

New Hope Audubon Society Newsletter



Volume 33, Number 4: July-August 2007

OLF Public Hearing in Charlotte

by Marsha Stephens

**The people
have spoken,
and the word
is NO OLF!!!**

New Hope Audubon had four members attend the OLF public hearing in Charlotte on Tuesday, April 17. Tom Driscoll and Karsten Rist left for Charlotte in the afternoon to arrive for the beginning of the hearing and stayed until around 10:00 pm. Dave Curtin and I left Chapel Hill around 5:30 pm and arrived at the Convention Center at 7:30-ish. By my estimate, there were easily 600 people in attendance and about 80 that spoke. There were farmers, residents of Eastern NC and Charlotte, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, scholars, scientists, hunters, fishermen, politicians, numerous conservation group representatives (Sierra Club, Audubon NC, New Hope Audubon, NC Raptor Center, etc.). Very powerful. Very overwhelming. A bit after 11:00 pm, I was able to speak for our chapter, and was the last called. I said that as a representative of the New Hope Audubon Society,

1,000 strong from Durham, Chatham and Orange counties, we were opposed to the building of an OLF on Site C, and ask that they withdraw Site C from consideration. I also asked them to listen to all those voices that have spoken out against the OLF for many varied and valid reasons at this hearing as well as the other hearings in the eastern part of the state. The people have spoken, and the word is NO OLF!!! Dave and I left around 11:30 pm, and got home around 1:30 am. Pretty exhausting, but well worth the effort for the experience.

After several public hearings in eastern North Carolina, this hearing was organized at the request of Senator Dole who wanted more input from the western part of North Carolina. As we all know, two days later Dole came out strongly in opposition of the OLF, indicating that she would 'fight the Navy's plan to build an airfield near an Eastern North Carolina wildlife refuge.' Dole finally joined Senator Burr, Governor Easley and other local politicians who voiced opposition to the site earlier. On May 17, the U.S. House passed a defense bill that repealed authorization for a Navy landing field to be built near the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge; the bill passed by a 397-27 vote. Dole, who is on the very influential Armed Services Committee, also stated that she will seek a similar provision in the Senate authorization bill. And, on May 24, the US Senate Armed Service Committee did indeed pass the FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Bill which repealed the \$10.06 million requested by the Navy for the construction of an outlying landing field (OLF) in North Carolina. No funding will be made available for any of the five potential OLF locations that have been selected. The Senate Arm Service Committee recommends that \$5 million be available for the Navy to conduct additional EIS information on alternative locations in the VA/ NC region. The saga continues, and we'll keep you updated.

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OLF UPDATES

*Stay in touch with the ongoing OLF saga through
the New Hope Audubon Society's website at:*

www.newhopeaudubon.org

The Second Great Ivory-billed Woodpecker Road Trip

by Martha Girolami



Judy Murray and I promised ourselves to go hunting for the IBWP when there were NO leaves. But we did not follow our own advice and hit the road on the 25th of April. The IBWP hunt this year, 2006-7, shifted to the panhandle of Florida on the Choctawhatchie River. So our trip targeted the Florida panhandle and then we weren't sure which way we would go. We wanted to see the Limpkin and during the trip we added the Florida Scrub Jay to the wish list. I also wanted to see really big, gross alligators at The Alligator Farm and Zoological Park in St. Augustine after reading an essay about them. They had big ones and a rookery!

Judy and I arrived at Wakulla Springs State Park 25 miles south of Tallahassee in the early afternoon on the April 26th. An IBWP was seen here in 1930 or so. We were there to see a Limpkin and to enjoy the wildlife living on the springs and to stay one night at

the Wakulla Lodge. Every hour or so a Parks service boat departs to take you down the river formed by the springs.

This was a big time for baby birds and noisy birds. The screamers were the Moorhens, the Soras, Pied-billed Grebes and in former times the Limpkins. Floating in the weeds were 6 foot, sort of dainty, alligators. Flying above were Swallow-tailed Kites, ospreys and a Bald Eagle. The spring water was aqua blue and the bottom was dotted with Wide Mouth Bass nests — clean sandy circles defended by a fish in the center.

Sadly, the limpkin was missing!! No wait, he/she had visited briefly the day before so there was a dim chance of a sighting. But the population of Limpkins that once lived at Wakulla Springs has crashed. A big part of the Limpkin diet is the right-handed Apple Snail. The bird's beak has a small opening at the tip to form a right-handed tweezer for getting into the shell. But the apple snail has died out three years ago because of high water levels that drowned the eggs. The snail only lives one year so one bad egg year and the population is greatly diminished. Also contributing was the rapid growth of floating Hydrilla; an invasive plant that was pushing out the native reeds and grasses for egg laying. Park restoration efforts include: incubating snail eggs in tanks, releasing baby snails and spraying herbicide on the Hydrilla. It is slowly working and a few Limpkins are visiting.

The next day we drove along Interstate 20 to the Choctawhatchie River and stopped at the bridge. The river was wide and full and the forests looked immense. Our 'strategy' was to turn down every river road and see what we find. On our first turn we met Ken. He was a construction manager for a rich conservationist named M.C Davis, who had purchased parcels of land and established the 48,000 Nokuse Plantation to restore, conserve and replant native forests. Davis also was supporting the local effort to find the IBWP and Nokuse was the headquarters. Ken was full of admiration for this man who also was saving the Gopher Tortoise and much more. Evidently Davis was both developer and conservationist and a former card shark. This brief mention of the IBWP filled us with hope — very much needed when you have 400 square miles to search in 2 days.



Next driving north on the west side of the Choctawhatchie, we visited Dead River Landing, then Tilley's Landing (4 Pileated's talking) and then a really big storm started bearing down on us. We left the steep, muddy river roads for the highway and found a motel in Ponce de Leon. Up early next day we began to work our way south along the east side of the river. At Morrison Springs Park we ran into a scuba class from Kentucky diving in the lovely springs that flowed into the Choctawhatchie. Then we explored River Road, Hinson Cross Roads and Shell Landing with no signs of woodpeckers except the occasional Pileated.

Lunch was hours overdue when we arrived at Boynton Cutoff Road. A fisherman launching his boat asked if we were looking for a certain Bird. He was eager to tell us his story but only after we assured him repeatedly that we were church-going and saved. In March he met the Professor (presumably Dr. Geoff Hill from Auburn University of IBWP fame) in his kayak when out in his fishing boat at the Boynton Cutoff. Dr. Hill told him about the IBWP hunt and described the bird in detail. Two weeks later at his home about 15 miles from the River, the fisherman hears 'knock knock' and looks out his back window and spots a bird in a burned out area of his yard. It was perched on a log pecking for bugs. The bird was similar to the one Dr. Hill had shown him. Since he didn't have binoculars, he ran to get his camcorder, but by the time he got back the bird was gone. Happens a lot to birders.

We fall ravenously on lunch at a diner in Ebro — 3 vegs plus meat for \$5.95. We are leaving way too soon but there is no way to search the River well except maybe by boat for many months. On to Tallahassee to stay overnight.



So we have no IBWP and we have no Limpkin. To find the Limpkin, our bird finder book suggests we head for Ocala National Forest. We arrive in Ocala City midday and fortify with milkshakes, sandwiches and a Cappuccino Blast. Good thing we were fed because the NF was hard to figure out since road names did not match the bird finder book. After 9/11, Homeland Security efforts lead to new road names that changed depending on which of the four counties you were in, in the NF. Finally we set out in the right direction and head for Alexander Springs.

The lovely Alexander Springs was packed with plump bathers and picnickers. Also picnicking next to the Springs were about 8 Black Vultures dining on someone's lunch on a cement table. We walked the nice boardwalk around the Springs and suddenly noticed on a vertical reed, Apple Snail eggs. These look like large pink pearls and can't

be missed. We were too late to rent a canoe so we decided to bird from the bridge over the spring fed river. Within minutes of walking to the bank next to the bridge two Limpkins flew overhead. One settled on an overhanging branch. We retrieved cameras and scope and were able to see it well. Several fly bys.

Motorcycles (Harleys) repeatedly buzzed us on the bridge but we were undaunted. Anyway, we finally tired of looking at Limpkins, and drove north to the xeric forest. At a likely side road next to Silver Glen Springs, we parked and walked in. There was the Florida Scrub Jay sitting on a stub tree and not too shy. Two birds out of three — very satisfying.

The final day we traveled early to St. Augustine and were the first customers into the Alligator Farm. They have every species of alligator or crocodile in the world (23 crocodylian species total). Mostly they have the American Alligator — big, little, albino. In a big pit up front there were many fourteen footers. Some were puffing up with air and bellowing. And some were vibrating their bodies so that water droplets flew up from each scale. Most of our time was spent walking a long boardwalk through a pond looking at the live oaks filled with nests of egrets, wood storks and herons. The rookery formed because the nests are safe from raccoons and such, since the trees are surrounded by alligators —safe, as long as you don't fall in.



At home the next day in Chatham County, I saw a lovely Rose Breasted Grosbeak on the feeder on my deck. That afternoon my granddaughter Samantha and I looked up the RB Grosbeak in a field guide. Samantha took one look and said 'Grandma, it is not missing anymore. See, it is black and white and red and has a white beak. THAT BIRD is not missing anymore.' She thinks we can stop looking now.

EDUCATION UPDATE



New Hope Education Chair Kate Finlayson was busy this year creating more programs for area schools, but has also included camps, 4-H groups, and even senior citizens at the Charles House in Carrboro to her schedule. Kate covers the tri-county area of Chatham, Orange and Durham. And after years of volunteering these visits, she is now being compensated for her work with funds raised specifically for educational purposes from New Hope Audubon. Traditionally she brings one hour programs to grades one through six, tailoring each for the particular group. Using collected slides, nests, eggs and feathers she presents this hands-on program with heartfelt enthusiasm about the natural world. The Audubon 'Sound Birds' are also a big hit with young and old alike.

This year she was invited to take part in Tiger Fest at Chapel Hill High School. 'My passion is to 'plant seeds' in children, so that they see the magic in the real world, the beautiful outdoors that is right out their window.' She believes that connection to the natural world can heal a wounded spirit, because it has healed hers. Thirteen schools are signed up to receive Audubon Adventures, the great nature newsletters for grades 3-6. We raise money every year with our bird seed sale to buy these for area schools that are interested in integrating fun nature education into their curriculum. If you are interested in having Kate come and do a program for your group or in receiving the Audubon Adventures packet, contact her at kate@naturenia.com or call 545-0737. Learn more about our Education chair by visiting her website at www.naturenia.com.

A Triangle Naturalist's Almanac

by Patrick Coin

Hail the Mighty Hercules



Though some Longhorn beetles are longer, the Eastern Hercules Beetle, *Dynastes tityus*, is our heaviest beetle.

At perhaps 50 grams (more than an ounce), it is more massive than many mammals, and apparently is the heaviest North American insect. Incredibly, the beetles fly quite well, for they are found coming to lights from late spring into the summer. Unfortunately, many are killed as they ram into walls and windows at full speed. A few survive, however, and they may be handled safely — despite their fearsome appearance, they do not bite or scratch. One male I picked up at a local drugstore wall latched onto my hand very firmly, and I was unable to detach him for quite some time. I finally coaxed him onto another perch placed behind him. He was a cooperative subject for photography, posing quite calmly on a log. However when I probed at his head gently with a pencil, he latched onto it with his horn and tossed it over his head! This was a brief demonstration of the use of the massive horn — present only on the males — in fighting. Presumably this competition occurs at breeding sites in the wild, but I have never seen it.

Dynastes tityus is also called Rhinoceros Beetle and Unicorn Beetle, and is a member of the scarab beetle family. Both parts of the scientific name speak in superlatives. *Dynastes* is from a Greek word meaning “lord”. The species name *tityus* refers to a mythological giant, a son of Zeus that was born from under the earth. Unlike some of the other large scarabs, this is not a dung beetle. Adults are fond of sap and fruit, while larvae feed on the debris from decomposing hardwood trees. It is one of just two species of this largely tropical genus found in the United States. Its most famous relative is the Hercules Beetle, *Dynastes hercules*, of the West Indies and Central America. This is even larger than our beetle, the males having a monstrous horn, giving them a total length of up to six inches!

The Eastern Hercules Beetle is found throughout the southeastern United States, including the entire state of North Carolina. In the Triangle area, look for it under lights near rich deciduous woods. I have seen it at several sites Durham and Orange Counties, always at lights. For further information on the Eastern Hercules Beetle, see bugguide.net.

Conservation Chair Needed

If you have an interest in becoming the New Hope Audubon Conservation Chair or know of someone who would be perfect for the task, please let us know! Responsibilities include keeping informed on local, state, national and world policies and actions related to environment and conservation, advising the board in such matters, and providing newsletter articles on conservation topics of choice. Contact Marsha Stephens at 732-4014 or stephens@mail.fpg.unc.edu to volunteer.

Eagle Observation Platform at Jordan Lake Destroyed

by Marsha Stephens

Sad to say, the Wildlife Observation Platform was destroyed in late April as a result of wind and wave action. The platform is located on North Carolina Highway 751 in Chatham County. Originally built in 1987 by New Hope Audubon Society members, the chapter received a “Take Pride in America” recognition for this work. Since then, the trail and platform have been used by thousands of hikers and birders to enjoy and observe nature. This is also one of the prominent sites for our quarterly Jordan Lake Eagle counts. NHAS has plans to rebuild, and upgrade the trails. In that regard, we have written several grant requests for funding to support this endeavor. Our chapter currently works cooperatively with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission and the Army Corps of Engineers to maintain the platform and trails. We will be meeting with a representative from Engineering Services of NCWRC, to consider future design requirements. The deconstruction of the remains of the existing platform, the removal of debris, the assembling of materials for the new platform, and the reconstruction of the platform will be a huge project. Pending funding notification, we are hoping to begin the process in late August or September. Volunteers will be greatly appreciated, and we hope to make the rebuilding a community project that will highlight the natural beauty of this location. Volunteer opportunities will definitely be publicized, so keep an eye out on our website, listserv, and local newspapers. The platform lasted for 20 years, and served us well. Please feel free to contact me, should you have any input of relevance. Thanks.



BLUEBIRD IN FLIGHT



PHOTO BY JOHN MOESBY

From Chris Canfield, Executive Director of Audubon North Carolina

Some Good News...

1. Our congressional representatives (special thanks to Cong. Price) are following their word and working all angles to make sure the Navy can't proceed at the site near Pocosin Lakes NWR — we have word that the Senate Armed Services Committee passed its own version that cuts funding at Site C and may provide funding for exploration of other alternatives. More to follow in both houses of Congress, so it is not done yet but all very encouraging.
2. The state's General Assembly is also letting it be known that they are against the Navy's plan. The House has done their part, the Senate to follow.
3. And further encouragement that the road originally planned to cut through Great Smoky Mountains National Park is going to be stopped. We hope the community and Congress will agree to a cash settlement. The Park is recommending that option, they announced.



Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Immediate Release
Contact: Bob Miller
Date: May 25, 2007
865/436-1207



Smokies Announces Status of North Shore Road Environmental Impact Statement

Great Smoky Mountains National Park Superintendent, Dale A. Ditmanson, has announced that the National Park Service (NPS) has begun preparation of a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) which was undertaken to resolve the long-standing issues regarding the proposed North Shore Road in the Swain County, NC area of the Park. As currently drafted, the FEIS will call for a monetary settlement to Swain County as the National Park Service's Agency Preferred Alternative. The Park expects to publish a Notice of Availability of the FEIS in The Federal Register in September and then will accept public comments for a 30-day period prior to publishing a Record of Decision.

Upcoming New Hope Audubon Society Activities

Our next newsletter will list our upcoming Fall 2007 activities.

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