NO BIRD LEFT BEHIND!
THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT RETURNS

The 8th annual Great Backyard Bird Count will once again be sweeping the nation from February 18 – 21, 2005. Novice and expert bird watchers across North America are invited to count birds in their backyards and report them over the Internet as part of this popular event, one of the world’s largest volunteer efforts of its kind. Participants help researchers better understand bird population numbers and distribution across the continent.

This year’s theme, “North America’s Great Backyard,” was chosen as a way to celebrate the beauty and diversity of birds across the country. Families, individuals, classrooms, and community groups are encouraged to count the numbers and kinds of birds that visit their feeders, local parks, nature preserves, greenways, schoolyards, and other areas in the “Great Backyard” during any or all of the four count days. You can take as little as 15 minutes to count. Participants enter their observations online at www.birdsource.org, a user-friendly, state-of-the-art web site developed by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. The Web site can also be accessed through www.parkan-drec.com.

Reedy Creek, Latta Plantation and McDowell Nature Centers are teaming up with Mecklenburg Audubon Society, Wing Haven Gardens and Bird Sanctuary, Carolina Raptor Center, and Wild Birds Unlimited to promote the annual Great Backyard Bird Count locally.

Last year, bird enthusiasts across North America submitted over 42,000 checklists totaling more than four million birds. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, with its 17,000-acre park system and tree-filled neighborhoods providing numerous opportunities for birdwatchers, submitted the highest number of checklists of any community in the country. “This remarkable event gives you the opportunity to visit some of our most special places and wild lands,” says Bob Perciasepe, Audubon’s chief operating officer. “In this way, the Great Backyard Bird Count reminds us that North America’s birds consider the whole continent to be one great big backyard, and in a sense, it is our backyard as well.”

Getting Down and Dirty for Wildlife!!

It’s hard to believe but spring is right around the corner. And that means it’s time to get our yards in order for neotropical migrants and new babies. This month’s meeting will discuss ideas how to improve your backyard habitat to be more inviting to our feathered and furry friends. We’ll go over the basics, look at some specific strategies and talk a little about invasive species. Then we will open it up to the floor for others to share what has worked in their yards.

Don’t miss this informative program. It will motivate and inform. So let’s all get down and dirty, in the fellowship hall of Sharon 7th Day Adventist Church [920 Sharon Amity] on Thursday, February 3rd at 7:30 PM. See you all there.
FieldTrips

Please, remember to contact the trip leader several days before the trip. If you don’t, you may not receive information about last minute changes or cancellations. Also, if we don’t know you are coming we might leave without you!!

Saturday, February 5th:
Evergreen Nature Preserve
[1/2 day]

Evergreen Preserve anytime of the year is a wonderful place to bird. The new pond and surrounding wetland plants has been a great addition. Winter birding in the preserve usually includes a variety of sparrows, woodpeckers, and wrens.

We will meet at the Winterfield School parking lot at 7:30 AM and should be done just about noon.

Be prepared to walk about 2 miles. If you are planning to join us, contact Larry or Louise Barden at 704-535-6385.

Saturday, February 19th:
Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge
[1/2 day]

Another great place to bird in the winter is Cowan’s Ford Refuge. Ducks and sparrows will be on the list but just about anything can show up at this Important Bird Area.

There will be a lot of walking so remember to wear sturdy shoes. It can be 5-10 degrees colder out there then in the city so remember to dress in layers. Snacks and water while walking are recommended.

We will meet in the parking lot at the viewing stand at 7:30 AM and should be done by noon. If you are interested in join this trip contact contact Judy Walker at 704-537-8181.

Saturday, March 3rd:
Latta Plantation Nature Preserve
[1/2 day]

Continuing our tour of the County nature preserves and refuges, we will once again assemble in the northern end of the county at Latta Plantation Nature Preserve. We visited the prairie last fall but there are a lot of other trails in the preserve that are not frequented by birders or hikers. Although we will mainly encounter our local getting geared up for their spring activities, there may be a few ducks still hanging around and who knows what might show up early.

Meet at the Nature Center parking lot just inside the gate at 7:30 AM. We will be doing a fair amount of walking so wear sturdy shoes and you might want to bring some water. We should be done by noon.

Saturday, March 19th:
Weymouth Woods Nature Preserve
[Full day]

Last fall we heard wonderful presentation on the red-cockaded woodpecker so we thought we would take a trip to see some up close and personal. We will be joined by Scott Hartley, a preserve staff member, who will give us an overview of the sandhills ecology and up-date us on the preservation work being done there. In the afternoon we will go to the Sandhills Gamelands in search of Bachman’s sparrows and other grassland species.

Complete logistical details will be in the March newsletter.

Got New Binoculars?

Here’s a good use for your old bins - Birders’ Exchange, a bird conservation program of the American Birding Association, collects used and new birding equipment and redistributes it, free of charge, to researchers, conservationists, and educators working to conserve birds and habitats in the Neotropics.

For more information visit the Birders’ Exchange website at: http://www.americanbirding.org/programs/consbex.htm; phone 719-578-9703; or email Betty Peterson at bpetersen@aba.org.

Audubon Adventures

This school year Mecklenburg Audubon is sponsoring Audubon Adventures in 37 classrooms and environmental programs in the Charlotte area.

For those not familiar with this program - Audubon Adventures is an environmental education program for children in grades 3 to 6. Developed by professional environmental educators, Audubon Adventures presents basic, scientifically accurate facts about birds, wildlife, and their habitats. A Classroom Kit serves 32 students.

The program is used by classroom teachers, after-school program coordinators, special education instructors, language arts teachers, and environmental educators.

The goal of Audubon Adventures is to develop in young people an appreciation, awareness, and understanding of the natural world -- birds, other wildlife, and all living things; the habitats, systems, and interplay of forces that affect living things; and the connections between people and nature.

Such an awareness of nature creates in young people (and their teachers and families) a sense of stewardship for the natural world.

This year’s topics include:

Sharing the Earth
Flutter By, Butterfly!
Birds of Prey: Hunters of the Air
Native Plants. Naturally!

For more information visit the Birders’ Exchange website at: http://www.americanbirthing.org/programs/consbex.htm; phone 719-578-9703; or email Betty Peterson at bpetersen@aba.org.
2004 GBBC Results

NC – 3rd in the number of checklists
NC – 9th in the number of species
NC – 9th in the number of individual birds
Charlotte – 8th in the number of individual birds

We have a reputation to protect. For three years in a row Charlotte has topped the nation in participation in the GBBC. But the Charlotte zip codes shouldn’t get all the credit. If you combine all the areas around Charlotte that have Audubon members the total is 761 reports. However, two cities in Mississippi, Gautier and Ashland, were hot on our heels. Let’s not be out done by some small out of the way place.

Last year we also topped the state in number of species seen. As I remember the weather on the coast wasn’t all that great which probably why Wilmington dropped to second place.

And not only do we have a lot of bird watchers we also seem to have a lot of individual birds. We were eighth in the nation in the number of individual birds tallied with 25,298 individuals. That’s a lot of feathers flying around.

Finally, birders from the Triangle area were amazed last year to see soooo many reports from the Charlotte area. They didn’t think there were any places to bird in the area or birder watchers. That just goes to prove you can’t tell a book by it’s cover.

So get out there an enjoy the weekend and see lots of birds.

<table>
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<th>Town</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Top 10 species

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1. Northern Cardinal</td>
<td>Northern Cardinal</td>
<td>Mourning Dove</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Carolina Chickadee</td>
<td>Carolina Chickadee</td>
<td>Northern Cardinal</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Mourning Dove</td>
<td>Mourning Dove</td>
<td>Dark-eyed Junco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Carolina Wren</td>
<td>Tufted Titmouse</td>
<td>Blue Jay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. House Finch</td>
<td>Dark-eyed Junco</td>
<td>American Goldfinch</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. American Robin</td>
<td>Carolina Wren</td>
<td>Downy Woodpecker</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Tufted Titmouse</td>
<td>American Goldfinch</td>
<td>House Finch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Downy Woodpecker</td>
<td>House Finch</td>
<td>House Sparrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. American Goldfinch</td>
<td>Red-bellied Woodpecker</td>
<td>Tufted Titmouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Dark-eyed Junco</td>
<td>American Robin</td>
<td>American Crow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Continued from page 1

No Bird Left Behind

To help kick off activities for the Great Backyard Bird Count, Wing Haven Gardens and Bird Sanctuary, 248 Ridgewood Avenue, will host a family Bird-Feeding Open House on Thursday, February 17, at 3:45 p.m. Guests will receive tips on backyard bird feeding and identification, learn how to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count, and make a special-recipe bird-feeder to take home. For more information, call 704-331-0664.

In addition to participating in the actual count, visitors to the Nature Centers and Carolina Raptor Center between February 18 – 21 can sample shade-grown coffee, which is grown on plantations that provide critical habitat for birds. Visitors can also pick up bird feeding tips, count checklists, and more information on attracting birds to their backyards. There will also be a variety of bird-related crafts and activities for children at:

- Latta Plantation Nature Center
  6211 Sample Road
  Huntersville, NC  704-875-1391
- McDowell Nature Center
  15222 York Road
Bird Friendly Trees
Adapted from an article in the July/August 2004 Bird Watcher’s Digest by Jeanne Lebow.

Fruits, seeds, shelter, and nesting areas – backyard gardeners/birders need to take all of these into consideration when choosing trees for their backyards. In addition a mix of evergreens and deciduous trees, plus a mixture of upper- and lower-story trees, is important. A mixture not only benefits the birds, but also provides the right amount of windbreak and sunlight to both the smaller plants and the gardener’s heating and cooling bills. Depending on the size of your yard here are a few native suggestions:

**Tulip Poplar** (*Liriodendron tulipifera*): At 80 to 200 feet tall, the tulip or yellow poplar is a true “canopy” tree. It is well loved by birds, especially neotropical migrants. Tanagers, indigo buntings and orioles eat the blooms as do cedar waxwings and goldfinches. Warblers glean insects which are attracted to the blooms. The fact that Latta Park in Dilworth is such a great place to bird in the spring is due in part to the large number of tulip poplars found there.

**Southern Magnolia** (*Magnolia grandiflora*): An evergreen relative of the deciduous tulip poplar, the southern magnolia – along with the live oak and the longleaf pine – is one of the ‘defining’ trees of the south. A tall handsome tree, it is known for the lovely, fragrant white flowers that measure up to 8 inches across. After it blooms (April to June) the flowers leave behind a woody cone that dries and matures to release many bright red seeds hanging by tiny threads – just right for birds to clip off for fall and winter meals. The tree also provide great cover all year for the bird and other wildlife.

For gardeners with smaller yards there is a petite version called ‘Little Gem’. Or you might try the sweet bay (*M. virginiana*), a smaller cousin that has 3 inch white flowers and small seedheads that still benefit the birds.

**Red Mulberry** (*Morus rubra*): At least 59 species of birds eat mulberries including bluebirds, orchard and Baltimore orioles, cardinals, blue jays, red-headed, red-bellied and downy woodpeckers, eastern kingbirds, yellow-billed cuckoos, wood thrushes, mockingbirds, red-eyed vireos, yellow warblers, robins, gray catbirds, titmice and brown thrashers. A deciduous tree with yellow leaves in the fall, the red mulberry is a fast grower that tolerates most soil conditions. However, make sure you plant it away from driveways, decks, and patios because the fallen fruits will stain.

**Red Maple** (*Acer rubrum*): Some of the earliest blooms belong to the red maple, the most wide spread N. American maple. It is tolerant enough of various soils to be established in wet areas of a yard or to be considered a ‘street tree’ where the conditions are more extreme. It is often planted for its shade and beautiful fall color.

The maples branches fill with tiny flower clusters as early as late January. The year the Anna’s hummingbird was in my yard, it was blooming in December! The hummingbirds visit the blossoms often. Grosbeaks, purple finches, pine siskins, and cardinals eat the ripe maple seeds. Orioles, wrens, and warblers check the foliage for insects while chickadees, nut hatchers and brown creepers [winter] patrol the trunks and branches all year long.

**Red bay** (*Persea pubescens*): Also called the swamp red bay is a cousin of the sassafras and is part of the laurel family. The blue, berry-sized fruits are approximately a 1/2 inch long. It is identified by the rusty-red fuzz on the underside of the leaves and by the interesting crooked trunk that grows to a height of 10-35 feet.

**Wild Cherry** (*Prunus serotina*): Eighty-four birds species have been attracted to a wild black cherry tree. In the backyard this tree tends to be smaller than in a forest setting. It is great for climbing and shading the yard. Sprigs of white flowers are followed by green then red fruits. I had fun watching a mockingbird try to defend ‘his’ tree loaded with fruit from a flock of robins.

**Chokecherry** (*Prunus virginiana*): A smaller tree than the wild cherry, it often grows only 10 feet tall and suckers freely. It is a good candidate for creating a natural bird thicket. It has dark red berries which are, along with the wild cherry’s fruit, subject to eastern tent caterpillars – another excellent source of food for birds!
Oaks [and acorns]: Every bird-friendly yard needs at least one oak to provide roosting and nesting spots, acorns and insects. Depending on your backyard environment the following species are recommended – live, water, white [has the sweetest acorns], post, overcup, bur or mossy cup, chestnut, chinquapin, Durand’s and swamp chestnut or basket [very large acorns].

Pines: Just as no bird-friendly yard is complete without an oak, not matter small the yard, it must have at least on conifer. Pines are most bird-friendly conifers. Chickadees, evening and pine grosbeaks, nutchatches, jays, pine siskins, red-bellied woodpeckers, creepers, thrashers and pine warblers all eat pine seeds. Large pines are favored roosting sites for migrating robins and common nesting sites for morning doves, blue jays, crows and Cooper’s and red-shouldered hawks. Pinea are also used by cavity nesting birds such as woodpeckers, chickadees and nuthatches. Native pines to consider include longleaf, loblolly, Virginia, and eastern white (Pinus strobes). The white pine, with its blue-green needles and pleasing shape, is often grown ornamental. It is a favorite of the yellow-bellied sapsucker.

UNDERSTORY TREES

Eastern Flowering Dogwood (Cornus florida): Happy in partial shade or full sun this tree [15-40 feet tall] is a great ‘edge’ tree and a good size for most backyards. The flowering dogwood and other smaller dogwoods are particularly valuable for attracting birds. The berries produced by these trees are eaten by almost 100 species of birds. It also provides good nesting sites for vireos and other small birds.

Serviceberry (Amelanchier arborea or canadensis): This tree attracts more than 40 bird species with sweet clustered fruits that look like tiny purple apples. It has lovely loose clusters of drooping white flowers in early spring and finely saw-toothed leaves that turn red-orange in the fall.

Red Buckeye (Aesculus pavia): This is an important tree for those who want to attract ruby-throated hummingbirds. In moist but well-drained soils, buckeyes may reach 30 feet, but most grow only 10 feet tall, making them appropriate for small yards. They begin blooming when they are 2-4 feet tall.

Hollies: Any backyard with hollies will make many birds happy. They not only offer thorny protection for general cover and nesting, but also abundant berries which are eaten by 48 species including robins, flickers, mockingbirds, catbirds, thrashers, bluebirds and cedar waxwings. Although there about a dozen hollies native to the southeast, the American holly (Ilex opaca) with its spiny and deeply toothed leaf, is one of the best known trees in the area and is tolerant of various moisture levels in the soil. Make sure you plant both male and females of any holly species to assure an abundance of berries.

Several holies that are not as well known but that are bird friendly and naturalize well are yaupon, dahoon, possumha and winterberry. Yaupon as well as other holies can be grown in hedges.

Hawthorns (Crataegus spp.): Like hollies these trees offer a wide variety of species for both the gardener and birds. They provide protective foliage with spines on branches that are often used by cardinal and hummingbirds for nesting. At least 39 species of birds eat hawthorn fruit including grosbeaks, finches, hermit thrushes and fox sparrows.

FAST GROWING TREES

Black Willow (Salix nigra): Is a fast grower that fits well into hedges. It produces both male and female flowers on separate trees in early spring before the leaves appear and a cherished by cedar waxwings. This tree is also a host tree for a number butterflies.

Elderberry (Sambucus canadensis): Our most common native elderberry grows to a height of 10 feet and has large flat-topped white flower clusters followed by dark purple berries hanging in heavy bunches. This is a perfect tree for feeding both the gardener and birds. Over 120 species have been documented eating the fruit, so you will have to get out there quickly if you want to make jelly or wine.

Of course you will have to do a little more research on these trees and your backyard to see if they are compatible but this list will help you limit your choices. Remember, look for native cultivars don’t risk introducing an invasive species.
Bird Weather Folklore

Excerpt from The Birder’s Miscellany: A Fascinating Collection of Facts, Figures and Folklore from the

Birds, being creatures of the air, have long been considered omens of the weather – and often with good reason, because meteorological changes obviously have the greatest impact on flying animals. The old saying that low-flying geese mean rain is firmly founded in the principle of barometric pressure. In the days when every farm had a flock of geese, fall was the traditional butchering season, since the fowl would be a burden to feed over the winter. The color of the breastbone was said to forecast the coming winter – cold if the bone is cloudy, mild if it is pale, but bitter and snowy if it is red. In ancient Rome, a thick wing bone meant a hard winter, a thin one, mild.

The autumn migration was watched with interest, since an early flight of geese meant a hard winter, but flocks going north might mean a mild, open season ahead. In the shorter term, songbirds feeding close to the house, or feeding with unusual intensity, were taken as a sign of an approaching snowstorm – a good guess because the lowering air pressure ahead of a front usually triggers a feeding frenzy among many kinds of wild animals.

Bird-related Weather Folklore

- If chickens run for shelter when it rains, the shower will be brief. If they stay outside, it will last a long time.
- Low-flying swallows mean rain, high-flying ones mean fair weather.
- A rooster crowing at dusk foretells rain.
- A large flock of crows is a sign of impending rain.
- If a European skylark flies high & sings loudly, fair weather is at hand.
- Ruffled feathers on a turkey, pigeons staying in the roost, and screaming guinea fowl mean rain.
- Heavy toe fringes on ruffed grouse mean a bad winter (grouse grow such fringes each winter to keep from sinking in the snow).
- Swallows nesting in a barn protects it from lightning.

North Carolina’s WatchList Birds

At least 39 National WatchList species regularly occur in North Carolina as breeders, winterers, or migrants. Along North Carolina’s coastal beaches Piping Plovers, American Oystercatchers and Wilson’s Plovers breed. Salt marsh habitats harbor nesting Black Rails and Seaside Sparrows and wintering Nelson’s Sharp-tailed Sparrows, and Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows. Coastal intertidal habitats provide important habitat for wintering American Black Ducks and Brant and migrating Short-billed Dowitchers. Pine forests support breeding Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatches, and Bachman’s Sparrows. Pine savanna habitats are home to wintering Henslow’s Sparrows. Bottomland hardwood forests of the along other major rivers contain important breeding populations of Swainson’s Warblers, Kentucky Warblers, and Prothonotary Warblers. For more information go to: http://www.audubon.org/bird/watchlist/bs-bc-northcarolina.html
Local Membership

Join now and your membership will be effective until June 2006.

Because of changes in National Audubon membership structure, Mecklenburg Audubon now must offer a local Chapter Membership to cover the cost of the newsletter, web site and cost of meetings.

Name

Phone

Address [Street, City, ST, and Zip]

E-mail


_____ Please, save trees and send me[us] the newsletter electronically.

_____ I[we] would be willing to lead a field trip.

_____ I[we] would be interested in participating in a work day at one of the local preserves.

_____ I[we] would be willing to do a program.

Return to: Lucy Quintilliano, Treasurer, Mecklenburg Audubon Society, P. O. Box 221093, Charlotte, NC 28222

Adapted from an article in the Sept/Oct 2004 Bird Watcher’s Digest by Bill Thompson III.

10 Reasons to go to a Birding Festival

1. New Birds: Most bird watchers state this as their primary reason for attending a festival and many festivals are built around the birding opportunities they offer.

2. New Habitat: It’s wonderful to immerse yourself in an entirely new habitat when going to a far-flung birding festival. Seeing new birds, animals, butterflies, and other natural wonders really adds to the ‘wow’ factor of a festival trip.

3. Optics and Gear: Festivals offer an excellent opportunity to see, sample and purchase new products such as optics, field clothing, books, art-work, and other cool birding and nature-related stuff!

4. Learn Stuff: Most birding festivals offer seminars, workshops, and/or presentations designed to inform you and make you a better bird watcher.

5. Group Birding: This is a double-edged sword. Too many people can be distracting making it difficult to see birds. However, the more eyes you have looking the more likely you are to find a new and/or unusual species.

6. Economic Impact: Bird watching packs an underestimated and under-appreciated economic punch. The 100 people attending the New River Festival in 2004 injected more than $100,000 into the local economy. Since many of these festivals are in smaller rural areas the impact is even more critical.

7. Conservation Impact: As the economic impact of bird watching and festivals grows, more communities and governments will realize that protecting habitat is a smart thing to do economically. Some festivals ask attendees to hand out calling cards to local businesses to show the impact of visiting bird watchers on the local economy. This helps demonstrate to local businesspeople that preserving habitat for birds pays!

8. Get Away from It All: A good festival experience can be every bit as enriching and renewing as a week at summer camp.

9. Make New Friends: Bird watchers come from all walks of life and all over the world. You can meet some very interesting folks who might even become good friends.

10. See More Birds, Have More Fun: The best reason for going to a festival really boils down to this. For more information check out the Birding and Nature Festival Directory [http://www.americanbirding.org/resources/evntfest-gen.htm].
Mecklenburg Audubon is a chapter of National Audubon. Meetings are held in the fellowship hall of the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church, 920 N. Sharon Amity Rd. on the first Thursday of each month, September through May at 7:30 PM.