Rescuing Waterfowl

Those of you who are MAS-L have probably seen the name Jennifer Gordon. But most have never met her or really understand what she does to help our local avian community stay healthy. Well, at the November you have the opportunity meet Jennifer and her about her passion to help our feathered friends. As director of the Carolina Waterfowl Rescue she will present information on what to do and who to call when you find injured or orphaned birds. She will discuss local wildlife rehabilitation efforts for birds and present some interesting case studies in birds.

Jennifer is a state and federally licensed wildlife rehabilitator. She is the director of Carolina Waterfowl Rescue, which takes in over 1000 birds each year. She has previously volunteered for several other wildlife groups including the Carolina Raptor Center. She is a board member for a wildlife sanctuary and has also served as a board member for Wildlife Rehabilitators of the Carolinas (WRNC) the state wildlife rehabilitation organization for the last 5 years. She is also the founder of a national group that coordinates rescues and transport for injured waterfowl, finds permanent homes for non-releasable wild waterfowl, provides adoption assistance for domestic waterfowl. It also provides educational information about waterfowl health, care and husbandry. The group has recently established it first overseas chapter. Jennifer also has a certificate for non-profit management from Duke University and is currently pursuing a degree as a veterinary technician.

So flock on over to the fellowship hall of the Sharon 7th Day Adventist Church (920 Sharon Amity) on Thursday, November 5th. Refreshments usually appear around 7:10 PM and the meeting begins at 7:30 PM.

Shopping for the Birds this Xmas

Wednesday, November 12th

Want to help Mecklenburg Audubon raise funds for education and conservation plus support efforts to help developing economies stay green? Then plan on shopping at Ten Thousand Villages, a non-profit store at Cotswold Shopping Center that exclusively sells fairly-traded gifts from around the world, on Thursday, November 12, 2009. Ten percent of the value of all goods bought by MAS members that day will be donated back to MAS by the Charlotte Ten Thousand Villages store. Bill Duston, a Ten Thousand Villages volunteer and a MAS member, will be on hand that night at the store to assist you with your purchases. The store has lots of interesting and unique gifts, priced from $2-$200, with the large majority of gifts being less than $25.

There will be a wine and cheese reception at the store that night from 5:30-8:00 PM. But the store will be open that day from 10:00 AM-8:00 PM. If you can’t be there for the wine and cheese, shop earlier in the day and identify yourself as an MAS member and your purchases will still be counted. So consider doing your Holiday shopping there and help support Mecklenburg Audubon!

Ten Thousand Villages is located at Cotswold Shopping Center (corner of Sharon Amity and Randolph Roads) in the pedestrian walkway behind Books-a-Million and David’s Jewelry Store. For further directions, you can call the store directly at 704 365-0010 or contact Bill at bduston@carolina.rr.com.

For more info about the organization’s mission visit - www.tenthousandvillages.com
Field Trips

Saturday, November 7th: McDowell Prairie
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

We will spend most of the morning birding the prairie, and then check the woods/river around Copperhead Island. We should find some wintering water fowl there. Parking is very limited at the prairie, so we will meet in front of the Harris-Teeter at the corner of Highways 160 and 49, at 8:30 AM. Afterwards we’ll grab a bite of lunch at a local eatery, and then bird the short Walker Branch Greenway nearby.

Thursday, November 12th: Ribbonwalk Nature Preserve
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Tom Sanders [tsanders1993@msn.com]

Join Tom Sanders for a winter trip in this preserve. Hawk Meadow should have a variety of sparrows. We will meet at 8:30 AM. From I-85, take Statesville Rd north. At about 1 mile, turn right on Cindy Lane (traffic light). Look for the entrance to the preserve on the left at about a mile.

Saturday, November 14th: Evergreen Nature Preserve
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Tom Sanders [tsanders1993@msn.com]

Tom Sanders will take us through this inner-city preserve looking for winter residents. We will meet at 8:30 AM in the bus lot at Winterfield School on Winterfield Dr.

Sunday, November 15th: Moss Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Corey Slovich [cslovick@gmail.com]

Corey Slovick will lead us along this restored wetland, north of Charlotte. It has been a great spot for white-crowned sparrows. Take I-85 north and go left on Poplar Tent Rd. Turn right on Harris Rd., then left on Moss Farm St. Meet in the parking lot of the school immediately on the left, at 8:30 AM.

Tuesday, November 17th: Four-mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy* • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

This 2 mile stretch of greenway has a variety of habitats and produces many species. We will meet in the parking lot on Johnston Rd. at 8:30 AM, then carpool to the other end. From I-485, take Johnston toward town. After the first light, look for the lot on the right just past the creek.

Sunday, November 22nd: Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge
Full Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

This all day trip will take us through different parts of the refuge, and the reservoir. The low grounds will still be open, so we should find a variety of ducks. The reservoir should have common loons and horned grebes. Bring a lunch. We will aim to be back in Charlotte by 6:00 PM. We will meet at 7:00 AM behind the McDonald’s in Windsor Square Shopping Center. Take Independence from town. Turn left on Sam Newell Rd. Take the first right to get to McDonald’s.

Saturday, November 28th: Ocean Isle/Sunset Beach
Full Day • Easy • Contact: Taylor Piephoff [zachary.piephoff@mecklengurgcountync.gov]

Our annual Thanksgiving get-away to the beach will cover Ocean Isle, Ocean Isle Water Treatment Plant, Twin Lakes, Sunset Beach and any staked out rarities. Target birds will be salt marsh sparrow, migrating sea ducks, shorebirds, rails & cave swallow.

We will meet at 8:00 AM at the east end of Ocean Isle which is now a municipal park on the Intercoastal Waterway side. There is plenty of parking. The closest town is Shallotte, NC where there are a Holiday Inn, Comfort Inn and other motels.

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.

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

Fox Sparrow
Ring-necked Duck
Double-crested Cormorant

KEY TO PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY

Easy - Trails are level to slight grades usually paved. 0-1.5 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.
Getting Involved

Buy Duck Stamps....
Put Your Stamp on Conservation

When the explorers first set foot upon the continent of North America, the skies, marshes and lands teemed with an astonishing variety of wildlife. Native Americans had been wise stewards of these precious natural resources. Unfortunately, it took the explorers and the settlers who followed only a few decades to decimate these resources. Millions of waterfowl were destroyed, some species to the point of extinction, at the hands of market hunters and a handful of overly ambitious sportsmen. Millions of acres of wetlands were drained to feed and house the ever increasing populations, greatly reducing waterfowl breeding and nesting habitat.

Not to be outdone by man, Mother Nature periodically takes her toll with devastating droughts and floods. During these periods, migration rest areas and wintering grounds are severely impacted. As recent as 1993, record-breaking floods ravaged the fertile Midwest, leaving more devastation in their wake. A large part of this catastrophe could have been avoided had many of the natural wetlands of that area not been drained and filled in for farming and housing and industrial development. Many people do not realize that wetlands help to maintain ground water supplies, act as a filtration system for pollutants, store floodwaters, protect shorelines from erosion, and modify climatic changes.

In 1934, with the passage of the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act, an increasingly concerned Nation took firm action to stop the destruction of migratory waterfowl and the wetlands so vital to their survival. Under this Act, all waterfowl hunters 16 years of age and over must annually purchase and carry a Federal Duck Stamp. The very first Federal Duck Stamp was designed by J. N. "Ding" Darling, a political cartoonist from Des Moines, Iowa, who at that time was appointed by Franklin Roosevelt as Director of the Bureau of Biological Survey, the predecessor to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Hunters willingly pay the stamp price to insure the survival of our natural resources.

Approximately 98 cents of every duck stamp dollar goes directly into the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to purchase wetlands and wildlife habitat for inclusion into the National Wildlife Refuge System—a fact that ensures this land will be protected and available for all generations to come. Since 1934, better than half a billion dollars has gone into that Fund to purchase more than 5 million acres of habitat. Little wonder the Federal Duck Stamp Program has been called one of the most successful conservation programs ever initiated.

In coming years, with the number of hunters dwindling, three groups of Americans will need to assume an increasing role in filling the gap in the purchase of Federal Duck Stamps—collectors, art enthusiasts and conservationists.

Collectors and art enthusiasts consider these stamps “miniature pieces of art” and have been great supporters of the program. The collection of duck stamps is a growing and constantly evolving phenomenon. A collector who had purchased each of the current stamps, at issue price, would have spent around $400. This investment today would be worth well over $5,000.

It the third group, the other conservationists, which includes the bird watching community, that we hope will take a more active role in purchasing duck stamps. Increasingly, birders are using the National Wildlife Refuges to pursue their hobby and grow their list of “life birds.” Other conservationists buy the stamps as a way of ensuring that these wild places will be around for all generations. And, possession of the most recent Federal Duck Stamp provides free admission into all National Wildlife Refuges.

The purchase of a Federal Duck Stamp provides an opportunity for every United States citizen to take a stand in the preservation of our natural heritage. All of us, working together, can and have made a difference.

Where to Buy a Duck Stamp ($15)

Most National Wildlife Refuges

Official Federal Duck Stamps vendors:
-United States Postal Service
  Phone: 1-800-782-6724 • Online: The Postal Store
  Note: Once at the website enter search text “Duck Stamps” in upper right hand corner.
  Or call your local post office to check Duck Stamp availability.
-Amplex Corporation (the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service distributor)
  Phone: 1-800-852-4897 • Online: www.duckstamp.com
-Duck Stamps can also be purchased at most major sporting goods stores that sell hunting and fishing licenses.

Refuges Funded in Part by Federal Duck Stamps

North Carolina
- Currituck National Wildlife Refuge
- Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge
- Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge
- Mackay National Wildlife Refuge
- Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge
- Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge
- Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge
- Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge
- Roanoke National Wildlife Refuge
- Swanquarter National Wildlife Refuge

South Carolina
- Savannah National Wildlife Refuge
- Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge
- Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge
- Santee National Wildlife Refuge
Good News for the Birds!

As the 2009 nesting season ends at Cape Hatteras National Seashore, National Park Service reports indicate rare birds and sea turtles benefited in the second breeding season after an April 2008 consent agreement increased park protections for baby birds and sea turtles endangered by off-road vehicles. The park has also attracted more visitors to date in 2009 despite the nationwide recession. The agreement—known as a “consent decree” because it was agreed to by all interested parties including park management, environmental organizations, off-road vehicle (ORV) enthusiast groups, and Dare and Hyde Counties—governs off-road vehicle driving on beaches within the national seashore.

“After witnessing a decade-long decline in the number of nesting colonial waterbirds at Cape Hatteras National Seashore, we are encouraged to see an increase in the numbers of nesting birds and sea turtles at the Seashore,” said Chris Canfield, executive director of Audubon North Carolina. “The consent decree provides a desperately needed management structure that balances the needs of all the Seashore’s visitors, both human and wild.”

According to National Park Service resource reports, the number of nests laid on Bodie Island, Hatteras Island, and Ocracoke Island by colonial waterbirds—a group of species that nest together in groups—more than doubled in 2009 compared to 2007, which was the last breeding season before the consent decree went into effect. Nesting success for several particularly sensitive species show an encouraging increase since the consent decree was implemented:

- Black skimmers nested on the park’s beaches for the first time in three years, with 40 nesting pairs.
- The number of least tern nests more than doubled with a minimum of 464 nests laid, according to preliminary 2009 data, compared to 194 nests in 2007.
- The number of oystercatcher chicks were raised to adulthood (fledged) increased from ten in 2007 under the old management plan to 13 in 2009.
- Piping plover numbers also increased: four chicks fledged in 2007 before the consent decree took effect and six chicks fledged in 2009. With 11 nesting pairs in 2008 and nine in 2009, these are the highest numbers at the Seashore for this federally listed threatened species since 1998. In 2007, six pairs nested at the Seashore.

“The numbers speak for themselves,” said Jason Rylander, attorney for Defenders of Wildlife. “The breeding successes we’ve witnessed over the past two seasons are the direct result of the heightened protections put in place by the consent decree; a move that has benefited the entire Cape Hatteras National Seashore ecosystem for both native wildlife and people.”

The National Park Service resource reports also show that the two seasons under the consent decree produced the two highest sea turtle nest counts ever officially recorded at the Seashore: a record 112 nests in 2008 and 103 nests in 2009, compared to 82 nests in the pre-consent decree 2007 season. Among the nests observed in the park this year was a rare leatherback sea turtle nest, one of only three in all of North Carolina this year.

“The national park’s seen another successful year for wildlife and visitors with improved protections for baby birds and sea turtles endangered by off-road vehicles,” said Deb Carter, director, Carolinas Office, Southern Environmental Law Center. “Such good news from Cape Hatteras reminds us why the national park system’s mission to protect a few special places where nature predominates is so vital.”

At the same time, more than two million people visit Cape Hatteras National Seashore each year and visitation to the park increased in 2009 during May through August when consent decree protections for birds and sea turtles were in effect as compared to 2007 before the consent decree. Besides the uptick in park visitation, recently released data demonstrated growth in tourism revenue despite the nationwide economic downturn. The Outer Banks Visitors Bureau reported in an August 11 news release that “…domestic visitors to and within Dare County spent an estimated $777.41 million dollars in 2008, an increase of 1.9 percent from 2007.”

The consent decree was designed to balance the needs of diverse park visitors, including beach drivers, families, anglers, surfers, birders, and wildlife. Statistics show it is doing so. Even at the peak of the breeding season in 2009, according to National Park Service data, only 13.7 miles of the seashore’s 67.5 miles of beach were temporarily off limits to ORVs for wildlife protections.

Some 2009 beach closures were caused by deliberate acts of vandalism of the fencing and signs installed to protect wildlife. The park service documented incidents of vandalism during the 2009 nesting season, ranging from the methodical destruction of 17 signs marking shorebird protection areas in a single incident to tire tracks traveling through the fence enclosing a turtle nest, into the no-driving area and past the nest. The consent decree requires expansion of wildlife protections when it determines that...
Two North American Field Guides

Review by John Buckman

This review will discuss two newer North American field guides to the birds, both of which use photographs as illustrations rather than the more traditional paintings.


I went through this book, which uses 2500+ color photos from today’s best bird photographers, rather than paintings, as illustrations. This practice, which is gaining in popularity, works well here. The text, although sparse in spots, is authoritative and helpful. 730 North American species are covered in the photos and text, accompanied by a like number of color-coded range maps. The book also comes with a DVD of 138 species’ songs and calls, resulting in 587 sound recordings. The MP3 format used may be copied to a computer or to a portable MP3 player for careful use in the field. With the widespread availability of bird song/call recordings, this may not, however, be a decisive advantage in buying the book. Another novel feature of the book is that it shows the American Birding Association (ABA) code number for each species. This code rates the relative overall difficulty of seeing that species from 1 (easy) to 6 (extinct). The book is about 8 x 5 x 1¼ inches, roughly the same size as the well-known National Geographic Guide, so is a backpack-size guide. A disadvantage to a photographic guide is that it is difficult to highlight specific identification features. This book does so in the text itself, which could be a shortcoming. There is a lot of helpful information in this book and at times it seems crowded. Nonetheless, it is a very good field guide.


This is another very worthy effort in using photos as illustrations. This guide actually ranks very close to Floyd’s (above) in my view. It covers 750 species with photos and same-page range maps. The photos have key field mark information highlighted in words on the photos themselves, in print that contrasts with the photo backgrounds. This is very helpful and should greatly reduce those “aw shucks” moments when we discover we didn’t check for a key field mark on a look-alike species before it flew. The range maps involved Paul Lehman as consultant, so are surely accurate, despite their small size. This book, like the Floyd guide, seems crowded at times, but contains a lot of information and is definitely worth owning.

If you are in the market for a first or new field guide, I would encourage you to look at the photo guides reviewed above. They could intimidate one initially, since they pack so much information on the page, but they are both authoritative and helpful.

Birds have wings; they’re free; they can fly where they want when they want. They have the kind of mobility many people envy.

- Roger Tory Peterson

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 birdbath 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.
Birds on the List: The Red-headed Woodpecker

Easily identified by its red head and white wing patches, this woodpecker is also the most adept at catching flying insects. It is one of only four woodpecker species known to cache food in the winter months and is the only known to cover food with bark and other wood. Historically, a species with population fluctuations, it has experienced a 4.6% decline per year since 1980 due to habitat destruction and a milieu of other factors.

Identification
Adult males and females are indistinguishable in the field and are easily identified by their red heads, necks, throats, and upper breasts. Their remaining underparts are white and their upperparts are mostly black with a blue or green iridescence. A large white patch on the wings is used to identify both adults and juveniles. Juvenile plumage most differs from adults on the head, neck, and upper breast with varying degrees of brown or red and white wing patch. Bill is white or gray. Calls are described as churr, tchur, and churr. Alarm call at nest is described as KRIT-tar-rah or QUARR-QUARR-QUARR. Drumming is done in bursts of 1-second duration and repeated 2 or 3 times.

Distribution and Population Trends
Breeding range covers most of the eastern half of the United States west of the Rocky Mountains north to southern Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec. Birds withdraw from northern third of range in winter with distribution dependent upon food abundance. Red-headed Woodpeckers are found in Nation's Road Grasslands and Letchworth State Park IBA in New York with over 8 breeding pairs, Bonny Lake State Park and South Republican Management Area IBA in Colorado, Cabot Head IBA in Ontario with more than 40 individuals during fall migration, and Kinosota-Leifur IBA in Manitoba where over 100 breeding Red-headeds occur (3% of Canadian population).

Populations have always seemed to fluctuate from abundant to on the verge of extinction. Periods of abundance have coincided with the decline of chestnuts and elms, perhaps because of increased nesting trees. Periods of decline coincided with the decline of beech trees and Rocky Mountain grasshoppers in central US. Range has contracted to the southern limits of Ontario and appears to be decreasing in abundance across entire range. The Breeding Bird Survey indicates a significant population decline of 2.5% per year from 1966-2000 and by 4.6% per year over the last 20 years (1980-2000). This has amounted to a 50% population reduction since 1966. The Christmas Bird Count indicates a similar population decline, with both a decrease in the number of individuals recorded and the number of individuals observed per party hour. Local population increases have been associated with increasing beaver populations and the creation of flooded forests with lots of snags for nesting.

Ecology
Occupies a wide range of habitats, but most are characterized by open areas for feeding, snags for roosting, and a secure food supply. Requires multiple snags for nesting, roosting, and foraging. Some of the habitats used are: open deciduous and riparian woodlands, orchards, parks, agricultural lands, savanna-like grasslands, beaver ponds with snags, forest edges, burned forests, and flooded bottomland forests. Habitats are similar in both breeding and wintering range, but winter distribution most determined by presence of food. Have been known to move north in winter if mast is heavy.

Begin nest-building as early as February and egg-laying as early as mid-April. An average of 4-7 eggs are laid in the cavity and incubated by both parents for 12-14 days. May have two broods per season and will lay a second clutch if first fails. A pair may use the same cavity for several years in a row. Red-headeds may use cavities excavated by other woodpeckers or even force some species to abandon active cavities.

Consume seeds, nuts, sap, corn, fruit, insects, bird eggs, nestlings, adult birds, and mice. Eats mostly insects and plant material in summer and mostly nuts (acorns and beech-nuts) in winter. Will forage on ground, capture insects in flight, glean food from vegetation, or chisel trees for wood-boring insects and sap. Most adapted of all the woodpeckers for fly-catching. Will store food for winter (grasshoppers, nuts, corn, and fruit) in natural crevices of trees and posts, in tree cavities, under bark, and under railroad ties and shingles. Only known woodpecker to cover stored food with bark or wood.

Threats
At one time the Red-headed Woodpecker was targeted by sportsmen because of its brilliant red plumage, as an agricultural pest, and for damage to telephone poles. Its population has decreased as a result of food source losses, as evidenced by population declines in association with the decline of beech trees and the disappearance of Rocky Mountain grasshoppers. Collisions with automobiles were particularly common in the mid-1900s and the species is considered a rare victim of tower collisions. Nest failure occurs when nests are excavated in telephone poles recently (within 3-4 years) treated with creosote. Competition for nesting sites with European Starlings was thought to decrease reproductive success, but recent studies show that this may not be the case. The mere fact that starlings nest earlier than this woodpecker suggests that Red-heads may not be vulnerable to starling invasion. Habitat has been degraded by the harvesting of snags, clearcuts, agricultural development, channeling of rivers, regeneration of eastern forests, fire suppression, monoculture crops, and the loss of small orchards.

Conservation
The Red-headed Woodpecker is listed as a vulnerable species in Canada and is listed on multiple state threatened species lists in the United States. Habitat should be managed so as to provide large forest fragments (>2 ha) with large snags for nesting and open areas for catching flying insects. In addition, selective thinning has been shown to increase the likelihood of occurrence and nesting in Ohio. Controlled fires have negative and positive impacts. While they open up the forest (providing open space for fly catching) and create snags, they can also destroy existing snags used for nesting.
Use a field guide with restraint. Stopping to consult the field guide is always dangerous when chasing a bird. If the bird is still in sight, you’re spending time you could be using to get a better look—and giving the bird a better chase to escape. Try to keep your eyes on the bird as long as possible and use the field guide as a last resort, not your first one. When you do open your book, always try to guess the identity of the birds first, and then look only at the illustration of that particular species. If your guess is wrong, look back at the bird in the field, take another guess, and look only at the illustration for that species. This technique requires self-discipline, but it forces you to realize which species give you problems, and it helps you develop your identification skills.

Unfortunately, opening the field guide after an unidentified bird has flown away creates another problem. Each glance at the field guide’s pretty closeups interferes with the memory of the real bird. Every flip of a page blurs it further. After a few minutes of page turning, the real vision can evaporate entirely. A notebook and sketchpad are helpful, but the only real solution is doing your homework—preparing yourself so well you know what field marks to look for before the birds appear.

From The Complete Birder: A Guide to Better Birding by Jack Connor
MAS Board

Rob Bierregaard - President
rbierreg@uncc.edu

Jack Meckler - Vice President
jmmeck@aol.com

Jeff Lemon - Secretary
Jeff_Lemons@hotmail.com

Jill Palmer - Treasurer
jpalmer53@earthlink.net

Ron Clark - Field Trips
waxwing@bellsouth.net

Tom Sanders - Conservation
tsanders1993@msn.com

Carol Ann Tomko - Conservation
catomko@earthlink.net

John Buckman - Membership
linbuckman@aol.com

Dennis Lankford - Membership
harecubed2@carolina.rr.com

Jill Shoemaker - Publicity
shoe4now@bellsouth.com

Lucy Quintilliano - Education
lucyq@carolina.rr.com

Chris Hanna - Hospitality
chritthanna@aol.com

Judy Walker - Newsletter
birdwalker@mac.com

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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.