As the New Year begins we all tend to take a few minutes to review the past year. For nature lovers that means reliving the year’s outdoor adventures. Why not take this opportunity to not only reminisce about them but also share your experiences with others?

That’s what happens at the January meeting. It’s like the old kindergarten ‘Show & Tell’, except for adults it’s more like ‘Brag & Tell’. It doesn’t matter, bring your pictures in print or on CD to share with everyone. If you’re a budding digital video producer, bring those as well. We’ll figure out how to project them. Some of us don’t get to travel as much as others so this provides us an opportunity to travel vicariously through your experiences.

This meeting is also our annual POT LUCK dinner which means we meet at 6:30 PM and you can bring your leftovers from your New Year’s bashes. Please also bring a place setting for each person coming. The club will provide coffee & other beverages.

So don’t forget to bring your pictures, videos, food and friends to the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church Fellowship Hall at 6:30 PM for Dinner (the program will start around 7:30 PM) on Thursday, January 7, 2010 for food, fun and fellowship.

As the New Year begins we all tend to take a few minutes to review the past year. For nature lovers that means reliving the year’s outdoor adventures. Why not take this opportunity to not only reminisce about them but also share your experiences with others?

That’s what happens at the January meeting. It’s like the old kindergarten ‘Show & Tell’, except for adults it’s more like ‘Brag & Tell’. It doesn’t matter, bring your pictures in print or on CD to share with everyone. If your a budding digital video producer, bring those as well. We’ll figure out how to project them. Some of us don’t get to travel as much as others so this provides us an opportunity to travel vicariously through your experiences.

This meeting is also our annual POT LUCK dinner which means we meet at 6:30 PM and you can bring your leftovers from your New Year’s bashes. Please also bring a place setting for each person coming. The club will provide coffee & other beverages.

So don’t forget to bring your pictures, videos, food and friends to the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church Fellowship Hall at 6:30 PM for Dinner (the program will start around 7:30 PM) on Thursday, January 7, 2010 for food, fun and fellowship.
Field Trips

Saturday, Jan. 2, 2010: Pee Dee NWR Christmas Count
Full Day • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@mac.com]

The Pee Dee Christmas Count is a great way to end the year birding. Every year it produces surprises. 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.

Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2010: Lower McAlpine Creek Greenway
1/2 Day (Easy*) • Contact: John Buckman [linbuckman@aol.com]

It’s time to look for rusty blackbirds along this birdy greenway. Of course we will look at other birds as well. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Johnston Rd.

Thursday, Jan. 7, 2010: Nations Ford Greenway
1/2 Day (Easy) • Contact: Dave Lovett [birdsalot@webtv.com]

This greenway will eventually connect to the Anne Springs greenway. It is sandwiched between the rear side of Springfield Golf Course and Sugar Creek. We will walk it about a mile, then retrace our steps. Expect the usual winter residents. I have seen winter wren and wild turkey here in the past.

Meet at 8:30 AM at the “On The GO “ gas station at the corner of HWY 21 and Business 21 about a mile south of Carowinds. Lunch will be at Fish Fare after for those interested.

Saturday, Jan. 9, 2010: Reedy Creek Nature Preserve
1/2 Day (Moderate) • Contact: Tom Sanders [tsanders1993@msn.com]

We’ll take a look around this little birdied preserve to see what winter residents it may be harboring. It has a variety of habitats and could proved to quite interesting.

We will meet at 8:30 AM in the first parking lot on the left after you enter the preserve.

Weekend, Jan. 16-18, 2010: Huntington Beach State Park
Full Day • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

This is our annual winter trip to this South Carolina state park. We will likely have 90+ species, if the birding gods are smiling on us and it’s not snowing! Bring a lunch. The optional jetty walk is about 3 miles round trip in the sand. Contact Ron Clark with any questions.

As usual, we’ll go out for dinner on Saturday night. Then bird Sunday morning and, as it is MLK weekend, for those who can stay an extra day, we’ll bird the afternoon and Monday morning.

We meet in the causeway parking lot at 8:00 AM on Saturday morning. After you cross the causeway, take a right and the parking lot is immediately on the left. There is a $5 per day entrance fee, unless you have a yearly park pass.

Thursday, Jan. 21, 2010: Four-mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day (Easy*) • Contact: Lucy Quintilliano [lucyq@carolina.rr.com]

Lucy will take us on a 2-mile stroll along this always birdy greenway with many different habitats. We’ll meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Johnston Rd.

Saturday, Jan. 23, 2010: Evergreen Nature Preserve
1/2 Day (Moderate) • Contact: Tom Sanders [tsanders1993@msn.com]

This preserve always has an interesting array of birds regardless of the season. This time of the year we will be looking for sparrows. We will start at 8:30 AM in the bus parking lot of Winterfield School.

Detailed directions to meeting spots can be found at meckbirds.org/trips
Thursday, Jan. 28, 2010: Ann Springs Close Greenway
1/2 Day (Moderate) • Contact: Dave Lovett [birdsalot@webtv.net]

We will explore a section of the greenway that contains 2 farm ponds and a portion of Steele Creek in search of water birds, and the extensive weedy fields looking for sparrows and other grassland species. There is a $2 use fee, bring exact change for the envelope.

Meet at the “On The Go “ gas station on the corner of HWY 21 and Business 21. Lunch after at the Fish Fare. MAP

Saturday, Jan. 30, 2010: Mallard Creek Greenway
1/2 Day (Easy) • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@mac.com]

This little birded greenway in the University area has potentially good habitat for sparrows and other winter visitors. We will meet at 8:30 AM at the University City McDonalds on Hwy. 29 across from the University Hospital.

Saturday, Feb. 6, 2010: McDowell Prairie/Copperhead Island
2/3 Day (Moderate) • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

We will spend most of the morning birding the prairie, and then check the woods and river around Copperhead Island. We should find some wintering water fowl there. After grabbing a bite of lunch at a local eatery, we will then bird the short Walker Branch Greenway nearby.

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.

Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2010: McAlpine Creek Greenway
1/2 Day (Easy) • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.com]

We will explore the various habitats of the oldest greenway in the county looking for wintering waterfowl and sparrows. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Monroe Rd.

Saturday, Feb. 13, 2010: Cowan’s Ford Refuge
1/2 Day (Moderate) • Contact: John Bonestell [[jmcblake@aol.com]

This county property, which has recently been expanded, always has nice birds. A Sedge Wren was located on this property during this year’s Lake Norman CBC. John Bonestall will take us through it since it is accessible by permit only. Meet at 8:30 AM at the observation stand.

Sunday, Feb. 21, 2010: Sherman Branch Nature Preserve (Woodcocks)
Evening • Contact: Taylor Piephoff [zachary.piephoff@mecklengurgcountync.gov]

Taylor Piephoff will take us looking for woodcocks. Be prepared for a short walk on a well-maintained trail through the woods to get to the site. Bring a flashlight as it will be dark when we walk back to the cars.

Meet at 5:30 PM at Sherman Branch Park parking area off Rocky River Road. From I-485 take the Hwy. 51 Exit (Mint Hill) and go east to the stoplight at the “T” intersection at Hwy. 24/27 (Albemarle Road). Turn left and then right at the next light on Rocky River. Pass Camp Stewart Road on the left, then look for the large parking area to the park on the left.

Woodcock Fun Fact

The flexible tip of the American Woodcock’s bill is specialized for catching earthworms. The bird probably feels worms as it probes in the ground. A woodcock may rock its body back and forth without moving its head as it slowly walks around, stepping heavily with its front foot. This action may make worms move around in the soil, increasing their detectability.
PRaises for EPA’s Finding on Carbon

STATEMENT BY JOHN FLICKER, PRESIDENT & CEO OF AUDUBON

“This is the most important and courageous step any administration has taken to address climate change. The finding comes none too soon and reflects what we all know to be true—that global warming poses a significant threat to human health and the environment we share with birds and other wildlife.

“The Obama administration continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to decisions based on sound science. Today’s finding reflects Audubon’s own scientific analysis of 40 years of bird population data that revealed the troubling impacts that climate change is already having on bird populations across North America.

“This important finding enables the administration to use the many tools at its disposal to address this problem head on in a responsible manner that will reduce pollution, create clean energy jobs, and help revitalize our economy. Audubon supporters and other nature enthusiasts across the country will join in their efforts to make a crucial difference for the future of our planet.

“Administrator Lisa Jackson and her team at the Environmental Protection Agency are to be commended for their outstanding work in a short period of time to move forward in a meaningful way on the critically important issue of climate change.”

Excerpt of the EPA Announcement: After a thorough examination of the scientific evidence and careful consideration of public comments, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced today that greenhouse gases (GHGs) threaten the public health and welfare of the American people. EPA also finds that GHG emissions from on-road vehicles contribute to that threat.

GHGs are the primary driver of climate change, which can lead to hotter, longer heat waves that threaten the health of the sick, poor or elderly; increases in ground-level ozone pollution linked to asthma and other respiratory illnesses; as well as other threats to the health and welfare of Americans.

“These long-overdue findings cement 2009’s place in history as the year when the United States Government began addressing the challenge of greenhouse-gas pollution and seizing the opportunity of clean-energy reform,” said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson.

“Business leaders, security experts, government officials, concerned citizens and the United States Supreme Court have called for enduring, pragmatic solutions to reduce the greenhouse gas pollution that is causing climate change. This continues our work towards clean energy reform that will cut GHGs and reduce the dependence on foreign oil that threatens our national security and our economy.”


Beginning Birder Tips: Top Binocular Technique

From: 101 Golden Rules of Birding by Marcus Schneck (Fall River Press, 2009)

There was a time when a dozen birders, including me, would suddenly spot the same bird a short distance into the undergrowth. A dozen pairs of binoculars would be lifted to a dozen pairs of eyes. A half-dozen birders would have the bird in view almost instantly. Another three of four would get their lenses on the bird within a minute or two. But, almost inevitably, among the last couple desperately panning around without a clue would be me.

That was until a kindly old-timer taught me how to use binoculars properly, beginning with the soft rubber eyecups at the back of the lens arrays, which were totally incompatible with my eyeglasses. Fold down the rubber and put the flat eyepiece against the lenses of your glasses, he told me. Ah, now that’s so much better?

Now, he said, become familiar with the central focus for your binoculars, the wheel over the hinge between the two barrels of the optics that you turn back and forth to get a sharp, clear image.

Then he gave me the piece of the puzzle I was missing, the piece that very few guides on binoculars offer the reader: Adjust each eyepiece individually before going afield.

Select something like a sign that has clear, sharp lines as your test subject. Set the adjustable eyepiece on the right lens to the zero mark on its scale, close your right eye and adjust for the left eye using the central focus wheel. Then, with the left adjustment still in place, close you left eye and adjust for the right eye with the adjustable eyepiece. At that point, with both eyes now open, the sigh should be in sharp focus. (Most binoculars have the adjustable eyepiece on the right, but if the pair in question has it on the left just switch the instructions.)

To double-check the adjustment, pick a second object at a different distance and, with both eyes open, turn the central focus ring to bring it into sharp focus. Alternately, close your left and then your right eyes. The image should remain in focus for both eyes. If it’s not, you need to do a bit of additional adjustment, following the same process as before, but making changes in only very small increments. Proper focal adjustment can be the difference between making a sighting and missing it.
Birds on the List: Rusty Blackbirds

**Euphagus carolinus**

Family: ICTERIDAE  
Order: Passeriformes  
Spanish: Tordo canadiense  
French: Quiscale rouilleux

**Population:**  
Global - 2 million  
Continental - 2 million  
Audubon State of the Birds: severe population declines small range.

The Rusty Blackbird is in trouble. Little known and not well studied, the species was only recently discovered to be sharply declining. This oddball among blackbirds desperately needs our immediate conservation attention.

**Appearance:** This songbird is 8 to 10 inches long, from the tip of its narrow, pointed bill to the end of its medium-long tail. It weighs approximately 2 ounces. During the breeding season, the male is black with a slight green-blue sheen, while the female is gray. Both have yellow eyes. In fresh, non-breeding plumage, many of the upper body feathers of both sexes are edged in rust, and both have pale eyebrows. Their bills, legs, and feet are black.

**Range & Distribution:** The Rusty Blackbird breeds in the wetlands of the far north, from Alaska to the Adirondacks and Newfoundland. It winters in the southeastern portion of North America, where it often mingles with other blackbirds in large flocks. A legend for the range map to the right can be found here.

**Habitat:** Rusty Blackbirds migrate far north during the spring, and settle into mixed forest near water. They prefer bogs, beaver ponds, swamps, and slow streams. Even during migration, the blackbird seeks out wet areas to rest and feed. In winter, this species forages in swamps, wet woodlands, and other moist places.

**Feeding:** The Rusty Blackbird is more carnivorous than most blackbirds, particularly on its breeding ground. Grasshoppers are a particular favorite; however, the birds also search the water’s edge for invertebrates and tiny fish, sometimes wading in the water as they hunt. When food is hard to come by, the Rusty Blackbird becomes an aggressive predator, occasionally killing sparrows, robins, and on one occasion, a snipe. In winter, the bird eats more vegetable matter, including acorns, fruit, seeds, and waste grains.

**Reproduction:** This species builds a bulky nest of twigs near water. The female lays 3 to 6 eggs, which she incubates for about 14 days. The young are helpless and almost featherless when they hatch, but are ready to fledge after just 13 days.

**Migration:** Late in the fall, the Rusty Blackbird migrates from the northern wetlands to the southeastern portion of North America, where it often mingles with other blackbirds in large flocks. Early in spring, the birds return north.

**Population Status & Trends:** Rusty Blackbird populations were estimated at 2 million in 2004 by Partners in Flight. However, the species is decreasing by almost 10% per year. To put this decrease in perspective, Rusty Blackbird populations may have been over 13 million in 1965, an apparent loss of more than 11 million birds. The species is in the yellow category on the Audubon WatchList. Forty years of decline documented by the Christmas Bird Count and Breeding Bird Survey vividly illustrates the plight of the Rusty Blackbird.

**Conservation Issues & Efforts:** Acid rain and mercury accumulation on the breeding grounds may be harming the species. Changes associated with global warming in the northern wetlands will continue to impact the Rusty Blackbird. Loss of wintering habitat has also played a role in this bird’s decreasing numbers. In addition, since Rusty Blackbirds sometimes join mixed blackbird flocks, they fall victim to lethal “blackbird control” programs which are indiscriminate.

For More Information: Learn more by visiting the International Rusty Blackbird Technical Working Group.

**References:**


For the Traveling Birder: Sandhill Crane Migration

40th Annual Rivers/Wildlife Celebration
Rowe Sanctuary, Gibbon, Nebraska

The 40th annual Rivers and Wildlife Celebration will be held March 18-21, 2010, in Kearney, Nebraska. Organized by Audubon Nebraska and the Nebraska Bird Partnership, the conference gathers together nature enthusiasts from across the county to witness the migration of over half a million sandhill cranes and millions of waterfowl and other birds through central Nebraska. Events include guided field trips, workshops, a family fun room, and daily visits to river blinds operated by Audubon’s Rowe Sanctuary for up-close views of cranes roosting on the Platte River.

Bird and Learn

Project Puffins: Hog Island Ornithology Lab

This summer, enjoy world-class ornithology sessions at Audubon’s spectacular Hog Island, located in Maine’s Muscongus Bay. Taught by some of the country’s leading birders and ornithologists, these dynamic sessions are for both beginners and experienced bird enthusiasts who seek field experience to learn more about the remarkable lives of wild birds. Two of these programs provide opportunities to work directly in the field with Project Puffin biologists on important seabird colony islands. Hog Island is an ideal home for sessions where learning, camaraderie, and great meals all come together in a beautiful setting.

Building on the traditions of Hog Island’s legendary ornithology instructors, Roger Tory Peterson and Allan D. Cruickshank, today’s instructors are world-class ornithologists and enthusiastic teachers who are dedicated to sharing their knowledge and expertise. They will lead field trips for small groups of 10 to 15 participants, a group size that promotes personal instruction. There are four sessions for adults, with a maximum enrollment of 60 in each session (please note that the May 30—June 4 Exploritas program may have a different maximum enrollment limit), plus one special session for teen (14 to 17 year old) bird enthusiasts.

Accommodations at Hog Island are in authentic early-20th-century buildings at the edge of the sea. Our renowned chef, Janii Laberge, serves extraordinary meals in an historic farmhouse that looks out onto Muscongus Bay.

HOG ISLAND 2010 PROGRAMS

The following sessions are now open for registration.

May 30—June 4 - Maine Seabird Biology and Conservation
June 13—18 - Joy of Birding
June 20—25 - Field Ornithology
June 20—25 - Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens
September 12—17 - Maine Seabird Biology and Conservation

For complete details go to http://www.projectpuffin.org/OrnithCamps.html
Getting Involved

The Carolina Herp Atlas: A Citizen-Science Project For Reptile & Amphibian Enthusiasts

Have you ever seen an eastern kingsnake in your backyard or found a Fowler’s toad on your porch and wondered if wildlife biologists needed to know about it? These observations are important and now there is a place to submit your observations that can help with the conservation of amphibians and reptiles in the Carolinas: The Carolina Herp Atlas (CHA). The CHA, developed by the Davidson College Herpetology Laboratory and Davidson College Information Technology Services, is an online database that uses observations by citizen scientists to track reptile and amphibian distributions in North and South Carolina. Funded by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, the CHA also allows users a simple way to maintain a personal database of the reptiles and amphibians they observe. County-level distribution maps can be viewed by anyone who visits the website. Wildlife biologists and herpetologists can use these data to understand activity periods, habitat relationships, distribution, conservation status and other facets of amphibian and reptile ecology in North Carolina.

How does the CHA work? Before you can submit records, you must first register and set-up a “My Herps” account. Once you register, you are able to add records and keep track of your observations. Each observation should include: 1) state and county, 2) genus and species, 3) date, 4) location, 5) geographic coordinates (using our GeoLocator) 6) remarks, 7) and a digital photo for verification of the species identification. The GeoLocator allows the user to pinpoint the exact location of their herp observation.

Since March 2007, the CHA has collected over 15,000 reptile and amphibian observations in the Carolinas. Please submit your reptile and amphibian observations to the Carolina Herp Atlas at www.carolinaherpatlas.org. Contact Steven Price at sjprice@davidson.edu if you have any questions.

Return to Wild America: A Yearlong Search for the Continent’s Natural Soul,
by Scott Weidensaul (North Point Press, 2005)

Scott Weidensaul grew up and currently lives in the Appalachian region of eastern Pennsylvania and has been a prolific nature writer with more than two dozen books on natural history. In Return to Wild America: A Yearlong Search for the Continent’s Natural Soul Weidensaul retraces the 100-day, 30,000 mile trek across North America originally made by Roger Tory Peterson and British naturalist James Fisher in 1953. On the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of their book, Wild America, Weidensaul sets off to retrace Peterson and Fisher’s steps to tell the story of wild America today, comparing the state of the environment now with what they recorded on their journey. How has the continent’s natural landscape and wildlife changed over the past fifty years?

The trip takes Weidensaul to the coastal communities of Newfoundland, where he examines the devastating impact of the Atlantic cod fishery’s collapse on the ecosystem; to Florida, where he notes the virtual extinction of the great wading bird colonies that Peterson and Fisher documented. Thankfully, the author’s findings are not all negative; he discovers that much of what Peterson and Fisher saw remains untouched by the industrial developments of the last fifty years. For example, the quadrupling of the seabird population in the rookeries on Cape St. Mary’s, Newfoundland is reassuring.

This book is a thought provoking and enjoyable read for anyone interested in birding and the outdoors and I would consider it a must read for those interested in bird conservation. In addition to this book, I would also suggest Weidensaul’s books, Living on the Wind: A Yearlong Search for the Continent’s Natural Soul, and Of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding, which recounts the history of what has become the increasingly popular “sport” of birding. I would highly recommend any or all three of these books to my fellow Audubon members.