



The Chattanooga Chat
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A Newsletter of the Chattanooga Chapter
Tennessee Ornithological Society

December Meeting

Ascension Lutheran Church
720 S Germantown Rd
Thursday, December 13
5:30 p.m. Executive Board
7:00 p.m. Monthly Meeting

Program:

The Christmas bird count has been held in Chattanooga for over 100 years. For the December 13 meeting Caryn Ross will be our presenter on "Changes in Winter Bird Populations in Tennessee Using Christmas Bird Count Data". Caryn is a graduate student with Dr. David Aborn at UTC. This is some interesting data on what we have less of and what we have more of than years ago.

Refreshments: We have not been having monthly refreshments the past 1-2 years. However, since it is near Christmas, it would be nice if a few people were willing to bring an item. If you are willing, email David Stone (rockyturf@epbf.com) and we will try to coordinate so we have enough variety to enjoy after the meeting.

Thanks

Thanks to Braam Oberholster from Southern Adventist University for presenting a program on the birds of

Kruger National Park in South Africa at our November meeting.

Field Trips

Christmas Bird Counts are scheduled on the following dates:

15th of December will be the Chattanooga Christmas Bird Count. Contact Kevin Calhoon kac@tnaqua.org

22nd of December will be the Nickajack Christmas Bird Count. Contact David Spicer birdsnbflys@gmail.com

1st of January will be the Hiwassee Bird Count. Contact Kevin Calhoon kac@tnaqua.org

Wings of Winter Festival
<http://www.friendstnwr.org/wings-of-winter.html>

Sandhill Crane Festival
<https://www.tn.gov/twra/wildlife/birds/sandhill-crane-festival.html>



Warbling Vireo by Hugh Barger

Guest Article

Jim Greenway

A deluge of apps, smartphones, and digital cameras has re-cast the art of field birding almost as much as the transition from shotgun & study skin to binoculars & field guide. Amidst it all, pencil & paper “nature journaling” can hone your bird observation skills while enriching your birding experience.

Naturalist/authors Kenn Kaufman, Pete Dunne, David Allen Sibley, and Bernd Heinrich all emphasize that the mental process of seeing, processing, and then drawing – however rudimentary the sketch might be – benefits the birder more so than a photo or an un-recorded observation.

Some of the sharpest (bird) ID experts I've met have been birders who regularly sketched in the field. (T)he point of the sketching was not to produce a work of art or illustration, but to truly see what was there. Kenn Kaufman, Kaufman Field Guide to Advanced Birding

The Georgia Master Naturalist program introduced me to “nature journaling” and prompted me to take up field sketching. In the nature journaling movement, the deepest learning about nature and science arises from personal observation, documentation, and reflection. The best vehicle for that learning is the nature journal.

According to Nature Journaling proponent Jack Laws, the goal is not “the pretty picture.” Instead, the journaler practices a habit of writing and drawing about nature observations as well as the bigger questions about nature

that arise from those observations. The artistic or writing skills and medium (pencil, paint, etc.) are secondary to the simple need to document routinely the journaler’s “sustained attention” to nature. That attention is augmented with simple “citizen science” tools for data collection.

In practicing my own sketching habits, I quickly became much more discerning in recording a bird’s physical and behavioral characteristics. I simply “paid more attention” than before. Maybe I didn’t want to draw the whole bird, but I looked a lot harder at even the less-obvious features.

These extra sketching steps began to hone my bird ID skills. Before, I would switch quickly from binos to field guide when I saw an unusual bird. Now, I would find the bird and observe it long enough to grab and render a very rough sketch of key features. Only then would I go to a field guide. It wasn’t just the more-focused looking. The acts of writing and sketching the details embedded those memories more so than simply flitting between scope and book.

The process was so rewarding that I wanted to get the bird back in view, so I could see physical or behavioral features that were highlighted in the guide but that I hadn’t sketched. Were my sketches rendered well? NO! But the process helped me to learn, and the journal pages became reference material of their own. My sketching skills even improved!

The sketching made me think more about bird anatomy. Feathers aren’t stuck willy-nilly on the bird. They’re in certain patterns, or “tracts,” and the bird can look very different depending upon

which feathers are raised. Learn the names and positions of those patterns and you'll become much better at interpreting your observations in the context of what's written in ID guides. And nothing aids in that learning more than writing and sketching them.

A quality digital photo is hard to beat for rare bird documentation. Nevertheless, a camera is a poor substitute for hand-recorded observation if you want to truly absorb the bird. I recently added a long telephoto lens to my camera equipment. While it certainly makes for dispositive images to clinch an ID, the lens also became a crutch for observation. My mental "muscles" for observation began to atrophy when I relied on the camera without sketching. My observational patience and intensity faded. I realized ruefully that I was getting better images but was missing out on a deeper and more rewarding nature experience.

The ability to sketch can help on several levels, though, when a camera is unavailable. In summer 2017, Dawn and I believe that we saw a Wood Stork on Barkley Lake in Kentucky. It's a "review" species there. We had no camera while we were paddling our kayaks in the river.

Several Black Vultures launched from a mid-river rookery island when a large white bird took off with them. The sketching habit was ingrained enough by then that I was able to better memorize the suspect stork's physical and behavioral details, including its flight and interaction with other birds. I immediately sketched out the bird, its flight path and pattern, and other details once we were ashore. That sketch also made me appreciate what features we

had not seen that might have differentiated it from other species. That review species report may not be accepted, but our narrative and the accompanying sketches had personal value that a less-than-stellar photo alone wouldn't.

...I feel that I have not really seen something until I have drawn it.... Art, like science, leads to the preservation of something that is perhaps thought of as fleeting, and capturing it in some tangible form is the only way to stay connected to it. Bernd Heinrich, *The Naturalist's Notebook*, ecologist and author of *The Mind of the Raven* and *Bumblebee Ecology*

Better observational skills weren't the only dividend paid by sketching. I already had a 20+ year practice of keeping written notes of birding and other nature observations. The need to observe carefully for journaling was now so rewarding that I began looking at the smallest details of even common birds. It was fascinating to be cognizant of how different birds would crack sunflower seeds, for example. It fostered a sense of connection or communion that made birding a richer endeavor. And it carried over to plants and other animals. Want to learn more? Visit Jack Laws' website <http://johnmuirlaws.com> or Facebook page. *The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling* is a great starting point. Other good references include books by Clare Walker Leslie.

What Have You Seen

November 13

Rain much of yesterday and chilly weather today likely accounted for

several birds of several species on my feeders and on the ground near the feeders today. Some of the feeders contain black-oil sunflower seeds, and the rest hold suet cakes. I saw more than 50 Sandhill Cranes from the viewing area at the Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge in Meigs County at Birchwood this morning, but I am guessing that there were as many as 300 late today.

Feeder species included:

Mourning Doves
Red-bellied and Downy woodpeckers
Blue Jays
Carolina Chickadees
Tufted Titmice
Red-breasted (1) and White-breasted nuthatches
Pine Warbler
Eastern Towhee
Song and White-throated sparrows
Northern Cardinals
House and Purple finches
Pine Siskins (at least 7)
Goldfinches (more than 2 dozen)
Charles Murray

This morning, November 17, I had three species of nut hatches on our feeder in Polk Country.

Rick Houlk

On Sunday (November 4) I had two female purple finches at my bird feeders – Highway 58 area, near Booker T. Washington State Park.

Maria Derrick

October 18

A morning low of 45 degrees Fahrenheit with a stiff breeze at my home in Birchwood reduced the number of mosquito bites to less than five. This motivated me to take my time birding this morning. I was rewarded with a

FOY male Kentucky Warbler, a Tennessee Warbler, one Yellow-rumped Warbler, and a Magnolia Warbler. No Ruby-throated Hummingbird appeared at my home feeders today, but a lone Rose-breasted Grosbeak was noted late in the day. Two FOS Pied-billed Grebes were observed near Hiwassee Island from the Cherokee Removal Memorial Park in Meigs County at Birchwood.
Charles Murray

November 11

This morning there was a Dunlin and a Pectoral Sandpiper feeding with the Wilson Snipe behind the school.

Bruce Dralle

November 13

Hamilton County, TN While making my window casualty rounds on the UTC campus this morning, I found a dead Ovenbird.

David Aborn

Join TOS

Membership dues:

\$28- individual \$32- Family
\$15- student \$40- sustaining
\$460- Life (Life members must pay \$10 local chapter dues each year.)

Send checks payable to “TOS” to:

Gary Lanham, TOS Treasurer
21 Cool Springs Road
Signal Mountain, TN 37377
chattanoogatos@outlook.com

If you are a new member, please include your address, phone number, and an email address for Chat delivery and bird walk information.

All dues, donations, gifts, and bequests are tax deductible under Sec. 501 (c)(3), the Internal Revenue Service