

Piping Plover report, continued from page 1.

This is one of those “unfortunate” species, one with some specific habitat requirements that has resulted in much conflict and tension between humans and plovers. Even across the various locations where they breed, these plovers always choose nest sites with very similar characteristics. Those include: open sand, gravel, or shell-covered substrates; the more elevated areas; near small clumps of grass but not in patches of evenly distributed vegetations; often near a large object (e.g. stone, log); and away from water. They also often nest is association with Least and Common Terns. The nest itself is a simple scrape in the sandy substrate and may or may not be lined with bits of pebbles and shells.

In addition to nest site preferences, the species has feeding preferences, with seasonal changes no less. Breeding birds usually forage within 5 meters (16 feet) of the water’s edge, only returning to higher ground at sunset.

Thus, attendant chicks on the coast must walk across the full beach, with the parents, twice a day, until they are able to fly (at about 28 days old). In winter, this species feeds at mudflats, sandflats exposed at low tide, and sandy mudflats.

In other words, these guys want nice, open, undisturbed beaches and freshwater shorelines. A bird could hardly pick a worse spot to make a living, in these times.

Few studies have investigated exactly what the birds are eating. This is hard to do, due to the species Threatened/Endangered status. But those data indicate birds along coasts are feeding on marine worms, tiny crustaceans and mollusks, fly larvae and beetles.

This brief synopsis highlights the lifestyle of this species. Next month I’ll relate what some folks are doing to assist these threatened birds, including some good news from one of our NC Audubon Coastal Sanctuary island groups.

~ John Gerwin

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Pipers are Calling in North Carolina

Part 1 of 2: Piping Plover Report 2006

Pipe-pipe-pipe-pipe-pipe” — so goes the high-pitched, territorial and courtship call of the delightful, diminutive Piping Plover (PIPL). I’ve always been a sucker for large, dark eyes on a cute round face, and the small plovers display that look more than almost any other bird (save for a few owl species — and I’ll stick to just birds here). Eight plover species regularly breed in North America, with the smaller ones, Snowy, Wilson’s and Piping, in some trouble. For better and worse, Pipers have garnered much attention over the years. PIPL’s breed along the east coast from North Carolina to Nova Scotia, and along shorelines of the Great Lakes and Northern Great Plains waterways. Most winter along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.

In North Carolina, PIPL can be found breeding along the coast, from Sunset Beach (the southernmost known breeding site for the species) to the Virginia line. These birds depart in late summer, with

other birds arriving in the fall to spend the winter. The non-breeding birds occur from Cape Hatteras south. Thus, in North Carolina, we see PIPL regularly all year round, and this is unique across the country. For some it is a blessing, others, a curse.

The species is listed as Endangered in Canada, and in the U.S. for the Great Lakes population. Elsewhere it is listed as Threatened. Populations were decimated during the heyday of the feather trade, and have made only a modest comeback since protection began, around 1920.

continued on back page...



photo courtesy Walker Golder

Herping in the Sandhills Cold but Productive

The “Halloween Herps in the Sandhills” field trip, held on Sunday, Oct. 15, was a success even though unseasonably cold weather put a damper on some reptile activity. The trip was led by Jeff Beane; also attending were Nathan Block, Ellen and Hank Lyle, David and Michael McCloy, and Carmen White. The trip lasted most of the day; covered portions of Hoke, Moore, Richmond, and Scotland Counties; and turned up nine amphibian species and eight reptile species. Some examples were a Dwarf Mudpuppy, Broken-striped Newts, Southern Hognose snake and Eastern Coachwhip. In addition, at least 27 bird species, a few mammals and fishes, and plenty of interesting invertebrates were seen. We ended with dinner at Los 2 Potrillos Mexican restaurant in Aberdeen. A good time was had by all.

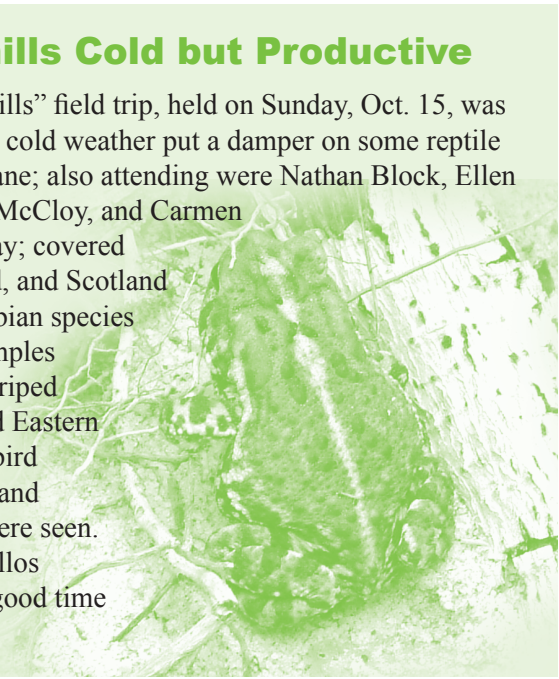


photo of a Southern Toad by Ellen Lyle (from last year’s herping trip)



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# Wake Audubon Calendar

Join us for these fun and informative upcoming events.

## Leader's Choice Bird Walk Saturday, Dec. 9, TBA

Need info for this

## Monthly Meeting — Dec. 12 Cetacean Stranding Along the North Carolina Coast —

Dr. Greg Lewbart, Professor of Aquatic Animal Medicine at the NCSU School of Veterinary Medicine, will discuss whale and dolphin strandings along our coast, including some of the causes of strandings and what we can learn from 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.

## Christmas Bird Count Saturday, Dec. 16

Join us for the 106th Annual Christmas Bird Count and be a part of the largest scientific social event in the world. John Gerwin (919-733-7450 x 726) and John Connors (919-733-7450 x 602) at the Museum of Natural Sciences will continue as compilers for our count, so give them a call or e-mail John Connors at

john.connors@ncmail.net if you would like to participate. Participation is free, but if you wish to be officially "counted" as a participant, your \$5 fee will defray the cost of publishing the count results.

Once you sign up, you will be placed with one of 15 or more group captains, who set the destinations and arrival times. Our Raleigh Count has been surveying the same tracts of land since 1937, so we have accumulated some impressive data. You can be a part of that — join us this year! Even those watching backyard feeders can report observations, provided they are within the Count Circle — a 15 mile diameter circle with its center at the Farmer's Market on Lake Wheeler Road.

We welcome all age and skill levels, so don't worry if you are a novice, we will team you with groups who will ensure you get some good looks at some great birds. We will have a noontime Countdown (site to be determined, ask your site captain and bring your lunch), and may share an evening supper. Hope to see you there.

## Feathered Facts



**Wilson's (Common) Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*)** — *The Wilson's Snipe was recently recognized as a different species from the Common Snipe of Eurasia. The two look very similar, but differ in the shape, patterning, and usually the number of tail feathers. The long bill is flexible. The tips can be opened and closed with no motion at the base. Sensory pits at the tip allow the bird to feel its prey deep in mud. Males*

*perform a "winnowing" display during courtship, flying high in circles above a waiting female who is hidden in vegetation below, and then taking shallow dives to produce an eerie, wavering sound. This results from air rushing through the attenuated outer tail feathers. Females almost always lay four eggs. The male leaves the nest with the first two chicks that hatch. The female takes the last two and cares for them. This species is fairly common in North Carolina in winter.*

~John Gerwin

# President's Message

## Forging Better Connections with our Members

Throughout my two years as president of Wake Audubon, I've come to know so many members who truly make this organization the special group that it is. And in case I didn't realize it before, I leave office this month with two years of understanding just how important you, our members, are to Wake Audubon's success. You are truly our most important resource — one to cherish, to embrace, and to cultivate.

National Audubon knows this as well, and recently announced a new way for you to stay connected with our leaders in the national office — the Audubon Action Center Web site is a hub of information about issues and projects at the top of Audubon's to-do list. It allows you to send messages to legislators, find out how you can participate in current conservation campaigns, update your personal information on file, and more. Visit <http://audubonaction.org/audubon/home.html> to take advantage of this improved resource.

Here at home, Wake Audubon too is making strides toward better communication with our more than 1,200 members in the Triangle area. The new year will bring with it new goals and projects for our group, plus the continuation of other issues we've begun, such as the Important Bird Area adoption. This winter we launch a new way for you to stay up to date with all these goings on — a Wake Audubon email listserv.

The listserv will be a database of email addresses of our members who wish to receive messages about upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, action alerts, etc. The email addresses already submitted to Wake Audubon will automatically be added to the listserv, but at any time if you wish to subscribe (or, for that matter, unsubscribe), all you have to do is send me a note to [cpearson17@nc.rr.com](mailto:cpearson17@nc.rr.com).

Rest assured that this listserv will only be used to keep you better informed, in real time, about what your Audubon chapter is doing in your community. We will never share your address with anyone else and promise not to spam you. You can unsubscribe anytime you wish.

Cultivating a membership that is knowledgeable, engaged and passionate about the organization's goals — this is the ideal we all hope for, whether at the national, state, or local level. I sincerely hope these new developments will offer you opportunities to become more involved with your Audubon Society. We look forward to working with you soon!

And, before I sign off for the last time, let me take this chance to say thank you to everyone who made my tenure as president so fulfilling and enjoyable. I've been out of pocket with my new parental duties this year, but throughout it all, I've kept Wake Audubon close. Thank you all for your continued support.

Happy Holidays,

*Ching*

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# Give the Gift of Wake Audubon this Holiday Season

Need a present for that hard-to-buy-for person in your life? Give a double gift by purchasing a Wake Audubon gift membership, giving a donation in someone's name, or buying a set of notecards or the ever-popular guidebook, *A Birdwatcher's Guide to the Triangle*. Any of these will not only make a great gift for the holidays, but will also contribute to Wake Audubon's treasury. Visit our Web site, [www.wakeaudubon.org](http://www.wakeaudubon.org) for information, or call Lena at 571-0388 to make a purchase or for additional details.

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## Act Locally

### Reducing and Reusing Your Holiday Waste

Do you find yourself wondering what to do now with all the excess stuff you have accumulated during the holiday season? Here are some pre- and post-holiday ideas for reducing and recycling.

Gift giving ideas: Wrap gifts in recycled wrapping paper, colorful pages from the Sunday funnies, reusable gift bags, baskets, or tins. Give no-wrap gifts such as gift-certificates, tickets, or make a donation in someone's honor to your favorite non-profit organization.

After the holidays, don't forget to recycle! Many local city/county recycling drop-off sites accept the following: holiday cards and envelopes (with "mixed paper"), corrugated cardboard, flat cardboard, pressboard (such as gift boxes and cereal boxes). Cans, glass, bottles, and newspapers are typically accepted in curbside recycling programs, or can be brought to your local recycling

center as well. Wake County accepts wrapping paper and trees for recycling at select drop off sites for two weeks after Christmas ([www.WakeGov.com](http://www.WakeGov.com) or 919-856-6186 for more info).

What about all those Styrofoam packing peanuts? Clean packing peanuts are often cheerfully accepted and re-used by local packing and shipping stores.

What else can you do with your Christmas tree besides sending it away to be recycled? Buy a live tree and plant it after the holidays. If you have the space in your back yard, use your tree to create a wildlife-friendly brush pile in your back yard to attract a variety of birds and other small animals, or break down your tree to use as compost or mulch.

Remember to act locally during the holidays just as you do throughout the year. Happy Holidays!