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# THE CHOWAN HERALD

Vol. LXX, No. 7 Published in historic Edenton . . . The South's prettiest town. Single Copies 50¢

## Flight risk: Experts say OLF danger to pilots, birds

BY GINGER LIVINGSTON  
Cox NC Publications

PLYMOUTH, NC - Nestled in Kimberly McCargo's arms, the tundra swan was rigid with uncertainty after a capture net interrupted her early morning breakfast.

But as Plymouth Mayor Brian Roth stroked the bird, she relaxed and her long neck draped into a graceful curve as she rested her head against him. Roth grinned.

"This is what the ugly duckling turned into," McCargo said, stroking the silky breast feathers of the 10-pound bird.

Biologists with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service were banding the swan and other flock members Thursday morning to study the Arctic birds' flight patterns in North Carolina.

Some of those biologists, along with local sportsmen, naturalists and Washington County residents fear the swans, tens of thousands of other migrant birds and the lives of Naval aviators will be endangered by a proposed practice runway.

An isolated strip of Washington County farmland is one of two preferred locations being considered for an outlying landing field for Naval pilots to

practice aircraft carrier landings.

The site is within three miles of Pungo Lake, part of the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, and one of the most significant East Coast wintering grounds for migrating Arctic waterfowl.

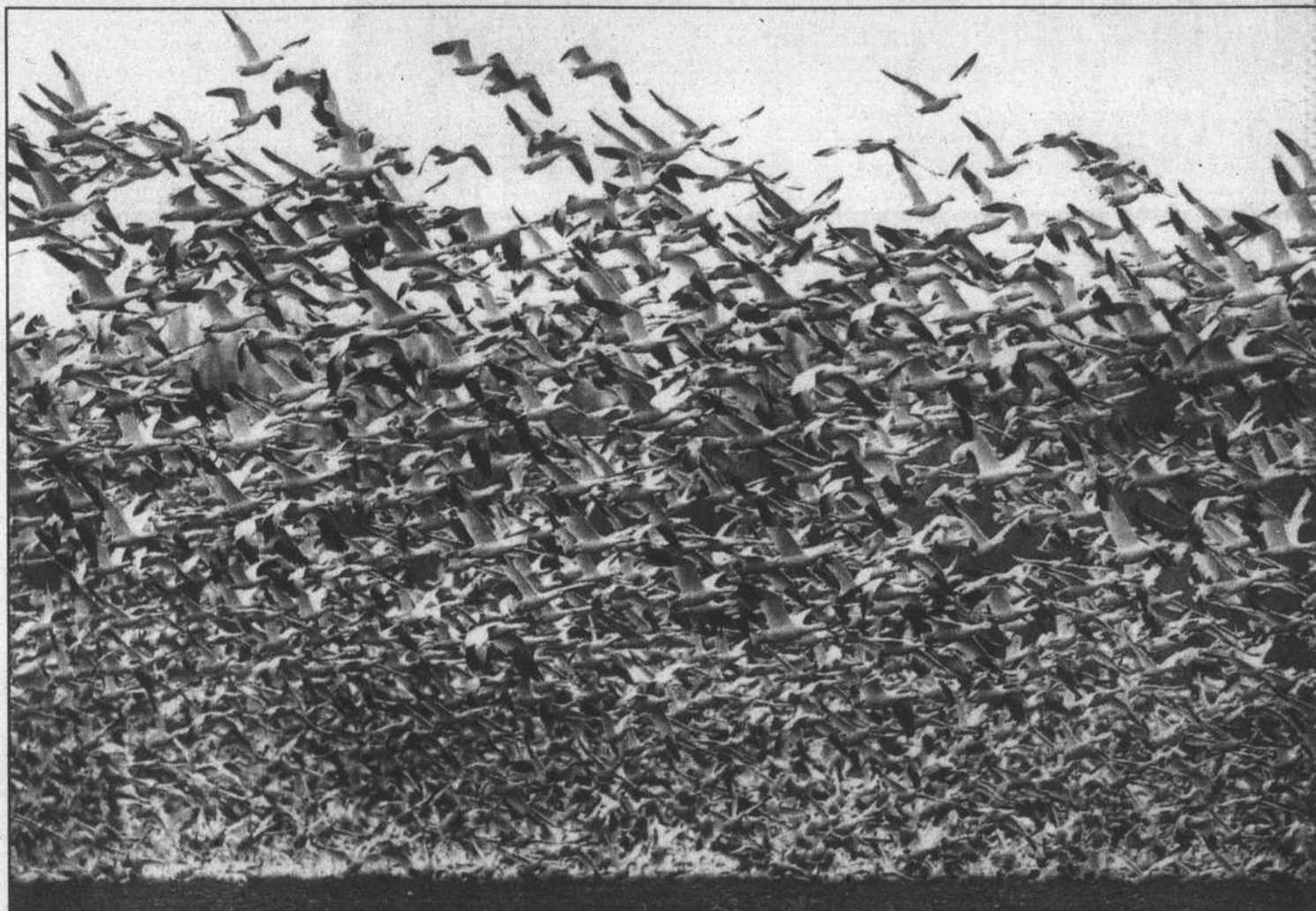
Placing the landing field in Washington County will place pilots and birds on a collision course that could result in the downing of a jet and long-term damage to the habitat, said Tom Earnhardt with the N.C. Natural Resource Group.

"There is no reason for pilots and this unique natural habitat to be put in harm's way," he said.

North Carolina houses every branch of the armed services and is proud of its military connections, Earnhardt said. But the proposed landing site is no place for the Navy.

The Navy wants to base 10 squadrons of F/A18 Super Hornet fighter jets at Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia and Marine Air Corps Air Station Cherry Point in Havelock. The units would phase out existing Tomcats and some Hornet squadrons.

The new squadrons come with a recommendation that a practice runway be established, said Lt. Scott McInay



A flock of snow geese takes to the air last week near the site of a proposed naval landing strip in Washington County. Residents of Chowan and other surrounding counties remain very concerned about the possible impact the field could have on the local economy and tourism, as well as the potential danger to pilots and wildlife. (Photo by Rhett Butler, The Daily Reflector, Greenville, NC)



Wendy Stanton, Alisa Esposito and Michelle Tarkenton show the wingspan of a tundra swan. Landing site opponents, including many Chowan County residents, fear jets will collide with the birds, risking the lives of pilots. (Photo by Rhett Butler, Daily Reflector)

with the Navy's Atlantic Fleet operations. While not required, an outlying landing field is preferred to lessen the noise problems in the more highly populated Oceana and Cherry Point areas. An outlying field gives more operational flexibility and allows a larger number of aircraft to practice.

The Navy has estimated that up to 200 flights a day, with each flight consisting of eight to 10 touch-and-go landings, could take place at the site, McInay said.

After environmental studies and public hearings last year, the Navy has preliminarily recommended placing the runway at either the Washington County location or in Craven County, near the Beaufort

County line. A final report should be completed by late May or early June. The Secretary of the Navy will select a site after that.

Local outdoors writer and television personality Joe Albea, Earnhardt and nearly a dozen others are asking the Navy to change its position about locating the landing field in eastern North Carolina. They have taken Naval officials on tours of the refuge and the proposed landing site to show the large bird populations and their relationship to the proposed site.

David Kitts, the wildlife services Pungo unit manager, once used a nearby airstrip to conduct aerial surveys of bird populations. "It was very common when the birds were here

(in the winter) to see the birds here," he said, gesturing toward the proposed OLF site.

The Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is 113,000 acres of Washington, Hyde, and Beaufort counties. The refuge encompasses Pungo Lake, a 12,000 waterfowl sanctuary. The lake - 4,000 acres of sediment dense blackwater - is a major attraction for migrating waterfowl because it has thousands of acres of surrounding croplands.

December and January are the peak months for birds feeding in the refuge. Recent surveys put the bird population above 100,000, said Howard Phillips, manager of the Pocosin Lakes refuge. Waterfowl start arriving in late September and do not leave until March.

## Volunteer organization focuses on disaster relief

BY REBECCA BUNCH  
Editor

If your church is looking for ways to become involved in community-based outreach efforts, Dick Vail, director of the Chowan County Interfaith Disaster and Relief Effort Inc., has a message for you: "we need your help."

Vail said his organization's goal is to work with local churches to help coordinate

recovery efforts within our community that could spring into action should the need arise due to a hurricane, tornado or other disaster.

"We can't wait until a hurricane blows through, or a tornado, and then have people coming out of the woodwork to help, and they're not trained," he said. "We must keep our organization viable through advance preparation."

The organization is currently seeking volunteers willing to serve in a variety of capacities during a disaster including: caseworkers; damage evaluators; office staff; drivers; Emergency Operations Center staff; warehouse manager and worker; Clothing Distribution Center manager; work team supervisors; and a volunteer coordinator.

"We are asking each house of faith in our community to canvass their members to see if any of them are interested in filling these positions," Vail said. "Please submit names, addresses and phone numbers

of potential volunteers to us as soon as possible." That information may be mailed to Richard H. Vail, Director, Chowan County Interfaith Disaster and Relief Effort Inc., PO Box 783, Edenton, NC 27932.

The organization has already come a long way since its beginning in 2001. It has a board of directors in place which meets on a regular basis, and has attained 501 (c) (3) status. The agency also has established a firm relationship with county officials and agencies. And, Vail said, those ties have enabled him to secure promised access to cell phones and the Internet should the need arise during an actual emergency.

One of the major benefits of having a local disaster relief agency in place, Vail said, would be to ensure that donations made to help our community would stay right here. Many people are not aware, he said, that when they donate to

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## Shooting suspect charged

BY REBECCA BUNCH  
Editor

Thomas Kendall Leary, 26, of 225 Wingfield Road, Edenton, has been arrested and charged in connection with a shooting that occurred last Tuesday evening. Leary is charged with assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill and inflicting serious injury. He is currently being held in the Chowan County Detention Facility under a \$35,000 bond.

According to Chowan County Sheriff Fred Spruill, at about 11:31 p.m. Tuesday evening, a call was received by the Chowan Central 911 Communication Center reporting a shooting and stating that an ambulance was needed at 212 Nixon Road. Spruill said the caller told

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## Dedication planned

The dedication of the gravemaker for Private Jonathan Overton, a free African American who served in the Revolutionary War, will be held next Wednesday, Feb. 19, at noon, at the Providence Burial Ground, 306 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, Edenton. The event is planned in conjunction with African American History Month.

## YOUTH SPRING SOCCER REGISTRATION

February 10 - February 14 for youth all ages 5-15  
Registration will take place at both the Edenton-Chowan Recreational Department (old D.F. Walker) and the Northern Chowan Community Center from 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. each day. Cost is \$5 (\$10 after February 14).

For more information, please call 482-8595

