A Bounty of Beautiful Butterflies

Birds are not the only winged creatures that are on the move in the fall. Butterflies are attractive to both birds and birders but for different reasons. The birds need them for nourishment for their long journey south. Birders are just fascinated by anything that has wings. It might also have something to do with the fact that birds aren’t as active during the middle part of the day and butterflies are, so they help fill the time until the birds become active.

However, if you have ever tried to identify these gossamer beauties you quickly found out they can be as challenging as birds. So to help us out with the basics, Taylor Piephoff will guide us through the identification intricacies of the order Lepidoptera. He’ll focus on local species that we are most likely to encounter. Then on Sunday, September 12th you can join him at Mallard Creek Greenway to see how much you have learned.

So flit on over to the Seventh Day Adventist Church for the first fall meeting of our birding season, on Thursday, September 9th. Socializing will begin around 7:15 PM. Meeting will start around 7:35 PM. See you all there.

Catawba River Hawk Watch

Last fall, Taylor Piephoff developed and coordinated an organized hawk watch at Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge. The Catawba River Hawk Watch ran from mid September to mid October and involved 18 people that spent over 175 hours at the refuge counting migrating raptors. This effort resulted in 816 individuals of 11 species being recorded over a 31-day period, including 36 bald eagles, 150 ospreys and 429 broad-winged hawks. While this baseline data is important, more years of consistent data collection are needed to help us understand how this section of the Catawba River functions as a corridor for migrating raptors.

We are now seeking volunteers to help with this second year of data collection. All birders are welcome, from those with strong skills in raptor ID to beginning and intermediate hawk watchers looking to develop their skills over this one-month period. The more eyes the better.
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!!

Thursday, Sept. 2nd: Lower McAlpine Greenway
1/2 Day (Easy*) • Contact: Lucy Quintilliano [lucyq@carolina.rr.com]

Join Lucy Quintilliano as we look for early migrants. We’ll meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Johnston Rd. From I-485, take Johnston Road toward town. Go through one light. The parking lot will be on the right immediately past the creek.

Saturday, Sept. 11th: Latta Park (Dillworth)
1/2 Day (Easy) • Contact: Tom Sanders [tsanders1993@msn.com]

Although not quite as good as in the spring, this favored park is still a great migrant trap in the fall. Tom Sanders will lead us to find all that we can. The parking lot at 8:30 AM is on East Park Ave. in Dilworth. Contact Tom if you’ll be coming.

Sunday, Sept. 12th: Mallard Creek Grnwy. Butterfly Walk
1/2 Day (Easy) • Contact: Taylor Piephoff [PiephoffT@aol.com]

Taylor Piephoff will take us on this greenway looking for butterflies ( and also birds ). Meet at 1:00 PM at the access trail to Mallard Creek Greenway at the corner of Governor Hunt Rd and David Taylor. From WT Harris Blvd. just west of I-85, turn Right at the light on to Research Dr. Turn Right on David Taylor Dr., turn Left on Governor Hunt. The trailhead is at this intersection. Park on the side of the road. Governor Hunt is also directly accessible off Mallard Creek Road north of WT Harris. This is the same location we met last year. Let Taylor know if you’ll be there.

Tuesday, Sept. 14th: Six-Mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day (Easy*) • Contact: Dave Lovett [birdsalot@webtv.net]

This 2 1/2 mile round trip greenway always has good migrants. Dave Lovett promises to find all of them! We’ll start at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Marvin Rd. From I-485, take Johnston Road away from town. After crossing Providence Rd West, take the first left onto Marvin Rd. Go through one light at Ardrey Kell. The parking lot is about one mile on the right.

Thursday, Sept. 16th: Campbell Creek Greenway
1/2 Day (Easy*) • Contact: Tom Sanders [tsanders1993@msn.com]

Tom Sanders is leading this walk on this eastside greenway. It has proven to be very good for fall migrants. We’ll start at 8:30 in the parking lot on Margaret Wallace Rd. Go out East Independence Blvd. Take a left on Margaret Wallace ( the next light after WT Harris ). The lot is about 1/3 mile on the right just past the creek.

Saturday, Sept. 18th: Jackson Park, Hendersonville, NC
Full Day (Easy but long) • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@mac.com]

The place to be for fall warbler migration as this expansive city park has habitat that seems to draw them like a magnet. Birds have been know to ‘drip’ off the trees. Although the trails are level and easy to traverse we will be on our feet for a long time so good walking shoes are a must. Also bring plenty of water, bug spray, and snacks. We will eat lunch at the park. We will meet at 7:30 AM at the McDonalds at 1909 Four Seasons Blvd. (Exit 49 off I-26). It’s on the right just past the first traffic light after getting off of I-26 as you are heading into Hendersonville.

Sunday, Sept. 19th: Ribbonwalk Nature Preserve
1/2 Day (Moderate) • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

We’ll be walking about two miles on woods trails, possibly muddy. Meet at 8:30 AM. From I-85, take Statesville Rd away from town for one mile. Turn right on Cindy Lane. Follow it for one mile ( it changes to Nevis Rd. ). Turn left on Hoyt Hinson Rd. which is the entrance to the preserve.

Key to Physical Difficulty
Easy - Trails are level to slight grades usually paved. .5-2 miles of walking;
Moderate - Trails can be uneven with some hills. 1.25 miles of walking;
Strenuous - Trails vary greatly. 2.5+ miles of walking; * - Trails are handicapped accessible.

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

Thursday, Sept. 23rd: Lower McAlpine Greenway
1/2 Day (Easy*) • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

We’ll meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Johnston Rd. From I-485, take Johnston Road toward town. Go through one light. The parking lot will be on the right immediately past the creek.

Saturday, Sept. 25th: Beginning Bird Walk
1/2 Day (Easy*) • Contact: Sally Miller [sallyart@bellsouth.net]

Sally Miller will take beginning birders and show them the ins and outs of birding. We’ll meet in the Monroe Rd. parking area of McAlpine Creek Greenway at 8:30 AM. Go out Monroe Rd and turn left into the parking area (about 3/4 mile past Village Lakes Dr). Contact Sally if you plan to attend or have any questions.

Saturday, Sept. 25th: Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge
1/2 Day (Moderate) • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@mac.com]

We’ll check out the fields and woods to see what migrants are moving through. Palm Warblers are known to be plentiful this time of the year. We’ll even check out the Hawk Watch for a while. We will be doing a lot of walking, up some steep hills so wear sturdy walking shoes. Water, snacks and bug spray are always recommended.

Tuesday, Sept. 28th: Anne Springs Greenway
1/2 Day (Moderate) • Contact: Dave Lovett [birdsalot@webtv.net]

Dave Lovett will take us through this beautiful area just south of Charlotte. We will be walking on woods trails with slight hills. There is a $2 fee. I’m sure he already has a lunch spot picked out. From I-77 south, take a left onto Carowinds Blvd. Go about three miles and you’ll see the entrance on the left.

Thursday, Sept. 30: Little Sugar Creek Greenway
1/2 Day (Easy) • Contact: Vivian & Dean Sprehe [vsprehe@carolina.rr.com]

Join Vivian and Dean Sprehe in the Huntington Farms subdivision to search for migrants along this quiet greenway. We’ll meet in the parking lot at 8:30. Go out Park Rd and turn right on Huntington Farms Lane. Follow it to the end.

Saturday, Oct. 2nd: Latta Park
1/2 Day (Moderate) • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

We’ll spend the morning looking for migrants and other birds in this Dilworth park. Meet at 8:30 in the parking lot on East Park Ave. Let Ron Clark know if you’ll be there.

Sunday, Oct. 10th: The Big Sit
All Day (Easy*) • Contact: Dave Lovett [birdsalot@webtv.net]

How often do you get to bird while sitting? Here’s your chance. We’ll be at the viewing stand at Cowan’s Ford refuge. It will start before dawn and end when the last person leaves. Dave Lovett is the organizer for this fun event. He’ll be cooking hot dogs and other goodies. Bring something to share if you wish and come whenever you can for as long as you want to stay. It’s a good time to meet others. This is one birding trip where talking is okay! More info will be furnished soon. Contact Dave if you have any questions. No sign-up is needed.

Saturday/Sunday, Oct. 16th-17th: Huntington Beach State Park
Weekend Trip (Moderate) • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@mac.com]

This is our fall sojourn to a South Carolina birding hot spot. Fall migrants – hawks and warblers – will still be moving through, wintering shorebirds will have settled in and a few ducks may also have begun arriving. This is probably one of the best times of the year to Peregrine Falcons and Merlins, and I am sure we will be delighted with spectacle views of hundreds if not thousands of tree swallows. Best of all, most of the people have moved out! It is a wonderful time of year to be on the beach.

We will meet in the parking lot on the eastside of the causeway at 7:30 AM. It can get pretty hot so remember a hat, sunscreen and plenty of water. We will eat lunch in the park so you will also need to bring food.

Since many participants stay for the weekend, we usually go out to dinner on Saturday night. At dinner we will plan where we will go on Sunday.
For those of you not familiar with Important Bird Areas here is an excerpt from the Audubon North Carolina website:

“Audubon North Carolina is leading the way in bird conservation in North Carolina. Our long-standing commitment to our coastal sanctuaries, cooperative research, education, and advocacy has coalesced into a major project known as the Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program.

Under this program, ANC, with the help of chapters, governmental agencies, concerned individuals, and other conservation groups, identifies sites across the state that supports significant populations of bird species of special conservation concern. To date, over 90 sites have met the stringent criteria established to determine if a site qualifies as an Important Bird Area.

One of the goals of the IBA project is to identify those areas that are indeed unique across the state. Some may support a large part of the total state or regional population of a species; others may host a wide variety of species of conservation concern. ANC biologists work hard to establish inventories of the known data on an IBA, as well as conduct inventory and monitoring projects in established and nominated sites.”

In an effort to contribute to the IBA program Mecklenburg Audubon Society, in conjunction with the county’s Division of Natural Resources, continues to operate a nest box program in the only IBA in the county the “Catawba River / Mountain Island Lake Watershed”. This was the first designated IBA in North Carolina receiving its status in October of 1999. Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge makes up 668 acres of this IBA and protects the “Duck Cove” natural heritage site, known for its bottomland hardwood forest, a threatened natural community in North Carolina.

The nest box program efforts were started by the Natural Resources Department back in 1997 with funding from Mecklenburg Audubon and we have actively collected nest box data each year since then. The program has involved many partners, students and volunteers over the years and has collected valuable data.

Last fall Mecklenburg Audubon applied for and received “Collaborative Project” funds from Audubon North Carolina for use in IBAs. In March of this year we used these funds to replace the old and damaged Protonotary Warbler nest boxes in the “Duck Cove” area which we monitored during this year’s breeding season. There was a bit of uncertainty about whether the birds would use the new boxes but this was quickly put to rest when we found nesting activity right away. In the end the warblers produced four successful nests, fledging a total of 16 young. In addition some Eastern Bluebird nesting occurred in two of the boxes. This is in line with nesting activity of past years.

One of the future goals of this project is to conduct a Prothonotary Warbler nest box/banding study in the next year or two, once we can determine how much time and funds will be available. Mecklenburg Audubon will be doing everything we can to help keep this important project going for years to come.

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Hawk Watch

There will be two shifts a day; from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Volunteers may sign up for as many or as few shifts a week as they like. Our goal is to have every shift covered during the hawk watch period, which runs from Saturday, September 11 to Sunday, October 10.

For those interested in training, there will be several upcoming opportunities. Reedy Creek Nature Center will host an indoor hawk watch ID training session on Sunday, August 29, from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m., with a follow up field session at Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge on Saturday, September 18 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. There will also be on site training with Taylor Piephoff on Saturday, September 11, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. or on Sunday, September 12, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Beginners may have opportunities to be paired up with experienced hawk watchers at other times during the hawk watch period as well.

Tom Sanders will be coordinating the volunteers and organizing the schedule. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact him at tsanders1993@msn.com.

The data generated through the hawk watch will be used both locally and nationally. Daily reports will be compiled through HawkCount, an on-line database of the Hawk Migration Association of North America.
A SWIFT NIGHT OUT is a continent-wide effort to raise awareness about and encourage interest in Chimney Swifts and Vaux’s Swifts. The project was originally inspired by John Connors with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh, North Carolina. In 2001 Paul and Georgean Kyle took John’s suggestion and developed the program for the Driftwood Wildlife Association that has become a favorite late summer event for professional & amateur birders alike.

As summer draws to a close and the swifts have finished raising their young, these fascinating aerial acrobats begin to congregate in communal roosts prior to their migration in the fall. Some roosts may consist of an extended family group of a half a dozen birds or so, but the larger sites can host hundreds or even thousands of swifts! We encourage you to involve your local Audubon chapters, bird clubs, scout groups and neighbors in this exhilarating spectacle.

Here is how it works: Keep your eyes to the skies at dusk and watch for areas where swifts are feeding. Look for a tall shaft, chimney or similar structure to locate where Chimney Swifts go to roost in your area.

This year, on one night over the weekend of September 10, 11, 12 observe the roost starting about 30 minutes before dusk and estimate the number of swifts that enter. When you have your number, send us an email at DWA@austin.rr.com. That’s all there is to it!

We ask that you include the following information: 1) the number of swifts counted; 2) the time; 3) date; 4) location, 5) a broad description of the site (e.g. school, warehouse, residence, etc.); and 6) weather conditions.

Living in the Fast Lane

The Chimney Swift is one of four regularly occurring species of swifts found in North America, and the most common one found east of the Rocky Mountains. As their name implies, they are accustomed to building their nests in chimneys as well as abandoned buildings and occasionally stone wells.

Adult Chimney Swifts are most commonly seen in flight -- usually in groups. When soaring, their long, scythe-shaped wings span about 12.5 inches supporting a proportionally short body with a squared-off tail. The flickering, bat-like flight when flapping is due to short, massive wing bones. Chimney Swifts’ flight is accompanied by a sharp “chippering” or “ticking” call.

At rest, an average 5 inch, 22 gram adult is sooty-gray to black with the throat silvery-gray in color. Both sexes are identical in appearance. The long wings cross by an inch or more over the tail feathers, which are tipped by pointed bristles. The claws and tail bristles are used to cling to rough vertical surfaces. Swifts are unable to perch or stand upright in passerine fashion.

Chimney Swifts winter in the Amazon Basin of Peru. They arrive in the continental United States in late March and are gone by early November. Nesting begins in May, and has been known to continue into August. Chimney Swifts are usually single-brooded, and there will be only one active nest in any structure regardless of the size of the site. The hatchlings are pink, altricial and completely naked at birth. They have sharp claws which enable them to cling to textured surfaces. Within a few days, black pin feathers begin to appear. The young are able to climb, and they exhibit preening behavior even before their feathers emerge.

By the time they are eight to ten days of age, the babies’ feathers begin to unfurl. By fifteen to seventeen days of age, their eyes begin to open.

A Swift Night Out

September 10-12, 2010

Once an entire brood has fledged, they will fly with their parents in slow, noisy parades around the area of the nest site. The young will return frequently to the roost during the first few days, but may soon begin to visit other roosts in the area.

At the end of the breeding season, the swifts’ communal instincts peak prior to fall migration. They congregate in flocks of hundreds and even thousands at suitable roost sites.

Although Chimney Swifts can withstand a few early cool snaps, they will usually ride south on the first major cold-front that blows through in the fall.
Imagine, if you will, what you would do if you had unlimited time, unlimited funds, a very supportive and patient spouse, and four children you had raised more or less to be self-sufficient teenagers? Hard to imagine, isn’t it? Life List is the story of Phoebe Snetsinger, a woman who had all that, plus the drive and determination she had inherited (along with the unlimited funds) from her father, Leo Burnett, who had founded one of the most successful advertising companies in the world.

Despite a brilliant college career and plans to become a chemist, Phoebe married right out of college, and soon found herself the mother of four children, with a husband who frequently traveled with his job. It was the 1950’s and women were expected to stay home and be the perfect wife and mother. Feeling frustrated and unfulfilled, Phoebe realized she needed more than just motherhood to be happy. When a neighbor invited her to go birdwatching, Phoebe was only too glad to tag along. What a neighbor invited her to go birdwatching, Phoebe (Who knew she would be so aptly named?) was hooked.

In 1967, Phoebe’s husband, Dave, accepted a job with Ralston Purina, and the family moved from Minnesota to Webster Groves, a suburb of St. Louis. Phoebe joined the Webster Groves Nature Study Group, where she made many friends and later described it “…as the answer to my prayers.”

Then she was diagnosed with melanoma and told she had less than a year to live. This may have been another turning point in Phoebe’s life, fueling her desire to see more and more birds while she had the chance. Before long, her love of birding and her desire to add more birds to her life list took over her life. Fortunately, the death sentence proved to be wrong, although she would have several more bouts with melanoma. With the inheritance she received after her father’s death, she began to travel farther afield. Eventually, she would be gone from home up to ten months out of the year on various bird tours around the world. At first, she dismissed the idea that she was in it just for the count, but her obsession grew to be all-consuming. Because of scheduled tours, she missed her two daughters’ weddings and her Mother’s funeral! She was not satisfied to count a bird just because the trip leader pointed it out. Before each trip, she studied all the birds that were expected to be seen, and most times, could identify them before the trip leader. She persevered through some of the roughest terrain imaginable and faced death several times, trying to become the first person with a life list of 8,000 birds, after which, she promised her long-suffering and ignored husband, she would slow down.

This book has been well-researched, with many reminiscences from Phoebe’s husband and four children, and many of her birding companions, although occasionally the story gets a little bogged down with discussions of Phoebe’s angst. The descriptions of some of the exotic birds that Phoebe saw make you want to get on a plane and see them for yourself. If only you had unlimited time and money—and stamina!

In an effort to be good stewards both economically and ecologically the Mecklenburg Audubon Board believes it is time to truly embrace some more 21st Century technologies. For a number of years about 1/3 of our membership has opted to receive Audubon News, Mecklenburg Audubon Society’s monthly newsletter, in the electronic form only. It’s time for the other two thirds to step up to plate and help us conserve resources.

It costs the chapter $1.08 to produce and mail one copy of the newsletter. Even for those who may be math challenged it is obvious that a local membership of $10 does not cover this cost. The board has hesitated to move to a completely electronic newsletter because we knew there were some membership who would not be open .pdf files. However, over the summer we discovered a free service that will allow everyone to view the newsletter online and/or print it out for reading in paper form. We are not going to go cold turkey with this. We will continue to mail newsletters through the month of December. That will give folks time to become familiar with the new format and it will let us work out any bugs with the system. But starting January 2011 we will switch to entirely to electronic distribution.

This will also mean we can keep our local membership dues to $10 for individuals and $15 for families, which is still a real bargain no matter how you look at it. The dues are still needed to help pay for our meeting facilities, web site hosting, Audubon Adventures and other conservation efforts that we wish to support.
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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.

Time to register for the 2010-2011 season. Cornell Lab of Ornthology is now taking sign ups for the next season of Project FeederWatch, which begins on November 13. For more information on the project and to sign up go to http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/

These nine letters fill the grid nine times each: GOLDFINCH
Each letter must appear once in each row, in each column, and in each 3x3 square.