**Monthly Meeting:** Thursday, December 3rd, 2009

**Birding Gear Fest!**

With Christmas right around the corner everyone is scrambling for gift ideas for that bird watching friend or spouse. Or perhaps you are trying to provide some hints to friends and spouse of what you would really appreciate. Well our December meeting is exactly what you need. It will be a showcase of stuff!! Stuff that every bird watcher dreams of owning –books, binoculars, scopes, Bird Jams, CDs, videos and who knows what else. We’ll have a couple of ‘experts’ around to discuss your options.

There will be a quick intro to what to look for in optics but the rest of the meeting will be pretty free flowing with opportunities to check out equipment and talk to folks who have experience with it. No one will be trying to sell you anything. This is strictly a time to glean information from more experienced colleagues.

With this said we really need your help to make this a success. Please bring your stuff as well. After all you might have a pair of binoculars or great hat that someone else would be interested in checking out. You may have questions about the best way to use your equipment or it’s features that others can answer. It is amazing what you can learn from fellow birders. One thing we won’t be talking about though is backyard equipment and supplies. We’ll save that for another meeting.

So gather up your gear and head on over to the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church (920 Sharon Amity) on Thursday, December 3rd. We begin flocking around 7:15 PM for food and drink. (Bring your own cup to help save trees.) The meeting starts at 7:35 PM. See you there with all your stuff!

**Sparrow ID Workshop**

Saturday, December 12th
8 AM to 3 PM • Reedy Creek Nature Center

Winter brings a wide variety of sparrows to our fields and backyards, but they aren’t the easiest to ID. This workshop is exactly what you need to hone your skills. Taylor Piephoff will provide an hour or so of ‘class work’ with study skins so you can see what the birds look like up close. Then he will take you out into the field to put into practice what you have learned.

We start at 8 AM for about 1.5 hrs. of discussion in the Reedy Creek Nature Center. (Directions: after you enter the park, follow the road to the stop sign; take a right and go all the way to the end.) Then we will go into the preserve for some field identification. After lunch at a local restraurant we will continue on to the Concord Mills for more birds. Species that will be covered will include Field, Song, Chipping, Swamp, White-throated, Fox or great hat that someone else would be interested in checking out. You may have questions about the best way to use your equipment or it’s features that others can answer. It is amazing what you can learn from fellow birders. One thing we won’t be talking about though is backyard equipment and supplies. We’ll save that for another meeting.

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**What’s Inside?**

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| 1  | Sparrow Workshop           |
| 2  | Field Trips                |
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**Upcoming Events**

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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, December 5th: Wintering Waterfowl**
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@mac.com]

By now most of the wintering waterfowl should have arrived at Coddle Creek Reservoir and the surrounding area. We will meet at Panera Bread across from Concord Mills Mall at 9 AM to first check out the wetland behind HH Greg and then car pool up to the reservoir. Depending on time we may even swing by Moss Creek Greenway to see what’s there.

**Saturday, December 12th: Six-Mile Creek**
1/2 Day • Easy* • Contact: John Buckman [linbuckman@aol.com]

Meet at 9:00. Go out Highway 521 past Ballantyne. After crossing Providence Rd West, take the next left, which is Marvin Rd. After crossing Ardrey Kell (traffic light), The greenway parking lot is about one mile on the right. This is a flat 2 1/2 mile walk on asphalt.

**Sunday, December 13th: Frank Liske Park**
1/2 Day • Easy* • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

Meet at 9:00. Take Highway 49 through Harrisburg. After the last light in Harrisburg (at the Taco Bell), go 2.6 miles, and turn left onto Stough Rd. (There is a sign for the park and a left turn lane). Take Stough for 1.2 miles and the park is on the right. Cross the tracks to the first left. Follow it to the parking lot on the right.

**Saturday, December 19th: Gaston County Christmas Count**
Full Day • Contact: Steve Tracy [stevepath1@aol.com]

For many animals the Catawba River can act as a barrier. Only the heartiest mammal will attempt to swim across the river. Birds, however, are not as easily intimated. And the river shouldn’t be a deterrent birders either. That’s why we team up with birders from the Gaston area to conduct the Gaston County Christmas Count. This will be a great opportunity to get to know our neighbors and explore new birding hot spots.

**Sunday, December 20th: Lake Norman Christmas Count**
Full Day • Contact: Taylor Piephoff [PiephoffT@aol.com]

This is hands down the best count circle in the Piedmont. Because of the wide variety of habitat — open fields, large lake, small ponds, wetlands, mixed hardwood forest, old farms — the potential for unusual birds is great. In some ways this count is like a tour through Peterson’s guide with a smattering of species from loons all the way through to the sparrows with representatives of almost everything in between.

Some groups will start before dawn to catch the owls and woodcocks. Others will meet at 7:00 AM. There are fast food places in the count circle but you may want to bring food to munch on for energy and warmth. Although you might spend a fair amount of time in the car, warm clothes and sturdy shoes are a must. A tally up dinner will be held at 5:30 PM.

**Saturday, Dec. 26th: Charlotte Christmas Count**
Full Day • Contact: Ken Kneidel [kendel2@earthlink.net]

The granddaddy of the counts, going all the back to 1941, this circle still encompasses a surprising variety of habitat considering suburban sprawl which has taken over much of the area. There are still patches of woods, ponds, lakes, streams and open fields which turn up a interesting variety of resident and wintering species.

In the last 5 years we have averaged around 85-90 species. A remarkable number considering the wholesale lost of habitat over the past 20 years, which just proves the tenacity of the birds.

Although this is an all day event if you can only participate in the morning or afternoon you are more than welcome to join a group. If you can’t get away to join a team and you live within the circle, you can count birds in your yard. Contact Ken for details on how to do this.

Since fast food establishments (and warmth) will be just around the corner packing a lunch is optional although a thermos of coffee never hurt. There will be a tally up dinner at Wing Haven 5:30 PM. Just bring your appetites and good birding stories. Too ensure even and complete coverage of the area those who wish to participate should contact Ken Kneidel.

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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.

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

From December 14 through January 5, tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas will take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. Families and students, birders and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists go out on an annual mission - often before dawn. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house during the Holiday season.

Each of the citizen scientists who annually brave snow, wind, or rain, to take part in the Christmas Bird Count makes an enormous contribution to conservation. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations - and to help guide conservation action.

The data collected by observers over the past century allow researchers, conservation biologists, and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent’s bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years.

The long term perspective made possible by the Christmas Bird Count is vital for conservationists. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat - and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well. For example, local trends in bird populations can indicate habitat fragmentation or signal an immediate environmental threat, such as groundwater contamination or poisoning from improper use of pesticides.

There is a specific methodology to the CBC, but everyone can participate. Your local count will occur on one day between the above dates. You can pick the most convenient date, or participate in more than one count. The count takes place within “Count Circles,” which focus on specific geographical areas. Each circle is led by a Count Compiler. Therefore, if you are a beginning birder, you will be able to join a group that includes at least one experienced birdwatcher. In addition, if your home is within the boundaries of a Count Circle, then you can stay home and report the birds that visit your feeder or join a group of birdwatchers in the field. In either case, if you have never been on a CBC before, your first step is to locate and contact your local Count Compiler to find out how you can volunteer.

Since the Christmas Bird Count began over a century ago, it has relied on the dedication and commitment of volunteer citizen scientists. In other words, it all starts with you.
Dreaming of a Green Christmas

The Tree

Decide whether to invest in a live or artificial tree. A live tree certainly evokes the season with its pine-fresh smell, and families often enjoy the annual ritual of picking out the perfect tree. Before strapping that 7-foot Douglas fir to your roof, however, consider the following:

**PROS:** Biodegradable; can be chipped into mulch, compost, or wood chips; wood can be repurposed to make fences or for use in building; Christmas trees trap more carbon dioxide than other tree forests; can buy or rent a living tree, which is planted after the holiday

**CONS:** Very few truly organic trees exist; trees can be loaded with pesticides; trees might be trucked across the country, adding to fuel costs; need to be watered regularly; shed needles that will need to be cleaned up; you will need to organize how you recycle your tree after its use and likely transport it yourself and not every community provides recycling options

Artificial trees are another option to consider. They can be shipped right to your door and don’t need to be watered or pruned. The key things to consider when deciding on an artificial tree are whether you have room to store it and if you can find a tree that hasn’t been shipped from overseas.

**PROS:** Can be used year after year; less expensive; won’t dry out; good for urban dwellers; can be put up earlier in the season

**CONS:** Made mostly of plastics and metals, including lead, that are not biodegradable; often shipped long distances, as most are made in China; need to be stored every year; not as aesthetically pleasing

The Lights

Not only will your choice of lights and their power source make an environmental impact, they’ll slash your energy bill, too. Switching to LEDs (light emitting diodes) is 90% more efficient than incandescent lighting. LEDs don’t get as hot as traditional lights, lowering the risk of fire, and if one bulb goes out, the rest of the string still works. They last longer, too. Set lights on a timer to save energy. This will also eliminate the need to run around turning off lights in inclement weather or late at night. The smaller the bulb, the lower the energy cost.

Household Decorations

How you decorate around the house is important, too. Use seasonal fruits as decoration, which you can eat afterwards, or are at least biodegradable. Pomegranates and gourds are good choices. Seedlings or potted evergreens are another option.

When it’s time to take down decorations, you will have a tree to plant. Decorate with bulbs. Amaryllis plants are always popular at Christmas, and they can be potted after the holiday. Wreaths don’t have to be made from evergreens. Make your own from fabric remnants, tree ornaments, or shells. Or buy one that can be used year after year. Other found objects like pine cones, horse chestnuts, and leaves are great natural touches.

Give Green

There are myriad ways to give green and choose gifts that will keep on giving.

Cut Back: The swiftest way to eliminate waste is to give less. A 2005 survey by the Center for a New American Dream showed that 78 percent of Americans wish the holidays were less materialistic.

Make it Yourself.

Good As New: Flea markets, estate sales, and local craft fairs are other great sources for gifts. Try shopping at thrift stores or your local Goodwill.

Think Outside the Box: Giving experiences, like a subscription to the opera, a tennis lesson, or dinner at a chic new restaurant are excellent alternatives to packaged material gifts. Donations to a favorite cause are always appreciated. Other outside the box gift ideas: personalized coupons for a car wash, a massage, or a movie night; bird watching lessons; membership to a local museum or non-profit organization; bird seed or suet; yard work for a month; membership to a local food co-op or other group that will deliver locally grown fruits and vegetables; an herb garden.

Encourage Green: Giving environmentally focused gifts will spread the word this season; energy-saving compact fluorescent lights; a reusable lunch bag; compost/recycling bins; reusable food storage containers; canvas grocery bags; reusable travel coffee mug; A basket full of non-toxic, organic

Maybe this year you’re dreaming beyond a white Christmas. At a time when many of us are trying to reduce our impact on the environment—even the White House will recycle its Christmas decorations this year and use LEDs on the national tree—Christmas provides an excellent opportunity to start ecologically-minded traditions. Here are some tips to green up your Christmas and be more eco-conscious all year round!

Go Green in Baby Steps

Initiating even a few changes this year will make a difference. Start discussing your intentions to have a green Christmas with your family early in the season. Decide on a few key areas to improve without sacrificing family traditions. Focus on the ways in which you as an individual can make changes. Sending cards via email, instead of sending paper cards, is one thing you can do on your own.

Holiday Cards

The 2.6 billion holiday cards sold each year in the United States could fill a landfill the size of a football field 10 stories high. Here are some options that could help reduce that pile. Consider switching to emailed holiday cards. You can send photo and holiday e-cards using sites like Blue Mountain and Amazon.com. Try creating a holiday album on a photo-sharing site like flickr or Shutterfly and circulating that instead of a traditional card. Buy cards printed on recycled paper, handmade papers, or paper made from materials like hemp. Buy cards that donate a portion of proceeds to a good cause. Finally, reuse holiday cards you receive to make gift tags. Most people don’t write on the back of the front of the card.

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Birds on the List: Trumpeter Swan

The Trumpeter Swan is North America’s largest species of waterfowl. It is also the only swan found exclusively within this continent. Named for its distinct, trumpet-like call, it is widely admired today for its beauty and grace. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case, as it was driven nearly to extinction less than a century ago. The Trumpeter Swan has benefited tremendously from modern conservation efforts, but remains one of North America’s least common native waterfowl species.

**Appearance:** Weighing up to 30 pounds, with a 7 to 8 foot wingspan, the Trumpeter Swan is the largest of North America’s native waterfowl. Trumpeters stand four feet tall, measuring up to five feet from bill to tail. All-white with a large black bill and dark legs, the striking adults are similar to the Tundra Swan, but generally slightly larger and bulkier, with a longer neck and more massive bill, which in the Trumpeter, is flatter, more evenly sloped, and extends back to more completely surround the eye. Individual birds are best identified by examining the details of the bill. Young birds are gray to brownish, with mottled pink and gray bills. They attain the all-white adult plumage after the first year.

**Range & Distribution:** Today’s Trumpeter Swan population is largely based in Alaska and the western Canadian provinces, but the birds also breed locally in many areas across the Rockies and western plains. Modern range expansion is thought to be further east than the limits of their actual historic range.

**Habitat:** Trumpeters breed on shallow bodies of water with plenty of vegetation, including freshwater marshes, ponds, lakes, and slow moving rivers. In winter, they choose similar areas such as streams, springs, lakes, or reservoirs where vegetation and ice-free water are available. Once common breeders in prairie regions, most of the birds’ present range is within forested areas.

**Feeding:** Trumpeters are mainly herbivorous, foraging by tipping up in shallow water to reach submerged aquatic vegetation, fish, or small aquatic invertebrates. They also graze on land, particularly in winter, picking up grasses, seeds and grains, and occasionally digging for roots and tubers.

**Reproduction:** Certain characteristics of the Trumpeters’ breeding biology contribute to the difficulties encountered in efforts to re-establish this species. The species is long-lived, reaching over 30 years of age. Compared to birds with shorter life spans, Trumpeters are slow to breed, so reintroduction efforts must be monitored over decades rather than seasons. While birds may pair off in their second year of life, they may not actually breed until their seventh year.

Trumpeters remain paired for life. Both parents build a very large nest, often on a raised mound, island, or even a beaver lodge. Nests can take over a month to construct. Once completed, the female lays her eggs and does much of the incubating, though the male assist. Young cygnets begin to vocalize up to 24 hours before hatching. When they emerge, wet and weakened, they are brooded by the female for another 24 to 48 hours before being led to the feeding grounds. The bulk of the young birds’ diet is small aquatic animals. While cygnets can feed themselves, the parents often assist by treading in shallow water to stir up various invertebrates. Young Trumpeters cannot fly until they are 100 to 120 days old, and family groups usually remain together throughout the first winter.

**Migration:** Each Trumpeter population has separate migratory habits. Northern flocks generally migrate long distances toward various points along the Pacific Northwest coast. Other populations can be notoriously sedentary, often remaining on breeding grounds well beyond the onset of harsh winter conditions, a habit that can occasionally prove fatal. They will move south only as far as necessary to find sufficient open water. In spring, the course is reversed, with birds often arriving on the breeding grounds before the ice has broken up. Many reintroduced populations have yet to establish strong migratory trends. The need for additional wintering grounds away from the Yellowstone region is a current concern for the interior Trumpeter population.

**Population Status & Trends:** Historically, Trumpeter Swans occurred across much of western North America. As civilization pushed westward over recent centuries, Trumpeter populations were quickly decimated. By the early 1930s, only 69 birds remained south of the US-Canada border, although small populations were later discovered in Alaska. Nearly extinct by 1940, the species has been recovering slowly yet steadily over the past half century. Thanks to numerous conservation efforts, these majestic birds are beginning to reoccupy areas where they haven’t been found for decades, and their range is expanding in certain areas. Marked birds from various re-introduction programs started in the 1980s and 1990s are now being reported in areas where the species formerly occurred. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service data from 2005 indicate that all three Trumpeter populations (Pacific Coast, Rocky Mountain, and Interior) are at a modern high, with over 34,000 birds surveyed continent-wide between May 2005 and January 2006.

**Conservation Issues & Efforts:** The species’ rapid decline over the past two and a half centuries was largely due to unchecked hunting for skins, feathers, and meat. Favoured habitat was also lost as much of the birds’ range was converted to agricultural use. The species has been federally protected under the Migratory Bird Act since 1918, but has also benefited from the additional protections afforded it over more recent
Continued from page 5

Trumpeter Swans

What You Can Do: Bird watchers, photographers, and outdoor enthusiasts should avoid disturbing this highly sensitive species. Hunters should avoid lead shot for the well being of Trumpeter Swans and all wildlife. Report sightings of collared, banded, or otherwise marked Trumpeter Swans to your local game commission or wildlife management agency. Participate in the Trumpeter Swan Society’s Adopt a Swan Program, which seeks to raise the funds necessary to further study the specific causes and solutions to the lead poisoning that is killing so many birds in the Pacific Northwest. Funds go towards the study, research, and monitoring of Trumpeter Swans in Washington and British Columbia.

More Information: The Trumpeter Swan Society is an organization dedicated to the welfare of these birds.

References:

Green Christmas

3rd Annual Silent Auction

Once again we will raise money for Audubon Adventures at the January Potluck meeting by conducting a silent auction of donated items. We are looking for bird/birding related items that are in good condition. If you have upgraded your equipment (scope, tripod, bins), consider donating your old items to the club. A wide variety of books about and for birders have sold well in prior years. Do you have any gently used apparel you’ve replaced? Maybe a vest, hat, gloves, fanny pack or even birding pants you’ve outgrown. What about games, puzzles, artwork, sun catchers or figurines? Have a feeder or bird bath in good condition that you aren’t using? If you have a donation, bring it to the November or December meeting or contact Lucy Quintilliano or Jill Shoemaker.

continue...
Beginning Birder Tips

Winter is duck season around the Carolinas. Most of the year we have only one or two species of ducks paddling around on our ponds - mallards and wood ducks when you can find them.

But the cold north winds push ducks from their northern breeding territory to our neck of the woods. Here are a couple of things to keep in mind when identifying ducks. Of course doing your homework before you go out is most important.

Differences in size, shape, plumage patterns and colors, wing beat, flocking behavior, voice, and habitat - all help to distinguish one species from another.

Flock maneuvers in the air are clues. Mallards, pintails, and wigeon form loose groups; teal and shovellers flash by in small, compact bunches; at a distance canvasbacks shift from waving lines to temporary V’s.

Closer up, individual silhouettes are important. Variations of head shapes and sizes, lengths of wings and tails, and fat bodies or slim can be seen.

Within binocular range, color areas can be important. Light conditions might make them look different, but their size and location are positive keys.

The sound of their wings can help as much as their calls. Flying goldeneyes make a whistling sound; wood ducks move with a swish; canvasbacks make a steady rushing sound. Not all ducks quack; many whistle, squeal, or grunt.

Although not a hard and fast rule, different species tend to use different types of habitat. Puddle ducks like shallow marshes and creeks while divers prefer larger, deeper, and more open waters.

Excerpted from Ducks at a Distance (http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/birds/duckdist/index.htm)

We have not inherited the land from our forefathers, we have borrowed it from our children."

– Kashmir Proverb

Who’s New?

Marc Deluca
Pat & Jocelyn McLaughlin