

Training Sessions Scheduled for Lumber River IBA Volunteers

After all the recent preparations for monitoring bird populations at the Lumber River IBA, it's time now for training! In recent issues of *Wingbeats* we have described to you how several Wake Audubon members, including John Little, Kendrick Weeks and John Gerwin, have laid the groundwork for our adoption of this Important Bird Area (catch up on the news by reading old issues at www.wakeaudubon.org/publications.htm). Now it's time for you to get involved.

March 17 will be the first training for volunteers interested in counting birds at Lumber River. Board member and ornithologist John Gerwin will conduct the first session. John, who will be recovering from a planned surgery and can't stray far from home, invites volunteers into his Raleigh neighborhood for this class. Find out more by contacting him at 919-854-7791.



The next scheduled training is onsite, the weekend of March 31. Board member and naturalist Kendrick Weeks, with possible assistance from Curtis Smalling of Audubon North Carolina, will conduct a training session at various locations in the Lumber River IBA itself. You can find out more about

these sessions by getting in touch with Kendrick at kendrickweeks@earthlink.net.

After that, we should be able to shift into high gear to undertake the fun work of monitoring birds in the Lumber River IBA. Those already involved in this process are excited about moving forward, and we hope all members of Wake Audubon are also. Whether you can participate or not, whatever interesting data comes out of the River we will be sure to share!

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March 2007

Wingbeats

Inside:

This month's calendar is packed full! Find an event to join by checking out page 2.

Printed on 70% recycled paper using soy inks. Please recycle.

Introducing the Carolina Herp Atlas A Citizen-Science Project for Reptile and Amphibian Enthusiasts

Have you ever seen an Eastern Kingsnake in your backyard or found a Fowler's Toad on your porch and wondered if wildlife biologists needed to know about it? These observations are important and now there is a place to submit your observations that can help with the conservation of amphibians and reptiles in the Carolinas: The Carolina Herp Atlas (CHA).

The CHA, developed by the Davidson College Herpetology Laboratory and Davidson College Information Technology Services, is a new, online database that uses observations by citizen scientists to track reptile and amphibian distributions in North and South Carolina. Funded by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, the CHA also allows users a simple way to maintain a personal database of the reptiles and amphibians they observe. County-level distribution maps can be viewed by anyone who visits the CHA Web site.

Wildlife biologists and herpetologists can use these data to understand activity periods, habitat relationships, distribution, conservation status and other facets of amphibian and reptile ecology in North Carolina.

How does the CHA work? Before you can submit records, you must first register and set-up a "My Herps" account. Once you register, you are able to add records and keep track of your observations. Each observation should include:

- 1) state and county;
- 2) genus and species;
- 3) date;
- 4) location;
- 5) geographic coordinates (using our GeoLocator);
- 6) remarks; and
- 7) a digital photo for verification of the species identification.

The GeoLocator allows the user to pinpoint the exact location of their herp observation.

So, if you want to help conserve amphibians and reptiles in the Carolinas, then tell us where they are. Submit your observations to the Carolina Herp Atlas at www.carolinaherpatlas.org.



Red-bellied Watersnake, courtesy CHA

Wake Audubon Calendar

Join us for these fun and informative upcoming events.

Leader's Choice Bird Walk Prairie Ridge Ecostation March 10 at 8:30 a.m.

Explore 35 acres of restored native habitats at the Museum of Natural Sciences' Prairie Ridge Ecostation. Enjoy birding the native grassland and bottomland hardwood forest with Museum employee and Wake Audubon Board member Becky Browning.

Prairie Ridge is located at 4301 Reedy Creek Road; the entrance is adjacent to the rear gate of the National Guard Armory. Follow signs to the military checkpoint; turn right onto a gravel road just before you reach the checkpoint (look for signs). Meet in the parking lot next to the wooden sign board. For further information, contact Becky at 606-5352.

Monthly Meeting The NC Birding Trail: Marching Across N.C. March 13 at 7:30 p.m.

Salinda Daley, Birding Trail Coordinator for the N.C. Wildlife

Resources Commission, will present an update on the N.C. Birding Trail — a multi-agency partnership to establish a drivable birding trail in North Carolina.

The meeting will be held in the A-level conference room of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, and is open to the public.

Field Trip N.C. Birding Trail March 24 at 8 a.m.

Spend the day exploring the NC Birding Trail! We will leave from the Museum of Natural Sciences parking lot at 8 a.m. and travel to a sampling of sites on the coastal plain Trail. We will explore as many sites as possible and return to Raleigh by 6 p.m. Bring binoculars, drinks, lunch and snacks. Contact Lena at 571-0388 to arrange for car-pooling.

Anderson Point Event Beginning Birding and Birds of the Meadows March 17, 9 a.m. - noon Call Melody at 362-5689.

Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) — *This species is one of the most delightful to watch around the house. They are not shy around people and like to probe all sorts of man-made objects. These wrens are year-round residents, maintaining territories and pair bonds for life, and singing all the while. Whereas females in this genus (around 30 species) sing, only male Carolina Wrens do. Carolina Wrens breed practically all year — coastal birds may begin in late February. This species thrives in hardwood forests. Here, they often feed by probing or tearing apart dead leaves that are clumped and suspended above ground. Only a few other North American species do this (e.g. Worm-eating and Golden-winged Warblers), whereas many in the tropics do. Carolina Wrens are of course quite adapted to various settings, including arid scrub as far away as Nicaragua.*

~John Gerwin

President's Message Unique Organisms Make Up Forest Web of Life

Walking in the woods on a cool damp afternoon, we can enjoy not only the sights and sounds of the woods, but also the smells. What is behind the distinct "woody" scent — often detected after a rain or soil disturbance? It is chemicals released by bacteria that live in healthy soil and break down leaf litter and the other detritus of the trees and shrubs. These bacteria, called Actinomycetes, are a large family of delicate, thread-like organisms. Without healthy soil full of microorganisms, the leaf material wouldn't be broken down to the basic nutrients that plants need to keep growing.

There are thousands of species of Actinomycetes, most of which are benign recyclers of the forest floor. These bacteria do wage a battle with other microorganisms in the soil, and the weapons they often use are what we call antibiotics. The Actinomycetes are the leading source of antibiotics in the world. The bacteria use these chemicals presumably to kill or inhibit the growth of competing microorganisms in their environment. The Actinomycetes themselves are resistant to the antibiotics that they produce. We have been isolating Actinomycetes and the antibiotics they produce for about a century.

The location of plants signals the presence of soil conditions and microorganisms required for that plant's growth. The Pink Lady Slipper is an example of a plant with a particularly interesting mutually beneficial relationship with a microorganism, this time a fungus. This beautiful native orchid appears in its special places in the woods early every spring. Don't try to dig some up and move them to your yard; they will almost surely die! They need the special nutrients and fungus found in that little patch of soil. The Lady Slipper's seeds don't have the nutrients necessary to support a new plant. A special fungus must attach to the seed, break the seed coat, and supply nutrients to the seed so it can germinate and the small new plant can grow. Once the plant is established, its roots supply nutrients back to the fungus and the other microorganisms in its neighborhood. And, although we may detect only a faint scent, the Pink Lady Slipper smells very good to bumble bees, who come expecting nectar, and instead get trapped inside the flower, and have to push their way out through the pollen-coated flower organs.

Next time you walk in the woods, look down and notice the interesting plants and insects on the forest floor. Such a delightfully complex web of life!

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News of Interest

Pocosin Lakes NWR Photography Exhibit — Before the Wake Audubon meeting on March 13, come early to visit this special exhibit at the Museum of Natural Sciences store. The store will be open from 6:45 to 7:30 p.m. especially for Wake Audubon members who would like to see this special place — the target of the Navy's ill-advised plan to build an outlying landing field — depicted in photographs by Diana Bloomfield, Mary Doherty, and Lisa Tolley.

The exhibit runs through April 1 during regular Museum Store hours.

Reptile and Amphibian Day will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, March 17 at the Museum of Natural Sciences. This annual educational event, sponsored by the Museum and the N.C. Herpetological Society, features an outstanding array of live amphibian and reptile displays, children's activities, guest speakers, and more. The event is free to the public and always draws among the largest

crowds of any Museum event. For more information, contact Bob Flook at 733-7450, ext. 503 or by email at bob.flook@ncmail.net.

Matthew Daw, our 13-year-old member who has recently participated in a field trip and the Christmas Bird Count, has won first prize in the **American Birding Association Young Birder of the Year** contest for his age group. Stay tuned for an article about Matt's adventures in the April Wingbeats!

B.W. Wells Heritage Day at Rock Cliff Farm — Saturday, March 31, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Learn about the pioneer ecologist and early botanist of N.C. by visiting his retirement home at Falls Lake. Take a walk to look at the geology or wildflowers; hike to Zeagle's Rock; participate in a canoe tour around the lake shore; learn about B.W. Wells through ecological games; pick up his book and other literature while enjoying the displays and exhibits and other activities. More information: www.bwwells.org.

Act Locally

Extra! Extra! Recycle Newspapers as Garden Mulch

Time to start planning for summer flower and vegetable gardens! Do weeds invade your tomato patch? Looking for some biodegradable weed-blocking mulch? Consider recycling your newspapers as garden or flower bed mulch. It is a simple, effective, environmentally-friendly, and economical way to recycle newspapers, plus it has numerous benefits for your garden. Mulching can help keep fruits and vegetables clean, conserve water by keeping your garden plants moist, prevent weed growth, and prevent soil erosion.

The method is simple. Just lay three to six sheets of newspaper

around plants, in garden walkways, or between rows. To cover the newspapers and help hold them down, use something that can be turned into the soil the following year, such as a layer of hay, shredded leaves, or a thin layer of grass clippings. Even topping the paper with garden soil works fine.

So the next time you fold up your newspaper after your morning coffee, go ahead and think ahead to your spring plantings. Save that paper to use as valuable mulch!