

The LowCountry Institute is helping Beaufort County and the Open Land Trust create a nature-based park at Widgeon Point . See page 4 for more information.  
*Photo by Eric Horan.*

### Letter from the Director

The 2008 successes of the LowCountry Institute represent the fruits of its decade-long work in our region. These diverse projects show the Institute's unique approach—seeking solutions that integrate sound science, realistic perspectives of human needs, and an increased appreciation of the LowCountry's notable habitats and biodiversity.

During the past eight years, the LCI has successfully worked to develop a sense of regional community. Port Royal Sound and its marine resources were highlighted as a shared treasure, benefitting everyone in the region. Among other steps taken in this process was helping area residents agree on priorities, thus building a sense of community. Questions asked were “What should residents know about the environment? and “How should we protect it and disseminate pertinent information?”

In order to accomplish this, the LCI worked closely with the Spring Island Trust. The Institute has learned from the Trust how to manage natural habitats in ways that protect biodiversity while being attuned to the expectations of human inhabitants. This knowledge is included in the core curriculum of the

Master Naturalist course, which it teaches adults throughout the community. When important information was missing in this curriculum, the LCI initiated research projects that have provided important new knowledge.

Finally, LCI recognizes that working closely with partner environmental organizations and universities is essential. Rather than work separately, these synergistic partnerships produce more effective outcomes jointly. The LCI provides a special role in these partnerships. No other organization, whether governmental or non-profit, possesses a team of staff who are as knowledgeable about managing nature in human-dominated landscapes and who know how to communicate this information most effectively.

The milestones we have achieved have been possible only because of the continued and generous support of our donors. Our expertise is now recognized by community leaders. It is imperative that we continue to leverage this influence and build on our successes.

*Chris Marsh*



## Teacher training

The teacher training program began its second year with 23 teachers from four elementary schools (Shanklin, Whale Branch, Okatie, and Shell Point) participating. Teachers attended class one Saturday a month and learned to bring environmental-based education into the classroom. The day-long classes are taught in the field at a different locations throughout the region. Graduates of the class are certified as Master Naturalists.

## Osher Lifelong Learning Institute course

Over 200 people have taken USC-Beaufort's "*Natural History of the Lowcountry*" mini-course for retirees that is taught by LCI volunteer Bill Hamel (2005-2008). The course consists of 6 one-day field trips and represents an introduction to the Master Naturalist curriculum through experiential learning.

## School programs

LCI continues to conduct field trips for school children whose teachers are part of the teacher training programs at our target schools. Students go on a habitat safari in our mobile classroom to learn about the different habitats found on a sea island. They also visit the Nature Center for a program on animals of the LowCountry, which includes live animal demonstrations.



**Sea creatures:** Teachers learn to identify marine invertebrates. Participants learn new ways to improve the quality of environmental education in Beaufort County

## Water quality workshops

The LowCountry Institute was contracted by Beaufort County to provide three water quality workshops for 52 staff from the Public Works, Planning, and Codes Departments. These workshops included discussions with staff focusing on strengthening county environmental ordinances. This feedback was used by the LCI to develop practical recommendations about the design of stormwater detention ponds and the enforcement of tree protection ordinances.



**Dolphin Watch:** Tony shows a group of students from Shanklin Elementary School a pod of dolphins playing in the surf while leading a field trip at Hunting Island State Park.



## Master Naturalist Course

Over 250 people have completed the Master Naturalist course since LCI became its primary sponsor in 2003. For the second year, LCI offered both a fall and a spring class. Participants in 2008 included local residents, SCDNR staff, golf course managers, SC Parks Service staff, eco-tour guides, Clemson Extension staff, and naturalists on Kiawah Island. Master Naturalists who completed the program through LCI contributed over **3,500** volunteer hours to a variety of citizen science, education, and public projects in 2008.

**Intertidal Inverts:** Master Naturalists learn about creatures that live in the surf at Fish Haul Creek in Hilton Head with Tony Mills.

## LowCountry Master Naturalist Association

The *LowCountry Master Naturalist Association*, which organizes and supports the efforts of graduates of the Master Naturalist program, received its state charter in 2008. Pete Richards (MN '06) coordinated this effort and Al Segars (MN '01) served as interim president for 2008. By the end of 2008, 84 Master Naturalists had joined the Association. The Association sponsored advanced training classes in butterfly identification and coastal geology, kayaking trips, and initiated several volunteer projects which will be the focus of Association efforts in 2009.



## Mobley Nature Center

The Mobley Nature Center expanded its collection of reptiles, amphibians, fish, and aquatic invertebrates. The animals have become indispensable educational tools in all the Institute's programs for youth and for adults. Our new, interactive touch-screen video kiosk has been a hit with visitors to the center. As a video field guide to Spring Island and the Lowcountry, it includes many of the plants and animals found here.

**Touch screen kiosk, left:** Visiting elementary school students utilize the new touch screen kiosk. The user-friendly format of the kiosk makes it easy for all ages to use.

## Star Mountain Interpretive nature trail

The Star Mountain interpretive nature trail was completed in December. This nature trail complements the Gillespie trail which was constructed in 2006. The two trails encompass all of the habitats associated with the region's sea islands. They are used for instruction in the Master Naturalist program and are also toured by visiting civic groups. Completion of the trail involved the construction of three foot bridges, trail clearing completed by a team of LCI volunteers, publication of the interpretive guide, and fabrication of trail markers (thanks to Paul Kinsey). The Star Mountain trail activity guide can be found at the Mobley Nature Center.



**Trail Ribbon Cutting Ceremony:** Madeline Kramer, granddaughter of Tim and Dorothy Kilty, cuts the ribbon at the official opening of the Star Mountain Interpretive Trail.



## Widgeon Point

Widgeon Point was purchased by the Beaufort County Open Land Trust and the Rural and Critical Lands program for Beaufort County. LCI staff and landscape architect Rob Montgomery created a master plan for the newly acquired property in December. The plan divides the property into two areas. The public area will include parking, an observation deck and picnic tables. The second, and largest, area will be a nature preserve with nature trails and a boardwalk leading to the shore of Broad River. The anticipated opening date for this park is the fall of 2009.

## LCI helps Hickory Hill landfill get certified

The LowCountry Institute helped Waste Management create a management plan for Hickory Hill landfill in nearby Jasper County. LCI provided guidance on how to manage the habitat to benefit wildlife. Waste Management's efforts resulted in their property being certified by the Wildlife Habitat Council, a non-profit organization that promotes conservation on corporate land. Volunteers for the LowCountry Institute also maintain wood duck boxes on Hickory Hill.



**Restoring an ecosystem:** David Bishop discusses what is needed to restore the habitat at Widgeon Point with representatives from Beaufort County and the SC Forestry Commission.



**Green golf:** Chechessee Creek Club is working to create quality habitat on their course.

## Improving wildlife habitat on golf courses

Ecologist David Bishop worked with golf course superintendents Jay Gratton and Bill Kennedy to create an updated habitat management plan for the Chechessee Creek Club. By converting the out-of-play areas to natural areas, golf courses can save money, create valuable wildlife habitat, and improve the overall outdoor experience for golfers. Since the course opened in 2000, The LowCountry Institute has been working with the Club on ways to improve habitats for signature species such as fox squirrels and painted buntings while improving air flow, sunlight, and aesthetics.

## Friends of the Rivers

In 2000 LCI adopted the fledgling grassroots organization Friends of the Rivers and helped support it financially while founder Nancy Schilling developed its programs and sources of funding. In June 2008 Friends of the Rivers received its official designation as a 501c3 from the IRS. Friends of the Rivers and LCI continue



to work together to provide water quality education programs and to make recommendations to County Council and municipalities.



## Painted buntings and golf courses

Clemson University started a new research project in 2008. Biologists Jessica Gorzo and Dr. Pat Jodice are looking at nesting success and habitat choice in painted buntings along golf courses. Most of the research is being conducted at the Chechessee Creek Club and on Spring Island. This research is partially funded by The LowCountry Institute and the Wild Links program through the US Golf Association.



## Bluebird fledgling dispersal

Master’s candidate Ali Rodrian completed her field work on Spring Island in 2008, where she was investigating dispersal in fledgling bluebirds. This project started because of the long-term effort of Spring Island residents to monitor the breeding success of bluebirds on Spring Island. It involved a partnership between The LowCountry Institute, Spring Island, Clemson University, and The Smithsonian Institute.

**Tracking birds:** Graduate student Ali Rodrian tracks a fledgling bluebird. A small transmitter attached to the back of each bird emits a unique radio signal that can be detected using an antenna and receiver.

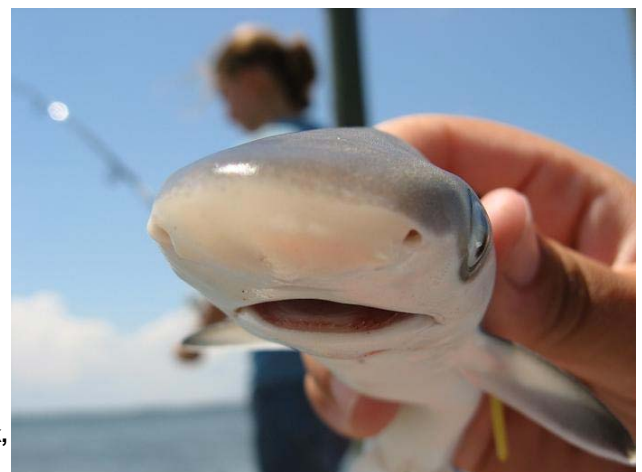
## Expeditions with Patrick McMillan

Patrick McMillan, host of the PBS nature series *Expeditions with Patrick McMillan*, worked with LCI staff during 2008 to produce his third program about the Lowcountry. The first two programs highlighted Spring Island’s environmentally sensitive development and first aired in May. The third program, “*Port Royal Sound: A Hotspot of Coastal Biodiversity*,” will air in 2009. Thanks to support from the Banbury Fund, LCI funded these programs and was the corporate sponsor for the series.

Since 1998 LCI has used \$87,000 to leverage research partners to spend more than \$380,000 on research programs in the region.

## Shark research

Michelle Evans, who is working on a master’s degree from Coastal Carolina University, completed her field work on elasmobranchs (sharks and rays). She studied the diversity and distribution of sharks and rays in Port Royal Sound, which provides essential habitat for a number of species of sharks and rays. Michelle’s research helps document how critical it is to protect water quality and promote responsible development in the region.



**Shark smile, right:** A researcher holds up an Atlantic sharpnose shark, the most common species captured during the research project.



### Kristen Marshall Mattson joins LCI staff

Kristen Mattson (M.S., University of Florida, 2006) was hired as an environmental educator in September 2008 and has rapidly become an important part of the LCI team. Her responsibilities include teaching and coordinating field trips for the Master Naturalist program, conducting school programs for our target schools, and husbandry of the large collection of live animals in the Nature Center. A talented plant ecologist and environmental educator, she adds new areas of expertise to the staff team. Kristen brings a high level of organization and attention to detail to all of her work. We are thrilled to have her here at the LowCountry Institute.

**Wetland wonder:** Kristen helps lead a habitat safari for school children.

### Institute Honors Director's 10 Years of Service



**Executive Director Dr. Chris Marsh** was honored at a dinner celebrating his 10 years of service to the LowCountry Institute. A. Each table was themed with a different local bird species. Centerpieces were created by the late Debby Keats. B. Jim Chaffin, with whom Chris has worked closely, toasts Chris. C. Marilyn Shaver and Gaye Yelverton celebrate. D. Evelyn Williamson, Joe Williams, Susan Schaller, and Ed Mitchell. Joe, former board member of the Nature Conservancy, offered a touching speech remarking upon the success of the LowCountry Institute.



## 2008 ANNUAL FUND

The important work of the LowCountry Institute is 100% funded by tax-deductible contributions. We are grateful for the support of 235 donors in 2008 whose gifts totaled \$381,637.00. We were especially pleased to welcome four new members to our Leadership Circle.

The LCI is viewed by both local environmentalists and developers as the definitive source of reliable information about the environment and the challenges of development. The Institute's work is increasingly important as the pressure of development in the Low Country continues to threaten our precious natural resources.

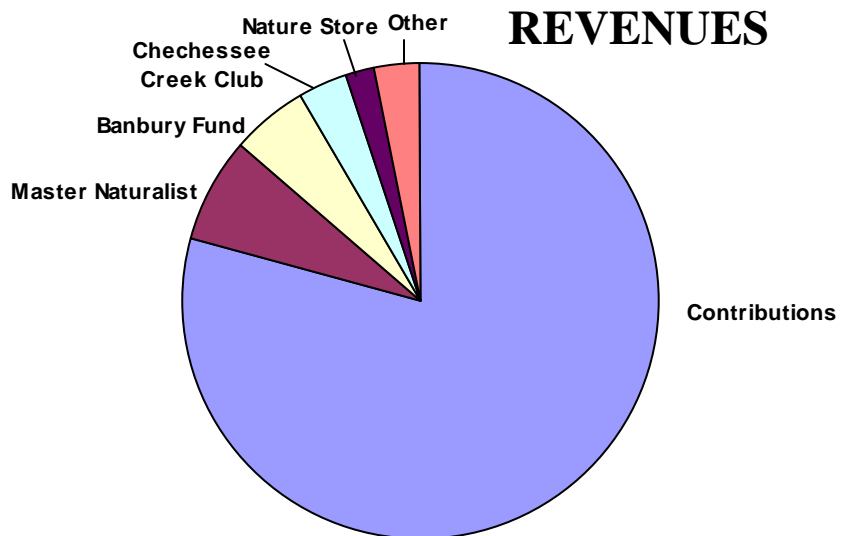
Many thanks to our donors and our solicitors whose generosity and hard work resulted in the wonderful success of the 2008 Annual Fund.

*Ann Baruch and Ginger Mitchell, LCI Fundraising Co-chairs*

### LCI 2008 Financials

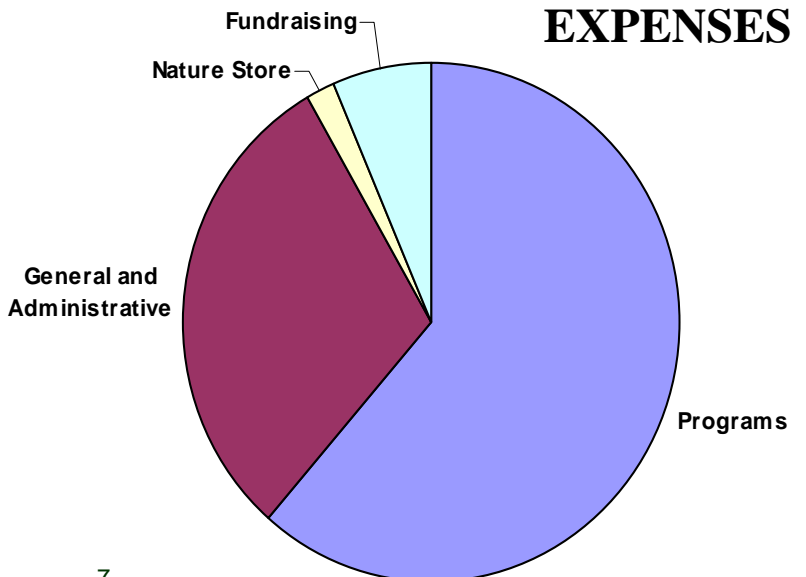
#### REVENUE

Contributions	\$381,637
Master Naturalist	\$35,000
Banbury Fund	\$25,000
Chechessee Creek Club	\$16,325
Nature Store	\$8,804
Other	\$15,377
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$482,143</b>



#### EXPENSES

Programs	\$311,474
General and Administrative	\$154,038
Nature Store	\$10,161
Fundraising	\$32,196
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$507,869</b>





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(Continued on page 9)





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 Debby Keats and John McCarter

## In Memoriam



On November 23, 2008 the Institute lost one of its most talented supporters, Debby Keats of Spring Island, SC. Debby's life was full of energy, creativity, and joy. After receiving a BFA degree from Rochester Institute of Technology and an MFA degree from the University of Miami, she established a prestigious 30-year career in graphic design and advertising in the United States, Brazil, and France. Her corporate design and advertising work earned

both local and national awards. From 2007 until her death she was a member of the faculty at Savannah College of Art and Design. She is survived by her husband John McCarter.

Debby shared her joyful, effervescent personality and her generous spirit with the Institute staff, which is illustrated by the memorable bird centerpieces she made for LCI's November dinner (see photo A on page 6). Memorial funds given in her name will be used to provide a Nature Journaling workshop, taught by artist Pam Brickell, to local teachers. Part of her legacy is the special warmth she left in each of us who had the great fortune of getting to know her.

– *Chris Marsh, Executive Director*

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## LCI Staff

Chris Marsh, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
[cmash@lowcountryinstitute.org](mailto:cmash@lowcountryinstitute.org)

David Bishop, Ph.D.  
Ecologist  
[dbishop@lowcountryinstitute.org](mailto:dbishop@lowcountryinstitute.org)

Lisa Gravil  
Administrative Assistant  
[lgravil@lowcountryinstitute.org](mailto:lgravil@lowcountryinstitute.org)

Kristen Marshall Mattson  
Environmental Educator  
[kmattson@lowcountryinstitute.org](mailto:kmattson@lowcountryinstitute.org)

Tony Mills,  
Education Director  
[tmills@lowcountryinstitute.org](mailto:tmills@lowcountryinstitute.org)



LowCountry Institute  
40 Mobley Oaks Lane  
Okatie, SC 29909  
(843) 987-7008

