

Last Minute Trip to Johnston County’s Howell Woods Makes for Good Birding

As you can read in the article on page 1, Wake Audubon’s June field trip was scheduled to go to Battery Island to see the White Ibis colony. With the disappearance of the colony this year, though, we had to make a last minute decision to find another spot to visit. The ever-dependable Howell Woods was the chosen spot, and five Wake Audubon members spent a day birding this 2,800 acres in southernmost Johnston County.


Jane and Jim Hunt, Richard Brown, Harriett Sato and I met at the museum and all squeezed into one car for the trip to Howell Woods Environmental Learning Center. Thanks to James Sasser, Director and Wildlife Biologist at the site, for allowing our group access to the Center’s diverse habitats, including the Neuse River and other sites on this beautiful property.

We started with the trails around the Learning Center, and then, after a picnic lunch on the Center’s shaded porch, we drove

most of the loop road down to the Neuse and back. We tallied 48 species seen or heard. Notable species include Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Chimney Swift, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting and Eastern Meadowlark. We were delighted to hear Bobwhite, Chat, Wood Thrush, and Acadian Flycatcher. For most of us, the highlight of the trip was hearing so many Cuckoos and getting a very good look at one of these impressive birds.

Howell Woods is a great spot for birding, and should be on every Triangle birders must-see list. Only about a 45 minute drive from downtown Raleigh, most of the trails are open to everyone and the habitat is so diverse that many birds can be seen. Pick up a bird checklist and trail maps on the porch of the Learning Center and make a day of it. But don’t forget — bring your insect repellent, sunscreen and water this time of year.
~Gerry Luginbuhl

Got a submission for the newsletter? Send it to linda_rudd@ncsu.edu by the first of the month to be considered for future issues. Submissions may be edited for space or content.



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Mission Statement: “To foster knowledge, appreciation, and enjoyment of nature; to encourage responsible environmental stewardship; to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats, for the benefit of humanity and the earth’s biological diversity.”

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August 2006

Wingbeats

Inside:
Wingbeats wins national accolades!
Read about it in the President’s message.

White Ibis Abandon Battery Island

Wake Audubon Forced to Cancel June Trip

The 100 acre Audubon Sanctuary at the mouth of the Cape Fear River in Brunswick County, which was home to 10 percent of North America’s breeding White Ibis (Eudocimus albus) and hundreds of pairs of other wading birds, is a lot quieter this year. So much so that Wake Audubon was forced to cancel our planned June field trip to view what is typically a spectacular sight there.

Nearly 15,000 nesting pairs of White Ibis did not show up for their annual coastal courtship and nesting. Where have they gone?

Walker Golder, Deputy Director of Audubon North Carolina, says that about a third moved to a nearby island in the lower Cape Fear River. The rest have yet to be found. Although research has indicated that White Ibis have high breeding site fidelity, several years of stressors may cause abandonment of the Battery Island site.

“Stressors can be human disturbance, predation, and successive droughts or wet periods,” Walker tells us. The reason for this season’s move is yet unknown, but “no evidence has been found related to human disturbance or mammalian predation.” The island is protected by an Audubon warden and wildlife enforcement officers with the North Carolina Wildlife

Resources Commission. In addition, outreach efforts to the local communities have helped protect the island from human disturbance.

While causes for this year’s abandonment remain a mystery, we can look to the past for hints of some of the challenges White Ibis face. The most significant causes of nest mortality on Battery Island in the past have been from flooding of low-lying nests and Fish Crows eating eggs.

In addition, excessive drought or wet weather can affect the availability of prey items that adult ibis feed to their young. Young ibis must cope with the lack of salt glands during their early lives, a trait that prohibits them from being able to process food from salty environments. This means the fiddler crabs that make up a large portion of their parents’ diets are ill-suited for the young birds. Adult ibis must travel inland to catch freshwater prey such as crayfish to feed the nestlings, and changes in the weather can affect their ability to find enough food.

If Walker and his Audubon colleagues discover the cause of the missing White Ibis, we’ll pass along the information. In the meantime, for more reading on Battery Island breeding birds visit www.audubon.org/chapter/nc/nc/IBAs/Coast/battery_island.htm.



Wake Audubon Calendar

Join us for these fun and informative upcoming events.

Monthly Meeting — August 8 Members' Slide Show —

This month's speaker is you! Bring up to five of your favorite natural history slides to the meeting to share, and be prepared to tell a little bit about them. The meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. in the A-level conference room of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, and is open to the public.

Birding the Buckeye Walk at Anderson Point

Saturday, August 12, 8:30 a.m.

Join us for a morning walk along the Buckeye Trail. Meet at the parking area of the Buckeye Trail on Crabtree Blvd. between Raleigh Blvd. and Capital Blvd. Contact Bob Winstead for more information at birderbob1@aol.com or 845-5006.

Tour a Wake County Backyard Wildlife Haven

Saturday, August 12, 8 a.m.

In February, Wake Audubon members were treated to a talk by Harry and Hallie Smith, two members who work hard to make their backyard a wildlife paradise. Having obtained the National Wildlife Federation's "Backyard Wildlife Habitat" designation, they concentrate their gardening efforts on native plants loved by birds and other creatures and that are native to this area. See for yourself how successful they've been when we visit their home in Raleigh. Meet at the Museum of Natural Sciences parking lot on Jones Street to carpool or to follow along.

Feathered Facts



American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*) —

Encounters with this species, along with a mesmerizing one with a male American Redstart, sealed my fate as a bird devotee. As a child I spent countless hours patiently stalking these oh-so-tame "wild canaries" in the hopes of catching one by hand. At times I came within a few feet. This species initiates nesting later than any other songbird. And while it

is fairly common in the state, few hard data exist on its North Carolina nesting cycle. This cycle, at least in the Piedmont, appears to occur in August — now who wants to be out looking for nesting birds in the August heat? Each year, adults bring recently fledged young to my thistle feeder at the end of August or early September. But after a month or so, I've noticed these birds are gone, with more showing up a few weeks after that. A highly migratory bird, it appears "our" birds head south, to be replaced by incoming Yankee ones... yet another pending study! ~John Gerwin

photo by Paul McAdams

President's Message Wingbeats Wins Newsletter Contest

We weren't sure it was such a good idea.

Wake Audubon Board members all agreed that the old newsletter needed to be revamped — black text turned dingy against the plain green paper, and photos of Wake Audubon activities were woefully few. But a major overhaul? One that would cost quite a bit more of our precious funds? Understandably there was some resistance.

That was two years ago, before *Wingbeats*, back when our number one method of communicating with you, our members, was decidedly less than spectacular. The newsletter contained great information and faithful, dedicated volunteers worked hard to put it together and mail it every month. But we entered it into National Audubon's newsletter contest and the feedback was clear: we lacked pizzazz. Surely the state's largest and most active Audubon chapter could do better!

I must admit I took a personal interest in this challenge, since I do graphic design as part of my day job. Together with other Board members, we sketched out some ideas to make our monthly newsletter reflect the high standards, knowledge and, well, pizzazz of the people behind it. How about a new logo? Check. What about featuring a different bird each month? Check. Trip reports, photos, tips for living "green"? All check. We had great ideas and the people to make them happen.

But still there was that question of money. No one disagreed that a new design would be nice, but, well, how much would it cost? And adding color? That would be expensive.

Then the great idea emerged to solicit businesses to sponsor our work. We knew that Wake Audubon is well respected in the Triangle and many area businesses already supported our work. A few calls later, and the Great Outdoor Provision Company and Wild Birds Unlimited signed on as sponsors. Their funds would completely pay for *Wingbeats*' production and most of the mailing. Now the road to the newsletter we all hoped for was clear.

Last month I think any naysayers or holdouts for the old, simple newsletter were quieted when the announcement from National Audubon came through — *Wingbeats* took first place in the national newsletter contest for chapters with 1,000 to 1,500 members! That's not too shabby, and I dare say we could have competed with chapters twice our size.

Not only have we created a newsletter that speaks to our members more loudly and more clearly, but one that has now received critical acclaim from professionals and our peers. What an accomplishment!

Thank you for your support through our changes! And happy birding,

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News of Interest

Plan Now to Attend 10th Year of Wings Over Water — Now in its tenth year, the Wings Over Water festival has become the premier birding festival of the Outer Banks of North Carolina. This year's festival will be Nov. 7-12, and organizers promise cooler temperatures, fewer tourists and not as many bugs. But of course, plenty of birds!

Highlights for 2006 include keynote speaker Ken Rosenberg of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, one of the principal researchers on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker Recovery Project. He will talk about the efforts to bring this bird back from the brink of extinction. Also an expert in optics, Ken will lead two field trips during his stay on the Outer Banks.

If it's trips you enjoy, Wings Over Water offers birding trips throughout a variety of diverse eastern North Carolina habitats, including barrier islands, maritime forests, and salt marshes. Find out more at www.wingsoverwater.org. Bird lists from past festivals are posted at www.northeast-nc.com/wings/birdlist2.pdf.

If you have any questions about the festival field trips, contact Wildlife Interpretive Specialist Ann Marie Chapman at (252) 987-1118 or by email at AnnMarie_Chapman@fws.gov. If you have any questions about registration or trip availability, call (252) 441-8144. Trips are expected to fill up quickly, so register soon!

Act Locally

The Hot, the Dry and the Costly: Save Water, Save Cash

Everyone can help conserve water (helping save both a valuable resource and money), both inside the home and out.

1. Turn off water when not in use (do you let the water run while brushing your teeth?).
2. Stop the drips. A dripping faucet or leaky toilet valve can waste many gallons of water each day. Don't forget to check for drips and leaks in plumbing fixtures, pipes, and outdoor irrigation systems, which can waste huge amounts of water if not promptly fixed.
3. Replace old appliances and toilets. Check the ratings for water usage (and energy consumption) of washers, dryers, dishwashers, and toilets.
4. Water wisely. Water lawns and gardens at dawn or dusk when

- less water is lost immediately to evaporation. Better yet, water sparingly or don't water at all. Use mulches and plant varieties that are drought resistant.
5. Collect water from roof runoff in a rain barrel to use for your yard.
 6. Collect water in your shower or sink while waiting for hot water, then use the collected water for plants, garden, or even to fill up your toilet tank after the next flush!
 7. Fill the dishwasher before running it. Make the most of the water you use.
 8. Be creative. There are many ways to save water, and every bit counts.