

PAINTINGS DISPLAYED

With Pen And Brush, He Captures Area's Birds

By HARRIET DOAR
Observer Staff Writer

You probably don't consider binoculars essential equipment for an artist.

But binoculars are more important than pens and brushes to Doug Pratt, a young science teacher and bird artist who has 28 drawings and paintings on display at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library.

Without the binoculars, Pratt would have a hard time observing some of his shyer subjects.

Pratt, 23, lives with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harold D. Pratt, on Route 3, in the Steele Creek Community. He taught biology at Olympic High School last year and will teach science this year at Wray Junior High in Gastonia.

This is his first public exhibition, but he has been drawing birds since he was a child. He has pursued them in Ecuador, Mexico, Florida and New England, as well as in all parts of the Carolinas, with the contrast of mountain and shore areas.

He's observed, by now, about 535 species of birds in the wild, and he doesn't try to estimate the number of sketches, drawings and paintings he's done.

"I began to take a serious interest about the sixth grade," he said.

He has never studied art but would like to study with one of the outstanding bird artists in



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the country. University of Oklahoma ornithologist George M. Sutton, whom he considers among the five or six top bird artists in the country.

He plans to specialize in ornithology for a Ph.D. in zoology, intending to teach in college later.

"Two of these artists, by the way, live in this area," he said, "both of them near Charleston — John Henry Dick and Edward von Siebold Dingle."

Pratt does his drawings from observation and study.

"I never draw or paint a species unless I've observed it in nature," he said. "But I use books, drawings, photographs, bird skins and in fact any help I can get. I don't copy, of course, but I use whatever I can find to get the correct color patterns, structure and details.

"I don't draw straight from life. Some people might claim they do, but I don't think most of them do. Birds just don't hold still that long."

Bird skins are, he explained, the whole skin, with the plumage, collected for scientific observation.

Pratt's exhibition at the library is in black and white, done with pen and ink, and in color, with transparent and opaque water color and a couple in scratchboard. The majority are birds he saw in Mexico last summer, where he was interpreter for a biology field trip conducted by Dr. Tom Daggy of Davidson College.

Artist Doug Pratt And Subjects ... He's Pursued Them To Ecuador

A graduate of South Mecklenburg, Pratt took his B. S. degree from Davidson in 1966. In the summer of 1965, he spent three months as a member of the first delegation to Ecuador of the Project of the Americas.

The Charlotte area is great for birds, Pratt said, because of shore and high mountain areas within easy travel distance along with migration and variety in environment. The difference in hardwood and pine forest, perhaps within a mile of each other, makes a great difference in observation.

Included in the current exhibit displayed in the library window with bird books, are such neighbors as the American redstart (color) and the snow goose (black and white), observed in North Carolina, and the ring-billed gull (black and white) and the painted bunting (color) observed in South Carolina.

Pratt belongs to the local Audubon Club and has displayed his bird artistry there.

He also helps with bird counts pointing out that in a 15-mile circle just south of Charlotte 112 species were noted in the spring count and 60 to 65 in the Christmas count.

These species are "observed," he said, chiefly by sound, and knowledge of bird calls is essential for the bird-watching artist who can eliminate varieties seen before.

Pratt is now working with a friend, Mark Simpson of Statesville, on a bird-watcher's guide to the Carolinas. He hopes later to write and illustrate a popular guide to birds in some tropical region of the Americas.

"Birds are getting to be the No. 1 hobby," he said. "They're giving stamp-collecting a run for its money."