
NEMOURS GAZETTE

A publication of the Nemours Wildlife Foundation

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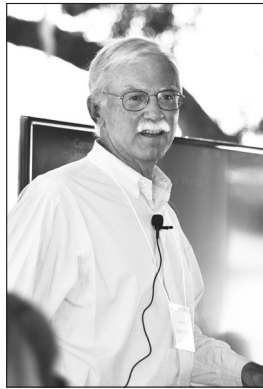
BIRDS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

Birds Can Change the World was the title of his talk and the message was repeated throughout by Dr. John Fitzpatrick who spoke to more than 120 guests at Nemours Wildlife Foundation's annual Friends event on October 19th.

Dr. Fitzpatrick is the Louis Agassiz Fuertes Director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithaca, New York. The Cornell Lab is a world leader in the study and conservation of birds.

"Birds are important indicators of the health of our environment," Dr. Fitzpatrick said. "We need real-time proxies to measure how we're doing, and birds are very sensitive environmental indicators: they grab us by the gut, they sing to us and call to us in ways no other organism can."

Dr. Fitzpatrick gripped the audience with example after example of both success and failure in the bird world. There were more than a few misty eyes when he played a recording from the Cornell Lab which houses the world's largest collection of bird sounds. The recording was made by two Fish and Wildlife Service biologists on Kauai in the Hawaiian Islands and featured the song of the very last OO bird. The biologists were stunned as the bird replied to the playback of its own song, hoping it had finally found a mate. "No such luck," said Dr. Fitzpatrick. "This was the very last OO bird and it became extinct in 1988." The melodic sounds became increasingly haunting as the story unfolded.



Dr. John Fitzpatrick speaks to Friends of Nemours

Citing the example of a bird familiar to all who live in the Southeast, Dr. Fitzpatrick noted that the Northern Flicker is declining by about 3-7% annually. The Flicker's decline is being carefully studied, but the bird is clearly telling us that something's gone wrong. One possible cause is the tendency by property owners to remove dead trees which are critically important to the Flicker's well-being. "Leave a snag; feed a woodpecker," he said.

"It is both possible and desirable that human cultures can grow richly and fully over the long term side by side with intact natural systems, but every human generation has to cherish that value," Dr. Fitzpatrick said. Over and over he emphasized the

importance of involvement by private landowners, organizations such as Nemours Wildlife Foundation and individuals who simply enjoy watching birds. All have a role to play in identifying and sustaining conservation tools that preserve wildlife habitat while at the same time protecting our vital air and water quality, indeed our quality of life. "It's remarkable the power that birds have to convince us that we need to live side by side in order for both humans and other species to survive."

As Dr. Fitzpatrick spoke on a beautiful autumn day in the Lowcountry, the mockingbirds called, even the timid fox squirrels played not far from the assembled guests, and a couple of alligators lazed in the pond, all "living side by side" as Dr. Fitzpatrick suggested.

RESTORING THE LONGLEAF

When early explorers first visited the Lowcountry they saw "a vast forest of the most stately pine trees that can be imagined, planted by nature at a moderate distance. . . enameled with a variety of flowering shrubs." (www.TheLongleafAlliance.org/longleaf-pine/the-big-picture). The stately pine they saw was the longleaf pine. The longleaf pine ecosystem once stretched across 70-90 million acres from Virginia to Texas. Today, less than 9,000 acres of true old-growth longleaf remain. Much of the decline of this ecosystem happened decades ago when the ancient longleaf pine was treasured for its strength and beauty, and its wood was used for building everything a young, growing country

needed built. Once the majestic 300+ year old longleaf were harvested, they were replaced with the easier to manage and faster growing loblolly, shortleaf, and slash pine species.

While over-harvesting was a major blow to the longleaf ecosystem, the suppression of fire probably did more to destroy this great ecosystem than any other activity. While it may sound odd, because we typically associate fire with destruction, periodic fire is a friend of the longleaf pine ecosystem. In fact fire is required to sustain longleaf forests. As a colleague remarked recently, a longleaf forest without fire is like a rainforest without rain. So eloquently said!

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NINTH ANNUAL WOUNDED WARRIOR / WHEELCHAIR DEER HUNT



Welcome to warriors and hunters

One of the best feel-good activities taking place at Nemours Plantation is the annual Wounded Warrior/ Wheelchair Deer Hunt. In partnership with the Lowcountry Chapter of Safari Club International, Nemours Plantation serves as "headquarters" for the two-day event which draws more than 50 hunters and their guides, along with hundreds of volunteers who do everything from setting up tables and chairs, wrapping red-white-and-blue bunting around trees, preparing and serving several meals, welcoming the arriving warrior/hunters, and then breaking it all down again once the event is over. Two dozen private landowners allowed hunters on their property, and while the logistics of all that coordination can be a bit daunting, it's all for a very, very good cause.

This year's event took a new twist with the participation of many therapy and service dogs. From the smallest (pictured) to the most enormous (a handsome young Great Pyrenees), the dogs made the rounds, showering equal attention on wheelchair-bound visitors as well as busy volunteers. It's fun to see how quickly a harried volunteer can come to a stop and enjoy the company of a friendly dog who pushes his nose into a hand and keeps coming back for



Lots of therapy in a small package

more. Observing these dogs and their handlers in such a setting, it's easy to see why therapy dogs play such an important role in the treatment and recovery of people who have experienced difficult situations. This group of two- and four-legged volunteers was a welcome addition to the 2013 event.

Ten hunters from the S.C. Disabled Sportsmen Association and 10 youngsters through SC DNR's Take One Make One program joined 35 wounded warriors in harvesting 27 deer this year. Through the generosity of many other hunters, each hunter in this year's event received a cooler with 30 pounds of processed venison.

Special thanks are due the many volunteers who made this event possible, including volunteer chefs, first responders

from the Sheldon Fire Department and Beaufort County EMS who stood by in case of an emergency, members of the Parris Island Marine Corps band who provided entertainment, and the color guard whose presentation made participants even more proud of the event's honored guests.

A young sergeant who took the time to send a letter of appreciation wrote, "You brought out the outdoorsman in me again." What more needs to be said?

TRIBUTE GIFTS

Nemours Wildlife Foundation is honored to receive donations which recognize a special person.

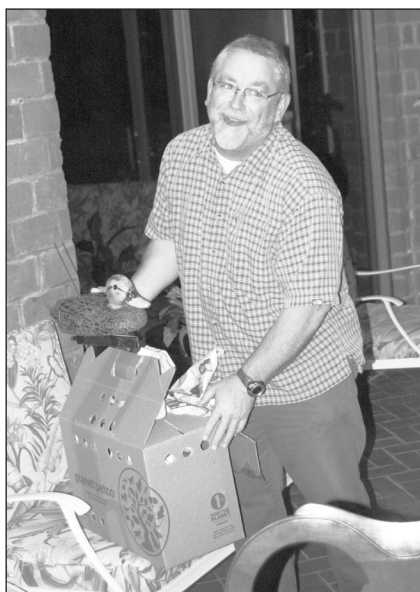
In memory of Walter Carucci
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In honor of Sissy Kinghorn
MARY AND MICHAEL WHITEHEAD

*In honor of Cindy Keener and
In memory of Jack Keener*
For their dedication to educating children
ANONYMOUS

A FOND FAREWELL

Friends and colleagues gathered at Nemours Plantation on a recent autumn afternoon for a heartfelt send-off for senior biologist Eddie Mills. Eddie, who joined the staff nearly 15 years ago, is putting aside his wildlife career for a while in favor of working with his very talented wife Juli (jmillsstudio.com) to grow her already thriving business. Even though everyone attending Eddie's send-off (and everyone who has commented on Nemours' Facebook page or sent emails) sincerely wish Eddie and Juli well in this next venture, it's hard to see him leave Nemours. There were a few farewell gifts but none was as big a hit as the duck decoy outfitted with a radio transmitter, a gift from SCDNR's Dean Harrigal who piloted the airboat during many duck captures and transmitter outfittings with Eddie over the years.



Eddie Mills admires a duck decoy with a radio transmitter

Having grown up in the Atlanta area and after receiving a Master's degree from the University of Georgia, Eddie first arrived in the Lowcountry in 1997 as an employee of The Nature Conservancy conducting an ecological characterization on Nemours Plantation to serve as a baseline for determining potential areas for scientific research. Not long after Dr. Ernie

Wiggers became the first executive director of the Foundation in 1999, he wisely recruited Eddie to work at Nemours. And, after nearly 15 years on the staff, the rest is history.

One of the students who worked under Eddie's supervision has referred to him as "the legendary Eddie Mills". His rapport with the students and the fact that most have kept in touch over the years is testimony to his love for the work and for shepherding those just entering the field. Eddie is a keen observer of wildlife, particularly birds, and one of the true pleasures of working with him was the opportunity to explore the plantation as he pointed out birds such as Swallow-tailed Kites, Black-necked Stilts, Roseate Spoonbills, a variety of hawks and many other winged visitors to the ACE Basin. He also has a strong interest in native plants. The front entrance to the main house at Nemours features a number of sweet grass plants that Eddie has nurtured over the years.

Director Wiggers said the decision to hire Eddie more than 14 years ago was really very easy because it was clear he knew more about the ecology of the area than anyone else, and it was a decision he never regretted. "Because it was only the two of us to carry out our research and educational programs," Dr. Wiggers said, "Eddie and I worked very closely over the years and became close friends. Without a doubt, Eddie is one of the best individuals at identifying plants and animals by their songs, sounds and other signs that I have ever been associated with. His departure will leave a big void that will be difficult to fill. Perhaps it is fitting that the person hired to follow Eddie, Beau Bauer, was an intern this past year and learned under Eddie's tutelage. All of us wish Eddie and Juli much happiness and success in this next phase of their lives."

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

Soon after the first of the year, Nemours Wildlife Foundation will begin to remodel a building on Nemours Plantation to convert it to a 2-bedroom handicap accessible temporary housing for use by graduate students and interns. The facility will also be available to families who visit Nemours Plantation through our partnership with the Outdoor Dream Foundation which works with youngsters battling serious health issues and their families.

Several months ago, knowing the increasing need for housing for the scientific research program at Nemours Wildlife Foundation, a private foundation which prefers to remain anonymous offered a \$20,000 challenge grant if Nemours could raise an equal amount in new

donations by March, 2014. Happily, more than \$16,000 has been raised to date and additional funds have been pledged. This success is a tribute to supporters of Nemours Wildlife Foundation who share our commitment to protect our natural resources while partnering with other organizations to enhance opportunities for excellence in land conservation, outreach, education and scientific studies.

We will be sure to keep you posted on the progress of this renovation as well as news about the exciting new research projects which necessitate the addition of students and interns. It's all good – and we're very grateful to those who have stepped up to take Nemours Wildlife Foundation to new heights.

STUDENTS UPDATE AND THANK THE FRIENDS OF NEMOURS

As the perfect follow-up to Dr. Fitzpatrick's compelling talk on the role of birds as indicators of environmental health, two of Nemours Wildlife Foundation's graduate students spoke at the Friends event about their respective research on two species of birds. Their talk was intended both to relay the findings from their research here over the past several years and to say thank you to the Friends membership for supporting their research.

Cathy Ricketts, now a Wildlife Biologist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, spent several summers in the Lowcountry marsh studying Clapper Rails. Clapper Rails are actually a game species in South Carolina and can be hunted during a short season in the fall. Cathy noted that she encountered Clapper Rails throughout the St. Helena Sound tidal marsh.

With the help of colleagues and cooperating organizations, Cathy and her team developed an innovative way to live capture these secretive marsh birds so she could attach tracking radios on them. With the use of an airboat provided by the SC Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), a thermal imaging camera, and a good, strong dip net, Cathy and colleagues went into the marsh on nights when the tides were unusually high, spotted the birds with the thermal imager, and moved in with the airboat and dipped up rails with the net. This process was so successful they wrote an article that was published in the scientific literature.

By following her radio-marked birds, Cathy located their nests and then monitored the nests over time. Her work suggested rail eggs are more likely to survive and hatch the further away from land the hen places her nest. The major predator of rail nests is the raccoon which probably explains why the further away from land the hens locate the nest, the greater the chance young will fledge from the nest. Cathy had fond memories of working in the Lowcountry pluff mud and likened a couple of extended bouts bogging through the mud with a trip to the local spa for a well deserved spa mud treatment.

The second student presenter, Clay Shipes, began his work at Nemours as an intern helping Cathy Ricketts on her Clapper Rail study. Clay who completed two field seasons at Nemours



Cathy Ricketts thanks Friends



Clay Shipes discusses Mottled Ducks



Eurasian Eagle Owl

studying mottled duck nesting ecology, is now completing his Master's thesis at Mississippi State University. As a part of his work and through the efforts of the SCDNR to capture and mark mottled ducks, the estimate of the number of mottled ducks in the state has doubled. Clay's work also points to these ducks having good nest success on average, suggesting the mottled duck population may still be increasing. Clay's work is also showing how important managed tidal wetlands are for these waterfowl species because all of his nests and most of his sightings of mottled ducks are in these managed impoundments.

Both students thanked and acknowledged the Friends members for the support of their research. Director Wiggers pointed out in the introduction of each student the various professional meetings the student had attended and presented their findings. Dr. Wiggers also suggested these students are prime examples of the professionals Nemours Wildlife Foundation wants to be associated with and through the critical support of the Friends membership we are helping shape the future stewards of wildlife resources.

Jim Elliott, executive director of the Avian Research Center and Meghan Sparkman, an educator at the Center for Birds of Prey in Awendaw, rounded out the day with demonstrations involving several varieties of winged residents of the Center. An astonishingly beautiful Eurasian Eagle Owl swooped on silent wings through the tent mere inches above the heads of guests, and an ungainly but charming Black Vulture strutted among guests who are more accustomed to seeing such a bird riding the thermals or devouring road kill.

Each of these presentations gave guests even more food for thought about the role of birds in our lives and in the grand scheme of our environment. Education is an important component of the mission of Nemours Wildlife Foundation and each of the speakers at our October event broadened the knowledge of our guests and undoubtedly reinforced their understanding of the vital importance of their support for this work.

NEWS AND NOTES

• The members and staff of the 2013-14 **Leadership Beaufort** program spent a day at Nemours Plantation in early October. These community leaders-in-training took a tour and heard from Dr. Ernie Wiggers about the history of the area and how remnant rice fields, now called managed impoundments, attract an astonishing variety of both migrating and indigenous waterfowl. As development encroaches, it is imperative that community leaders have first-hand knowledge of the importance of conserving large tracts of land to protect both wildlife and our fragile ecosystem. Based on feedback from the group, many were largely unaware that critical scientific research is taking place at Nemours Wildlife Foundation, virtually in their own backyard.

• Some 35 members of the **National Association of American Foresters** who were attending a conference in Charleston made a side trip to Nemours Plantation recently. The foresters hailed from all across the country and many were entirely unfamiliar with the South Carolina coast. Touring Nemours Plantation's longleaf pine forests and the recently restored longleaf pine savanna project designed to attract the Red Cockaded Woodpecker was a hit, but the foresters from places like Wyoming, Arizona and Arkansas also kept wary eyes out for alligators!

• There wasn't a fox squirrel in sight when about 35 **Robert Smalls Middle School** 7th graders spent a morning recently at Nemours Plantation. The shouts and laughter of the kids warned even the most curious animal residents to hunker down. Even though the students were armed with binoculars, it was difficult to spot wildlife during

their tour. They did, however, enjoy an opportunity to be outdoors and to learn more about the precious natural resources that must be protected through their actions, now and well into the future.

• Some in the audience at the Friends event in October were already familiar with **eBird.org**. Dr. Fitzpatrick encouraged even the most casual birdwatchers to consider using this global tool which provides a way to record and share bird sightings as well as contribute to science and conservation. The program allows birders to determine when a particular bird might appear in their neighborhood, or even what birds one might expect see during a vacation. According to the eBird website, "With thousands of birdwatchers across the continent helping to construct (a database) by contributing their sightings, eBird will soon become a vast source of bird and environmental information useful not only to birdwatchers but to scientists and conservationists the world over."

• It isn't easy to coordinate a visit by a highly sought after speaker like Dr. John Fitzpatrick from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Nemours Wildlife Foundation owes special thanks to Friends of Nemours **Joe and Terry Williams** and **Ned and Linda Morgens** for taking care of logistics. And thanks too to **Mike and Gigi McShane** for co-hosting a reception with the Williams at the Carolina Yacht Club in Charleston to welcome the Fitzpatricks to the Lowcountry. It's clear that Fitz and Molly Fitzpatrick have many friends, both old and new, in the Lowcountry and we look forward to a return visit soon.

RESTORING THE LONGLEAF

Continued from page 1

Restoration of longleaf pine forests has become a major conservation priority in recent years. Why should we be concerned? The longleaf pine ecosystem contained an incredible array of plants and animals, many unique just to longleaf pine woodlands. The understory hosted many species of grasses, peas, and asters. In the depressions which held water for longer periods of time a variety of carnivorous plants like pitcher plants, bladderworts, and sundews could be found. In some of the remaining old-growth longleaf stands you can encounter 40-50 different species of plants within an area about the size of your dining room table. You might find over 100 species in one-quarter of an acre. This scale of diversity is rivaled only by the rainforests along our planet's equator.

Longleaf pines are also home to many animals. Besides birds, including bobwhite quail and wild turkeys, there is an impressive list of amphibians and reptiles that used these woodlands. In fact many of our threatened and endangered species are those that once thrived in longleaf forests. These included the red-cockaded woodpecker, Gopher Tortoise, and Indigo snake.

In recognition of the ecological importance of the longleaf pine ecosystem, the conservation community



Conservation partners strategize longleaf proposal

has made the restoration of this ecosystem a focal point. Locally the Nemours Wildlife Foundation is proud to join with several conservation partners on a grant proposal with objectives to increase the number of acres planted in longleaf pine, improve the management of existing longleaf pine stands, promote the use of prescribed burning on private lands, and develop outreach programs for landowners. The proposal is being submitted to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) in February, and will request \$350,000 in funding to carry out the objectives. The focus area includes the ACE Basin and the South Lowcountry region and includes the counties along the Savannah River from Jasper to Edgefield. Partners include The Longleaf

Alliance, the Beaufort Open Land Trust, Clemson University Extension, the SC DNR, and the Fish & Wildlife Service.

Perhaps the most exciting part of the proposal is the emphasis on providing private landowners hands-on training in planning and conducting prescribed burns. More acres of habitat can be impacted with prescribed burning than any other management tool at our disposal. While the goal of planting more longleaf pine is important, if we are not good stewards of these forests, then the outcome of our efforts will be diminished. What was that phrase, "A longleaf forest without fire is like a rainforest without?" We will keep you posted on our successes.

NEMOURS WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

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Photos courtesy of Gigi duPont McShane and Nemours staff.

All good wishes for the holidays and beyond!

