THE BULLETIN

Chapel Hill Bird Club

June-September, 2002

(Vol. XXX I, Nos. 6-9)

c/o Ginger Travis
5244 Old Woods Rd.
Hillsborough, NC 27278

September 23 meeting – welcome back!

This is our first meeting after the summer break. Bring your summer sightings to share! Everyone is welcome, so invite any friends and acquaintances who are interested in birds.

When: Monday, **Sept. 23**, 7:15 p.m. for refreshments; meeting begins at 7:30.

Where: The lounge at Binkley Baptist Church in Chapel Hill. Binkley is at the corner of Willow Drive and the 15-501 Bypass (east side of Chapel Hill) next to University Mall.

Program: Bobbie Collins-Perry will speak on "Cranes of the World--Here in the U.S."
Learn about the rare and beautiful cranes of the world as Bobbie Collins-Perry, a local birder, takes us on a photographic journey to the famous Rowe Sanctuary in Nebraska and the International Crane Foundation in Wisconsin.

Saturday morning field trips

The regular Sat. a.m. field trips began in August this year (stories below) because of prime conditions for shorebirds, and trips will continue through Dec. 7 except for Sept. 21 (Chatham Co. count) and Nov. 30 (Thanksgiving weekend). Call Doug Shadwick for details of the destination du jour: 942-0479. If you haven't yet gone on a shorebird field trip, the best is yet to come (if water levels stay low), because migration peaks in early to mid-September.

Meet at Glen Lenox shopping center in Chapel Hill for departure at 7:30 a.m. sharp. Glen Lenox is on the north side of Hwy. 54 just east of the Hwy. 15-501 Bypass. Trips usually are over by noon. Bring binoculars and scope if you have one, wear stout shoes, and be prepared to do some walking. (If in doubt about how strenuous the trip will be, ask Doug. The shorebird trips may involve longer walks than others.) Trips are free; beginners and visitors are definitely welcome!

Dragonfly field trip Sunday, Sept. 8

Dragonflies are honorary birds, are they not? Well, then, Sunday, Sept. 8, from 9 a.m. to noon, Josh Rose – odonate expert, birder, all-around naturalist, road food connoisseur, and Duke grad student – will lead a trip to Occoneechee Mountain for CHBC members, friends and others interested in learning a few dragonflies. Meet at the Occoneechee Mtn. parking lot at 9 a.m. **Directions**: Take I-40 from Chapel Hill, or I-85 from Durham, and get off at the Hillsborough exit onto Old NC 86 or Churton Street. (On I-85, this is the exit with McDonalds.) Go north. Turn left on Mayo St. at the second traffic light north of the I-85 overpass. Where Mayo ends in a T, turn left onto Orange Grove Road. Then, on the right look for a little dirt road called Virginia Cates, just before another I-85 overpass. Turn onto Virginia Cates Rd. This is the Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area's driveway; it winds past the two ponds to a pretty large parking area with restrooms. Need additional info? Email Josh: jsr6@duke.edu.

Other upcoming events, counts

Sept. 14-15: Fall weekend field trip on the Blue Ridge Parkway in southern Va. and Ashe and Alleghany Counties, N.C. Focus will be migrating warblers and vireos, plus migrating hawks at Mahogany Rock Overlook (milepost 235). **Call Will Cook (382-9134) if you are interested**. Accommodations can range from your sleeping bag on the floor at Will's house in Fancy Gap or a room at a nearby motel such as the Alleghany Inn in Sparta. (Tel. 888-372-2501. Please make your own reservations.)
Sept. 21: Chatham County fall count. Contact Will Cook (382-9134); email: cwcook@duke.edu.
Oct. 15-20: 6th annual Wings over Water birding festival on the Outer Banks. See www.northeast-nc.com/wings/.

Send your sightings!

by Shelley Theye
Starting next month I'll be writing an occasional column with observations by CHBC members of noteworthy birds and/or interesting behaviors of

common birds. Please send me any observations that you feel would be of interest to other club members. These could include, but are not limited to, unusual or rare yard and feeder birds, interesting behaviors, and noteworthy interactions between individuals of the same or different species. You could also send interesting observations from the field. I may at times also include items from the Carolinabirds listserve. Send your information in the way that is most convenient for you. You can use mail, phone or email:

Shelley Theye,
1065 Boothe Hill Rd.,
Chapel Hill, N.C. 27517.
Call 967-5681 before 8:30 p.m.
Email: psbmt@aol.com

I look forward to your sightings!

Note: Will Cook, compiler of our Triangle checklist, will continue to publish his comprehensive list of all unusual birds seen. So if you've got a rare bird, be sure to let him know too.

Aug. 3 field trip report: mudflats and shorebirds

by Will Cook, trip leader

This morning (Sat., Aug. 3) 19 birders on a Chapel Hill Bird Club trip visited the Morgan Creek mudflats at Jordan Lake (Chatham Co., NC). We had a lot of the same species as were seen at the nearby New Hope Creek mudflats. Our highlights included a nice flock of Stilt Sandpipers and a nice flock of Bald Eagles in various plumages. Here's what we noted:

75 Great Blue Heron
60 Great Egret
1 Snowy Egret
12 Little Blue Heron
1 White Ibis
2 Glossy Ibis
25 Mallard (no other ducks, though one Mallard was about as dark as a Black. Also had some Canada Geese.)
6 Bald Eagle
1 Black-bellied Plover
20 Semipalmated Plover
50 Killdeer
25 Lesser Yellowlegs
1 Solitary Sandpiper
5 Spotted Sandpiper
150 Semipalmated Sandpiper
6 Western Sandpiper
25 Least Sandpiper
50 Pectoral Sandpiper
16 Stilt Sandpiper
5 Purple Martin
2 N Rough-winged Swallow
50 Barn Swallow
1 Cliff Swallow

It was a fun trip, though everyone got wet feet crossing Morgan Creek on a broken beaver dam. *Ed. note: As a side note on Aug. 3, one birder who wishes to remain nameless got more than her ankles wet, when she slipped off the broken beaver dam and achieved a waist-deep immersion in the waters of Morgan Creek. Her cell phone and binoculars are still drying. It's the stuff of local legend.*

August 17 field trip report: an avocet for starters

by Kent Fiala, trip leader

Nine club members and visitors birded the New Hope Creek arm of Jordan Lake at the 751 bridge on Aug 17. The morning got off to an auspicious start with a single American Avocet seen from the bridge. A small flock of eclipse plumage Blue-winged Teal sent everyone to their field guides for a lesson in teal identification.

Shorebirds were present in good numbers. We identified 14 species – the list, with guess-timated numbers, was

Black-bellied Plover (2)
Semipalmated Plover (20)
Killdeer (30)
Short-billed Dowitcher (5)
Greater Yellowlegs (3)
Lesser Yellowlegs (100)
Solitary Sandpiper (4)
Semipalmated Sandpiper (30)
Western Sandpiper (5)
Least Sandpiper (50)
White-rumped Sandpiper (1, seen by only one observer)
Baird's Sandpiper (1)
Pectoral Sandpiper (150)
Stilt Sandpiper (10)

The bright juvenile Short-billed Dowitchers provided good views of their distinctive tertials. We were tipped off about the Baird's Sandpiper by other birders who were returning as we reached the middle of the flats, and it was spotted by Tom Driscoll just as we were about to leave. It was the highlight of the trip, being variously a lifer, a state bird, or a county bird for some. One juvenile Black Tern was another highlight, although we missed the adult Black Tern that others had also seen.

The many herons present were mostly Great Egrets, upwards of 80 being visible, along with Great Blue Herons and one each of Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron and Green Heron. We enjoyed good views of about 7 Bald Eagles, mostly adults.

We saw a few land birds on our way to or from the flats, including Blue Grosbeak and Eastern Kingbird at the bridge, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Red-eyed Vireo, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Goldfinch, American Redstart, and a few Blue-gray Gnatcatchers all in one tree on the way out.

The Jordan Lake grassflats – how'd that stuff get there?

by Clyde Sorenson (to Carolinabirds)

The grass you are seeing [growing now all over Jordan's mudflats] is typically several species of annual grasses and sedges (like grass but not grass- most have a triangular cross-section in the stem). Some kinds represented would include some panic grasses, sprangletop, and many others.

How the seed get there: The seed for many of these species can indeed lie dormant under standing water for a very long time (rice seed also does this); the seed bank can accumulate from the product of previous drought years, deposition by wind and waves, and even deposition by geese (not everything gets ground in a gizzard). These seed will wait patiently for the cool breath of life- atmospheric oxygen- to germinate, and they're off and running. Their main mission is to hurry though their life cycle so that they may, yes, leave another seed bank to wait for the next bout of low water.

Once these grasses and sedges germinate, they can tolerate moderate flooding (such that the entire plant is not submerged) and will continue to grow as the water rises until they enter the reproductive phase of their lifecycles. Some can, under these conditions, grow many feet tall. (I once saw domestic rice in backwater flooding of Mississippi bottomland ricefields reach stem lengths near 8 feet under slowly rising, clear water conditions. These fields collapsed and died when the flood came off the fields) If the grasses are overtopped, they will drown, however.

This new seed bank is potentially very important to the waterfowl coming down this fall- most dabblers make their living off this very kind of food source. Wildlife managers in most of our refuges try their best to emulate this exact chain of events in marsh impoundments to provide abundant food to migrating waterfowl. The flooded grass plants themselves, however, are not utilized much by waterfowl, although geese and swans will graze them extensively when they are young and growing.

Ed. note: Clyde Sorenson is an entomologist at N.C. State University and wrote about river cane in the Bulletin last year.

Monitoring the Cub Creek heronry

by Alan Johnston (to Carolinabirds)

On Sunday morning, July 7th, I checked the Great Blue Heron colony at Cub Creek, which flows into the northwestern end of Jordan Lake. Most of the nests are now empty, but I still counted 19 young herons standing on their nests, and 5 or 6 adults flying in and out. The dozen Black Vultures present on my last two visits had now disappeared.

Here is a summary of my sightings at the colony this season. Between March 14th and July 7th I made eight trips to the heronry, mapping the nests each time and making a note of how many adults or young were visible standing or sitting on each nest. The totals for the year included 63 nests, approximately 94 adult herons, and 132 baby herons.

During the season I mapped a total of 63 nests. Adults were seen standing or sitting on 59 of the nests at one time or other. Baby or young herons were counted on 41 of the nests. My best estimate is that approximately 94 adult herons were involved in this colony.

Although the maximum number of adults counted at any one time was 58, if you assume each adult is associated with a specific nest, I was able over time to count 82 adults standing or sitting on a specific nest, and an additional 12 adults associated with specific trees where I could not see a nest. For each nest I added the maximum number of young herons seen at the nest at one time. At 3 nests I saw only 1 baby or young heron. At 4 nests I saw two young herons. At 17 nests there were three young; 15 nests had four young; and two nests, both at the very top branches of a tree, had five young. These nests got very crowded and noisy as the babies grew at 8 to 10 weeks into almost full size juvenile herons. A total of at least 132 baby herons hatched at this heronry this year. During the course of the eight visits to the site I only saw one dead baby heron, which had fallen out of a nest and gotten hung up in the branches below. But I assume the vultures were there for a reason. But short of spending much more time out at the site, I can not think of an efficient way to estimate how many juveniles survive and fledge. Ehrlich (1988) gives a fledging time of 56 to 60 days. Several juveniles in this colony were still at their nests 63 days after hatching. I welcome suggestions on monitoring this site, and look forward to visiting it again next season. I will be glad to provide specific directions to the site.

Review: Mark Crocker's "Birders: Tales of a Tribe"

by Judith Fortney

I loved this book, both when I read it the first time, and when I reread it for this review. As the name implies, it is about birders, not birds. Each chapter, though, is named for a memorable sighting by Crocker – starting at the age of eight – which precipitates a train of thought about birds and birding. Sort of a British *Kingbird Highway,* this is a chronology of the growth and development of a birder and the sightings, people and trips that shaped that development. A beautifully written book, it should appeal to nonbirders too. It goes a long way towards explaining the lure of birding, covering as it does some of the intellectual – philosophical even – aspects of birding as well as the pleasures of an ID

challenge and the thrill (almost orgasmic, Crocker says) of a rare bird.

About 560 birds have ever been seen in Britain, but only about 200-225 regularly breed there. Because of its latitude, any 2 to 3 week trip with a radius of about 180 miles will yield around 200-225 birds. Thus, "twitchers" need to visit remote islands – both north and south – to rack up the numbers. As a teenager, Crocker hitchhiked to these remote places, which leads to many a good tale, as the title promises.

Crocker grew up near Buxton (in Derbyshire, not the Outer Banks). He describes the delight of birding on a lovely spring day in a beautiful place (Derbyshire moors are wild and beautiful) and the realization – at the age of 12 and in reference to a Short-eared Owl – that no field guide, especially the inadequate ones of his youth, can do justice to the real thing. This, believe it or not, leads to a discourse on feathers.

Each chapter draws lessons from a particular bird sighting; in the case of the Short-eared Owl, on feathers; in the case of pipits, on the shortcomings of early field guides. He develops the immediate lesson, and the continuing learning during a birder's life. His chapter on the technology and psychology of optics is hilarious – from the revered, ancient and useless binoculars of some oldtimers to the multiple high-tech toys of others. His obsession with notebooks, and the class system among (British) birders are among many subjects discussed with humor and perception.

In short, a good read for anyone interested in America's most popular "sport," or simply married to one of the tribe.

Musings on range expansion and contraction

by Norm Budnitz

I killed a chipmunk this morning. I swerved to miss it with my car, but I guess I caught it with one of my right-side tires. I felt that little tightness in my chest that seems to come whenever I kill something, however inadvertently.

It was 6:30 on a Saturday morning, no traffic, and my brain was in pre-coffee, semi-idle mode as I was heading into the office to catch up on some work. That chipmunk set my mind to pondering. Where I grew up in New England, Eastern Chipmunks were everywhere. They lived in every small patch of trees. Walking in the woods, I seemed to see them sitting up on every fallen log. They fed on the birdseed under our feeder. They chipped at me in my friend's old barn.

But here in the piedmont of North Carolina, chipmunks are not very common. It seems that we are on an edge of their range. I remember one (or perhaps a pair) that hung around the exposed roots of a large beech tree behind one of the houses I lived in back in the 70s. My graduate student friends, who knew about such things, were mildly impressed that I had chipmunks in my neighborhood. I just thought it was a nice reminder of my earlier Yankee life. Now that I have lived here for 30+ years, I realize that I had a good thing with that little guy. My sightings of piedmont chipmunks probably number in the low double figures in all that time. And I spend lots of time in appropriate habitat, being a birder, loving wild flowers, and just generally enjoying being outdoors.

The same can be said for groundhogs (or woodchucks, if you prefer). Our part of North Carolina seems to be on the edge of their range as well. I see them occasionally (more often then chipmunks, actually), but not very reliably. Drive along a highway in the northeast, and you will see groundhogs feeding in the grass by the roadside around every third curve, all summer long. I know a patch of kudzu here in the piedmont where I can usually count on seeing them, but in the fifteen years I have lived on my current property, my groundhog sightings have come at the rate of about one every third or fourth year. One sighting was in mid-spring. There it was, sitting in the middle of my garden, looking absolutely ravenous. Being familiar with the devastation a groundhog can wreak, I almost threw in my trowel then and there. But I never saw that groundhog again. My next sighting on my property was some 3 or 4 years later.

Both of these species, chipmunks and groundhogs, are fairly common just a hundred miles north and/or west of here. And both are essentially absent to the south and east. When I envision a map in a field guide depicting their range, I see the line passing through my property! Actually, I see it wavering back and forth from year to year. Of course, this is silly, but only sort of silly. The edge of a range of animals (or plants) is not a static boundary. It does change, perhaps even pulsate, over time, with expansions followed by contractions followed by expansions, caused by who knows what minor changes in local weather or land-use patterns.

Birds, too, show similar changes in ranges. A pair of Dickcissels, birds of the great plains of North America, has recently been nesting just west of Chapel Hill. A pair of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, normally breeders in the arid regions of Oklahoma and Texas, has raised broods in Monroe, NC, near Charlotte. And there have been several very late reports of Cedar Waxwing pairs this spring in our area. They occur in large numbers in the winter, feeding on the hollies and ornamentals we humans like to plant to adorn our yards. But by June, they are usually almost completely absent.

Range expansion and contraction is a fascinating process to behold. But it can be difficult for biologists to study, because the changes may be slow, and likely will vacillate back and forth, back and forth, almost like the waves on a beach as the tide comes in or recedes. Sometimes, the expansions occur fairly rapidly and with little ebb and flow—the expansion of Cattle Egrets into the New World. Sometimes the changes occur more slowly and steadily—the expansion of Northern Cardinals, Tufted Titmice, and Northern Mockingbirds into northeastern North America. Sometimes the declines are precipitous—Northern Bobwhites in the southeastern states.

The Cardinals and Titmice that came to our bird feeder when I was a kid were such a rarity that they probably contributed to my life-long passion for bird watching. The excitement of knowing that something special was happening in my own backyard, in combination with the perplexing hormonal changes that were occurring in my body as I entered puberty—well, I suspect there was a synergy of emotions that has resulted in this wonderful obsession I have with birds.

I am sorry I killed that chipmunk. I may have slightly contributed to the wavering of that range line in the field guide. But chipmunks are prolific breeders, and if conditions warrant, there will be more to delight the children in my neighborhood in the years to come. Or not. Evolution is funny that way.

Postscript: I wrote the preceding essay in June 2001. Eleven months later, in May 2002, I was driving around the exact same curve when a chipmunk sprinted out from the exact same patch of woods. It stopped, did a U-turn, and sprinted back into the woods, tail held high, unblemished. Looks like that little pocket of chipmunks has some life in it yet!

Obituary: Eugene Odum, Chapel Hill birder, the father of ecosystem ecology

Ed. note: This obituary appeared in several newpapers and was circulated on the Ecolog-L listserve.

Eugene Odum was born September 17, 1913. He grew up in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where his father, Howard W. Odum, was a professor of sociology. Eugene Odum's brother, named Howard after their father, was born in 1920 and was to become a noted ecologist as well.

Eugene Odum showed a deep interest in birds as a teenager in Chapel Hill and with a friend named Coit Coker began a column called "Bird life in Chapel Hill" in the local newspaper in the spring of 1931. When Odum graduated from high school in 1929, his class presented him with a comb because his wind-blown hair was never neat.

He received his bachelor's and master's from the University of North Carolina and spent one formative summer as at the Allegheny School of Natural History. His first faculty post was in the department of biology at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1937, he entered the University of Illinois to work on his doctoral degree.

After graduation, he took a job as a resident naturalist for the Hyuck Preserve in upstate New York. He also married Martha Ann Huff, to whom he was married until her death in 1995. While at the Hyuck Preserve, Odum began research on birds and their habitats, research that would led him to a greater understanding of how entire ecosystems work.

The more Odum thought about ecosystems, the more he was convinced that there should be a way to study how one part affects another. Yet this was in a day when there were no computers. Only crude tools were available to understand how biological and physical systems interacted. And yet, with the single-minded determination that became the hallmark of his method, Odum set about creating a discipline that took a revolutionary view of how ecosystems worked.

In the fall of 1940, Odum took a full-time job as an instructor of zoology at the University of Georgia. He was the only ecologist in a department of five faculty members, none of whom thought much about his ideas of studying entire ecosystems. Before he could develop his ideas further, World War II exploded. Odum spent three years helping teach science to nurses, pharmacy-mates and pre-medical personnel. He even found time to coach the UGA tennis team.

In 1951, the Atomic Energy Commission made a decision that would have a profound affect on Odum's career and the future of ecology. The AEC had earlier built the Savannah River Site on land in South Carolina just across the line from Georgia. To see if the site had any effect on nearby plants and animals, it proposed an ecological laboratory.

The AEC selected a proposal developed by Odum as a basis for what would become the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory. Suddenly Odum found himself with one of the largest, self-contained environmental laboratories on earth, some 300 square miles or property off limits to the public.

He helped set up research projects at the site, but one thing was still lacking for the consistent study of ecosystem ecology: a textbook. There had been many books on the ecology of parts of the natural world for years but there was no single book that examined the entire ecosystem, starting from the top down.

His book, *Fundamentals of Ecology*, was, for an astonishing 10 years, the only textbook available worldwide on ecosystem ecology. It was translated

into many languages and was crucial in the training of an entire generation of ecologists. Odum argued that ecology was not a subdivision of biology or anything else. Instead, he said it should be an integrated discipline that brings all of the sciences together instead of breaking them apart.

Odum was also deeply involved in the establishment of and staffing of the UGA Marine Institute on Georgia's Sapelo Island, which has continued its mission of marine research for more than 40 years. All of Odum's varied pursuits came together when the University's Institute of Ecology was founded in 1960, with Odum as its first director. It immediately made a name for itself, training a generation of scientists committed to Odum's holistic method of looking at the world around us.

In addition to *Fundamentals of Ecology*, Odum published more than a dozen other books.

Numerous honors came Odum's way during his long professional life. He was elected to the National Academy of Science and was named an honorary member of the British Ecological Society. With his brother, Howard W. Odum, he received the $80,000 international "Institut de la Vie" prize from the French government. He also received the Tyler Ecology Award and a check for $150,000, presented by then-President Jimmy Carter in ceremonies at the White House.

In 1987, Eugene and Howard Odum won the Craaford Prize given by the Royal Swedish Academy, the equivalent of the Nobel Prize, which is not awarded in ecology. Eugene Odum's share of the money, $125,000, went to set up a private foundation for the promotion of research and education in ecology.

Odum retired from the University of Georgia in 1984 but he never stopped coming to work every day and published his last book in 1998, *Ecological Vignettes*. He was also the subject of a documentary film that aired a number of times on Georgia Public Television and which has been used in ecology classes on campus.

Odum was preceded in death by his wife, Martha, and two sons. William Eugene Odum, also an ecologist, died after a brief illness in 1991, and Daniel Thomas Odum died in 1987.

Birds, food, an election

by Ginger Travis

On May 20, at the second annual potluck dinner, meeting and election, CHBC members elected officers for the upcoming year – and compiled a bird list for the evening at the Ebenezer Point picnic shelter at Jordan Lake. The food was good, the weather was good, and some of the scope views were dazzling (the Kowa introduced after mine, wow!). Officers for 2002-2003 are:

President: Joe Bearden
Vice president (RDU): Karen Bearden
Vice president (CH): Judy Murray
Secretary: Karen Piplani
Treasurer: Ruth Roberson

Thanks to the incoming and outgoing officers, including Magnus Persmark, for your service to the CHBC. As a small club we must rely on the willingness of a few folks each year to get involved and maintain the structure of programs, field trips and other services for all members. This includes the committee chairs.
Field trip chair: Doug Shadwick
Checklist compiler/mailing list manager/Webmaster and Carolinabirds list owner: Will Cook
Refreshments coordinator: Karen Piplani

Attending the May potluck were Ken Lundstrom, Margaret and Tom Scott, Julia Guo, Magnus Persmark, Mike Skakug, Alan and Sally Johnston, Karen and Joe Bearden, Lee van Malssen, Lena Gallitano, Russell and Ruth Roberson, Roy and Betty Lindholm and Ginger Travis.

We saw the following birds around the picnic shelter and over the lake: Double-crested Cormorant, Osprey, Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Great Blue Heron, Eastern Kingbird, Chipping Sparrow, Purple Martin, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, Bank Swallow, Tree Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, American Crow, Fish Crow, Common Grackle, Orchard Oriole, Mourning Dove, Killdeer, Yellow-throated Warbler, Eastern Bluebird, Carolina Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse.

Mini-review: Warblers on one page

by Roy Lindholm

Just got a copy of "Warblers on One Page" field guide (pocket-size, accordion-fold) in color. North American eastern spring warblers on one side. Fall on the other. Great . . . worth having! You can get them from BWG Publications BA, P.O. Box 1072, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan 48303-1072. Cost is $3.95 plus $1 shipping and handling. Check or money order to BWG Publications. It was advertised in May 2002 *Winging It*.

Paper or paperless?

This year as an experiment, we will send you your CHBC Bulletin by email, if you prefer. So if you'd like to cut down on paper entering your house, let me know. Email: ginger_travis@unc.edu. You can reverse course at any time and go back to a paper Bulletin if you're not happy with email.