Monthly Meeting: Thursday, October 2, 2008

**Birds of the Outer Banks**

Take a journey to the eastern edge of North Carolina with Sidney Maddock, Field Technician for Audubon North Carolina, as he introduces us to Bird Conservation on the Outer Banks. Using beautiful pictures, he will provide an overview of the shorebirds and colonial waterbirds that nest in this important area.

He will discuss the recent lawsuit Audubon filed against Cape Hatteras National Seashore, the settlement of the litigation, and how Audubon tried to achieve a delicate balance of allowing properly managed off-road vehicle use while increasing protection for nesting shorebirds and colonial waterbirds from human disturbance. The threat posed by bills that have been recently introduced in Congress to overturn the settlement also will be discussed. Sidney will suggest ways people can help conserve the shorebirds and colonial waterbirds.

**Caps for Sale & T-shirts Too**

Thanks to the work of Jack Meckler, Mecklenburg Audubon now has its own official t-shirt and ball cap. They were unveiled at the September meeting and are going like hotcakes. The shirts come in two colors - stone grey and sage green. The caps, which are designed to fit all head sizes are beige. All great birding colors. Both are selling for a mere $15!

Jack will have them again at the October meeting or you can contact him at jmmeck@aol.com.
Field Trips

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, Sep. 27: Francis Beatty Park* (1/2 Day- Easy)
Leader: Weslyn Strickland – 704-846-1824 or hstrickland@carolina.rr.com

This lovely park in the Mint Hill area of the county offers it all: large lake, playing fields, meadows, and woodland trails adding up to a goodly number of bird species that can be seen or heard on a morning walk. Last year we visited this park twice with great results. Come help us find and sort out the birds we locate. Follow the park signs to LAKE POINT HALL where we will meet at 8 AM.

Saturday, Oct. 4: Evergreen Nature Preserve (1/2 Day- Moderate)
Leaders: Larry and Louise Barden – 704-535-6385 or larry@lbarden.com or louise@lbarden.com

No matter what season of the year, a bird walk at Evergreen Nature preserve is an adventure. Fall migration birding can be especially rewarding. “Go Wild in the City” with us as we again explore this urban NATURE GEM close to downtown Charlotte.

Meet at 8 AM in the parking lot near the playground of Winterfield Elementary School. The school is at the end of Winterfield Drive off Central Ave, close to the intersection of Central and Sharon-Amity.

Thursday, Oct. 9, 2008: Huntingtowne Farms Greenway
1/2 Day - Easy* Leaders: Vivian & Dean Sprehe - 704-552-1864 or vsprehe@carolina.rr.com

The paved greenway and open “park like” setting of this urban hot-spot allows for close up looks at a good variety of resident and fall migrating bird species. Soccer fields and a good stand of hardwoods and evergreens in the picnic area enhance the available habitat. Streamside willows and wild grapes are an added draw. Migrating Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Yellow Warblers have been found here on past Autumn bird walks.

Meet in the main parking lot at the end of Huntingtowne Farms Dr off Park road at 8:30 AM.

Saturday, Oct. 11, 2008: Ribbon Walk Nature Preserve
1/2 Day – Moderate Leader: Ron Clark - 704-866-0811 or waxwing@bellsouth.net

With over 192 acres of natural woodlands, comprising the southern end of Nevin Park, RibbonWalk 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 a 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-wings and Mourning Warblers but the birding gods were probably just playing with us. We’ll meet in the parking lot at 8 AM. Let Ron know if you are coming.

Tuesday, Oct. 14, 2008: Latta Park (Dilworth)
1/2 Day - Easy* Leader: Ron Clark - 704-866-0811 or waxwing@bellsouth.net

The well known migrant trap at Latta Park is well known for a great birding site during spring migration. Less “birdy” in the autumn, it is still worth a peak to see what might be moving thru. Birding here is slow and easy, and Ron will help us sort out any confusing fall warblers we do find. Meet in the main parking area at 8:30 AM.

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KEY TO PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY

Easy - Trails are level to slight grades usually paved. .5-1.5 miles of walking
Moderate - Trails can be uneven with some hills. 1-2.5 miles of walking.
Strenuous - Trails vary greatly. 2.5+ miles of walking.
* - Trails are handicapped accessible.
Field Trips

Saturday, Oct. 18, 2008: Beginning Birders
1/2 Day - Easy Leader: Jill Shoemaker - 704-537-6370 or shoe4now@bellsouth.net

The third of our fall series of beginning birder field trips will investigate Evergreen Nature Preserve. We’ll be looking for local residents and the arrival of our first winter visitors.

We will meet at 9 AM in the Winterfield Elementary School parking in front of the playground. The school is at the very end of Winterfield Ave off Central Ave close to the intersection with Sharon Amity.

Saturday, Oct. 18, 2008: Huntington Beach SP, Myrtle Beach, SC
Full Day - Strenuous Leader: Judy Walker - 704-537-8181 or birdwalker@me.com

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 to Peregrine Falcons and Merlins, and I am sure we will be delighted with spectacle views of hundreds if not thousands of tree swallows. Best of all, most of the people have moved out! It is a wonderful time of year to be on the beach.

We will meet in the parking lot on the eastside 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.

Saturday, Oct. 25, 2008: Six-mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day - Easy Leader: Dennis Lankford - 704-541-6909 or harecubed3@carolina.rr.com

The one-mile paved Six Mile Creek Greenway along with some hidden side shoots, continues to offer some good birding surprises including hard to find Pileated and Hairy woodpeckers. One year we even found an olive-sided flycatcher. No promises this year other than a fun morning of birding! Meet at 8 AM in the main parking.

Saturday, Nov. 1, 2008: Moss Creek Greenway - Cabarrus County
1/2 Day Leader: Corey Slovick - 704-451-4644 or cslovick@gmail.com

In the NW corner of Cabarrus county near NC-73 and Odell School Rd. lies the private Moss Creek Development. Bordered on the SW by Rocky River, a wonderful nature trail runs the length of the development. Corey Slovick, a resident and MAS member, birds there regularly and has offered to show us this “new” birding location. Meet us in the Odell Elementary School parking lot, on the corner of Odell School Rd. and NC-73) at 8 AM to explore this trail.

Detailed directions to meeting spots can be found at meckbirds.org/trips
Last month we talked about a plant that could be a little unsightly and messy but provides natural food for both migrant and resident birds. Here’s another suggestion that will probably also raise some eyebrows in your neighborhood but will enhance your backyard habitat for wildlife. Build a brush pile!

It’s not hard to start a brush pile but you will have to give up the idea that your backyard will be immaculate. Brush piles are a bit untidy but the benefits are well worth the minor mess. They also don’t cost anything to build except a little physical energy, which probably would beneficial to our own health.

When creating your brush pile start with large branches as a foundation. I started one of my piles with several limbs that fell during a storm. You don’t have to cut the side branches off. They will help maintain holes and crevices in the pile that birds can hide in. After you have laid the foundation then add small branches and twigs. Don’t pack things down. What you want to do is create a pile of ‘stuff’ that the birds can get into for shelter.

Once you have a brush pile started it does need to be ‘fed’ periodically because the stuff on the bottom does decompose. So like a fire, every so often add more branches and twigs to build it up again. After the holidays wander around your neighborhood and collect discarded Christmas trees to add to the pile. Placing a brush pile near feeders gives the birds a quick hiding spot when predators appear. The cardinals use the brush pile as a staging area. They first fly to the pile. Check out the neighborhood and then hop up onto the feeder. During snows doves, wren, sparrows, towhees and thrashers all using the pile for shelter. The years I have had fox sparrows in my yard they have always hung out around the brush pile. Wrens and sparrows also patrol the pile for hidden insects. So it not only provides shelter it’s also a fast food joint! Chipmunks and other small critters will also use the pile for shelter.

So this fall as you begin ‘picking up’ your yard, don’t mulch those branches and twigs. Start building a small apartment complex for the wildlife! You will be repaid with hours of watching enjoyment.

Helping Backyard Birds: Eastern Towhee

Large, secretive black, white, and rust-colored sparrows, Eastern Towhees flourish in brushy habitats across the Eastern United States. Towhees feed on the ground under bushes and shrubs, and can be helped by protecting brushy fields and forest understory from over browsing by deer and by planting additional patches of native shrubs as nesting, foraging, and roosting habitat.

How You Can Help

• Plant or maintain patches of native shrubs and bushes including fruiting mulberries, viburnums, bayberries, and blueberries, briars, or wild grapes.
• Allow leaves to accumulate under bushes to provide foraging opportunities for towhees.
• Towhees will come to commercial bird seed including millet and sunflower seeds spread on the ground or low platform feeder below bushes or shrubs.
• Avoid use of pesticides that kill insects that towhees eat, and herbicides that destroy their brushy habitat and weedy plant foods.

For more information on helping birds visit www.audubonathome.org
Audubon NC
News & Notes

Birding Column on Raysweather.com

The generous folks at Raysweather.com, the western North Carolina weather and news website, invited Curtis Smalling with Audubon North Carolina to contribute a weekly birding column to the website. From his roost in the high country near Boone, Curtis reports on any and all things bird-related, including migratory bird sightings and trip reports. His entertaining column is always splashed with colorful bird photos. Thus far in 2008, the column has received 35,768 page views. Not shabby Curtis! Check it out for yourself.

IBA news: Peregrine pair at Grandfather Mountain raises young for first time since 2003

This summer, a pair of peregrine falcons successfully raised two chicks in a nest located deep in the backcountry of Grandfather Mountain. This is the first time in five years that biologists have documented peregrines at Grandfather raising chicks to the point that they could survive on their own. Grandfather Mountain is an IBA that boasts incredible hiking trails, beautiful vistas, and great birding. You can read more about this exciting nesting story at the Grandfather Mountain website.

Audubon Education Team launches new website

In July, Audubon launched a new education website (http://www.audubon.org/educate) which contains games, crafts, and activities for children and families, and a section for educators. Visitors to the site will find out about Audubon Centers, TogetherGreen, birds and birding, Audubon educational products, Audubon nature stores, Audubon Adventures, and much more. These exciting pages are bringing new conservation education features and tools to Audubon’s website.

Conservation Corner

Cape Hatteras National Seashore Remains Protected

Last week, a bill that would have increased beach driving in critical nesting habitat for federally protected birds and sea turtles failed to pass a Senate committee. This bill threatened to repeal a compromise agreement between Audubon, other environmental groups, and representatives of off-road vehicle users at Cape Hatteras National Seashore. Under the compromise, beach driving is limited to areas not being used as nesting sites by shorebirds and sea turtles. In August, this amounted to all but one mile of the Seashore being open to pedestrians, and over half being open to beach driving. According to the National Park Service, preliminary review of the current regulations shows that it has been beneficial for the shorebirds and turtles, with almost twice as many breeding Piping Plover pairs and more than double the number of sea turtle nests as this time in 2007.

Bill to Protect Migratory Songbirds Introduced in Senate

On Monday, September 15, Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), along with a bipartisan group of seven other senators, introduced a critically important bill for bird conservation. The bill would increase the funding available through the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act for the conservation of birds that breed in North America and spend their winters in the tropics. The bill would increase funding from a current level of $6.5 million per year up to $20 million per year by 2015. The seven original cosponsors of the bill are Senators Whitehouse (D-RI), Voinovich (R-OH), Collins (R-ME), Leahy (D-VT), Kerry (D-MA), Lieberman (I-CT), and Menendez (D-NJ). Stay tuned for your opportunity to let Congress know that this important legislation for migratory birds deserves to pass!

The Power of Your Letters

The National Audubon staff is often asked, “Do my emails, letters, or phone calls really make a difference?” The answer is a resounding yes.

It’s simple. Audubon’s legislative team could not advance bills that protect the environment—or stop bills that would harm it—without the support of people like you who take the time to contact their elected officials on issues that are important to them.

Take one recent example, which highlights the synergy between Audubon’s state programs, the policy program in Washington, D.C., and the power of our activists and chapter volunteers. Audubon South Carolina’s Director of Bird Conservation was alarmed when Rep. Henry Brown (R-SC) introduced legislation that would have provided federal subsidies to develop in critical Piping Plover habitat in South Carolina. Audubon, together with local conservation groups, alerted our supporters in South Carolina and asked them to contact their members of Congress to oppose this misguided bill. Within a matter of weeks, Rep. Brown announced that he was withdrawing his legislation, citing input of his constituents in his decision.

Never doubt that your contacts with elected leaders have an impact. And don’t worry if your Member of Congress always votes pro-environment or always votes anti-environment. They all need to know what their constituents think about an issue.

You just never know when your email, your phone call, or your question at a town hall meeting will help turn the tide on an issue, or encourage a champion to go the extra mile, or make people think twice about how important it is to protect our world.
Nature Preserve Programs

Latta Plantation, McDowell, and Reedy Creek Nature Centers offer weekend and weeknight environmental education programs for the general public on a variety of topics from birds and butterflies to wetlands and woodcocks. Listed below are a few of the offerings for October.

Mecklenburg Audubon Society is a co-sponsor of the Bat programs. A complete listing of all the programs can be found in the Division of Nature Preserves and Natural Resources’ quarterly newsletter - Natural Connections which can be found on the Charlotte Mecklenburg Park and Recreation website (http://www.parkandrec.com).

Great Outdoors Festival
Saturday, October 4: 11 AM - 5 PM
Latta Plantation Nature Preserve
All Ages * FREE

Latta Plantation Nature Center and The Vineyards on Lake Wylie invite you to beautiful Latta Plantation Nature Preserve for music, food and fun! This event for all ages will help you discover how to lead a healthy lifestyle and feel better through activities in the great outdoors. Enjoy live music, great local food, kayak and canoe demonstrations, fishing events, activities for kids and live animals. Vendors will be on hand to show you the latest in outdoor gear and equipment. We hope you and your whole family can join us for this celebration of the great outdoors!

Nature, a Good Book & a Cup of Joe
Reedy Creek Nature Center
Wednesday, October 1st: 6:30 - 8 PM
Ages: 18 and older * FREE

Join one of our educators as we read and discuss a variety of important environmental books. Meet like-minded individuals while discussing important issues of today or enjoying a beautiful piece of literature. Organic, shade grown coffee will be served.

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek is a 1974 nonfiction narrative book by Annie Dillard. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1975. The book is about Dillard’s experiences at Tinker Creek, which is located in Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains. In the book, Dillard records observations and thoughts on solitude, writing, religion, and the flora and fauna. It is analogous in design and genre to Henry David Thoreau’s Walden or and fauna. It is analogous in design and solitude, writing, religion, and the flora records observations and thoughts on environmental books. Meet like-minded individuals while discussing important issues of today or enjoying a beautiful piece of literature. Organic, shade grown coffee will be served.

Big Sweep
Saturday, October 4: RibbonWalk NP
Saturday, October 4: Reedy Creek NP
9 AM - Noon * Ages: 5 and older * FREE

Big Sweep is a national based program to clean up lakes, rivers and streams and increase awareness about the protection of these resources. Go out along the shorelines of creeks and ponds for a cooperative litter sweep. Ages 5-15 must be accompanied by an adult.

Advanced Wild: Bats! (36401)
Thursday, October 30: 6:30-10:30 PM
Saturday, November 1: 9 AM - 3 PM
Reedy Creek Nature Preserve
Organization for Bat Conservation Director Rob Mies returns to show off his bats but also lead educators and all interested on a special bat hike. Workshop topics will cover bat biology, identification, and behavior. The workshop will include lessons, activities, and projects that can be incorporated into the classroom or home school science lessons. CEUs and EE credit available upon request. Co-sponsored by North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. Participants must attend both days.

Bat Encounter! (36405)
Friday, October 31: 7 - 8:30 PM
Reedy Creek Nature Preserve
All Ages * Fee: $15

Bat man returns! Organization for Bat Conservation director, Rob Mies returns to show off his live bats and to uncover the truth about these magnificent animals. For more information, please call the Reedy Creek Nature Center at 704-598-8857 or go online at www.batconservation.org. Space is limited call today!

Project Feeder Watch

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders from November through early April. FeederWatch helps scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance.

Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada.

Who can participate? Anyone with an interest in birds! FeederWatch is conducted by people of all skill levels and backgrounds, including children, families, individuals, classrooms, retired persons, youth groups, nature centers, and bird clubs.

What will I do? Count birds that appear in your count site because of something that you have provided (plantings, food, or water). For each species, you will report only the highest number of individuals that you see in view at one time. By following this procedure, you are certain to avoid counting the same bird more than once. You will report your bird counts to scientists at the Lab of Ornithology either over our web site or on paper Data Forms. Learn more about how to count birds for FeederWatch in the instructions section of this web site.

Does it cost money? There is a $15 annual participation fee ($12 for Lab members), which covers materials, staff support, web design, data analysis, and a year-end report (Winter Bird Highlights). Project FeederWatch is

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Project FeederWatch

supported almost entirely by participation fees. Without the support of our participants, this project wouldn't be possible.

What will I get? Participants receive a Research Kit, which contains instructions, a bird identification poster, a wall calendar, a resource guide to bird feeding, and data forms—everything you need to start counting your birds. Your kit will arrive in the fall (or about 3 weeks after you sign-up when you sign-up during the FeederWatch season). You provide the feeder(s) and seed.

Where do I count the birds? You designate an area that you can consistently observe throughout your count days. Participants are advised to choose obvious boundaries, such as the border of a yard or the area within a courtyard. Learn more about setting up a Count Site in the instructions section of this web site.

When does the season start? The survey is conducted each winter starting on the second Saturday of November and running for 21 weeks, through early April. You may join at any time of year. The last day to sign up for any given season is Feb. 28. Kits are shipped in the fall or, if you sign up during the season, about 3 weeks after you sign up.

How much time does it take? It's up to you! Select your own bird-count days—two consecutive days once every two weeks (or every week if you enter data online and you choose to count that often). Count during all or part of those days. Learn more about selecting Count Days in the instructions section of this web site.

Why should I participate? FeederWatch results are regularly published in scientific journals and are shared with ornithologists and bird lovers nationwide. The counts you submit will make sure that your birds (or lack of birds) are represented in our papers and in the results found in the Explore Data section of this web site.

As a FeederWatcher, you will learn more about winter birds and how their populations are faring. You will also contribute to the science and conservation of North American feeder birds.

For complete details go to http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw

Birder’s guide to Field Trip Survival
by Don Feiday from Pete Dunne on Birding (Houghton Mifflin, 2003)

Going on a first field trip is a little like attending your first dance. You can either step onto the floor and let someone else lead or you can learn a few dance steps beforehand. Both approaches are fine.

But for those who like the assurance that knowledge brings, here is a list of field trip dos and don’ts I have collected from field trip participants, leaders and my own experiences in the field. Take them to heart and on your first field trip you’ll spend more time enjoying the birds and less time tripping over your (or fellow birder’s) feet.

Do ask questions about the trip before the trip.

Do make sure the leader knows before the trip about any special physical needs or limitations. Many times such needs can be accommodated with advance notice.

Do honestly evaluate whether you are physically up to a particular trip or portion of a trip.

Do be early, or at least on time.

Do make sure you know how to get to the meeting place.

Do let the leader know whether there is a particular bird you would like to see. However, don’t harp on the birds you are missing.

If someone calls out a bird and you cannot find it, say so!

Do call out yourself if you see a bird. One of the chief advantages of birding with a group is having multiple sets of eyes all looking at once.

Do learn how to give and receive directions to a bird’s location.

Do know when to be quiet. Being quiet means more than not talking loudly. It means not moving unnecessarily and moving quietly when you have to move.

Do watch the leader. If s/he stops suddenly with head cocked, stop. Undoubtedly the leader heard a bird—maybe your next life bird.

Do stay with the leader.

Do wear quiet clothing in quiet colors.

Do be prepared for less than adequate bathroom facilities.

Don’t be a scope hog.

Don’t be a complainer.

Don’t insist on driving alone. If carpooling is possible, do it. The fewer vehicles involved in a trip, the better.

Don’t drag significant others along unless they are eager to come and understand what is involved. Make sure they have binoculars.
Many Thanks

The MAS board wants to take this opportunity to thank Dave Lovett for his work as Field Trip Co-ordinator for the past 4 years. He has decided to do a lot more traveling and we wish him a lot of good birding as he explores new areas. We also hope that he will continue to share his adventures with us via Meckbirds.

We also want to thank Ron Clark and Ken Kneidel for stepping in to take up the slack. See we need two folks to replace Dave! Ken will be taking over the Christmas Bird Count and Ron will be co-ordinating the field trips.

If we are going to continue the weekday field trips, we will need some additional folks to step forward to lead some of those trips. If you would be willing to do this please contact Ron at waxwing@bellsouth.net.

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.

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.

Name: ___________________________ Address: ___________________________
Phone: ___________________________ Email: ___________________________

- 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.

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