



2012 Meetings

- Monday, January 23 MOVIE. "My Life as a Turkey" Deep in the wilds of Florida, Joe Hutto, wildlife artist and naturalist, was presented with a rare opportunity. It had long been his hope to learn about the secret world of wild turkeys by having young turkey poults imprint on him, but obtaining wild turkey eggs, or young poults, had proven to be next to impossible; so when he arrived home one day to find a bowl filled with wild turkey eggs on his doorstep, he went out immediately to obtain an incubator, determined to become their mother. It was an experience that would change his life in ways he could never have imagined.
- Monday, February 27 NC STATE PARKS INVENTORY. Ed Corey will speak about his inventory work at DENR Parks. NC Parks is improving their website and one of the things readers can now do is get lists of plants and animals for a given park. Ed will discuss this and other topics.
- Monday, March 26 SANDHILLS WEED MANAGEMENT AREA. Tracy Rush will share details about her work with the Sandhills Weed Management Area. Their mission is to help manage and control invasive plant species in the Sandhills region of North Carolina.
- Monday, April 23 BUTTERFLYING IN NORTH CAROLINA. Jeff Phippen will share his experiences tracking down and photographing butterflies across the state.
- Meeting Times: 7:00 p.m. - Fellowship and Socializing. 7:30 p.m. - Meeting and Program.
- Program Location: Weymouth Woods Visitors' Center Auditorium.
Phone 910-692-2167 for directions.

*** We normally meet on the 4th Monday of each month. ***

Upcoming Field Trips

- January 21 10:00 a.m. National Champion Pond Cypress.** Bruce Sorrie will lead a short hike to see the newly-crowned National Champ pond cypress. Meet at BP station at corner of Connecticut Ave and Broad St in Southern Pines at 10 am. We'll carpool from there and drive

up towards Vass. It's likely to be squishy afoot, so wear waterproof footwear. This trip won't take more than 2 hours, so perhaps we will do some local birding afterwards.

February 18

7:00 p.m. Stargazing. Scott Hartley will lead a stargazing program. Meet at Weymouth Center at 7pm. Join us for a fun night of learning some basic astronomy and how to locate and identify several of the most visible constellations. Contact Scott Hartley at 910-692-2167 or scott.hartley@ncdenr.gov.

March 24

7:00 a.m. Birding and Wildflowers. Come, see, and photograph early spring wildflowers at historic Endor Iron Furnace (county park) followed by birding both there and at the White Pines Conservation Preserve, both in Lee County, west of Sanford. Meet at Town and Country parking lot, Aberdeen, at 7:00 a.m., Saturday, March 24, 2012, to car-pool. This will be a half-day trip, so expect to be back about 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. Be sure to bring binoculars and water and snacks if you desire. Moderate walking will be involved. Contact David McCloy, mdmccloy@mindspring.com or (910) 692-5094, if you have questions or plan to attend.

April 1

Butterflies. Join Jeff Pippin to look for local butterflies. Check website and/or e-mail for more information as the details become available.

IMPORTANT: *Call or email the field trip leader to register for a trip. Please do so at least one day before the trip to ensure that the trip is still on schedule.*

Trip Leaders Needed

We receive a lot of trip ideas from members; what we need are members to lead these trips. You don't necessarily have to be an expert to lead a trip. You just need to be willing to schedule, meet, and do the logistics. So please consider leading one of the following:

Falls Lake-Triangle Lakes for waterfowl
Uwharrie National Forest
Bay Lakes
Bog Turtle search

If you have other field trip ideas or would be willing to lead one of these trips, please contact the Field Trip Directors: David McCloy, Carol Bowman, or Jeff Beane.



C/o Weymouth Woods Nature Preserve
1024 N. Fort Bragg Road
Southern Pines, NC 28387

WINTER BIRDING DELIGHT!

Submitted by: Jennifer Archambault

Between 14 December 2011 and 5 January 2012, birders across the North and South American continents, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands participated in the 112th annual Christmas Bird Count. This event, sponsored by the National Audubon Society, is the oldest-known, and possibly the largest, citizen science project around. Known as the CBC, the event is organized by dedicated count compilers, who assign participants a route within a 15-mile diameter "Count Circle". The count in each circle is completed in a calendar day, and all counts worldwide are conducted during the count window. Every bird heard or seen all day is counted, resulting in a species total and total number of individuals at the end of the day.

Though participants range in experience from beginners to wildlife professionals, count compilers ensure that newbies are paired with experienced birders. Thus, the CBC is able to provide reliable, long-term data on bird population trends. The effort by some 60,000 volunteers in more than 2,000 count circles accomplishes tasks that no one research or management project could do alone. Over the years, the effort of volunteers has helped to document the recovery of the bald eagle, the rapid expansion of the Eurasian collared dove, and the decline of many common birds, including the northern bobwhite, the field sparrow, and even the common grackle.

Last year, North Carolinians participated in 49 Count Circles from Highlands Plateau in the mountains to Cape Hatteras on the Outer Banks. Our citizens logged nearly 1.4 million birds from 223 species! I've had the opportunity to participate in the Southern Pines Count Circle the last couple years. The Southern Pines CBC, led by compiler (and NCTWS President-Elect) Susan Campbell was held for the 39th time on 18 December 2011. We saw 95 species and had a record 35 participants! Highlights reported by Campbell included a merlin (*Falco columbarius*), a species rarely spotted in this count circle; an orange-crowned warbler (*Vermivora celata*), further inland than typically expected; 8 common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), often too elusive to detect; loads of waterfowl on our many ponds and lakes; and, of course, seeing old friends and new faces at the chili luncheon and countdown. It was a wonderful way to spend a winter day outdoors and among friends and wildlife.



Jennifer Archambault (left) and Gabriela Gonzalez-Garrison (right) counting a raft of more than 80 hooded mergansers and other waterfowl (out of frame) on a pond near Vass, NC, during the Southern Pines Christmas Bird Count. (Credit: Bill Mullin)



A merlin (*Falco columbarius*) sits atop a power pole on a chilly, yet deceptively sunny December morning during the Southern Pines Christmas Bird Count. (Credit: Jeff Beane)

As a biologist, participating in the CBC is a great way to brush up on professional development, whether you're just beginning a career as a student or are a seasoned veteran. If you missed out on this season's CBC, don't fret – The Great Backyard Bird Count is coming up, February 17-20. A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon, The Great Backyard Bird Count is another clever way to hone your skills and get children involved in learning about wildlife.

To learn more about the CBC and the Great Backyard Bird Count, or to explore the results of these citizen science projects from previous years, visit them at <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count> and <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>. Who says the field season ends with the falling leaves?!

Photography Spotlight

The images below were taken by Michael McCloy at the home of Marjorie Ludwig.



Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

Michael McCloy photo



Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

Michael McCloy photo

Big Days: Why?

The Sightings and Ramblings of a Young Birder

Many birders of a more "traditional" nature tend to scoff upon the idea of a "Big Day", a 24-hour calendar day period in which one sets out to find as many species as birds as possible in a specified area, usually a county or state. Their argument normally centers around the amount of resources consumed on a Big Day, namely gasoline, and many dismiss it as a silly, pointless pursuit...a game. Yes indeed, it is a game, a way to help rid birding of it's widespread passive stereotype. In my view, the way each birder thinks of the act of birding can fit into one of three categories- an art, a science, or a sport, or any combination of the three. Big Days are a way to bring a competitive aspect to the activity of birding, whether the competition is against your self or against others who have previously set Big Day records. It is a change of pace from the mundane, from the covering of the same small, general area day after day. It is a motivator to get out there, bird and learn. Lastly, a Big Day is not pointless at all. It is a tremendous learning tool, in many ways more so than the more thorough or casual forms of birding. For me, my first official Big Day was in February of this year. I had done many informal "Big Days" on my own before, but those were mainly a competition against myself to see whether I could find 75...90..100 species in a given area in a day. Official Big Days comply by American Birding Association (ABA) rules, and are submitted to them once a year for inclusion in their record books. I have now done 5 official Big Days this year, four in North Carolina and one in Washington. I have learned a tremendous amount from each and every one of them.

In order to successfully plan a Big Day route, one must have an in-depth knowledge of exactly where to find each expected species. Ok, no big deal right? Wrong. Think about it for a minute. When running a Big Day, the phrase "plenty of time" are alien words. This means that you are forced to find as many species as possible in as few and quick of stops as possible. Okay, so just hit the major hotspots along your planned route and you'll get a good enough tally. Wrong again. In a Big Day, no tally is "good enough". Even if it is close to dusk and you have already broken the previous monthly/state record, you don't stop. You try for owls and rails after dusk, giving your absolute 100% until you just absolutely can't bird any more. Caffeine is essential. And if you only bird at hotspots along the Big Day route, a surprising number of common birds will be missed, even if most of the more uncommon species are found. Thus, it is essential to integrate short stops for specific target birds in with several hotspots during the day. This is where an inherent knowledge of bird distribution and abundance comes in. You have to have locations planned where you can find Blue Jay, Tree Swallow, White-breasted Nuthatch, and other common species, as well as backup locations for each one. House Sparrow can be surprisingly tricky to find along some Big Day routes in NC. Many times, the common birds disappear when you really need to find them on a Big Day. This is why you need backup, even multiple backup locations for as many of these as possible. From doing four Big Days in NC this year, I have learned a surprising amount about reliable locations for common and uncommon species that I never thought about before. Sometimes you need to make spur-of-the-moment stops to pick up species that you missed elsewhere, and this is where deep knowledge of habitat preferences comes in. This patch of habitat is too small, too wet, too dry, too young, etc. for species X, let's not waste time here and instead travel on down the road to find some better looking habitat. Ali Iyoob and I did a Big Day earlier this month, ending with 130 species, which was a new NC November record (more on that Big Day in a following post). Some of our big misses that day were -- American Goldfinch, House Sparrow, Brown Thrasher, Hermit Thrush, and Sora, all common birds in November in the right habitat in eastern NC.

Big Days also require a keen ear, since most species of land birds are checked off for the day's tally by sound alone- whether it be a Kentucky Warbler's song, a Downy Woodpecker's whinny, the crisp call note of a Swamp Sparrow, or the flight call of a Bobolink. To end with a respectable total for the day, it is absolutely essential to know at least all the usual vocalizations of the expected land birds on your route. This serves as a motivating tool to study up on vocalizations before hand, especially if you are not one to bird by ear often. Also, upon hearing an unknown vocalization on a Big Day, the potential addition of a species to the day's tally drives you to track down the bird as quickly as possible. For me, this has proven to be the most effective way to learn a new "chip" note. Many birders are resistant to birding by ear, though, whether the reason is failing hearing, an overwhelming sensation of "I can

never learn all these songs!", or something else entirely. I have birded primarily by ear for years, and can attest to its effectiveness. Upon looking back on past daily checklists, especially from forested settings, I would estimate that in certain circumstances, 75% or more of these species were ID'd by ear first, many of which I never ended up actually laying eyes upon. Thus, you can see why birding by ear is essential to the success of a Big Day.

Conducting a Big Day also causes you to be hyper-vigilant. In normal circumstances, such as, casually birding with a friend or while on a field trip, birders tend to get lost in conversation instead of actually birding. I have observed this phenomenon especially while driving between birding spots. Yes, I am guilty of this myself (many times over) and have probably missed many noteworthy birds this way. On a Big Day though, there is no room for error here...every bird counts. Thus, you are just as alert while driving, looking for distant raptors soaring or for a different looking sparrow flushing out of that roadside ditch, as you are while actually birding. A good example- back to when Ali and I did a Big Day earlier this month. Super alert while driving, always scanning the marsh edges, the distant horizons, and the telephone wires, we spotted a Glossy Ibis in the marsh by the north end of the Oregon Inlet Bridge along route 12. Glossy Ibises are very hard to find on the Outer Banks that late in the season, and was an exceptional bonus bird for us on the Big Day. If we weren't extra-alert and constantly looking, then we most likely would have missed the bird entirely.

A unique aspect of a Big Day is that every bird is equally important. Okay, you say, all birds are always important, not just on a Big Day. Entirely correct, chickadees are just as important as condors in all circumstances. But these common birds, chickadees, titmice, cardinals, grackles, doves, tend to get passed over on a daily basis by most active birders. A North Carolina birder will pay much more attention to a Masked Duck than to a Mallard, at least in NC. The reason is clear- there is only one state record for Masked Duck, but Mallards can be seen virtually anywhere. On a Big Day though, a Masked Duck and a Mallard are treated as equals -- each will add one species to your list for the day.

While talking to non-birders, mentioning that you have just done, or are about to do a Big Day is a great way to spark interest immediately. Many are turned off from the idea of birding if they think it is purely a passive hobby for the rich elderly (which is still the widespread stereotype, although *The Big Year* helped). If introduced to the competitive aspect however, many view it as a sport, a break from the mundane, and even view it as "cool". I have observed this personally on several occasions. On one occasion in particular, I stopped at a gas station in Raleigh, NC about 9 PM the day before a Big Day to buy two five-hour energy shots to keep me going the next day. The cashier was in his late twenties, and made a remark along the lines of "lot of partying tonight"? I said no, early morning tomorrow...getting up at 2 AM to drive halfway across the state in order to see as many species of birds as possible. His response was "Dude, that's totally cool". I ended up telling him about it for the next five minutes or so, and he was captivated. Similar responses have been evoked from fellow students at WCU to whom I have mentioned my Big Days.

Many Big Day birders have pledged charitable donations for every species recorded on a Big Day, or have gotten sponsors to do so. If you have the means, this is a great way of helping to publicize exactly what it is that you are doing and also serves as a way to offset the impact you have on resources while doing it.

Big Days = extreme birding. They are not for the faint of heart. In summary, Big Days are not just a silly, wasteful game. They are a way to further your avian knowledge, break away from the usual birding stereotypes, perhaps help spark interest in non-birders, and most of all, see a lot of birds and have fun!!!! So get out there and bird, bird, bird, and go ahead, try a Big Day! You won't regret it.

Mike McCloy

Western Carolina University

Cullowhee, NC

Blog Entry on November 30, 2011

<http://crazybirdingfool.blogspot.com/>

Don't Forget...To check the SNHS web site (www.sandhillsnature.org) for information on last-minute field trips and/or changes in already scheduled ones. There you'll find a link to the Sandhills Natural History Society facebook page which also has all the latest information.

Facebook: If you're a facebook user, be sure to "like" our page at www.facebook.com/sandhillsnature

DUES – Dues are \$5.00 per person, per year. The dues year runs from January 1 through December 31. Please mail your check for \$5.00, payable to "Sandhills Natural History Society", to Chris Norkus, Treasurer, at:

Sandhills Natural History Society
P.O. Box 1472
Southern Pines, NC 28388-1472

Please include your address, telephone number, and e-mail address with your payment.

TEES AND LANDS' END CAPS – SNHS merchandise can be purchased at our monthly meetings. Contact David Kilpatrick at 910-295-5224 or at snhslogo@mac.com if you have any questions.

\$10	T-shirts
\$17	Baseball caps (with embroidered logo)
\$14	Baseball caps (with plain logo)
\$12	Mugs
\$ 3	Stickers

Recycle your nature, birding, or gardening magazines at each monthly meeting. There will be a table where you can drop off or pick up magazines of interest to our group.

SNHS Board of Directors 2012:

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ATTENTION!!!

If you have e-mail and are experiencing trouble receiving all the newsletters and announcements via e-mail, please contact Chris Norkus immediately. info@sandhillsnature.org

If you do not have e-mail, please read this:

Our field trips often have schedule changes and we send out e-mail updates to the membership. We suggest you ask a friend who receives these emails to keep you informed. You can also periodically call the field trip leader to get the latest updates. You can also check out the SNHS web site at www.sandhillsnature.org.