In the southeast one can not observe birds without noticing where they spend a lot of their time - in trees. So the health of our tree canopy is essential for the health and well being of birds.

So at this month’s meeting David Grant, Urban Forester for Union County, will talk about the importance of urban trees to migrating birds as well as our resident breeders. He’s a graduate of Clemson University and has worked in Urban Forestry in South and North Carolina since 1996. He’ll also provide us with some basic tree identification tips, so the next time we see a bird in a tree we hopefully can say more than “It’s in a tree over there”.

Join us on Thursday, February 3rd in the fellowship hall of the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist (920 N. Sharon Amity) at 7:30 PM for what will undoubtedly be a most informative program. Refreshments are available at 7:15 PM.
All Mecklenburg Audubon Field Trips are free and open to the public. Directions for all trips can be found on the Mecklenburg Audubon website - meckbirds.org. Click on Field Trips. Please remember to contact the trip leaders several days before the trip. If you don’t, you may not receive information about last minute changes or cancellations. Also, if they don’t know you are coming, they might leave without you!!

**Field Trips**

**Saturday, February 5th: Reedy Creek Nature Preserve.**
1/2 (Moderate) • Contact: Tom Sanders

Tom Sanders will lead us for 1/2 day in this preserve with a variety of habitats. We'll meet at 8:30 AM in the first parking lot on the left as you enter.

**Sunday, February 13th: Sherman Branch Woodcock Walk**
Evening (Easy) • Contact: Taylor Piephoff (piephofft@aol.com)

Join Taylor Piephoff as we look at the woodcocks, and other birds, in this nature preserve. The birds are almost guaranteed, sometimes landing 30 feet away. Meet at 5:30 PM in the parking lot off Rocky River Rd.

**Saturday, February 19th: McDowell Prairie/Copperhead Is.**
1/2 Day (Moderate) • Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net)

Ron Clark will lead this trip to the prairie and nearby Copperhead. Meet at the Harris-Teeter at the corner of Hwys. 49 and 160 at 8:30 AM.

**Tuesday, February 22nd: Nations Ford Greenway**
1/2 Day (Easy) • Contact: Dave Lovett (birdsalot@webtv.net)

This non-manicured trail, near Anne Springs, has not been birded by us enough, but should be. With woods and large creek, it was very productive last fall. It is mostly flat with some hills near the end. Meet Dave Lovett at 8:30 AM. (Dave will send directions for the meeting spot).

**Saturday, February 26th: Evergreen NP Workday**
1/2 Day (Moderate) • Contact: Larry & Louise Barden (louise@lbarden.com)

A new patch of bamboo has reared its invasive head, so we'll remove it. The area we took down recently never grew back, so let's do it again. Absolutely bring along binoculars, as I'm sure there will be some birding involved. We'll post later what tools to bring. Meet at 8:30 AM in the bus lot of Winterfield School. Larry and Louise Barden will head up the work crew.

**Saturday, March 5th: Toby Creek Greenway**
1/2 Day (Easy) • Contact: Judy Walker (birdwalker@mac.com)

Last fall the county completed work on the Toby Creek Greenway starts at the corner of University City Blvd. and W.T. Harris Blvd. and connects with the Mallard Creek Greenway about two miles down the trail. In doing so it wanders through the heart of the UNC Charlotte Campus. There is a variety of habitat that should produce some interesting birds. This is spring break so the campus should be quiet as we explore the greenway and a few choice spots on campus.

We will meet in the Town Center parking lot on University City Blvd. across from the Hardees at 8:30 AM.

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

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**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.
When Audubon North Carolina assumed full management of Pine Island on the northern Outer Banks close to a year ago, the organization became the steward of one of the last remnants of the storied Currituck Sound landscape. The 2,600-acre Donal C. O’Brien, Jr. Audubon Sanctuary and Center at Pine Island protects a mosaic of marsh, sound, and forest in a region that was famed for waterfowl hunting and bass fishing and is now a popular vacation destination. The first Audubon center in North Carolina came to fruition when the National Audubon Society, through the generosity of Mr. Earl Slick and his family, received ownership of parcels of land on the Northern Outer Banks that now comprise more than 2,600 acres of marshes and uplands within a 5,000-acre area of the Currituck Sound.

Named for Audubon’s legendary board chair Donal C. O’Brien, Jr., the sanctuary protects more than 2,600 acres of marshes along Currituck Sound, as well as bottomland areas and about 370 acres of dry sandy areas and upland maritime forests. Audubon is working closely with community leaders to develop a vision for this sanctuary and educational center that will offer visitors an array of environmental experiences, from exploring the vast expanse of Currituck Sound to studying the smaller wonders of nature.

The story of the landscape
Currituck Sound is a shallow, brackish water system located between the Outer Banks and the mainland in the northeastern region of North Carolina. This Important Bird Area (IBA) is comprised of an extensive system of marshes, creeks, channels, and open water, as well as the Pine Island Sanctuary. The region has experienced rapid residential and commercial development in the past decade but historically it was a wild, roadless area.

Currituck Sound’s abundant waterfowl and appeal as a remote getaway attracted wealthy businessmen seeking hunting opportunities in the nineteenth century. “They bought up vast tracts on the Outer Banks and the marshy islands of the sound,” writes Thomas Schoenbaum in Islands, Capes, and Sounds. “Sumptuous clubhouses and lodges were built on these tracts,” including a rambling two-story hunting lodge built at Pine Island in 1913. Local residents worked in the hunt clubs as guides and caretakers. According to Schoenbaum, “in this heyday of market hunting, ‘battery-boxes’ equipped with huge ‘punt guns’ blanketed the air with shot and brought down a whole flock of birds with a single burst, until the practice was outlawed in 1918.”

Although hunting diminished the huge concentrations of waterfowl, in the 1970s the Sound still supported an estimated 300,000 waterfowl. Today, numbers have declined considerably, but the Sound is home to a few thousand ducks, geese, and swans annually, including Snow Geese, Tundra Swan, American Green-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, and Northern Pintail. Pine Island’s shrub thickets and forests provide good habitat for migrant songbirds and the marshes support rails, bitterns, and wading birds. The sanctuary harbors 170 bird species, as well as 7 amphibian species, 17 reptile species, 19 mammal species, and more than 350 species of plants.

Looking ahead
In developing a conservation management plan for the sanctuary, Audubon staff must factor in the area’s changing natural dynamics. Water quality is an issue of concern for all of Currituck Sound. Declines in submerged aquatic vegetation and subsequent declines in waterfowl and fisheries have been attributed to increased salinity, turbidity, and non-point source pollution. Increased development and recreational activity on Currituck Sound contributes to the disturbance of birds. Additionally, sea level rise is projected to impact this part of the state more than almost any other location along the Atlantic Seaboard. Pine Island has the potential to become a center for discussing and modeling appropriate responses to climate change. Guided by center director Mark Buckler, staff and stakeholders

Coratank is the Indian word from which our Currituck—sound, county, courthouse—was long ago derived. “Where the wild geese fly,” it meant, and so prodigiously did they once fly here that even hunters going after the decimated remnant flocks of the 1960s believed they were seeing all the birds in God’s creation. Precious few now living can recall the geese and ducks flying so thick and voluminous over Currituck that they darkened the sky, but there are still a few of the old clubhouses and hunters’ halls about the sound: Pine Island, Swan Island, Whalehead, and modest Monkey Island.

— Bland Simpson, Into the Sound Country: A Carolinian’s Coastal Plain

Donal C. O’Brien, Jr. Audubon Sanctuary & Center
North Carolina’s Newest Audubon Sanctuary at Pine Island

Continued on page 6
The 2010 Great Backyard Bird Count broke another participation record--bird watchers across the continent and Hawaii set a new record by submitting more than 97,200 checklists--a nearly 4% increase over last year. Checklists came in from all 50 states in the U.S. and from all 10 provinces and 3 territories of Canada. Participants reported 602 species in 11.2 million individual bird observations. Patterns detected in GBBC data are used to alert scientists to particular species or questions that may require more detailed follow-up studies.

Fewer visiting Winter Finches

One of the exciting things about winter birding is that a suite of northern birds, often called “irruptives,” show wild swings in their abundance from year to year. This is particularly notable in the northern United States and southern Canada. Species like Red and White-winged crossbills, Common and Hoary redpolls, Pine Siskin, Evening and Pine grosbeak and a few others may be common one year and entirely absent the next. These irruptions may be closely tied to both reproductive success and food supply. Observations for the Great Backyard Bird Count can raise questions about what is happening to bird populations hundreds or thousands of miles to the north!

Patterns from the 2010 GBBC along with eBird data (www.ebird.org) suggest none of the common irruptives occurred in elevated numbers this year, and many were entirely absent. Their absence was especially conspicuous because the past two years have been excellent ones for irruptive birds moving south. To see how striking these differences can be, compare the GBBC map of White-winged Crossbill for 2009 (left—an irruption year) with 2010 (right—a non-irruption year).

Winter finches are always one of the most exciting stories of the Great Backyard Bird Count. It will be interesting to see what the story will be in February 2011!

Gulls Gone Missing

The Glaucous-winged Gull is another example of a bird whose numbers fluctuate from year to year, but unlike the winter finches, these fluctuations are less understood. In most winters, the species is found in modest numbers along the Pacific Coast through southern California. During winter 2009 an exceptional number were found farther south than usual. But this year was a different story. Numbers of Glaucous-winged Gulls were down markedly along the United States Pacific Coast, as were numbers of “northern gulls” in general, a group that includes a suite of gulls that breed in the far north including Glaucous, Thayer’s and Mew gulls.

During the 2010 GBBC, participants in Washington reported 41% fewer Glaucous-winged Gulls compared with last year (2009: 8,795; 2010: 5,174), 64% fewer were reported in Oregon (2009: 938; 2010: 339), and in California a whopping 83% fewer gulls were reported during the GBBC (2009: 1,099; 2010: 185) -- that despite the fact that the number of checklists from California increased 23% this year. Though the number of checklists dropped slightly this year in Washington, and Oregon compared to 2009, the change was not enough to account for the huge drop in gull numbers.

The GBBC is helping track these cycles from year to year, and provides an important late winter snapshot of the distribution and abundance of these birds.

Rare and Wonderful Sightings

A few lucky GBBC participants are always treated to rare and wonderful sightings. In Lake Havasu City, Arizona, numerous birders reported a Black-legged Kittiwake. Participants in McAllen, Texas, reported a Crimson-collared Grosbeak—the first time the species has been since during the count since 2005.

Birders off the coast of San Diego added a new species to the GBBC list this year when they saw a Red-billed Tropicbird during a pelagic trip. This is the first verified sighting of this species for the Great Backyard Bird Count. It also inspires a wonderfully expanded perspective on what our “backyard” embraces!

Highlights from Canada this year included a Rustic Bunting seen in...
Creighton, Saskatchewan. This bird had been delighting birders for much of the winter, so it was great that it hung around to be counted for the GBBC. In Marathon, Ontario, a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch was a spectacular sighting because it was far outside its normal range in the Rocky Mountains. Such outliers always provide a charge of excitement when they are discovered.

**By the Numbers**

The GBBC Top-10 lists are a fun way to highlight the count’s extremes. In terms of overall numbers of birds counted, the American Robin led the way by a huge margin with 1,850,082 individuals reported. Canada Goose was a distant second with reports of 748,356 birds. Snow Goose, American Crow, and European Starling all came in with about 500,000 individuals each.

Texas, with its size, habitat diversity, and dedicated birders, was the species diversity hotspot again this year with 347 species. Since 2004, Texas has consistently led the count with more than 300 species recorded each year. This year Tivoli, Texas, takes the honor of having the most species recorded at any locality with 175 species. In terms of sheer numbers of individual birds of any species, Saint Petersburg, Florida, led the way for the second year in a row with 1,476,478 birds reported—1,450,058 of those birds were robins! Issaquah, Washington, recorded the second highest abundance with 226,266 birds.

But in terms of human participation—birders out there on the ground, observing and submitting reports—Mentor, Ohio, led the way with 709 checklists.

**Early Migrating Species**

Mid-February is an interesting time for a bird count. The count is timed on the cusp of migration for many early migrants. And it is that window of transition that affords an opportunity to pick up changes in those early treks northward.

Some species showed dramatic increases in numbers from past years. For example, although the number of states reporting Tree Swallows was down from 25 in 2009 to 20 this year, the number of individuals reported increased nearly four-fold, from 22,431 to 84,585. Whether this is a result of warmer temperatures and earlier migrations is not yet clear.

**Range Shifts**

One of the great benefits of the GBBC is that it creates an instant snapshot of the status of all birds across an entire continent and in Hawaii. Over the course of many years, these valuable data can reveal patterns and trends.

For example, the introduction and expansion of the Eurasian Collared-Dove from the Caribbean, to Florida, to a wide swath of North America is clearly illustrated in the GBBC data—in 1999, just over 1,000 doves were reported in nine states; this year more than 14,000 doves were found in 39 states. Some of that change is due to an increase in the number of birders participating in GBBC, but still the pattern is strong.

**Explore on your own and count throughout the year**

So after the fun of counting birds, spend some exploring the results to which you contributed—look for interesting patterns in species distribution or shifts in abundance by looking at maps and lists in the Explore Data section. It can be a fascinating and enlightening journey. And don’t wait for next year’s Great Backyard Bird Count to continue the process. On eBird (www.ebird.org) you can count and submit your observations throughout the year.
New Sanctuary

have identified some key themes during their first year of discussions about Pine Island:

- Pine Island is envisioned as a sanctuary for people as well as wildlife that will offer visitors immersive experiences and educational opportunities.
- The extensive marshlands support secretive birdlife and other wildlife that has yet to be fully documented. Much of the initial work at the site will involve conducting research and natural resource inventories.
- The sanctuary’s facilities will allow this one-time private preserve to become a place that Universities and other institutions can use as a living laboratory for students and faculty.
- With its great diversity of native flora and fauna, the site will evolve into a natural attraction for the area, giving residents and visitors alike a vital connection to the nature of North Carolina, while creating economic benefits for the region.
- Pine Island promises to be a conservation hub for Audubon North Carolina and the region. Northeastern North Carolina is home to one of the largest concentrations of IBAs in North Carolina. Nearby Cape Hatteras National Seashore is among the highest priority conservation sites for Audubon and several national wildlife refuges are located within a three-hour drive of the sanctuary, including Mattamuskeet, Pocosin Lakes, Alligator River, Pea Island, Mackay Island, Currituck Banks, and Great Dismal Swamp.

Next steps

During our first year of management, Audubon North Carolina has made great progress at Pine Island, including contracting Frank Harmon Architect PA to develop a master plan for the Sanctuary. Based in Raleigh, this award-winning green architecture firm’s project list includes Walnut Creek Urban Wetlands Park Environmental Education Center and Prairie Ridge Eco-Station. The Pine Island master plan, still under development, promises to model best practices in building and landscape design, construction, and management that are not simply sustainable but environmentally restorative. The plan will include renovations to existing buildings (including the historic lodge) and site improvements that will provide educational opportunities and increased public access to the site.

On September 22, Chandler Sawyer joined Audubon as the Habitat and Resource Manager at Pine Island. Chandler will develop the overall conservation plan for all species that inhabit the sanctuary. An eighth generation native of Currituck County, Chandler brings a wealth of natural resource knowledge to this position. Most recently he worked as a Fisheries Technician for the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries and as an Educator at the Outer Banks Center for Wildlife Education. Chandler has a sincere passion for the preservation of local history and the conservation of our local natural resources and is an avid waterfowl hunter and renowned decoy carver in the Currituck tradition.

Among his many responsibilities, Chandler manages waterfowl impoundments on the upland portion of Pine Island that have been prepared to provide resting and feeding areas for wintering ducks. Hundreds of ducks (mostly Green winged Teal, Northern Pintail and Mallards) are already utilizing these important refuge areas. Although these impoundments have been operating for decades to benefit waterfowl, this spring they will also be managed for migrating shorebirds. This past May, hundreds of shorebirds were making use of these areas.

Although science and conservation will always be of primary importance at Pine Island, we will always try to incorporate education into our research efforts and offer educational programs to the public. We have already offered programming on a limited basis, but the spring of 2011 will bring the start of more regular programming. Natural history and birding programs will be offered to the general public and more immersive workshops in the area of nature photography will also be initiated. We will keep you updated on Pine Island news and events in future newsletters and on our website at www.ncaudubon.org.

Audubon North Carolina wants to acknowledge the generosity of those people who have directly contributed to Pine Island and allowed us to make progress with our conservation and planning efforts.

Equipment wish list:

- Tractor and implements; chainsaw; power tools; hand tools; small skiff/john boat; mud motor for boat; pressure washer; air compressor; spotting scope and tripod; binoculars; duck food (corn); grain hopper/bin

To make a donation, contact Mark Buckler at mbuckler@audubon.org or 252.453.0603.

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New Books for Birders

The Crossley ID Guide: Easter Birds

Richard Crossley’s new ID Guide has been generating a fair amount of buzz on listservs and blogs. You can watch a couple of short videos that Crossley narrates and explains how and why he took the approach he did. Here are the links and the publisher’s summary follows.

http://tinyurl.com/4sk7vbb
http://tinyurl.com/66nljfm

This stunningly illustrated book from acclaimed birder and photographer Richard Crossley revolutionizes field guide design by providing the first real-life approach to identification. Whether you are a beginner, expert, or anywhere in between, The Crossley ID Guide will vastly improve your ability to identify birds.

Unlike other guides, which provide isolated individual photographs or illustrations, this is the first book to feature large, lifelike scenes for each species. These scenes--640 in all--are composed from more than 10,000 of the author’s images showing birds in a wide range of views--near and far, from different angles, in various plumages and behaviors, including flight, and in the habitat in which they live. These beautiful compositions show how a bird’s appearance changes with distance, and give equal emphasis to characteristics experts use to identify birds: size, structure and shape, behavior, probability, and color. This is the first book to convey all of these features visually--in a single image--and to reinforce them with accurate, concise text. Each scene provides a wealth of detailed visual information that invites and rewards careful study, but the most important identification features can be grasped instantly by anyone.

By making identification easier, more accurate, and more fun than ever before, The Crossley ID Guide will completely redefine how its users look at birds. Essential for all birders, it also promises to make new birders of many people who have despaired of using traditional guides.

- Revolutionary. This book changes field guide design to make you a better birder
- Reality birding. Lifelike in-focus scenes show birds in their habitats, from near and far, and in all plumages and behaviors
- Teaching and reference. The first book to accurately portray all the key identification characteristics: size, shape, behavior, probability, and color
- Practice makes perfect. An interactive learning experience to sharpen and test field identification skills
- Bird like the experts. The first book to simplify birding and help you understand how to bird like the best
- An interactive website--www.crossleybirds.com--includes expanded captions for the plates and species updates

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