**The Owls of Charlotte**

Spring usually brings to mind warblers and hummingbirds. But for one of the Mecklenburg Audubon members it means nights wandering the streets of Charlotte looking for some denizens of the night. That person would be Rob Bierregaard and his hardy band of UNC Charlotte graduate students in search of nesting Barred Owls. And they have embarked on the 7th season of a now nationally known project of tracking Barred Owls in urban areas. Rob usually provides us with tidbits of information about the owls at monthly meetings, but for the April meeting he will provide us with a complete update. He’ll share the data they have collected over the years, provide us with insightful interpretations of that data and regale us with stories of daring encounters with these predators that hunt in Charlotte’s treetops at night.

Don’t miss this illuminating presentation Thursday, April 2nd in the fellowship hall of the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church at 7:30 PM.

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**Upcoming Events**

- **4/2** Charlotte Owls (Meeting)
- **4/5** Congaree Swamp (Field Trip)
- **4/11** Brunswick Co., NC (Field Trip)
- **4/16** Latta Park (Field Trip)
- **4/18** Weymouth Woods (Field Trip)
- **4/19** 6-mile Creek (Field Trip)
- **4/21** Latta Park (Field Trip)
- **4/23** Lower McAlpine (Field Trip)
- **4/25** Latta Park (Field Trip)
- **4/26** Campbell's Creek (Field Trip)
- **4/28** Landsford Canal (Field Trip)
- **4/30** Latta Park (Field Trip)
- **5/2** Sherman Branch (Field Trip)
- **5/3** Latta Park (Field Trip)
- **5/5** Latta Park (Field Trip)
- **5/7** 4-mile Creek (Field Trip)
- **5/7** Birds of Charlotte (Meeting)
**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!!

**Sunday, April 5th - Congaree Swamp National Park.**
*Full Day - Moderate  Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net or 704-866-0811)*

We will drive south to meet the migrants. This is a flat 2 1/2 miles on a boardwalk. Bring your lunch. We will also check out a wet area closer to the interstate. Last year we had 7 warbler and 4 vireo species. We will meet at 7:00 AM off the Carowinds exit to carpool. Turn right onto Carowinds Blvd. and look for the large parking lot behind the gas station on the right about 100 yards.

**Latta Park Walks**

Latta Park in Dilworth is a real gem in spring migration. It is possible to have a 15 warbler day, with surprises like Wilson’s or Nashville. Add to this 4 or 5 thrushes, 3 or 4 vireos, scarlet tanager, rose-breasted grosbeak, both orioles and many others, and it’s hard to stay away. We will have many trips to this birdy park in April and May. You will find birders there almost every day from mid-April to mid-May.

We will be leading ‘official’ walks which will meet at 8:30 AM on the dates listed below. The meeting spot will be at the parking lot on East Park Ave. between Winthrop Ave. and Springfield Ave. There is a map on the MAS web site under “local birding spots”.

*Thursday April 16th - Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net or 704-866-0811)*
*Tuesday, April 21st - Contact: Tom Sanders (tsanders1993@msn.com)*
*Saturday, April 25th - Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net or 704-866-0811)*
*Thursday, April 30th - Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net or 704-866-0811)*
*Sunday, May 3rd - Contact: Dennis Lankford (harecubed2@carolina.rr.com)*
*Tuesday, May 5th - Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net or 704-866-0811)*

**Saturday, April 11th : Brunswick County**
*Full Day - Easy  Contact: Taylor Piephoff (zachary.piephoff@mecklenburgcountync.gov)*

This has become an annual spring pilgrimage to the coast. We will start out walking the beach at the east end of the island and scanning the flats and ocean. We will then head for the Green Swamp and the Nature Conservancy’s property for pine savanna birding. If you want to go, please let Taylor know by April 6th.

Meet at 7:30 AM in the public parking lot at the east end of Ocean Isle Beach. From the bridge over the Inter-coastal Waterway onto Ocean Isle, take a left onto 2nd Street just before the traffic circle in front of the pier. Follow 2nd Street for a couple of miles to “Road Closed” signs. Turn left at the signs into a parking lot, which is public parking.

There is a Comfort Inn, Holiday Inn Express, etc. in Shallotte, NC, and Ocean Inn on the island for lodging. Early reservations are suggested since it is Easter weekend.

**Saturday, April 18th : Weymouth Woods State Park.**
*Full Day - Moderate  Contact: Taylor Piephoff (zachary.piephoff@mecklenburgcountync.gov)*

This trip will have an ecological emphasis, with a priority for finding Bachman’s Sparrow and Red-cockaded Woodpecker. We will meet at 8:00 at the park visitor’s center (1024 Ft. Bragg Road, Southern Pines, NC 28387), which is about a 2 hour drive from Charlotte. There is lodging in the area, if anyone prefers go down Friday night. Bring lunch and drinks.

Detailed directions to meeting spots can be found at meckbirds.org/trips

**KEY TO PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY**
*Easy - Trails are level to slight grades usually paved. 0.5-1.5 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.
Sunday, April 19th: Six-Mile Creek Greenway  
1/2 Day - Easy  
Contact: Judy Walker (birdwalker@mac.com or 704-537-8181)  
This one mile greenway, located in southern Mecklenburg County, has hosted a breeding pair of Swainson’s Warblers for the past two years. Hopefully they will return again this year. We should also encounter a variety of newly arrived neotropic migrants.  
Directions: Take Highway 521 past Ballantyne, then turn left on Ardrey Kell Rd. Turn right at the first light, which is Marvin Rd. and greenway will be about a mile down, on the right. We will meet at 8:30 AM.

Thursday, April 23rd: Lower McAlpine Creek Greenway.  
1/2 day - Easy  
Contact: John Buckman (linbuckman@aol.com or 704-541-7433)  
Another great place to greet neotropic migrants in the spring. We should encounter a variety of species along this greenway, which is next to the Four-mile section. It is a very good place for spring migrants. It is a flat walk, around 2 miles total. We will meet at the Johnston Rd. parking lot at 8:00.

Sunday, April 26th - Campbell’s Creek Greenway  
1/2 day - Easy  
Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net or 704-866-0811)  
Ron Clark will lead this walk on a flat paved greenway, three miles total. It has proven to be a great migrant area. We will meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Margaret Wallace Rd. Take Independence Blvd east. Margaret Wallace is light after W. T. Harris Blvd. Turn left and drive about 1/3 mile. The parking lot is on the right just past the creek.

Tuesday, April 28th - Landsford Canal State Park  
1/2 day - Moderate  
Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net or 704-866-0811)  
This beautiful SC park is on the shore of the Catawba River below Rock Hill. It has nesting prothonotary warblers and bald eagles, among others. This will be a flat walk through woods, around 1.5 miles total. There is a $2 fee.  
We will meet in the shopping mall parking lot near Carowinds at 7:30AM. Directions: Take I-77 south to the Carowinds exit. Turn right, and then an immediate right at the first light. There is a large parking area on the right at about 150 yards.

Saturday, May 2nd: Sherman Branch Nature Preserve  
1/2 day - Moderate  
Contact: Judy Walker (birdwalker@mac.com or 704-537-8181)  
Nestled in the eastern side of the county, this preserve is one of the few places where Kentucky Warblers breed in the area. Grasshopper sparrows and a variety of grassland birds can also be found in the large open field. We will meet at 8:00 AM in the preserve’s parking lot on Rocky River Church Rd. about a 1/4 mile north of Camp Stewart Rd.

Thursday May 7th: Four-Mile Creek Greenway  
1/2 day - Moderate  
Contact: John Buckman (linbuckman@aol.com or 704-541-7433)  
This section of greenway has produced some good birding since it opened last fall. This will be the first spring that we have been able to bird it. There are a variety of habitats along its 1.8 miles, including an area with good rail potential. John Buckman will lead this 1/2 day trip to see how it holds up in migration. We will meet at the Johnston Rd. parking lot at 8:00 AM.
Audubon News

Board Elections in May

At the May 7 meeting four new members of the Mecklenburg Audubon Society board of directors will be elected. The terms of three long-time board members will expire, in accordance with the by-laws, and the board will be expanded from 11 to 12 members. That creates four board vacancies.

The departing board members are: Judy Walker (Board Member and President); Larry Barden (Board Member and Secretary); Louise Barden (Board Member and Publicity Chair)

These three people have been instrumental in leading MAS for many years and creating a highly effective organization with interesting and educational monthly programs, more field trips than any other Audubon organization in North Carolina, supporting environmental education through donations of Audubon Adventures kits to the public schools, adoption of Evergreen Nature Preserve and an outstanding web site and monthly newsletter. Judy will continue to manage the web site and produce the newsletter.

The nominees for the four board seats are all proficient birders and excited about the opportunity to continue the high quality programs, field trips and community support of Mecklenburg Audubon. They are: Chris Hanna, Dennis Lankford, Jill Palmer, and Tom Sanders.

Chris, Dennis and Jill are all veteran MAS members. Dennis has led field trips for us. Tom and his wife Tami recently moved to Charlotte from Florida. Tom led the Evergreen field trip last week.

According to the by-laws, the board directors will elect new officers, (President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary) each year prior to the September meeting. Directors serve for a term of 3 years with a maximum of 2 three-year terms. Each year, four directors’ terms expire. Elections will be held each year during the May meeting.

Increased Funding for the Refuge System

Washington, DC - The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) applauds Congress and the Administration for including a nearly $29 million increase for the National Wildlife Refuge System budget for Fiscal Year 2009 (FY09) which ends September 30, 2009. The much-needed increase brings the operating budget for the Refuge System to $462.8 million, roughly $3.08 per acre for the now 150 million-acre System.

“Added to recently approved stimulus dollars for green jobs on refuges, this increase helps put the Refuge System on course to meet its fundamental wildlife conservation and public outreach objectives by the end of President Obama’s first term,” said Evan Hirsche, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “Congress and the Obama administration have demonstrated a clear commitment to supporting our premier wildlife conservation lands and waters.”

For more information about NWRA priorities funded in the FY09 Omnibus Appropriations Act, please visit: www.refugeassociation.org/New-issues/FY09-FundingPriorities.html.

Conservation Corner

Saving Diamondback Terrapins

Abandoned crab traps (also known as “ghost pots”) strewn along the Atlantic coast can snare turtles, fish, and other wildlife. Legislation, new technology, and conservation efforts are now helping to stop the entrapment.

Once considered a delicacy, diamondback terrapin turtles (“terrapin” is Algonquin for “edible turtles that live in brackish water”) were almost hunted to extinction. Now they’re facing another threat in the form of ghost crab traps. Now state and local governments, crab trappers, and other individuals have formed a partnership to prevent derelict fishing gear from harming turtles in the brackish water that forms the terrapin’s domain along the Atlantic coast.

In 2008, with help from Dave Lee, director of The Tortoise Reserve, Audubon North Carolina received a grant from NOAA to study derelict crab pots and their effects on diamondback terrapins. Education Director Andy Wood is heading up the project for Audubon. Keep an eye on the website for more information soon, and in the meantime, take a look at a great video on the Audubon magazine website called “Shell-shocked: Protecting Turtles from Crab Traps.”
Beginning Birders: Yellow Birds

With new neotropic migrants arriving almost every day in April and many of them having yellow plumage, a quick review of these birds may be in order. Learning plumage coloration is important but often you don’t get to see all of the bird. Or you are looking at it from underneath. That’s when the over gestalt of a bird can come in very handy.

Here are four families of birds that include species with a lot of yellow plumage. If you can sort a mystery yellow bird into one of these families you are well on your way to identifying the bird.

Wood Warblers have been called the butterflies of the bird world because of their variety of bright colors. Most warblers have some yellow color, but two distinguishing traits set these birds apart from other yellow birds. The first is they are among the most nervous-acting birds, as they actively move through the woods, darting from branch to branch making them hard to observe when the trees are leafed out. The other characteristic is their small, straight, pointed bill, which they use to glean insects from leaves and branches.

Vireos are also small birds but slightly bigger than most warblers. They will be gray, olive and yellowish in color. They have heavier slightly curved bills that have slight hooks at the end, which they use for feeding on insects and fruit. Vireos move more sedately than warblers, more deliberately. When a vireo perches, it usually remains still for a short time whereas warblers move incessantly. Overall vireos also have duller plumages. Vireos are also divided into those that have wing bars and those that do not. Most of them also have strong eyebrow lines or ‘spectacles’ made by eye-rings combined with supraloral stripes.

Although male Baltimore and Orchard Orioles are relatively easy to identify their females and juvenile males pose more of a challenge with their yellow plumage. Orioles are related to blackbirds and have many of the same physical and behavioral traits. They are generally sleek, medium-sized, elongated birds with long, sharp, slightly curved bills. They are also fairly gregarious, noisy and move around a lot.

The last group of yellow birds is the female tanagers. Tanagers are also mid-sized birds but have more compact bodies than orioles. They also behave more like vireos, moving slowly through the canopy, often sitting still for extended periods of time. Tanagers have shorter, heavier and slightly curved bills compared to the orioles.

You can see there are physical and behavior similarities between warblers and orioles and vireos and tanagers. But tanagers and orioles are larger than the warblers and vireos. It is generally the female tanager and/or oriole that pose the challenge, but they are often seen with males which helps confirm the identity. Warbler and vireo females are often just paler versions of their male counterparts and they don’t usually migrate together.

So this spring as these birds arrive take good looks at them and see if you see the subtle differences in bills and behavior.
Melodious songbirds, Gray Catbirds nest in thickets and shrubs from British Columbia, northern Utah and New Mexico east to the Atlantic. Fairly common in some suburban areas, catbirds can be attracted to more urbanized areas by planting native shrubs and bushes for nesting, foraging, and roosting sites.

**What Gray Catbirds Need**

**Food:** Catbirds forage on the ground and in shrubs, bushes, and low trees for fruit and small insects including grasshoppers, beetles, and caterpillars. Favorite fruits include blackberries, wild cherries, wild grapes, sumac, blueberries, elderberries, serviceberries, and hollies.

**Nesting:** Catbirds usually build nests half way up in a patch of shrubs, bushes, or tangled vines less than 9 feet tall. They will also nest in foundation plantings and along fence rows.

**Shelter:** The Catbird’s roosting and sleeping behavior is almost unknown, but they are believed to use the sheltered branches of trees and shrubs.

**Other:** Catbirds will drink and bathe at a birdbath or small pond. They are susceptible to predation by cats and collisions with picture windows. Low flying catbirds also frequently collide with automobiles.

**How You Can Help**

- Plant fruiting native shrubs and bushes, including sumacs, wild grapes, and other catbird favorites.
- Provide raisins, chopped fruits, or fresh grape jelly on a platform feeder with a red surface.
- May also come to mealworm feeders.
- Avoid using pesticides that may kill insects used as food, or herbicides that destroy shrubby patches used as foraging habitat.
- Plant thick patches or rows of diverse native bushes, shrubs, and low ornamental trees. Favorites include dogwoods, hawthorns, native honeysuckle, native cherries, sumacs, elderberries, spirea, and wild grapes.
- Encourage neighbors to plant bushes and shrubs to provide additional habitat.
- Maintain bushes and shrubs with minimal pruning to provide ample roosting, sleeping, and resting cover.
- Provide a birdbath or small pond for bathing and drinking. Make sure to keep birdbaths clean and free of mosquito larvae.
- Screen windows or make them visible so catbirds can avoid colliding with them (www.audubonathome.org/SafeWindows.html).
- Wherever possible, plant patches of shrubs for catbirds away from busy roadways.

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**Win a Great Horned Owl Limited Art Print and support a local Classroom**

Enter at the Mecklenburg Audubon Meeting or mail your check to: Lucy Quintilliano, Treasurer, Mecklenburg Audubon, P.O. Box 221093, Charlotte, NC 28222

Name: ________________________________

Address: ______________________________

City, State Zip: _________________________

Amount Enclosed: $ ___________ for ____________ tickets

Tickets: $5 each or 3 for $10.
Black River Boat Trips

This four-hour guided trip takes participants on an unforgettable exploration into the Black River; one of North Carolina’s most pristine and healthy river systems. Embarking from the downtown Wilmington riverfront aboard the Capt. J.N. Maffitt, a classic 1940s-era Liberty Launch resembling the movie legend African Queen, we cruise up the Cape Fear River before entering the primordial world of the Black River with its old growth Bald Cypress and Tupelo Gum swamp. Audubon North Carolina’s education director Andy Wood provides colorful narrative about the sights along our route including natural history lore with emphasis on connections with this area’s important cultural heritage.

Pileated Woodpeckers and flocks of colorful warblers and other neotropical songbirds can be heard and seen as we boat upriver. Black bear, bobcat, American alligator and other seldom-seen wildlife may make an appearance, but more common encounters will be with river turtles, Belted Kingfishers, herons, and egrets.

Trip cost: $55/per person, $40 for children 12 years and younger. To register for a trip please call Cape Fear River Boats 910-343-1611.

This program is also available for families and organized groups. For groups of 20, the cost is $45/person and for groups of 30, the cost is $30/person. To arrange a special group trip, contact Andy Wood at 910-270-9451 or via email.

Holly Shelter Eco-Tours for Groups and Families

Organized groups and families are invited to book passage on a special trek into history, both natural and cultural, to experience unique wonders found in long leaf pine savanna and Carolina Bay habitats. This four-hour guided tour of the state-owned Holly Shelter Game Land takes participants through a limited-access 100-square-mile Important Bird Area and natural heritage treasure in the heart of rural Pender County. This low-impact exploration allows participants to explore grand expanses of long leaf pine savanna and cypress-rimmed pocket pond habitats with close-up first hand views of Venus’ fly trap, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, and other rare and unique species.

Special tours and educational programs may be arranged for groups. Please note there may be fees attached to these tours. For more information and to schedule tours, please contact:

Andy Wood, Education Director
Audubon North Carolina
7741 Market Street, Unit D
Wilmington, NC 28411
awood@audubon.org
(910) 686-7527

Please note:
* Trip fees are per person and include equipment and tour transportation.
* Meeting location and additional information will be provided with registration.
* Outdoor safety and awareness are important in all Audubon programs. Trips are contingent upon the weather. Thunderstorms and severe weather may result in cancellation or time change. Refunds will be made for Audubon-canceled programs. No-shows cannot be refunded without 24-hour prior notification.
* Suggested items to bring include sunscreen, drinking water, hat, comfortable shoes (not sandals), and camera. Some binoculars will be provided.

Friday field trips to Mason Inlet Waterbird Management Area

Starting April 24, Audubon North Carolina biologists will offer free tours of the Mason Inlet Waterbird Management Area at the north end of Wrightsville Beach every Friday at 9:00 am. The tours last about two hours, and include a hike along the protected sanctuary that serves as habitat for beach-nesting birds including Least Tern, Black Skimmer, American Oystercatcher, Wilson’s plover and other unique coastal birds.

The Mason Inlet Waterbird site is framed by the Atlantic Ocean to the east, tidal salt marsh to the west and Mason Inlet to the north. Audubon North Carolina manages the sanctuary in cooperation with New Hanover County and Wrightsville Beach. Audubon staff provides daily monitoring and site maintenance, along with conservation-education programs designed to connect people to the birds that use this important habitat.

You do not need to register for the 9 a.m. Friday tour; just meet at the Mason Inlet information kiosk located off the cul-de-sac near the Shell Island Resort. Public parking is available on the main road just south of the resort. Coming from Wilmington, cross the Wrightsville Beach bridge, bear left, and continue to Lumina Avenue. Turn left on Lumina Avenue and follow the road to the northernmost end of the beach where Shell Island Resort is located.
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.

MAS Board

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Tour the NC Coastal Island Sanctuary
May 3, 2009  1:00 - 5:30 PM - Carolina Beach Marina

Audubon established the NC Coastal Islands sanctuary system more than a decade ago to protect and restore vital nesting habitats for coastal birds. Today, Audubon North Carolina protects 19 islands that support thousands of nesting pairs of pelicans, herons, egrets, ibises, gulls, terns, and black skimmers. This cruise will take you on a tour of some of these islands, including Battery Island, a nesting site for approximately 12% of the global white ibis population.

Guides for the trip include area experts including Dr. James Parnell, retired Professor Emeritus of Biology from UNC Wilmington, and Walker Golder and Andy Wood with North Carolina Audubon. Pack a picnic lunch if you would like and soft drinks will be sold aboard ship.

Cost: $35.00 Adults, $25.00 Children under 12.

For more information contact Melinda Stewart (JohnandmelindaS@aol.com)

It’s Time to Renew

To guarantee that you don’t miss the fall issue of the Audubon News please remember to renew. Subscriptions go from July 1st through June 30th.

Mecklenburg Audubon Society

Join now and your membership will be effective until June 2010.

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: ____________________________ E-mail: ____________________________

☐ 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