The Night Stalkers

Most of us when we hear the word heron think of the Great Blue Heron which stands silently at the end of a pond acting more like a sentry than a bird. You may have also heard folks mention some heron rookeries along a couple of our greenways. But did you know that if you live in the Cotwold or Plaza Midwood area of Charlotte you could have a heron nesting in your backyard. Now that’s a great yard bird even if it can get a bit messy.

These aren’t your typical heron. They are the night feeding Yellow-crown Night-heron. And Ken Kneidel has been keeping track of these fascinating birds for a number of years now. At our May meeting Ken will discuss what he has found out about these birds - what they look like, food preferences, where they like to nest and how they are similar and/or different from other herons in the area. He’ll also try to answer the big question - what are they doing in an urban area?

So skulk on over to the fellowship hall of the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church (920 Sharon Amity) on Thursday, May 8th at 7:30 PM. Refreshments start at 7:15 PM. Don’t forget to bring a cup for your beverage.

Win An Evergreen One-of-a-Kind

Be the first to hang a Brad Kuntz unique, original photo in your house while you support the Audubon Adventures program in the schools! It’s easy, just enter Mecklenburg Audubon’s raffle.

The 11”x14” photograph Goldfinch on Thistle is hand-signed, dated and numbered (1/1) by photographer Brad Kuntz. The finished size of this custom-framed piece is 16”x20”. The photograph is archivally matted and suspended above a background of hand-made paper, behind anti-fade conservation glass.

You can view the framed picture on display at the Mecklenburg Audubon meetings in April and May before the winning ticket is drawn at our annual picnic in June.

Tickets are just $5 for one or $10 for three. So don’t miss your chance to own this beautiful original piece of art. The more tickets you buy, the greater your chance of winning.

At the same time, you will support the Mecklenburg Audubon Society’s gift of Audubon Adventures educational programs to the schools. All proceeds from this raffle will go to the program.

We thank Brad Kuntz for his generous donation of the photograph, taken at Evergreen Nature Preserve. In addition, Gene Tomko at Wolfe Camera donated the fine enlargement.
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!!

**Saturday, May 3rd: Latta Park (Dilworth)**  
½ Day - Easy  
Latta Park in Dilworth is the place to bird during spring migration. With a history of a good variety of neotropical migrants attracted to the mature flowering trees and shrubs along with a small flowing stream, this habitat always provides excellent birding in the spring.  

Join Dennis Lankford for spring migration in the park. Meet in the parking lot at 8:30 AM. For further info contact Dennis at harecubed2@carolina.rr.com or 704-541-6909. Restrooms are available.

**Thursday, May 8th: Anne springs Close Greenway (Ft. Mill, SC)**  
½ Day - Moderate  
Anne Springs Greenway has it all - mature trees, grassy areas, lakes and streams - varied birding habitat for spring migration. Join Dave Lovett for a morning of birding in this quiet preserve. There is a $2 day use fee and restrooms are available. Picnic tables are handy for lunch after we finish our walk.  

Meet in the main parking lot off HWY 21 at 8 AM. Trails can be muddy after rain. For more info contact Dave 704-507-7677 or birdsalot@webtv.net.

**Tuesday, May 13th: Latta Park (Dilworth)**  
½ Day - Easy  
Birding Latta Park can be different each day as successive waves of migrants set down during the season. Fellow MAS Board member Lucy Quintilliano will lead us this morning as we explore this urban birding mecca.  

Meet at 8 AM in the parking area. For more info contact Lucy at 704-364-9028 or lucyq@carolina.rr.com

**Saturday, May 17th: South Mountain State Park**  
Full Day - Moderate/difficult  
Located in the foothills, this 18,000 acres state park is a great place to visit during spring migration. An IBA site, it provides essential nesting habitat for 66 bird species including Worm-eating Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, Black-throated Green Warbler, and Acadian Flycatchers.  

Join Dennis Lankford and Dave Lovett as we explore portions of this lovely park. Wear good hiking shoes and bring a lunch, snacks, and water.  

For more info call Dave at 704-507-7677 or email Dennis at harecubed2@carolina.rr.com. There are rest rooms available in the picnic area of the park. We will meet at 7:30 AM in parking lot of the Cracker Barrel at Billy Graham and I-85.

**Sunday, May 18th: 6 Mile Creek Greenway**  
½ Day - Easy  
Join local birding “guru” Taylor Piephoff for a morning birding foray at the paved one mile long 6 Mile Creek Greenway at the southern edge of the county.  

This currently “lightly used greenway” has a history of great birding, Swainson’s and Kentucky Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, Hooded Warbler, and Acadian Flycatcher are only some of the birds we may encounter some of these birds may be “heard only”, so brush up on their calls.
Meet at 8 AM in the greenway parking lot. There are no facilities. For more info contact Taylor at piephoft@aol.com or call 704-361-5139.

**Saturday, May 24th: Colonel Francis Beatty Park**
½ Day - Easy

We visited this lovely Mint Hill Park this past September with excellent success, vowing to come back in the spring for migration. MAS member and veteran birder Weslyn Strickland, has made this possible. Her familiarity with the various habitats in the park should help us experience a good morning of birding. Restrooms are available.

We will meet in the parking lot by the Community Clubhouse-follow the signs at 8 AM. For more info contact Weslyn at 704-846-1824 or hstrickland@carolina.rr.com

**Saturday, May 31st: Evergreen Nature Preserve**
½ Day - Moderate

Join fellow MAS members Martha Sherman and Robert Bustle - recently returned from an extended visit to Costa Rica - for a morning of “tamer birding” at Evergreen NP which they bird frequently.

In addition to listening to their Rican Adventures, we will search for resident nesting species and late migrants.

Meet in the Winterfield School Parking lot at 8 AM. For more info contact them at turnstone@bellsouth.net.

**Mountain Birding Weekend: June 7th & 8th**
Moderate

To culminate our MAS birding season, we have added a special mountain birding trip to our agenda. Led by Taylor Piephoff, this trip is sure to provide not only good birding but also to add some great memories to cherish in the future.

The “GOAL” is to locate all four empidonax flycatchers that nest here in the mountains of NC along with any other high elevation nesters we encounter.

Plans call for starting at 8 AM at Fletcher Park north of Hendersonville seeking Willow flycatchers. From there it is up Wagon Gap Road to the Parkway in search of Acadian Flycatcher. In Shining Rock Wilderness, we search for Willow and Alder Flycatchers to bag our foursome. Black-capped Chickadees could be a bonus.

Saturday evening Taylor will conduct an 8:30 PM owl prowl for Saw-whet Owls along the Parkway for those interested.

Bring a lunch for Saturday and plenty of water and snacks. Best bet for lodging would be a motel in Hendersonville on Friday night and accommodations in Brevard on Saturday evening. Contact Taylor for more info at piephoft@aol.com or call 704-361-5139.

PS - It would be well to “bone-up” on your flycatcher calls for this trip, as they all look quite alike!
Birds We Love to Hate

Pigeons: Winged Rats or Heroes?

Rock Pigeons (Columba livia), more commonly known simply as just “pigeons,” are familiar birds in developed areas around the world. They are members of the family Columbidae which also includes doves. Chunky birds with sharply pointed wings, Rock Pigeons are found in a variety of colors and patterns, although all gray is most common. Rock Pigeons have black bills with white fleshy bases, red eyes, red fleshy eye-rings, and salmon-colored feet.

The Rock Pigeon has such a long history of association with humans, having been used for food and entertainment for over 5,000 years, that the original range of the species is impossible to determine. Homing pigeons, domestic Rock Pigeons, are well known for their ability to find their way home from long distances. Despite these demonstrated abilities, wild (feral) Rock Pigeons are rather sedentary and rarely leave their local areas.

Rock Pigeons originated in the Eastern Hemisphere and were introduced to North America in the 1600’s by Northern Europeans who settled in Nova Scotia, Canada. Early European settlers at Jamestown and Plymouth also brought pigeons with them. All of the birds in North America and most of the European populations are descended from domestic stock thus they are referred to as feral pigeons.

Feral pigeons display courtship behaviors throughout the year although they are more likely to mate in late winter and spring. Once a pair has formed a “bond” they will stay together for life. The Rock Pigeon makes a flimsy nest, but it often reuses the location repeatedly, building a new nest on top of the first. Because the pigeons do not try to remove the feces of their nestlings, the nest turns into a sturdy, potlike mound that gets larger month by month. Unhatched eggs and mummies of dead nestlings may also get cemented into the nest.

Pigeons will produce more young when food is plentiful than when it is scarce. An adult pair of pigeons with a plentiful food supply can breed six or even ten times a year, producing up to 20 new pigeons. The same pair, in time of scarcity, may breed only once or twice a year, producing as few as four or even two new pigeons. Pigeons produce two chicks at each nesting.

Rock Pigeons are found in a wide variety of habitats, especially suburban, urban, and agricultural environments. Their original native habitat was sides of cliffs which building in cities and towns mimic very well.

In the wild, all individuals of a species usually look much the same. Robins, for example all have gray backs and red-orange breasts. All crows are black. But the pigeons we see around the world are a different story. They show remarkable color variation, just like cats and dogs. Why? They are all descended from the blue-bar Rock Pigeon, but over hundreds of years pigeons were selectively bred by humans for their colors, homing instincts, or racing abilities. As a result, captive flocks of different-colored pigeons were established all over the world. Eventually, captive birds escaped into the wild to become the feral, common pigeon flocks we see today.

Feral pigeons have adapted to life in cities, in suburban parks, on beaches and on farms. They have had established populations in North America for 400 years and on other continents for much longer. And despite this, their populations continue to have individuals of many different colors. They have never reverted to the colors of their wild relatives in the Mediterranean and beyond. No other feral animal has kept so many domestic colors for more than a few generations.

Scientists believe there are at least three possible explanations why there are so many colors of pigeons across the world:

1. They don’t have many natural predators in cities. Predators tend to attack the “odd one out”. For example Peregrine Falcons or hawks will kill the one red bird in a flock of blue-bars. But in cities, there are few predators to eat the colorful or odd-colored birds. Therefore these birds may survive to breed and pass their unusual colors to the next generation.
**Tips for Novice Birders**

**Where are those Warblers?**

Good warbler spots tend to have most of the following elements: 1) low deciduous trees, 2) thick, tangled undergrowth, 3) an open or semi-open canopy, 4) clear edges, 5) fresh water, 6) wind protection and 7) pathways that are wide (four feet across or wider) and/or elevated. The first six elements attract the warblers. The last makes it easier to look at them.

Quiet roads around lakes or along rivers are usually excellent warbler spots. The birds frequently feed in the tree limbs closest to the road or reveal themselves by flying across the road and landing in the first tree they reach on the other side. These roads are generally elevated, at least one side, and the extra height offers an advantage to the birder, since the top of a 10- or 12-foot tree may be at eye level.

Ironically, city parks, college campuses, and similar “less natural” habitats are often much better for warbler watching than deep and pretty lowland forests. In artificially landscaped areas, warblers will take refuge in widely separated lines of trees. Unless they are severely disturbed, they tend to move along these lines and so are more easily tacked.

**Stratigraphic Specialist**

Most warblers prefer certain heights. In many cases the preference is so strong that the stratigraphic level occupied by the warbler can be a clue to its identity.

Other stratigraphic preferences are more subtle and harder to chart, but may still prove helpful once you become aware of them. In the East, for example, you should look twice at any “female hooded warbler” Fly-catching over your head: there’s a good chance that the bird is a female Wilson’s. Hooded warblers will sometimes be seen up in the mid-levels (especially singing males), but they are more often seen near waist level and below.

You may also find that stratigraphic preference for particular migrant warblers in your area may differ from those described in the books (including this one).

Spring, as every birder knows, is the best season for warbler watching. The birds are in their finest plumage, and many sing strongly when they are still hundreds of miles south of their nesting grounds. What is not so well known is how brief the spring migration period actually is and how easy it is to miss.

Some warblers move north relatively early – the yellow-rumped, pine, palm, Louisiana waterthrush, black and white, yellow-throated, yellow, prairie, palm, and black-throated green. Three species tend to come late: the blackpoll, morning, and Connecticut. The rest tend to come together and pass through any given area within a period of three weeks or less. Typical peak periods appear in table 3, and dedicated warbler chasers try to be out in the field at every opportunity during the peak period, since weather patterns will determine the fallouts, and these are almost impossible to predict.

No general guide can list the warblers in the sequence in which they will arrive in your area. Different species of warblers migrate at different speeds, so where you live will determine when each reaches you.

The Northern Parula, for example, is one that may arrive in the U.S. as early as the first week in March. It moves northward slowly, however, and does not arrive in Maine until mid-May during the main influx of warblers there.

Especially in spring, the morning after a night of hard rain is the best time to look for a fall-out of passerine migrants. Birding during days with intermittent rain can also be productive. The birds will continue to feed during light rains. If the showers stop and the sun breaks through you can find yourself suddenly surrounded by parties of celebrating, hyperactive warblers.

Wind is a more serious problem. Warblers are more sensitive to wind than most birds and tend to stop moving and hide inside the foliage even during moderate gusts. If the wind starts to blow steadily at more than fifteen miles per hour or so,
Book Nook

A Birder’s Guide to Florida (5th Ed.) by Bill Pranty

I’m sure all of you are well aware of the number and variety of spectacular birds in Florida. What you may not realize is just how easy it is to plan a very productive self-guided trip to any area of Florida. Bill Pranty’s A Birder’s Guide to Florida has been around for a long time and has been updated repeatedly in an effort to keep pace with the changing landscape as rapid development impacts bird habitat. When I first went birding in Florida I borrowed a copy of the fourth edition and quickly learned how important it is to have the most recent edition. New homes were found on former vacant lots where burrowing owls had lived, interstate exit numbers had changed, etc., leading to a very frustrating experience. But I have been very successful using the latest (fifth) edition since it was published in 2005.

Whether you will be on a trip in a certain area and want to know what birds are nearby and how to find them or you are planning a birding trip to see as many species as possible, this book is just what you’ll need. It is organized by region, with accurate and detailed directions to each site. I’ve used it to plan stops along I-95 on a drive to Miami, to locate birds along the gulf coast when visiting family in Fort Myers and Clearwater, and, most recently, to find hotspots around Tallahassee.

In a section called “Florida Birds of Particular Interest” you’ll find information to help you find hundreds of specific species. Bar graphs provide insight into general location, abundance and seasonal data for many species. And there are checklists of all manner of other fauna.

Much of this information is on the web, but this book is a great resource while traveling in your car. Nothing is quite like a book or map in hand on a road trip.

There are similar guides to birds in other states. I’ve used Birding Georgia (A Falcon Guide), and, based on that experience, I just bought Birding Colorado and Birding Utah in preparation for trips I am planning. If you are traveling to other states, these guides are great for identifying target birds and maximizing your chances of finding them. Spend $20-$25 for one of these books and you won’t regret it.

Review by Lucy Quintilliano

Your Chance to Win Evergreen GOLD

Goldfinch on Thistle by Brad Kuntz

- Hand signed, numbered (1.1) and dated
- 11” x 14” archivally matted and framed to 16” x 20”
- 3-dimensionally suspended above a background of handmade paper

Enter at the Mecklenburg Audubon Meeting or mail your check to:
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Amount Enclosed: $ ___________ for ____________ tickets

Tickets: $5 each or 3 for $10.

Continued from page 5

Warblers

you should search deeper (and lower) in the woods or, better yet, put on your hawk-watching hat and save the warblers for another day.

The simple and ultimately delightful truth about warblers is that you can never identify all you see. No one can. This is ultimately delightful because it means warblers are always a challenge – warblers will always be a challenge – no matter how skilled you become.

You can only become faster and more accurate in identifying them; you can never overmaster them.
2. Food is abundant in cities. When food is in short supply, animals will fight among themselves to get it. The winners (the dominant individuals) get to eat first. If blue-bars, for example are dominant, they will win all of the food fights and thus be the only birds that can survive and breed. But in cities, where food is plentiful, food fights would be few, and all morphs would be able to survive and breed.

3. Assortative mating. Maybe multiple color morphs continue to persist because city pigeons choose mates by their colors. For example, some birds may choose mates of their own color. This is called assortative mating. Others may prefer mates of different colors. Because colors are inherited, the colors of parents will determine the colors of their young.

The Rock Pigeon is often called the feathered rat because it can be a nuisance. However, they do not negatively affect native species like other introduced species (house sparrow & starling), since they are predominantly found in disturbed environments. In fact, since Peregrine Falcons living in urban areas prey predominantly on them, the abundance of Rock Pigeons has assisted the comeback of the falcon.

On the other hand pigeons are highly prized for their speed and ability to return home by others. Pigeons aloft (in the air) can fly 80 kilometers (km) an hour and cover 1,600 km in two days to reach their home loft (a building that houses pigeons). For millennia, humans have trained and bred pigeons to use this homing instinct. Greeks used pigeons to send news of the Olympic Games winners about 2,800 years ago. Pigeons delivered military messages from the earliest recorded battles through World War II. In 1903, Julius Neubronne designed a tiny camera that mounted on a pigeon’s breast, and the Bavarian Pigeon Corps was born. The cameras snapped a picture every 30 seconds as the pigeons headed home. Spy planes soon took over where the pigeons left off. Pigeons still fly blood samples from an island off France to the mainland. And people still race pigeons as a hobby.

Pigeons probably use several methods to find their loft, including the Earth’s magnetic field, the position of the sun, and familiar landmarks. Pigeons have better eyesight than humans, and can see ultraviolet light.

They have been used in helicopters to spot orange life jackets and to help humans rescue other people lost at sea. A recent study by David Grimm (Science Now; 7/26/2004, p3-4) seem to indicate that homing pigeons often follow large roadways, and even learn which exit leads home.

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**International Migratory Bird Day**

Saturday, May 10, 2008 - 8 AM - 2 PM

Evergreen Nature Preserve

3100 Winterfield Place, Charlotte, NC

- 8:30 AM to 10 AM: Bird Banding
- Guided Bird Walks
- Educational information about birds/habitats
- Crafts and activities for the whole family
- Wild Birds Unlimited Merchandise

For more information call 311

Program Coordinator: Laura.Domingo@MecklenburgCountyNC.gov
**Activities Calendar**

- **5/3** - Latta Park (Dillworth) (1/2 day Field Trip)
- **5/8** - Night Stalkers (Monthly Meeting)
- **5/8** - Anne Springs Close (1/2 day Field Trip)
- **5/10** - IMB Day
- **5/13** - Latta Park (Dilworth) (1/2 day Field Trip)
- **5/17** - South Mt. SP (1/2 day Field Trip)
- **5/18** - 6 Mile Creek Greenway (1/2 day Field Trip)
- **5/24** - Francis Beatty Park (1/2 day Field Trip)
- **5/30** - ANC Annual Mtg.
- **5/3** - Evergreen NP (1/2 day Field Trip)
- **6/5** - Annual Picnic
- **6/7** - Mountain Birding

**Audubon News**

P.O. Box 221093
Charlotte, NC 28222

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**Who’s New?**

- James Jernigan
- Karen Kimbrel

**Starbucks Coffee**

If you are not aware of it, the Starbucks at Cotswold Shopping Center provides coffee for our monthly meetings. So the next time you in the neighborhood and need a cup of joe, stop in and thank them for us.

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**Mecklenburg Audubon Society**

Join now and your membership will be effective until June 2009.

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 & cost of meetings.

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- **Judy Walker** - President
  704-537-8181 birdwalker@mac.com
- **Rob Bierregaard** - Vice President
  704-333-2405 rbierreg@email.uncc.edu
- **Larry Barden** - Secretary
  704-535-6385 larry@barden.com
- **Lucy Quintilliano** - Treasurer
  704-364-9028 lucyq@carolina.rr.com
- **Dave Lovett** - Field Trips
  704-507-7677 birdsalot@webtv.net
- **Jack Meckler** - Conservation
  704-540-1573 jmmreck@aol.com
- **Carol Ann Tomko** - Conservation
  704-752-9232 ctomko@ceenta.com
- **Jill Shoemaker** - Membership
  704-537-6370 shoe4now@bellsouth.com
- **Marek Smith** - Education
  704-545-9971 maresmit@carolina.rr.com
- **Louise Barden** - Publicity
  704-535-6385 louise@barden.com
- **Andrea Owens** - Member-at-large
  704-651-2232 andreaoens1@yahoo.com
- **Jeff Lemons** - Member-at-large
  jeff1son@hotmail.com

**It’s Time to Renew**

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**Return to:**

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