THE DAILY CLIPS

December 1, 2008

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by the East Carolina University News Bureau from:

The Greenville Daily Reflector
The Raleigh News & Observer
   The New York Times
   The Wall Street Journal
   USA Today
   The Charlotte Observer
   The Fayetteville Observer
The Greensboro News & Record
   Newsweek
   U.S. News & World Report
   Business Week
   Time

East Carolina University News Bureau
E-mail to durhamj@ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481 FAX: 252-328-6300
Clear voice

Local role important to success

This community should pause over a wonderfully intoned voice from this past week that spoke simply about a local quality often overlooked, understated or, in the worst case, distrusted. It would serve to listen a last time before the words are lost to us:

"Because Greenville is such a close community, it was a great place for me to learn how to be a public figure in a community setting where I was a part of the minority. I learned how to bridge a lot of background gaps, a lot of social gaps. There are so many people who helped me get into the mind-set of thinking big and connecting across disciplines."

The speaker was 21-year-old Aisha Saad, who lived in Greenville for her middle and high school years before her family moved to Cary. She was valedictorian of the J.H. Rose class of 2005 and will graduate next May from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Last week she was named one of 32 Rhodes Scholars from the United States for the coming year. She may be the only Rhodes Scholar to come from a Pitt County school.

In an article last week about the scholarship, she told The Daily Reflector:

"At times it was difficult after 9/11, when public response was really puzzled about how to interact with the Muslim community or how to receive them, but in Greenville everyone overlaps at the Little League baseball games, at neighborhood cookouts and those types of things."

In the wake of a strident political campaign during which harsh voices targeted race and religion, such an affirmation of this community's tolerance and nurturing potential is more than welcome. This is especially true following the controversy over the Obsession DVD, a self-described documentary film that targeted radical segments of the Muslim world. Many in the local Muslim community found the DVD and its distribution by The Daily Reflector particularly unsettling.

As all this noise continues to abate, it is good to hear such sincere appreciation and approval from such a credible young voice.

Ihab Saad, Aisha's father and formerly with East Carolina University, added his voice to his daughter's: "We came from a different background, growing up in Egypt. We are of the Muslim faith so we felt that it was a responsibility of ours to try to bridge some of the gaps that people put between different cultures."

It should be reassuring to hear this community's part of a life dedicated to the proposition that living together with kindness and respect is the highest of callings. Congratulations and good wishes to Aisha and her family and to all of those here who delight in differences and helped her find her way.
ECU launches new outreach scholars academy

By ECU News Bureau

Beth Velde, professor of occupational therapy and assistant dean in the College of Allied Health Sciences, knows the importance of community engagement in scholarly work.

For 11 years, she has partnered with the small, North Carolina community of Tillery on research, health services, grants and publications. The benefits, she said, have flowed both ways.

"Tillery has been my teacher," Velde said. "I always said they have given me far more than I have ever done for their community."

Now, Velde will encourage other ECU faculty members to pursue scholarship related to community outreach, partnership and curricular engagement as the director of ECU's new Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy.

"The academy was developed out of recognition that more could be done to support and enhance faculty knowledge and capacity to secure external funding and conduct scholarly work throughout the region," said Ted Morris, associate vice chancellor for Engagement, Innovation and Economic Development.

The academy's purpose is to cultivate engaged scholars who can be leaders in their professions while working with communities to improve quality of life and foster economic prosperity.

Eight specially chosen faculty members will embark on the program next spring. Representing a range of disciplines, these tenure-track and fixed-term faculty members will attend six, two-hour workshops to learn about community-based research and the resources available to them on campus. They also will work with a coach to develop their own research plans. In the fall, scholars who complete the program will receive a seed grant to help launch their studies.

The academy will raise ECU's profile as an engaged, doctoral institution and leverage external grants for faculty research, Velde said.

"The scholarship of engagement and work with community has become a high-profile issue for universities across the nation, and, I think because of ECU's motto, 'To Serve,' this fits really well with what we've done in the past," she said.

Though studies focused on eastern North Carolina will be encouraged, research can involve global initiatives.

"These projects will start to address some really difficult needs in our communities, for example, the health disparities issue, the difficulties that K-12 schools are experiencing and some of the environmental issues that are prevalent in this region," Velde said.

The next set of scholars is to enter the academy next fall. For information about eligibility and applications, contact Beth Velde at 737-1377 or at veldeb@ecu.edu.

Museum to host open house

The Country Doctor Museum in Bailey hosts its fourth annual holiday open house from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday.

Admission and guided tours are free. Complimentary hot apple cider and cookies will be served in the museum gift shop. Guests can make holiday potpourri sachets to take home.

On the same day, the Christmas parade will be held at 1 p.m. in downtown Bailey.

"Everyone is invited to stop in the museum before or after the parade," said Jennie Schindler Graham, historic site manager. "The museum gift shop is also a great place to get some of your holiday shopping done."

The museum, created in
Construction pros certified "green"

Ron Sessoms and Erich Connell with ECU’s Department of Construction Management have become “Certified Green Professionals” (CGP).

Both attended a workshop Nov. 12-14 in Myrtle Beach hosted by the National Association of Home Builders and earned the designation at the event. The CGP designation is equivalent to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design); however, CGP is sponsored and governed by the National Association of Home Builders.

With the designation, Sessoms and Connell have become certified to evaluate and understand what can be called “green” or sustainable homes and housing.

Coming up

■ Wednesday: Dr. Paul R.G. Cunningham, dean of the Brody School of Medicine, will be the guest lecturer for the second annual Jose G. Albernaz Golden Apple Distinguished Lecture to be held in the Old Laupus Library at 12:30 p.m.

■ Thursday and Friday: ECU’s Pirates Treasures collects and donates household goods on ECU’s reading days. Students can donate their usable household items at one of five Pirates Treasure drop-off sites.

■ Thursday through Saturday: ECU’s School of Art and Design holds its annual holiday sale at the Gray Gallery in the Jenkins Fine Arts Center. See www.ecu.edu/cs-ecu/calendar.cfm for information on these events and other ECU upcoming activities.

Surgeon receives research recognition

Dr. Walter Pories, a professor of surgery at the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University and a pioneer in weight-loss surgery, has received a TOPS Research Achievement Award.

This award, made possible by an annual grant from the Take Off Pounds Sensibly Foundation, recognizes and rewards people for achievement or contribution to the field of obesity research. Pories received the award Oct. 3 at the annual scientific meeting of The Obesity Society in Phoenix.
With thanks

Laurels — To the Thanksgiving holiday, which affords Americans the opportunity to gather with family and friends to count the many blessings of the last year. They are asked to remember those less fortunate at this time and in the weeks to come. This year has brought financial hardship to many, and all are asked to be charitable as the Christmas season draws closer.

Make a deal

Laurels — To Black Friday, the most profitable shopping day of the year for retailers and an important day for the nation's economy. With many stores offering deep discounts and early-bird sales, consumers are encouraged to begin their holiday shopping. An active day of commerce could prove critical to spurring economic growth desperately needed in a year beset by dour fiscal news.

Laurels — To Gov. Mike Easley's proposal to spark economic growth in North Carolina by accelerating the pace of planned construction projects across the state. The governor wants to fast-track $700 million in infrastructure improvements that will aid higher education, agriculture, law enforcement and public safety. East Carolina University may see work begin quickly on the dental school and a family medicine and geriatric center.

Darts — To traffic congestion in this community and across the state on a popular travel weekend. An estimated 1.22 million motorists were expected to take to the roads this weekend for the holiday, which can make travel a frustrating and lengthy enterprise. Locally, Thanksgiving traffic ran smoothly despite Black Friday shoppers and the East Carolina football fans packing thoroughfares.

Laurels — To the end of the 2008 Atlantic hurricane season on Monday, which saw 16 named storms, eight hurricanes and five major hurricanes. Haiti was hit repeatedly, with 800 deaths attributed to tropical systems, but eastern North Carolina was again fortunate to avoid a direct strike.

Darts — To the job cuts at local manufacturer NACCO Materials Handling Group, which were announced this week. Though company officials declined to specify the number of jobs affected at the Pitt County facility, some local employees are expected to be out of work in the near future. The national economic downturn has driven up unemployment, and Pitt County workers are not exempt.

Laurels — To the East Carolina University football team, which captured its first Conference USA division title with a win against the University of Alabama-Birmingham last week. The Pirates will play next week for the conference championship and a bid to the Liberty Bowl on the line. Friday's 53-21 win over UTEP shows the team will put up a strong fight for the title.
Community members play sick; students listen, diagnose

BY TOM MARINE
The Daily Reflector

Jess Maxwell came to the emergency department on the recommendation of his family physician.

During the previous 24 hours, he experienced the gradual onset of abdominal pain that caused cramps and nausea. He appeared anxious at his physical exam and occasionally groaned deeply.

There is one wrinkle to this story — Jess Maxwell does not exist.

He is a character played by a standardized patient in the office of clinical skills assessment and education at the Brody School of Medicine.

Standardized patients provide medical students with the opportunity to practice listening to patients, hearing what they have to say and doing it in a timely fashion, said Maria Clay, interim chair of the Department of Medical Humanities and director of clinical skills assessment and education.

"From the student perspective, I think this is wonderful," Clay said. "What I think is fun, is the partnership that develops between the student and the standardized patient. They become partners in the student's learning."

The learning process works by having the standardized patients, who are employed by East Carolina University, take on new names and illnesses to be examined by the medical students. The exam is filmed and the students are then graded on how well they treated the patient.

"It's a way for medical students to utilize the rich talents of our community and for the community to work with health care providers," Clay said.

Isabelle Plant is a former standardized patient who now helps run the audio visual room at the office. She said the load of cases they run each day depends on the total number of

See MEDICINE, B3
students who come from the medical school, the College of Nursing and the physicians assistant program.

"It enlightens some of the up-and-coming doctors about some of the techniques," Plant said. "That is the biggest thing, because some forget they still have a lot to learn."

Angie Reid, who has worked nine months as a standardized patient, said she enjoys the role-playing element of the job.

"Today, I was literally a mental case and other days I have appendicitis," she said. "I think it is huge, giving (the students) the opportunity to have hands-on experience. I've seen students from other schools that didn't have this experience, and they were hesitant."

Before the exam, Reid said she receives a script that explains who she is and what she is suffering from. She said there is very little room to improvise during the physical exam because they are asked to stay within the realm of the script.

"The main thing is just feeling like you are helping the students to have a more enriched learning experience," said Reid, who comes in to act between three and five times each month.

For Jim Williams, becoming a standard patient was the perfect hobby after he retired, he said.

Williams said giving back to the community in his own small way is something he loves doing, adding he has never had more enjoyment doing anything that could be called work.

"This is oriented toward helping students learn to be compassionate in the way they express themselves to the patients they are treating," he said. "I've talked to older faculty members that will tell you how they wish there was this kind of practice when they went through school."

Rebecca Rawl, a third year medical student at Brody, explained how practicing on standardized patients is particularly useful on the licensing exam. That exam, she said, contains a section that utilizes standardized patients.

Since the medical students have practiced with standardized patients as part of the curriculum, Rawl said it gives them feedback and the chance to apply what they learned.

"Basically, they allow us to learn these exams in a way that is timed and not threatening," Rawl said. "It allows us to practice before we are cut loose on real patients."

Contact Tom Marine at	 tmarine@coxnc.com or at (252) 329-9567.
ECU edits its mission statement

BY JOSH HUMPHRIES
The Daily Reflector

East Carolina University has a new clear and concise mission statement to guide the institution into the future.

The ECU Board of Trustees approved its new mission statement last week. It is considerably shorter than the previous one, a move that really defines the university’s purpose, said trustee Carol Mabe, who worked on the statement.

“Most mission statements are fairly generic, and we decided to take more of a consumer marketing approach,” Mabe said. “We are going to let the mission statement really define our purpose as a university. It needs to be very precise and very specific to ECU.”

Mabe said the trustees formed a committee to review the university’s mission statement at the prompting of Chancellor Steve Ballard.

UNC System President Erskine Bowles asked every state university to submit its mission statement to the general administration by Dec. 1, and Ballard wanted to update ECU’s statement before that time, Mabe said.

Mabe, who is a marketing specialist, said the new statement says a lot with few words by touching on the strategic goals of both the university and the UNC system as a whole.

University historian John Tucker said the new mission statement is in line with the philosophy of the university that can be found in the inaugural address by the school’s first president Robert Wright a century ago when it was East Carolina Teacher’s College.

“This is to be a professional school,” Wright said. “I hope those who go out from our tutelage will be so filled with the professional spirit that they will realize the great responsibilities that rest upon them. May they realize that they are dealing with young life in all of its manifold relations, and may they go forth prepared to live up to the high responsibilities of the great and noble work they have undertaken.”

Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9565.
East Carolina University's School of Dentistry as well as its Family Medicine and Geriatric Center will get funding sooner than expected.

BY JOSH HUMPHRIES
The Daily Reflector

Gov. Mike Easley announced Wednesday that he is fast-tracking more than $700 million in capital improvement projects in North Carolina, including $105.8 million for East Carolina University's School of Dentistry as well as its Family Medicine and Geriatric Center.

The announcement will allow ECU to get an unexpected jump start with the $69 million for the dental school and the $36.8 million for the family medicine center.

"Fast — when it comes to capital projects — is always good," said ECU spokesman John Durham.

The two projects had been approved by the Legislature in its last session, but funding had been frozen. This announcement un-freezes the funds, which were expected to be unavailable until sometime in 2009, Durham said.

"These facilities are critical to our being able to meet our mission, which is to provide the very best health care for the citizens of this region," said Phyllis Horns, vice chancellor for health sciences at ECU.

"We are very pleased that the governor has taken this position. These projects are fundamentally needed to get going as soon as we can get them going."

Groundbreaking ceremonies for both facilities were held earlier this year, the dental school in February and the family medicine center in September.

Durham said design work for the family medicine center is complete, and the design work for the dental school is nearly complete. The first project will be to build utility tunnels for both, Durham said.

Easley said the priority projects will be

See FAST, A9
Continued from A1

on the Council of State's agenda for approval at the beginning of January — just a few days before governor-elect Bev Perdue takes office. The council must approve all property transactions and major capital improvements projects.

Easley said going to the market now with the $700 million in statewide capital improvement projects is cost effective because interest rates and building costs are low.

Economists estimate that, for each dollar spent on a construction project, $2.28 is pumped into the state's economy, and every $1 million spent on a project results in 36 new jobs. Easley's office says that means these projects will produce nearly 26,000 new jobs.

Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9565.
The president of Theta Chi at East Carolina University said one of the items taken during the Sunday morning break-in was a plaque honoring a fraternity member who died in the early 1990s.

BY GINGER LIVINGSTON
The Daily Reflector

The head of local fraternity said an apparent prank involving the theft of several plaques and commemorative items has gone too far.

Chase Tobin, president of Theta Chi at East Carolina University, said one of the items taken during a Sunday morning break-in at the East 11th Street house was a plaque honoring a fraternity member who died in the early 1990s.

"That, to me, is the most disrespectful thing you can do; you don't disrespect the dead," he said. "That's the most horrific thing you can do to a fraternity."

It's the second time this year the fraternity has been hit, Tobin, a junior criminal justice major, said. Thieves broke into the house during the spring and took several plaques and photographic composites of members. At the time, someone pried the plaque honoring the deceased member off a wall and didn't take it. None of the items taken in the spring were recovered.

Tobin said he is sure members of another fraternity are responsible, because the missing items wouldn't have any value if sold.

Along with the memorial plaque, other items taken Sunday were a composite photograph of the class of 1968-69, two trophies, four class bricks and two other plaques.

The head of ECU's Inter-Fraternity Council said he agrees the memorial plaque's theft crossed a line.

"This goes beyond a simple prank; it was just mean, but I don't think it is a fraternity-on-fraternity on crime," said Patrick Sebastian, council president. "If we do find out it was a fraternity-on-fraternity crime I know I and the council will take action."

Stealing fraternity and sorority items occasionally happens, said Keith Tingley, ECU's assistant director of Greek Life. Usually the purloined mementoes are returned within 24 hours, he said.

"A lot of time it's not the fraternity but individuals who make a mistake — it's not the leadership," Tingley said. If evidence suggests a theft was an organization operation, that's
THEFT

Continued from B1

when his office becomes involved.

Tingley said he's been urging Greek groups to file police reports so the incidents go on the record. A fraternity that filed a report this spring saw its items returned within 24 hours, he said.

Three thefts have been reported to his office this year, Tingley said. The two Theta Chi incidents and a third involving another fraternity.

Sebastian, a member of Delta Sigma Phi, said fraternity and sorority houses are often targets for criminal elements.

"I know my house has had simple things like lawn mowers stolen several times," he said.

Tobin said Sunday's incident happened sometime between 4-5 a.m. One of his brothers was asleep on a downstairs coach and woke up when he heard noises.

"He looked up and saw someone with a hood stealing composites from the walls, yelled at him and then (the thief) ran out," he said.

Tobin said he and other members at the house started searching the grounds but didn't see anyone, so they called the police.

"About 10 minutes later, I looked out of my window and there was a dark Explorer driving really slow down the street," he said.

"Then I looked out and saw there were two people standing in our yard and one had some plaques."

Before anyone could get outside the people were gone.

The fraternity installed a security system after the spring thefts, but it appears someone left a door unlocked, and that's how the person entered the house, Tobin said.

Tobin said members at the house provided officers with good descriptions of the people seen outside the house and are hopeful they can resolve the issue.

"After filing the police report, I went back to my guys and said we're not rolling out with our pitchforks and torches. We're going to work through the authorities," he said.

Contact Ginger Livingston at glivingston@coxnc.com and (252) 329-9573.
Muddy waters

Defining and then banning inflammatory speech on college campuses will be an onerous mission. Is it necessary?

No right-minded person would condone the now-infamous thoughts written on N.C. State University’s Free Expression Tunnel. Four students were caught (on camera) in a stupid and outrageous act of scrawling racist and threatening comments about President-elect Barack Obama. What those students did was bad enough to involve the U.S. Secret Service, which justifiably looks hard at any such threats. The incident has embarrassed the university. What the students did was wrong — horribly wrong.

Understandably, the University of North Carolina system, under President Erskine Bowles, wants to avoid a repetition of such behavior. But in assigning a commission to look at whether the system should establish a code that blocks “hate speech,” Bowles is treading on shaky ground. The students were not charged in the incident — though the university is likely to take disciplinary action — in part because of the place where they did their dirty work, in a tunnel dedicated by definition to free speech.

What the university system can and should do is to rule out of bounds any message that explicitly threatens violence. Direct advocacy of violence goes beyond free speech; it may incite murderous acts. (One of N.C. State students wrote that Obama should be shot in the head.) Beyond that, however, Bowles would himself be going into a tunnel with no end.

What is hate speech? How would it be defined? Who would define it? Would punishment vary depending upon the degree of the offense — and who would determine those different degrees? Would the university find itself in one legal dispute after another with students defending themselves on free speech grounds? The questions just seem endless.

And let’s not forget that while the offending students were out of bounds and engaged in reprehensible behavior, their actions prompted a push-back from fellow students. Once the offending remarks had been painted over, other students responded to them with thoughtful message of peace and reconciliation. Those responses more accurately reflected the “free expression” sentiments of the vast majority of N.C. State students. That kind of process, in which outrageous comments prompt eloquent response and a more thoughtful dialogue ensues, has been part of American life and politics — and universities — since the country began.

To be sure, N.C. State and all universities have as part of their mission the social as well as academic enlightenment of students. They should encourage thoughtful exchanges among students within and without the classroom. Young people learn from that, just as they learned from this ugly episode, which perhaps set many of them to thinking about the country’s racial divide. Universities also can do more in terms of orientation to bring students from different backgrounds together, because many of them are thrust into a diverse campus environment far different from the places they were raised.

But trying to codify forbidden speech as a matter of policy? A daunting task indeed.
College-Aid Season Starts Jan.

Between crisscrossing the country visiting colleges, fielding teacher recommendations and stressing over standardized tests, students contemplating a college education share another daunting task: filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

Although Congress in August passed legislation calling for a simplified aid form, parents and students seeking money for college in the 2009-10 academic year will still have to contend with the old six-page application that requires the entry of detailed family financial information. Those applications may be made starting Jan. 1.

Congress wants to see a two-page FAFSA EZ form, hoping a less-intimidating application will remove a barrier for low-income students to attend college. The Department of Education recently released a proposed two-page form, but it will be at least another year before it is ready to go.

“We’ve been sitting around and waiting for this for a long time. It hasn’t happened fast enough,” says Haley Chitty, a spokesman for the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. “It would be great to get something done soon.”

No Aid, No College

The financial-aid process is complex, Mr. Chitty says, and Congress should focus on creating a form that does not out aid in the fairest manner. The FAFSA form is used to apply for all federal aid, including Pell grants, student loans and college work-study programs. In addition, most states and many schools use the FAFSA information to award their own financial aid.

For low-income students, many of whom may be the first in their families to apply for college, there is often little assistance at home. Many of these students end up dropping out of college or not going at all because of financial hardships, says Mark Kantrowitz, publisher of FinAid.org, which helps students apply for financial aid.

Students often bypass applying through FAFSA because of the form’s complexity and lengthy directions. More than a million students eligible for Pell Grants, a key source of federal aid, don’t even fill out the FAFSA form, according to the American Council on Education.

Meanwhile, some worry that a simpler FAFSA form would allow higher-income families who don’t need as much aid to receive help.

One quick solution, which Congress has allowed the Department of Education to pursue, is to incorporate tax information collected by the IRS so families won’t have to dig into their files to fill out the FAFSA form. A new form could automatically plug in such data.

Currently, students can’t file a FAFSA form before Jan. 1, which makes it difficult to gauge their financial situation, says Lauren Asher, vice president of the Institute for College Access and Success. The deadline for filing the federal form is June 30, but many states have earlier deadlines, so parents are encouraged to complete the application as quickly as possible.

Many students finish applying for colleges before Christmas but they’re clueless about how much financial help, if any, they will receive at the schools they wish to attend, she adds.

One concern in crafting a new, improved FAFSA application is whether eliminating questions means students will have to fill out more forms for state and college aid, which often rely on FAFSA information.

“It’s been a long, not particularly pretty dance of balancing state, institutional and federal aid programs,” Ms. Asher says. But “no matter how much you hate this form, it’s still worth it. Just apply.”

Even with the economy suffering, the cost of attending college jumped 6.4% this fall, according to a new College Board report. Some schools will raise tuition in the middle of this school year.

Avoid Paying for Help

In the College Board report, “Trends in College Pricing,” average tuition and fees at four-year state schools was $6,585, a nearly $400 rise. At private colleges, prices jumped 5.9% to $25,143.

With that much on the line, some families may find it worth their while to pay for application help from third parties. One firm, Student Financial Aid Services Inc. (FAFSA.com), charges up to $80. But the FAFSA Web site, www.fafsa.ed.gov, warns applicants to be wary of organizations that charge a fee to submit an application, noting that “generally any help that you pay for can be received free from your school or Federal Student Aid.”

In addition to the financial-aid office at your chosen school, you can get more information on college application and financing choices online at studentaid.ed.gov and students.gov.

Read more at marketwatch.com

Stat of the Week

BAD FALL: Corporate values—along measured by “market capitalization,” which is the total dollar value of a company’s outstanding shares of stock—plummeted between Labor Day and Thanksgiving.

| Amazon (AMZN) | $34.42 billion | $18.85 billion | -45% |
| Chevrom (CVX) | 177.34 | 162.4 | -8.4 |
| Coca-Cola (KO) | 120.36 | 104.99 | -13 |
| Disney (DIS) | 60.70 | 41.65 | -31 |
| FedEx (FDX) | 25.77 | 21.55 | -16 |
| Gap (GPS) | 14.08 | 9.16 | -35 |
| Home Depot (HD) | 46.06 | 40 | -13 |
| Intel (INTC) | 128.58 | 77.7 | -40 |
| Johnson & Johnson (JNJ) | 196.82 | 161.67 | -18 |
| Kellogg (K) | 20.65 | 16.5 | -20 |
| McDonald’s (MCD) | 69.73 | 64.53 | -7.5 |
| Procter & Gamble (PG) | 211.70 | 188.58 | -11 |
| Walgreen (WAG) | 36.06 | 24.31 | -33 |

Source: WSJ Market Data Group.
NCSU biologist finds reporting flaws in nation's bird counts

BY WADE RAWLINS
STAFF WRITER

Every spring, dedicated birdwatchers armed with clipboards and binoculars embark on roadside counts to record how many birds they can see and hear. These long-running censuses, such as the North American Breeding Bird Survey, help scientists estimate trends in bird populations. Or maybe not.

New research by N.C. State University scientists suggests bird surveys that rely on identifying birds by their calls may be seriously flawed and could understate bird populations.

A team of researchers led by Theodore Simons, a biologist at N.C. State, found that trained birdwatchers aren't as good at hearing birds in the wild as previously thought, and their powers of perception drop sharply with even small increases in background noise. Factors such as traffic noise and observers' inaccurate spatial perceptions could inadvertently bias bird counts, they say.

"The real upshot of our work is not to question specific estimates for individual species," Simons said, adding, "We've probably been assuming our methods and data are better than they really are, and there are a lot of factors that can introduce bias into our results."

"In general, we were really surprised at how many mistakes people were making and how many birds were calling that observers were missing," he said.

To test observers' ability to identify birds by their calls, Simons and his fellow researchers developed Bird Radio, a series of about 45 remotely controlled playback devices that mimic birds

SEE RADIO, PAGE 48
singing in the woods. The playback devices, controlled by a laptop computer, were placed at distances of up 200 meters and heights of up to 15 meters from a central point in Howell Woods, an environmental learning center managed by Johnston County Community College and chosen because it’s quiet.

**Noise level matters**

Quiet is important, because bird-watchers doing surveys are much more likely to identify birds by hearing them than by seeing them. Depending on the terrain, roughly 70 percent to 90 percent of birds are identified by ear.

“You can hear them from much farther away — and hear them if you’re not looking in the right direction,” Simons said.

People participating in the experiment would stand at the designated spot and try to log on a data sheet as many of the half-dozen or so species as they could hear in three to 10 minutes. Calls of ovenbirds, Acadian flycatchers and various warblers sounded for about 20 seconds, sometimes a cacophony of several songs at once.

The listeners also tried to determine how many birds of a given species were present by estimating how far away each bird call was.

Simons said about 50 experienced birders took part in the experiments. The tests were conducted only in winter months from November 2005 to March 2007, when none of the migratory species used in the recordings would actually be present to bias the experiment.

The experiment showed even trained birders are limited in how well they can detect birds at different distances and how many birds they can hear at once.

“If you are trying to measure the distance to the sound source, your ability to map it accurately is much worse than we thought,” Simons said. “Our ability to decide whether we hear two birds or one bird facing in two different directions is very limited.”

The study found that even small amounts of background noise, from rustling leaves, wind or automobile traffic, led to a 40 percent decrease in the ability of observers to detect singing birds, Simons said.

“We know our world is getting noisier and noisier,” Simons said. “If we do these survey routes over a 40-year period and counts are going down, does that mean the population is going down or our ability to detect these birds has gone down?”

Simons said the researchers think errors on actual counts are probably larger than the Bird Radio experiments suggest, because the simulation involved a relatively small number of species and the observers were highly experienced.

**Change may be coming**

Keith Pardieck, a wildlife biologist at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland and national coordinator of the breeding bird survey, said Simons’ research was important to unravel nagging questions about bird surveys. The U.S. Geological Survey and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission helped fund the work.

“There is some concern whether noise is influencing how we are counting birds,” Pardieck said. “It’s a possibility if traffic has been increasing and noise related to that in roadside surveys, it may be confounding our ability to hear them. It’s something people have been aware of a long time and has been a concern.”

The breeding bird survey, begun in 1966 and administered by the Geological Survey and the Canadian Wildlife Service, is a large-scale international monitoring effort to track bird populations. In the U.S. alone, it involves 3,000 survey routes, which volunteers drive each spring, making stops at regular intervals along roadsides to record all the birds they can see or hear.

Pardieck said the breeding bird survey organizers are considering changes in survey techniques, such as sending two people out per route or running a route multiple times to try to improve accuracy.

“I think eventually the research will make the survey more accurate,” he said.

Mark Johns, nature program specialist at Hemlock Bluffs in Cary and former state wildlife biologist who coordinated the breeding bird surveys in North Carolina for years, said the research would help fine-tune the survey and what people can claim from the data.

“I think the breeding bird survey is a good general match for problem areas,” Johns said. “It may not adequately give you a pure population trend or population abundance, but it starts to point at issues.”

For example, Johns said, if you look at the trends from the breeding bird survey, the wood thrush appears to show a slight decline.

“When it sings, the song tends to echo and bounce around in odd ways,” Johns said. “It’s the nature of the song being flute-like. It’s hard to pinpoint a distance. Maybe we’re misrepresenting the numbers we’re counting. It only sings early in the day or right at dusk. [You’ll miss it] if you’re not out there then.”

wade.rawlins@newobserver.com or 919-829-4528
State players give new company's helmets positive reviews

BY KEN TYSIAC | STAFF WRITER

N.C. State linebacker Ray Michel clutched his helmet after practice as he discussed how it fits over his dreadlocked hair. "I love it," he said. "I wouldn't trade it for anything." Michel is one of eight N.C. State players testing helmets provided by a new company called Xenith. The players with long hair like the helmets because they say tiny squeeze bottles to reduce the head's acceleration. Ferrara said the Xenith helps prevent violent movements of the head during low and medium-impact collisions better than other helmets.

Vin Ferrara, Xenith's founder, is optimistic that the helmets will reduce concussions in players who wear them. A former Harvard quarterback with a medical degree and MBA from Columbia University, Ferrara was inspired to produce a new helmet in 2004 after seeing the Philadelphia Flyers' Eric Lindros suffer one of his many concussions. With the help of engineers and medical experts, he designed a helmet that relies on disc-shaped plastic shock absorbers placed inside the helmet shell instead of foam padding. On impact, the shock absorbers release air like tiny squeeze bottles to reduce the head's acceleration.

The Xeniths aren't the only new helmets that manufacturers hope will decrease concussions. After suffering a concussion in the opener against South Carolina, quarterback Russell Wilson switched to the heavily padded Revolution by Riddell. Running back Andre Brown is wearing the Schutt DNA and raves about its comfort. "I compare it to a couch," he said. "There's extra cushion in that thing, and it's extra light." In the Triangle, Duke and North Carolina use helmets by Riddell and Schutt. The Carolina Panthers use Riddell and Schutt helmets.

Mike Ferrara, a certified athletic trainer who directs the University of Georgia's athletic training programs, said the improvements in the field are encouraging. "There are better padding systems," said Mike Ferrara, who isn't related to Vin Ferrara. "Everyone draws from different fields. You can evaluate similar technology in the motor vehicle, auto racing and motorcycle-type helmets with similar protective characteristics to learn from other technology."

Helmet makers are doing that. Schutt has developed a new thermoplastic urethane cushioning. Riddell's Web site reports that players wearing the Revolution are less likely to suffer concussions than players wearing traditional helmets.

The next step for Vin Ferrara after testing the Xenith helmet on thousands of players this season is selling them in time for next fall. The team retail price of the Xenith X1 will be $350, and the individual price is $495.

Stewart predicted that the Xenith test results will be favorable and anticipates purchasing more for N.C. State's players. Irving, N.C. State's top linebacker, said his new helmet has cushioned his head more. "I think it has," he said. "It has a little bit more advanced padding in it than the old helmet. So I think it was designed to prevent that kind of thing (concussions), and I think it is."
Going Off to College for Less (Passport Required)

By TAMAR LEWIN

ST. ANDREWS, Scotland — Isobel Oliphant felt she was making an offbeat choice when she graduated from Fox Lane High School in Bedford, N.Y., and enrolled at the ancient university in this quiet coastal town of stone ruins and verdant golf courses.

"I thought I was being original," said Ms. Oliphant, now in her third year at the University of St. Andrews. "But my high school class president came here, too. And when I got here, it was all 'Hi, I'm from Massachusetts,' 'Hi, I'm from New York.'"

St. Andrews has 1,230 Americans among its 7,200 students this year, compared with fewer than 200 a decade ago.

The large American enrollment is no accident. St. Andrews has 10 recruiters making the rounds of American high schools, visiting hundreds of private schools and a smattering of public ones.

With higher education fast becoming a global commodity, universities worldwide — many of them in Canada and England — are competing for the same pool of affluent, well-qualified students, and more American students are heading overseas not just for a semester abroad, but for their full degree program.

Ryan Ross of Annapolis, Md., applied only to St. Andrews; McGill University in Montreal; and Trinity College in Dublin. "I knew I wanted a different experience," said Mr. Ross, now a freshman studying international relations at St. Andrews.

The international flow has benefits, and tradeoffs, for both sides.

For American students, a university like St. Andrews offers international experience and prestige, at a cost well below the tuition at a top private university in the United States. But it provides a narrower, more specialized course of studies, less individual attention from professors — and not much of an alumni network to smooth entry into the workplace when graduates return to the United States. For overseas universities, international students help diversify campuses in locations as remote as coastal Fife, home of St. Andrews.

Just as important, foreigners are cash cows. While students from Scotland and England and across the European Union pay little or no tuition at St. Andrews, Americans pay about what they would as out-of-state students at leading American public universities.
Although admission to St. Andrews is intensely competitive for European students, with at least 10 applications for each seat, many Americans who would be long-shot applicants at Ivy League schools can find a place at St. Andrews.

“I applied to, and got into, some American liberal arts colleges, like Skidmore and Trinity,” said Savanna Cummin, a St. Andrews student who was not admitted to Brown or Harvard. “But I thought my time and my money would be better spent here, that I’d get more out of the experience, and it would be a better credential.”

Stephen Magee, the vice principal at St. Andrews, sees no problem with admitting Americans who may be marginally less qualified than the European students.

“Am I wrong to say I don’t care if they can’t get into Harvard?” Mr. Magee said. “If a Scottish parent asked why their very talented child did not get in to St. Andrews, when so many Americans did, I would tell them to ask the government, which encourages us to take international students, but caps the number of local students they will pay for.”

Mr. Magee emphasizes that Americans are not displacing homegrown students, since St. Andrews would not be allowed to admit additional applicants from Scotland or England if it cut back American admissions.

The Americans at St. Andrews cluster in a few departments: art history, English and, especially, international relations, where more than 100 of the 350 freshmen are American.

St. Andrews, its reputation burnished by Prince William’s recent attendance, is not the only ancient Scottish university with an influx of Americans. The University of Edinburgh has more than 1,250 American students, many drawn by the veterinary program, although they are less visible among its 25,000 students.

Expatriate education is expanding. This fall, at the National Association for College Admissions Counseling conference in Seattle, where admissions officers from American universities mingle with the counselors who help shape high school students’ college choices, there were representatives from the University of Waikato in New Zealand, Seoul National University in South Korea, Jacobs University Bremen in Germany, the University of Limerick in Ireland, as well as dozens more from Canada and Britain.

Scottish universities have a different approach from American institutions to education. Students apply to the department they wish to study in, and specialize from the beginning, with no requirement that they take courses in many different fields, as is generally the case in the United States.

For some Americans, the Scottish system represents a kind of happy medium, with early specialization, but some room to explore areas outside their major, and even change majors, during the first two years. English universities, with their three-year, entirely specialized programs, are a harder fit for Americans.

Some Americans leap at the chance to concentrate on what they love, and avoid subjects they dislike. Sam Dresser, a graduate of Hastings High School in Westchester County, N.Y., spent much of his high school career immersed in religion and philosophy — Nietzsche, Sartre, Schopenhauer, with a teacher or without — sometimes to the exclusion...
of other subjects.

“My math and science grades were not so good, and I’m not going to do anything with them when I’m out of school, so I loved the idea of only studying what I’m interested in,” said Mr. Dresser, now a freshman at the University of Edinburgh, taking courses in psychology, logic and introductory philosophy.

The Scottish admissions process is straightforward, mostly a matter of meeting numeric benchmarks. While requirements vary among departments, St. Andrews generally wants SATs of 1950 (out of a possible 2400) and a 3.3 grade-point average, and the University of Edinburgh looks for a 3.0 grade-point average and balanced SATs of 1800, as well as two Advanced Placement scores of 4 or 5, or scores of 600 or more on two subject tests.

Applicants write no essays on their most-admired public figure, or what they learned from their summer travels in Guatemala, or, as Mr. Dresser put it, “those hilarious American college-admissions essays on ‘If you were going to sing a song in a talent show, what would you sing and why?’ “

Students need not present themselves as the well-rounded package of perfection, as many feel they must to impress American admissions officers.

“The fluff is irrelevant,” said Rebecca Gaukroger, a recruiter for the University of Edinburgh. “It’s built into the U.K. system that students will have strengths and weaknesses, and if a student wants to study chemistry we don’t need to know if they’re good at history.”

Scottish universities do expect students to know where they are headed, and to be intellectually independent, recruiters and students said.

“Before I came to the University of Edinburgh, I went to Hamilton College in upstate New York,” said Lucea Spinelli, a second-year politics and philosophy student. “It was very beautiful, and very fun, almost like summer camp, with all kinds of extra help available. It’s like they hand-feed you everything. I had one teacher who gave my paper back for revisions until I got an A-plus. That wouldn’t happen here. There’s not that kind of hand-holding.”

Ms. Spinelli said she missed the close relationships she had with her American professors, but she and her roommates, fellow New Yorkers, all revel in the cosmopolitan feel of Edinburgh, the ease of travel around Europe, and the international friendships.

“Last night, in our flat, I looked around, and in one room, there were some people speaking Swedish, others speaking Italian and others speaking English,” said one of the roommates, Lucy Lydon, “And I thought, this is wonderful.”

But other Americans say they have been less than impressed by a system in which there are few assignments, and there is almost no help from professors. “Feedback on essays ranged from very little to none,” said Ben Wilkofsky, a philosophy student at Edinburgh. “There is no feedback on exams.”

As a result, he said, it is something of a mystery how students are expected to improve their work.
Many Americans also say that, with the drinking age at 18, many of their classmates seem to be spending far less time in the library than in the pub, starting with Fresher's Week, an orientation period that can seem like one long pub crawl.

There is a broad array of student clubs — serious (the Philosophy Society, the Humanist Society), hedonistic (ChocSoc, for chocolate lovers, or the Water of Life Society, devoted to whiskey tasting) or peculiarly Scottish (Edinburgh's Highland Society and the St. Andrews University Tunnocks Caramel Wafer Appreciation Society) — many of them meeting at pubs.

For Scottish students, it does not go unnoticed that so many American students, and English ones, come from expensive private schools.

"A lot of the people I grew up with associate St. Andrews with money and don't come here because they don't think they would be comfortable," said Katy Alexander, a fourth-year Scottish student.

Last year, after two years in town, Ms. Alexander moved back to her parents' home. "Part of the reason I moved home was that it feels like an English-American colony here," she said. "I look at the architecture and think about the history, and sometimes I wish it was more Scottish. But it has broadened my views. I now know that they're not all alike."

For all their intellectual independence, some American students said their parents played a large part in their decision to go to Scotland. Mr. Dresser, for example, said his mother, poring over college information on the computer, was the one who proposed applying to Edinburgh.

"My mom got very, very into the college process," Mr. Dresser said. "At the time I was, O.K., do we have to talk about college every night at dinner? But in retrospect, it was very helpful."

American parents' involvement in the college-admissions process — and the helicopter-parent phenomenon, with hovering parents keeping close watch on their children's lives — has been a continuing revelation to Scottish admissions officials.

On a recent recruiting trip in New York City, as she talked to a reporter in an East Side coffee shop, Ms. Gaukroger was spotted by the mother of an Edinburgh freshman. ("Rebecca, is that you?" the woman said, delightedly. "I don't want to interrupt, but I have to tell you how well things are going.")

Ms. Gaukroger remembered her well: "I think I met her at a college fair, and she came to visit in Edinburgh, and we also had lunch once," she said.

"Scottish parents don't get so involved in choosing a university. For better or for worse, when we're recruiting American students, we involve the parents more. It makes sense that American parents are different, because they are investing a lot of money and sending their children far away."