

The Newsletter of the SE PIF Working Group

**Southeastern Partners in Flight
Members: SC, NC, GA, AL, MS, LA,
FL, TX, TN, KY, MD, VA, and WV**



Southeastern Working Group

A Letter from the Editor

This is the first newsletter the Southeastern Partners in Flight Working Group has attempted to create. Per our meeting in Blacksburg, VA in March of this year, South Carolina agreed to take on the creation and distribution of the newsletter for the first year, followed by Florida and Georgia. The rest of the member states would rotate off in subsequent years. Because this is the first newsletter, the format and content is still being perfected so comments are welcome. As you can see, the newsletter is divided into working group sections with progress reports listed under each. In future publications, I hope to have more information to present, especially those that have not come across one of the many List Serves out there! Thank you for your patience with this new project. Please contact me regularly with suggestions, and material for the newsletter. That is the only way to make this thing work. We will evaluate the newsletter's effectiveness as we go along. We also need a name for the newsletter. Please e-mail your suggestions to me.

Sincerely,

Anna Huckabee, South Carolina PIF
annah@scdnr.state.sc.us 803-734-5534

**PLEASE HELP NAME OUR
NEWSLETTER!**

Upcoming Meetings of Interest

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|---------------------|---|
| AUGUST 5-9, 2003 | 121st Stated Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois |
| OCTOBER 12-15, 2003 | Southeastern Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies Annual Conference, Mobile, AL. For details and registration visit www.dcnr.state.al/seafwa2003/ |
| OCTOBER 15, 2003 | SE PIF Steering Committee in conjunction with the SEAFWA in Mobile, AL |
| MARCH 3-6, 2004 | SEPIF Annual Meeting in Jekyll Island, GA |

In The News

- The Florida Wildlife Commission recently passed a policy that prohibits and authorizes the removal of feral cats on FWC lands. More information can be found on the following website: http://www.abcbirds.org/cats/states/florida_policy.htm. The Summer 2003 issue of The Wildlife Society Bulletin (31:2) contains an article on the public's perceptions of feral cats on Texas A&M University property. The results of the survey demonstrated that while the public understands cats are predators that impact native wildlife, but they do not believe that this predation or the cat's status as an exotic species is reason enough to control population numbers.
- The USFWS has a new website for migratory bird permits. The web address is <http://permits.fws.gov>.
- The South Korean government has decided to go ahead with its plans to develop the internationally acclaimed Saemangeum wetland into an industrial park. This will jeopardize the endangered spotted greenshank as well as Saunders' gull, Baikal teal, spoon-billed sandpiper, and great knot. For more information, visit <http://www.birdlife.net/news/news/2003/07/saemankeum.html>.
- Avibase is now online at <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/avibase/avibase.jsp>. According to its creator, Denis Lepage, it contains "taxonomic and distribution information (including maps) for all 10,000 extant species and 22,000 subspecies of birds in the world, plus several extinct and ancient fossil species."
- With 80,000 cell phone towers now in existence with many more preparing to be installed, bird mortality is expected to increase. The following website explains the cell phone revolution and the implications the towers have to the future of bird conservation.

Job Changes

- D. Breck Carmichael Jr., formerly assistant deputy director for the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR), has been awarded the job of Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative Program coordinator. The Initiative is directed at restoring bobwhite quail populations through large-scale habitat conservation across the entire 34-state range of the species. The Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative coordinator will provide consultation to a variety of federal, state, and private conservation organizations on policies, programs, projects and practices related to agriculture, forestry, and habitat conservation for bobwhite quail and other grassland wildlife species.
- Joni Ellis's job as Education Specialist was cut due to work force reductions along with several other positions in her agency. As of July 1, she will be the Assistant Birding Trail Coordinator, working with Julie Brashears in Tallahassee. She will still represent the Education Committee of SE PIF and National PIF.



Working Group Reports as of July 2003

Monitoring: Updates from Florida: Biologists with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) are doing conservation research with many high-priority bird species. Here are a few updates:

Florida Grasshopper Sparrows Monitoring

FWC completed the final year of a contract with the Department of Defense to monitor endangered Florida Grasshopper Sparrows (*Ammodramus saviannarum floridanus*) on Avon Park Air Force Range in south-central Florida (1996-2002). This military installation contains 3 of the 5 known populations. Annual point-count surveys indicated a decline from an estimated total of 298 birds in 1997, to 162 birds in 2002. An analysis of changes in sparrow distribution at Avon Park showed a contraction to core areas away from forested edges and military targets. Counts in 2003 produced an estimate of only 17 Florida Grasshopper Sparrows. Efforts are being made to determine the cause of this drastic decline. The other two known Florida Grasshopper Sparrow populations (Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area and Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park) appear to be stable. ---Mike Delany, FWC (mike.delany@fwc.state.fl.us)

Monitoring Peripheral Populations of the Florida Scrub-Jay

The Florida Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) population in and around Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve (Levy County) represents the most northerly population of the species on the Gulf Coast. This population is highly isolated and has declined from an estimated 100 jays in 1982 to approximately 2 dozen jays in August 2000. FWC is currently working with the Florida Park Service to color band all individuals, monitor reproductive success, and search for additional family groups on private property. FWC assisted the Florida Park Service in developing a scrub management plan for Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve during 2001. Aggressive habitat restoration (removal of mature sand pine stands, prescribed burning) is underway to improve habitat quality for Florida Scrub-Jays. ---Karl Miller, FWC (karl.miller@fwc.state.fl.us)

Southeastern American Kestrel Nest Box Study

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) nest box programs currently exist in many U.S. states and Canadian provinces. In some cases, nest boxes are cleaned and monitored for a few years, but monitoring is eventually discontinued. Without a monitoring program in place, kestrel nest boxes can accumulate nesting material from other birds and mammals, potentially reducing their suitability and/or their productivity for American Kestrels. FWC is conducting a study to examine the effects that abandoned nest boxes have on local populations of Southeastern American Kestrels (*F. s. paulus*), listed as threatened by the state of Florida. Nest box occupancy, clutch size, nest success, and productivity are being compared in sample of abandoned and maintained nest boxes in north-central Florida during 2000-2005. Ultimately, the results from this study will contribute to our ability to properly manage a regional nest box program in Florida. ---Tim Breen, FWC (tim.breen@fwc.state.fl.us)

Everyone is encouraged to report/enter their data into the National Point Count database housed at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (<http://www.mp2-pwrc.usgs.gov/point/>).

Awards: Mark Johns was recently selected by the American Forest and Paper Association for the 2003 Wildlife Stewardship Award in the Category of Industry Cooperator.

Working Group Reports as of July 2003, continued...

Communications, Outreach, & Education: A total of 113 activities were reported as part of the 2003 Caribbean Endemic Bird Festival. Over 7,600 persons participated in nine countries. Thanks to all of you for helping make this event a great success! Joni is attending the biannual conference of the SCSCB (Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds) in Trinidad/Tobago and taking some supplies down for distribution.

International: In an attempt to partner US states with Caribbean countries, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources sent International Migratory Bird Day posters to Joni Ellis for transport to one such country. SC joins GA, NC, and TN in this partnership.

With funding from a generous private businessman, 4 representatives of Georgia Partners in Flight and the Wildlife Resources Division assisted biologists on Cayman Brac with research and surveys of the Brac Parrot. The Brac Parrot is a flagship species for habitat conservation on the island that provides winter haven for several high priority migrant birds that nest in the Southeast. The work is part of a long term international partnership that will also result in bi-weekly surveys of winter migrants by local volunteers.

Management: Revision to Paul Hamel's Blue Book are still underway. Additional Breeding Bird Census and Winter Bird Populations studies are being compiled into a form that will permit a more definitive summary of published results of actual density estimation from these two techniques. Paul's group has compiled the hardcopies of most of the remaining data sets last year, and entered most of the winter bird data into the computer. They still have a number of bird lists to enter, at which time the first summary can be drawn. The Regional Office provided additional funds to assist with that work this fiscal year. Paul suspects that it will be sometime in the fall before the data will be set up properly to attempt to produce the first run of a new summary.

Research: Dr. Bob Cooper, Co-Chair of the Research Working Group, will be on sabbatical from the University of Georgia during Fall Semester 2003. One of the projects that Bob will be working on during this time is completion of the Proceedings from the SE-PIF Conference in Biloxi.

Recently Available Publications

- Environmental Concern Inc. (www.wetland.org) is pleased to announce the arrival of its newest publication. Authored by Dr. Edgar Garbisch, *The Do's and Don'ts of Wetland Construction* is a practical guide to assist wetland practitioners in their effort to make professionally sound decisions regarding: site selection, plans and specification development, pre-bid and pre-construction meetings, contract bidding, wetland construction, post-construction maintenance, and post-construction monitoring. Over thirty years experience in one book. Straight talk from a leader in the field. Order your copy today on-line for \$34.95. For more information contact: Environmental Concern - (410) 745-9620, dir.educate@wetland.org
- "Managing Backyards and Other Urban Habitats for Birds" is now available from Chris Moorman (chris_moorman@ncsu.edu).

Featured Article: [Chimney Swifts: Another Purple Martin?](#) *submitted by John Cely*

The Purple Martin is widely known for being almost entirely dependent upon humans for its housing needs. The shift from its natural nesting habitat – old woodpecker cavities - has been so complete that nearly every martin east of the Mississippi River has been raised in a human-provided gourd or house.

Purple Martins have a hard-core following of thousands of dedicated "landlords" and there are several organizations devoted to martin conservation and management. Unfortunately another bird that has become increasingly human-dependent, the Chimney Swift, seems to get little notice or attention, despite nesting under our very noses.

During my 25-year DNR career, I have

noticed a dramatic increase in the number of chimney caps, especially for new residential developments, but also for older homes, that have effectively shut swifts out of thousands of nest sites in South Carolina. No doubt this pattern holds true throughout much of the extensive breeding range of this unique bird, and may be the underlying cause, along with the use of newer metal chimneys unsuitable for swifts, for the long-term Chimney Swift decline noted by the Breeding Bird Survey (Fig. 1) for the Southeast (USFWS Region 4).

Paul and Georgan Kyle of the Driftwood Wildlife Association (DWA) (<http://www.concentric.net/~Dwa>), Austin, Texas, have been outstanding advocates for Chimney Swifts. They produce

a newsletter about swifts, appropriately called [Chaetura](#), and have also produced several brochures including one on providing and maintaining nesting habitat for Chimney Swifts.

Here at my office on the outskirts of Columbia, South Carolina, we installed two Chimney Swift towers (Fig. 2), slightly modified from the plans provided by DWA, and have had success attracting a nesting pair to each. These towers, however, are fairly expensive, about \$175 worth of lumber, heavy, and impractical for most backyard applications. They would make a good service project/ educational tool for an agency or organization with plenty of open space free of trees, buildings, and other obstructions.

Chimney swifts continued...

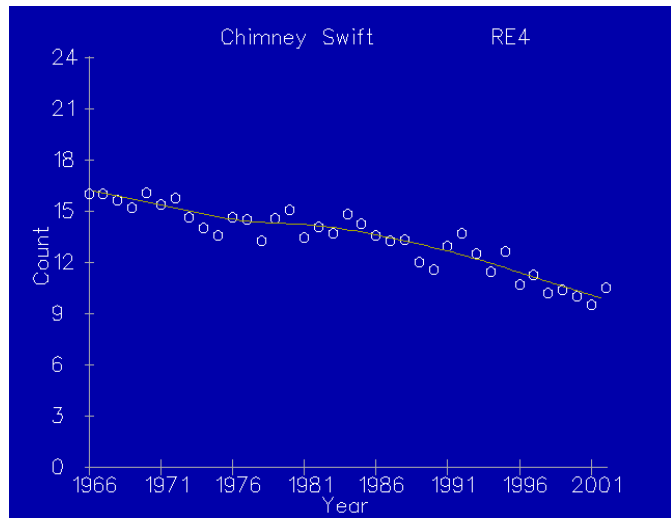


Figure 1. Chimney Swift Breeding Bird Survey Trends for Region 4, 1966-2001.

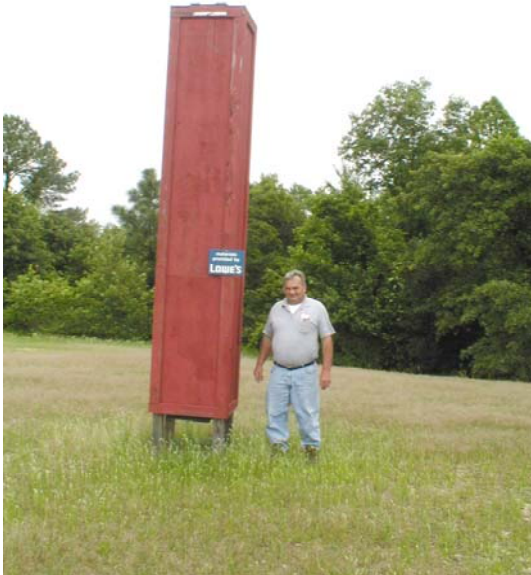
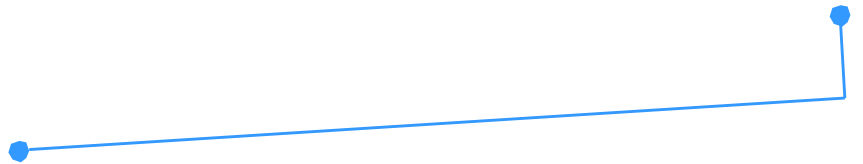


Figure 2. Chimney Swift nesting tower at Sandhills Research and Education Center, Columbia, South Carolina.



The DWA has also installed web cams on some of their towers that provide interesting images of swift nesting biology and behavior.

I think most of us, from time to time, experience a feeling that our professional efforts at bird conservation and management fall short. Objectives and results are sometimes difficult to quantify and feedback is infrequent. I know Fish and Wildlife Service biologists that use to have, and many probably still do, signs over their doors that said “what have you done for the ducks today?” With the complex problems and numerous obstacles facing landbird conservation in the Americas, it can be frustrating to ask ourselves what have we done for Neotropical migrants today. The problems facing Chimney Swifts, however, are relatively straightforward and well understood. Along with the good folks at the Driftwood Wildlife Association, a small group of dedicated swift enthusiasts, both amateur and professional, could make a big difference in making those BBS trend lines for Chimney Swifts start going up.

John Cely
SC DNR

