

CBC NEWSLETTER

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FALL MEETING SET FOR WILMINGTON

The fall meeting of the Carolina Bird Club has been scheduled for October 6-8 in Wilmington, North Carolina. The meeting will be primarily a birding meeting with emphasis on shorebirds and land bird migrants. The early October date should coincide with the peak of the warbler migration along the coast. If the weather cooperates, migrant traps such as the Fort Fisher area could be very exciting. Field trips are being planned for a number of the excellent birding areas

IMPROVING BIRD WATCHING SKILLS

By DON McCULLOUGH

I have a bird watching notebook that I keep very secret. I keep it secret because I write down all my mistakes in it. Even more embarrassing than calling a Common Tern an Arctic Tern because of tough conditions is calling a White-eyed Vireo a Yellow-throated Vireo given a perfect view, or calling a Bonaparte's Gull a Laughing Gull, or writing down Prairie Warbler when the song turns out to be made by a Black-throated Blue Warbler. But they're in there along with many other bad calls.

I write them down because I have found that analyzing mistakes like these really improves my bird watching skills. The thing I have noticed is that these mistakes happen because I have one favorite field mark for many common species. That favorite field mark often allows me to get quick ID's on the common species as I walk along. That way I can spend time checking for the more interesting rarities. But that "crutch" field mark can also lead me into bad calls. Let's examine each of the blunders I am willing to admit.

At Jordan Lake, near Chapel Hill, NC, White-eyed Vireos are very common in the spring. They are so common that I

around Wilmington. Programs for Friday and Saturday night are being planned by Derb Carter. Programs for both nights will focus on shorebirds and their identification. **Claudia Wilds** of Washington, DC, one of the leading experts on east coast shorebirds, will participate in the programs and field trips.

The meeting headquarters is the Ramada Inn, 5001 Market Street, Wilmington, NC 28401, telephone (919) 799-1730. A reservation form is provided in the Newsletter. **Reservations should be**

just listen for their song and don't even try to get a glimpse. The song is my "crutch" field mark. So when I saw a vireo-like bird with yellow spectacles and some yellow underneath, I didn't say "White-eyed," my mind remembered that I got several Yellow-throated Vireos at about the same time last year and that is what I called it, Yellow-throated. Now, this wasn't some quick glance, it sat there for me. I went along quite pleased with my sight until I came upon a White-eyed singing right by the trail. As soon as I scoped it with my glasses I saw my earlier mistake. The guide book confirmed it; both species have yellow spectacles and yellow "underneath." Figuring out why I made this mistake expanded the clues I have to ID the commoner White-eyed and firmly establish in my mind the need to look for the yellow throat, not just the spectacles on the Yellow-throated.

The Bonaparte's Gull mistake also happened this spring at Jordan Lake. One lazy morning at the observation platform by the lake the only thing going was some black headed gulls out on the calm surface. Black heads mean Laughing Gulls of course. But it was a great morning and all that was waiting for me was work, so I sat (see SKILLS page 3)

made no later than September 15.

DIRECTIONS TO MOTEL: Arriving from the north on I-40 continue on NC 132 at the end of the interstate. Take US 17 exit. At the end of the exit ramp turn left (west) onto Market Street. The Ramada Inn is 1/2 mile on the right.

Arriving from the south or west on US 17 or US 421 take US 17 Business route through downtown Wilmington. Look for the Ramada Inn on the left after leaving the downtown area on Market Street.

PRESIDENT APPOINTS COMMITTEE CHAIRS

CBC President Robin Carter has announced his appointment of the following committee chairs:

Awards Evelyn Dabbs
 Membership..... John Fussell
 Publicity..... Ruth Young
 Finance..... Heathy Walker
 Meetings..... John Wright

Zack Bynum will head the Long Range Planning Committee established recently by the Executive Committee.

Carter also indicated that in accordance with the provisions of the CBC Bylaws he will submit the names of Harry LeGrand, Jr. and Sid Gauthreaux, Jr. to the Executive Committee for approval as chairs of the CBC Species Records Committees for North Carolina and South Carolina respectively. The two chairs will present the names of their nominees for membership on the committees to the President and Executive Committee for approval.

President Carter stated that his action was in keeping with the stated desire of the Executive Committee for the CBC to continue the species records function.

BRITISH MUSEUM
(NATURAL HISTORY)

6 APR 1992

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ALASKAN BIRDING TOUR

By
BOB HADER

"Spring bird watching is an experience to be found nowhere else on this continent." So says the WINGS 1989 brochure of birding tours, and I heartily agree. Actually WINGS offers two Alaskan tours. I signed up for *Alaska I*, twenty days starting in Anchorage May 29. *Alaska I* includes six days at Gambell on St. Lawrence Island, two days each at Nome, the Pribilofs, Denali Park, a ferry trip from Homer to Kodiak and return to Seward, and intervening days in Anchorage. *Alaska II* omits the Gambel segment, but includes Glacier Bay and Barrow. Segments of either tour may be omitted with the cost proportionately reduced.

Our group consisted of about 30 birders, plus leaders Jon Dun and David Sibley. Included among the birders were three other CBC members, **Heathy Walker** and **Jim and Jansen Lasley**. On the first evening we were taken to a Northern Shrike nest, a Boreal Owl nest, and also saw a breeding plumage Hudsonian Godwit. The next day we flew to Nome and then on to Gambell, an Eskimo village on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea. The flight to Gambell was an adventure in itself. Four flights of nine-passenger, two engine Navahos were necessary. Weather at Gambell was marginal for landing. The first two flights got in, the third (mine) made an unsuccessful attempt at landing, but had to pull up at 100 ft. and eventually go back to Nome. We finally made it late the following day, but our half of the group missed the Eurasian Bullfinch.

At Gambell we stayed in two old frame houses owned by the Eskimos. We slept on cots or on the floor; no running water and a "honey pot" toilet. Helen Carlson, a birder from Billings, Montana, was our cook. The meals were simple but very good. The two primary birding areas were the "Point" or beach on the Bering Sea and the Boneyards in the village. At the Point countless numbers of auklets, murrelets, gulls, loons and waterfowl stream by. Among these were all four species of eider, Yellow-billed Loon, Emperor Geese, Slaty-backed Gull, Ivory Gull, all three jagers, both

Tufted and Horned Puffin. Incidentally, on one clear day we could see across to Siberia, only 40 miles away. The Boneyards are areas of a few acres where lie the bones of marine mammals brought in by Eskimo hunters over many, many decades. The Eskimos now prospect these areas for old walrus tusks from which they carve lovely small items for sale. In the Boneyards we found Bramblings, Common Sandpiper, Red-throated Pipit, Rufous-necked Stint and a variety of more common shorebirds, Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs. Nearby we found a Bluethroat, both Yellow and White Wagtails and McKay's Bunting.

After our days at Gambell we returned to Nome and spent two days birding nearby. Among the good birds were Tufted Duck, Terek's Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Willow and Rock Ptarmigans, Bluethroat, Northern Wheatears, Bar-tailed Godwits and both Pacific and Arctic Loon. The tundra around Nome was still about 50% covered with snow. Gambell had been over 80% snow covered.

From Nome we went back to Anchorage and then flew to St. Paul in the Pribilofs. St Paul is a lovely community of Aleuts. Here we stayed at a reasonably modern hotel, ate in a good restaurant and did our birding by bus. The main attractions are the large and easily accessible colonies of alcids, Black and Red-legged Kittiwakes and Red-faced Cormorants. St. Paul also has breeding colonies of over 1,000,000 fur seals, a herd of reindeer and many Arctic foxes.

From the Pribilofs we flew back to Anchorage and set out for Denali Park in two vans. We stayed overnight at the Denali Park Hotel, a really first class accomodation. Shuttle buses took us into the park where we saw moose, grizzlies, Dail sheep, caribou, red fox and wolves. Best birds were a pair of Gyrfalcons, an Arctic Warbler, Bohemian Waxwings, and, near the park, two Hawk Owls, a pair of Smith's Longspurs, Tundra and Trumpeter Swans and a Three-toed Woodpecker. Perfect weather permitted a rare, really impressive view of Mt. McKinley.

From Denali we drove back to Anchorage and then to Homer for the ferry trip to Kodiak and back to Seward. Highlights of this part of the tour were hundreds of Northern Fulmers, Short-tailed Shearwaters, Fork-tailed Storm Petrels, Marbled and Kittlitz Murrelets, Northwestern Crows and Aleutian Terns. We saw no evidence of the oil spill. In the open sea it has apparently pretty well dissipated. From Seward we drove back to Anchorage, getting White-winged Crossbills, Pine Grosbeaks and Rufous Hummingbird along the way.

The WINGS tour having ended, I flew to Juneau and to Glacier Bay for a one day cruise among the glaciers. The excursion boat, with narration by a park ranger, goes 60 miles up the bay to the foot of Grand Pacific and Margerie glaciers, where it stops for 45 minutes to watch huge chunks of ice calve off and fall into the water with a loud roar. I stayed overnight at rustic Glacier Bay Lodge set in a beautiful spruce-hemlock forest on the shore of Bartlett Cove. I was thrilled to see two male Blue Grouse within a few feet of my cabin.

Finally after 22 days it all came to an end, and I returned to the real world. For the whole trip I saw 176 bird species of which 51 were new to me. I also saw approximately 15 species of mammals from Arctic squirrels to grizzlies and gray whales. It was indeed a once in a lifetime adventure which I highly recommend. For information on WINGS tours, write to WINGS, Inc., P.O. Box 31930, Tucson, Arizona 85751.

TRAVELER'S NOTE

Jolene Robinson and Ruth Fordon have transformed the lighthouse keeper's home on Ocracoke Island, NC into The Lightkeeper's Inn, a bed and breakfast inn. Special weekends of interest to birders have been planned for the fall beginning Sept. 15-17. The fee for the weekend includes room for two nights, most meals, and a naturalist/program fee. For more detailed information send SASE to Lightkeeper's Inn, Box 597 Ocracoke Island, NC 27960. Tel. (919) 928-1821.

SKILLS (continued from page 1)
 and watched the gulls fly and turn just over the surface. It seemed funny that I had never noticed that really pretty white wedge on the forewings of the Laughers before. They seemed so dainty, too. So I just flipped to the gulls section in the guide book. I soon saw that they were not Laughers but Bonaparte's. Several "cutch" field marks were working on me here. Black heads was one. But the other was that I was used to the black spot just behind the eye on Bonaparte's in winter. In addition, I was used to seeing Bonaparte's on the Outer Banks at Thanksgiving as my other "crutch." So I learned to expect black headed Bonaparte's inland in the spring. I also learned that maybe the gulls were not as boring and obscure as my bias against them would have me believe.

Finally, the Prairie Warbler mistake. After the spring CBC meeting in Tryon I drove along the Blue Ridge Parkway. At one pull off I heard a buzzy song going upward in phrases. Maybe it wasn't exactly like the Prairies at Lake Jordan and the habitat didn't seem exactly right, but the CBC member I was with seemed to vaguely agree with my suggestion that it was a Prairie. So I went on looking for the Chestnut-sided Warblers and Ravens

that I wanted from my trip. My friend came back a few minutes later and corrected me; it was a Black-throated Blue. Sure enough, the Black-throated's song was three buzzy phrases going up. Comparing later at Lake Jordan, the two songs are not really much alike at all; the Prairie is much more energetic. But like the yellow spectacles and the black head the buzzy phrases going up was a crutch I used to note a common bird. In addition, my crutch on the Black-throated Blue was the dapper little white handkerchief on his wing. Being wrong expanded my understanding of these two birds.

These mistakes are the mirror image of Mike Tove's discussion of "rare bird-itis," they are "common bird-itis." Both "diseases" are caused by assumptions about what birds should be seen and by incomplete knowledge or consideration of field marks. Rare bird-itis is easier to cure because most of us are slow to ID a rare bird because we know it is important. But we rely on our "crutches" to toss off ID's of the more common species. I certainly didn't scramble for my field guide when I made the bad ID of the "Yellow-throated Vireo." I assumed that I was on familiar ground. But if it maybe had been a Kirtland's Warbler...

So my tip for becoming a better bird

watcher is to pay attention to mistakes. Rather than being ashamed of them, try to analyze them and discover why you were wrong. At least in my case I have found that having a favorite or "crutch" field mark for a common bird makes it more likely that I won't have a complete picture of the bird in my mind, leading to mistakes. In fact, a mistake is often my first clue that I am relying on a crutch. Studying field guides might be a good way to fill out these incomplete pictures. But for me that's too much like work. Lots of time in the field and analyzing my mistakes are the best way I have found to complete the pictures of birds I ought to know. Writing down the analysis in my secret notebook also provides a good way to remember the lessons I have learned. So try filling out your notes with your bird watching mistakes as well as your triumphs.

TALK (continued from page 4)
 grammar or whether or not your story is interesting to other members. I love to get mail so please send your information to me at 9776 Dogwood Hill Lane, Wake Forest, NC 27587.

RAMADA INN RESERVATION FORM
 Carolina Bird Club Fall Meeting, October 6-8, 1989

Name _____ Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____

ROOMS (1 - 4 persons per room) \$36.00

Please reserve _____ room(s) at \$36.00 per night plus tax. My check for the first night's lodging is enclosed. I will arrive _____ and depart _____.

Mail with deposit to Ramada Inn, 5001 Market Street, Wilmington, NC 28401. Telephone (919) 799-1730.

REGISTRATION FORM
 CBC Fall Meeting, October 6-8, 1989

Name(s) _____
 (list each name for name tags)
 Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Enclosed is my check in the amount of \$ _____ for _____ member registrations at \$4 each and _____ nonmember registrations at \$5 each.

Mail with check to CAROLINA BIRD CLUB, INC., PO Box 27647, Raleigh, NC 27611.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

MELINDA CALHOON
Durham, NC

CAROLINA H. LANE
Atlanta, GA

PAMELA PAPPAS
Greenville, NC

HARVEY E. SAVELY & FAMILY
Beaufort, NC

RICHARD SMITH & FAMILY
Apex, NC

BRAD & VALERIE STONE
Asheville, NC

BRAXTON & SHIRLEY TESH
Morehead City, NC

JUDITH WALKER
Charlotte, NC

CBC RARE BIRD ALERT
(704) 332-BIRD

BACKYARD BIRDING

With FRANCIS J. NELSON

NOTE: Clyde Smith, in an "Editor's Note" in the Summer 1989 issue of the CBC Newsletter asked for a volunteer to write the "Backyard Birding" column. I answered his call. My husband CJ and I moved from Northern Virginia to Wake Forest, NC in June. CJ is originally from Hennessey, OK, and I'm from Washington, NC. We grew up with birds because our mothers instilled the love of birds in us as toddlers. In the past year CJ has become serious about birding and our goal is to turn our eleven acres into a bird sanctuary.

I must admit my interest in birding is not quite as serious as my husband's although I am learning to identify more birds than I ever have before. My excuse for my lack of seriousness is graduate school. I am finishing a degree at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA, so much of my free time goes to writing papers, studying, and driving to Fairfax.

Once I finish my degree I can spend more time birding--an activity I am looking forward to.

MARTHA FREDERICK'S PUMPING HUMMINGBIRD

Dorothy J. Foy, of Oriental, NC, and one of the 35 North American hummingbird banders, explains the pumping action Martha Frederick observed:

The hummingbird was more than likely poisoned, either by eating insects that had been on a leaf previously sprayed with a chemical or by taking nectar from a flower that had been sprayed.

The moral of this heart-breaking explanation is to avoid using toxic chemicals to rid your plants of insects. I use a concoction of garlic, onion, hot pepper and water to spray my outside plants. I mix the ingredients in a blender and then pour the liquid into a spray bottle. So far this

"insecticide" works, and I have not witnessed sick birds. I use a small onion, one garlic clove, one-half teaspoon minced hot pepper, and four cups water.

NORTHERN ORIOLE

Lex Glover of Lugoff, SC reports feeding orange-flavored Kool-Aid to a female Northern Oriole (*Icterus Galbula*) last winter. He tried several flavors, but the oriole preferred the orange made with one and a half times the normal amount of sugar. His oriole ingested the Kool-Aid nectar from a hummingbird feeder, so you don't need to buy a feeder specifically designed for orioles. Mr. Glover fed the oriole from January to March 23, 1989, and he also saw American Goldfinches drinking from the feeder.

PEP TALK

This column is for you to ask questions, report sightings, tell bird stories, etc. Do not be concerned about spelling, punctuation, (see TALK page 3)

CBC NEWSLETTER is published quarterly by Carolina Bird Club, Inc., the ornithological society of the Carolinas, with headquarters at Raleigh, NC. CBC is a nonprofit corporation, founded in 1937, with membership open to anyone interested in birds, natural history and conservation. Members are encouraged to submit items of interest to CBC Newsletter, Clyde Smith, Editor, 2615 Wells Avenue, Raleigh, NC 27608.

CAROLINA BIRD CLUB, INC.



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