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News Release/August 2011

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NEW BOOK DOCUMENTS MAGNOLIA CEMETERY BIRDS

The surprisingly abundant and diverse bird population at Charleston's historic Magnolia Cemetery has been captured in a new book by Patrick Harwood, an adjunct communication professor at the College of Charleston.

"The Birds of Magnolia Cemetery: Charleston's Secret Bird Sanctuary" is 130 pages filled with 400 photographs of 45 different bird species, all taken in the intimate setting of one of America's most historic and beautiful cemeteries.

Harwood, who took the photographs during the past three years, says what started as a diversion turned into a passion that has culminated in his first book endeavor. "Who would think that a place of death could contain so much life," he says. His first visit to the cemetery in March 2008 during which he encountered a pair of wood storks got him interested in birding, Harwood says.

Dating to 1850, Magnolia Cemetery, located on Charleston's outskirts near the Cooper River, is known as the final resting place for many of Charleston's movers and shakers. Strong War Between the States connections are evident in the large statue of Gen. Wade Hampton, Confederate flags that fly daily, the graves of 1,700 Civil War casualties and veterans, including the men who died aboard the historic submarine Hunley.

But what many people don't know is how Magnolia Cemetery is also a birders paradise, Harwood says. The remote location, two lagoons, adjacent salt marshes and lack of (living) human presence have created an ecosystem that attracts a wide array of birds from large herons, egrets, wood storks and osprey to smaller birds and ducks such as belted kingfishers, yellow-rumped warblers, mallards and hooded mergansers.

Harwood says with the right publication arrangement he would share book proceeds with Magnolia Cemetery to help continue to preserve and maintain the historic graveyard.

Harwood has worked at the College of Charleston since 1991, in public relations then as a professor in the communication department. A former broadcast journalist, Harwood holds degrees from Virginia Commonwealth University and Northwestern University.

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