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Upcoming Events

12/04  Save the Songs
12/06  Wintering Waterfowl
12/07  Francis Beatty Park
12/14  Lake Norman CBC
12/20  Gaston CBC
12/27  Charlotte CBC
01/03  Pee Dee NWR CBC
01/08  Food, Fun & Fotos
01/17  Huntington Beach SP

Who’s New?

Sue and Joe Heritage
Clinton Parker
Connie Scribner
Joan Soeth

New Start time for Monthly Meetings
7:15 PM!!!!!

After many, many years of first Thursday of the month meetings MAS has to change its start time. Recently the Marion Diehl Senior Center has moved under the management of Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation department. With this new management the county staff at the center while we meet has to be off duty at 9:00 PM.

The board felt to cut our meeting time short would take away some of the value and enjoyment of the monthly meeting. We all love our socialization at our meeting and then sit down to listen what we hope is a very good speaker on a topic most interesting.

Refreshments and Social time will start as early as 6:45 PM. The meeting will start at 7:15 PM sharp. Please mark this on your calendar.

Save the Songs

For our December meeting, Kim Brand, Bird Friendly Communities Coordinator with Audubon NC, will present “Save the Songs: Climate Change and Birds.” Kim will present Audubon’s new science that quantifies the specific risk to North America’s birds in a greater level of detail and clarity than has been available so far: which birds are most threatened by climate change and where. She will discuss what we will do together in North Carolina to protect our birds today and tomorrow as our climate changes. This new information about the threat global warming poses to birds will add urgency and clarity to our work in a way that few things have before.

Join us on Thursday, December 4th, at 7:15 PM at the Tyvola Senior Center (2225 Tyvola Rd.).
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/trips/trips.html. 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, December 6th - Wintering Waterfowl
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com] • MAP
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.

Sunday, December 7th - Francis Beatty Park
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Matt Janson [m.janson.geolover@gmail.com]
Matt Janson will lead, in this park near Matthews. It has woods, open areas and a large lake. Meet at 8:30 at the upper playground parking lot near the softball fields.

Sunday, December 14th - Lake Norman CBC
Contact: Taylor Piephoff [Piephoff@aol.com]
This is by far the best count circle in the Piedmont. Because of the wide variety of habitat - open fields, large lake, small ponds and wetlands, mixed hardwood forest, old farms the potential for unusual birds is great. In some ways this count is like a tour through Peterson’s guide with a smattering of species from loons all the way through to the sparrows with representatives of almost everything in between. Groups will start before dawn to catch the owls and woodcocks. Others will meet at 7:00 AM. There are fast food places in the count circle (in Cornelius) but you may want to bring food to munch on for energy and warmth. Although you might spend a fair amount of time in the car, warm clothes and sturdy shoes are a must. A tally up dinner will be held at 5:30 PM.

Saturday, December 20th - Gaston CBC
Contact: Steve Tracy [stevepath1@aol.com]
For many animals the Catawba River can act as a barrier. Only the heartiest mammal will attempt to swim across the river. Birds, however, are not as easily intimidated. And birders shouldn’t be phased by the river either. That’s why we are teaming up with the birders from the Gastonia area to conduct the Gaston County Christmas Count. This will be a great opportunity to get to know our neighbors and explore new birding hotspots. All the details haven’t been worked out yet but plan to spend at least a morning if not the entire day getting to know Gaston County.

Saturday, December 27th - Charlotte CBC
Contact: Ken Kneidel [kndel2@EARTHLINK.NET]
The granddaddy of the counts, this circle still encompasses a surprising variety of habitat considering suburban sprawl which has taken over much of the area. There are still patches of woods, ponds, lakes, streams and open fields which turn up an interesting variety of resident and wintering species. In the last 5 years we have averaged around 90 species. A remarkable number considering the wholesale lost of habitat over the past 20 years which just proves the tenacity of the birds. Although this is an all day event if you can only participate in the morning or afternoon you are more than welcome. Since fast food establishments (and warmth) will be just around the corner packing a lunch is optional although a thermos of coffee never hurt. There will be a tally up dinner at Wing Haven [248 Ridgewood Ave] at 5:30 PM. Just bring your appetites and good birding stories.
Field Trips

Saturday, January 3rd: Pee Dee NWR CBC
Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]
There is nothing quite like knowing you are the only one wandering the paths of a wildlife refuge. That’s what it is like at the Pee Dee Count. We have the refuge to ourselves and it’s a wonderful opportunity to see a wide variety of birds and hopefully other animals in a truly wild environment. Habitats include open fields, mixed woodlands and small lakes and ponds. Red-headed woodpeckers and ducks abound and if we are lucky a few Tundra Swans might grace the landscape. We will meet at 5:45 AM at the McDonald’s at the Windsor Square Shopping Center on Independence. We will be out in the field all day so remember to dress warmly as things can get pretty cold out in the fields. Waterproof shoes would also be helpful but not necessary. There will be a hot lunch to warm our inners and energize us for an afternoon of more birding.

Saturday, January 17th: Huntington Beach State Park, SC
Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]
Our winter excursion to Huntington Beach State Park is an annual favorite offering some different bird species than our fall trip. Waterfowl - both freshwater and saltwater - have arrived in good numbers including loons, grebes, and ducks. Gannets are numerous offshore along with shorebirds along the quiet beaches.

Saturday, January 17th: Huntington Beach State Park, SC
Full Day • Moderate • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]
We will meet at 8 AM in the causeway parking lot. Be sure to dress warmly as the winds off the ocean can be chilling and bring a lunch for a midday break.

For those staying the weekend, Saturday evening we gather at a local restaurant for dinner to decide on where we will bird Sunday morning for half a day before heading home.

Local hotels with off-season rates include: Litchfield In [843-237-4211], Comfort Inn Surfside [843-233-8585], Days Inn Surfside [843-238-4444], Brookwood Inn [843-651-2550].

Homes for the Holidays

With your help, our community can give even more Brown-headed Nuthatches a home for the holidays. We are collaborating with Audubon North Carolina and participating local bird stores for a special holiday promotion. When you BUY ONE nest box, Audubon will GIVE ONE nest box to our community to be installed in the community. Your purchase will go twice as far to give these darlin’, squeaky birds a cozy home this winter and a place to raise their young in the springtime. Don’t search high and low for the perfect gift for the bird lover on your list. Click here to find a participating store in your neighborhood or order one online - http://ncaudubonblog.org/2014/11/a-nuthatch-home-for-the-holidays/
Preventing Window Strikes

Millions of birds die every year flying into windows, because they can’t tell reflections from trees, plants and sky. Most of those windows are on houses. According to George Fenwick, president of American Bird Conservancy, a home may kill a dozen or more birds a year without the owner being aware. Even small windows can be dangerous, as many birds fly into small spaces such as tree cavities or between branches to escape predators.

Daytime collisions typically occur for one of two reasons:
1. The window is reflecting the surrounding habitat, and birds can’t tell the difference.
2. The window is transparent, and birds see through it to appealing objects on the other side.

Even if the impact doesn’t kill a bird immediately, it may be injured or stunned, making it vulnerable to predation later.

Three simple ways to prevent window collisions

Taking the simple steps listed below — in addition to deploying the products described on the following pages — will dramatically reduce the chance that birds will be harmed in collisions at your home.

1. Move feeders close to your windows — 1.5 feet or closer. From this distance, birds won’t be able to build up enough momentum to hurt themselves if they do fly against the glass.
2. Close curtain and blinds when possible to break up the illusion of clear passage or reflected habitat.
3. Move houseplants away from windows. Birds may view them as refuges and try to perch on them.

Research has identified solutions to alert birds to windows. The easiest of these involve applying visible markings to the outside of windows in patterns that the birds can see while requiring minimal glass coverage to keep your view unobscured. Although we don’t yet have all the answers, we know that most birds will avoid windows with vertical stripes spaced four inches apart or less, or horizontal stripes spaced two inches or less apart. Stripes should be at least 1/4” wide and light colors are generally more visible. More complicated or irregular patterns will also work as long as they follow the general spacing guidelines specified above.

Three tips for using decals and paint on windows

Use multiple decals to create a pattern that covers the window uniformly. Arranged decals in columns 4” apart and the rows should be 2” apart. The decals should be at least 1/4” in width and contrast as much as possible with the windowpane. Patterns can be placed on the inside or outside of a window that is transparent. If it is reflective, the pattern must be applied to the outside. (Source: Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP))

For specific information about how to treat your windows and where you can find approved products download You Can Save Birds from Flying into Windows [http://goo.gl/a03Gip] by the American Bird Conservancy and visit birdwatching.com special feature 15 Products that Prevent Window strikes [http://goo.gl/iICNyvv].

Five bird deterrents that don’t work

1. Hawk silhouettes: One window decal in the shape of a hawk will not frighten birds. Shape is not important.
2. Single window decals: Affixing a single decal to a window will not deter birds. To lessen the area of exposed glass and help make a window visible to birds, use multiple decals (even multiple decals in the shape of a hawk).
3. Plastic owls: Birds learn quickly that a motionless plastic owl is not a threat.
4. Noise deterrents: Common noise deterrents — high-frequency ultrasound, noise cannons, and recorded distress calls — are ineffective at preventing birds from colliding with windows.
5. Magnetic fields: Some deterrents emit a magnetic field said to disrupt birds’ geomagnetic orientation and encourage them to avoid the area. Magnetic fields are not effective at protecting birds from window collisions.

Source: Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP)
Audubon News

The routine abundance of gulls makes a convenient excuse for ignoring them. No other group of birds presents so many subtle identification problems or such an array of overlapping plumages. There are more plumage variations within most gull species than there are between species. The first-winter herring, for instance, looks more like the first-winter versions of western, lesser blacked-backed, California, Thayer’s and several others than it does an adult herring.

Gull sizes and silhouettes, are only moderately useful as guides to identification. Sorting out the plumages is essential, and this is one part of birding that seems to get harder with experience.

The first thing to realize about gull plumages is that no general field guide illustrates them all. All gulls have five to nine distinct plumages, not counting periods of transition or individual variations.

The second thing to realize about gull plumages is that there’s no avoiding the lingo. Anyone interested in mastering the gulls must adjust to the gull specialists’ categories: ‘two-year gulls,’ ‘three-year gulls,’ first-winter plumage,’ ‘second-summer plumage,’ and so on.

Sorting gull plumages begins with a straightforward principle: the number of plumages increases with the size of the bird. Small gulls, for example Bonaparte’s, are two-year gulls and have five plumages. Mid-sized gull, for example laughing and ring-billed, are three-year gulls and have seven plumages. Large gulls, for example herring and greater black-backed, are four-year gulls and have nine plumages. There are no ‘one-year’ gulls or ‘five-year’ gulls.

The general progression is from a muted (often brown) juvenile plumage through a series of increasingly less motley intermediate plumages to the cleaner, crisper colors of the adult plumages.

**JUVENAL:** The juvenile plumage is worn by all gulls from the time they leave their nest until late summer or early fall. Generally, it is the least important plumage to study, since most gulls molt their juvenile plumage before migrating. You will see juvenal plumaged gulls regularly only if the species nests in your area. [Such as the laughing gull along the Carolina coast.]

**FIRST WINTER:** The first-winter plumage is very important to learn and is the subadult plumage most often illustrated in the field guides. It is acquired in late summer or early fall of the gull’s year of birth, and worn until the following spring. First-winter gulls are almost always more numerous than gulls in other non-adult plumages and frequently outnumber adults. In fact, if a gull occurs only as an autumn or winter stray in your area, knowing the first-winter plumage is more important than knowing the adult’s. Vagrant gulls are most likely to be ‘lost’ first-winter wanderers.

**FIRST SUMMER:** The term ‘first summer’ may seem confusing, since the plumage of a gull’s initial summer of life is its juvenile plumage. A gull in first-summer plumages is in its second year of life. In most three-year and four-year gulls, first-summer plumage is hard to distinguish from first-winter plumage.

**SECOND WINTER AND SECOND SUMMER:** Since two-year gulls achieve their adult-winter plumage in their second winter and breeding plumage in their second summer the terms ‘second winter,’ ‘second summer,’ are used only with reference to three- and four-year gulls. As three-year gulls move into their second-winter plumages, they gain more adult like wings. Four-year gulls in second-summer plumages often show a telltale mark. Most of the bird is obviously subadult: the wings are smudgy or spotted; the tail is banded; the bill lacks the adult’s red spot. But the back (or ‘saddle’) is the color of the adult’s back.

**THIRD WINTER AND THIRD SUMMER:** These terms are used with reference only to four-year gulls. All smaller gulls have reached adult plumage by their third year. Four-year gulls in their third-year plumages resemble adults except at each end – the tail and the tip of the bill. The tails generally still show bands or smudges of darkness, and the bills often retain some dark color and lack the adult’s red spot. The wings also tend to be less cleanly marked than the wings of full adults.

Continued on page 6
Winterizing for Birds

Fall and winter don’t mean your garden has to go on hiatus. Since some songbirds will also use roost boxes to stay warm in the winter, you can keep your yard bustling all year long by providing a cozy abode for these feathered friends. These birds include ones that nest in tree cavities or birdhouses in spring—such as bluebirds, chickadees, titmice, screech owls and some woodpeckers.

Providing shelter is one of the key elements to ensuring your yard is a welcoming space for birds. Here are 4 tips for luring birds in—and helping them out!

1. **Try a prefabricated box.** Look for boxes where the entrance holes are near the bottom instead of in the middle or near the top. The idea is that hot air rises, so a low entrance hole keeps warm air from leaking out.

2. **Leave nest boxes up all winter.** Some evidence suggests roosting birds prefer boxes mounted 10 feet high or more in winter—possibly because birds feel safer up high.

3. **Winterize your birdhouse.** If reusing a spring nest box that has large ventilation holes (which keep the summer sun from overheating the interior), consider blocking them to keep out the draft. Don’t seal the box up too tight though, since most birds like to check out a roost box before calling it home.

4. **Protect the box from predators.** Since most bird predators can climb trees and wooden posts, opt for a metal pole to mount the box instead.

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**Gulls 101**

**ADULT WINTER:** To separate adult-winter plumage from breeding plumage, study the heads. The hooded gulls [Bonaparte’s and laughing] and the kittiwakes have ear patches or partial hoods in adult winter plumage. Most other gulls in adult-winter plumage have streaky or spotted heads.

**ADULT BREEDING:** This plumage is achieved by two-year gulls in their fifth plumage, as they are nearing two years of age; by three-year gulls in their seventh plumage, as they are nearing three years of age; and by four-year bulls in their ninth plumage, as they near four years of age. All gulls have easily recognized breeding plumes. One simple and excellent double-check for adult gulls at all seasons is the tail. Except for the Heermann’s gull, all North American gulls have bright white tails in both adult plumages.

Once a gull has reached full adulthood, its plumage alternates between adult winter and breeding adult for the rest of its life. All feather are renewed at least once annually, and plumage cannot be used to estimate age. Twenty-year-old gulls are indistinguishable from five-year-olds.

(This is an excerpt from Jack Connor’s *The Complete Birder: A Guide to Better Birding*. He goes into detail on how to distinguish between the individual species.)