Conservation Corner – Outlying Landing Field (OLF)
by Joanna Hiller

In his essay, “Death before Birth, or a Mite’s Nunc Dimittis,” Stephen Jay Gould, the noted Harvard science historian, evolutionary biologist, and paleontologist wrote: “Can anything be more demoralizing than parental incompetence before the most obvious and innocent of children’s questions: Why is the sky blue, the grass green? Why does the moon have phases? Our embarrassment is all the more acute because we thought we knew the answer perfectly well, but hadn’t rehearsed it since we ourselves had received a bumbled response in similar circumstances a generation earlier.” One similar, but slightly more complex question, which currently confronts us, is: Is it right to destroy wildlife? The U.S. Navy’s proposal to construct and operate an outlying landing field (OLF) near Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (a winter home to near 100,000 Tundra Swans and Snow Geese), in Washington County, North Carolina, will place our military pilots in training, the community and our wildlife in harms way, impact the future of our American heritage, from eminent domain, property rights, agriculture industry, to environment and economic justice.

Gould goes on to say: “It is the things we think we know — because they are so elementary, or because they surround us — that often present the greatest difficulties when we are actually challenged to explain them.” The U.S. Navy’s choice of the environmentally sensitive site in Eastern North Carolina is all the more painful to accept because of the behind the scene wrangling that has taken place within the Naval department officials. Wrote Wade Rawlins in the News and Observer (11/24/2004):

“...Members of a Navy team doing an environmental study of the site, had e-mailed each other complaining about having to back up the decision by top Navy leaders to buy 30,000 acres straddling Washington and Beaufort Counties and build a field. That decision came after the Navy made up its mind in 2000 to move 10 new Super Hornet jet squadrons to the East Coast. Those squadrons were going to Naval Air Station Oceana and Fentress Landing Field in southeastern Virginia.

“Then came the recommendation to divide the squadrons between Virginia and North Carolina (eight in Virginia, two here). E-mails show that recommendation may have been made because of noise complaints in the Hampton Roads, Va., area, or because the Navy wanted to put squadrons in North Carolina to get the state’s members of Congress to support the new landing field.

“In any case, some on the Navy team involved with the environmental study were uncomfortable: Wrote Alan Zusman, one of them, in an e-mail in September 2002: “Don’t know about you, but I have a very uneasy feeling about our criteria and the process.” In a reply, another team member, Cmdr. John A. Robusto, wrote, “Up until the preferred OLF (landing field) site was chosen everything made sense and all decisions could be logically explained. Now we have to reverse engineer the whole process to justify the outcome.”

And, the U.S. Navy has indeed done so - having written and publicly presented an official environmental statement, Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS), to justify their choice. To view and read this document go to the following web site:

Governor Easley’s response and effort to reverse the Navy’s environmentally insensitive stand were as follows: “I am writing to express my frustration and disappointment with the Navy’s decision to again identify Washington County as its preferred site for the proposed Outlying Landing Field (OLF) through its draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS). I have spent a great deal of time with the higher command of the Navy and top Pentagon officials, and with people here and in Washington discussing

Continued on page 2.
alternatives to the Washington County site. Our Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources has repeatedly talked with the Navy leadership in charge of this project, and our OLF Study Group has worked hard to identify viable alternatives. As the draft SEIS shows, the Navy remains unwilling to even fully consider reasonable alternatives. I believe this matter can be resolved, but spending millions of dollars to build the proposed OLF next to a world-renowned wildlife refuge for migratory birds is not an acceptable resolution. Congress controls the purse strings for this project, and Congress should withhold funding until the Navy is willing to consider reasonable alternatives.”

There is little doubt that as Gould states “parental incompetence” is demoralizing. In the case of the federal government, it is a matter of giving the Navy the tax dollars to establish a publicly unwelcome and environmentally unsound landing field. Public forums have been and are being held throughout the state regarding this issue. The last of these will be held in Charlotte, NC on Tuesday, April 17th, 2007 at 4:30 pm. Writing a letter to your legislator is also a way to have your voice heard on this matter. Take a look at the NOOLF.com website for more information on this very important issue that affects all North Carolinians.

Protest Rally Against Outlying Landing Field (OLF) in Plymouth, NC April 4th
by Judy Murray

The Outlying Landing Field the Navy wants to build in Washington County to train pilots for aircraft carrier landings is opposed by almost everyone. Several protest rallies have been held recently to allow people to speak their minds about the consequences of building this field next to one of the best wildlife refuges on the East Coast. Also this OLF would affect the farmers in the area, as they would have to give up their livelihood if their land is in the construction site area. Even if their land, the most fertile in NC, would not be condemned, they will be told (by the Navy) what to plant to avoid attracting the birds to their fields. At a time when corn, wheat and soybeans are at a premium and cotton (the crop of choice by the Navy) at lowest price in years the farmers are really feeling the pinch of this OLF. The latest protest rally was held at Plymouth, the community that would be most affected by this OLF. There was a pre-rally parade of farmers and farm equipment. I have never seen so many combines, tractors and other harvesting equipment in one place before, and each piece of machinery labeled with placards against OLF. There was even one sign that read “NO DOLE” (however at this pre-publication date we’ve heard a rumor that Dole has spoken out against OLF, but not Senator Burr, yet).

We arrived at Plymouth about 4:30 PM and had until 6:00 PM to talk with the Navy personnel about any aspect of the OLF. They had excellent displays and the spokesmen were well informed and answered most of our questions well. I was surprised to learn of all the airways (highways in the sky) that the Navy already has in that area. The site near Plymouth was chosen among other reasons because it would affect the fewest number of people and would take out the least amount of county tax ($75,000.00). The one question that was not answered to our satisfaction was the pollution these planes can develop.

The auditorium capacity was 250 seats and only people who signed up to speak (three minutes each) could enter the auditorium. There was a huge overflow with more than 250 more people outside listening to the protesters via loud speakers. The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 AM!! And not everyone got their chance to speak! We left at about 10:00 PM when there was a huge drop in the temperature as a cold front moved in. Those attending from New Hope Audubon were Martha Girloami, Karsten and Carol Rist, Tom and Margaret Scott and Judy Murray. Wake Audubon organized the chartered bus we rode — many thanks to them for doing this. There were 39 folks on the bus. The next protest rally will be in Charlotte at the Convention Center on Tues. April 17th. If you can possibly go, do — it will be an eye-opener for you. For more information you can go to: www.noolf.com or call one of our board members listed on the back of this newsletter.
No OLF Meeting in Plymouth
by Karsten Rist

A bus filled mainly with people from Wake Audubon took Martha Girolami, Judy Murray Carol and myself to Plymouth, close to the western end of Albemarle Sound, where the hearing on the proposed Outlying Landing Field (OLF) was held on April 5. Leaving Raleigh at 1:30PM we arrived at the hearing site about 4:00PM. The area outside the hearing room was dominated by an impressive collection of green farm machinery with tires about 10 feet tall. The machinery was decorated with U.S. flags and “NO OLF” signs. Some signs had their “F” changed to “E” with a “D” inserted in front of the “OLF” so they read “NO DOLE”. Most of the farmers appeared to be big, burly, friendly men, sized to fit the monster machinery. They were pleased to have the people from the Triangle there to support them. The Navy had set up some large displays explaining just about everything one might want to know about the OLF. The only thing I could not find was a simple statement of what made the site near Pocosin Lakes so preferable to other sites. The hearing started at 7:00PM and proceeded like clockwork with three minute statements. The three minute time limit was strictly enforced and left quite a few arguments dangling unfinished. The farmers objected to the potential loss of farmland as well as to possible regulation of what crops they might farm. Such regulation would have the farmers change to cotton production from corn, because cotton would not leave any feed for birds on the ground. There were so many people signed up to speak that only the local folks got heard. I was impressed by many statements of the farmers who sounded well informed and sincere. One farmer began his presentation recalling that his farm was on land granted to his forbears by King George. The hearing room with about 250 seats could accommodate less than half the people who had come. We ended up listening to the proceedings bunched around a loudspeaker on the outside. At 10:00 PM we got back on our bus for the return trip. Before the bus left Chris Canfield talked to us for a few minutes. He thanked us for having made the trip and told us that he felt confident the issue would be resolved in our favor by the end of the year. We finally got home around 1:00 AM. I fell asleep feeling that the Navy had gotten our message loud and clear.

Wildathon 2007

Tom Driscoll and Marsha Stephens will co-chair this year’s Wildathon which is one of NHAS’s major annual fund raising events for conservation and protection of habitat. Beginning in mid to late April and running through mid May, teams count species (birds, plants, reptiles or any other) for a 24 hour period, and ask that supporters make pledges for their efforts. The pledge form is included in this newsletter. If you would like to contribute, be a team leader or member, or otherwise participate, please contact either Tom or Marsha. The ways in many choose to participate are:

1. Make a financial contribution. Contributing is one of the best ways to protect important bird and wildlife habitat here in Chapel Hill (Mason Farm) and at the Coast (Audubon Coast Islands Sanctuary).

2. Lead a team and/or join a team. The Wildathon is a day in April or May where teams go out to identify and, more importantly, count bird, plant, reptile and amphibian, insect, and/or other species. Usually, donations are based on the number of species counted. You do not have to be experienced to be on a team.

3. Help bring in donations. Beyond making a donation yourself, participants can help raise money by soliciting donations on behalf of their team.

4. Help with publicity. Bring your creative energy for making posters, flyers or otherwise getting the word out for support of the Wildathon 2007.

Contributions are tax deductible and your participation will be noted in our bi-monthly newsletter and on our website (www.newhopeaudubon.org).
Queen Snake – spring basker

Late spring an early summer is a good time to watch for one of our more elegant snakes, the Queen Snake, *Regina septemvittata*. It is of medium size, a beautiful dark brown above and creamy below, with a striped belly. It is most frequently observed on cool mornings basking in vegetation along the sides of streams. The Queen Snake is a member of the non-venomous colubrid family, and is quite retiring — it usually slips into the water if approached closely. It may also be found resting under rocks or logs in the shallows of streams. The placid habits of this snake are in accordance with its diet — it preys almost exclusively on molting crayfish, which are unable to defend themselves. Therefore this snake is found exclusively in good crayfish habitat, usually clear, rocky streams.

The origin of the common name for this snake, and its generic name, *Regina*, are something of a puzzle. *Regina*, of course, is Latin for queen, and it seems likely the generic name was based on the common name for this particular species. It was originally described in the genus *Natrix* in 1825, and only later (1853) placed in the newly erected genus *Regina*. The queenliness of *Regina septemvittata* itself is not readily apparent. Perhaps the name refers to the striping on the belly, which may resemble regal vestments. The name could have been influenced by that of the unrelated Kingsnakes as well. Other common names for the Queen Snake include Willow Snake and Leather Snake, referring, no doubt, to the habitat and its brown color, respectively.

The Queen Snake is found over much of the eastern United States in suitable habitat, though it is not present in the coastal plain of the Carolinas. It is sensitive to degradation of water quality, so is most common in clear streams and rivers. In our area, the best place to observe it is at Fews Ford in Eno River State Park.

For further information on the Queen Snake, see: Gibbons and Dorcas, *Snakes of the Southeast*, and Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/Queen_snake).

Mini Breeding Bird Survey (MBBS)

It's that time of the year, and the annual Mini Breeding Bird Survey will begin on May 15! This is a reminder for those who have been counting, and an invitation to others to join if interested (and if routes are available). The MBBS is a joint project with Chapel Hill Bird Club, New Hope Audubon and interested birders in our area which began in 1999. These surveys are a small scale version of the North American Breeding Bird Survey. The routes were originally selected for Orange County, but expanded to Chatham County in 2000 and Durham County in 2002, due to great interest. Haven Wiley, Professor of Biology and Ecology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, supervised and initially trained participants. The routes are randomly selected and there are 12 in Orange, 14 in Chatham, and 8 in Durham. Each route is run on an annual basis from May 15 through June 30 in order to count breeding birds both seen and heard. The goal is to document year-to-year changes in the distribution and numbers of birds, and to track habitat changes at each stop. Procedures, descriptions of routes, and results can be found at:

http://www.unc.edu/~rhwiley/mbbs/

If you are interested in participating, please contact me.

Marsha Stephens, stephens@mail.fpg.unc.edu, 732-4014
NHAS Representative and Chatham County Coordinator

Proposed Slate of 2007-08 Officers

The Nominating Committee has proposed the following slate of officers for 2007-2008. The election of officers will take place at the May 5, membership meeting. If you have any additions to these nominations please contact Cynthia Fox at wildbird@mindspring.com before the meeting.

President . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Marsha Stephens
Vice President . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Robin Moran
Secretary . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Pat Reid
Treasurer . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Karsten Rist
Director . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Carol Ripple
Director . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Vacant
Director . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Vacant

http://www.naturalsciences.org/exhibits/special_exhibits.html

New Hope Audubon’s Kate Finlayson, our Education Chair, will conduct two tours on May 5, at 1:30 pm and 2:30 pm.

Brochures detailing the event will be available at our program meetings and other New Hope Audubon events.
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 website. 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, 7) and 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.

Feeder Watch
by Tom Driscoll

Feeder Watch reports on birds you could be seeing at the bird feeders and/or in your back yard. If you have ideas about what to write, want to report on the birds you are seeing, or have questions about the birds you are seeing, please send me an email at btdriscoll@bellsouth.net.

You should be receiving this newsletter in about mid-April. Flowers and trees are blooming and the temperatures are rising. Our winter visitors, like the juncos and the White-throated Sparrows, will be leaving and our summer visitors will be arriving. You may not be seeing the females, such as the bluebirds and cardinals as much because they are no their nests.

Martha Girolami reports that her hummingbirds have started arriving. Get out your feeders (they are for sale at many bird feed stores and hardware stores if you don’t have one), clean them, and prepare your sugar water. Remember, four parts water to one part sugar. You may notice that birds are pairing up and not flocking together as much. During April, our resident birds will be nesting (as I write this article, we have House Finches and Eastern Bluebirds with eggs) and they may be eating less food. As their eggs hatch and the chicks fledge however, they will be visiting your feeders more often.

Have you seen orioles (orange and black), grosbeaks, or tanagers (red like cardinals, but without a crest)? These are mostly migratory birds that are passing through, although some tanagers nest in the area. If so, then putting out pieces of oranges may attract these birds. The Rose-breasted Grosbeaks will be coming through soon and they prefer sunflower seeds. Make sure your bluebird boxes are up. The bluebirds will nest two or three times each season, so if you would like to purchase a bluebird house contact me. The New Hope Audubon Society sells them for $15. Free delivery! Note that other birds, such as titmice and chickadees, will use these boxes as well.

If you are not sure what birds you are seeing, email me with descriptions or, even better, buy a bird guide and learn to identify your feeder birds. I challenge you to learn the names and calls of your feeder birds! Please let me know if you do. If you have questions or notice an unusual bird, then please contact me. See you at the next membership meeting or read this column in the August-September-October newsletter!
New Hope Audubon Programs
by Tom Driscoll

The New Hope Audubon Society 2006-2007 membership meetings will be ending on May 3. Norm Budnitz will be presenting the results of the Jordan Lake Christmas and spring bird counts. Norm is one of the organizers for this count and his presentation should have some very interesting data and trends.

You may have noticed on our website that they order of the presentations changed. This was because we had to cancel our February meeting due to inclement weather. Linda Gaines, who was scheduled to make a presentation on “Wildlife Up Close in the Galapagos”, will be speaking during the 2007-2008 season instead.

Speaking of the 2007-2008 season, I am putting together the presentations now. If you know of a good speaker with an interesting natural history topic or you have a topic in mind, then please let me know soon. My email address is btdriscoll@bellsouth.net.

As always, our membership meetings are held at 7 pm on the first Thursday of each month, September through May at the North Carolina Botanical Gardens’ Totten Center (Hwy. 15-501 and Old Mason Farm Rd., Chapel Hill). We serve refreshments, discuss some business, and have a presentation. We are normally finished by 9 pm. Everyone (including nonmembers) is welcome!

New Hope Audubon Society Activities Calendar

SUN., APRIL 15, 7:30 AM: Bird Walk to Bynum Area Forest along Haw River. Led by Tom Driscoll. Meet at the Mardi Gras parking lot (near the coffee hut) at 7:30 am. Please contact Tom Driscoll (btdriscoll@bellsouth.net) if you intend to attend or need more information. Beginners and non-members invited!

SAT., APRIL 28, 8 AM: Bird Walk to Local Hot Spot with Cynthia Fox, owner of Wild Bird Center in Eastgate shopping center, Chapel Hill. Meet at the store at 7:55 am. Carpools leave from the store.

THURS., MAY 3, 7:30 PM: Member Meeting at Botanical Gardens. Speaker Norm Budnitz.

SAT., MAY 5, 7:55 AM.: Bird walk to local hot spot with Cynthia Fox, owner of Wild Bird Center in Eastgate shopping center, Chapel Hill.

SATURDAY, MAY 5, 1:30 PM & 2:30 PM: Museum of Natural Science - “Hunters of the Sky” exhibit - Kate Finlayson will lead two walks.

SAT., MAY 5, 9 AM: Stream Watch - John Kent, Leader

SAT., MAY 12, 7:55 AM: Bird walk to local hot spot with Cynthia Fox, owner of Wild Bird Center in Eastgate shopping center, Chapel Hill.

SAT., JUNE 2, 9 AM: Stream Watch - John Kent, Leader

SAT., JUNE 16, 8 AM: Adopt A Highway Stagecoach Road - Phil Johnson, Leader

Adopt-A-Highway
by Phil Johnson

On Mar 17, four of us [Judy Murray, BG Adams, John Suhrbier and myself] took 4 hrs to cleanup 11 bags of trash!!! The weather was a bit cool and breezy in the AM, but, then warmed up and we had a near perfect ending. The ‘Fish and Game Management’ parking lots were badly trashed. At last .... I was ‘rewarded’ by finding an unused Barnes and Noble Gift card good for $25.00!!!! Next cleanup scheduled for June 16!
From Chris Canfield, Executive Director of Audubon North Carolina

Wow, a story without the Navy in it! This time a welcome, rare visitor, the Snowy Plover, was documented at Audubon’s great sanctuary at the end of Wrightsville Beach. The first spotter was one of our wardens, eagle-eyed Robin Wood (yes, son of Andy). Congratulations on a great find.

Article published April 12, 2007
Rare Visit Brings Birders to Beach

Tourists flocking to the Cape Fear Coast in early April isn’t unusual. But for a bird instead of the Azalea Festival? Yet that’s the drawing power of a very rare visitor to the shores of Mason Inlet. Researchers last week confirmed a sighting of a snowy plover, a shorebird that’s normally found along the Gulf and Pacific coasts. The sighting is only the third time the bird has been observed in North Carolina, according to the Carolina Bird Club, which tracks such things.

Andy Wood, education curator with Audubon North Carolina, said news of the plover’s appearance has prompted dozens of bird lovers to head to the north end of Wrightsville Beach to try to sneak a peek at the unusual visitor. “It’s all the buzz in the birding community,” he said. While traveling hundreds of miles to see a shorebird that’s probably lost might seem a bit strange to some, Wood said it’s an adrenaline rush for others. “It’s like people who like fine art or a good concert,” he said. “They don’t want to miss it when it’s here, and it’s the same with bird watchers.”

The plover, a male, seems to be in good health. But Wood said researchers can only guess what prompted him to travel so far off course. “That’s the big question,” he said. “It may be a stray, but we really don’t know why it’s here.” Steve Emslie, an ornithologist at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, said the snowy plover could have just gotten its wires crossed while leaving his wintering home along the Gulf Coast for his breeding grounds west of the Mississippi River.

No one knows how long the bird might hang around. “But I’m sure it feels right at home along the beaches here,” Emslie said, adding that he thought it probably would stay for a few more days rather than weeks before moving on. Wood said the snowy plover was seen Tuesday night along with 11 piping plovers, which might be a record number of the highly endangered birds observed at once at Mason Inlet. The snowy plover has gray legs compared with the piping plover’s yellow legs and a slender, black bill compared with the piper’s stubby, orange bill.

Mason Inlet was moved 3,000 feet north by New Hanover County five years ago to protect Shell Island Resort and other properties at the northern end of Wrightsville Beach threatened by the encroaching waterway. The old inlet channel is now home to the Mason Inlet Waterbird Management Area, which has become a popular spot for migrating and nesting shorebirds. “It’s kind of cool when something like this happens,” Wood said of the snowy’s visit. “And it’s certainly something that doesn’t happen every day.”

Gareth McGrath: 343-2384
gareth.mcgrath@starnewsonline.com

DON’T FORGET TO DONATE TO THE 2007 WILDATHON!

Please help make our annual Spring fundraiser a success.
Take a look at the Wildathon insert in this newsletter to find out how you can help!
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<td><a href="mailto:btldriscoll@bellsouth.net">btldriscoll@bellsouth.net</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>