February 2014
Mecklenburg Audubon Society, P.O. Box 221093, Charlotte, NC 28223
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Monthly Meeting: Thursday, February 6, 2014

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Kevin Kienholz
Sandy Kohn
Paul McDermitt
Ruth McDermitt
Marilyn Rickelman
Robert Shoestock
Rose Shoestock
Darcy Varon
Lauren Wait

Painted Buntings of the Southeast

He has worked at the Museum since 1988. He is the Chairperson for the Scientific Council on Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Birds of NC. He serves on the Board of the Wake Audubon Society as Treasurer, and the Important Bird Areas Technical Committee for Audubon NC (the State Office of National Audubon, as well as the NC Partners In Flight advisory committee. He has served on the review committee for the Piedmont region of the NC Birding Trail program. He co-organized a youth group, called the Young Naturalists Club, for Wake Audubon and works with kids in the Museum’s Junior Curator program.

Please join us, Thursday February 6th at 7:30 pm at the Tyvola Road Senior Center (2225 Tyvola Road).

Bird Friendly Birds & Beans coffee will be available during the meeting. No coffee orders will be taken for our February meeting, but there will be plenty of bags available for purchase. Coffee orders will resume in March. The merchandise table will have a nice selection of T-shirts, and Brown-headed Nuthatch boxes will be available at the meeting for $15 each. Help Audubon NC build a Bird Friendly Community across North Carolina.

Painted Bunting
©Jeff Lemons

Weren’t you enamored at your first sighting of a Painted Bunting? Even if you’ve yet to spot them in your bins, I’m sure you’ve been amazed by these brilliantly colored songbirds in photos. With their dazzling feathers in red and green and blue, they may seem to us to be a drifter from a far away tropical island. Even the “green birds”, referring to the female and juveniles, are impressive. These spectacular songbirds are indeed close to home and even choose our coastal region to breed and raise their young. Paparazzi will be swarming (okay, maybe not) at the February meeting of Mecklenburg Audubon as John Gerwin, Research Curator of Ornithology at the NC Museum of Natural Sciences will explain a day in the life of one of our most glamorous birds.

Mr. Gerwin’s current research is on the life cycles of migratory birds, with a focus on breeding biology. He studies the following species: Painted Bunting, Black-throated Green, Worm-eating, Swainson’s, and Golden-winged warblers, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker using radio telemetry. He also co-leads ecotours to various locations, but often to Nicaragua, or South America.

Female Painted Bunting
©Debra Carr
Thursday, January 30th: McAlpine Creek Park
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Tom Ledford
This park off Monroe Road has a variety of habitats; woods, lake, beaver pond, short grass and brush. This is about a 1 1/2 mile flat walk on gravel trails. Meet at 8:30 AM.

Saturday, February 1st: 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 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.

Tuesday, February 4th: Nation Ford Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Dave Lovett [birdsalot1@gmail.com]
will lead us on this non-manicured greenway with a few hills, consisting of deciduous woods, brush and creek side. We’ll meet at 8:30 AM in the Food Lion parking lot on U.S. 21. Take a left at the Carowinds exit on I-77 south. Go one mile and the Food Lion will be on your left.

Saturday, February 8th: Beginner Bird Walk (Four-mile Creek)
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Matt Janson [m.janson.geolover@gmail.com] (MAP)
Matt Janson will be leading a beginner bird walk in conjunction with Wild Bird Center at the Arboretum. Participants will meet at the Wild Bird Center of Arboretum (Suite 1500 8042 Providence Rd.) at 8:30 AM on Feb. 8th and carpool to Four-mile Creek Greenway from there due to limited parking. Participants receive a $5 off Wild Bird Center Coupon! Binoculars will be provided, if needed.

Saturday, February 8th: Hinson Lake
Full Day • Moderate • Contact: Tom Ledford [tledford1207@gmail.com]
Located near Rockingham, this beautiful lake looks more like a beaver pond, full of marsh growth and dead trees. A two-mile trail encircles it and takes us through woods and fields. Meet at 7:30 AM at the Bojangles in Marshville. It is at the intersection of Hwy. 74 and Hwy. 205, a few miles past Monroe.

Sunday, February 9th: Woodcock Walk
Late Afternoon/Evening • Easy • Contact: Taylor Piephoff [piephofft@aol.com] (MAP)
One of the best places to see displaying woodcocks in the area is Sherman Branch Nature Preserve on Rocky River Church Rd. in the eastern portion of the county. Meet at 5:30 PM in the parking lot.

Sunday, February 16th: Beginner’s Bird Walk (Latta Prairie)
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Marcia Howden [howden32@aol.com] (MAP)
Marcia Howden will lead this month’s walk for beginners, and more experienced folks, starting at 8:30 AM at nature center in Latta Nature Preserve. She will be demonstrating birding techniques and other aspects. Binoculars will be provided, if needed.

Tuesday, February 18th: Four-Mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Tom Ledford [tledford1207@gmail.com] (MAP)
This two-mile stretch covers woods, wetlands, brush and open habitat. We’ll meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Johnston Rd.
Field Trips

Saturday, February 22nd: Ribbonwalk Nature Preserve
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net] (MAP)
This area 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.

Tuesday, February 25th: McMullen Creek Greenway (MAP)
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Dave Lovett [birdsalot1@gmail.com]
This is a flat walk through woods, fields and wetlands. We’ll meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Highway 51.

Saturday, March 1st: McDowell Prairie /Copperhead Island
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@ellsouth.net] (MAP)
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. 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.

Thursday, March 6th: Six-Mile Creek Greenway (MAP)
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Tom Ledford [tledford1207@gmail.com]
Tom will lead us along this southern Mecklenburg greenway. It’s about 2 1/4 miles total, and follows the creek, with brushy areas and woods. We’ll start at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Marvin Road.

Sunday, March 9th: Clark’s Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com] (MAP)
Judy will lead a walk on this little birded greenway which winds its way through woods. Last March there were a number of winter wrens and other winter sparrows. We’ll meet in the greenway’s parking lot adjacent to Mallard Creek Elementary school at 8:30 AM.

Tuesday, March 11th: Little Sugar Creek Greenway [Huntingtowne Section]
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Dave Lovett [birdsalot1@gmail.com] (MAP)
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 in the parking lot at the end of Huntingtowne Farms Lane off Park Road.

Saturday, March 15th: Birding by Ear Workshop
3/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]
Save the date. Details in March issue.
From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, bird watchers from more than 100 countries are expected to participate in the 17th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), February 14–17, 2014. Anyone anywhere in the world can count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count and enter their sightings at www.BirdCount.org. The information gathered by tens of thousands of volunteers helps track the health of bird populations at a scale that would not otherwise be possible. The GBBC is a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society with partner Bird Studies Canada.

“People who care about birds can change the world,” said Audubon chief scientist Gary Langham. “Technology has made it possible for people everywhere to unite around a shared love of birds and a commitment to protecting them.” In North America, GBBC participants will add their data to help define the magnitude of a dramatic irruption of magnificent Snowy Owls. Bird watchers will also be on the lookout for the invasive Eurasian Collared-Dove to see if it has expanded its range again. GBBC observations may help show whether or not numbers of American Crows will continue to rebound after being hit hard by the West Nile virus and whether more insect-eating species are showing up in new areas, possibly because of changing climate.

Last year’s Great Backyard Bird Count shattered records after going global for the first time, thanks to integration with the eBird online checklist program launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab and Audubon. Participants reported their bird sightings from all 7 continents, including 111 countries and independent territories. More than 34.5 million birds and 3,610 species were recorded—nearly one-third of the world’s total bird species documented in just four days.

“This is a milestone for citizen science in so many respects—number of species, diversity of countries involved, total participants, and number of individual birds recorded. We hope this is just the start of something far larger, engaging the whole world in creating a detailed annual snapshot of how all our planet’s birds are faring as the years go by,” said Cornell Lab director Dr. John Fitzpatrick.

“Canadian participation in the Great Backyard Bird Count has increased tremendously in recent years, and it’s wonderful to see this program growing globally,” said Bird Studies Canada President Dr. George Finney. “The count is introducing unprecedented numbers of people to the exciting field of bird watching.” The Great Backyard Bird Count is a great way for people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with nature and make a difference for birds. It’s free and easy. To learn more about how to join the count visit www.birdcount.org and view the winning photos from the 2013 GBBC photo contest.
Great Books for Bird Gardeners

It may be cold outside but it is February and time to think about warmer days and the garden you want to prepare for the birds and other wildlife. Here are some book suggestions from Cornell’s Yardmap site that will help you plan for the spring planting season. For the complete list go to [http://content.yardmap.org/?p=2997]

**BRINGING NATURE HOME: HOW YOU CAN SUSTAIN WILDLIFE WITH NATIVE PLANTS** by Doug Tallamy

Tallamy’s seminal book covers everything you need to know about the “why” and “how” of going native in your garden. Bursting with color photographs of “bird food” (i.e., insects) and helpful how-tos, this book will make proponents of seed feeders rethink their means of provisioning birds. This book is full of real science (including specific regional guides to native plants and a table of butterfly/moth host plants), making even the most casual gardener feel like an ecologist.

**FRONT YARD GARDENS: GROWING MORE THAN GRASS** by Liz Primeau

Primeau begins her book with an interesting discussion of “why we mow” and how we came to accumulate 24 million acres of lawn in North America. She presents several alternatives to lawns that increase property values, provide wildlife foods, and increase sense of community. The color photos and species lists are thorough enough that every style of garden (e.g., cottage, formal, arid) can benefit from the included garden plans. Perhaps best of all, the author presents a case for building community through front-yard gardening: out with the imposing front lawns and in with fluid boundaries and inviting colorscapes!

**GARDENING FOR THE BIRDS: HOW TO CREATE A BIRD-FRIENDLY BACKYARD** by George Adams

Whether you’re a gardener hoping to learn more about birds, or a birder interested in drawing birds into your backyard, this book is for you. We especially like the calendar for seasonal fruiting, which helps you plan for year-round fruits. We also like the calendar for wildflower blooms, which ensures you’ll not only have colorful blooms throughout the growing season to attract bees and hummingbirds, but you’ll also know when wildflower seeds will be available to birds. The plant and bird directories are also very detailed.

**LAWN GONE! LOW-MAINTENANCE, SUSTAINABLE, ATTRACTIVE ALTERNATIVES FOR YOUR YARD** by Pam Penick

If you’re tired of pouring water, money, time, energy, and chemicals into your lawn only to get nothing in return, this is the book for you. Penick illustrates how to replace all or some of your lawn with something more useful: ground cover plants, hardscaping, play space for the kids, or native drought-friendly no-mow grasses. Penick also offers suggestions for dealing with neighbors and HOAs.

**NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY’S THE BIRD GARDEN: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO ATTRACTING BIRDS TO YOUR BACKYARD THROUGHOUT THE YEAR** by Stephen Kress

We like the hybrid field guide to common plants and birds, organized by region. If you are the kind of birdwatcher who appreciates a good list, then you’ll like the lists of suggested plantings for things like making windbreaks and attracting hummingbirds. It’s a lightweight book that is heavy in useful content for the backyard fixer-upper.

**THE AUDUBON SOCIETY GUIDE TO ATTRACTING BIRDS: CREATING NATURAL HABITATS FOR PROPERTIES LARGE AND SMALL** by Stephen Kress

This book is just downright useful! For the hands-on property manager, it provides ideas to keep the project-lover busy but not broke. You’ll find plans for building bird houses, water features, and even brush piles. From planting food plots for wildlife to protecting nest boxes from livestock, the ideas are simple and approachable. With diagrammatic support for almost every project, we think you might need some more bookmarks.

**THE BIRD-FRIENDLY BACKYARD: NATURAL GARDENING FOR BIRDS, SIMPLE WAYS TO CREATE A BIRD HAVEN** by Julie Zickefoose

Cornell recommends this book because it’s like a collection of their favorite magazine articles, all in one place. With short sections and numerous sidebars, it’s great for those who prefer magazine-style writing. Beginning enthusiasts might also enjoy the Q & A sections and charming illustrations.
Birdie It’s Cold Outside!!!

The key to survival for a bird in winter is the same as for every animal that must endure cold weather. It needs to maintain an adequate body temperature by getting enough food each day and by protecting itself against the cold at night. It also must remain alert to avoid becoming food for another animal that is also trying to survive. To do this they have developed several survival strategies:

MIGRATION:
When food supplies are inadequate, birds are forced to migrate to locations where food is available.

DIET CHANGES:
Birds must eat richer food in winter to boost their metabolism. Woodpeckers, which are primarily insect eaters, will adapt their winter diets to include beef suet and seeds when available at feeding stations.

INCREASE THE AMOUNT THEY EAT:
They eat, and eat, and eat, and eat. Much like we do over the holidays. However, because they have such high metabolisms to maintain a high body temperature (between 105-107°F) they burn most of their food up very quickly in cold weather. Many birds eat 1/3 to 1/2 of their weight a day in high-energy foods such as sunflower seeds and suet. Since food is scarcer in the winter they spend most of their day eating!

CACHING/HOARDING:
When an abundant food source such as your feed is discovered, birds will eat their fill and then take more for hoarding. Jays are notorious for caching seeds and nuts, but other birds such as chickadees, nuthatches, and raptors do it as well.

FLOCKING:
Various species of winter songbirds often gather into mixed flocks when foraging for food. A larger number of birds find more food and they enjoy better protection from predators than do individual birds.

FLUFFING:
When the cold becomes a major obstacle to survival, nearly all species of birds fluff their feathers for better insulation which prevents the loss of body heat.

Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark.
Rabindranath Tagore

Matters of the Heart

Generally speaking the smaller the bird, the bigger its heart in proportion to its body size. The heart of the tinamou, a large, sluggish forest fowl of South America, is just .21% of its body weight. A hummingbird, however, which has a ferocious metabolism and a circulatory system to match, has a heart that makes up 2.4% of its mass - proportionally more than ten times greater than the tinamou’s. The hummingbird’s heart rate is also much faster. A blue-throated hummingbird, in active flight around its Southwestern habitat, has a pulse rate of nearly 1,200 beats per minute. A turkey’s heart barely exceeds 90. As a comparison here are a few other common species heart rates:

- American crow - 342
- Domestic turkey - 93
- American robin - 570
- European starling - 460
- Black-capped chickadee - 500

(Taken from The Birder’s Miscellany: A Fascinating Collection of Facts, Figures and Folklore from the World of Birds by Scott Weidensaul, Fireside Books, 1991.)
What’s That Bird? Merlin - A New App

“The Merlin” iPhone app asks five questions to help beginners ID backyard birds.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has released a free iPhone app to help people identify 285 birds in North America. Created with support from the National Science Foundation, the app asks just five questions, then displays photos of birds that match your description—customized to your location and time of year.

“We named the app ‘Merlin’ because of its uncanny, almost magical, way of guessing which bird you saw,” says the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Jessie Barry, whose team created the app with partner Birds in the Hand. “The app is designed for beginning and intermediate bird watchers and we hope birders will share the free app with friends and family.”

Barry says that, far from magic, Merlin uses data from citizen-science participants and bird watchers to understand how people see and describe birds—and to narrow the list to the birds found nearby.

The app is the first to use data from the eBird citizen-science project to dynamically select the birds found within about a 30-mile radius of your location at the time when you saw the bird.

“This type of precision is only possible because bird watchers report their sightings to eBird from locations across North America every day of the year,” Barry said. Merlin draws upon 70 million eBird sightings to calculate which species you’re most likely to encounter.

Additionally, bird watchers “trained” Merlin to understand how people see and describe birds. By participating in online activities to describe birds based on photos, they contributed more than three million data points that Merlin uses to deduce which birds are the most likely based on people’s description of color, size, and behavior.

The app records your response when you confirm the bird you saw, enabling researchers to identify successful interactions and improve Merlin’s performance over time. It also displays photos, ID tips, sounds, and range maps for each species.

The Merlin Bird ID app can now be downloaded from the App Store. The Android version will be available in Spring 2014. For the Merlin App video and website, please visit birds.cornell.edu/Merlin.

Food and Feeder Preferences of Common Feeder Birds

Cornell has put together a list of almost 100 common feeder birds and cross referenced what they like to eat and where they like to eat it. You can choose a species, region, type of food and/or type of feed. Entries for each species include a quick visual guide to their range, food preference, and the type of feeders they like. Explore to see what you might be able to attract to your feeder this winter! Here’s the link:

http://feederwatch.org/learn/common-feeder-birds/

For the first time birders can explore eBird’s site information in a map-based tool designed to provide quick access to the information they need. Discover the best places for birding nearby or around the world. The Hotspot Explorer provides a completely new way to plan birding trips, putting millions of records from over 100,000 eBirders around the world into your hands. At a glance, you can see which birding locations have the most species. You can filter to show only the results for a particular month, or for the last 10 years, or sites with visits during the last month. The hotspot explorer may even help reveal some hidden gems near you that you never knew about!
For Groundhog Day: Ten Things to Know about These Surprising Creatures

As Groundhog Day approaches, it would be fun to take a look at some of the remarkable things that are known about these critters. Groundhogs (or woodchucks) are rodents and are part of the marmot family. After squirrels, they are among the most frequently observed mammals in the U.S. and Canada.

Here are ten things you may not have known about America’s “woodchucks.”

1. The name “woodchuck” does not come from these creatures tossing wood around or from just being woodland dwellers but rather it comes from an Algonquian (possibly Narragansett) name for the animal, wuchak.

2. The average animal weighs between 4-9 pounds but some (in places where there is alfalfa farming, for example) have been known to reach 30 pounds which would make them “woodchunks.”

3. Many people are surprised to discover that groundhogs are accomplished swimmers and (when pursued by a predator or reaching for a snack) are excellent tree climbers.

4. When they observe something that might be a threat, they will rise up on their hind legs and let out a clear warning whistle to family members much in the same way as prairie dogs in the West.

5. The average wild groundhog will live for two to three years. One animal was actually known to have lived for 22 years in captivity in Wiarton, Ontario (the iconic “Wiarton Willie”). The U.S. version of Willie is Punxsutawney Phil (from Pennsylvania). Legend has it, from the local Punxsutawney townspeople, that Phil is over 100 years old. Hmm.

6. Groundhogs hibernate for three to six months each year and, prior to going underground, will accumulate a half inch layer of fat to hold them over. An adult animal will eat about one third of its body weight per day in late summer which makes them a true challenge for many gardeners.

7. Groundhogs are champion diggers. On average, an animal will remove about 700 pounds of soil to make a burrow. The burrow is designed with several rooms and extends for 25 to 35 feet. One to three entrances are included. Farmers have been known to say that a groundhog “eats to give himself the strength to dig holes, and then dig holes to give himself an appetite.”

8. In Delaware, Ohio, a groundhog burrow actually ended up uncovering a Native American archaeological site. It is called the Ufferman Site from the Woodland period and the groundhogs have excavated bones, pottery and stone tools.

9. The first official Groundhog Day was celebrated on February 2, 1886 in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. As indicated above, this event gave rise to the annual observation of the groundhog activities of “Punxsutawney Phil.” The town of Wiarton in Ontario, Canada, has a similar iconic weather predictor called “Wiarton Willie.”

10. The “Groundhog Day” legend comes from German tradition when, on Candlemas Day, people would tell a tale of hedgehogs or badgers serving as a test for the remaining duration of winter. The first recorded U.S. reference was made Feb. 4, 1841 in Morgantown, Pennsylvania when storekeeper James Morris’ diary made this entry: “Last Tuesday, the 2nd, was Candlemas Day, the day on which, according to the Germans, the Groundhog peeps out of his winter quarters and if he sees his shadow he pops back for another six weeks nap, but if the day be cloudy he remains out, as the weather is to be moderate.”

Adapted from the NWF blog - Wildlife Promise (http://blog.nwf.org/?p=12325)

Mecklenburg Audubon Executive Board

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Jim Pugh [jepugh@pol.net]
Bill Rowe [birderpa@att.net]
Newsletter: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]

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