Monthly Meeting: Thursday, November 7, 2013

The Wonders of Wing Haven

Wing Haven Gardens & Bird Sanctuary has been a special part of Charlotte since its creation by Elizabeth and Edwin Clarkson in 1927. The gardens, enclosed on all sides by brick walls, encompass almost three acres in the heart of Charlotte and include lovely vistas, formal gardens, woodland areas and lots of birds! Jeff Drum, Garden Curator of Wing Haven will share the wonders of this hidden jewel in the Queen City.

So join your fellow Mecklenburg Auduboners on Thursday, November 7th at 7:30 PM in the Tyvola Senior Center (2225 Tyvola Road, Charlotte, NC 28210). Refreshments begin at 7:15 PM.

A Banner Year for the Birds!

The results of the summer nesting season are in and tabulated, showing it was a great year for many nesting-bird species across North Carolina. Coastal Biologist, Lindsay Addison and Biological Technician Tara McIver along with seasonal staff Maria Logan, Zach Gilstrap and interns Abby Chiaramonte and Carlie Thieman all contributed to the hard work of monitoring thousands of nesting pairs. Audubon monitored several important bird areas including the Lower Cape Fear River, Wrightsville Beach, Masonboro and Lea-Hutaff Islands, and the Ocracoke Inlet. Read the full report at http://ncaudubonblog.org/?p=3866.

Meanwhile, it was a record setting year in the mountains of Western North Carolina. A team of field technicians and volunteers mapped 74 male Golden-winged Warbler territories and counted 39 nests. In addition, a Lawrence’s male warbler sighting marked the first in more than a decade for that area! Read the full report at http://ncaudubonblog.org/?p=3804.

What’s Inside

Wing Haven 1
Banner Year 1
Field Trip 2
Sparrow Workshop 2
Turkey Talk 3
Nuthatch 4
Winterizing Your Yard 5
Sparrows 6
Binoculars 7
Photo Contests 8

Up Coming Events

11/02 McDowell Prairie FT
11/03 Beginner Bird Walk
11/05 Little Sugar Creek FT
11/07 Ribbonwalk NP
11/07 Monthly Meeting
11/10 Toby Creek Grnwy
11/16 Latta Plantation Prairie
11/19 McMullen Grnwy FT
11/23 Pee Dee NWR FT
11/26 Four-mile Creek FT
11/30 Ft. Fisher FT
12/07 Waterfowl FT
12/14 Gaston CBC
12/15 Lake Norman CBC
12/21 Charlotte CBC
12/28 Pee Dee NWR CBC

Who’s New?

Gayla Jackson
Alice Bryant
Amber & Joel McCune
Liz Noto
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!!

Saturday, November 2nd - McDowell Prairie/Copperhead Island.
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net)
The prairie is a 2-mile loop through fields and woods edges. Sturdy shoes are suggested. Then we’ll go to nearby Copperhead Island to scope Lake Wylie for early waterfowl. We’ll meet at 8:30 AM. Turn right on Shopton Road off Hwy 49. In 0.7 miles, turn left on Four Horse Road. Follow it about 3/4 mile to the green gate on the right. This is where the road makes a 90 degree turn to the left.

Sunday, November 3rd - Beginner’s Bird Walk.
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Marcia Howden (howden32@aol.com)
Marsha will lead this month’s walk for beginners, and more experienced folks, starting at 8:30 at Latta Prairie in Latta Nature Preserve. She will be demonstrating birding techniques and other aspects. Binoculars will be provided, if needed.

Tuesday, November 5th - Little Sugar Creek Greenway.
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Dave Lovett (birdsalot@webtv.net)
This runs about a mile along the creek in Huntingtowne Farms sub-division in the Southpark area, with open grass, woods and fields. Dave Lovett will lead it. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot at the end of Huntingtowne Farms Lane off Park Road. birdsalot1@gmail.com

Thursday 7th - Ribbonwalk Nature Preserve.
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Tom Ledford (tledford1207@gmail.com)
This preserve is mostly wooded. Sturdy shoes are recommended. Trails could be muddy if it has been raining. Also included are three ponds and a large field. We’ll cover about 1 1/2 miles. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Hoyt Hinson Rd.

Sunday, November 10th - Toby Creek Greenway.
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker (birdwalker@me.com)
Although not strictly a beginner bird walk, this greenway does avail itself to close observation of common local birds with a few oddities thrown in. We’ll be looking for winter migrants. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot adjacent to the Hardies and O’Charlies on University City Blvd.

Saturday, November 16th - Latta Plantation Prairie
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Judy Walker (birdwalker@me.com)
We’ll see what wintering sparrows have moved into the area and maybe take a peek at the lake as well for any early ducks. Meet at the Nature Center at 8:30 AM.

Tuesday, November 19th - McMullen Creek Greenway.
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Dave Lovett (birdsalot@webtv.net)
Dave will lead this flat walk through woods, fields and wetlands. We’ll meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Highway 51.

Saturday, November 23rd - Pee Dee NWR.
Full Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark (waxwing@bellsouth.net)
We’ll cover different sections of the refuge, with fields, ponds, coniferous and deciduous woods, and wetlands. Low Grounds will still be open so we should see a few ducks. In the afternoon, we’ll go to Lake Tillery and see what waterfowl may have shown up. This is an all-day trip, bring lunch and water. We’ll meet at McDonald’s in Windsor Square Shopping Center on Independence Blvd. at 6:30 AM.

Don’t know what this is? Find out at the -

Sparrow Workshop

Saturday, November 9th
Reedy Creek Nature Preserve
9 AM to 4 PM

We’ll have our second workshop on November 9th. This one will be on Sparrows, also frustratingly known as LBJ’s or Little Brown Jobs. Taylor Piephoff will teach this class, limited to 15 participants. We’ll start at 9:00 AM at the Reedy Creek Nature Center, at 2900 Reedy Creek Road, for one to two hours, and then go to Harrisburg Sports Complex, a very good sparrow area. After lunch, he’ll take the group to Kirk Farm Fields. All walking is on flat ground. Kirk Farm is a boardwalk. The cost is $20. Make checks out to MAS and send them to PO Box 221093 Charlotte 28222. Also, email Taylor and let him know you’ll be attending. piephofft@aol.com. Checks will be held until the class.
**Field Trips**

**Tuesday, November 26th - Four-Mile Creek Greenway.**
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Tom Ledford (tledford1207@gmail.com)
This two-mile stretch covers woods, wetlands, brush and open habitat. We’ll meet at 8:30 in the parking lot on Johnston Rd.

**Saturday, November 30th - Fort Fisher, NC**
Full Day • Moderate • Contact: Taylor Piephoff (piephofft@aol.com)
Taylor will lead his annual coastal trip to Fort Fisher, south of Carolina Beach, and other spots. More details in the next issue.

**Saturday, December 7th - Wintering Waterfowl**
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker (birdwalker@me.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.

**Saturday, December 14th - Gaston County CBC**
Full Day • Contact: Steve Tracy (stevepath1@aol.com)

**Sunday, December 15th - Lake Norman CBC**
Full Day • Contact: Taylor Piephoff (piephofft@aol.com)

**Saturday, December 21st - Charlotte CBC**
Full Day • Contact: Ken Kneidel (kenkneidel@gmail.com)

**Saturday, December 28th - Pee Dee NWR CBC**
Full Day • Contact: Judy Walker (birdwalker@me.com)

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**Let’s Talk Turkey!**

Impress your friends and relatives around the table with these turkey tidbits.

- Wild turkeys are native to North America and there are five subspecies: Eastern, Osceola (Florida), Rio Grande, Merriam’s (Rocky Mountains and the neighboring prairies of Wyoming, Montana and South Dakota) and Gould’s (central Mexico into the southernmost parts of New Mexico and Arizona).
- Between 5,000 and 6,000 feathers cover the body of an adult turkey. They provide a variety of survival functions such as keeping them warm and dry, flying, and showing off for the opposite sex.
  - The head and upper part of the neck are featherless. If you look close, you can see little bumps of skin on the bare area.
  - The gobbler, or male turkey, is more colorful, while the hen is drab brown to camouflage her with her surroundings.
  - Gobblers have beards - tufts of filaments, or modified feathers - growing out from the chest. It can grow to an average of nine inches with some growing much longer.
  - Wild turkeys have excellent vision during the day but don’t see as well at night.
  - Turkeys can run at speeds up to 25 mph, and they can fly up to 55 mph.
  - Newly-hatched turkeys must be ready to leave the nest within 12 to 24 hours to feed.

- Pouls eat insects, berries and seeds, while adults will eat anything from acorns and berries to insects and small reptiles.
- Wild turkeys like open areas for feeding, mating and habitat. They use forested areas as cover from predators and for roosting in trees at night. A varied habitat of both open and covered area is essential for wild turkey survival.

Have a great Thanksgiving!!
The Brown-headed Nuthatch, a southern bird born and bred, needs your help to find a good home. Because of urbanization and deforestation, these nuthatches are losing the pinewoods and dead trees they need for nest holes. These darlin’ squeaky birds need more nest boxes now so we can all enjoy them for generations to come.

About the Brown-headed Nuthatch

The Brown-headed Nuthatch is a small bird - just under 4” long - and sounds just like a rubber ducky squeaky toy. A quintessential Southern bird, with a home range from Virginia to east Texas, the nuthatch lives in old-growth pine or just about anywhere it can get its favorite food - pine seeds. Nuthatches live in family groups with their grown babies (mostly male birds) sticking around to help out with the next brood. These birds are also smart little whippersnappers -- they use a piece of bark as a lever to pry up other bark to look for food. They also use bark as a pantry door to cover a seed cache.

Conservation Status

The Brown-headed Nuthatch is a high-priority species for conservation in the piedmont region. No big surprise, but humans have had a hand in their decline. Humans can also help reverse this trend. We know that putting up nest boxes in backyards worked to conserve the Eastern Bluebird and we also know that adding nest boxes is a solution that will help our nuthatch friends thrive!

Nest Boxes

There are two easy ways to provide a cozy little home for the nuthatch. First, any nest box design approved by the North American Bluebird Society will work very well for Brown-headed Nuthatches but it is important to make the opening smaller – ideally 1” in diameter. Bird stores sell metal excluders that you can attach over the 1 1/2” hole on a standard bluebird box to make it ready for nuthatches. Or you can purchase a made-for-nuthatches nest box at bird stores or online. If you’d like to decorate the box, be sure to paint only the exterior with a light colored paint.

To invite both bluebirds and nuthatches to your yard (they make fine neighbors) you can put both a bluebird box (1 1/2” hole) and a nuthatch box (1” hole) no less than 15 feet apart.

Installation

Nuthatches prefer semi-open habitat but they are quite willing to nest in wooded and open areas – as long as there are pine trees nearby. You can put up your houses near the edge of woods, on existing trees or mounted on pipes. Predator guards - Predators will raid boxes mounted on trees or fence posts about 30% of the time so putting up a predator guard can really help keep snakes and mammals away from the eggs and babies. Predator guards are simple to make - a 2 feet piece of stove pipe, an inverted 2 foot wide funnel or a purchased 2 foot wide predator guard disc will all work. Look at a bird store or online to find reasonably priced solutions and do-it-yourself instructions.

Poles

Pipes make great nest box poles and all materials are easy to get at your favorite home improvement store. To put up two next boxes, purchase:

- One 10 foot length of 1/2” diameter RIGID conduit (galvanized pipe)
- One 10 foot length of 1” EMT (electrical conduit) pipe
- Four 1” two-hole pipe straps
- Two 1” hose clamps.

Ask the store to cut the 1/2” pipe into 40” lengths and the 1” pipe into 5’ lengths.

Timing

Nuthatches begin building nests as early as December and usually lay 5-7 white-speckled-with-brown eggs once a year from late March through early May, with babies leaving the nest by early June. But these little birds also roost in boxes all winter so putting up boxes any time helps our squeaky friends.

Mecklenburg Audubon is selling nestboxes specifically designed for these diminutive birds for $10. We will have the boxes at our monthly meetings. But to make sure there is one waiting for you please contact Jill Palmer <jpalmer53@earthlink.net> to reserve your box.
Winterize Your Yard For Birds
BY STEVE KRESS
Complete article can be found at http://www.audubonmagazine.org/articles/living/winterize-your-yard-birds

WITH THESE 9 STEPS, YOU CAN CREATE AN AVIAN WINTER WONDERLAND AND GET A JUMP ON SPRING MIGRATION SEASON.

Get Planting
Choose trees, shrubs, vines, and groundcovers native to your area. In northern climates this will ensure that new plants are in place and ready to resume growing in the early spring; it’s also a good idea in the South, so plants can begin growing outside of the hot and dry seasons. One note of caution: Fall plantings are especially vulnerable to predators. Take steps to protect trees from bark-gnawing mice, rabbits and deer. by covering sapling trunks with plastic wrap.

Provide Water
Make sure there’s ample water near protective shrubs. Many kinds of birds bathe in and drink from open water in frigid weather. Avoid ceramic baths; they can crack in cold weather. Instead, purchase a plastic birdbath with a built-in heater, or convert a summer birdbath by adding a heater. Baths on pedestals are ideal for reducing risks from predators such as cats, but if neighborhood cats are a regular threat, it’s best not to use birdbaths at all. Clean birdbaths as needed with a stiff, rounded hand brush. Frequent refills are necessary in winter because the water quickly evaporates in dry air.

Out With the Old
Clear out nest boxes in the fall. It’s wise to remove bird and mouse nests because some birds will use these boxes as winter night roosts. Clean them a second time in early spring to prepare for the coming nesting season.

Push the Limits
Create a songbird border along your property edge with plants that meet birds’ needs year-round. Mimic natural flora communities by including indigenous plant species in varied heights that offer a mix of food, cover, nesting, and singing perches. A border that takes the form of a hedge can double as a windbreak if planted on a home’s north side. Ideally, yours should serve to connect any isolated patches of habitat.

Tell Us About Your New Neighbors
With your help 10,000 new Brown-headed Nuthatch homes will be put up in North Carolina by 2015. To keep track of how we are doing, we invite you to join in a few fun activities.

• Join the flock in conserving the Brown-headed Nuthatch by signing up at audubonaction.org/NCNuthatches. We’ll send you info and ideas for keeping your birds safe and thriving throughout the year.
• Ask your questions by emailing us at nuthatch@audubon.org
• Upload photos to our Facebook page - facebook.com/audubonnc
• Share with us on Twitter - @audubonnc and hashtag Home4Nuthatches
• Instagram a photo and use the hashtag #Home4Nuthatches

Discard Old Seed
You should get rid of old birdseed, especially if it has been kept in a hot, humid place like a metal garbage can during the summer months. Although these cans are ideal for protecting seed from rodents, they can also encourage mold growth if the seed gets wet and then heats up.

Pile On
Build a brush pile in a corner of your property to offer songbirds shelter in extreme weather. During fall cleanup, set aside downed branches and tree trunks for construction. If they’re available, use large logs as a foundation, then heap fallen and cut branches in successive layers.

Grab a Brush
Clean feeders with a bottlebrush and a 10 percent solution of nonchlorinated bleach. Rinse thoroughly and dry in the sun before refilling. Rake up soggy seed from under feeders and bury it far away to prevent the growth of bird-toxic mold. Scrub and store hummingbird feeders so they will be ready for spring.

Make Mulch
Rake fallen leaves under shrubs to create mulch and to protect natural ground-feeding areas for such birds as sparrows, towhees, and thrashers. Birds prefer leaf mulch to woodchip and bark mulches. Earthworms, pillbugs, insects, and spiders--songbird delicacies--will thrive as the mulch decomposes.

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Nest Box Maintenance
Nuthatches love to use the same home year after year. It is so much fun to see your little nuthatch return to the same cozy home you have provided! A good fall cleaning to remove all the old nest materials is a good idea. You can clean out the box starting in August so it is ready to be a protected winter roosting spot.

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Identifying LBJs: a.k.a. Sparrows

New birders often make the mistake of trying to identify sparrows visually. This can be very frustrating, because, except for a few species, sparrows don’t stay in view long enough to see the necessary field marks. Most of the time the bird will be zipping from one hiding place to another and/or will be flying away from you. However, by doing a little homework ahead of time it is possible to narrow down the possibilities fairly quickly. Here are a few tips for identifying those LBJs.

1. Know what species are most likely to be seen in the area and study them carefully.

   First, become familiar with the most common winter species. In this area, the LBJs most often encountered are the song and white-throated sparrows. Most folks think they know what these birds look like but don’t be fooled. The white-sparrow has at least two plumage variations; juveniles may not have a white throat; and few birds will have the yellow in front of their eyes. And although we have one particular subspecies of song sparrow breeding in the area, there are 29 identified subspecies, which exhibit a wide range of plumages. Three or four different subspecies in a bush could give the impression there are several different species.

   Other species one can expect to encounter are Chipping, Field, Savannah, Swamp and Fox. Although these birds are relatively easy to ID in the breeding season, winter plumages can vary especially on juveniles. Savannahs are another species with a number of subspecies with variable plumages.

   One last comment about sparrow plumage. Don’t rely on a chest spot to identify a bird. Almost any sparrow can appear to have a chest spot. Weather conditions, lighting, plumage stage and even feather condition can produce what appears to be a spot on a bird. Although most of the sparrows we see in the winter are some shade of brown, white and gray, the pattern on each bird is unique to the species. Crowns, tails, face patterns, & wing bars are much more important diagnostics than a chest spot.

2. Make sure it’s a sparrow.

   There are other species of birds that are small and brown such as wrens, finches or creepers. However, they will have very different shapes, bills, habits and habitat preferences. Females in many species, such as the Red-winged Blackbirds, are also plain and brown. So it’s important to know what these species look like as well. Sparrows do have a distinct body and bill shape. Take a good look at these characteristics.

Common Sparrow Habits/Habitats

**Song:** Individuals sing throughout the year, but infrequently in the winter, and the winter song may be different from the breeding song. Although they tend to stay in dense vegetation, they are not generally difficult to see, and often respond to vigorous pishing. Usually found in loose small flocks, often associated with other sparrows. Their flight is jerky, not strong and their long tail is characteristically flipped to one side and pumped in flight. Generally found in open brushy habitats, often along the borders of ponds or streams, abandoned pastures, thickets or woodland edge, tall weedy fields, marshes, moist ravines and brush piles.

**Chipping:** Forages both in trees and on the ground. In winter frequently occurs in large, loose flocks feeding in short grass. Prefers dry, open woodlands or woodland edges with grassy understory, orchards, parks, golf courses.

**Field:** Solitary or occur in small flocks (often of mixed species composition) in win- ter. They are not generally difficult to see, and respond to pishing. As their name implies they prefer old fields with scattered bushes, thickets and brushy edges.

**White-throated:** Generally found in loose flocks or small groups, sometimes in mixed species flocks. When flushed, they may fly up into a small nearby tree where they are easily seen. A brushland birds often found in dense deciduous thickets or brush piles, often in woodland edges.

**Savannah:** Generally feed on the ground, but they may glean insects from branch tips. They are generally not difficult to see, and flush readily. Their flight is strong and direct. When flushed they frequently perch in a small bush, tree or stalks. They are not usually found in mixed flocks. They are birds of open country, grassy meadows, cultivated fields, lightly grazed pastures, roadside edges, and coastal grasslands.

**Swamp:** Characteristically fly only short distances. They are not difficult to flush, and respond readily to pishing. Found in dense vegetation, often in low, open and wet areas, commonly at the edge of ponds or flooded fields.

**Fox:** Can be found in small, loose flocks. Their flight is strong and direct, but when flushed they may fly from bush to bush with a nervous jerking of the tail. They feed on the ground, often using a double-scratch method; often they can be heard scratching among dried leaves. Winter habitat is usually found in low, moist areas with tall brush, and brush piles, often at the woodland edge.
Are You Thinking about Binoculars for Christmas?

Before buying any binoculars, download (for free) Bird Watcher’s Digest Annual Optics Buyer’s Guide. It is chock-full of valuable information about how choose the best pair for you specific needs. Below is an excerpt from the guide. To get the guide go to - http://www.birdwatchersdigest.net/shot2013/oa2013/

First, every optics buyer should consider two fundamental elements: size and price range. “Once we have the size figured out, that narrows our choices down from, say, 500 binoculars to 200 binoculars,” says Lizdas. After you couple your preferred size with a general price range, the field of options usually becomes an easily manageable list of four or five models.

What Size Binoculars Do You Want?

When we talk about size with regard to optics, it has less to do with the physical weight and dimensions and more to do with the power of the binoculars—the magnification and the diameter of the objective lenses (respectively the first and second numbers in 8x42, for example). To determine what size will best suit your needs, think about how you intend to use your new binoculars. Do you plan to travel with them or stay in the backyard? Will you spend more of your time in woodlands watching warblers or in open areas watching hawks and shorebirds? Different types of birding favor different types of optics (more on that shortly).

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

IDing Sparrows

3. Become familiar with habitat preferences.

Although sparrows are essentially ground feeders, where that ground is, is important to them. Swamp sparrows prefer to be around water, while Savannah sparrows prefer open fields with areas of short grass. You won’t usually find these species together except when a pond or wet area is located in the middle of a field. Chipping Sparrows also like open fields but like to have pine trees around as well. You won’t find a sharp-tail or seaside sparrow in Charlotte because they want to be in salt marshes. Habitat preferences include wintering ranges. Although any bird could show up anywhere, 99.9% of a species will winter within its normal range. Outside that range they are considered a rarity.

4. Learn the common chip notes or calls of the wintering birds.

The sounds the birds make are also important. This time of the year the birds aren’t singing territorial songs but they are still very vocal. Each species has a set of calls and/or chips unique to the species. Although hard to describe, the song sparrows have several vocalizations that easily identify the bird. But the only way to really learn these vocalizations is to be out in the field looking at and listening to the different birds.

Once you become familiar with the common sparrows in the area, the more unusual birds, Lincoln, Lark or White-crowned Sparrows, will stand out. But even then you need to note not just the markings but where the bird is, how it is acting and what it is saying.
Ithaca, NY—The BirdSpotter photo contest launches on November 6. The contest is sponsored by Bob’s Red Mill Natural Foods and offers weekly prizes for the photos that receive the most votes on the contest website.

BirdSpotter is being run through the Project FeederWatch citizen-science project at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. FeederWatch participants keep track of their feeder birds from November through April and report what they see online. This information helps scientists learn more about the changes in bird distribution and population numbers in North America over time.

Each Wednesday from November 6 through February 12, a new BirdSpotter photo theme will be posted, such as “birds in flight” or “birds eating.” You can upload one entry per week and then vote for your favorite photo. The winner will be announced on Monday morning. Each weekly winner receives a package of Bob’s Red Mill products and gifts from the Cornell Lab.

Voting for the top three photos from among all the weekly winners begins February 19. The grand prize winner gets a trip for two to Oregon to go birding with Bob, tour the Red Mill, and collect other great prizes.

For more information go to http://feederwatch.org/birdspotter2013/

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### Share the View - An International Photo Contest

**October 15 to December 1, 2013**

**Grand Prize: $1,000**

How often can you turn $10 into $1,000 with just one beautiful image? Enter “Share the View”, the Audubon Society of Greater Denver’s international nature photography contest, for a chance to do so. $1,000 is the top cash prize among ten that will be awarded, in addition to recognition for the top 250 images selected by our experienced panel of judges.

Enter as many images as you’d like for an entry fee of $10 per image, or 6 for $50. Not only is there a chance to win some big bucks, but images placing in the top 250 will appear on the contest website during 2014 and receive a Certificate of Merit. One of the top 250 will be featured per day on the home page and all will be accompanied by the photographer’s name, contact information and website link (if requested).

FOR MORE INFO: See last year’s winners and register now on the Share the View (http://denveraudubon.contestvenue.com)