

# New Hope Audubon Society Newsletter



Volume 33, Number 6: November-December 2007

## CONSERVATION CORNER

### Keeping the Glass (at Least) Half Full

By Carol Ripple

New restrictions on water use appear almost daily as concern about our area's water crisis grows. Adopting conservation techniques is something we should get used to: although the current crisis will surely end, the pressure on our supply will only grow as more and more people move to the Triangle. We can hardly blame them for wanting to join us in this beautiful place, and — while we can't change the weather — there are changes to policy and to our own practices at home that can help conserve precious water and help our backyard birds.

Although growth limits arguably offer the best solution to ensuring an adequate water supply, strategies to limit runoff and capture rainwater in urban and suburban areas also make good, practical sense. For example, a system in the State Legislature Building in Raleigh collects rainwater to fill its fountains and to irrigate the grounds. Condensation from the building's air handlers drains into the system so that there are gains even when it doesn't rain. On a larger scale, the Town of Cary pumps treated wastewater to homes and businesses for uses including irrigation and cooling. The reclaimed water travels through pipes that are separate from those carrying water for drinking, bathing, or washing clothes (for more information, see <http://www.townofcary.org>). At the state level, a proposal before the North Carolina Building Code Council would allow builders to install concrete tanks in homes to catch and store rainwater for uses that do not require drinkable water, such as flushing toilets.

There is no question that more sweeping, forward-looking policy changes are essential to protect the area's water. Meanwhile, there are actions that each of us can take and several resources we can access to gather helpful information. For example:

- 1. Observe restrictions.** Most area residents on public water face mandatory watering restrictions. Those of us who rely on wells should also follow those restrictions closely: the threat to underground water table levels is all too real. News about the latest statewide conditions can be found at <http://www.ncdrought.org>.
- 2. Be aware of water use at home.** Familiarizing ourselves with our own 'water hogs' is the first step to reducing use. For example toilets are responsible for as much as 28% of home water use, and leaks in pipes or toilets can waste hundreds of gallons. Online sources for practical tips on ways to affect these and other uses abound, such as [http://www.ncwater.org/Water\\_Supply\\_Planning/Water\\_Conservation](http://www.ncwater.org/Water_Supply_Planning/Water_Conservation).
- 3. Use alternate sources of water for the garden.** There are scores on websites that offer rain-catching systems, such as rain barrels or cisterns, some for under \$100 (for example, <http://rainbarrelguide.com>). Gray water (wastewater from baths, showers, and clothes washers) can be used to water indoor and outdoor plants. NC State offers information on cisterns, <http://www.bae.ncsu.edu/topic/waterharvesting>.

Conserving water helps to protect our water supply and also brings direct and indirect benefits to wildlife. Proposals that reclaim water in buildings and towns help to limit runoff, an increasingly recognized environmental hazard. Systems that reclaim water for irrigation foster healthy plants that produce flowers and seeds that birds rely on. Finally, just capturing clean water as we wait for it to warm up can be used to fill birdbaths that backyard birds depend on when other sources have run dry. Cynthia Fox of Chapel Hill's Wild Bird Center recommends filling birdbaths and other receptacles with two inches or less of clean (not gray) water and changing it every day or two.

We can all support responsible, practical water conservation at home by becoming aware of and limiting our water use and, more broadly, by staying aware of policy developments. Someday it will rain enough to ease the immediate crisis, but long-term changes in practice and policy are needed to ensure that there is enough water for our community and our wildlife, too.



## Bird Banding by Tom Driscoll



*Brian Strong banding an indigo bunting.*

Ever wonder how we obtain detailed data, such as bird weights and lengths? We have these data from the hard work of people like Brian Strong and Emily Parisher of the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation. For the past four years, Brian

gets up very early at least once a week for nine weeks to conduct bird banding at the Eno River State Park. Brian and his helpers begin around May 10 and continue through early August. The bird banding begins at the end of migration and continues through the breeding season. As a result, Brian has banded some very interesting birds, such as Prothonotary Warbler, White-eyed Vireo, American Redstart, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Canada Warbler, and Yellow-breasted Chat.

Although Brian is a big strong guy, he is very gentle with these birds. As you can see from the picture, they look very small in Brian's hands. The birds are frightened and thrash about in the nets and sometimes Brian and his assistants have difficulty extracting the birds from the nets, but very few have suffered any ill effects; mostly they lose a few feathers and maybe some of their dignity.

Brian and his helpers weigh and measure the length of each bird. In addition, they determine the gender and age of each bird. This is sometimes very difficult, but having them in hand helps. Brian sometimes catches bird that he has banded. He submits these data to a national database. His commitment is for five years of conducting bird banding at this site, but he plans to continue banding at the site after this year.

Some of the migrants that nest in the piedmont, such as Indigo Buntings, seem to come back to the same place to nest each year. About 20% of the birds captured, have been already banded by Brian. He will sometimes catch the same bird several times during a season.

Brian and his helpers set up seven or eight nets in several habitats. Some are very close to the Eno River, while others are deeper in the woods. Several are set up under a power line clearing. He and his helpers are running the whole time. By the time they collect the birds from the nets and conduct the measurements, it is time to go back out and collect birds again. I stayed for several hours and was tired just trying to keep up with them. The work they and others do to characterize our bird populations is important for determining the health of and general trends in piedmont bird populations. If you are interested in observing, then I encourage you to contact Brian next year and watch them at work!



## New Hope Audubon Society Membership Meeting Presentations for November and December 2007

The New Hope Audubon Society membership meetings are held at the Totten Center at the North Carolina Botanical Gardens on the first Thursday of every month (except June, July, and August). The gardens are on Highway 15-501 at the intersection of Old Mason Farm Road on the southeast corner. The parking lot is on the southeast corner too. The meetings start at 7 pm with refreshments, chatting with friends, and meeting visitors or new members. There is chapter business at 7:20 or so and the presentations start at approximately 7:45 and run through 9:00.

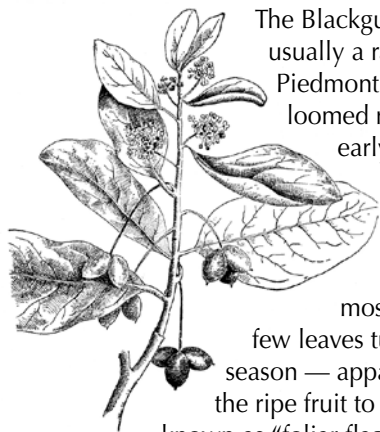
Our speaker for November 1, 2007 is Guy Meilleur. His topic is entitled, "Ornitho-Arbiculture: Creating Niches while Caring for Urban Trees." We will be learning about the trees we need to plant and nurture that are good for NC fauna. Our speaker for December 6, 2007 is our own board member, Linda Gaines. She will be presenting, "Galapagos — Wildlife Up Close." She will present slides on the flora and fauna of the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador. Everyone, even non-members, is welcome! See you at the next meeting!

**I am always looking for speakers or nature/environmental topics. If you have or know of a good nature or environmental presentation, or know of a good speaker or a topic that you would like to hear, then please contact me at [btdriscoll@bellsouth.net](mailto:btdriscoll@bellsouth.net). Thanks!**

# A Triangle Naturalist's Almanac

Patrick Coin

## Blackgum — rich in folklore and confusion



The Blackgum tree, *Nyssa sylvatica*, is usually a rather uncommon tree in Piedmont forests, but for some reason loomed rather large in the tales of early residents of our area. This is a medium-sized tree, usually noticed as an individual here and there on the edges of woods. It is most notable in early fall, when a few leaves turn crimson early in the season — apparently helping to advertise the ripe fruit to birds. This phenomenon is known as “foliar flagging”.

The profusion of common and scientific names for this species is remarkable. Our Piedmont Blackgum is *Nyssa sylvatica* var. *sylvatica*, the “nominative” variety, and it occurs in upland forests. *Nyssa sylvatica* var. *biflora* occurs in coastal plain swamps and is sometimes treated as a separate species. The most quoted common name for *Nyssa sylvatica* is black gum, or simply Blackgum. To add to the confusion, the tree is sometimes called *Yellow gum*. This name was apparently reserved for the upland variety, which was somewhat desirable as lumber, and said to resemble “yellow poplar”, i.e., Tuliptree. Despite the profusion of gummy names, *Nyssa sylvatica* has no gummy sap. I can find no indication in the literature as to why the tree is called “gum”, but my best guess is that it comes from a resemblance of the bark (alone) to that of Sweetgum, *Liquidambar styraciflua*. *Tupelo* is used as a common name for both varieties of *Nyssa sylvatica*, as well as two related species in the genus. This is supposedly from the Creek language, *eto* meaning tree, and *opelwu*, “swamp”. *Pepperidge* is yet one more common name, and this is derived from a “fancied” resemblance to Barberry, according to Donald Culross Peattie. I think the resemblance is in the fruit — those of Blackgum are bluish and oblong, similar to those of Eurasian barberry.

Historical sources are uniform in bemoaning the low timber value of Blackgum. It is said to rot easily, and also to warp upon drying. Due to its dense, cross-grained nature, it could not be split or sawed easily into boards. For precisely this reason, however, it was useful for applications where resistance to splitting was paramount. John Lawson (18th century) reported that it was “fit for cart-Naves” — a *nave*, apparently, being the central load-bearing part of a cart. Blackgum lumber was used for the handles of axes, mauls, and guns — all applications where split-resistance was important. Lawson reported a bit of Native American folklore about the tree, namely, that it could not be damaged by lightning. This is likely true, given the resistance of the tree to splitting along the grain. In yet one more curious application, Alice Lounsbury (circa 1900)

reported that the twigs were formed (by chewing) into brushes for dipping snuff. How quaint.

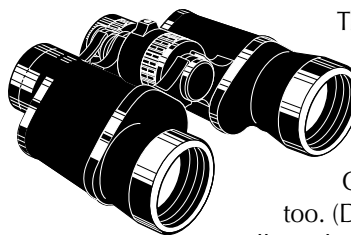
Although formerly put in their own family, Nyssaceae, Blackgum and related trees are now placed with the Dogwoods in the Cornaceae. The family resemblance can be seen in the four-part flowers.

Blackgum can be found in most upland woods in our area. It is easiest to find in early fall, when the isolated scarlet leaves stand out. The fruit is bitter, unlike that of some of its coastal plain relatives, but is relished by birds and possums.

For further information on Black Gum, see Peattie, *A Natural History of Trees of Eastern and Central North America*; Duncan, *Trees of the Southeastern United States*.

## My Favorite Birding Spot

Lucretia Kinney



This morning [Sept. 30] I stumbled across an avian watering hole that I think other birders in the Chapel Hill/Carrboro, North Carolina area might want to try, too. (Directions follow.) I happened to walk on the Sugarberry pedestrian bridge in Battle Park and never made it across because of all the bird activity. In the 45 minutes, from 11:00 to 11:45 a.m., that I stood at the railing of the bridge, I saw the following species flying in to bathe and drink in the trickle of water running in what is left of the creek: 2 pileated, a downy, and a hairy woodpeckers, (several red bellieds vocalized from the surrounding woods), a little flock of goldfinches, Carolina wren, Carolina chickadees, tufted titmice, a female scarlet tanager, cardinals, robins, a Swainson's thrush, a little flock of house finches, a brown thrasher, and a blue jay. There was never a moment that there was not some bird activity. Perhaps others would like to check out this spot, too, and see if it remains so productive.

Here are the directions: Park at the Community Center off of Estes Drive in Chapel Hill. Walk around the side of the Center on the gravel path and turn left at the sign saying Battle Park Trail. Cross the long wooden walkway and walk on the sidewalk by the apartments. Turn right onto Battle Branch Trail at its sign. Take the first left marked Sugarberry Road and in front of you will be a wooden pedestrian bridge. Stand on the bridge and look right towards the watering place which is a little way beyond the side of the bridge (the side nearest the apartments which you can see through the trees). Good birding!

**Don't forget to pick up your bird seed order from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM on Sat., Nov. 3rd at the Wild Bird Center in Eastgate Shopping Center, Chapel Hill, N.C.**

## Winging off to a Hummingbird Researchers Conference AT LAST!

Susan Campbell



"I was thrilled to finally, after ten years, attend the /seventh biennial/ conference of hummingbird researchers from August 16-19 in Sierra Vista, AZ" Although this tends to be a time of year when I am very busy banding Ruby-throateds, I took time out to join some fifty of my colleagues from all over North America at Ramsay Canyon to share research results, trapping and band-making techniques and fund-raising techniques. Of course it was also a thrill to actually see a number of western hummingbirds up close. We were in Cochise County, the "Hummingbird Capitol of the US," and managed to spend quality time with ten species of hummingbirds in just a few short days. Banding the local birds was a very small percentage of the planned activity at this site given the fact that hummingbirds are not concentrated here at this time of year. The birds were on the move through the southeastern mountains in a diffuse, broad front. But I did manage to get up close and personal with a few Anna's Hummingbirds (see photo) as well as view Broad-billed, Magnificent, Blue-throated, Black-chinned, Broad-taileds, and Rufous. We teased out a few Calliopes, Lucifer's and White-eareds from scores of the tiny visitors at locations in and around Ramsey Canyon.

There were many highlights during the trip. I finally had the opportunity to meet colleagues that I had only communicated with via email for a number of years. I also had some time to catch up with my dear friends and mentors from Alabama: Bob and Martha Sargent. But probably the one of the biggest thrills was learning how Sheri Williamson and her husband, Tom Wood, have built the Southeastern Bird Observatory there in the Huachuca Mountains along the San Pedro River from the ground up. Their on going research, popular public programs and Adopt-A-Hummingbird Program are an inspiration.

Many thanks to the New Hope Audubon Chapter for providing financial support for this trip.

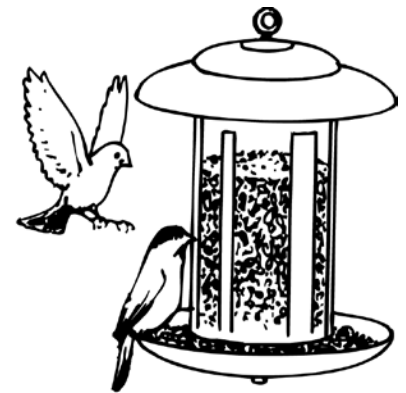
## Feeder Watch

Tom Driscoll

With this article, "Feeder Watch" kicks off its third year of discussing feeder birds. Although I discuss the birds you can see at your feeders, I am hoping to receive reports and questions about the birds you are seeing. This will make the articles more interesting. If you have ideas about what to write, want to report the birds you are seeing, or have questions about the birds you are seeing, please send me an email at [bttdriscoll@bellsouth.net](mailto:bttdriscoll@bellsouth.net).

You should be receiving this newsletter in mid-October. The leaves are starting to fall which will make the birds easier to spot! At my feeders, the nesting, year-round resident birds, such as Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Northern Cardinal, Eastern Towhees, House Finch, American Goldfinch, Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Brown-headed Nuthatch, are feeding less. They have raised their broods and now have to eat and feed less. Some of the youngsters have been forced to find other areas, so as not to compete for food with their parents.

Our hummingbirds have left and maybe yours have too, but don't take down your feeders yet. Every year in the triangle, we have some "western" hummingbirds, such as Rufous and Calliope Hummingbirds, that spend the winter here. If you notice hummingbirds around your flowers or feeders after October, then clean the feeders and refill them. If your winter hummingbirds remain, then please contact me. More than likely, these hummers are from the west.



Your winter migrants, such as Dark-eyed Juncos and White-throated Sparrows, should be arriving in late-October and November. Eastern Towhees, a colorful black and orange year-round resident, eat seeds as well, but usually on the ground. Sometimes, I put millet on the ground for towhees and some of our winter sparrows.

We have several species, including Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers, that regularly dine at suet feeders. Other woodpeckers, including the Pileated Woodpecker, and other residents, such as Eastern Bluebirds and Brown Thrashers may also eat suet. Some residents, such as American Robins and Eastern Bluebirds, eat berries from the Holly Bushes, Dogwood, and juniper trees in your yard.

You may not be the only one watching the birds at your feeders. Hawks, such as Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, feed on small birds and may also be "feeding" at your feeders. Have you seen any smallish hawks?

# New Hope Audubon Society Calendar of Activities

**Thursday, November 1: General Meeting at 7:00 p.m. at NC Botanical Gardens.** The speaker is Guy Meilleur. His topic is entitled, "Ornitho-Arbiculture: Creating Niches while Caring for Urban Trees."

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**Saturday, November 3: Bird Walk at Duke Gardens** with Cynthia Fox

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**Saturday, November 3 Stream Watch 9:00 a.m.** Led by John Kent. Contact John for more information.

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**Sunday, November 11: Tom Driscoll will lead a Bird Walk** to a to be determined destination in the Triangle. Meet at the Mardi Gras Bowling Alley parking lot at 1 p.m., and we will look for winter visitors, such as ducks and sparrows. Bring water and sturdy hiking shoes. The hike will not be strenuous. We will be gone from 2-3 hours. Please e-mail Tom at [bttdriscoll@bellsouth.net](mailto:bttdriscoll@bellsouth.net) to let him know you're going.

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**Saturday, November 17: 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 a.m. and return to the store by 10:00 a.m. Carpools leave from the store.

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**Saturday, December 1, 9:00 a.m.: Stream Watch** Led by John Kent. Please contact John for more information.

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**Thursday, December 6, 2007: General Membership Meeting at the NC Botanical Gardens at 7:00 p.m.** The speaker is our own board member, Linda Gaines. She will be presenting, "Galapagos — Wildlife Up Close."

## A Swift Night Out

by Matthew Klever

September 9th was a "Swift Night Out" - a specially designated day to count chimney swifts. We met Tom Driscoll at Blackwood Farm at dusk hoping to see a gathering of chimney swifts. A chimney swift box, had been built by an eagle scout and placed at the farm a few years ago. Tom told us a lot about chimney swifts. They eat annoying insects and one family of only the parents and fledglings will eat 12,000 insects in a day. Chimney swifts live in southern Canada and the U.S.

It is getting close to migration season, so they gather together in hundreds and even thousands to prepare for the long flight to Peru. Chimney swifts cannot perch on branches because their legs are at the wrong angle. They used to roost and nest in hollow trees, but humans have cut them down, so they have adapted to use chimneys. They rely on man-made structures to roost and to build their nests.

Unfortunately, some people don't like chimney swifts in their chimneys because of the noise they make, so chimney swifts have few places to roost except man-made structures. Since it's close to migration season we were hoping to see chimney swifts in great numbers. Unfortunately, we only saw one. We hope that more chimney swifts will come to Blackwood Farm in the future.

## Membership Matters

Karen Olson, Membership Chair

I need help! For starters, greeting members and distributing brochures, small things which make New Hope Audubon known and personal. There are probably bigger things that a committee will bring forward. Please call or e-mail or see me at the next meeting to ask questions or sign up. Karen Olson, Membership Chair [karenolson@earthlink.net](mailto:karenolson@earthlink.net)

## Christmas Bird Counts

Judy Murray

The 108th year of the National Audubon's Christmas Bird Count is fast approaching. Below is a list of local counts with contact person and phone number. Come on out for some fun counting birds — contact the leader and get on a team, or make a team of your own. Novices welcome.

Sat., Dec. 15th: Raleigh, John Connors, 919-755-0253

Sun., Dec. 16th: Durham, Jeff Pippen, 919-383-8040

Sun., Dec. 23rd: Chapel Hill, Will Cook, 919-382-9134

Sun., Dec. 30th: Jordan Lake, Carol Williamson, 919-383-2364

Wed., Jan. 2nd, Falls Lake, Brian Bockhahn, 919-676-1027

For a complete list of counts for North and South Carolina go to: <http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/christmas/>

## New Hope Audubon Society 2007-2008 Officers

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Director	Tom Outlaw	202-494-5355	TomoutlawDC@aol.com
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Bird Seed Sale	Judy Murray	942-2985	jmurray@unc.edu
Eagle Count	Stewart Pearce	942-7660	spearce@yankelevich.com
Eagle Platform	Vacant		
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Important Bird Areas: Jordan Lake Chair	Tom Driscoll	932-7966	btdriscoll@bellsouth.net
Mini Breeding Bird	Marsha Stephens	732-4014	stephens@mail.fpg.unc.edu
Stream Watch	John Kent	933-5650	jkent@tmug.org
Wildathon Co-Chairs	Vacant		

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