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Food, Fun, and Fotos!

Dinner - 6:30 PM
Program - 7:30 PM

What better way to start the New Year than breaking bread with birding colleagues and reminiscing about the past year. So we continue our January tradition of having a potluck dinner and sharing photographs and/or videos of our past adventures. It’s a great time to get to know folks we may not have had an opportunity to spend time with last year. Many friendships have their origins in the dinner.

We will start setting up around 6:00 PM aiming to start eating at 6:30 PM. Please bring a dish that will feed 8-10 people plus your own plate, cup and flatware. The club will provide drinks and dessert.

While we are chatting and catching up we have the opportunity to peruse an assortment of items donated for our second annual Silent Auction (see details below). After dinner we will once again regale ourselves with photographs and videos taken best photographers in the county – our members!!! It’s your chance to share with everyone special moments you encountered while traveling or just looking out your back window.

Photos should be nature oriented, no grandchildren please ;-) We will have slide project, video tape player and computer to play CDs and/or DVDs. If you are bringing digital photos, it is helpful if they are either in a power point presentation or just .jpg files. Any other programs may or may not work on the computer we have. Digital videos should be in a .mov, .wav or .mp3 format. If you have any questions contact Judy Walker (birdwalker@mac.com).

So start off the New Year with fun, fotos and fellowship in the fellowship hall of the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church (920 Sharon Amity). Dinner – 6:30 PM Photo – 7:30 PM.

Silent Auction Returns

Last year we held our first Silent Auction as part of the potluck dinner. It was so successful we thought we would try again. All the proceeds go to funding our Audubon Adventure classes. This year we have books for the budding and experienced birder, tripods, artwork, feeders, binoculars, and much more. Each item will have a minimum asking price (most under $5) and a suggested increment for making higher bids. So don’t forget your checkbook and help make this fundraising event another success.

Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to the body and soul. --- John Muir

Upcoming Events

1/3 - Pee Dee NWR CBC
1/8 - Food, Fun & Fotos (Meeting.)
1/10 - Cowan’s Ford (Field Trip)
1/16 - 6-mile Creek Grnwy. (Field Trip)
1/17 - Huntington Beach (Field Trip)
1/22 - 4-mile Creek Grnwy. (Field Trip)
1/24 - McDowell Prairie (Field Trip)
1/31 - Moss Creek Grnwy. (Field Trip)
1/30-2/1 - Carolina Bird Club Mtg.
2/5 - Backyard Habitat (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!!

Saturday, January 3, 2009: Pee Dee NWR Christmas Bird Count
Full Day  Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@mac.com]

The Pee Dee Christmas Count is a great way to start a of year birding. It produces surprises almost every year. One year it was turkey tracks in the snow and lots of sparrows. Another sight to behold is seeing the ducks take off in the morning or watching them come back in at dusk. Because of the wide variety of habitat and its central location we usually have a pretty good list of birds including Bald Eagles, Tundra Swans, and lots and lots of sparrows and ducks.

If you want to carpool, meet at the McDonalds at Windsor Square Shopping Center at 5:45 AM [on Independence]. Otherwise meet at the Pee Dee Maintenance Building [main entrance off Rt. 52] at 7 AM. Lunch will be provided but you will want to wear lots of layers and bring snack foods and something hot to drink while you are out in the field.

Saturday, January 10, 2009: Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge
1/2 Day - Moderate  Leader: John Bonestell

Winter is a great time to wonder around Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge. The fields surrounding the two ponds are usually loaded with sparrows and some years Sedge Wrens. The ponds and duck cove usually harbor wintering waterfowl. And the woods have been known to shelter winter irruptives like Purple Finch, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Evening Grosbeaks.

John spends a lot of time at the refuge and will be able to show you all his favorite nooks and crannies. There will be a lot of walking over some uneven terrain. Meet in the parking lot by the viewing stand at 8:30 AM.

Tuesday, January 13, 2009: Six-mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day - Easy*  Leader: John Buckman

A great place to bird any time of the year. Meet at 8:30 AM in the greenway parking lot.

Saturday, January 17, 2009: Huntington Beach State Park, SC
Full Day  Leader: Judy Walker

Our winter excursion to Huntington Beach State Park is an annual favorite offering some different bird species than our fall trip. Waterfowl - both freshwater and saltwater- have arrived in good numbers including loons, grebes, and ducks. Gannets are numerous offshore along with shorebirds along the quiet beaches.

We will meet at 8 AM in the causeway parking lot. Be sure to dress warmly as the winds off the ocean can be chilling and bring a lunch for a midday break.

For those staying the weekend, Saturday evening we gather at a local restaurant for dinner to decide on where we will bird Sunday morning for half a day before heading home.

Thursday, January 22, 2009: Four-mile Creek Greenway*
1/2 Day - Easy*  Leader: Ron Clark

A newly opened greenway is always an exciting place to explore. Folks who have walked the trail so far indicate it is very birdie and could be harboring some surprising finds. Five species of woodpeckers have already been seen there.

The trail is about 1.8 miles one-way but is easy walking. Meet at the Johnston Road parking lot at 8:30 AM.

Continued on page 3

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, January 24, 2009: McDowell Prairie
1/2 Day - Moderate  Leader: Ron Clark

We will first try our luck at identifying all the wintering sparrows on the prairie. There may be a few Lincoln’s and/or White-crowns in among all those brambles. Then we will visit Copperhead Island, some nearby ponds, and McDowell Nature Preserve to look for waterfowl. We will probably finish around 2:00 so bring snacks and/or lunch. Hot drinks will probably be appreciated but remember there are no facilities at the prairie.

Meet at the Harris-Teeter at intersection of Highways 160 and 49 at 8:00 to carpool to the prairie.

Saturday, January 31, 2009: Moss Creek Greenway (Cabarrus Co.)
1/2 Day - Easy  Leader: Corey Slovich

Another new greenway with a great, restored wetland and several small ponds. Since this is just down the street from his house Corey gets to walk this greenway (2 miles round-trip) often so he knows where all the good birds hang out. Right now there are lots of sparrows. It’s a great place to see several different subspecies of Song Sparrows. There were some Rusty Blackbirds hanging out there as well.

Meet Corey in the bus parking lot of the ‘new’ Odell Elementary School at the corner of Moss Farm St. and Harris Rd. not too far from Concord Mills.

Christmas Counts Highlights

Although we still have one more count – Pee Dee NWR – to go at the time of this writing, Christmas counts this year have been productive. It’s hard to complain about warm weather when a good portion of the country is dealing with record snows and chills, but the weather was almost too nice for the Gaston count which turned up some nice birds – Fish crow, Purple Finch, Canvasbacks and Bald Eagle.

Lake Norman was a little more interesting weather wise. Many counters started out in pouring rain trying to coax owls and woodcocks into revealing their presence. The morning cleared with pleasant temperature but then the front came through dropping the temperatures and kicking up the wind. Not a pleasant thing on the lake. However, the count offered up some very interesting species – the first ever recorded Common Raven for Mecklenburg County and Barn Owls! John Bonestell managed to record an interesting yard bird – an Osprey.

Charlotte’s count offered up some interesting weather as well as some nice birds. It was really tough to see birds when you could barely see the trees! Everything seemed to be LGJs – little grey jobs. It really tested ones ability to identify birds by silhouette only. Perhaps that will be the next big thing in birding.

Over all Lake Norman tallied approximately 97 species and Charlotte is up to 85. For complete details on these and other counts around the Carolinas and the country go to http://www.audubon.org/Bird/cbc/.

Many thanks to all who participated. Your work is important to the protection of bird habitat in the Charlotte metropolitan area.
Helping Backyard Birds: Cedar Waxwing

An attractive black-masked brown songbird that breeds from across Canada and southeast Alaska through the central United States, and winters across southern Canada and the central US, and south through Mexico and Central America. Waxwings need shade trees for nesting, and berry-producing trees and shrubs for food. They can be attracted and helped by planting fruiting trees for food and by providing large shade trees for nesting sites.

What Cedar Waxwings Need

Food: Waxwings eat a wide variety of fruits and also feed on insects, which they catch in mid-air or pick from the bark and foliage of trees. They also eat flower petals. These birds often pass berries from bird-to-bird down a line. This may both reinforce social bonds within a flock and soften and break down the thick, waxy skin of some berries. Nestlings are fed mostly insects for their first 1-3 days, and then increasing amounts of fruits.

Nesting: Avoiding the forest interior, waxwings nest in open woodland and old-field habitats with numerous shrubs and small trees—including urban and suburban parks and backyards, and at the edge of wooded areas or in isolated trees or shrubs in old fields. They usually build nests in the forks of horizontal branches 5-30 feet up in trees such as maple, eastern red cedar, apple, pear, hawthorn, bur oak, eastern white cedar, and various species of pines.

Shelter: Waxwing sleeping and roosting behavior is almost unknown, but they probably roost on sheltered branches of trees.

Other: These birds will use bird baths and small ponds for bathing and drinking.

How You Can Help

• Plant fruit and berry trees that can provide fruit when waxwings are in your area. Favorites include native cherries, hawthorns, mountain ashes, elderberries, red elder, serviceberries, and junipers.

• Plant berry trees at least 30 feet from windows or roadways to protect waxwing flocks from colliding with cars or glass.

• Avoid spraying trees with pesticides that may kill insects or contaminate fruit that waxwings eat.

• Plant a variety of native trees and shrubs, including oaks, pines, maple, cedar, and hawthorn.

• Hang 5 inch pieces of white cotton twine or yarn on tree limbs for waxwings to use as nesting material.

• Plant shade trees that can provide sheltered evening roosts.

Backyard Habitat: Recipes for the Birds

In the colder months birds need to eat a lot of energy rich foods to keep their body metabolism working at top efficiency to provide the body heat they need to stay warm and active. Fat in the form of suet and/or peanuts provide quick usable energy. So many backyard feeders like to supplement their feeding stations with homemade concoctions. Here a couple of recipes you might want to whip up and treat your birds. Of course you can also just go to the bird store and buy suet cakes, but what fun is that!?!?

Catbird Cake
[also cherished by Mockingbirds and Thrashers]

1 c. raisins
2 c. flour
1 heaping T. shortening
1 t. baking soda
1 1/2 c. water
1 c. sugar

Simmer the raisins in the water for 20 minutes. Drain and reserve 1 cup of liquid. To the liquid, add the shortening and the baking soda and let stand to cool. Add sugar and flour and stir in raisins. Pour into an 8” x 8” pan and bake at 375 degrees for 1 hour. Serve in pieces at ground feeder.

Bluebird Betty

1 c. sugar
2 c. flour
1 c. raisins
1 t. baking powder
1/2 c. shortening
1 t. baking soda
1/2 c. water
1/3 c. nutmeats

In a medium size bowl put flour, baking powder and baking soda. Set aside. Boil sugar, raisins, shortening and water for 5 minutes. Add this to the dry ingredients. Mix well. Add nuts. Spoon into well greased 8” x 8” pan. Bake 20-25 minutes at 350 degrees. Serve in pieces on feeder tray or ground feeder.

Suet Made Easy

2 c. fat (lard, bacon grease, suet)
5 c. cornmeal
1/2 c. peanut butter
1 c. sunflower and/or millet

Melt fat. Add peanut butter & melt. Add cornmeal and cook until bubbly. Remove from heat and add birdseed. Cool in refrigerator until firm enough to form balls. Freeze until ready to use.
2008 Victories, Challenges, Opportunities

Victories

Teshekpuk Lake - In summer 2006, we thought we would lose this globally important Alaskan wetlands to oil and gas development. An 11th hour lawsuit halted the sale and required the Bureau of Land Management to conduct a proper environmental impact statement. In May 2008, the BLM relented and announced it would defer any leasing for ten years. We’ll press now for permanent protection.

Incentives for Landowners to Protect Endangered Species - Audubon has long pushed for financial incentives to encourage landowners to protect endangered species. With the passage of the Farm Bill, landowners who choose to engage in projects on their land that help provide habitat for endangered species will now be eligible for $300 million in tax benefits, a win-win solution for private property owners and endangered species.

Polar Bears - The world’s largest land predator was finally listed as threatened, though the Bush Administration offered oil lease sales in its critical Arctic Sea habitat. We will work to ensure polar bear habitat is in the Arctic Ocean is protected.

Pocosin NWR - Audubon North Carolina put the kibosh on plans to land Navy jets near the Pocosin National Wildlife Refuge.

Wetlands Protection - Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) and the Yazoo Pumps projects were finally dumped to the great relief of Louisiana and Mississippi wetlands.

Piping Plover & Sea Turtles - A court settlement in North Carolina protected Piping Plovers endangered sea turtles from off-road vehicles on Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

Sage-grouse Habitat - The Bureau of Land Management adopted a critical part of Audubon’s recommendations to save the most important Sage-grouse habitat in Wyoming while allowing some compatible energy development activities to proceed.

Mixed Bag, Needs More Work

Invasive Species - Whether to prevent invasives in our waterways or stem incursions in refuges and other habitat, various pieces of legislation stalled out. We’ll be back next year.

Red Knots - This tiny shorebird with its very long migration got some relief when a moratorium on horseshoe crab takings was declared in New Jersey, but not in Delaware. Red Knots depend upon horseshoe crab eggs on eastern shorelines during their migration. We’ll keep working to save this bird!

Conservation Funding - While Congress ultimately rolled agency funding into a Continuing Resolution which funds programs at last year’s levels, we made the case for increased funds for: refuges and other public lands programs.

Neotropical Migratory Bird Act - This legislation took flight in both the House and Senate but didn’t get very far. The groundwork is laid for next year and the good news is that both versions significantly increase funding levels for this important songbird bill.

No Child Left Inside - Legislation to increase funding to get kids out of the classroom and into nature passed the House and was awaiting Senate action when Congress adjourned. We’ll take up where we left off next year and hope to move this important environmental education piece all the way to the President’s desk.

2009 Challenges

Public Lands, Refuges - We’ll be alert for threats to the Arctic Refuge, and any other bad ideas that pop up for our public lands. For instance, the proposed road through the heart of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge went from hearings to markup and came perilously close to a floor vote. And with a new Congress and administration, it’s not clear whether plans to put a border fence through our Sabal Palm Sanctuary and Center in Texas will progress. The fence also threatens to close wildlife off from critical habitat and water in the Lower Rio Grande Valley Wildlife Refuge.

Endangered Species Act - Even as legislative threats diminished, a war was waged on ESA regulations. It moved to delist species that did not warrant such action, claimed the lowest record of listing new species of any administration, and rammed through 11th hour regulations to weaken key aspects of the Act. We’ll be working with both Congress and the White House to bring science back to ESA and reverse many of the damaging actions taken to date.

This information was gleaned from the Audubon Advisory, a monthly e-newsletter from the National Audubon Society. For more information on how to receive this newsletter directly go to http://audubonaction.org/audubon/join.html?r=1peG_761rie0E&
Tips for New Birders
How Field Guides are Organized

Many of you may have received a new field guide as a holiday present. For neophyte birders this can be both a blessing and a bane. Most new birders appreciate the colored illustrations that can help them identify the new yellowish brown bird at the suet feeder. But when they go to the guide in anticipation of being able to find an illustration of the bird they just saw, they are often frustrated by the way the guide is arranged. Why is organized in such a crazy way? Why isn’t it in alphabetical order or grouped color or size? A few guides actually do group birds by color and/or size, which can be helpful to new birders. An alphabetical arrangement, although it sounds good, isn’t much help if you don’t know the name of the bird. It’s like trying to find a word in the dictionary when you don’t know how to spell it.

Although it may not be apparent to a novice birder, there is a method in the madness. The majority of field guides are arranged in what is called taxonomic order. In laymen’s terms it’s a classification system that groups birds that are related to each other. It’s a type of family tree. The system was first devised by Carl von Linne (a.k.a. Carolus Linnaeus) in the mid-18th century. As systems go it is hierarchical meaning it starts with very large groups called kingdoms (bacteria, plants, animals & fungi) and then breaks them down into smaller and smaller groups – phyla, classes, orders, families, genera, and finally species. All organisms in a particular group have certain biological characteristics in common which may be obvious to novice birders but more often are not. For example the phylum Chordata includes animals that have a rod of cartilage (notochord) down the middle of their back. Those animals that have replaced the notochord with a backbone, which include the classes for fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds & mammals, belong to the subphylum Vertebrata.

Birds belong to the class Aves within the subphylum, which is divided into orders whose names end in –formes, pronounced form-ease. The orders include at least one family whose names end in –idea, pronounced ih-dee. Some families are divided into subfamilies with names ending in –inae. If you take a close look at your field guide you will see these the Latin names for the orders, families, subfamilies, genera & species in italics. Sometimes there is a brief explanation of why the birds are grouped in the order and/or family.

The organization of most field guides is based the classification for birds of North America in a sequence established by the American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU). This system reflects the current scientific view of how birds evolved, with the most primitive orders first. For a long time this list started with loons and grebes and ended with the large order of Passerines (songbirds). However you may have noticed that the newest field guides have a different sequence than say a guide published five years ago. This isn’t plot by publishers to get you to buy new guides. It reflects a revision in the classification sequence based on new DNA evidence about relationships between the birds. Scientist now believe ducks and gallinaceous birds (chickenlike birds - grouse, quail, prairie chickens, etc.) are the most primitive species and thus have moved them to the front of the list.

So that is the long and short of why field guides have such a ‘wacky’ organization. However don’t despair, since you will spend hours studying your guide you will eventually learn your way around. And then when all else fails there’s always the index!
If you are not aware of it, the Starbucks at Cotswold Shopping Center provides coffee for our monthly meetings. So the next time you in the neighborhood and need a cup of joe, stop in and thank them for us.

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Audubon News is published monthly from September through May by the Mecklenburg Audubon Society, a chapter of National Audubon. Local members receive the newsletter via postal mail and/or electronic mail. It is also posted on the Mecklenburg Audubon web site - meckbirds.org.

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