



CBC Newsletter

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For members of the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., Ornithological Society of the Carolinas

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Make Plans Now to Attend the Spring Meeting in Beautiful Blowing Rock, North Carolina!

Ron Clark & Katherine Higgins



What could be nicer than being in the North Carolina mountains in the spring? How about enjoying spring migration in the mountains! On May 6th to the 8th, we'll be returning to the Blowing Rock area for our meeting. We last met there in 2005 and tallied 146 species, including 26 warblers. The list included some hard-to-find birds such as Ruffed Grouse, American Bittern, Eastern Screech-owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Marsh Wren, Grasshopper Sparrow, Dickcissel, Bobolink and Red Crossbill. There's even a King Rail on the list for Valle Crucis Park.

Many folks consider early May the best time to bird. All the birds are in their Sunday finery, from the reds of tanagers, to the blues of Indigo Buntings and Blue Grosbeaks, to the yellows of many warblers. This is the time for non-confusing spring birds, without the first-year females that make you want to take up a new hobby! We'll have several trips along the Blue Ridge Parkway, beautiful even without birds. We'll offer four half-day trips to the Wagner property, which can only be visited with their permission. Offering fields, ponds, woods and marshes, this site is always a favorite. Other habitats we'll bird include rocky outcroppings, old-growth coniferous and deciduous forests, and even waterfalls.

We'll be headquartered at the Meadowbrook Inn at 711 Main St. in Blowing Rock (<http://www.meadowbrook-inn.com>). Within walking distance of downtown, the inn offers a variety of room arrangements. The majority of the rooms are \$89. Standard suites are \$99. VIP suites with fireplace and whirlpool tub are \$129. There are king deluxe rooms with fireplace, whirlpool and sunroom for

\$109, and one two-bedroom suite for \$229. Lastly, if you're feeling really decadent, there are two Pool Suites that have fireplace, whirlpool and their own private swimming pool for \$219. Prices do not include tax. The rooms have WIFI and are smoke-free. All rooms, except the \$89 ones, have microwave and refrigerators, but these can be added to the \$89 rooms for an additional fee.

The Inn has a fitness center, indoor pool, and whirlpool. Breakfast is included in the price and will start at 6:00 a.m. on Friday and Saturday. Call 800-456-5456 or 828-295-4300 to make your reservation. Be sure to mention that you are with CBC to get these special rates. The Inn can answer any questions about the variety of rooms.

A buffet dinner, prepared by the Meadowbrook Inn chef, will be offered before the Saturday night meeting. Curtis Smalling, the Important Bird Areas Coordinator and Mountain Program Manager for Audubon NC, will provide one of our programs. He'll tell us about "Warblers of the High Country", with beautiful photos and hints on where to go to find many of our warblers, in case you miss some during our field trips. We'll have door prizes, plus some other nice items to be raffled.

With beautiful scenery, delicious food, lots of birds, and great folks, this is a meeting you don't want to miss. You'll find the registration form and trip descriptions in the next Newsletter.

Come and join us in the Blue Ridge Mountains in May!



To See a Yellow Rail

Steve Shultz



Kenn Kaufman writes of the Yellow Rail: “Among North American birds, this is the most difficult to see.” John Fussell calls it “one of the mice” (the other being the Black Rail) and notes it is “particularly hard to locate.” The Yellow Rail is not necessarily an uncommon bird, but it is uncommonly difficult to see. In the northern sedge meadows and upper salt marshes where it breeds, the bird is frequently inaccessible, secretive, and seems to shun sunlight like a tiny, feathered vampire. On the wintering grounds the birds remain secretive and, just to make birders even more frustrated, make no sound. Walking through the moist, densely vegetated wintering habitat is often futile as the birds rarely flush, instead preferring to run, and they can run quite a bit faster than most birders can tramp through the grass.

So how do you see one? For many birders the answer is luck, much patience, or simply dealing with a blank spot on the life list. But there is one way, and a relatively easy one at that, to see the birds that is not only productive, it’s a lot of fun as well. How? Well, Yellow Rails are known to frequent rice fields along the Gulf coast and along the U.S. southeastern coastline. In coastal areas of Louisiana and Texas rice can be harvested twice each season, a first crop in July or August and a second, or “ratoon”, crop in October or November. During harvesting of the ratoon crop, rails, often including Yellow Rails, are flushed by the combines crisscrossing the paddies. If a birder could find a way to be on a combine, or even observe from close by, then seeing a Yellow Rail is not only a possibility, it is a likelihood.

To serve the birding community’s desire to see this most elusive rail, and to introduce birders to the farmers, millers, and others who produce American rice, a small, dedicated group of birders in Louisiana began holding an annual Yellow Rails and Rice Festival in 2009. I was fortunate to be in southwestern Louisiana this past November for the 2010 edition of the Festival and can unequivocally state that it was some of the most fun I’ve ever had birding.

The 2010 festival ran from a Thursday though Saturday, with each day offering a “field pass” to observe

rice harvesting operations and opportunities to ride on a harvester combine.

My group of three arrived at the Lafayette-New Iberia airport around noon on Thursday and within an hour were



pulling up at the site of the rice harvest south and west of Jennings, Louisiana. Five minutes later we saw our first Yellow Rail flying away from the combine and across the field. Just like that, the “hardest bird” checked off. But that rail was just the first of many. In what was considered an epic day of railing, an estimated 150 Yellow Rails were spotted by happy festival-goers working on and around two combines. In addition to the Yellows, we also enjoyed Sora, Virginia, and King Rails, but the Yellow Rail was the big winner, with an estimated 6-8 Yellow Rails for every one of the others.

Before long it was our turn to mount the big harvester. Three to four birders could ride comfortably on the outside, just to the left of the operator’s cab, with another riding inside along with the driver. From this vantage point above the rows of swaying rice plants, we could see not only rails flushing from in front of the twirling blades of the cutting attachment, but also see rails running from the harvester. It was at this point that I realized the futility of stomping through the marshes looking for these little sprites. They are fast! Really fast. And quite agile. Not infrequently rails would be spotted running ahead of the combine and not flush at all, they seemed to simply melt away (and no, they were not getting “harvested”; we saw zero bird mortality due to harvesting operations during our visit) When a Yellow Rail flushed, the combine operator would blow the horn (yep, combines have horns) to alert those standing in the field, pacing the harvester, or watching from the dikes surrounding the rice field. Sometimes the rails would flush into uncut

Yellow Rails

rice, while at other times the birds would fly into the stubble, offering a tantalizing chance for birders to get a look at a non-moving rail, and maybe even snap that prized photo. But even in four-inch rice stubble, a Yellow Rail can disappear quickly. Each strip of rice cut left less and less un-harvested crop, and in each paddy, the last cut was always watched with great expectation. How many rails were corralled into this last bit of tall rice? Sometimes the combine would finish out the field with few birds flying from that last cut, but on one occasion we had more than half a dozen Yellow Rails fly out of the rice.



Yellow Rail at the 2010 Festival
Donna L. Dittmann

When the sun edged toward the horizon and the rice harvesting operations wrapped up for the day, plenty of birding opportunities remained. Each evening the sky became dark with thousands and thousands of ibis and geese (mainly Greater White-fronted, but also Snow and Ross's) flying in to spend the night on flooded rice fields or in crawfish (don't call them crayfish) ponds. Think Lake Mattamusket in winter, but with even more birds!

Mornings were just as exciting. Since rice harvesting cannot commence until the dew has burned off the crops, birders generally have a couple of hours to beat the bushes before the rails begin to fly. A tour through the agricultural areas may produce a shallowly flooded field with a thousand Long-billed Dowitchers, or a raptor spectacle of hawks and falcons, or a chance to sort through dabbling ducks and waders. Nearby Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge provided the opportunity to see Roseate Spoonbills, shorebirds, more ducks and waders, and wintering passerines.

For birders that are satisfied with their viewing of the Yellow Rails, trips were offered to the Gulf coast and to the pine woods north of Jennings. The pine woods offered the possibility of Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Bachman's Sparrow among others, and the coast was a free-for-all of gulls, shorebirds, raptors, western vagrants, lingering passerine migrants, and more.

We visited the Gulf Coast, an intriguing area to bird. Unlike the Carolina beaches, there is very little development, just miles and miles of beach, a road, and the marshes. The relatively calm surf allowed for birds to

mass on sandbars that appeared just offshore at low tide, providing an easy way to scan through flocks of gulls, terns, and shorebirds. The beaches can be driven in a passenger vehicle due to hard packed sand, even our Chevrolet Malibu made the trip up and down the shoreline without complaint.

Once darkness fell, the Festival events changed from birds to social functions. One evening featured homemade desserts at the historic Tupper Museum, a recreation of an early 20th century general store. The next night found us at the Zigler Museum munching on boudin, alligator wrapped in bacon, and etouffee while enjoying a glass of wine and watching a docent flip through the pages of a James Audubon "Birds of America" copy in the original "double elephant folio" size. Our final evening in Jennings featured southern Louisiana cooking and Cajun music at a lakeside pavilion. A nice way to end a great trip!

Plans are already underway for the 2011 edition of the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival to be held in late October. If you want to see a Yellow Rail, and have some fun while doing it, may I suggest you consider a trip to southwestern Louisiana as part of your 2011 travel agenda?

Look for details, probably beginning in late spring, at the following web site:



<http://tinyurl.com/38sp7az>

Donna L. Dittmann



Wings Over Water 2010

Steve Shultz



The 2010 edition of the annual Wings Over Water wildlife festival will likely be remembered by the nickname “Road Under Water!” While challenging weather conditions are an expected part of late fall birding on North Carolina’s Outer Banks, the conditions encountered during the recent Wings Over Water event were uncommon. A distant cyclone far over the eastern horizon set up an impressive wind field creating steady 20-25 knot north to northeast winds over coastal North Carolina that blew for several days. While the residents of the western 8/10ths of the state were enjoying a spectacular Indian Summer week, Dare County and the Outer Banks were suffering from a blanket of low, scudding cloud and onshore surf in the 8-12 foot range. This persistent surf eventually breached Hatteras Island in several places between Buxton and Oregon Inlet, effectively isolating everything south of the inlet from everything north of the inlet for most of the day on Friday, November 12th.

But with challenging weather comes birding opportunity, and several nice finds for coastal North Carolina were located, and some even stuck around for multiple field trips. Ricky Davis’ excellent ear for all things chip-note helped locate multiple Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs. The Oregon Inlet Snow Bunting became quite the celebrity with several hundred photos obtained as the bird worked the edge of the rocky groin with no concern whatsoever for the observers standing nearby.

A male Brewer’s Blackbird at the Pea Island Visitor Center feeders would probably have been a bigger story, but as few could actually get to Pea Island, the bird enjoyed its stay without the presence of the paparazzi.

The inability for Friday and some of Saturday’s field trips to visit Pea Island meant that locations that were accessible received excellent birding coverage. Kent Fiala’s Saturday morning trip to the Bodie Island Lighthouse Pond turned up an immature Black-legged Kittiwake (with a strange growth on the ventral region) that circled the pond long enough for all to see. Somewhat more expected, but no less elegant, was a

drake Eurasian Wigeon, also at Bodie Lighthouse Pond. As do most Eurasians at this location, the bird favored the least accessible portion of the impoundment, but in the late-day sunlight, was not too difficult to pick out from it’s American brethren.

Friday evening’s Keynote Speech, held during a well-attended reception at the North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island, featured Bill Thompson III. Bill is the editor of the popular magazine *Birdwatcher’s Digest*, author of several books on birds and bird identification, a singer and songwriter, and, as we found, an excellent speaker. Wings Over Water attracts a diversity of nature enthusiasts, all of whom are not birders. Bill used this as an opportunity to explain why birders do some of the things we do (like visit dumps, sewage retention ponds, and odoriferous dredge spoil islands) and shared humorous anecdotes as examples of how a perfectly innocent hobby can become an obsession. The talk ended up with a sing-along version of Bill’s very own “Don’t Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowbirds”, sung, of course, to a Willie Nelson song of similar title.

If you have not attended a Wings Over Water, November 2011 will give you another chance (and chances are good that that roads will be above the high tide line!)



Vehicles traverse a flooded section of NC12 at Pea Island

Field Trip to Huntington Beach March 19-20, 2011

Huntington Beach State Park (HBSP) is one of the premier birding sites in South Carolina. Join us to visit the varied habitats in the park (diverse wooded areas, lake and ponds, marshes, beaches and ocean, jetty) We will spend the entire Saturday in the park. On Sunday morning we will either revisit parts of the park or visit other nearby birding spots, such as South Litchfield Beach or the Santee Coastal Reserve.

The latest HBSP bird checklist can be found at http://www.southcarolinaparks.com/files/State%20Parks/hbsp_bird_list.pdf

Fee:

\$10 (registration fee will be refunded if cancellation before March 5, 2011)

Logistics:

HBSP charges \$5 per person entrance fee unless you have an annual SC State Park pass (which admits all the occupants of a vehicle at no charge). Meet at 8 a.m. in the paved parking lot at the south-east end of the causeway. Be prepared for a 3-mile round trip walk on the beach to the jetty at the northern end of the park. Bring a scope if you have one, drinks, snacks and a picnic lunch. Restrooms are located at several convenient places in the park.

To register:

To reserve a place on this trip, or for more information, contact Paul Serridge at paulserridge@gmail.com. Complete and return the registration form below only after confirming your spot with Paul.

Participation is limited to 14 people plus the leader.

CBC Huntington Beach SC Registration Form

Name(s) _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Day Phone _____ Evening phone _____

Email _____



HBSP, SC 3/19-3/20

Registration (Member) _____ x \$10 = \$ _____

Total Enclosed = \$ _____

Club policy requires all field trip participants to comply with the field trip leader's assessment and requests concerning the physical ability of each participant to make or complete the trip.

I release and discharge (and will not make a claim against) Carolina Bird Club for injury, death, or property damage arising from my participation at this meeting and/or Club field trips. This release of liability is entered into on behalf of all members of my family, including all minors accompanying me. I certify that I am the parent or legal guardian of any such minors and that I am over 18 years of age.

Signature _____ Date _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Make check payable to Carolina Bird Club and send to: CBC, 353 Montabello, Bloomingdale, IL 60108

Please note that March 5, 2011 is the last date to cancel and receive a refund of your registration fee. Cancel by contacting the Headquarters Secretary (contact info is on the back page of this newsletter). If you have to cancel after the refund cutoff date, please notify the Headquarters Secretary so we can give your field trip space to someone on the waiting list.



Peregrine Falcon Breeding Results

Chris Kelly

Here's a summary of 2010 Peregrine Falcon (PEFA) nest results for North Carolina. Ten of thirteen "known" territories were occupied this year. Falcons were not found at Moore's Wall, Buzzard's Roost, or Shortoff Mountain. Two "new" pairs were found this year at Pickens Nose and Victory Wall. Nest success improved to 58%. Seven of twelve nesting pairs were successful in raising young. Productivity improved to 1.25 nestlings/pair (based on 15 nestlings from 12 nesting pairs). Second year females were found at three sites: Big Lost Cove, Grandfather Mountain, and NC Wall. The female at Grandfather Mt. was banded, the first instance of a banded PEFA found nesting in western NC. Her state of origin could not be determined.

Here are the detailed site summaries:

Big Lost Cove (Avery County)

- Result: Nest failure
- History: Falcons were first discovered at this site in 1997 and have reared 9 chicks. They were successful for 4 of the first 5 years and were successful in 08-09.

Hickory Nut Gorge (Rutherford County)

- Result: Two (2) fledglings.
- History: First successful nest since 1990.

Devil's Courthouse (Transylvania County)

- Result: Nest failure
- History: The pair at Devil's Courthouse has been successful 8 of the last 11 years, raising a total of 14 chicks. This cliff is a popular tourist attraction on the Blue Ridge Parkway and an easy place for birders to get a good view of the falcons' breeding activities.

Grandfather Mountain (Avery County)

- Result: Unknown
- Observations: Second year, banded female on territory with adult male. Active at usual nest ledge, but not clear if they nested.
- History: Grandfather Mountain is very remote with plenty of rock faces. A total of 9 chicks have been raised here.

Hanging Rock State Park (Stokes County)

- Result: Unoccupied
- History: Falcons returned to Hanging Rock in 2007

after a three year absence and have been successful three times (2001, 2007, and 2008) raising at least 3 chicks. The falcons face considerable competition from the many ravens and vultures in the area.

Shortoff Mountain (Linville Gorge, Burke County)

- Result: Unoccupied
- History: A pair has been in the gorge at NC Wall, Shortoff, or Gold Coast every year since reintroduction began. Although falcons were largely unsuccessful at first, they have produced 24 fledglings in the past 11 years.

North Carolina Wall (Linville Gorge, Burke County)

- Result: Nest failure
- History: North Carolina Wall is the site of the earliest post-reintroduction nesting attempts in Linville Gorge (1987-2000). NC Wall and Shortoff Mtn are now the two closest known nesting sites, less than three miles apart.

Looking Glass (Transylvania County)

- Result: Three (3) fledglings.
- Observations: Following a few years of nest failure, this site was successful this year.
- History: In 1957, Looking Glass hosted the last known pair of falcons before the species was extirpated from North Carolina. A total of 31 chicks have fledged here, including 19 in the past eleven years.

Panther Mountain (Transylvania County)

- Result: Two (2) nestlings.
- History: Falcons were first successful at Panther Mountain in 1995. Since then, 29 chicks have fledged from this site.

Buzzard's Roost (Pigeon River Gorge, Haywood Cty)

- Result: Unoccupied
- Observations: Due to the I-40 rock slide closure, the first opportunity to visit the site was in May, late in the nesting season. Falcons were not observed on two visits, though there was fresh whitewash.
- History: In 2004, a pair established a territory but nesting was not documented.

Peregrine Falcon Breeding Results

(continued)

White Rock (Madison County)

- Result: Two (2) fledglings
- Observations: New nest ledge on cliff.
- History: The female was a sub-adult in 2008 and had the distinct blonde wash of a young bird in 2009.

Whiteside Mountain (Jackson County)

- Result: Two (2) fledglings
- Observations: New nest ledge on cliff.
- History: This enormous cliff has been the most successful peregrine falcon breeding site in North Carolina since 1984. A total of 45 chicks (28 in the past 10 years) have fledged at Whiteside.

Dunn's Rock (Transylvania County)

- Result: Nest failure
- Observations: Pair on territory. Lots of vulture activity near the eyrie.
- History: The pair nested successfully in 2007.

I checked a few secondary sites this year. These are sites where there is decent cliff nesting habitat, but no records (recently or ever) of nesting peregrines.

Pickens Nose (Macon County)

- Result: Minimum two (2) fledglings
- Observations: No clear view of the eyrie. Adults active at site all spring. Could hear at least two young calling. Later observed one fledgling at a time flying.
- History: A birder reported PEFA's at this site in 2009. Pickens Nose was historically used as a hack site during PEFA reintroductions.

Victory Wall (Haywood County)

- Result: Two (2) nestlings.
- History: Falcons were observed nesting here in the 1990s, then moved to Devil's Courthouse. In June 2009 an adult PEFA observed on territory, but it was too late in the season to determine if nesting had taken place.

Additionally, There was a new nest found on the NC side of the Smokies. That nest produced at least two fledglings.

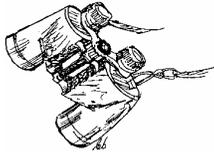
Read The Chat and the Newsletter anywhere you have Internet access!

The most recent editions of the Newsletter and The Chat are online on the CBC website. Older editions of The Chat are free for anyone to download, but the CBC Newsletter and the two most recent calendar years of The Chat are available only to CBC members. All CBC members will use the same username and password to access these publications. The username is "**member**" and the password is "**birdfun**".

This is a membership benefit, please don't share the password with non-members! The password will be changed from time to time, but can always be found in the most recent print edition of the Newsletter.

Go to <http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/newsletter> to access the Newsletter, and <http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/chat> to access The Chat.

Welcome New Members!	Bill Jacobs Raleigh, NC	Sarah McCrory Asheboro, NC	Kent and Jane Roberts Patterson, NC	Melissa Vindigni Asheboro, NC
Cathy Barrett Fayetteville, NC	Judy Jaenicke Raleigh, NC	Jeanne Musgrove Rock Hill, SC	Killian Robinson Winston- Salem, NC	Ken and Constance Christison Conway, NC
Ernest Glenn Greer, SC	Patsy Martin Vass, NC	Susan Powers Lenoir, NC		



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Upcoming CBC Meetings

Blowing Rock, NC May 6-8, 2011
 Beaufort, SC Sept 29 to Oct 1, 2011

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 April, June, August, and October.

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