



December 2022

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Members and Friends of Hilton Head Audubon,

As Hilton Head Audubon enters the final weeks of 2022, we look forward with great anticipation to December 14. Many of you and over 200 volunteers will participate in our annual Christmas Bird count that day.

It is part of the largest and longest-running citizen science survey in the world, one that includes over 2,600 count circles. All provide critical data on bird population trends. Learn more about our contributions to this vital initiative here. We work year-long on this project, with Susan Murphy, our prized Board member, leading the way with infinite care and planning. (Thank you, Susan!)

Then we're off and running toward 2023, with a rich slate of monthly meetings at the Coastal Museum planned, several engaging field trips and an exciting new initiative with Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park that we look forward to sharing with you soon.

December Meeting

Our annual Christmas Bird Count meeting is on Thursday, December 8th. It will be at First Presbyterian Church, Fellowship Hall, 540 William Hilton Parkway. Our social begins at 7:00 pm. The presentation, by Robert Rommel, begins at 7:30 pm. A distinguished wildlife photographer and a past president of Hilton Head Audubon, he is our science advisor for the CBC. His insights and tip on bird identification are unsurpassed.

As always, you are welcome to bring treats for the snack table.

Give a Holiday Gift of Joy, Health and Nature While Supporting Birds & Conservation

While you thoughtfully plan your holiday gift-giving, we invite you to include a Hilton Head Audubon membership as a gift to a friend, family member or nature-lover...including those new to the island. Gifts and donations may also be made in honor or memory of a loved one.

The health benefits of birding – from watching and learning about these amazing, feathered creatures and getting out in nature, to sharing our joy and fascination of birds with others – are increasingly recognized by the conservation and scientific communities. As we recently wrote about, academic research shows that nature walks where people encounter a high number of birds are more “positively associated with a lower prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress” than those walking in nature

without birds.

So, a gift goes much further than introducing your giftee to nature, or supporting our internships, educational initiatives, island signage and maintaining our 50-acre Audubon Newhall Preserve. It will spark more opportunities for your recipient to improve their health and longevity by spending more time outside while enjoying the beauty of birds, and the pleasure of meeting new friends.

We thank you in advance for thinking of including us not only in your gift-giving, but in your estate planning, as well. Please reach out to us to learn more about how we can help you allocate your resources to supporting precious island birds and conservation.

Kudos to The Hilton Head Public Service District!

The Hilton Head Public Service District (PSD) has once again achieved designation as a “Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary” through the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP), an Audubon International program. It was first certified as such in 2019.

To reach certification, a property must demonstrate that they are maintaining a high degree of environmental quality in a number of areas. These categories include: Environmental Planning, Wildlife & Habitat Management, Water Quality and Conservation, Resource Management, and Outreach and Education. Properties go through a recertification process every three years.

Cheers to HH PSD!

Cornell Online Courses Discount Offer Expires 12/31/22

In collaboration with the Sun City Bird Club we have partnered with Cornell University Ornithology Lab to offer our members access to 28 online courses at a special 30% discounted price for the remainder of 2022. These 28 courses are truly university level courses, designed and taught by university professors. To view the course catalog, [please click here](#). To purchase a course select and click on the desired class. Click on Enroll on the next screen. At the next screen, enter the coupon

code SunCityBird43 (no spaces) and click on the Apply Code button. This code will reduce the course price by 30%, a substantial savings. Finally, proceed to checkout and complete the purchase by entering your credit card information.

And finally, we share a compelling message from our President Kay Grinnell on the 2022 State of the Birds Report.

Your Hilton Head Audubon Board and Committee Members.

A Letter from our Audubon President: State of the Birds 2022 and Thoughts on What We, Together, Can Do Locally

It's been a while since I've written a letter to HHIAS members; the new State of the Birds 2022 report is compelling enough for me to ask you for your ear again.

You probably remember the startling reports published in 2020 about the bird population declining by 3 billion in the last 50 years. While loss of habitat was presumed to be the primary driver of this unhappy news, follow-up studies were key to better answering the "why". The results have been recently published in the "**State of the Birds 2022**" report. It's no better news, but we have a more precise understanding for the causes of the declines, including which habitats that are most in peril, and the most and least impacted species. This information gives us direction for taking action to stem this trend and gives me hope that we'll (collectively) do something!

The big picture in terms of actions needed is no surprise: If we take necessary steps to reduce the impact of climate change and develop focused environmental practices to help humans flourish (clean water & air for example), our birds will also flourish. You could have guessed that, so now let's get more specific about this.

This study looks at the status of birds grouped by 8 major habitats across the US: shorebirds, grasslands, aridlands, western forests, eastern forests,

waterbirds, Hawaiian birds and seabirds. Breeding species – including shorebirds – are declining in all habitats except select species of waterfowl and waterbirds in wetlands, where 4 decades of focused environmental conservation investments have been made (think big things like the North American Wetlands Conservation Act leading the charge). For each habitat, “tipping point” species have been identified to single out those experiencing big population losses. The 70 tipping point species have collectively lost two-thirds of their populations in the last 50 years. There are lots of details in the report to chew on, and if you’d like, [you can read those for yourself in this link.](#)

For now, **let’s focus on a habitat that’s near and dear to us and what we can do to make a difference: our coastal beaches.** There are 29 shorebird species in the U.S. and 10 have reached the tipping point. As you probably know, many of these shorebirds, including most of the tipping point species, are seen on Fish Haul Beach. The primary drivers of this dramatic population loss are habitat destruction and habitat disturbance. Shorebirds make amazing migrations, from the arctic to the southern hemisphere and back, and need these crucial places to rest and feed along the way. When these resting habitats aren’t available or aren’t friendly to shorebirds, the birds suffer, and many don’t succeed in reaching their destination.

There are things locally that we can do to impact habitat destruction, like opposing the Bay Point Resort development; [you can read how HHIAS helped this effort here.](#) HHIAS also supported the passage of Beaufort County’s Greenspace Tax and you supported it! This is another way vital lowcountry land will be saved from further development.

There are also things each of us can do to help minimize habitat disturbance. If we could reduce the incidence of kids and dogs chasing resting birds on our beaches, we could make a difference today and every day. We’re working on two actions to help our shorebirds and we’ll be reaching out to you soon with more information and ways to get involved.

First, Education. Audubon is working to put signs up at beach entrances to educate the public about letting birds rest and feed. You may have seen

a few of these already, the result of local kids' art contests. It's a start. Pointing these signs out to your guests and friends when you visit our beaches is an easy way to start discussions about the importance of our beaches to our shorebirds.

Second: Dog leash laws. We know that dogs love to run free on the beach, but also that keeping them away from resting and feeding shore birds during migration is crucial for their survival. It's a hard and sensitive issue to address, with strong feelings on both sides. HHIAS supported the thinking behind Beaufort County's more restrictive dog leash laws, which were passed this summer. Now, with the Town of Hilton Head's reversal of those laws, we are working to promote a compromise that allows people to run their dogs on some (but not all) island beaches. Fish Haul beach is a particularly important shorebird resting area, and we are hoping to have a "dogs always on leash" law installed there.

As HHIAS President, I wrote a letter to our Town Council to encourage them to consider the importance of leash laws and enforcement for our shorebirds, especially on Fish Haul beach. Our local International Shorebird Survey team led this process by writing to the Town; several other concerned organizations are also likely to weigh in on this important matter. Whether or not the Town adopts the laws to reflect this important conservation issue, we will continue working on this compromise and on educating beach-goers and dog owners. Keep an eye out for our email on how you can join this effort to help save our shorebirds.

There are many other actions we can take to help our birds, but that's enough ear bending for one read!

In closing on a positive note, I would like to think that, now that we better understand the issues and threats to our birds across the U.S., we can find ways to help them. Closer to home, I'm hoping we can find the kind of success story for shorebirds that Amber Kuehn and the turtle team found for our turtles.

Happy Birding and Happy Holidays,
Kay Grinnell

Volunteering Opportunities

Christmas Bird Count Day: The Hilton Head area count is on Wednesday, December 14th. We have a few field teams needing another birder. More Feeder Watchers are always welcome! As a Feeder Watcher, you can participate from the comfort of home. If you are interested in being a part of this international effort, please e-mail Susan Murphy at HHICBC@gmail.com and she will have an Area Captain contact you.

Christmas Bird Count and Great Backyard Bird Count: We are looking for volunteers that are willing to assist classroom teachers in area schools (public or private) to teach their students to use binoculars, learn about birding and then participate in the CBC and GBBC. We will train individuals and provide them with information they can give to the teachers and their students. If you live near a school or maybe you have a relative attending (or working) at the school we can make the arrangements for you to become a volunteer at that school.

[Learn about all of our volunteer opportunities here.](#)

Join/Renew

Joining HHIAS or renewing your membership is easy, [click here to complete the online forms](#). Please consider a contribution beyond the basic annual membership level to support our mission. As the holidays are approaching a reminder that Gift memberships are available for purchase, [click here](#).

Members receive the first notification of and the ability to register for Hilton Head Audubon sponsored field trips, educational events and social gatherings, a subscription to Ecobon our digital newsletter and a chance to actively participate in citizen science (Christmas Bird Count) and

conservation efforts. But more importantly your membership allows us to continue conservation and educational efforts throughout Hilton Head Island and Beaufort County, South Carolina.



\$10 Fledgling
Basic Membership
Student



\$25 Carolina wren
Basic Membership
Individual



\$35 Cardinal
Basic Membership
Family



\$100 Great Egret
Membership Plus
Additional Contribution



\$250 Ruddy Turnstone
Membership Plus
Additional Contribution



\$500 Painted Bunting
Membership Plus
Additional Contribution



\$1,000 Bald Eagle
Membership Plus
Additional Contribution

Donations

Hilton Head Audubon accepts donations online, using Venmo, or by mailing a check. Donations can also be made in honor or memory of someone by following the instruction on the form.

[Donate online.](#)

[Donate by mail.](#)

Donate by Venmo. **If you have Venmo, scan the Venmo QR code** or go onto the [Venmo app](#) and find us by typing “HHI Audubon Society” or “@HHIAudubon”.



venmo

We use our donations to support: advocacy regarding conservation/birding in our region, providing birding education programs to area schools, maintaining and interpreting through signage and tours of the Audubon Newhall Preserve, managing the annual Christmas Bird Count, actively participating in regional Citizen Science programs, and increasing awareness about local conservation projects or concerns.

UPCOMING EVENTS

PROTECTING BIRDS AND THE PLACES THEY NEED.

JOIN US



Events

Mark your calendars: Our regularly scheduled monthly member events will be held at 2:30 on the second Tuesday of each Month at The Coastal Discovery Museum's Sea Island Room. Please note the exception is the December meeting which take place in the evening at a different location.

To view all upcoming events in a calendar format, [click here](#).

Newhall Work Day

Saturday December 10

[To learn more, click here.](#)

December Member Meeting Christmas Bird Count Featuring Robert Rommel

[To learn more, click here.](#)

The meeting will take place on Thursday, December 8, 2022 from 7:00pm to 8:30pm at the First Presbyterian Church on Hilton Head Island.

Annual Christmas Bird Count

Wednesday, December 14, 2022

[To learn more and how to participate, click here.](#)

January Member Meeting Featuring Dr. Andy Jones of the Spring Island Institute

Tuesday, January 10, 2023

[To learn more click here.](#)

February Member Meeting Featuring Larry Carlile, Federal Wildlife Biologist Specializing in Red Cockaded Woodpeckers

Tuesday, February 14, 2023

[To learn more click here.](#)

March Member Meeting Featuring Dr. Alan Biggs on Shorebirds

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

[To learn more click here.](#)

April Member Meeting Featuring Riley Egger of the Coastal Conservation League.

Tuesday, April 11, 2023

[To learn more click here.](#)

May Member Meeting - Picnic and Birding at Jarvis Creek Park

Tuesday, May 9, 2023

[To learn more click here.](#)

Field Trips and Walks

Spring Island Field Trip - December 10

[To learn more and register, click here.](#)

Kingfisher Pond Field Trip - December 18

[To learn more and register, click here.](#)

Beidler Forest Field Trip - January 6

[To learn more and register, click here.](#)

Solomon Tract of Savannah NWR Field Trip - January 7

[To learn more and register, click here.](#)

Bear Island Field Trip - February 11

[To learn more and register, click here.](#)

Save the Date as we finalize the following field trips!

Tybee Island, Saturday March 18

Webb WMA, Saturday April 22

Harris Neck NWR, Saturday May 6

Newhall Preserve Guided Walks

Free guided tours every Tuesday led by Master Birders. Please gather in the parking lot by 8:30 AM.

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

PROTECTING BIRDS AND THE PLACES THEY NEED.

HILTON HEAD AUDUBON IN THE NEWS



Congratulations to Master Bird Class Graduates!

by Lynn Hodgson



L to R seated: Karen Penale, Morgan Dunmire, Lynn Hodgson, Terri Cerisoles, Kathy Shea-Kettel, Rachel Green

L to R standing: Holly Bjorkstrom, Steven Miller, Stephen Dickson, Hilton Klein, Kathy Jackson, Kathy Byrd, Mary Alice Tartler, Karen Seminar (also holding certificate for Sophia Schade), Lauren Clontz

This group of happy faces belongs to those graduating from the fall 2022 Master Birder program, Coastal Cohort, offered by Georgia Audubon. Most of GA Audubon courses have been offered in or near Atlanta, but this year the Hilton Head Island Audubon Society and the Ogeechee Audubon Society joined in to help organize a coastal offering for those of us in the Savannah to Hilton Head area. We had 8 Zoom sessions on various aspects of ornithology, and 4 field trips led by local experts. The group included people just beginning their birding adventures as well as some “old hands”. All of us learned new information about birds and new techniques for studying them and made some new friends. We encourage others to consider jumping in next time the course is offered in our area. Thanks, Georgia Audubon!

2023 Master Birder Class

Join the waitlist to receive priority notification about the next session, [please click here](#).

Tracking Birds Across The Globe

by Bob Speare

On October 13, a four-month old bar-tailed godwit known as B6, embarked on an incredible 11-day, 8,435 mile journey from Alaska to Australia, marking the longest documented non-stop flight by any animal. We know this because B6 wore a small GPS transmitter, which sent signals to a satellite and recorded its specific location along the way. This allowed avian researchers to track this entire epic journey in almost real time.

For smaller birds like sandpipers, warblers, sparrows, and even bats, butterflies, and dragonflies, smaller nano-transmitters are used to track their movements. Weighing less than a paperclip, these tiny transmitters emit a signal which is picked up by local (Motus) receiver stations placed across the landscape. As a tagged animal passes within a few miles of a station, an antenna picks up the signal emitted, and records the specific time the animal passed by. Over the course of its migration, the animal's recorded signals become a series of dots on a map. As we connect these dots, the migration route is revealed, along with the specific times each dot was recorded.

Both the GPS system used on B6, and the smaller Motus technology are proving to be extremely valuable in understanding the precise routes being used during migration, along with the specific locations and times spent at important staging areas and stopovers used for resting and refueling.

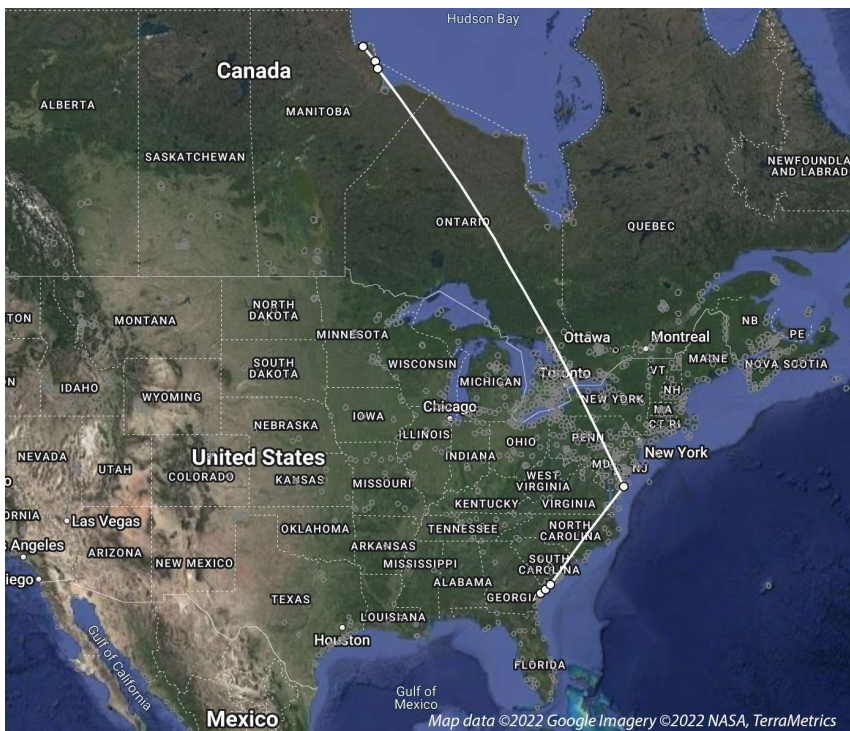
Hilton Head Audubon is playing a key role in assisting those studying these movements by hosting a Motus receiver antenna here on Hilton Head Island. Here are three bird species this receiver has picked over the past few months:

A Red Knot, tagged on Wolf Island NWR, in Georgia. This shorebird passed by our receiver eight times over 17 days in March as it traversed

back and forth to and from Edisto Island, in the ACE Basin region. Even these local movements between locations are important data to those studying these species.

A Virginia Rail, tagged at the Nature Conservancy's Emiquon Preserve, in Havana, Illinois. This bird left the preserve and was detected by our receiver two days later—no other detections were picked up along that route. This means that the HHI station revealed where this bird ended up.

A Short-billed Dowitcher, tagged in July in Manitoba, Canada, on the Hudson Bay. It flew to Assateague Island, VA, then spent 6 days on Harbor Island before passing by our station on its way to Ossabaw Island in GA. (see image below)



And we'll continue to add to our local story as more data comes into our station.

We've come a long way over recent years in our ability to better understand where and when birds are traveling between migratory endpoints. Still much more needs to be done, and for some species, time is running out. Let's hope we can all be inspired by stories like that of B6, a 12 oz. shorebird completing such an amazing journey, and we will support conservation measures aimed at protecting these amazing species.

New Dog Leash Rules and Their Potential Impact at Fish Haul Beach

by Alan R. Biggs

Hilton Head Island Town Council recently extended the definition of “beach” in the Municipal Code. Before the recent change, “beach” was defined as the area from Braddock Cove and Calibogue Sound, then all along the Atlantic Ocean, then extending up to Fish Haul Creek along Port Royal Plantation. The new definition now includes the area from Fish Haul Creek all the way to the tip of Pine Island in Hilton Head Plantation. The geographical extension of the beaches allows the town to spend Beach Preservation Fees to manage, monitor, and renourish the additional beach areas. Concomitant with the redefinition of “beach” was the implementation of current beach rules for dogs to all the new beach areas.

Here are the current beach rules for animals (basically dogs):

April 1 through Thursday before Memorial Day

10 AM to 5 PM - dogs on leash only

5 PM to 10 AM - dogs on leash or under voice control

Friday before Memorial Day through Monday of Labor Day

10 AM to 5 PM - no dogs on the beach at all

5 PM to 10 AM - dogs on leash or under voice control

Tuesday after Labor Day to September 30

10 AM to 5 PM - dogs on leash only

5 PM to 10 AM - dogs on leash or under voice control

October 1st through March 31st

Dogs on leash or under voice control at all times

As you can see, where Fish Haul Beach previously had the rule of “dogs on the leash at all times,” there is now ample opportunity for dogs to run “under voice control” during one of the most important times of year for bird

migration and resting at this sensitive area.

The previous rule of “on-leash at all times” was because Fish Haul Beach, when it was Mitchelville Beach Park (MBP), was not considered a “beach” under the definition of such in the Municipal Code (i.e., the beach was defined as ending on the Port Royal side of Fish Haul Creek), and so the rules at Fish Haul (MBP) were different. Leash rules at Fish Haul (MBP) mirrored those of other town parks at the time. Since then, the residents of The Spa have lobbied for Fish Haul Beach to be included in the Municipal Code as a beach, so that the Town would add that area to their regular beach renourishment and maintenance regime. For the same reason the beach now extends all the way to (and includes) Pine Island in Hilton Head Plantation (see Municipal Code on Town's website, Section 8-1-112(1)). That means that dogs can also run off-leash “under voice control” over that entire stretch. I put “under voice control” in quotation marks because in my experience very few animals respond to voice control when stimulated by the sight of a bird on the beach.

Hilton Head Audubon has expressed the following concerns to Town Council: The Fish Haul area is unique in being a major feeding and resting area for many Arctic-nesting species of shorebirds, terns, skimmers, plovers, sandpipers, etc. Recent Christmas Bird Count data have recorded thousands of birds resting there. It is unique on the island as really being the only major feeding location for these migratory birds. South Beach and the Folly are two other refueling/wintering areas but very minor in comparison. This is why the Manomet International Shorebird Survey has been conducted at Fish Haul over the past decade. And this is why the Fish Haul area has become an important location on the island for “bird tourism.” Groups of birders can be observed there almost every day during fall and spring migrations and during the winter resting period for those birds that remain here.

If you compare Fish Haul with other sensitive sites in the area, such as Huntington Beach State Park, Hunting Island, Botany Bay, Tybee Island, and many others, our current dog leash rules for this sensitive area are an anomaly. All those sites either don't allow dogs at all or have marked off the sensitive feeding locations as areas where no dogs are allowed - ever.

According to former town staff, they have tried, unsuccessfully, many times over the years to suggest changes to our leash laws so that dogs remained on leashes when piping plovers and other migratory birds were present. Hilton Head Audubon realizes this could prove to be a very divisive issue with our populace, but we believe some kind of compromise around Fish Haul would make everyone happy while still preserving the unique environment of the Fish Haul area.

If you have the opportunity, please speak with your Town Council representative about this issue, or if you're more comfortable, send an email or write a letter. The more voices our town officials hear about this issue may help the Town Council realize the sensitive nature of the Fish Haul Beach area.

To contact your Town Council representative (note: some of these will change after December 31, 2022 as a result of the recent elections), [click here](#).



Newhall Work Days

Our November Work Day was successful, as always. The ladies, led by Vice-Chair Lynn Hodgson, culled unwanted vegetation from the long leaf pines planted after Hurricane Matthew. The gentlemen spread milled asphalt on the access road and parking lot, and stabilized the new logs lining the access road. Shown below from left to right are David and Julia Buzzard, Lynn Hodgson, Karen Lucey, Sal Gioia, and Bob Clemens. Hilton

Klein joined in the fun, but had to leave before the photo was taken. The second photo is an onlooker we have dubbed "King of the Forest!" Join us for the next Work Day on Saturday, December 10th, 8:30-10 AM. RSVPs are helpful, but not necessary to Bob Clemens at rclemens318@gmail.com or (317) 989-5777.s.



FEATHERS IN OUR LENSES

PROTECTING BIRDS AND THE PLACES THEY NEED.

COMMUNITY SIGHTINGS AND STORIES



Gifts for Bird Lovers

by Patty Kappmeyer

As a birder, photographer, nature journaler and outdoor lover, here is list of gifts that I covet!



Bird Nerd, Book Nerd

[Slow Birding](#) by Jan E. Strassmann

The art and science of enjoying the birds in your own backyard.

[Learning the Birds](#) by Susan Fox Rogers

Join Rogers as she becomes a birder and joins the community of passionate and quirky bird people.

Any book by [Mary Oliver](#).

Puzzlemania

[National Geographic Bird Migration](#)

[Cornell Lab of Ornithology Bird Puzzles Sets](#)

Hummingbirds

Journaling

Decomposition Blank Notebooks

Handbound Journals

All Weather Field Notebook

Backyard Birding

Bird Buddy

Bird Feeder Cam

Bird Bath Fountains

Hiking

Backpacks for Birding

Birding Vests

Touchscreen Gloves

Happy Holidays!

November Sightings: 94 species!

[Click here to view the list.](#) Please enjoy these collages of bird activity photographed during the past month by our Facebook group members.

There are several ways to report bird sightings : use eBird, join the [HHIAS Facebook group](#) or Birding-Friends@google.com. If you would like to join the Birding-Friends google group please send an email requesting access to ecobon@hiltonheadaudubon.org.

