

## Ecotourism brings Chatham bounty

*Birders drop greenbacks by the bundle*



PHOTO BY SONKE JOHNSEN, COURTESY OF THE TRIANGLE LAND CONSERVANCY

By Neha Shah

Recreation is increasingly becoming prominent as more travelers focus on value, green leisure activities, scenic and rare spaces, and general appreciation of the outdoors. We are among the fortunate in that we have an abundance of nature-based assets in Chatham County. Activities for travelers range from the easy-paced hiker to the more adventurous kayaker. While we steer clear of trite slogans such as hidden gems, best-kept secrets, and proclaiming that we have it all, we can honestly say we



PHOTO BY JOHN SHILLITO

White Pines Nature Preserve (top, left) is located at the confluence of the Deep and Rocky rivers. Its namesake, the towering white pine (bottom, right) normally is found in the mountains. Jordan Lake offers a full complement of water recreation, including a fishing pier (above) as well as sculling (top right).



PHOTO BY JOHN SHILLITO



PHOTO BY SONKE JOHNSEN, COURTESY OF THE TRIANGLE LAND CONSERVANCY

believe it to be true. Here's just a short inventory of our eco-treasures (not in any specific order):

- Jordan Lake State Recreation Area (JLSRA)
- American Tobacco Trail
- Jordan Lake Educational State Forest (JLESF)
- Three rivers for kayaking and canoeing: Deep, Haw, and Rocky
- Seven birding sites on the N.C. Birding Trail
- 198-mile cycling trails in our 707 square miles
- Championship and challenging golf courses: One public, three private, and two semi-private (open to the public)
- Nature preserves and open lands – Triangle Land Conservancy sites

Chatham County's biggest tourism draws and reasons for visiting are the multiple offerings in nature-based activities. JLSRA already had 600K +

### Fast facts about tourism in Chatham County

- Domestic tourism in Chatham County generated an economic impact of \$24.83 million in 2007, a 6 percent increase from 2006.
- More than 170 jobs in Chatham County were directly attributable to travel and tourism.
- Travel generated a \$3.16 million payroll in 2007.
- State and local tax revenues from travel to Chatham County amounted to \$1.87 million. This represents a \$30.43 tax saving to each county resident.

visitors in 2008 and 1,241,551 in 2007. The greatest demand for information from visitors is in regards to nature-based attractions. While some may believe that those traveling to attractions for the day or overnight may not spend much because of the availability of so many free sites, that's not the case. Travelers bring boats or bicycles still eat, may shop for sundries, and pay nominal fees, all at the very least, which does bring additional sales tax to the county. Furthermore, recent studies have yielded fascinating demographics about the significant target market of birders alone that will have a powerful economic impact (information based on visitors of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail):

- Birders, on average, spend two more nights on trips; 61 percent stay two to six nights, 18 percent stay more than six nights
- Birders average a higher rate of repeat visitation by 4 percent
- Nearly 18 percent of birders spend \$1000+
- Approximately 6 percent stay in B&Bs

The belief that recreation has long-term value to an area and career opportunities is reinforced by the Central Carolina Community College's new course offerings in ecotourism. Starting with its summer session, Central Carolina Community College's Continuing Education Department will offer an Ecotourism Certificate, the first in the North

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## SUMMER FUN IN CHATHAM



Easing into summer fitness  
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Kayaking on Jordan Lake  
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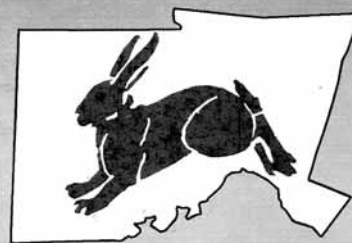


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## The new book in town

Tales Beyond Fried Rabbit  
Chatham's Historical Heritage



Fred J. Vatter

Chatham County Historical Association, Inc.

By Deborah R. Meyer

Why is history important for us?

"It makes us realize the blood, sweat, and tears, and the struggle that people went through to make this area what it is today," Fred Vatter said.

Vatter is the author of "Tales Beyond Fried Rabbit: Chatham's Historical Heritage," just published by the Chatham County Historical Association. Vatter is a past CCHA president and the collected articles were originally written for *Chatham County Line*.



VATTER

Vatter began his columns for the paper about 2000 and soon a number of people were telling Vatter he should publish them in book form. "Duane Hall told me he cut out all my articles and saved them in a scrapbook," Vatter said. Hall, founder of the Chatham County Camera Club, recently put together an exhibit at the venue of historical photos of Siler City. When the CCHA learned that Vatter was mulling over a book of his columns, it offered to publish it. Board member Judith Peterson volunteered to be the editor and her husband David worked along side her. They organized the columns into sections such as prominent citizens, industries, medical care, and naval stories.

The audience that Vatter envisioned for his columns were of the younger sort. "I was tutoring down at the Silk Hope School and noticed that some of these kids didn't know much about North Carolina history or the county they lived in. I originally intended these for kids to understand history, but adults have latched on," said Vatter, who gets stopped when he is out and

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