Monthly Meeting: Thursday, November 1, 2007

The Traveling Birder: California Bound

Just like the birds, bird watchers have a wonderlust. Even though they ‘love’ the birds in their backyards they like to go to new places to see new ones. Hundreds of thousands of birders migrate around the county and some even around the world in search of new feathers.

Ron Clark is one of these wondering birders. He loves to travel not just to see the birds but to experience new wild places as well. At our November meeting he will share with us some of his discoveries on the west coast. He will help us vicariously experience the birds and other wildlife of California, Oregon and Washington. Since he is getting to be an old hand at this, he’ll also give us some tips on where to go and how to plan a trip.

So travel on over to the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church (920 Sharon Amity) on Thursday, Nov. 1st and be transported to the other coast. Nibbles and drinks will be available from 7:15 PM in the fellowship hall. The program will begin around 7:45 PM. See you all there.

Evergreen Master Plan Community Workshop

Winterfield Elementary
(adjacent to Sheffield Park and Evergreen Nature Preserve)
Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2007
7:00 PM

This is the first/initial community workshop regarding the master planning of this nature preserve. All interested individuals are encouraged to attend.

There is still pressure to take some of this property and create soccer fields. We need to let the planners know that 90% of the community still wants this property to be a nature preserve. We also want to encourage them to make improvements to the property so that the neighbor schools can use it for environmental education.

A Brief History of Evergreen Nature Preserve

Evergreen Nature Preserve derives its namesake from the adjacent Evergreen Cemetery on Central Avenue. The City of Charlotte purchased 200 acres for Evergreen Cemetery in the early 1940’s as an alternative to the nearly full Elmwood Cemetery. Only 50 acres were developed for plots, and through the years, families in the surrounding neighborhoods of Sheffield Park, Eastway, and Medford Acres used the undeveloped and forested areas of the cemetery for hiking, walking, mountain biking and bird watching.

In April 1977, Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department began discussions with the City of Charlotte on the possibility of utilizing a portion of the undeveloped cemetery for a district park and proposed in its 1989 Park Master Plan a park in the cemetery’s vicinity. In December 2000, the community submitted a petition to the Department requesting that nearly 80 acres of the cemetery property be protected as forest habitat and that any needs for active recreation facilities be developed at the adjacent schools instead. 90% of community workshop attendees during that same month supported that proposal. On October 2, 2001, the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners unanimously voted to accept 77 acres of City of Charlotte owned property at Evergreen Cemetery and designate the parcel as nature preserve in accordance with the 1997 Nature Preserve Master Plan. Thus Evergreen Nature Preserve was born.

The preserve’s natural communities are primarily upland hardwood forests with a couple of forest openings or glades. Several tributaries flow through the preserve and empty into Edward’s Branch and the Edward’s Branch wetlands. Remnants of the historic Potter Road, one of the two main roads in Mecklenburg County in 1775, can be seen near the Evergreen Nature Preserve and Sheffield Park border.
Field Trips

Saturday, Nov. 3rd: Ann Springs Close Greenway, Ft. Mill, SC
1/2 Day Field Trip - Leader: Dennis Lankford

For this walk we have selected the “Barn” area of the greenway with open horse, goat, and cattle pastures, a pair of historic one room buildings, a picnic area set among old hardwood trees, a farm pond, and riparian woods along a section of the creek bed. This varied habitat usually provides some great birding along with the opportunity to observe migrating raptors. Longtime MAS member Dennis Lankford will lead us.

Because of road changes in the area, we will meet at the service station on the corner of HWY 21 and BUS 21 at 8 AM. There is a $2 day use fee at the greenway. Restrooms are available at the parking area.

Contact Dennis at 704-541-6909 to register or HARECUBED2@Carolina.RR.COM

Thursday, Nov. 8th: Lower McAlpine Greenway
1/2 Day Field Trip - Leader: John Buchman

Fellow MAS member John Buchman will be leading us on this morning walk along Lower McAlpine Creek Greenway in search of late migrants and wintering birds, an easy, paved walkway. This section of the greenway can be quite pleasant without the heavy weekend neighborhood traffic.

Meet John at 8:30 AM at the entrance to the Shandon Circle greenway access. Sign up for the trip with John at 704-541-7433 or Linbuckman@AOL.COM

Sat./Sun., Nov. 11 /10th- 11th: Hilton Head/Savannah River NWR, Weekend Field Trip - Leader: Dave Lovett

Two years ago we had a wonderfully successful trip to Hilton Head Island and decided to revisit again this year. Saturday we will bird Fish Haul Park and Creek on Hilton Head, and then after a PICNIC LUNCH, visit Pinckney NWR accessed from the causeway to Hilton head. Saturday evening we will gather for dinner at the Old Oyster Factory and recount our adventures of the day.

Sunday morning we are off to the Savannah NWR Auto Drive just a short distance to the south. At the refuge we will drive the dykes and bird the impoundments and hammocks. We should finish up in the early PM for the drive home.

Hilton Head and adjoining Bluffton on the mainland offer many types of accommodations. Meet in the Nature Museum parking lot located on the right hand side of the causeway as you drive on to the island.

Sign up with Dave Lovett 704-507-7677 or birdsalot@webtv.net.

Thursday, Nov. 15th: Landsford Canal St. Park, SC
1/2 Day Field Trip - Leader: Dave Lovett

Today we will head south for a walk along the lower reaches of the Catawba River. Landsford Canal is in my book, one of the most picturesque of parks located within a short drive of south Charlotte. We will be birding the nature trail which follows the shoals of the Catawba River and return along the old towpath trail in search of both land and water loving species.

Meet at 8:30 AM in the Crossroads Mall parking lot which is off the entrance drive into Carowinds Theme Park from Carowinds Blvd. From there we will carpool to the park entrance, birding as we go. There is a small $2 entrance fee per vehicle. Facilities are available at the park.

Contact Dave Lovett at birdsalot@webtv.net or call 704-507-7677 to register for the trip.

All Mecklenburg Audubon Field Trips are free and open to the public. Directions for all trips can be found on the Mecklenburg Audubon website - meckbirds.org. Click on Field Trips. 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 they don’t know you are coming, they might leave without you!!

White-throated Sparrow

Hemt Thrush

Ruby-crowned Kinglet
**Field Trips**

**Saturday, Nov. 17th: Beginning Birder Walk (Francis Beatty Park)**

1/2 Day Field Trip - Leader: Andrea Owens

The third and final beginning birding walk for the fall will again take place at Francis Beatty Park with Andrea Owens as the leader. Winter migrants should have arrived to pose some new identifying challenges.

We will meet at 9 AM in the main building parking lot. It is the left turn that leads you to the paddleboat rental area. This trip is limited to 10 folks so you need to sign up with Andrea at andreaoemens1@yahoo.com or 704-651-2232.

**Saturday, Nov. 17th: Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge**

1/2 Day Field Trip - Leader: John Bonestell

Come bird our local Charlotte Important Bird Area on this fall morning with fellow MAS member John Bonestell, who birds this site quite regularly.

Depending on the drought situation we may find arriving ducks or shorebirds along with wintering resident species. If time allows we may also visit the fields of nearby Rural Hill Preserve.

Sign up for the walk with John at JMCBLAKE@AOL.COM or call 704-896-2300 to register.

**Saturday, Nov. 24th: Southport/Bald Head Island, NC**

Full Day Field Trip - Leader: Taylor Piephoff

We will continue our yearly tradition of Thanksgiving at the Beach this year with a Saturday, November 24 trip to Bald Head Island and the Southport, NC area. Late November may be the very best time of year to visit Bald Head Island. Late fall landbird migrants like western kingbird are very possible, and there should be lots of loafing gulls, terns, and shorebirds on the beaches. We will spend some time ocean-watching for loons, grebes, sea ducks, and jaegers; yet still have time for maritime forest, freshwater pond, and salt marsh birding.

If time permits, we will explore Shepard Road, site of North Carolina’s only record for green-tailed towhee, and other seasonal rarities.

Bald Head Island is accessible only by boat or ferry. The private ferry is $15.00 dollars round-trip, with $5.00 per day parking at the terminal. Once over on the island, we will rent 6 or 4-passenger golf carts depending on the number of participants. Be prepared to pay around $20.00 per person for golf cart rental.

For non-birders, Southport is rich in history with attractions such as the Smithville Cemetery, and across the Cape Fear River you will find Fort Fisher and the NC Aquarium. Fishing Charters are also available inshore and offshore.

Contact Taylor Piephoff at PiephoffT@aol.com or 704-545-2314 by NOVEMBER 15 if you plan to attend.

**Saturday, Dec. 1st: Wintering Waterfowl**

Hopefully, the drought will not affect the ducks to severely. Numbers and locations of ducks this year could be very interesting. Coddle Creek Reservoir is usually the place to see waterfowl in the Charlotte area so we will plan this trip for there. However, depending on water conditions we may change our destination. We’ll have to wait and see if it rains any time soon.

For now we will plan on meeting at Panera’s Bread at the across from Concord Mills Mall off I-85 at 9 AM and will return about 1 PM. Before we head out to the reservoir we’ll check out the wetlands behind H.H. Gregg. Contact Judy Walker at 704-537-8181 or birdwalker@mac.com if you are interested in going on this trip.

Detailed directions to meeting spots are available on the Mecklenbird Audubon web site: http://meckbirds.org
Birds We Love to Hate

Starlings: Slow Change Artists

Last spring a friend of mine, who although she’s not a birder knows the common species, emailed me asking me to identify a bird. Her description was of an iridescent black bird with blues and greens and a yellow beak. Because it was so beautiful she thought it might be an exotic bird so she took a picture of it. Of course when I opened the file, a handsomely clad European Starling stared back at me in all his breeding plumage glory. My friend was a little taken aback when I told her it was a starling since she felt she was well acquainted with this species. I told her familiarity does not always mean we really know a bird. And this is certainly the case with starlings.

Most folks are aware that the starling is not a native North American species. The exact details of its introduction to the states is not known, but there is a wide spread rumor that a gentleman named Eugene Schieffelin, a member of the Acclimation Society of North America, released somewhere between 60-100 birds in Central Park in New York City sometime in the 1890s. Reputedly he and his society wanted to introduce to North America all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare’s plays, the starling Starlings: Slow Change Artists was mentioned in Henry IV, but there is no real proof of this claim and it is probably an urban myth.

It is, however, a fact that all of the over 200 million starlings now residing in North America came from the birds released in Central Park. Sometime in the late 1890s the first starling nest was discovered in the eaves of American Museum of Natural History in New York City, which sits across from Central Park. The speed at which this bird colonized its new home is nothing short of spectacular. Wintering birds reached northern Florida in 1918. Maine and Ontario recorded nesting in 1920s. By the 1940s they had reached the Pacific coast and they were finally spotted in Alaska in the 1970s. This species managed to conquer the continent in less then 100 years. It took the Europeans almost 300 years!

This rapid dissemination across the continent was due primarily to the starling’s adaptability to new environments and tolerance of humans. They seem to prefer man-altered environments and like to forage in open areas with short, mown lawns or grazed grasslands. Although they tend to avoid woodlands, arid chaparral and desert, one of the few birds I saw while driving through Joshua Tree National Park was a starling sitting on top of a cactus!! Moving your feeder under a canopy of trees is also one way to deter them from eating you out of house and home.

We generally picture these birds walking around the sidewalks of cities and towns eating discarded food. But although they can exploit a variety of food sources, they prefer to eat invertebrates, fruits, berries, and grains. In fact in the spring and summer during breeding season they love to comb lawns for grubs, Japanese beetles and moths. They sure beat using a lot of chemicals to get rid of those pests.

These highly social birds do not defend a territory beyond their cavity nest site. Males are, however, very protective of their mates. They are monogamous and both sexes help raise the young. Anywhere from three to eight eggs are laid in each clutch and they can nest as many as three times per breeding season.

It is their aggressive protection of nesting sites that has given these birds a bad rap. They are known to evict occupants from desirable holes, including the woodpeckers that excavated them. Bluebirds, chickadees, titmice and other small cavity dwelling birds have suffered loss of habitat due to the starling’s tenacity and size. However, providing nest boxes with smaller holes has help lessen the impact.

Probably the most fascinating characteristic of the starling is its voice. Both males and females (especially in the fall) sing and make a variety of calls and whistles including their infamous ‘wolf whistle’. Males typically sing two types of songs, one consisting of loud whistles and the other a so-called ‘warbling song’. It’s that warbling song that can be very interesting since they like their cousins the thrashers and mockingbird will incorporate songs of other birds. An individual

Continued on page 6
November 6th
Land Bonds Referendum

In addition to the school bonds and the Central Piedmont Community College bonds, the third bond referendum on the November 6 ballot will be for $35.6 million for Mecklenburg County to acquire land for watershed protection, to expand parks and greenways and to acquire land for a new public library in northern Mecklenburg County.

- $31,590,000 - watershed protection/nature preserve acquisition
- $2,400,000 - greenway acquisition
- $1,650,000 - and for a new library

Specifically the money would be used to:

• Acquire 4,600 feet of shoreline and 219 acres at Mt. Island Lake
  Mountain Island Lake (MIL) is Mecklenburg County’s water supply. In 2006 water quality in the MIL watershed decreased for the first time, with higher levels of sediment, bacteria and other pollutants (2006 LUESA Report). A long-standing goal has been to protect 80% of MIL’s shoreline and 80% of its tributaries. To date, 74% of the shoreline and 20% of the tributaries have been protected.

• Acquire an additional 435 acres for County nature preserves.
  Mecklenburg County Nature Preserves already protect 14 miles of shoreline at MIL and its tributaries, in addition to providing passive and active recreation to the county’s 850,000 people. While we have wonderful nature preserves (5,800 acres), the county lags far behind other urbanizing counties in acquiring and protecting nature preserves relative to our population and population growth.

• Acquire an additional 200+ acres to expand the county’s greenways
  Greenways provide recreational opportunities, filter pollutants, help absorb floodwaters and preserve open space along creeks. About 60% of the land needed to complete Little Sugar Creek Greenway has been acquired. This money would make significant additional acquisitions along this, Mecklenburg County’s signature greenway and other greenways.

Don’t Forget
VOTE
NOV. 6, 2007
**Starlings**

can mimic up to 20 different species including Eastern Wood Pewee, Killdeer and meadowlarks. It appears that longer songs are more successful at attracting a mate. But bird songs are not all they mimic. They will also incorporate sounds from their environment. In Europe starlings are often kept in cages because they can be taught to whistle tunes and speak like a parrot.

But why did I call them slow change artists? Well that brings me back to my friend’s original identification request. Most of the year starlings walk around in their basic plumage which is primarily black with flecks or spots of yellow or white. This is the image most of us conjure up when we think of these birds. Starlings molt into their basic plumage at the end of the breeding season, but unlike other birds they do not molt again into breeding plumage in the spring. That’s because the spots of their basic plumage are an illusion created because their feathers are only fringed in white or yellow. It is only the very ends of the feathers that are colored not an entire feather. As time progresses toward the breeding season the tips of the feather wear off. By the time spring arrives all the spots are gone and the birds are clad in feathers that are black but have an iridescent green or blue quality caused by the structure of the feather. Their beak also goes through a transition. During the basic plumage it is black but glows yellow during the breeding season. So they don’t change their ‘clothes’ quickly like other birds do in the spring. They do it slowly over the course of the fall and winter. Therefore, they are slow change artists!!

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**Ask Audubon**

I’m about to do a big holiday house cleaning, and I want to minimize my impact on the environment and on my family’s health. Can you recommend effective household cleaning products (either commercial or homemade) that won’t harm the environment while cleaning bathroom surfaces, kitchen floors, windows and blinds?

-- Submitted by Elaine O. of NY

There are a number of green cleansers available today. These products are made without the petrochemicals, chlorine, phosphates and other toxins that are contained in many common cleaning products. The site http://www.newdream.org/consumer/cleaners.php will give you a fairly comprehensive list of ecological cleansers.

It is also possible to make your own cleansers with a few simple ingredients such as vinegar and baking soda. Studies have shown that a 5% solution of vinegar kills 99 percent of bacteria, 82 percent of mold, and 80 percent of germs (viruses). Two tablespoons of vinegar can be dissolved in two cups of water to create a basic household cleanser. For many great tips on homemade cleansers see http://www.care2.com/channels/lifestyle/home#55.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of products used in the home and school. This has prompted New York to become the first state to institute green cleaning legislation requiring all schools and government agencies to use environmentally benign cleansers. To read more about this see http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/fac-plan/greenclean.htm.

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**For the Birding Geek**

If you feel you aren’t challenged enough when you are out birding, try some of these online quizzes that will hone your identification skills.

- http://www.americanbirding.org/photoquiz/
- http://www.aves.net/publications/quizfaces-00.html
Tips for Novice Birders: Body Parts

It can be confusing sometimes trying to identify a new bird, especially if you aren’t familiar with the vocabulary used to describe the ‘parts’ of a bird. What’s the difference between an eye-brow (over the eye) and an eye-line (through the eye)? And what the hey is a supercillum (big word for eye-brow)? Here’s a diagram that should help you learn the basic parts of a bird. So the next time you look at your book’s description of a bird you won’t think it’s in a foreign language.

Mecklenburg Audubon Society
Join now and your membership will be effective until June 2008.

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, website & cost of meetings.

Name
Phone
Address [Street, City, ST, and Zip]
E-mail

- Individual Membership [$10]
- Family Membership [$15]
- Please, save trees and send me/us the newsletter electronically.
- Please, add me to Meckbirds, the local listserv about birds and the environment.
- I/we would be willing to lead a field trip.
- I/we would be interested in participating in a work day.
- I/we would be willing to do a program.

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Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. - Rachel Carson
To raise funds for our support of 40 Audubon Adventures classrooms, we are going to add a new feature to our January meeting - a Silent Auction. We already have three cold-cast porcelain sculpted hummingbird plates from the Maruri “Treasures of the Sky” collection auctioned. Each plate is new, in its original packaging, and includes a Certificate of Authenticity from Maruri USA. The plates are valued at $33 each. Members are encouraged to donate items for this worthy cause, items can be new or lightly used and can be brought to the November and December meetings.

Please let Terry Hamilton (THam9281@aol.com) or Andrea Owens (andreaowens1@yahoo.com) know if you have items for donation.

Coming Attraction

Have you ever heard of these birds? Do you know their real names?

- Water Turkey
- Water Witch
- Hurricane Bird
- Wavey
- Fly-up-the-creek
- Lady-of-the-Waters
- Thunder Pump
- Fool Hen
- Bald Plate
- Preacher

Name That Bird!