater to 20-40 or more birders at a time go out from all of our coasts in search of seabirds. These excursions are dedicated to looking for birds, with captains and crews experienced in finding and even chasing particular individual birds when they come upon them. Following are descriptions of what these trips can be like.

Boats go out from our North Carolina Outer Banks, head out to the Gulf Stream, and search for seabirds including some specialties like Fea's, Trindade, and even the rare Bermuda Petrels. On these trips there is a captain who runs the boat, a mate who, among other things, tends to the passengers' needs, and one to several 'spotters.' It's a spotter's job to work continuously to look for birds, and upon finding something, relay that information to the captain and to as many participants as possible as quickly as possible. The goal, of course, is to get everyone 'on the bird.'

Moving slowly and chumming by laying down a slick of fish oil and assorted fish parts, these boats can get Wilson's Storm-Petrels to come within several feet of the stern. These robin-sized birds with their tube-nosed beaks can be delightful as they patter their little toes in the water.



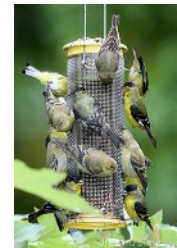
Or occasionally, a South Polar Skua, one of the 'pirates' of the sea will come barreling in, flashing its white wing patches, and bully some more mild-mannered seabird into regurgitating some food it has worked so hard to get for itself.

There are certainly periods of inactivity, but when a 'good' bird shows up, well, imagine a shoe box full of quiet cockroaches (perhaps not the best comparison) and suddenly someone raps the side of the box. Bodies are moving in all directions, voices are shouting, both asking for and giving directions, and binoculars are scanning the ocean. People are



Feeder Watch

By Tom Driscoll



Our winter visitors, Dark-eyed Juncos, White-throated Sparrows, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and other migrants from the north are here now and they are hungry. I am serving up much more food than in the autumn months. The birds are eating a suet cake almost every day now. I use the hot pepper kind so the squirrels won't eat it. I have also been putting millet out for the ground feeders; unfortunately, when food is spread on the ground I am also feeding squirrels. The birds, such as the American Goldfinches and House Finches, are finally eating my nyjer seed (also called thistle or black thistle) as well. They hadn't been eating this seed for a while and I wondered whether the seed goes bad or is unappetizing or unhealthy for the birds. Are your birds eating nyjer seed?

I continue to use tube feeders and platform feeders. Some of the birds are not as adept at dining from the tube feeders, so the platform feeder is helpful for them. The platform feeder is also better for observation and photography. During the winter, there are periods of no or little rain, so ensure your birds have a source of water. Even a small dish of water would be helpful for birds.

Some residents, such as American Robins and Eastern Bluebirds, eat berries from the Holly Bushes, Dogwood, and juniper or cedar trees in your yard. We have also seen Cedar Waxwings and Hermit Thrushes in our yard eating berries. Have you seen the Cedar Waxwings yet?

Our Ruby-throated Hummingbirds have departed for warmer climes, so I have taken down my hummingbird feeders. If you are still seeing a hummingbird, please let me know! I have seen Purple Finches and Pine Siskins recently near my house, so keep an eye out for these birds. Do you know how to tell the difference between the common House Finches and the much rarer (here anyway) Purple Finches? Check out the differences in your bird book or app!

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 spttdrshnk@yahoo.com.



Continued from Pg 2 Pelagic Birding

searching, people are pointing, and with luck, everyone gets on the bird. Great fun. Lots of adrenaline. And then high fives and relaxation, until the next good bird.

This past October, I went out on a Pacific coast pelagic trip that proved to be a different experience altogether. The following is just an example and in no way is meant to disparage the general west coast experience.

Going out on the ocean can be risky, and trip leaders always start with a safety talk that includes boat information, suggestions on behavior on board, and helpful hints like the location of the heads and where to go on the stern if you must eject the contents of your lunch. On this particular trip, the leader behaved more like a tyrant than a colleague. All instructions were given as ‘thou must do this; thou shalt not do that.’ Fear seemed to be the mode of persuasion rather than soft but firm direction. The boat was small and the number of passengers was large. We were forbidden from crossing the deck from port to starboard unless we held onto a rail. This was impossible because there were too many people in the way. We were told that if a good bird showed up on one side of the boat, we must stay put. The captain would turn the boat so that all would get a chance to see. This never happened. In fact, I got yelled at for *not* crossing the deck to see a bird, even though I was just obeying the initial instructions! Consistency was not our tyrant’s forte.

The spotters seemed inattentive, both to the birds and to the birders. I watched as photographers aggressively displaced other birders in order to get a good shot. Nary a word was said. I watched beginning birders miss seeing obvious birds because no one offered to help. I would have offered, but remember, I was forbidden from crossing the deck. In sum, this was a miserable experience and there weren’t even high seas with people hanging over the stern. That would have been a real birding disaster.

Pelagic birding may not be for the faint of heart. But the experience can be both rewarding and exhilarating. If a gadfly petrel comes out of nowhere, bounding high and soaring low, and flies by the boat closely for all to see, it’s definitely worth the price of admission. And if a White-tailed Tropicbird circles over the boat for five minutes, tail streamers waving, orange bill gleaming, it may take hours for the adrenaline to clear your system.



Get up the gumption and give it a try. You may (or may not) have a great time!



Thank You for a Successful 2014 Bird Seed Sale!

Many thanks to all of you who purchased bird seed this year and for those of you who also included donations with your order! The bird seed sale is one of New Hope Audubon Society's major fund raisers to assist in funding projects such as the Piedmont Barn Owl Initiative, trail building at the Wildlife Observation Platform at Jordan Lake and board walk construction at the Mason Farm Biological Reserve. Net proceeds from the sale this year were \$3989.47, over \$1000 greater than last year's sale!



Thanks go to the cheerful crew of volunteers who helped on pick-up day with loading cars and delivering seeds....as shown below – Pam Timmons, Norm Budnitz, Frances Sample, Anne Dayer, Paul Dayer, Mary George and Mark Kosiewski. A huge thank you goes to Tracy Rehberg (third from the right in the photo), owner of The Wild Bird Center in Eastgate Shopping Center, and her staff for allowing us to use her store for the bird seed distribution and for co-sponsoring the sale. Next year Anne Dayer and Mary George will team up to co-chair the bird seed sale effort.

Mary George, Bird Seed Sale Coordinator



Calendar of Activities



Thursday, January 8, **NHAS Membership Meeting**, Marcia Herman-Giddens, Tick specialist, will tell us about Ticks, Infections, and Keeping Safe

Saturday, January 10, **Stream Watch** with John Kent, 9:00 AM.

Saturday, January 10, **Bird Walk with Tom Driscoll**, Meet at 8:00am at the Wild Bird Center in East Gate Shopping Center in Chapel Hill. The walk will be about 3 hours at a location to be determined.

Thursday, February 5, **NHAS Membership Meeting**, 7:00 PM,

Saturday, February 7, **Stream Watch** with John Kent, 9:00 AM.

Sunday, February 8, **Bird Walk** with Tom Driscoll, Meet at 8:00am at the Wild Bird Center in East Gate Shopping Center in Chapel Hill. The walk will be about 3 hours at Butner Gamelands in northern Durham County.

Eagle Count by Steve McMurray

Can you identify an eagle or would like to develop your skills in doing so? How about enjoying being outside early in the morning? If so, try out our quarterly Eagle Counts. This is a great opportunity to enjoy Jordan Lake and watch birds too! If you are interested and new to our count, we will pair you at one of our manned locations with a seasoned volunteer. This is a great citizen science project and a great way to keep track of our magnificent bird right in our backyard.

Looking back on our last count on October 12th 2014, we had eight sites manned (out of 18), around the lake and one down at the dam, with a total of 15 volunteers!! We saw 22 adult eagles and 17 immature for a total of 39 eagles. A great day! Just think, you are almost guaranteed to see an eagle if you participate! Counts take place every 2nd Sunday of every quarter. Next two counts will take place on January 11th and April 12th from 7:00 – 8:30am.

Our goal is to have most if not all, the 18 locations around the lake manned. If you would like to participate or have any questions, please contact me at steve.mcmurray@ncparks.gov or at [919-362-0586 ext 219](tel:919-362-0586).



Bird Friendly Gardens



"It's simple: By gardening with native plants, no matter where you live or how small or large your space is, you can help sustain wildlife." - Doug Tallamy, Bringing Nature Home

Your yard -- and the kinds of plants in it -- matters more than you may know. Native plants play a very important role in providing the food birds need to survive and thrive in a way that non-native plants cannot do.

Going Native

Native plants are those that occur naturally in an area. North Carolina, with its diverse geography, is home to thousands of native plant species! Our natural wildlife - including birds - have adapted to the resources provided by North Carolina's native plant population. These plants and trees are, in a real sense, home for our birds.

The current population of native plants is becoming displaced by non-native, exotic and often vigorously growing foreign species. These invasive exotic plants encroach on natural habitats and do not provide the nutrients many birds or other critters need to survive.

Why are native plants important?

In a word: insects. Almost all land birds require insects to feed their young. Even seed-eating birds often must feed their babies insects to ensure their survival. Insects cannot adapt to eating non-native plants. Fewer native plants mean fewer insects, which in turn mean fewer bird babies growing to adulthood.

How to get startedHow you can make a difference

It can be a little overwhelming to consider transforming your yard from what, for most of us, is one that is dominated by non-native plants (and often invasive ones) to a native wildlife habitat. However, you can take it one step at a



time. For instance, if your Bradford Pear (considered an invasive species) is diseased or damaged and needs to be removed, consider planting a native tree to replace it, or use the newly sunny space for a patch of native wildflowers.

Consider gradually cutting down on your lawn area and using some natives to replace it. And as you cut down your lawn area, use leaf mulch to hold down weeds and provide natural fertilizer. Raking leaves to the curb robs your plants of a free and natural source of nutrition, and pine bark mulch is a poor substitute for leaves from your own trees. Leaf litter is also a home for many insects such as lightning bugs. If the leaves are too coarse, run over them a few times with a mulching mower. If you don't have enough leaves, cities are often glad to dump a free load in your yard as they go through your neighborhood vacuuming them up.

And last but not least, consider gradually removing invasive plants starting with the worst offenders. Find out what plants are considered invasive and what the worst ones are at this website:

<http://www.ncwildflower.org/invasives/list.htm>.

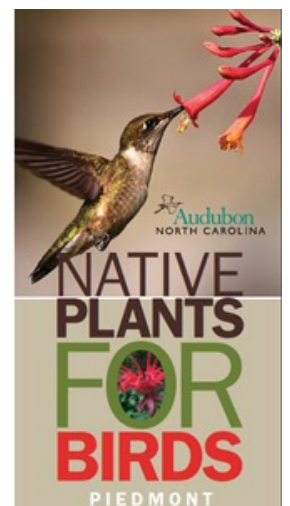
In short, there are a lot of ways to gradually transform your yard. Share what you are doing and what has worked out well for you by posting to the New Hope Audubon Facebook Group or our Yahoo discussion listserv. Links to sign up for both of them are on our webpage at <http://www.newhopeaudubon.org>.

NOTE: the first several sections of this article were directly excerpted from NC Audubon's webpage on bird-friendly gardens at:

<http://nc.audubon.org/bird-friendly-plants>

Download this brochure of native plants for the Piedmont at:

http://nc.audubon.org/sites/default/files/documents/piedmont_plants_final.pdf





New Hope Audubon Officers for 2014-2015

President	Tom Driscoll		
Vice President	Bo Howes	Director	Mark Kosiewski
Treasurer	Frances Sample	Director	John Kent
Secretary	Pat Reid	Director	Carol Ripple

Committee Chairs and Special Projects

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