

SPRING ISLAND TRUST
SUMMER NEWSLETTER, 1994

They are here en masse: longtailed skippers, gulf fritillaries, yellow sulphurs, giant, spicebush and zebra swallowtails and a multitude of other nectar-seeking butterflies. The warm summer days of June and July provide a wonderful opportunity to observe these dramatically colored insects. Newly hatched giant swallowtails with their distinctive yellow and black patterned wings spanning nearly a full 6" may be found feeding on thistle blossoms. Toothache trees are the host tree for the giant swallowtail larvae and are mainly found around the Tabby Ruins. The purple flowering pickerel-weed patches located in wetlands and on the edges of the golf course ponds are favorite feeding grounds for gulf fritillaries and longtailed skippers. Summer rains have created an abundance of mud puddles which provide another good observation site. In general warm sunny days are best for butterfly watching since these cold-blooded insects rely on the sun to keep them warm and raise their metabolism so they can fly.

After a successful Songbird Workshop in May, Ornithologist Dr. Chris Marsh returned in early June to conduct our second annual breeding bird census. Fifty stations encompassing the entire Island were sampled over two consecutive mornings and results were tallied. A sizeable increase in wood thrush and acadian flycatcher sightings (and soundings) was noted. Eight new bird species were found this Spring, including worm-eating warblers, prairie warblers, black-and-white warblers, american redstarts, and the elusive ovenbird. We were quite encouraged to find these neotropical migratory birds at a time when their numbers are so rapidly declining.

Our wood storks and white ibis are back again in great numbers and can be viewed at Betsy's Pond, Otter Pond, Rice Gate Pond and Twin Pipes Pond until late September or October. Three new stork rookeries have been discovered in our state this year (for a total of 6). As nesting habitat declines in Florida, more of these endangered species will probably find their way to the Lowcountry, maybe even Spring Island!

The two eaglets will be leaving their nest soon. Male eagles make their first flight at about 78 days of age, while females usually fledge later, at about 82 days. Our adult eagles nested 6 weeks later than any other eagles in the state and no one knows why. Most other coastal eaglets left their nest in late May and early June. South Carolina had a record number of nests this year, a total of 118! With this year's nesting Spring Island has fledged 8 eaglets since 1987.

The Trust has completed stocking many of our ponds. Approximately 550 largemouth bass fingerlings were added to the pond at golf course holes #13/14 to round out the fish population, which already included channel catfish, bluegill/shellcracker and grass carp. Gordon Mobley transported 800 hybrid striped bass to stock the Ruins Pond near the Tabby Ruins and hole #9. Unlike #13/14 Pond, the Ruins Pond is now available for both fly and traditional tackle fishing. Please release all fish from this pond after you catch and admire them. Four additional ponds on the golf course were stocked with grass carp for use as aquatic weed control. The Trust would like to thank member John Wierdsma for his generous contribution to stock the pond along hole #2 with largemouth bass fingerlings. The bass will feed on the already healthy bream population and therefore prevent stunting and overpopulation of this tasty panfish.

Johnny Taylor and his landscape crew have begun a popcorn tree management program. The Chinese tallow tree or "popcorn tree" (Sapium sebiferum) is a non-native species originating in China. Although an attractive ornamental, this tree is very invasive and can "take over" wetland areas in just a few years. Johnny's crew is cutting the larger "seed source" trees and spraying the stumps with a systemic herbicide.

Botanist Dale Soblo (S.C. Nature Conservancy) visited in early July and worked with Bruce on our ever-growing plant inventory list (which now approaches 500 species). They walked much of the Island documenting and collecting specimens including several rare and endangered species. Dale is involved in managing the Conservancy's 112,000 acres statewide and made recommendations for conservation, clearing and fire management of the Island. He was very excited to have his first look at the needle palms, an endangered species in South Carolina.

The Nature Lab has a full compliment of "furry critters". Rachel and Rhododendron, the little raccoon sisters, travel back and forth to Savannah with Bruce every day. Amber the orphaned deer fawn arrived in late June at the tender age of 7 days. Beverly Lundquist, our organic farmer, has taken on the task of raising Amber, who nurses on a bottle filled with goat's milk and baby formula.

Andrew Stonefield has arrived this month to begin a summer internship with the Trust. A recent graduate of Coastal Carolina University, Andrew will be with us for 3 one week periods throughout the summer. He will be monitoring the uses of our fields (planted and unplanted) by birds, mammals, and insects. This will give us baseline information and help us to determine future management and plantings. Andrew will also be collecting insect and plant specimens for our inventory program and herbarium.

Three new colonies of bees have been established at the Bonny Shore and Walker Landing apiaries, and are busy building and depositing honey. It will be a year before Bruce begins harvesting from these new colonies. Honey bees, brought over by European Settlers in the 1600's, are social insects with a marked division of labor between the various types of bees in the hive. A strong hive of honey bees includes a queen (a fully developed female), 300 drones (males) and 60,000 workers (nonreproductive females). Honey bees may fly as far as five miles to gather nectar! The top nectar-producing species on Spring Island include: Chinese Tallow Tree, Cabbage Palmetto, Red Maple, Sweet Pepperbush, Gallberry, Goldenrod, Tulip Poplar and Blackberry. Even with the heavy June rains (approximately 14") our hives are continuing to thrive. Due to the vibration from the nearby bulkhead installation, the bees vacated the Nature Lab's observation hive. We will begin another hive as soon as possible following the bulkhead completion (scheduled for the end of September). If you would like to learn more about honey bees, join Bruce on his weekly beekeeping visits. You can "suit up" in protective clothing and help him as he maintains each hive.

Sincerely,



Betsy Chaffin



Bruce C. Lampright