Come extend the Holiday cheer into the New Year at Mecklenburg Audubon’s annual POTLUCK and Photo Share, Thursday January 7th 2016 at 6:30 pm at the Tyvola Senior Center (2225 Tyvola Road). 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 with the intentions of eating by 6:30 PM. Please bring a dish that will feed 8-10 people. Also bring your own plate, cup and flatware. The club will provide ice as well as Birds & Beans Bird-Friendly coffee & other beverages.

After dinner we will once again regale ourselves with photographs and videos taken by the best photographers around – our members!!! It’s your chance to share with everyone special moments you’ve encountered while traveling or simply looking out your back window. So gather about 10-15 of your favorite bird and/or nature photos or a video or two on a thumb drive, whip up a dish to share and bring a friend!

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.

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!
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!!

Sunday, January 10th: McDowell Prairie & Copperhead Is.
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Matt Janson [m.janson.geolover@gmail.com]

We will be looking for winter migrants at the prairie and then waterfowl at Copperhead Island. Brief directions: 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.

Thursday, January 14th: Four-mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy* • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

This two-mile stretch walking through a variety of habitats always produces interesting birds. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Johnston Rd.

Saturday, January 23rd: Huntington Beach State Park, SC
Full Day • Moderate • 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.

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.

Tuesday, January 26th: Latta Plantation 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.

Saturday, January 30th: McDowell Prairie & Copperhead Is.
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

Another walk through this extensive prairie looking for winter migrants. And we will go looking for waterfowl at Copperhead Island. Brief directions: 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.

KEY TO PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY

Easy - Trails are level to slight grades usually paved; .5-3 miles walking
Moderate - Trails can be uneven with some hills; 2-4 miles walking.
Strenuous - Trails vary greatly; 4+ miles of walking.
* Trails are handicapped accessible.
Climate Change New Year Resolutions

Delegates from around recently came together to tackle the issue of climate change. The Paris agreement is a great step forward in reducing its impact. But here are a few things you can do in your own backyard and home to stem the effects of climate change.

Help the Birds:
- Plant a bird-friendly native plant garden with perennials, shrubs and trees
- Remove invasive plants
- Reduce pesticide use on your lawn
- Create a brushpile for birds
- Provide clean water for birds
- Put up nest boxes for Brown-headed Nuthatches (1 or 1 1/8" hole); White-breasted and/or Red-breasted nuthatches (1 1/4" hole)

Reduce Your Carbon Footprint
- Plant trees to shade your air conditioner and the south and west sides of your home
- Mow your grass with an electric lawn mower
- Reduce fertilizer use on your lawn and garden
- Set thermostat lower in winter and higher in summer
- Change light bulbs to LEDs or CFLs
- Clean and replace your home’s air filters regularly
- Turn down water heater to 120 degrees
- Line-dry clothing for a season
- Schedule an energy assessment for your home with your local utility or an energy-efficiency consultant
- Get your house assessed for roof top solar by a local solar company
- Carpool to school/work and when possible, travel by train rather than by plane
- Install low-flow shower heads

Advocate & Spread the Word
- Encourage your friends and family to make their yards bird-friendly and to reduce their carbon footprint
- Ask your homeowners association to convert lawn areas to bird-friendly native plant gardens
- Ask nurseries and garden centers to participate in the Audubon NC Bird-Friendly Native Plants program
- Purchase products from companies that have taken action to fight climate change (find them at http://climatecounts.org/scorecard_overview.php )
- Invite an Audubon Ambassador to give a presentation on birds & climate change at your social, faith-based or civic meeting
- Subscribe to Audubon Action Alerts and share them with family and friends
- Write a letter to city, town, or county officials to educate them on birds and climate change
- Attend a public hearing to speak about the need to protect climate-threatened birds.

Be a Citizen Scientist - COUNT BIRDS!
- Participate in Great Backyard Bird Count and Project FeederWatch
- Record bird observations on eBird.org
- Participate in Christmas Bird Counts and spring bird counts
- Share observations at Hummingbirds@Home
- Record nest observations on NestWatch.org
- Recruit new people to go birding with you

eBird.org & YOU!!

No more excuses now that eBird’s mobile app is available for the Android. Now any birder with a smart phone can easily submit their sightings. And here are a few of reasons why you should make submitting sightings to eBird your number one New Years Resolution:

✦ All data submitted whether from a backyard or nature preserve is valuable. Backyard data provides a important information about birds at a specific location and/or a specific species.
✦ It helps you to keep tract of the birds you have seen in a safe place. (Recently a birder commented that her computer crashed and she lost all of her lists! That won’t happen if it’s on eBird.)
✦ It helps scientists, conservationists, and government agencies make evidence-based, data driven decisions about the environment.
✦ It will help you become a better, more observant birder.
✦ It’s fun and you can win some pretty good stuff if you participate in their monthly challenges.
✦ The web site will help you locate great birding sites when you travel.

So become more than a bird watcher, become a citizen scientist!!!

More info
Meet a NC Priority Bird

Brown Pelican
Pelecanus occidentalis

An unmistakable bird of coastal waters. Groups of Brown Pelicans fly low over the waves in single file, flapping and gliding in unison. Their feeding behavior is spectacular, as they plunge headlong into the water in pursuit of fish. The current abundance of this species in the United States represents a success story for conservationists, who succeeded in halting the use of DDT and other persistent pesticides here; as recently as the early 1970s, the Brown Pelican was seriously endangered.

Habitat
Salt bays, beaches, ocean. Mostly over shallow waters along immediate coast, especially on sheltered bays; sometimes seen well out to sea. Nests on islands, which may be either bare and rocky or covered with mangroves or other trees. Strays may appear on fresh water lakes inland.

Feeding Behavior
Forages by diving from the air, from as high as 60' above water, plunging into water headfirst and coming to surface with fish in bill. Tilts bill down to drain water out of pouch, then tosses head back to swallow. Will scavenge at times and will become tame, approaching fishermen for handouts.

Eggs
3, sometimes 2-4. White, becoming nest-stained. Incubation is by both sexes, roughly 28-30 days. Young: Both parents feed young. Young may leave ground nests after about 5 weeks and gather in groups, where returning parents apparently can recognize own offspring. Young may remain in tree nests longer (perhaps up to 9 weeks) before clambering about in branches. Age at first flight varies, reportedly 9-12 weeks or more. Adults continue to feed young for some time after they leave colony. 1 brood per year.

Diet
Almost entirely fish. Types of fish known to be important in some areas include menhaden, smelt, anchovies. Also some crustaceans.

Nesting
Nests in colonies. Nest: Site is on ground or cliff of island, or on low trees such as mangroves. Nest (built by female, with material gathered by male) may be simple scrape in soil, heap of debris with depression at top, or large stick nest in tree.

Migration
After breeding season, flocks move north along both Atlantic and Pacific coasts. These birds return southward to warmer waters by winter. Small numbers of immatures regularly wander inland in summer, especially in southwest.
Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month

Panicum virgatum: Switchgrass

It turns out that prairie and grassland birds are some of the most imperiled species due to the grassland lost. Switch grass clumps allow ground nesting birds to weave around the mounds eluding predators, unlike the continuous even cover of lawn grasses.

The seeds of Switchgrass are eaten by songbirds, rails, teal and geese and the foliage is how to the Tawny Edged Skipper butterfly.

Switchgrass can be found in marshes, pine forests and open ground in a full range of moist to dry soil conditions. It thrives in the full sun and grows 4-8 feet tall with green to bluish leaves. Switchgrass is easy to grow and not fussy, tolerating almost anything but standing water. Once established Switchgrass can be a sturdy barrier to erosion in tricky locations.

Grasses offer some of the best winter structure of the native plant palate. According to Carol Otteson in the Native Plant Primer “Outstanding as a winter ground cover, Switchgrass is beautiful in a border, where its floppiness works to advantage; it weaves itself in among other ornamentals: The natural movement of Switchgrass in the wind is lovely to see.

Switchgrass flowers emerge as maroon, turn to a tan and are delicate haze over the plant. These can be planted in multiple clumps as a border or grouping or it can be interspersed among perennial flowers blending texture and serving as a natural backdrop for the colors in the border.

Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month is a joint effort of the NC Native Plant Society & Audubon North Carolina.

Bird Friendly Trick:
A goo from a winter project is to rescue trees climbing English ivy by snipping vines at the base, and then pulling the vines down as they die and release their hold on the tree. This saves you from using a mosquito service to spray the mosquitos hiding in the ivy covered trees all summer. Less spraying means more caterpillars as food for the baby birds.

Field Sparrow ©Jeff Lemons
Sparrows like this Field Sparrow benefit greatly from the planting of tall native grasses.
Understanding the Endangered Species Act
by Curtis Smalling, Audubon North Carolina [http://nc.audubon.org/node/9396]

As part of the Putting Working Lands to Work for Birds and People initiative, Curtis Smalling and his team from Audubon North Carolina are working to develop and restore habitat for the Golden-winged Warbler, a species being considered for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

North Carolina is home to an estimated 463 different bird species at some point during their annual life cycle. Some birds spend the winter here; some birds arrive in the spring to breed; some birds stay all year-round. Birds depend on finding the habitat they need when they arrive in North Carolina to sustain them.

The higher the numbers of a particular bird, the more likely the species is to thrive. Audubon North Carolina focuses its work to help birds, whose populations are most threatened.

The Golden-winged Warbler is one such bird species in decline and the focus of Audubon North Carolina conservation programs.

Here, Curtis helps us understand what it takes for a species to be considered an Endangered Species and what happens when a species is listed?

Criteria for Listing

This can seem like a mystery since it’s not a widely publicized process. But every species, whether potentially threatened or endangered, is evaluated on the following criteria:

1. Is the species’ habitat or range facing destruction, modification or curtailment?

It is important to know a species’ range, so the proper amount of space is managed to benefit the animal, as well as its ability to sustain and expand a healthy population. If a species is forced out of its range by a change in climate, lack of resources, diminished habitat, or human disturbance it will decline in numbers leading to possible extinction.

2. Is the species being over-utilized for commercial, recreational, scientific or educational purposes?

Overutilization of a species uses animals to the point that a population isn’t able to sustain itself or recover. Uncontrolled hunting of the Passenger Pigeon led to its extinction in the early 1900s.

3. Is there a threat of disease or predation of the species?

Disease can rapidly change the normal balance of a population particularly if it already suffers from existing challenges such as habitat loss or an increase in predators like raccoons or foxes.

4. Are there other natural or manmade factors affecting the species’ survival?

Due to human disturbance or development ecosystems can be altered to the point that they no longer sustain a species historically found in that ecosystem. Disappearing ecosystems can impact species survival.

How Does A Species Get On the List?

Meeting the criteria is just the first step. For a species to be added to the Endangered Species list, there is a strict legal process known as a rulemaking (or regulatory) procedure.

In the first step in assessing the status of a species, the Federal government publishes notices that state a species is under review and that the science community believes it meets the definition of threatened or endangered. The science community refers to these species as “candidates” for listing. [Continued on page 8]
Tips for the Novice Birder:

Finding Birds

Move Quietly: Birds are not necessarily disturbed by noises, but you may be distracted by them. Often the first clue to a bird’s presence is some small rustling of leaves or soft call notes. Any noise or distraction, such as conversation or swishing clothing, can prevent you from noticing these signs.

Travel Gently: Birds are extremely sensitive to abrupt movements. A sudden wave of the hand, such as that made when raising binoculars or pointing a finger, can scare off a bird more surely than almost any other action.

Travel Slowly: One can often see more birds by standing in one spot than by moving quickly and covering a lot of ground.

Watch for movement: This requires holding still and looking with a ‘wide field’ – not focusing on a particular spot. Once you detect a movement, even if you’re not sure what caused it, you may find it useful to aim your binoculars at the spot and try to find a bird.

Follow Sounds: The expert finds many birds by knowing their songs and calls. You don’t have to be able to identify the species to take advantage of one of the basic benefits of this. Simply listening to sounds will give you a clue to where the birds are in a given area, and then you will be able to walk toward them. This will maximize your chances of seeing birds, and you will see more of them than if you simple wandered around randomly. This is also a very important first step toward learning the vocalizations of the birds.

Pay Attention to Behavior: Watch the edges of a flock and pay special attention to outlying birds or those that act differently; these may be different species. Behavior offers clues that can be a great help in finding and identifying birds, and noticing behavior is the way to learn these clues.

Let the Birds Find Predators: Bird’s extraordinary alertness and eyesight can aid a birder. The scolding calls of chickadees, jays, or crows are often your first clue o the presence of a hawk or owl. Learn these sounds and track them down. Similarly, the alarm calls and evasive actions of small birds may also signal the presence of a hawk or owl. If all the birds at your feeder suddenly take off in a flurry of wingbeats and urgent high-pitched call notes, leaving the scene deserted and silent, you can be pretty sure that a hawk or other predator has just visited. A careful search of the ground or of nearby perches might reveal it, and the habit of looking out quickly when these sounds are heard will help you see a hawk in the future. Take note when you see a shorebird cock its head to study something in the sky above. Look for whatever has caught the bird’s attention and you may discover a high-flying raptor.

Watch Flock Behavior: The takeoff of a flock of birds, or the coordinated movements of a flock of sandpipers in the air, takes on a certain urgency in the presence of a hawk. Many small birds react to an aerial predator by forming a tight flock and swerving back and forth around it, not allowing it to get above them or to single out one member of the flock. Starlings do this more dramatically and more persistently than other birds. The sight of a distant ‘starling ball’ is often the first clue to the presence of a hawk.

(from Sibley’s Birding Basics)
Endangered Species Act

Through notices of review, scientists seek additional biological data that will help conservation biologists complete the status reviews for these candidate species. The full list of candidate species is available here.

Because of the number of candidates and the time required to list a species, there is a priority system designed to direct conservation efforts toward the plants and animals in the greatest need. The priority system is selected as follows:

• **Highest Priority**: The degree or magnitude of threat.
• **Medium Priority**: The immediacy of the threat.
• **Lowest Priority**: How distinctive the species is.

What protections are given to an endangered status bird?

Once listed as endangered, species receive several protections including:

• Protection from adverse effects of Federal activities such as thinning vegetation to prevent wildfires or dredging waterways;
• Restrictions on taking, transporting or selling a species;
• Authority for conservation groups to develop and carry out recovery plans;
• Authority for Federal government to purchase important habitat;
• Federal aid is designated to State and Commonwealth wildlife agencies with cooperative agreements.

These efforts contribute to species’ survival and assist in achieving the ultimate goals — conserving plants and animals, and maintaining their natural diversity and the ecosystems upon which they depend.

The Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department Division of Nature Preserves and Natural Resources is once again offering this 15-week, intensive program. This volunteer program is a recognized non-credit certificate program through the Center for Sustainability at CPCC.

The program will take place Thursdays from 9 AM to 3:30 PM beginning the last week in February and running through the end of May. Topics include everything from geology, weather, biogeography, and land use to the more traditional topics such as mammals, herps, butterflies, plants, etc. It will also include teaching methods for sharing what you learn. There is a 40 hr. volunteer requirement to complete the course. For more information about the course contact Staci R. Clark (staci.Clark@mecklenburgcountync.gov), Master Naturalist Coordinator & Supervisor, Division of Nature Preserves and Natural Resources Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation, ASAP.