Audubon News

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Monthly Meeting

Wonderful Woodpeckers

What’s that knocking on your tree? It’s probably one of five species of woodpeckers that are common in the Charlotte area. As the leaves begin to fall, seeing and identifying birds becomes a lot easier so this month we are going to take a closer look at these fascinating birds. How is it they can bang that little head so often and not rattle their brains? How do they stay on the side of that trunk? How do they excavate their nest cavities? We’ll get answers to these questions plus learn how to tell the difference between downy and hairy woodpeckers and much more.

So rattle your bones and join us Thursday, October 4th in the fellowship hall of the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church at 920 Sharon Amity at 7:30 PM. See you all there.

Land Bonds on November 6 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 for watershed protection and nature preserve acquisition
$ 2,400,000 for greenway acquisition
$ 1,650,000 for land for a new library

Specifically the money would be used to:

• Acquire 4,600 feet of shoreline and 219 acres at Mountain 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.

Remember to VOTE ON NOVEMBER 6, 2007
Field Trips

Saturday, Oct. 6th: Ribbon Walk Nature Preserve
1/2 Day Field Trip - Leader: Ron Clark

With over 192 acres of natural woodlands, comprising the southern end of Nevin Park, Ribbon Walk Forest lies largely untouched and unnoticed just minutes away from downtown Charlotte, NC. It is a woodland oasis in the heart of the city of Charlotte. The forest includes woodland and wetland habitat with several miles of nature trails and a variety of native flora and fauna. An extraordinary grove of old-age beech trees designated as a “treasure tree grove” stands out as one of the most impressive features of the forest. There are also picturesque mature pines, flowering trees and other native hardwoods. Wetland features include several ponds and meandering streams. Native wildflowers dot the forest floor.

There should still be birds migrating through. We have seen Golden-winged Warblers and Mourning Warblers but the birding gods were probably just playing with us.

We'll meet in the parking lot at 8 AM. Contact Ron if you are planning on participating at 704-866-0811 (home), 704-866-9495 (shop) or waxwing@bellsouth.net.

Sunday, Oct. 7, 2007: Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge
Full Day Field Trip - Leader Judy Walker

When birders think of National Wildlife Refuges places like Pea Island, Chincoteague or Merrit Island spring to mind. Places on the coast. But there are literally hundreds of smaller refuges across the country that protect unique habitat for both flora and fauna. Pee Dee NWR is one of the smaller refuges tucked away in a not so glamorous place - the NC Piedmont. But the refuge is a unique and wonderful place to wander for hours at a time and not see anyone else.

Wild flowers and butterflies are usually abundant this time of the year. Migrants should still be moving through. You never know what you're going to see on the refuge.

There will be a fair amount of easy walking so wear comfortable shoes. We will eat on the refuge so remember to bring a lunch, snacks and plenty of water.

We'll meet at the McDonald’s at Windsor Square at 7 AM. Contact Judy if you are planning on going at 704-537-8181 or birdwalker@mac.com.

Thursday, Oct. 11, 2007: Six Mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day Field Trip - Leader: Dave Lovett

This small, rarely birded greenway, has offered surprises over the last couple of years including olive-sided flycatcher, swainsons and kentucky warbler, black-billed cuckoo, white-crowned sparrow and eastern screech owl.

A paved, easy, one mile long trail provides access to the streams, trees and under story at this greenway. Join us at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Marvin Rd just before the Union County Line. Contact Dave at 704-507-7677 or birdsalot@webtv.net if you want to participate.

Saturday, Oct. 13, 2007: Beginning Birders
1/2 Day Field Trip - Leader: Andrea Owens

The second of our fall series of beginning birder field trips will investigate Colonel Francis Beatty Community Park. We’ll be looking for local residents and the arrival of winter visitors.

We will meet at 8:30 AM in the main building parking lot. It is the left turn that leads you to the paddle boat rentals. Contact Andrea if you plan to go at 704-651-2232 or andreaowens1@yahoo.com.

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!!
Field Trips

Saturday, Oct. 13, 2007: Moore Property (NE Mecklenburg County)  
1/2 Day Field Trip - Leader: Ken Kneidel  
No, we haven’t made a mistake. We have really scheduled two field trips on the same day. Ken Kneidel will lead this inaugural field trip to a very promising property on the east side of town. Primarily created for mountain bike riders it also has a wide variety of habitats which protect several birds species of special concern in the county, including Kentucky warbler and Grasshopper Sparrow. The warbler won’t be around but the potential for some odd winter sparrows is great.  
We will meet at 8 AM in the parking lot on Rocky River Church Rd. just north of Camp Stewart Rd. (It will be on the left if you are coming from Camp Stewart Rd.) There will be a lot of walking so wear sturdy shoes; bring plenty of water & snacks, and be prepared to wander through a new area of the county. Contact Ken at 704-365-5609 or kendal2@earthlink.net if you plan to go.

Tuesday, Oct. 16, 2007: Wing Haven  
Afternoon Field Trip - Leader: Dave Lovett  
Wing Haven Garden and Bird Sanctuary, in the heart of Myers Park, was created by Elizabeth & Eddie Clarkson and has become an island of green amid the Charlotte sprawl. Because Wing Haven is only open from 3 -5 PM on Tuesdays we thought we would try an afternoon field trip to this lovely setting. Birds are always plentiful and the trees and bushes often hold some surprises.  
We will meet in the Wing Haven parking lot at 3 PM. Although there are a lot of nooks and crannies to investigate walking will be very easy, more like ambling. Contact Dave at 704-507-7677 or birdsalot@webtv.net if you want to participate.

Saturday, Oct. 20, 2007: Huntington Beach St Park, Myrtle Beach, SC  
Full Day - Leader: Judy Walker  
This is our fall sojourn to a South Carolina birding hot spot. Fall migrants – hawks and warblers – will still be moving through, wintering shorebirds will have settled in and a few ducks may also have begun arriving. This is probably one of the best times of the year for Peregrine Falcons and Merlins, and I am sure we will be delighted with spectacular views of hundreds, if not thousands, of tree swallows. It is a wonderful time of year to be on the beach.  
We will meet in the parking lot on the east side of the causeway at 7:30 AM. It can get pretty hot so remember a hat, sunscreen and plenty of water. We will eat lunch in the park so you will also need to bring food.  
Since many participants stay for the weekend, we usually go out to dinner on Saturday night. At dinner we will plan where we will go on Sunday. Contact Judy if you are planning on going at 704-537-8181 or birdwalker@mac.com.

Saturday, Oct. 27, 2007: Evergreen Nature Preserve  
1/2 Day Field Trip - Leaders: Larry & Louise Barden  
The walk at Evergreen Nature Preserve, hosted by MAS board members Larry and Louise Barden, is a favorite trip no matter what time of the year.  
Located close to downtown Charlotte, this urban birding "gem" is a must-see for any new members and a return favorite for many. Come see why the Bardens went to such great lengths to help establish this safe haven, protected from developers and well-intentioned multiple-use advocates. And why the preserve has been “adopted” by our chapter, including installing benches at birding hotspots.  
We will spend a 1/2 day exploring the preserve. This late in the fall, we should be able to see some late migrants as well as some early winter-resident arrivals. Meet at 8 AM in the Winterfield Elementary School parking lot, in front of the new school playground, located at the end of Winterfield road off Central Ave. Contact the Bardens at 704-535-6385 or louise@lbarden.com if you plan to go.
Birds We Love to Hate

Blue Jays: Bully or Benefactor

Most people when seeing a group of jays come swooping into their backyard feeders also notice how all the other birds seem to disappear. So they assume the rancorous birds are bullies and have chased all the birds away so they can have the feeder to themselves. That’s what I used to think, too. But since moving my feeder to right outside my kitchen window I have noticed a different scene. Yes, the birds still do take off when the Blue Jays swoop in but within a few minutes they are back jostling for position and tasty morsels with their larger cousins. So why did they disappear in the first place? Well it might have something to do with the fact that the Blue Jay’s silhouette in flight is very similar to an accipiter’s – rounded wings, long tail – and they are about the same size as a Sharp-shinned Hawk or small Cooper’s Hawk. At catching sight of such a silhouette, every small, red-blooded avian species knows not to wait and get a better look at field marks. They know they need to disappear. Once they see the coast is clear they are back at the feeders.

I have heard some jays give great renditions of the Red-shouldered Hawk’s call just before appearing at the feeders. But the response of the birds is often mixed. If they fly in, most birds scatter. If they come through the trees or bushes, the birds often will stay put. One would think if they wanted to scare the birds they would learn to mimic the accipiter calls. Most Red-shoulders and Broad-wing Hawks (another call often in a jay’s repertoire) don’t snack on birds.

Although some folks find the jay’s calls/songs loud and annoying, some of their vocalizations can be helpful to both birds and bird watchers. They are usually the first to sound the alarm if there is a predator such as a hawk, cat or snake in the area. They also do a good job of announcing the presence of birders as well since we are strangers on their territory. Although they usually lose interest in us relatively quickly, but the damage has been done – the little birds have gone into hiding. On the other hand if you are out and about and hear a chorus of jays making a racket, you should go and see what’s up. Often they have found an owl or hawk for you. I guess that’s to make up for when they scare all the little guys away.

There’s another myth that may contribute to the gangster reputation of these birds: That they rob nests and eat eggs and babies. To be sure, there are probably a couple of individuals here and there that do this. Audubon probably witnessed such a scene and then painted it for posterity, forever labeling the jays as robbers. However, research has determined that only about 1-3% of the jay’s diet comes from eggs. It is true the jay is an opportunist and a scavenger at times. So it is just as likely they could have picked those morsels up from eggs in abandoned nests and/or ones that had fallen out of the nest. Jays have been observed picking up window kills much like crows.

In fact most of the Blue Jay’s diet consists of plant material, especially acorns. Some feel the Blue Jay has a type of symbiotic relationship with oak trees. Their mouths are specifically adapted to be able to eat acorns, which they prefer even when presented with other nuts such as peanuts. What they don’t eat immediately they bury to recover later in the winter when food is scarce. They are very good at relocating their cache, finding 60-80% of what they buried. It’s to the oak tree’s advantage that they don’t find all of them since the unfound acorns have a good chance of growing into new trees. I read somewhere that after the glaciers began to recede the jays gave the oak tree an advantage over trees with wind born seeds, distributing their acorns more widely through the forest.

Blue Jays are extremely intelligent and have a rather complex social structure. They spend most of the year in small flocks of usually related birds although an unattached bird can be welcomed into the group. While in flocks they can be boisterous and noisy. But there are two times during the year that they are relatively quiet. Often in

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We are half way to raising $500 dollars to donate to the North Carolina Birding Trail group in support of publishing the Piedmont NC Birding Trail Book which includes most of the birding spots in our area. The NC Birding Trail group is the non-profit organization spearheading the creation of a North Carolina Birding Trail similar to those created in Texas and Florida. They have already published the coastal guidebook, which we have for sale at our meetings. To fund the publishing of the piedmont guidebook they have secured a grant but they can only use the money if they raise matching funds. The MAS board felt we could help raise funds for this project using a type of ‘pyramid scheme’. The board will match donations from members dollar for dollar up to a total of $500. We will then give that money to the Carolina Bird Club, which will match our contribution dollar for dollar up to $1,000. They will then give the money to NC Birding Trail folks who then get a dollar for dollar match from the grant. So if you contribute $25, the MAS board will match that to make $50. Then the Carolina Bird Club will match that $50 to make $100. And finally the grant will match that money to make $200. So your $25 contribution will actually be worth $200!

Why do we think this is worth your contribution? These books are sold to birders from all over the country to be used when they come to our area to visit. I regularly receive requests for information about birding in our area so there is really a demand for the book. And these birders bring tourism dollars to the area. Also, the identification of birding spots in the area that bring in tourism dollars will provide economic ammunition for protecting these areas. Finally, we will be selling the books as a fundraiser for MAS!

Please consider contributing to this worthy cause by returning your donation with the accompanying form. Your contribution will be helping birds, birders, the region, and MAS.
Audubon News

THE BIG SIT RETURNS!
SUNDAY, OCT. 14, 2007
COWAN’S FORD WILDLIFE REFUGE

Many years ago the New Haven, CT bird club started a birding event called the "BIG SIT," which has gained quite a bit in popularity over the years. The object of this event is to pick a location and from within 17 ft of this location, see how many species of birds can be seen or heard in a 24-hour period.

Last year the BIG SIT on the viewing stand at Cowan’s Ford Refuge yielded 49 species including a migrating Peregrine Falcon. We won top honors for both North and South Carolina as storms knocked out the coastal sites. This year will be even more of a challenge with a new sit at Pea Island NWR expected to win top state honors. So we need as many eyes and ears as we can fit on the viewing stand!!

Come join us on the platform any time from dawn to dusk for as long as you can. We will keep a running tally of what we see. Although this is an all day event, you don’t have to be there all day. If you can great! If not drop in for several hours during the day to help us count.

If we are really lucky we might win the Golden Bird prize, which is $500 from Swarovski Optik. For more information on the National Big Sit and previous year stats check out 2007 Big Sit on the Bird Watcher’s Digest web site.

We’ll have hot coffee and tea and a grill for hot dogs or you can bring your own picnic lunch. Bring some folding chairs if you plan to be around for a while. This is a great way to get to know some of your birding colleagues. During the counting lulls there will be time to swap birding adventure stories. You don’t have to tell us you’re coming, just show up when you can.

For more information contact Dave Lovett at birdsalot@webtv.net or 704-507-7677

For the Birding Geek

Bird Cinema - YouTube for birders. Birdcinema.com is a place for people to post many different types of bird videos. Our goal with this site is to provide a community of people who love birds, domestic and wild. We hope both amateurs and professionals will come to the site and share their bird videos and a little about the bird, the video, or whatever else they feel is relevant. With the help of professionals such as yourself we will be able to make this site educational and informative. Submission of videos is simple: upload the videos just as you would upload a YouTube video.

Blue Jays (Cont.)

the spring folks ask me where have all the Blue Jays gone. Well, they haven’t gone anywhere they have just become silent and secretive. Unlike other birds that sing up a storm during breeding season, Blue Jays become amazingly silent. It’s not until their young have fledged--they usually have 5 per nest--and the flocks begin to form again in August that you begin to hear their varied, weird vocalizations again. The other time they remain silent is when they migrate. Our birds are probably permanent residents but birds from farther north move in for the winter swelling the numbers in our woods. This time of the year if you are paying attention you can see small flocks of Blue Jays moving quietly through the sky during the day. They aren’t strong flyers so they tend to stop to rest and feed often on their long journey. If you have some birds camping out at your feeders this time of the year they are probably migrants since your local birds will tend to use the feeders like a grocery store. They come in, take what they want and stash it somewhere for safekeeping.

When it first swept through the country the West Nile Virus hit Blue Jays hard along with crows, robins, chickadees, bluebirds, titmice and house wrens. However, their population along with the House Wren’s has recovered to their pre-1999 levels.

So the next time you see these attractive birds at your feeder, take a closer look at them and ponder their life anew. They really aren’t the bullies some have made them out to be. They are citizens of your neighborhood avian community and as such have the same rights and responsibilities as all the other birds who make up that community.
**Tips for Novice Birders: Locating the Bird**

*Where is that bird?*

Probably the hardest thing about bird watching is not identifying the bird, but telling someone else where it is. My favorite response to the question “where is it?” is “in the tree”. It does help if you know what kind of tree or shrub the bird is in but in the winter that’s sometimes hard because the trees don’t have leaves. Here’s a tip about how to describe the location of a bird to someone else. Try visualizing a clock super imposed over the tree or shrub where the bird is located, like the picture to the left. Put the center of the clock in the center of the tree/bush and then determine where the bird is by telling its position on the clock. So the bird in the sample picture is between 10 and 11 so it’s at 10:30. If the bird isn’t at the outer edge of the tree you should then indicate how far from the edge the bird is like one or two feet in from the edge.

Another way to describe the bird’s location is to look for some unique identifying ‘landmark’ near the bird like a curved branch, different colored leaves, opening in the leaves, etc.

*Using Binoculars*

Finding a bird with your binoculars can be challenging when you first begin bird watching. Here’s a little hint – keep your eyes on the bird and just bring the binoculars up to your eyes without moving them. At first this feels funny, but it will become automatic after you’ve done it a number of times. If you need to, practice doing this in your backyard while focusing on a tree or your feeder. It really does work.

*Nature holds the key to our aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive, and even spiritual satisfaction. Each species is a masterpiece, a creation assembled with extreme care and genius. -- Edward O. Wilson*
Audubon News
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Who’s New??

Dori Cerbone
Cynthia Dienemann
Laura Domingo
Michael Kirschman
Tom & Carla Ledford
Kevin Metcalf
Candace York

Activities Calendar

10/4 Wonderful Woodpeckers (Monthly Meeting)
10/6 Ribbon Walk Preserve (Field Trip)
10/7 Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge (½ day Field Trip)
10/11 Six Mile Creek Greenway (½ day Field Trip)
10/13 Moore Property, (Field Trip)
10/14 Big Sit, Cowan’s Ford Refuge
10/20 Huntington Beach, SC (Field Trip)
10/27 Evergreen Preserve (Field Trip)
11/1 Monthly Meeting
11/10-11 Hilton Head/Savannah River NWR, SC (Weekend Field Trip)
11/24 Southport/Bald Head Island, NC (Full day Field Trip)

Tree Seedling Sale

It is time to place your orders for the upcoming Tree Seedling Sale sponsored by Mecklenburg Soil and Water Conservation District. The deadline for tree orders is October 31st.

Trees not only create wildlife and plant diversity, they also can help save money by reducing energy costs! Not to mention, they reduce soil erosion, noise pollution, and air pollution. For more information go to www.mecklenburgconservation.com then click on Fall Newsletter.

Tree Seedling Sale