Monthly Meeting • Potluck & Photo Share
Thursday, January 8th • Tyvola Senior Center

Extend the Holiday cheer into the New Year at Mecklenburg Audubon’s annual POTLUCK and Photo Share, **Thursday January 8th 2015 at 6:15 PM at the Tyvola Senior Center (2225 Tyvola Rd.)**. Bring a dish to share and some photos and stories of your own as we line up a photo tour of the past year’s birding adventures!

We will start setting up around 6:00 PM so we’ll be set to eat at 6:30 PM. Please bring a dish that will feed 8-10 people plus your own plate, cup and flatware. The club will provide ice as well as coffee & other beverages.

We will also be offering a cup raffle! There will be an assortment of items which have been donated throughout the year. Raffle tickets will be available at the door: 1 for $1; 6 for $5; 15 for $10; or 40 tickets for $25. All the profits from the ticket sales will go towards our ongoing conservation efforts.

After dinner we will once again regale ourselves with photographs and videos taken by the best photographers in the county – our members!!! It’s your chance to share with everyone special moments you’ve encountered while traveling or just looking out your back window. So gather about 10-15 of your favorite bird and nature photos or a video or two on a thumb drive, whip up a dish to share and don’t forget to bring a friend! It’s a great time to get to know new members and welcome them to all Mecklenburg Audubon Society has to offer. Aim to get there a little early so we can be set to eat at 6:30 PM sharp!
All Mecklenburg Audubon Field Trips are free and open to the public. Directions 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, 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 its 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 10th: Wintering Waterfowl
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]

This is the rescheduled December trip. 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.

Tuesday, January 13th: Four-mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

This two-mile walk includes a boardwalk over an extensive wetland area that is always good in the winter. We’ll meet at 8:30 AM in the Johnston Rd. parking lot, and carpool to the other end.

Saturday, January 17th: Huntington Beach State Park,
Full Day • Moderate • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]

Our winter excursion to Huntington Beach State Park in South Carolina 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.

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.

Saturday, January 24th: Latta Prairie
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

After the prairie, we’ll check some of the open lake in the preserve for any waterfowl. Meet at 8:30 AM in parking lot at the Visitor Center.
Get involved

Buy Duck Stamps.... Put Your Stamp on Conservation

When the explorers first set foot upon the continent of North America, the skies, marshes and lands teemed with an astonishing variety of wildlife. Native Americans had been wise stewards of these precious natural resources. Unfortunately, it took the explorers and the settlers who followed only a few decades to decimate these resources. Millions of waterfowl were destroyed, some species to the point of extinction, at the hands of market hunters and a handful of overly ambitious sportsmen. Millions of acres of wetlands were drained to feed and house the ever increasing populations, greatly reducing waterfowl breeding and nesting habitat.

Not to be outdone by man, Mother Nature periodically takes her toll with devastating droughts and floods. During these periods, migration rest areas and wintering grounds are severely impacted. Record-breaking floods ravaged the fertile Midwest, leaving more devastation in their wake. A large part of this catastrophe could have been avoided had many of the natural wetlands of that area not been drained and filled in for farming and housing and industrial development. Many people do not realize that wetlands help to maintain ground water supplies, act as a filtration system for pollutants, store flood-waters, protect shorelines from erosion, and modify climatic changes.

In 1934, with the passage of the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act, an increasingly concerned Nation took firm action to stop the destruction of migratory waterfowl and the wetlands so vital to their survival. Under this Act, all waterfowl hunters 16 years of age and over must annually purchase and carry a Federal Duck Stamp. The very first Federal Duck Stamp was designed by J. N. “Ding” Darling, a political cartoonist from Des Moines, Iowa, who at that time was appointed by Franklin Roosevelt as Director of the Bureau of Biological Survey, the predecessor to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Hunters willingly pay the stamp price to insure the survival of our natural resources.

Approximately 98 cents of every duck stamp dollar goes directly into the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to purchase wetlands and wildlife habitat for inclusion into the National Wildlife Refuge System—a fact that ensures this land will be protected and available for all generations to come. Since 1934, over 800 billion dollars has gone into that Fund to purchase more than 6 million acres of habitat. Little wonder the Federal Duck Stamp Program has been called one of the most successful conservation programs ever initiated.

Waterfowl are not the only wildlife to benefit from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps. Numerous other bird, mammal, fish, reptile and amphibian species that rely on wetlands have prospered. Further, an estimated one-third of the nation’s endangered and threatened species find food or shelter in refuges established using Federal Duck Stamp funds.

People, too, have benefited from the Federal Duck Stamp. Hunters have places to enjoy their sport and other outdoor enthusiasts have places to hike, watch birds, photograph and explore. Moreover, these protected wetlands help purify water supplies, store flood water, reduce soil erosion

2014-15 Jr. Duck Stamp by Si youn Kim of Tenafly, NJ

2014-15 Duck Stamp by Adam Grimm of Burbank, South Dakota
and sedimentation, and provide spawning areas for fish important to sport and commercial fishermen.

In coming years, with the number of hunters dwindling, three groups of Americans will need to assume an increasing role in filling the gap in the purchase of Federal Duck Stamps — collectors, art enthusiasts and conservationists.

Collectors and art enthusiasts consider these stamps “miniature pieces of art” and have been great supporters of the program. The collection of duck stamps is a growing and constantly evolving phenomenon. A collector who had purchased each of the current stamps, at issue price, would have spent around $400. This investment today would be worth well over $5,000.

It is the third group, other conservationists, which includes the bird watching community, that need to take a more active role in purchasing duck stamps. Increasingly, birders are using the National Wildlife Refuges to pursue their hobby and grow their list of “life birds”. Other conservationists buy the stamps as a way of ensuring that these wild places will be around for all generations. And, possession of the most recent Federal Duck Stamp provides free admission into all National Wildlife Refuges.

The purchase of a Federal Duck Stamp provides an opportunity for every United States citizen to take a stand in the preservation of our natural heritage. All of us, working together, can and have made a difference.

Both Federal Duck Stamps ($15) and Junior Duck Stamps ($5) are sold in many post offices across the country. You can also buy both stamps on the internet, and at many national wildlife refuges, sporting goods and outdoor stores. Visit http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps/stamps.htm to learn where you can purchase Federal and Junior Duck Stamps.

Refuges benefiting from Duck Stamps

North Carolina
- Currituck National Wildlife Refuge
- Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge
- Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge
- Mackay National Wildlife Refuge
- Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge
- Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge
- Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge
- Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge
- Pocomo Lakes National Wildlife Refuge
- Roanoke National Wildlife Refuge
- Swanquarter National Wildlife Refuge

South Carolina
- Savanna National Wildlife Refuge
- Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge
- Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge
- Santee National Wildlife Refuge
Audubon North Carolina’s Local Roots program is working to create more availability of native plants that specifically benefit birds, but also our environment and our local economy. We’re partnering with local plant nurseries and growers to offer more bird-friendly native plants to add to your garden to help our birds with food and shelter as their natural habitats continue to disappear.

Local Roots is all about LOCAL! Local plants, local businesses and local gardens. By supporting local growers in North Carolina, you are helping to lay down roots to buy and plant more bird-friendly native plants.

WHY BIRD-FRIENDLY PLANTS?

We want to see a resurgence of native plants that specifically benefit birds as well as benefitting our environment and our local economy. It’s simple, bird-friendly native plants are a winning choice for gardeners because they are:

**Easy** - Bird-friendly native plants are easy to grow in North Carolina’s climate. This means less maintenance and plant care once they are established in your garden.

**Perform** - Since these plants are native to North Carolina, after the first year these selections often grow with little coddling. Plant it and forget it.

**Earth-Friendly** - Native plants endure North Carolina’s pests, heat, cold, natural rainfall and other plant maladies. Less pesticides and herbicides means a healthier environment for everyone.

**Beautiful** - Native plants are gorgeous. If you haven’t seen an American Beautyberry with fruit or a Coral Honeysuckle in bloom, we suggest you take a moment and do an image search. These bird-friendly native plants are great additions to your garden over time. We’re not recommending a total plant makeover, but just adding a few of these plants to your yard can make a world of difference for birds.

**Food for Birds** - You will be helping birds raise their chicks, and who isn’t happy about that? Birds need native plants to feed their chicks and to stay fed all winter. In the spring, birds pick off caterpillars to feed their babies. In the fall, the seeds and fruits from bird-friendly native plants are excellent sources of energy for the winter.

**Available** - We are currently working with North Carolina plant growers and retailers to grow a select list of native plants, our “Bird-Friendly Native Plants of the Year.” This will make it easier to find bird-friendly native plants at participating nurseries. By planting bird-friendly native plants you will help show growers that there is demand, allowing them to grow and provide more varieties year after year.

**NATIVE PLANTS OF THE YEAR**

We’ve worked with growers to select our Bird-Friendly Native Plants of the Year. We’ve purposefully picked just a handful of bird-friendly native plants so you can add new plants to your collection each year, while growers prepare plants for the following year. This is an add-as-you-go program where you can buy new species of native plants to benefit birds each year.

2015 Bird-Friendly Native Plants of the Year - COMING SOON!

Check back for the new list each year! Or sign up to receive e-bulletins to your email letting you know about all things bird-friendly.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

We want more bird-friendly native plants in more yards! It’s really that simple.

Print out the bird-friendly native plants of the year list (coming soon) and visit participating retailers and ask for Bird-Friendly Native Plants. Local nurseries are treasure troves of information to help you succeed in your planting adventures.

Sign-up to get the Local Roots eNews [http://bit.ly/1tGvXzK] twice a year with tips on how to care for native plants plus a preview of the new list of Bird-Friendly Native Plants of the Year.

Donate to Audubon North Carolina to help us continue to create a bird-friendly state.

Funding for this project was provided in part through an Urban & Community Forestry Grant from the North Carolina Forest Service, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service, Southern Region.
Tips for New Birders

When trying to identify a bird one of the basic questions you should ask yourself is what does the bird look like. Most beginning birders tend to focus in on color when looking at a bird and not really ‘see’ the bird. This not very helpful if you encounter a flock of LBJs (little brown jobs). They might be sparrows but they could also be female or immature warblers, buntings, grosbeaks, or blackbirds. Cardinals and Summer Tanagers are both red but the look very different. Recognizing that look takes time in the field but will become second nature the more you bird.

The look of the bird is really made of several elements, which we will discuss over the next few issues. One of element is the bird’s bill/beak. You may have heard more experienced birders say something like, “It had a vireo not a warbler bill.” Becoming familiar with beak shapes will help you quickly sort an unfamiliar bird into a family of birds that will make it easier to identify.

Familiarity with bills is particularly helpful during the fall migration when birds are not in their breeding plumage and there are a lot of immature birds with drab plumages. A good example of this is two very similar looking birds – Tennessee Warbler and the Red-eyed Vireo. They are about the same size, similar in color and have an eye stripe. But their beaks are not the same. The warbler’s beak is thinner and pointers, whereas the vireo’s bill is broader and somewhat blunt.

Another example of when the bill becomes important is when you are trying to distinguish between a Downy and a Hairy Woodpecker. The bill on a Downy Woodpecker is usually the same length or shorter than the width of its head. The Hairy Woodpecker’s bill is always longer than the width of its head. Even if the bird is at a good distance if you get a profile view of the bird you should easily be able to determine the length of the bill.

The beaks also tell you a lot about the bird’s lifestyle since it is main way they get food. Each species lives in a specific habitat niche. Even within that niche they are often food specialists with bills uniquely adapted to securing that food. Insect eaters have very different beaks from those that primarily eat seeds. Both the robin and hawk are predators but hunting worms needs a very different beak than one that has to tear its prey apart. It’s fun to look at the beaks of unfamiliar birds from other parts of the world and guess what type of food they eat.

So take some time to familiarize yourself with the different beak shapes and then when observing a bird make sure you note what type of beak it has. It may be the key to identifying the bird.

A cone shaped bill is found in many birds such as finches and grosbeaks. It is a strong beak used for cracking seeds.

Thin, slender, pointed beaks are found mainly in insect eaters. They are used to pick insects off leaves, twigs, and bark. This warbler is a good example.

Woodpeckers have strong beaks that taper to a tip, forming a chisel for creating holes in trees for food or nests. These birds feed on insects that live under the bark.

Hummingbirds have long, tubular bills that resemble straws, which they use to sip nectar from flowers.

Mergansers, specialized for eating fish, have sharp tooth-like structures on the edge of the bill to hold fish tightly.

Hawks, owls, and other birds of prey that catch and kill live prey have sharp, “hooked” beaks. These are used to bite the skull or neck and also to tear the body into pieces small enough to swallow.

The edges of a Mallard’s bill are fringed to strain plants, seeds, and small animals from mud and water.

Beaks flat and wide at the base are found in birds that catch insects in flight, such as flycatchers. These birds also often have whiskers at the corners of the mouth, which effectively widens the mouth opening, allowing more effective capture of prey.
There’s an App for That!

I know a number of you probably received a new mobile device from Santa Claus this year. So I thought I would include a quick review of some of the basic apps available to enhance your bird watching pleasure. This is by no mean a complete list. At the very least you should have one of the guides and the BirdLog app. Most of these apps are very sophisticated and are not free. However, you only have to pay for them once and you get all of the updates until there is a completely new app.

Field Guides

All of these guides are great. Like the books everyone has their own favorites. They all have ID information, the ability to ‘key’ the bird you are seeing by inputting location, color, size, etc. Some are more robust than others. All have songs but again the number and types vary. Most are using Cornell’s Mccaulay sounds. Some have the capability of creating specific list and ability to create a life list. They all have additional information about birds on their websites.

Since many also have numerous versions from backyard to the world, I suggest you download a free or low cost version to see if you like it. Then get the complete version of the one you with which feel most comfortable.

Audubon [iOS & Android] $$$
Field guide app with focus on visual ID. Options to search for species by region, month, and abundance; songs can be hard to search. Integration with NatureShare social network is highlighted throughout app. Option to look for nearby birds using eBird. Audubon also has a host of other apps covering geographic regions and other insects, wildlife, and plants.

Sibley eGuide [iOS, Android, Windows & Kindle] $$$$$
Field guide app with focus on visual ID. Featuring extensive, detailed images from the extremely popular print field guide. An extensive set of sounds includes song and call examples with good text descriptions. Similar-sounding species can be hard to navigate to. There is also a free version of the app that contains 30 species.

Merlin [iOS & Android] Free
A very basic guide for beginners. You enter various characteristics of the bird and the app will provide you with possibilities. Includes photos, basic information about the bird and several songs and chips.

National Geographic Birds [iOS] $$
Field guide app; focus on visual ID but sound resources are also strong, featuring songs as well as chip notes and geographical variation. Text describing similar-sounding species—with the similar species playable from the same screen—helps you explore possibilities when trying to ID a sound. A lite version featuring 70+ species is free.

Peterson Birds [iOS & Android] $$$$$
Field guide app with focus on visual ID. App features complex navigation via icons and swipes that can be time-saving once learned. Sounds include one recording per species, playable directly from the field guide image. A “pocket edition” has fewer features (though it keeps the sounds and maps); it still covers 820 species.

iBird Pro [iOS & Android] $$$$-
Field guide app with focus on visual ID. A very popular app with extensive species coverage (including Hawaiian birds). Features multiple sound examples per species and a helpful list of similar species playable from the same page, but minimal text about the sounds. Also features sound spectrograms, which can be very helpful for studying sound details, although size is a bit small on the iPhone. Also available, a backyard version covering 231 species

BirdSong

Although all the guides have sounds, these apps will help you LEARN the songs, calls and chips of the birds. Both include game components to challenge your birding by ear skills. Their websites are also very helpful.

BirdLog [iOS & Android] $$$$$
This app is a must have if you want to keep track of what you are seeing AND contribute to the Cornell eBird data, which I strongly encourage. It does not contain sounds. It allows you to enter sightings into eBird from your phone. Although many field guide apps feature self-contained life lists, this app updates your eBird account, which is then accessible from any web browser. Your data also help build the overall eBird database used by scientists. Also available in worldwide and country-specific versions.

Keeping Track

Chirp [iOS & Android] $
This well-designed app features an addictive gaming style that will go a long way toward getting you to put in the necessary hours to learn your songs. The number of songs per species is limited and it can be hard to zero in on just the right set of bird songs to learn, but this is still a well-designed app with emphasis on fun.

Larkwire [iOS] $
Far and away the best and most comprehensive of any of the song apps. Multiple songs and regional variations added as you increase your level of difficulty, ensuring that you learn the song pattern. The app is kept manageable by restricting it to either landbirds or waterbirds—each app gives you depth rather than breadth. If you don’t have an iOS device use their website to learn bird songs.
Finding Birds

If you do any traveling and want to bird an unfamiliar area these apps are essential. Both connect with eBird and will provide you with about what birds are being seen and where. They include frequency charts to let you know if the bird should be in the area in a particular season.

**BirdsEye** [iOS & Android] $$
This app focuses on bird-finding, but also includes brief ID text, photos, and sounds. It queries the eBird database to find notable recent sightings or target birds near you. You can view other people’s eBird checklists and get driving directions to birds or places of interest—very useful when exploring away from home. Also available in various continent/country/region-specific versions.

**HotSpots** [iOS] $
A simple tool for birders. It makes it quick and easy to find nearby hotspots so you can quickly get there and start birding! Get driving, walking and transit directions to any hotspot worldwide in your favorite apps.Hotspots currently works with many of the popular map and navigation apps.

Just for Fun

**Daily Bird** [iOS & Android] Free
Daily Bird is a photo-a-day calendar that features stunning bird photography along with interesting facts and finding tips for that bird. You can also use the app as a clock and have it on display with its gorgeous photography that changes each day.

**BirdNote**
Stories about birds, the environment, and more.

For your listening pleasure - http://birdnote.org

BirdNote strives to transport listeners out of the daily grind and into the natural world with outstanding audio programming and online content. The stories we tell are rich in sound, imagery, and information, connecting the ways and needs of birds to the lives of listeners. BirdNote shows are aired on public radio stations around the country every day and can be found online at any time. Each show is scheduled to coincide with the time of year when it’s possible to see or hear the featured bird. We inspire people to listen, look, and exclaim, “Oh, that’s what that is!”

**Additional Resources**

- MERLIN - http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org
- iBird Pro - http://ibird.com
- Peterson’s Birds - http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/peterson/
- Chirp! - http://chirp.io
- Larkwire - http://www.larkwire.com

Legend: $ < 5.00; $$ < 10.00; $$$ < 15.00; $$$$ < 20.00

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