Backyard Habitat for the Birds

Our speaker for the February 5 meeting is local master composter-gardener Carol Buie-Jackson. A resident of Matthews, she and her husband have a website, smelllikedirt.com. She is a habitat steward with the North Carolina Wildlife Federation, and her property was designated a Backyard Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation. As we get ready for spring and are making landscaping decisions, she will talk about ways to replace invasive species with native plants and the need for a return to sustainable gardening and land management practices. She will focus her discussion on bird friendly habitats and plants.

Count for Fun - Count for the Future

The 12th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count
February 13th - 16th

This February, join tens of thousands of people throughout the U.S. and Canada in the 2009 Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). You can count the birds you see in your backyard, off your balcony, at your local park, or from your window—anywhere you can spot birds!

People of all ages and all levels of bird-watching experience are invited to take part. It’s a great way to learn more about the birds in your backyard and neighborhood. It’s also a fun activity for kids—and an opportunity to get outside and connect with nature. You can count by yourself, or with your family, community group, school, or friends! It’s an ideal way for more accomplished birders to introduce friends, children, grandchildren, and others to the wonderful world of birds.

Whether you are brand new to watching and counting birds, or an expert birder, your counts count! Your checklist will contribute valuable information for science and conservation when you enter your tally online at www.birdcount.org. Your list, short or long, will help scientists understand more about how the distribution and abundance of birds are changing through time.

Last year, participants submitted a record-breaking 85,000 checklists. In 2008, GBBC participants documented the huge southward movement of northern finches from Canada, as well as the expanding

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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

February 7th: Anne Springs Close Greenway
1/2 Day - Easy  Leader: Dennis Lankford
We will spend the morning in the area near the dairy barn. Meet at 8:00 AM at the Bojangles on Highway 21. Take I-77 south to the Carowinds exit. Turn left and the Bojangles is on the left about 3/4 mile. There is a $2 fee. Contact Dennis at harecubed2@carolina.rr.com or 704-541-6909 if you are planning to join the group.

February 11th: Four-Mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day - Easy*  Leader: Ron Clark
This has consistently been a very birdy section, newly opened. It is 1.8 miles on flat surface. We will meet at 8:00 AM at the Johnson Rd. parking area. From I-485, take Johnson Rd. toward town, past the light at Earth Fare. The lot is immediately past the creek, on the right. Contact Ron Clark at waxwing@bellsouth.net or 704-866-0811 if you would like to join the group.

February 14th: Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge
Full Day - Moderate  Leader: Ron Clark
This is an all-day trip, so bring lunch. We will plan to be back in Charlotte by 6:00 PM. We’ll cover the hot spots of the refuge and end at the reservoir. We will be able to go into the low grounds for ducks. Pee Dee often turns up some nice surprises. Last year we had a golden eagle fly over and two white-winged scoters on the reservoir. We will meet at the Windsor Square McDonald’s at 6:30 AM on Highway 74 just past Sam Newell Rd. Contact Ron Clark at waxwing@bellsouth.net or 704-866-0811.

February 15th: Sherman Branch Park (Woodcock walk)
Evening - Moderate  Leader: Taylor Piephoff
Taylor Piephoff will take us looking for woodcocks and other birds. We will meet at 5:30 PM in the parking lot on Rocky River Church Rd. We’ll have some time before the woodcocks start to check the area for other winter favorites. Take Exit 41 off I-485. This is Albemarle Rd, or 24/27. If you take Albemarle Rd. from town go past I-485. Turn left at the light on Rocky River Church Rd. After you pass Camp Stewart Rd. on the left, the parking lot is a few hundred yards further, on the left. Contact Taylor at piephofft@aol.com.

February 21st: Evergreen Preserve Work Day
1/2 Day  Leader: Larry & Louise Barden
Looks like the bamboo is back and a few other invasives need to be beaten back as well. So we will gather at the Winterfield Elementary School parking lot at 9 AM to attack these problem areas as well as pick up trash and fill in pot holes. We need all the hands on deck. Bring gloves, rakes trimmers, cutters and anything else you might have. Let Larry & Louise know you will be there at louise@lbarden.com or larry@lbarden.com or 704-535-6385.

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. .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, February 28th: Hilton Head**

**Sunday, March 1st: Savannah National Wildlife Refuge**

Weekend Trip  Contact: Ron Clark

“Local “ birder Dave Lovett will take us to several different spots on Saturday, including a nice restaurant for dinner. Sunday, we will bird Savannah National Wildlife Refuge for 1/2 day. For those who head down on Friday Morning, we will bird Pinckney NWR that afternoon. The meeting spot and time for Pinckney will be posted later on MAS-L.

On Saturday Morning, we will meet in the parking lot of Quality Inn and Suites at 8:00. It is located at 200 Museum St. on the corner of Highway 278, the main road into Hilton Head. After you cross the bridge, it is on the left at mile marker 3, next to Appleby’s. If you want to stay there, they are giving us a price of $44.96, for two queen beds, non-smoking. There are microwaves, refrigerators, and continental breakfast. The number is 843-681-3655. If you have a problem getting that price, mention Ron Clark’s name. They are holding 5 rooms, but will add more, if needed.

Ron Clark is organizing this trip so contact him at waxwing@bellsouth.net or 704-537-8181. Let him know if you will be going down early, on Friday.

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

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### Helping Backyard Birds: Eastern Bluebird

The familiar blue songbird is a year-round resident from the mid-Atlantic States south to northern Florida and west to Oklahoma and eastern Texas. In the summer it ranges farther north to southern Canada. A separate population ranges from southeastern Arizona south into Mexico. Bluebirds nest in tree cavities and eat both insects and small fruits. They can be helped by placing and maintaining bluebird nest boxes and planting fruiting trees and shrubs.

**Food:** Bluebirds feed on insects and other arthropods and also on small fruits. During spring and summer, insects and other arthropods predominate. Bluebirds survey the ground from a perch and drop down to pick up prey from the ground. In late summer through winter, a wide variety of small fruits and berries dominate the diet.

**Nesting:** Bluebirds are secondary cavity nesters, utilizing woodpecker holes and other natural cavities as well as bird boxes. They will nest in a wide range of open habitats. Nests are open cups 1 to 4 inches high, made of dried grass or pine needles. Eggs (usually 4 to 6) are powdered blue color.

**Shelter:** Bluebirds sleep in nest cavities or on sheltered branches of trees and shrubs.

**Other:** House Wrens, House Sparrows, and Tree Swallows are aggressive nest site competitors and may drive bluebirds from nest boxes. Raccoons, cats, fire ants, and snakes may kill nestlings.

**How You Can Help**

- Install and maintain a live mealworm feeder.
- Plant native fruiting trees and shrubs along field or woodland edges, including blueberry, sumac, sassafras, and pin cherry.
- Limit pesticide use on fruiting trees and shrubs and on insects in proximity to nesting bluebirds
- Whenever safe to do so, leave standing dead trees (snags) and small fence posts to provide perches for foraging bluebirds.
- Provide nest boxes 3-6 feet up on fence posts or low poles in open areas away from trees. Inside of box should be at least 4 x 4 inches wide and 8-12 inches deep, with a 1 1/2 inch entrance hole.
- Monitor nest boxes at least weekly to check for predation or other problems.
- For more details on nest box specifications and nest box management see wwww.nabluebirdsociety.org.
- Plant scattered native trees and shrubs near open nesting and foraging areas to provide adequate roosting opportunities.
- Provide several boxes in appropriate areas to make room for bluebirds and other cavity nesters.
- Remove House Sparrow nests from boxes.
- Install predator guards below nest boxes to keep climbing predators from reaching nests.
- Discourage cats and raccoons by providing a 5 inch roof overhang above the nest box entrance hole.

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Audubon North Carolina
Chapter Day 2009

Saturday, February 7, 2009
9:30 AM – 3:00 PM
Stedman Multipurpose Center, North Carolina Zoo, Asheboro, NC

The members of North Carolina’s nine local Audubon chapters drive much of our conservation work, providing an invaluable grassroots presence for our statewide and national organization. The local chapters play a vital role in citizen science projects like the Christmas Bird Count and offer Audubon biologists tremendous support through programs such as Adopt-an-IBA (Important Bird Area). The annual Chapter Day is an opportunity for members across the state to meet and share ideas on a range of chapter-oriented topics. Even if you are not currently involved with a chapter, Chapter Day is a great way to find out more about the exciting events, programs, and field trips that chapters offer their members. We hope you can join us!

This year’s agenda will help chapter members learn more about post-election realities at the state and national level and what they mean for Auduboners. Special presentations by a NAS DC office legislative director and state-level lobbyists will focus Audubon activists on the potential opportunities and challenges in the year ahead. The afternoon will focus on chapters, sharing successes and developing action steps on projects that ANC and chapters may work on jointly in the coming year.

How to register:

If you plan to attend please register so we can keep a head count. Once you register we will send you directions to the Zoo and the final agenda. There is no cost to attend chapter day, UNLESS you want to partake of the continental breakfast and reserve a box lunch; the combined cost of the meals is $16.00 (these are offered only as a package). If you do not wish to reserve the meals, we encourage you to bring your own breakfast and lunch. If you do reserve the meals when you register, please mail a check to our office by February 1, or bring cash or check with you the day of the event. But please register whether you are reserving the meals or not!

To register, please e-mail or call Anne Brown at: agbrown@audubon.org or 919-929-3899. Please let her know how many people will be attending and whether they would like to reserve the meals.

Chapter Day Agenda

9:30 AM: Arrive, register, and enjoy a continental breakfast of pastries, juice, coffee, and tea. (Registration fee required for breakfast)

10:00-10:10 AM: Welcome and Introductions by Chris Canfield, Executive Director, Audubon North Carolina

10:15 AM -12:00 PM: Perspectives on Politics and Conservation Panel
Panelists: Mike Daulton, National Audubon Society Policy Director; Henry Lancaster II, Lancaster, Craig and Associates and ANC Board of Trustees; Grady McCallie, Policy Director, North Carolina Conservation Network

12:00- 1:00 PM: Lunch

Pre-register for Chapter Day and reserve a lunch (details below). Boxed lunches will include sandwiches, cold salad, fruit, cookie, and beverages.

1:00 – 3:00 PM: Sharing Chapter Successes, Challenges and Next Steps

Group discussion will focus on these questions: “How do chapters see working in support of state office and national issues and priorities? Do chapters want to be more involved at either or both levels? If so, what are the action steps that could be accomplished to move this forward over the coming year?”

Food, Fun & Fellowship

Nestbox Monitors Needed

Mark Oliver, Natural Resource Specialist with Mecklenburg County is looking for a volunteer to monitor bluebird boxes in McDowell Nature Preserve from March thru September 2009. He will train you on what he is looking for but the assignment will entail going to McDowell once per week (doesn’t matter what day and anytime is fine but he prefers afternoons) and checking the boxes. He or someone on staff will cover if you have to go out of town or miss due to illness. If you are interested in this project contact Mark at 704-948-4504 or mark.oliver@mecklenburg-countync.gov
Tips for New Birders: Tricky IDs - Accipiters

Sharp-shinned (Accipiter striatus) and Cooper’s (Accipiter cooperii) hawks commonly prey on feeder birds, and they are frequently reported during the Great Backyard Bird Count. Despite their common occurrence, these hawks present a significant identification problem for many beginning and intermediate (and even more advanced!) birders. Throughout the year, there is great variation in plumage and in size for these two species. Therefore, perhaps more than any other similar-looking pair, no single field mark is likely to distinguish one species from the other. Instead, the careful observer must use a combination of field marks and draw from the overall “gestalt” of the hawk for proper identification. No field guide will substitute plenty of practice in the field for this pair.

Sharp-shinned Hawk

A small, jay-size hawk (avg. 10-14” long), with dark gray back, a rusty-barred breast, a slender square-tipped tail. Sexes are similar, but female is larger in size

- SIZE: Similar to a jay or a dove. Female is larger and can be similar to smaller Cooper’s. Therefore, size often unreliable.
- BODY SHAPE: Broad chest and narrow hips lend the bird a more regal appearance...center of gravity is often high
- LEGS: Thinner, pencil-like legs compared to Cooper’s.
- TAIL: Tip of long tail is square, showing prominent corners. The outer tail feathers are usually the longest (or nearly so). Don’t mistake thin white terminal band with grey above as the “broad white band” of Cooper’s. Note: tail tip of soaring bird appears rounded.
- HEAD FEATHERS: Feathers on crown and back of neck are dark, giving the bird a “hooded” appearance.
- SOARING: Short rounded wings are pushed forward at the wrists, so that the small head barely extends past the wings.
- FLIGHT: Typically flies with several quick wingbeats followed by a short glide. When compared to the Cooper’s Hawk, the Sharp-shinned’s wing beats are erratic, more difficult to count.

Immature Sharp-shinned Hawks

- Birds have brown backs and streaked underparts.
- Heavy, bold (reddish) streaks on underparts, especially on lower breast and belly.
- Birds have yellow eyes (adults have red eyes). Usually has a pale stripe above the eye.

Cooper’s Hawk

A medium crow-size hawk (avg. 14-20” long) with a dark gray back, a rusty-barred breast, dark cap, and a long, rounded tail. Sexes are similar, but female is larger in size

- SIZE: Slightly larger than most Sharp-shinneds, similar to a crow.
- BODY SHAPE: Broad chest and thick body lend the bird a thicker, “scrappy” appearance. Thick, tubular body has a lower center of gravity than Sharp-shinned.
- LEGS: Thicker than Sharp-shinned.
- TAIL: In fresh fall plumage, its long tail is rounded at the tip with a broad white band. The middle tail feathers are usually the longest.
- HEAD FEATHERS: Feathers on crown are black and feathers on back of neck are pale, giving the bird a “capped” appearance. Feathers on back of head often raised, giving it a crested look. (This is never seen on the Sharp-shinned.)
- SOARING: The large, angular head projects far beyond the wings giving the bird a cross-like appearance. Extended tail appears proportionally longer than Sharp-shinneds, though this feature is often too subtle to detect.
- FLIGHT: Often flies with slower wing beats followed by a short glide. The slower, regular wing beats are easily counted when bird flies overhead.

Immature Cooper’s Hawks

- Birds have brown backs and streaked underparts.
- Finer streaks mostly on upper breast; lower belly mostly white.
- Yellow eyes (adults have red eyes). Lacks stripe above the eye.
- Often has reddish cast on side of head and nape.

Resources used to compile this species comparison: The Birds in Forested Landscapes Species Accounts; Kenn Kaufman’s Advanced Birding (a Peterson field guide); The Sibley Guide to Birds (published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.); Field Guide to the Birds of North America (published by National Geographic); Summer 1995 Birdscope article: Sharp-shinned Hawks and Cooper’s Hawks by Kenneth V. Rosenberg; Stokes Nature Guides.
Great Backyard Bird Count

ranges of the Eurasian Collared-Dove and the Red-bellied Woodpecker. Northern Bobwhite and Eastern Meadowlark numbers continued to decline. Some species showed up in GBBC reports for the very first time, including a Masked Duck in Texas—a bird that is usually found in the tropics. An Arctic Loon, seldom seen outside Alaska, was spotted in California. An Ivory Gull wandered down from the high Arctic to show up on a checklist in South Dakota.

It’s easy to participate


2. Count the birds you see, wherever you choose to count. Write down the highest number of individuals you see at one time—that way you will avoid counting any bird twice.

3. After at least 15 minutes of watching in one place, report your results online at www.birdcount.org.

4. You can repeat your count at the same place on each day of the Great Backyard Bird Count. You can also visit other locations and submit separate tallies for those areas as well.

View your results

Online maps and lists are updated throughout the count, making it easy to see how your birds fit into the big picture.

Send your photos!

You can submit your digital images of birds—or of Great Backyard Bird Count participants—for our online gallery and photo contest at www.birdcount.org.

Share your videos too! Upload to YouTube with the tag “GBBC” and we’ll post the best on our web site.

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: __________________________

☑ 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