



February 2023

Inside this issue:

- What's New
- Upcoming Events
- New & Noteworthy
- Audubon Newhall Preserve
- Feathers Through Our Lenses



Members and Friends of Hilton Head Audubon,

There is so much exciting news to share this month.

Hilton Head Audubon Awarded 3 Grants!

We've been busy applying for 3 different grants, and were recently notified

we've been awarded all 3! HHIAS was awarded an "Audubon in Action" grant from National Audubon to fund research on birds and nature in Gullah culture during the period of the Mitchelville settlement. This research will be used to create educational content and HHIAS booth activities for the Juneteenth celebration.

National Audubon separately awarded HHIAS a grant to fund "birdability" tours: we will be partnering with the Pinckney Friends group to offer birding tours for the mobility impaired on Pinckney Island mid March thru mid May this year. And third, our request for dollars from local ATAX funds are going towards enhancing visitor and tourist experiences and will include 1) updated trail guides for our Newhall Preserve, 2) expansion of our social media and advertising to attract visitors to Hilton Head, and 3) installation of interpretative signs to improve visitors' understand and enjoyment of the unique plant and bird life at Newhall.

Unique Volunteer Opportunities

In the Volunteer section we highlight four unique opportunities to suit a range of commitment levels: a 1 day beach cleanup or a day of representing HHIAS at our Juneteenth booth, a season monitoring bluebird box nests, a 4 month position on the committee to plan for the HHIAS participation in Juneteenth, and a longer commitment on a citizens' advisory committee regarding the Town of Hilton Head Parks and Recreation. We sincerely hope that you will consider lending your time to support HHIAS and our partners.

Recruiting Applicants to Join our Board

Hilton Head Audubon is currently recruiting people interested in participating in club governance by joining the Board of Directors. We are particularly interested in members with organizational skills, for instance to help with member events, programs, member recruitment, or field trips. We also have continuing needs for technological and editing skills to help with our newsletter (Ecobon) and with our website. You do NOT need to be an expert birder – just have their interests at heart.

If you want to help but are not sure where you fit, call one of us to chat. Most Board Members start out as members-at-large of the Board, until they

figure out where their interests and skills are most needed. Election of the new Board will be in April, with service starting in May. Term of office is two years, meetings are once a month, usually 10 a.m. on Thursdays, in person or via Zoom.

If you wish to apply, send a brief bio or letter of interest to Chair of the Governance Committee, Lynn Hodgson, Hodgson.lynn@aol.com, 808-282-5218 by mid-March.

February Meeting

The Hilton Head area is part of the Lowcountry Osprey Watch program through the Spring Island Trust, which is part of an international project. Locally, volunteers observe assigned nests and their observations and photos are entered into the international online database.

The mission of Osprey Watch is to collect information on a large enough scale to be useful in addressing three of the most pressing issues facing aquatic ecosystems including global climate change, depletion of fish stocks, and environmental contaminants. HHIAS member Carol Clemens will introduce these amazing birds and the monitoring program on Hilton Head.

A retired High School Spanish teacher who moved to the Lowcountry after retiring in 2005, Carol holds advanced degrees from the University of Notre Dame. Among her volunteer activities, she is a Lowcountry Master Naturalist, a docent for the Coastal Discovery Museum, an interpreter at Volunteers in Medicine, teaches genealogy programs for the Heritage Library, is active with the Hilton Head Notre Dame Club, participates in various bird counts for the Hilton Head Audubon Society as the International Shorebird Survey and CBC, and is the area coordinator of the Hilton Head Osprey Watch program.

Carol enjoys photography and her nature photos can be viewed on [her website](#).



Happy Birding!

Your Hilton Head Audubon Board and Committee Members.

Volunteer Opportunities

Bluebird Nest Box Monitors Needed

We are looking for volunteers to help with bluebird nest box monitoring at the Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge during the nesting season (March to August) this year. Training will be provided. The time commitment and number of boxes to monitor will be determined based on the number of volunteers. For more information, please contact Bob Speare at bobspeare@gmail.com, or Alan Biggs at alan.biggs2@gmail.com.

HHI Parks and Rec Advisory Committee

If you've been following the plans for development of the new park at the Mid Island Tract on Hilton Head, you know that Audubon has been providing input, where appropriate, on a regular basis to the Town of Hilton Head for the last few years. This process needs to continue into the near future as the park development moves forward. Audubon is looking for a volunteer to represent our birds, nature and our environment as a member of the committee formed by citizens to advise the Hilton Head's Parks and Rec Committee. One of this committee's big topics is the Mid-Island Tract,

now named Mid-Island Community Park. We're asking for your assistance in positioning Audubon to serve as a continuing voice regarding this development. The committee meets the third Thursday of the month, usually at the Rec Center, with a Zoom option. If you are interested in volunteering or have questions about this committee, please send an email to Kay Grinnell at k.grinnell@yahoo.com.

Mark Your Calendars!! April 22 is Beach Clean Day!!

Hilton Head Audubon is teaming up with the Lowcountry Alumni Tri Delts to participate in the Outside Foundation's Earth Day Beach Clean Up. In our ongoing effort to reach new groups of people, we've reached out to this active and large group to join forces, and we need your help!

Celebrate Earth Day with us and clean up the beaches for our birds – you'll be putting conservation into action. This fun and easy way to help our birds will make you feel good, too! Sign-up on our Events page. Contact Laura Voight, Conservation Chair, at conservation@hiltonheadaudubon.org for more information.

Help HHIAS with our First Ever Participation in Juneteenth

We've been talking to the folks at Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park and are doing exciting research in preparation for our HHIAS booth, kids' activities and tours during this year's Juneteenth celebration. We'll need plenty of volunteers for that day, and could also use some help with planning for the event. You can volunteer a little or a lot! Interested? Send an email to HHIAudubon@HiltonHeadAudubon.org to let us know.

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. A reminder that Gift memberships are available for purchase, [click here](#).



\$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

Our monthly member events are held at 2:30 on the second Tuesday of each Month at The Coastal Discovery Museum's Sea Island Room.

Newhall work days take place on the second Saturday of the month.

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

Newhall Work Day*

Saturday February 18, 2023

**3rd Saturday of month this time only*

To learn more, click here.

**February Member Meeting Featuring Carol Clemens Lowcounty
Osprey Watch Program**

Tuesday, February 14, 2023

[To learn more click here.](#)

**March Member Meeting Featuring Larry Carlile on Red Cockaded
Woodpeckers**

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

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



CBC's not just for Hilton Head!

by Susan Murphy

Hilton Head's Christmas Bird Count Coordinator (Susan Murphy) reports that our count involved 380 participants, and counted 27,609 birds from 135 species. Very impressive. And 3rd largest in the country. However, the Hilton Head count is not the only one in the area! If you enjoyed the HH CBC, please consider volunteering for some of the neighboring counts next year. Counts with smaller numbers of participants still have to cover a 15-mile circle, and they are just as much fun. You visit some cool new places, see different birds, meet new people, and help out your fellow chapters. I had a blast, participating in 3 off-island counts this year. The counts, dates, and contact people are all listed on the National Audubon website section on the CBC.

Hilton Head's count was first, on December 14, 2022. I captain the team at Port Royal Plantation, where 2 groups roar around in golf carts, 1 group walks the Mid-Island Tract, and 1 group splits the afternoon between beach walks and an arranged tour of the water treatment plant (always good for winter ducks and Canada geese). We also have several feeder-watchers. As you know, we had perfect weather, not always the case.

The next day, Dec 15, I scurried over to Harbor Island, which is part of the Lowcountry count (Beaufort and vicinity). It was pouring rain early in the

morning, so we delayed the count by a couple of hours. Our hostess was Peggy Lucas, so we were able to shelter at her house between rain bands. Late morning, we birded her wooded neighborhood, then in the afternoon split into 2 groups to bird the long beach. We actually had sunshine to start, but were finally chased off the beaches by rain and wind – and of course the birds were hunkering down and hard to find as well. CBC dates are determined a year or more ahead of time, so you just do your best regardless of the weather!

Two days later, Dec 17, was the Sun City / Bluffton Count. Again, sunny, if chilly, weather. For several years, I have helped team leader Leanna McMillan at Oldfield Plantation, a lovely birding area with a long dock from which to look out for shorebirds along the river, as well as golf courses and woody trails between the salt marsh and the residential areas. High points for me are the red-headed woodpeckers, especially when we see a juvenile. Then we know the colony is prospering.

Finally, on Jan 2, 2023, I joined the Savannah/Ogeechee Count. Larry Carlille and Diana Churchill assigned me to cover Kingfisher Pond and the trails around the Visitor Center of the Savannah NWR. This year, my team consisted of 4 Hilton Head / Sun City birders who had recently joined me in completing GA Audubon's Master Birder Class: Karen Penale, Karen Seminary, Terri Cerisoles, and Kathy Shea. Maybe by next year they will volunteer for captaining their own sections! Karen P and I arrived before dawn to count the hundreds of ibis, egrets, and herons that roost on the central island trees. Later, our biggest challenge at Kingfisher was the group of ducks – all females, just to make it harder. We decided they were a mixed flock of gadwall and American wigeons, and we promised each other we would review female ducks before the count next year! But the high point occurred when Terry spotted "an owl". It looked very long, so we were thinking great horned. But binoculars revealed two barred owls, sitting one behind and a few inches below the other!

I am happy with my contribution to this amazing citizen science effort, in its 123rd year. More than that, though, I want to encourage more of our readers to consider broadening their participation.

Field Trip Report: Solomon Tract of the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, January 7, 2023

by Lynn Hodgson

Ten HHIAS members met leader Lynn Hodgson at the Solomon Tract at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday Jan 7. It was a chilly but beautiful sunny morning. The Tract is not especially “birdy” in winter, but we spotted a respectable 30 species. A bald eagle, red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks and a lone turkey vulture were overhead. Tiny ruby-crowned kinglets, Carolina wrens, and a marsh wren in the shrubbery and grasses. We also worked out song, white-throated, and swamp sparrows. A lone hermit thrush allowed us a good look, a “life” bird for a couple of our members. Woodpeckers were also relatively abundant, with good views of downy and red-bellied woodpeckers and yellow-bellied sapsucker. A few participants caught glimpses of a couple of red-headed woodpeckers. We heard quite a few northern flickers, although we did not get close enough for good looks.

On the way in, we chatted with some hunters coming out (a good reason to wear orange and schedule winter field trips for 8:30 instead of 8:00). Solomon Tract is open only for youth hunts. Hunters under 16 years of age must be accompanied by an unarmed adult supervisor. These kids all looked pretty sleepy, having been hunting since pre-dawn, and having had no success today. But it is good to know that learning to hunt safely is a priority and that at least some young people in this crazy world get a chance to experience the out-of-doors. The accompanying adults were quite chatty and informative and very aware of what birds were around. This was the last day for deer season. Later hunting will be small game and possibly pigs. Several members of our group sighted a couple of small pigs running away from us at the dikes, and we saw quite a bit of “rooting” damage. They have become a pest in much of the Lowcountry.

A few of the group had lunchtime commitments, so turned back at about 10:30 a.m. near where the woods open out onto the dikes. The rest of us walked the dikes in a big loop, and got back to the cars at about noon. The

whole walk is about 4 miles. We could not have asked for a more beautiful January day and better company.

HHIA Volunteers Help Piping Plover Study

by Laura Voight



Melissa Chaplin, FWS and project leader, holding YO YO

Watching our many, small shorebirds along the water's edge, feeding as they go, is always a thrilling experience for me. One day not long after I moved to the island, mesmerized by the small groups of Sanderlings, Semi-palmated Plovers and Piping Plovers darting back and forth along the edge of the incoming tide, I couldn't believe my eyes: a light blue band on one of the tiny Piping Plover's legs! It was my first time seeing a banded bird, and I excitedly started wondering about what an incredible journey this tiny shorebird must have made to our island and where it would be returning to.

Just the fact that we can find out some of its story by identifying that tiny band is thanks to the amazing work of people who monitor and study these

shorebirds. Their work goes beyond monitoring these plovers' individual stories of where they came from and how many chicks they hatch, to how healthy they are and pin-pointing where and how conservation efforts can best help them. Piping Plovers have benefited greatly over the decades from concentrated conservation efforts, increasing in population from their near extinction (Endangered Species status) in the 1980s to Near Threatened status today, a status which indicates that their populations are increasing.

Conservation efforts are indeed helping, but there is still much to do. The beaches on Hilton Head are still considered "disturbed sites" – primarily because of off leash dogs. When dogs chase and disturb birds, their energy is depleted as they flee danger, and importantly, their feeding is disturbed; beaches after all are their grocery stores, but in a life-or-death, must-have-source-of-food kind of way. From studies like the one conducted on Hilton Head earlier this month (more on that below), we know that when birds flee their body chemistry is also altered, and that that endangers them even more. Birds that are exposed to high levels of chronic disturbance are likely to be under more oxidative stress, which damages body condition with long term exposure. Locally, we need to continue to pressure our HHI Town Council to reinstate dog leash laws at important bird areas like Fish Haul, Folly Field and in Sea Pines.

This month, 19 HHI Audubon members had an incredible experience participating in a Piping Plover banding project run by FWS and Virginia Tech's Shorebird Program. For three days (Jan 18-20), volunteers witnessed four different shorebirds studied up close, including one known as YO YO. This banded Piping Plover, with her two yellow and orange bands (YO YO), came from Silver Lake State Park, MI, where she and her nestlings were rescued from a high traffic area in 2020 and raised in UMN's captive-rearing program before being released. Since then, we know that YO YO has spent each winter in HH and then returned to northern Michigan in both 2021 and 2022 to nest and successfully fledge chicks! Where she came from, conservation has helped her species dramatically: in 1990, Endangered Piping Plover pairs in northern Michigan were reduced to 12 breeding pairs; today there are about 64 (Sierra Club statistics). Our HHIA volunteers played a key role in helping shorebird

conservation efforts here. Thanks to all who helped and played a part in saving our plovers!



Photos show researchers holding plovers, setting up nets, volunteers observing and patrolling the beach, details of three banded birds including YO YO running. Team photo in center, from left: Christy Wails, Camille Alvino (squatting down), Hope VanDerwater, Chelsea Weithman, Kelsi Hunt, and Melissa Chaplin. Don Fraser, the VT boat captain was not pictured.

The following is a short description of the banding project written by its leader, Melissa Chaplin:

Melissa Chaplin of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's South Carolina Field Office, located in Charleston, SC, is collaborating with Virginia Tech's Shorebird Program researchers Kelsi Hunt, Chelsea Weithman, and others on a project at multiple sites in Georgia and South Carolina. This project builds on past work in Georgia and the Carolinas and is investigating the physiological effects of disturbance on overwintering shorebirds, particularly piping plovers. Past work revealed that piping plovers overwintering at more disturbed sites had lower survival and weighed less than piping plovers overwintering at less disturbed sites. These findings echo past work in other parts of the piping plover overwintering range, which is where they spend the majority of their annual cycle, and prioritizes the importance of minimizing disturbance. The current project involves trapping piping plovers and other focal species in order to collect a blood sample, which will be

used to measure the lengths of telomeres in certain blood cells. Telomere lengths shorten as organisms age, but oxidative stress can accelerate this process. This project is investigating whether or not piping plovers overwintering at more disturbed sites have shorter telomere lengths indicative of oxidative stress.

Volunteers from the Hilton Head Island Audubon Society assisted Melissa and the VT group in January while they were trapping piping plovers on the island. The volunteers talked to beachgoers along the shoreline of Port Royal Plantation by Fish Haul Creek and Pine Island [in HHP] to let them know what was going on and asked them to go around the trapping operation. Once a bird was caught, it was gently measured, banded, and weighed before a blood sample was collected. The researchers were able to successfully trap three piping plovers, one semi-palmated plover, and one sanderling.



Newhall Work Days

Who has triskaidekaphobia? Not us! Thirteen stalwart volunteers, fueled by only 12 donuts, braved cold weather for the January work day at the Audubon Newhall Preserve. Jim Reynolds and his crew of the Rios siblings, Elizabeth, Thaddaeus, and Nathanael, extended the milled asphalt surface material up the Audubon Trail. Vice-Chair Lynn Hodgson and Elizabeth spruced up the parking lot pollinator garden and waged war against fire ants. Co-Chairs Jack Coleman and Bob Clemens cleaned out and added wood shavings to two of our three owl boxes. We spared an owl box near the Audubon Pond after finding it occupied by a baby possum!

We have dubbed him or her “Pogo,” whose famous Earth Day 1970 quote regarding pollution was: “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

Meanwhile, closer to the ground, Karen Lucey, David and Julia Buzzard, Sal Gioia, Tom Marko and newcomer Daniela Duran gathered logs, branches and other debris from around the Audubon Pond into piles to be removed by our friends from Sea Pines CSA. For our traditional photo op, below, we positioned the roses among the thorns . . . From left to right: thorns David Buzzard, Fearless Leader Clemens, Tom Marko, John Grobe, Co-Chair Jack Coleman, roses Vice-Chair Lynn Hodgson, Daniela Duran, Julia Buzzard, overlapping thorn Jim Reynolds, rose Elizabeth Rios, and thorns Sal Gioia, Thaddaeus Rios and Nathanael Rios. It was a great day to be outdoors!



Our next Newhall Work Day will be Saturday February 18th, 8:30 to 10 AM! (Ordinarily we schedule our Work Days for the second Saturday of each month, but your Fearless Leader will be out of town on February 11th, so we will push it back a week next month!)

FEATHERS IN OUR LENSES

PROTECTING BIRDS AND THE PLACES THEY NEED.

COMMUNITY SIGHTINGS AND STORIES



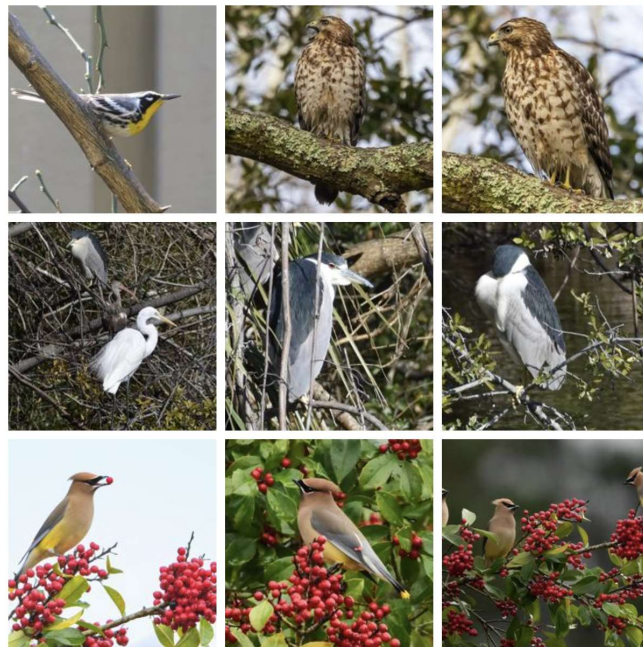
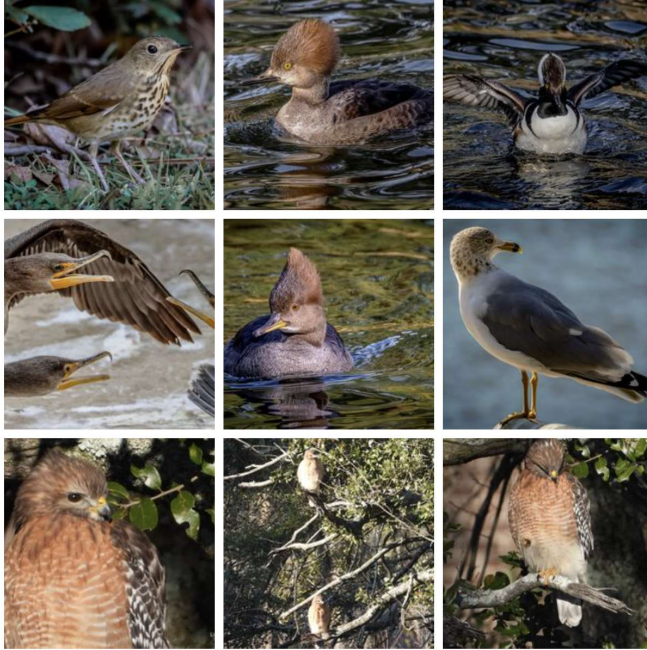
From Kathy Byrd January 19, 2023

Today I had the privilege volunteering with a team of biologists from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Virginia Tech who are trapping shorebirds on Hilton Head for a research project investigating how beach disturbances influence a shorebird's health and lifespan. This is "YO-YO" who was nicknamed for her yellow-orange-yellow-orange bands. She was caught and banded yesterday and migrated here from Silver Lake State park Michigan where she hatched in 2020. She has spent each winter on Hilton Head. The bands are harmless to the birds and help the scientists to track and monitor them. In addition they take blood samples to monitor the health of the birds. I learned so much. What a fun day!!



January Sightings

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.