Monthly Meeting

The Healing Powers of Plants

Plants hold the power to heal. But how do you release that power? Mandy Smith, Environmental Educator at Latta Plantation Nature Center will join us at our next meeting to educate us about the many amazing attributes of our chlorophyll ladened friends. Through a powerpoint presentation and hands-on activities she’ll teach us about different native and naturalized plants and their medicinal properties to use at home or just for fun. Learn how to make infusions, decoctions, tinctures, and washes. Bring your own mug for some taste testing of different herbal remedies.

Come, be rooted to your seats during this informative presentation on Thursday, February 2nd in the fellowship hall of the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church at 7:30 PM.

Count Birds with a Buddy

The ninth annual Great Backyard Bird Count will once again sweep Mecklenburg County and the nation February 17 – 20, 2006. Novice and expert bird watchers are invited to count birds in their backyards and report their numbers via the Internet. These volunteer reports help researchers better understand bird populations and distribution across the continent.

This year’s theme for the Great Backyard Bird Count - Count Birds with a Buddy - encourages bird enthusiasts of all ages to share their love of birds with a friend, a child, a scout troop, a class, or a co-worker - opening their eyes to the joy of birding. Last year, participants across North America submitted over 52,000 checklists totaling more than six million birds. Folks in the Charlotte region totaled 595 checklists, 104 species and 33,557 individuals. Charlotte alone [282—zip code] was second in the nation in the number of reports filed.

During this period, families, individuals, classes, and community groups are encouraged to count the birds that visit their feeders, parks, nature preserves, greenways, schoolyards, and backyards. You can take as little as 15 minutes to count the numbers and kinds of birds. Bird watchers then enter their observations at www.birdsource.org. The Web site can also be accessed through our Mecklenburg Audubon Web site [meckbirds.org] or the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Web site [www.parkandrec.com]. You can submit multiple lists each day as long as they are from different areas i.e. your yard, a local park, greenway, etc.

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Now that winter has gripped much of the continent, what are our birds doing? Bird populations are dynamic; they are constantly in flux. They
Please remember to contact the trip leaders 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!!

Thursday, February 2nd: McDowell Preserve

In conjunction with Mecklenburg Park and Rec, we will be offering a walk at the preserve along one of their many trails to look for winter birds. Contact Karen Resmer at 704-588-5224 to sign up for the walk. Dave Lovett will be leading. Directions.

Saturday, February 4: Evergreen Preserve

A winter delight, Evergreen Nature Preserve, off Central Ave. close to downtown Charlotte, harbors a wonderful variety of wintering birds in a small area.

Veteran MAS members Larry and Louise Barden, our hosts for this walk, have an uncanny knack of ferreting out birds in the only nature preserve inside the city limits -- which they call their “backyard”.

Join them for an enjoyable half day of birding as two teams compete for the “honors” of finding the most species.

If going contact the Bardens - larry@lbarden.com or louise@lbarden.com. Meet along Winterfield Dr. near the front of Winterfield School at 8 AM.

Thursday, February 9th: McDowell Preserve


Saturday, February 11th: McDowell Prairie

McDowell Prairie Nature Preserve, an ongoing effort to restore habitat to the native “grasslands” of yesteryear, is always a delight to bird in the winter months. Raptors and sparrows abound. Recent sightings include bald eagle, kestrel, harrier, and red-headed woodpecker. Throw in an unusual sparrow or two and you have a birder’s gourmet feast.

Veteran bird walk and hawk watch leader Sharon Freeman, formerly of NYC-Central Park, will lead this morning excursion.

Since parking at this site is very limited, we will meet at the Harris Teeter parking lot at the corner of Hwy 49 and Hwy 160 (Steele Creek Rd.) at 8 AM and carpool to the prairie site. If your going, contact Sharon.

February 18th-20th: Alligator River NWR/ Mattamuskeet NWR/ Goose Creek St. Park

Presidents day weekend, a three day holiday for many people, will allow us to head “Down East” to one of the premier birding spots in NC.

On Saturday morning we will visit the newly established Palmetto Peartree Preserve - “3P” - 9,372 acres of pine forest adjacent to Albemarle sound close to Columbia, NC. Home to over 20 clusters of red-cockaded woodpeckers, it’s solitude, marshy areas and sound front make it a great birding spot.

After lunch we head over to Alligator River NWR located east of Columbia. This huge 152,000 acre refuge has a bird list of over 250 species and the largest black bear population on the East Coast. Farm fields in this refuge are famous for wintering raptors. Recent sightings include golden eagle, rough-legged hawk, short eared owls, and mucho harriers.

Sunday morning after breakfast it is on to Mattamuskeet NWR, renown for its wintering population of migratory swans, geese and ducks. Local impoundments draw tens of thousand of waterfowl. It’s truly
**Field Trips Con't.**

A sight and sound to be remembered. With a 40,000 acre shallow lake, 3,500 acres of marsh, 6,000 acres of forest, and 400 acres of cropland, this bird magnet boasts over 235 species of birds.

Monday morning we cap off our trip with a visit to Goose Creek State Park on the Pamlico River near Washington, NC. Park Ranger, Curtis Dykstra, has graciously agreed to lead us on a walk through the marshes, impoundments, and trails of the park. We will search for Virginia and King rails, wintering birds, and waterfowl. Recent sightings include goldeneye, over 150 ruddies, and horned grebes.

During our trip we will be headquartered at The Brickhouse Inn [415 Main St., Columbia, NC - 252-766-3333]. Always gracious and a wonderful host, Lee Brickhouse has set aside his rooms for us that weekend. Rates are about $65 per room and include full breakfast. Book early for the best room selection and say your with the birding group so he will release you a room. Contact Dave Lovett if you are going.

**Sunday, February 26th. Wallace Dairy Farms**

On the Christmas count, we had American pipit, loggerhead shrike, palm warbler, white-crowned sparrow, Wilson snipe and many others. Be prepared for mud unless it’s cold enough for the ground to be frozen.

Then we’ll go to the property of Frank Bragg. The 300 acres, along with an adjacent 500 acres, have been left to the Catawba Lands Conservancy. We birded it the first time on the Christmas count. We’ll walk 2-3 miles (mostly flat) on trails through pine stands, hardwood, open fields and grassy areas. There are also a couple of ponds. Frank will meet us and be our tour guide so we can find our way back to the cars!

We should finish up around 1:00. Meet at 7:30 AM at the University City McDonald’s [across from University hospital]. Contact Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net) if you want to go.

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**For Those Who Still Wonder**

Here’s an answer to the age old dispute over which came first, the chicken or the egg. Scientists say reptiles were laying eggs thousands of years before chickens appeared. The first chicken came from an egg laid by a bird that was not quite a chicken. So according to scientists, the egg came first.
Echinacea

One of the most popular herbs in America today is the Native American medicinal plant known as echinacea. The herb is named for the prickly scales in its large conical seed head, which resemble the spines of an angry hedgehog (echinos is Greek for hedgehog).

Results of archeological digs indicate that Native Americans may have used echinacea for over 400 years to treat infections and wounds and as a general “cure-all.” Echinacea has also been used throughout history to treat scarlet fever, syphilis, malaria, blood poisoning, and diphtheria. Although this herb was popular during the 18th and 19th centuries, its use began to decline in the United States after the introduction of antibiotics. Echinacea preparations became increasingly popular in Germany throughout the 20th century — in fact, almost all of the scientific research on this herb has been conducted in this country.

Today, echinacea is primarily used to reduce the symptoms and duration of the common cold and flu and to alleviate the symptoms associated with them, such as sore throat (pharyngitis), cough, and fever. Many herbalists also recommend echinacea to help boost the activity of the immune system and to help the body fight infections.

Echinacea has tall stems, bears single flowers that are pink or purple, and has a central cone that is usually purplish-brown in color. The large cone is actually a seed head with sharp spines that resemble a stiff comb. Of nine echinacea species, only three are used for medicinal purposes (Echinacea angustifolia, Echinacea pallida, and Echinacea purpurea).

Aloe Vera

The Aloe vera plant has been used for thousands of years to heal a variety of conditions ranging from skin lesions to constipation. It is grown in most subtropical and tropical locations, including South Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Aloe was one of the most frequently prescribed medicines throughout most of the 18th and 19th centuries and it remains one of the most commonly used herbs in the United States today.

Aloe vera is a perennial plant with yellow flowers. The plant can grow up to 4 feet in height and its tough, fleshy, spearlike leaves can grow up to 20 inches long. Only the leaves are used for medicine, but different parts of the leaves can be used for different purposes. For example, the clear, thick gel found in the inner part of the leaf is most commonly used for minor cuts and burns. The bitter yellow juice found between the gel and the outer skin of the leaf is dried and commonly used for laxative purposes.

Cranberry

The medicinal properties of cranberry (Vaccinium macrocarpon) have been recognized for centuries. Native Americans used raw cranberries as a wound dressing. Early settlers from England learned to use the berry both raw and cooked for a number of ailments including appetite loss, digestive problems, blood disorders, and scurvy (vitamin C deficiency that causes weakness, gum disease, and spontaneous bleeding in the skin).

In the early 1920s, American scientists discovered that people who eat large amounts of cranberries have more acid in their urine than those who do not eat high amounts of the berry. Because bacteria cannot survive in an acidic environment,
the researchers speculated that a diet rich in cranberries may help prevent and treat urinary tract infections (UTIs), which are commonly caused by bacteria known as Escherichia coli. In time, the popularity of cranberry for UTIs soared and many women reported satisfactory results from drinking cranberry juice. Although the scientific explanations for its purported benefits have changed through-out the years, there is a significant amount of evidence today to support the use of cranberries to prevent and treat UTIs.

Cranberry

Found primarily in North America and grown in bogs, cranberry is an evergreen shrub that is related to blueberry, buckberry, huckleberry, cowberry, and bilberry. The cranberry bush has upright branches with leaves that are speckled on the underside by tiny dots. Pink flowers blossom and red-black fruits appear during June and July. The ripe fruit of the cranberry is the part used in commercial and medicinal preparations.

The cranberry fruit is high in antioxidants, partly from substances called proanthocyanidins (which give cranberries their rich color). Antioxidants scavenge damaging particles in the body known as free radicals. Free radicals are natural by-products of normal metabolism. But, free radicals can alter cell membranes, tamper with genetic material known as DNA, and even cause cell death. Environmental toxins (including ultraviolet light, radiation, cigarette smoking, and air pollution) can increase the number of free radicals in the body, which are believed to contribute to the aging process as well as the development of a number of health problems such as heart disease, cancer, and infections. Antioxidants can neutralize free radicals and may reduce or even help prevent some of the damage they cause.

Dandelion

While many people think of the common dandelion (Taraxacum officinale) as a pesky weed, herbalists consider it a valuable herb with many culinary and medicinal uses. Dandelion is a rich source of vitamins A, B complex, C, and D, as well as minerals such as iron, potassium, and zinc. Its leaves are often used to add flavor to salads, sandwiches, and teas. The roots can be found in some coffee substitutes and the flowers are used to make certain wines.

In traditional medicine, dandelion roots and leaves have been used to treat liver problems. Native Americans also used dandelion decoctions to treat kidney disease, swelling, skin problems, heartburn, and stomach upset. Chinese medicinal practitioners traditionally used dandelion to treat digestive disorders, appendicitis, and breast problems (such as inflammation or lack of milk flow). In Europe, herbalists incorporated it into remedies for fever, boils, eye problems, diabetes, and diarrhea. Today, dandelion roots are primarily used as an appetite stimulant and digestive aid while dandelion leaves are used as a diuretic to stimulate the excretion of urine.

Hundreds of species of dandelion grow in the temperate regions of Europe, Asia, and North America. Dandelion is a hardy, variable perennial that can grow to a height of nearly 12 inches. Dandelions have deeply notched, toothy, spatula-like leaves that are shiny and hairless. Dandelion stems are capped by a head of bright yellow flowers. The grooved leaves funnel the flow of rainfall into the root.

Dandelion flowers are sensitive to light, so they open with the sun in the morning and close in the evening or during gloomy weather. The dark brown roots are fleshy and brittle and are filled with a white milky substance that is bitter and slightly odorous. Dandelion leaves produce a diuretic effect while the roots act as an appetite stimulant and digestive aid.

The identification of the two eastern red finches of the Carpodacus genus can be extremely difficult. Each species is about the same size and shape, each is colored red with varying degrees of brown streaking, and each is common to feeder areas. What's more, the ranges of these birds overlap quite a bit, primarily owing to the ubiquitous distribution of the House Finch. In certain areas of the West, it is possible to encounter all three species! Here are some tips from Cornell Lab of Ornithology Lab [http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/redfinches.html] that will help you make an accurate ID.

**House Finch**
- Slimmer body with short, stubby bill with curved culmen; long tail faintly notched.
- Intensity of red color varies in males from yellow to orange to red; observer should rely on pattern of color rather than hue;
- “headband” of red with brown cap and brown cheek patch;
- Red chin, upper throat, and breast fades into conspicuously streaked sides;
- Brown wings and back, sometimes lightly washed with red, fades into red rump; brown tail

**Female**
- Very plain face; lacks the strong facial pattern of Purple Finch;
- Dull white underparts have longer, less sharply defined streaks;
- Undertail coverts have broad dark streaks

**Cool fact:**
Male House Finches display extreme color variation, ranging from pale yellow to bright red. The depth of red coloring in each male depends on the amount of carotenoid pigments in the bird’s food sources during the molting period. Studies show that females prefer the brightest and reddest males; presumably the hue and intensity of color are indications of the male’s fitness.

**Purple Finch**
- Plumper body with short, conical beak; shorter, deeply notched tail.
- Deep raspberry color on most of head (including nape, face, and throat) is underlain by darker ear coverts, nape, and malar stripe, making the head appear contrasted at a distance; light stripe over eye; may have peaked crown;
- Raspberry carries onto hindneck
- Reddish color of throat and breast diffuses into a variably but usually faintly streaked lower breast and belly;
- Extensive red color on back in eastern birds, less red in Pacific birds

**Female**
- Strong face pattern: dark auricular patch separates a bold white “eyebrow” and a white moustache;
- Underparts show heavy broad streaks;
- Back and scapulars are brown and streaked;
- Undertail coverts usually white with no streaks

**Cool fact:**
Declines in northeastern Purple Finch populations, especially in suburban areas, may be correlated to competition with expanding introduced populations of the closely related House Finch. Similar declines in suburban Purple Finch populations in the first decade of this century were attributed to expansion of the House Sparrow, another introduced species.
GBBC Activities

To prepare for the Great Backyard Bird Count, Wing Haven Gardens and Bird Sanctuary [248 Ridgewood Avenue] will host a family bird feeding open house: Wednesday, February 1, 2006 at 3:45 p.m ($10/family).

Participants will receive tips on backyard bird feeding and identification, learn how to participate in the Bird Count, and make a special-recipe bird feeder to take home. For more information, call 704-331-0664.

Anyone interested in the bird count is invited to the local Nature Centers and Carolina Raptor Center February 17 – 20, to pick up bird feeding tips, count checklists, and more information on attracting birds to their backyards. Nature center visitors can also sample shade-grown coffee, which is grown on plantations that provide critical habitat for birds. These activities are at:

Reedy Creek Nature Center
2900 Rocky River Road, Charlotte, NC
704-598-8857

Latta Plantation Nature Center
6211 Sample Road, Huntersville, NC
704-875-1391

McDowell Nature Center
15222 York Road, Charlotte, NC
704-588-5224

Carolina Raptor Center
6000 Sample Road, Huntersville, NC
704-875-6521

For more information, call Reedy Creek Nature Center at 704-598-8857 or visit www.parkandrec.com.

Counting Birds (Con’t.)

want to take a snapshot of North American bird populations and YOU can help. Everyone’s contribution is important. It doesn’t matter whether you identify, count, and report the 5 species coming to your backyard feeder or the 75 species you see during a day’s outing to a wildlife refuge. Your data can help answer many questions. How will this winter’s snow and cold temperatures influence bird populations? Where are the WINTER finches and other irruptive species? Will late winter movements of many SONGBIRD and waterfowl species be as far north as they were last year?

The data you collect will be combined with Christmas Bird Count and Project FeederWatch data to provide an immense picture of our winter birds. Every year these data are collected makes them more important and meaningful.

2005 Results

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595  33,557
Board Members

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Calendar of Activities

2/2 McDowell Nature Preserve [Field Trip]
2/2 Medicinal Plants [Monthly Meeting]
2/4 Evergreen Nature Preserve [Field Trip]
2/9 McDowell Nature Preserve (Seniors) [Field Trip]
2/11 McDowell Prairie [Field Trip]
2/18-20 Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge [Field Trip]
2/26 Wallace Dairy Farm/NE Mecklenburg [Field Trip]
3/2 Galapagos Islands [Monthly Meeting]
3/2 McDowell Nature Preserve [Field Trip]

Whoooo’s New?

Chris and Lisa Pittman
Steven Tracy

Mecklenburg Audubon Society

Join now and your membership will be effective until June 2007.

Because National Audubon has reduced the chapter share of the national membership, Mecklenburg Audubon now must offer a Local Membership to cover the cost of the newsletter, web site and cost of meetings.

- Individual Membership [$10]
- Family Membership [$15]

Name

Phone

Address [Street, City, ST, and Zip]

E-mail

- Please, save trees and send me[us] the newsletter electronically.
- Please, add me to Meckbirds, the local electronic discussion list about birds and the environment.
- [we] would be willing to: 
  - lead a field trip 
  - participate in a work day 
  - do a program 
  - serve on the board

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