Brown-headed Nuthatch Declines: Are Bluebirds to Blame?

Brown-headed Nuthatches have been in decline for decades. The conventional explanation for this decline has been habitat destruction. This species, like the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, is a cooperatively breeding Southeastern endemic that does best in old-growth pine stands. Yet Dr. Stanback’s research demonstrates that Brown-headed Nuthatches can thrive in suburban habitats. However, competition for nest sites with Eastern Bluebirds, a species that has quadrupled in number in recent decades, may contribute to nuthatch declines.

Mark grew up in Salisbury and attended Davidson College. He got his PhD at UC-Berkeley studying cooperative breeding in Acorn Woodpeckers. He then moved on to a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Washington in Seattle, where he studied the endocrinological basis of cooperative breeding in Acorn Woodpeckers. His next stop was Namibia, where he conducted research on hatching asynchrony, brood reduction, and sperm storage in hornbills. Since 1995 he’s been at Davidson College, where he teaches Animal Behavior, Vertebrate Zoology, Evolutionary Biology, and Introductory Biology. He and his students study Eastern Bluebirds, Brown-headed Nuthatches, Carolina Chickadees, House Wrens, Tree Swallows, Barn Swallows, Purple Martins, and Screech-owls.

The MAS annual silent auction and potluck is changing to December this year instead of January. If you have any gently used bird/nature-related items, start bringing donations to the September 6th meeting.
All Mecklenburg Audubon Field Trips are free and open to the public. Directions for all trips can be found on the Mecklenburg Audubon website - meckbirds.org. Click on Field Trips. Please remember to contact the trip leaders several days before the trip. If you don't, you may not receive information about last minute changes or cancellations. Also, if they don't know you are coming, they might leave without you!!

Saturday, September 29th - Ribbonwalk Nature Preserve
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Tom Sanders (tsanders1993@msn.com)
Tom will lead us on the mostly wooded trails, one of which is arguably the best thrush area around. Two falls ago we found three golden-winged warblers. The parking lot is on Hoyt Hinson Road, off Nevins Road. Meet at 8:30 AM.

Thursday, October 4th - Latta Park (Dilworth)
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.com)
Near downtown, this park is one of the best spots around. We’ll meet at 8:30 AM in the pavilion on East Park Ave.

Saturday, October 6th - Evergreen Nature Preserve
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Judy Walker (birdwalker@me.com)
Larry and Louise Barden will take us though this beautiful preserve, which is essentially their back yard. With wooded trails, a pond and woods clearings, the variety should be good. Join them at 8:30 AM in the bus lot at Winterfield Elementary School.

Saturday, October 13th - Campbell Creek
1/2 Day • Easy* • Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net)
We’ll meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Margaret Wallace Road. It’s a 2 1/2 mile flat walk through woods.

Saturday, October 13th - Beginner Bird Walk
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Sally Miller (sallyart@bellsouth.net)
This is a monthly walk where Sally Miller goes over the basics of birding, from binocular usage to tips on bird identification. If you don’t have binoculars, she can provide them for you. Meet her at 8:30 in the parking lot of McAlpine Creek Park.

Sunday, October 14th - Big Sit
All Day • Contact: Dave Lovett (birdsalot@webtv.net)
This is a fun-filled day of birding with minimal walking. It takes place in the viewing stand at Cowan's Ford Refuge. It will start before daybreak and end around 5-6, whenever the last folks leave. You can come for an hour or all day. Bring a chair, snacks and your binoculars. This is a great way to meet folks, and one of the few outings where talking is okay. Dave Lovett heads it up, and will be cooking hot dogs and whatever else he brings. Sign-up isn’t necessary. If you have questions, contact Dave Lovett.

Sunday, October 14th - Bird Banding
Contact: Don Seriff (donald.seriff@mecklenburgcountync.gov)
In conjunction with the Big Sit, Don Seriff will set up his banding net nearby, in Cowan's Ford. So will be able to count and see some birds up close and personal. If you want to watch or help, contact him. He'll tell what to bring and exactly where he’ll be.

Wednesday, October 17th - Six-mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Dave Lovett (birdsalot@webtv.net)
Enjoy a leisurely walk on the birdie. We will be looking for late departing migrants and early arriving ones. We will meet in the parking lot on Marvin Rd. at 8:30 AM.

Sat/Sun, October 20-21 - Huntington Beach State Park, SC
Weekend Trip • Strenuous • Contact: Judy Walker (birdwalker@me.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 the best time of the year to see Peregrine Falcons and Merlins, and I am sure we will be delighted with spectacular views of thousands of tree swallows.

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.

**Thursday, October 25th - McAlpine Creek Park**
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Lucy Quintilliano (lucyq@carolina.rr.com)
The beaver pond at this park can produce some interesting birds. Winter migrants should be arriving. Meet in the parking lot on Monroe Rd. at 8:30 AM.

**Saturday, October 27th - Anne Springs Greenway.**
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Dave Lovett (birdsalot@webtv.net)
This is a beautiful area with woods, fields and lakes, with a few small hills. Dave Lovett will lead it for us. There is a $3 entrance fee. Meet at 8:30 AM. The entrance is on Hwy. 21 below Carowinds.

**Wednesday, October 31st - Four-mile Creek Greenway**
1/2 Day • Easy* • Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net)
It’s Halloween, but we'll get only treats. We’ll cover a two-mile stretch walking through a variety of habitats. Meet at 8:30 in the parking lot on Johnston Rd.

**Saturday, November 3rd - McDowell Prairie/Copperhead Island**
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net)
We’ll walk the prairie and then check Lake Wylie at Copperhead Island for waterfowl. We’ll meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot of Harris-Teeter at the intersection of Hwys 49 and Rt. 160.

**Wednesday, November 7th - Lower McAlpine Greenway**
1/2 Day • Easy* • Contact: Dave Lovett (birdsalot@webtv.net)
This is part of a six-mile long greenway, with woods, creek and a small pond. Join Dave Lovett as we explore the area. We’ll start at 8:30 AM in the Johnston Rd. parking lot.

**Sunday, November 11th - Toby Creek Greenway**
1/2 Day • Easy* • Contact: Judy Walker (birdwalker@me.com)
This is an easy stroll through the UNCC campus with a variety of habitats. If there is time we will also check out the Kirk Farms Fields at the end of Mallard Creek Greenway. We’ll meet in the parking lot across from O’Charley’s on University City Blvd. at Harris Blvd. at 8:30 AM.

**Saturday, November 17th - Beginner Bird Walk**
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Sally Miller (sallyart@bellsouth.net)
This is a monthly walk where Sally Miller goes over the basics of birding, from binocular usage to tips on bird identification. If you don’t have binoculars, she can provide them for you. Meet her at 8:30 AM in the parking lot of McAlpine Creek Park.

**Saturday, November 17th - McDowell Nature Preserve**
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Dave Lovett (birdsalot@webtv.net)
This area has woods and power line right-of-way, good for sparrows. We’ll also look at Lake Wylie for ducks and other waterfowl. The park entrance is on Hwy. 49 near the SC border. Follow the signs to the Nature Center. Meet at 8:30 AM.
Launched in response to kestrel population declines across much of North America, The Peregrine Fund’s new American Kestrel Partnership (http://kestrel.peregrinefund.org) is a network of citizen and professional scientists working to collaboratively advance kestrel demographics and conservation.

Unfortunately, this historically common little falcon has become a rare sight in many regions of North America, where populations have been declining for numerous decades. In several areas the declines are relatively steep, such as the Bird Conservation Regions for the Southern Rocky Mountains/Colorado Plateau, Lower Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Plain, and New England/Mid-Atlantic, illustrated in the graph at right and based on roadside count data from the USGS Breeding Bird Survey.

Reasons for population declines may include land use, climate change, depredation by Cooper’s Hawks and other birds of prey, competition with European Starlings for nesting cavities, and environmental contaminants such as rodenticides, heavy metals, and brominated flame retardants (used in electronics and textiles). However, researchers do not have sufficient data to understand why these long-term, wide-spread population declines are occurring. Counts like the Breeding Bird Survey indicate there are fewer breeding kestrels, but they cannot determine where the birds are having trouble in their life cycle. Are adults not returning after winter to breed? Are they dying at high rates during breeding, migration, or over-wintering? Are they not breeding as often or failing when they do try to breed? And, critically, how are these demographic processes influenced by land use, environmental contaminants, climate trends, and competing or predatory species?

These questions highlight the need for nestbox monitoring data, which offer demographic insights beyond head counts by giving us a glimpse into the kestrel life cycle. Although there are numerous successful nestbox programs across North America, they are largely localized and isolated from each other in a research context—making it difficult to draw reliable conclusions on a large scale. In response, the American Kestrel Partnership is coordinating an unprecedented, Western Hemispheric nestbox monitoring network and database by supporting existing nestbox programs and helping new programs fledge. Do you see kestrels where you live? Whether your local environment has growing, stable, or declining kestrel populations, we need your observations to advance kestrel demographics and conservation.

To learn more about kestrel population trends in your state or Bird Conservation Region, please visit our webpage on population declines.

How do I participate?

Anyone can join the Partnership by creating a Partner Profile on the website, whether you are simply curious about kestrels, work as a professional researcher, already maintain or want to develop a nestbox program, or want to donate to or sponsor the Partnership. To directly participate in the research process, you can build/buy, install, and monitor one or more kestrel nestboxes, and then enter your nestbox monitoring data through your Partner Profile on the Partnership website. Nestbox monitoring is simple and does not require professional research skills, so citizen scientists can make critical contributions to kestrel research and conservation. Professional scientists will then use models to explore relationships between your nesting data and data for environmental factors that might influence kestrel nesting success, such as land use, climate, environmental contaminants, and competing and predatory species. Your participation and data are critical for researchers to understand and address kestrel population declines. Through first-hand experience, we assure you that managing a kestrel nestbox program is a fun, easy, and rewarding experience.

Continued on page 5
International Nature Photography Contest

October 15 - December 1, 2012

Submit your best nature photos for a chance to win up to $3,500 in cash prizes, while supporting the Audubon Society of Greater Denver’s education programs in Denver, Colorado, metro schools.

You can submit an unlimited number of entries at $10/entry or six for $50. The best 250 images will be featured on the contest website through 2013.

Learn more on the Share the View Website at http://denveraudubon.contestvenue.com

Kestrals (cont.)

ence, and in doing so, you can contribute to the largest American Kestrel research and conservation initiative in history.

In addition to collaborating with citizen scientists, the American Kestrel Partnership is partnering with professional scientists to conduct research that requires technical research skills, equipment, and grants. For more information, please visit our Research goals page.

We also encourage kestrel enthusiasts to consider becoming members of The Peregrine Fund. For thousands of American Kestrels, your donations help pay the rent.
Tips for Beginning Birders

Bird Words!!

For the neophyte bird watching terminology used by more experienced birders and/or ornithologists can be confusing and sometimes frustrating. Here are a few basic terms Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon thinks beginning bird watchers should become familiar with -

Natural History Words

Adaptation: A special physical or behavioral ability that has allowed a species to adjust to a particular way of life.

Distribution: The geographic area(s) where a given species of bird can be found.

Niche: The role a bird plays in the ecosystem, including what it eats and where it lives (habitat).

Non-native Species: Birds that have been released from or have escaped captivity. In some cases (House Sparrows, Rock Doves, and others), such species have become established in North America.

Population: The total number of individuals of a single species inhabiting a given area.

Taxonomy: The way bird scientists classify bird species based on their similarities to or differences from one another.

Behavior Words

Diurnal: Used to describe birds that are active during the day. Most birds are diurnal.

Dominance: The ability of one bird to control the actions of another.

Flock: A group of birds made up of either the same or different species.

Habitat: The environment where a particular species of bird lives. Forests and wetlands are both examples of habitats.

Hovering: A technique a bird uses for various reasons, including to search for food. To hover, a bird remains stationary in mid-air, usually by rapidly flapping its wings.

Migration: An extended journey a bird makes from one place to another (for example, when a bird flies from its wintering areas in South America to its breeding area in North America.)

Nocturnal: Used to describe birds that are active at night. Most owls are nocturnal.

Permanent Resident: A species of bird that does not migrate and so spends the entire year in the same region.

Roost: A place where a bird sleeps, sometimes in groups.

Food and Feeding Words

Carnivorous: Flesh-eating birds (usually fresh or live as opposed to carrion). Raptors (hawks and owls) are carnivorous birds.

Crop: A sac inside a bird where its neck meets the body. It holds food before digestion.

Frugivorous: Birds that feed primarily on fruit. Cedar Waxwings are frugivorous birds.

Granivorous: Birds that eat grains or seeds, such as the Rock Pigeon.

Grit: Small pieces of rock, shell, or other hard substances that birds eat to help them digest other foods. Grit helps grind up coarse vegetable matter.

Herbivorous: Birds, such as the Canada Goose, that primarily eat plants.

Insectivorous: Birds that eat mainly insects. Swallows are a good example.

Nectivorous: Birds that feed largely on the nectar of flowers or the juices of fruit, such as hummingbirds.

Omnivorous: Birds that eat anything that is considered digestible/edible. American Crows are a common example.

Piscivorous: Fish-eating birds. The Osprey is piscivorous.

Predation: When one animal kills another for food. The animal that is taken is the prey, and the animal doing the taking is the predator.

Raptors: Generally hawks, eagles, falcons, and owls. These birds prey upon mammals, smaller birds, and other animals.

Feather Words

Camouflage: Having a color and/or pattern that allows a bird to blend with its habitat.

Crest: A tuft of feathers on the top of a bird’s head.

Field Mark: A characteristic or combination of characteristics such as color, shape, or specific marking (eye rings, wing bars, breast stripes), by which a species of bird can be distinguished from other species.

Molt: The process by which a bird renews part or all of its plumage by shedding old, worn feathers and growing new ones.

Plumage: The feathers that cover a bird’s body.

Preening: The process by which a bird cleans, arranges, and cares for its feathers, usually by using its bill to adjust and smooth feathers.

Sexual Dimorphism: When male and female birds differ in plumage.
Birders Take Your Seat!

Come join us on the platform any time from dawn to dusk for as long as you can. We will keep a running tally of what we see. Although this is an all day event, you don’t have to be there all day. If you can great! If not drop in for several hours during the day to help us count.

If we are really lucky we might win the Golden Bird prize, which is $500 from Swarovski Optik. For more information on the National Big Sit and previous year stats check out the Big Sit page on the Bird Watcher’s Digest web site.

This year as a special treat, Don Seriff of Mecklenburg Natural Resources Department will set up a banding station near the observation deck. It will provide folks with an up-close-and-personal view of both migrants and resident birds.

We’ll have hot coffee and tea and a grill for hot dogs or you can bring your own picnic lunch. Bring some folding chairs if you plan to be around for a while. This is a great way to get to know some of your birding colleagues. During the counting lulls there will be time to swap birding adventure stories. You don’t have to tell us you’re coming, just show up when you can.

For more information contact Dave Lovett at birdsalot@webtv.net.

For the Big Sit

Many years ago the New Haven, CT bird club started a birding event called the “BIG SIT”, which has gained quite a bit in popularity over the years. The object of this event is to pick a location and from within 17 ft of this location, see how many species of birds can be seen or heard in a 24-hour period.

Bird Call Challenge!

Can you tell a twitter from a tweet? A chirp from a cheep or a buzz from a trill?
eNature’s Bird Call Challenge will test your knowledge of your local birds or those of any other zip code you choose. And you can choose to quiz yourself on just songbirds or every species of bird in the area.

Go to http://enature.com/challenge/birdcallchallenge.asp to take the Bird Call Challenge to test your knowledge!

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Prothonatary Warbler
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