Let’s Get Ready to COUNT!

7:15 PM
Thursday, February 2nd
Tyvola Road Senior Center
2225 Tyvola Rd, Charlotte

The 17th-20th of February are important days for backyard bird watchers. Over those four days we have the opportunity to participate in one of the most comprehensive citizen science projects created. Cornell Lab of Ornithology launched the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) in 1998. Over the past 18 years it has grown from a small group of backyard feeder watchers to an international conservation project. Scientists use information from the GBBC, along with observations from other citizen-science projects, such as the Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and eBird, to get the “big picture” about what is happening to bird populations. The longer these data are collected, the more meaningful they become in helping scientists investigate far-reaching questions, like - How will the weather and climate change influence bird populations? and What kinds of differences in bird diversity are apparent in cities versus suburban, rural, and natural areas?

This month’s meeting will take a closer look how we can participate fully in this exciting adventure. Judy Walker, one-time reviewer for the GBBC, will share with us tips on how to make some tricky identifications; count large flocks of birds, and how to navigate the GBBC website. There will be some interactive activities to help sharpen your identification skills. As a bonus, she will also ease us into the world of electronic birding tools. You’ll learn how to use eBird.org to plan your next birding trip and take a tour of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website. We’ll also look at some other websites, blogs and apps that will help sharpen your identification skills and turn you into a true citizen scientist (or at least a good armchair bird watcher). Bring your own device, if you have questions or need help getting started.

Come prepare to participate and sharpen your skills as well as learn how to use some amazingly helpful tools that will enhance your birding experience.
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, Feb. 4th: Torrence Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]
We’ll walk this little birded greenway in the northern part of the county to see what it might have in store for us. During the Lake Norman Christmas Count a group found a Baltimore Oriole feeding in some Bradford Pears. We will meet at 8:30 AM at the greenway entrance on Bradford Hills Lane. [From I-77 take exit 23, Gilead Rd.; turn left; go 1.7 miles to Bradford Hill Lane; turn left on Bradford Hills.]

Saturday, Feb. 11th: McDowell Prairie/Copperhead Island
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]
We will try again looking for wintering LBJs (Little Brown Jobs a.k.a. sparrows, wrens, etc.) and waterfowl at Copperhead Island. We will meet at 8:30 AM on Four Horse Rd. 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.

Sunday, February 12th - Woodcock Walk
Evening • Easy • Contact: Matt Janson [m.janson.geolover@gmail.com]
Our annual trek to see dancing Woodcocks will be the second half of a double header bird walk day. We will meet at 5:15 PM in the parking lot of Sherman Branch on Rock River Church Rd. From I-485 take exit 41. Go east (left) on Albemarle Rd. First left will be Rocky River Church Rd. Parking lot will be on the left shortly after Camp Stewart Rd. Make sure you bring a flashlight.

Saturday, Feb. 18th: Burkes Garden, VA
Full Day • Contact: Matt Jansen [m.janson.geolover@gmail.com]
We will be meeting at the Hampton Inn in Wytheville on Saturday at 7:30 AM, driving to Burkes Garden from there. Waterfowl, Golden Eagle, Rough legged Hawk, Red-headed Woodpecker are all possibilities. Gorgeous Appalachian scenery. Limited amenities. Lunch can be had at the Mennonite Grocery in Burke’s Garden. Usually only one thing on the menu but it’s hearty Pennsylvania Dutch style fare. Expect snowy, cold conditions, so come with an adventurous spirit and 4-wheel drive if possible!
Sunday we may explore surrounding areas/Blue Ridge Parkway in search of Golden Eagle and Ruffed Grouse as well, depending on conditions.

Sunday, Feb. 19th: McAlpine Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]
We haven’t birded this park in while due to construction. But things have settled down over there so we will take a look at the beaver pond and walk the back wooded area as well as check out the open fields for sparrows. Meet at the Monroe Rd. parking lot at 8:30 AM.

Tuesday, Feb. 21st: Four-mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]
This greenway is productive just about anytime of the year. We will meet in the Johnston Rd. parking area at 8:30 AM.

Saturday, Feb. 25th: Latta Plantation Prairie & Waterfowl
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]
We’ll walk up to the prairie to see what wintering birds are there and then check out the lake for waterfowl. Meet in the parking just inside the Latta Plantation Preserve gate (Sample Rd.) at 8:30 PM.
The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), isn’t just for the backyard any more. You can now count anywhere - but preferably your favor spots that may not be considered ‘hot spots’ - your neighborhood, local park, shopping center parking lot, etc. You should observe the area for at least 15 minutes, although longer is better. Make your best estimate of the number of birds being seen at one time. Large flocks can be challenging but your best guess is still valuable. Then submit your numbers at http://gb-bc.birdcount.org. See easy as 1,2, 3.

Here are a few links that will help you with counting & identifying birds:

- tricky IDs - https://goo.gl/Rs2Wr6
- 2017 Photo Contest - https://goo.gl/PMIJIc

Count the Birds at Wing Haven!

In partnership with Wing Haven, Charlotte’s hidden gem of an urban garden and bird sanctuary, we invite all Mecklenburg Audubon Society members and friends to join us for the Great Backyard Bird Count!

Wing Haven will be open all four days of the national event (Fri, Feb. 17 - Mon, Feb. 20th), 8:00 am - 5:00 pm, free admission. In addition to coming by the garden to make your count, Wing Haven needs many volunteers to welcome participants and share their passion for birding. Guides, tally sheets, binoculars, educational materials, and refreshments (hot chocolate!) will be available for volunteers and participants. Please consider volunteering for at least one shift while visiting Wing Haven during this big event!

Please sign up to volunteer at http://www.signupgenius.com/go/20f0a4aadac2aa0fc1-great1

To register for this free event, please go to: https://winghavengardens.org/events/

Please direct any questions to Jill Goodrich [jill@winghavengardens.org], Education Coordinator, 704.331.0664, ext. 103

Do you love watching birds? Consider sharing your experience with someone new to birding. Whether during the Great Backyard Bird Count or any day of the year, we invite you to make the “Pledge to Fledge” and share your enthusiasm with at least one other person. If every bird watcher inspired just one other person to watch birds, we could double the number of people who enjoy and care about birds!

Originally launched by the Global Birding Initiative, and adopted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in 2015, Pledge to Fledge encourages bird watchers to introduce friends and acquaintances to birding. You can contribute however you wish—in ways small or large.

Here are just a few ideas:

- Go birding with friends, family, and other non-birders at a local park or nature reserve
- Host a “feeder party” at home
- Help a neighbor or friend set up a feeder station in his or her yard
- Introduce someone new to the Great Backyard Bird Count
- Take “The Pledge” below:

The Pledge

“I pledge to actively share my enthusiasm for birds with non-birders by taking them into the field to show them birds and foster their own appreciation for birds whenever possible. I will strive to be friendly, patient, helpful, and welcoming when approached by ‘non-birders’ or asked about birds by acquaintances. I believe that individual birders, as part of an international grassroots movement, can effect positive and profound change for our shared birds and their future.”
NC Priority Bird: Baltimore Oriole

The rich, whistling song of the Baltimore Oriole, echoing from treetops near homes and parks, is a sweet herald of spring in eastern North America. Look way up to find these singers: the male’s brilliant orange plumage blazes from high branches like a torch. Nearby, you might spot the female weaving her remarkable hanging nest from slender fibers. Fond of fruit and nectar as well as insects, Baltimore Orioles are easily lured to backyard feeders.

One of the most brilliantly colored songbirds in the east, flaming orange and black, sharing the heraldic colors of the coat of arms of 17th-century Lord Baltimore. Widespread east of the Great Plains, Baltimore Orioles are often very common in open woods and groves in summer. Their bag-shaped hanging nests, artfully woven of plant fibers, are familiar sights in the shade trees in towns.

Feeding Behavior: Orioles have a wide and varied diet which includes insects, berries and nectar. In summer they feed mostly on insects, especially caterpillars, including hairy types avoided by many birds. They also eat beetles, grasshoppers, wasps, bugs, and others, plus spiders and snails. The birds forage by searching for insects among foliage of trees and shrubs. They sometimes fly out to catch insects in midair. Since they like to visit flowers for nectar, they can be enticed to sugar-water feeders or pieces of fruit (especially oranges) put out at feeders. Unlike robins and many other fruit-eating birds, Baltimore Orioles seem to prefer only ripe, dark-colored fruit. Orioles seek out the darkest mulberries, the reddest cherries, and the deepest-purple grapes, and will ignore green grapes and yellow cherries even if they are ripe.

Breeding Behavior:

Male sings to defend nesting territory. In courtship, the male faces female and stretches upright, then bows deeply with tail spread and wings partly open. Nests are placed in tall deciduous tree, placed near end of slender drooping branch, usually 20-30' above the ground but can be 6-60' up or higher. The nest (built primarily by female, sometimes with help from male) is a hanging pouch, with its rim firmly attached to a branch. It is tightly woven of plant fibers, strips of bark, grapevines, grass, yarn, string. Spanish moss, lined with fine grass, plant down, hair.

The birds lay 4-5 (sometimes 3-6) bluish white to pale gray eggs, with brown and black markings concentrated at larger end. Incubation is done by female for about 12-14 days. The young are feed by both parents and leave nest about 12-14 days after hatching.

Conservation status: Still widespread and common, but surveys show declines in recent decades. In the mid 20th century, Dutch elm disease killed many of the American elms that had been favorite nesting trees for this species in the past.

Habitat: Orioles prefer open woods, riverside groves, elms, shade trees. Breeds in deciduous or mixed woodland, generally in open woods or edges rather than interior of dense forest. May be common in trees in towns. Often favors elms. Winters mostly in the tropics around forest edge and semi-open country but can be found in Mecklenburg county at feeders in the winter.

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Baltimore Oriole

Backyard Tips: Baltimore Orioles seek out ripe fruit. Cut oranges in half and hang them from trees to invite orioles into your yard. Special oriole feeders filled with sugar water supplement the flower nectar that Baltimore Orioles gather. You can even put out small amounts of jelly to attract these nectar-eaters (just don’t put out so much that it risks soiling their feathers). Planting bright fruits and nectar-bearing flowers, such as raspberries, crab apples, and trumpet vines, can attract Baltimore Orioles year after year.

Fun Facts:
• Baltimore Orioles got their name from their bold orange-and-black plumage: they sport the same colors as the heraldic crest of England’s Baltimore family (who also gave their name to Maryland’s largest city).
• Young male Baltimore Orioles do not molt into bright-orange adult plumage until the fall of their second year. Still, a few first-year males in drab, female-like plumage succeed in attracting a mate and raising young. Females become deeper orange with every molt; some older females are almost as bright orange as males.
• Baltimore Orioles sometimes use their slender beaks to feed in an unusual way, called “gaping”: they stab the closed bill into soft fruits, then open their mouths to cut a juicy swath from which they drink with their brushy-tipped tongues.
• The oldest recorded Baltimore Oriole was over 12 years old when it was caught and killed by a raptor in Minnesota.

What do You Know about Beaks?

Birds do not have teeth or lips. Instead they have a hard substance similar to our finger nails that constantly grows from their faces.

Each bird beak has a purpose & has evolved over time to help them carve out a niche of survival in the food chain.

Should you use ‘bill’ or ‘beak’? Originally, ‘beak’ was the term used for the hooked bill of a raptor, but now it can be used interchangeably with ‘bill’.

It is thought that woodcock beaks are incredibly sensitive and can feel the vibrations of earthworms in the ground.

Many species of waterfowl have little ridges along the upper mandible of their beaks that allow them to filter out water when they grab food underwater.

Can a pelican’s beak hold more than its belly? Yes, it can, but they don’t swallow the entire contents. They grab a beak full of food and water and then squeeze out the water swallowing the remaining contents, usually fish. Pelicans can’t swallow the fish along with the water.

Adapted from 1001 Secrets every Birder should Know by Sharon Stiteler.
Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month:

New Jersey Tea (Ceanothus americanus)

Additional common name(s): Mountain snowbell, Redroot

A great little deciduous native shrub, grows across the Carolina’s in woodland glades and forest edges. Throughout the summer, a cloud of small creamy white flowers bring in butterflies and hummingbirds, and the resulting berries provide food for winter birds. The billowing clusters of tiny, fragrant white flowers appear on long stems in late spring and early summer. Ceanothus makes a lovely and fragrant cut flower! Young twigs are noticeably yellow and provide subtle winter interest. It quickly grows into an attractive, loose mound which makes it nice for a low hedge, or a hot, dry slope. It is deer resistant, drought-tolerant once established, and fixes its own nitrogen.

Benefits:
• The leaves from this shrub make an excellent tea
• Host plant for Spring Azure, Summer Azure, Mottled Duskywing butterflies
• Turkeys, quail and other birds eat the seeds
• Sweet flowers attract butterflies and hummingbirds
• Dense, compact form make it small space friendly
• Yellow twigs are showy in the winter landscape

Growing Tips: Grow New Jersey Tea in average, dry to medium, well-drained soils in full sun or part shade. It grows well in sandy loams or rocky soils with good drainage, but is equally at home in average garden soils. It is not tolerant of wet soils. The thick roots of Ceanothus go deep and help plants to withstand drought, but make established shrubs difficult to transplant.

Used as a tea substitute during the American Revolutionary War, excellent tea that was very popular during the Revolutionary War period

Fun Facts:
• The dried leaves make excellent tea. They were used as a tea substitute during the Revolutionary War since tea was hard to find. Alas, New Jersey Tea has no caffeine.
• In herbal medicine, the root was used as an astringent, expectorant, sedative and as an antispasmodic.
For the neophyte bird watching terminology used by more experienced birders and/or ornithologists can be confusing and sometimes frustrating. Here are a few basic terms Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon think beginning bird watchers should be familiar with:

**Natural History Words**

- **Adaptation:** A special physical or behavioral ability that has allowed a species to adjust to a particular way of life.
- **Distribution:** The geographic area(s) where a given species of bird can be found.
- **Niche:** The role a bird plays in the ecosystem, including what it eats and where it lives (habitat).
- **Non-native Species:** Birds that have been released from or have escaped captivity. In some cases (House Sparrows, Rock Doves, etc.), such species have become established in North America.
- **Taxonomy:** The way bird scientists classify bird species based on their similarities to or differences from one another.

**Behavior Words**

- **Diurnal:** Used to describe birds that are active during the day. Most birds are diurnal.
- **Dominance:** The ability of one bird to control the actions of another.
- **Hovering:** A technique a bird uses for various reasons, including to search for food. To hover, a bird remains stationary in mid-air, usually by rapidly flapping its wings.
- **Migration:** An extended journey a bird makes from one place to another (for example, when a bird flies from its wintering areas in South America to its breeding area in North America.)
- **Nocturnal:** Used to describe birds that are active at night. Most owls are nocturnal.
- **Permanent Resident:** A species of bird that does not migrate and so spends the entire year in the same region.
- **Roost:** A place where a bird sleeps, sometimes in groups.

**Food and Feeding Words**

- **Carnivorous:** Flesh-eating birds (usually fresh or live as opposed to carrion). Raptors (hawks and owls) are carnivorous birds.
- **Crop:** A sac inside a bird where its neck meets the body. It holds food before digestion.
- **Frugivorous:** Birds that feed primarily on fruit. Cedar Waxwings are frugivorous birds.
- **Granivorous:** Birds that eat grains or seeds, such as the Rock Pigeon.
- **Grit:** Small pieces of rock, shell, or other hard substances that birds eat to help them digest other foods. Grit helps grind up coarse vegetable matter.
- **Herbivorous:** Birds, such as the Canada Goose, that primarily eat plants.
- **Insectivorous:** Birds that eat mainly insects. Swallows are a good example.
- **Nectivorous:** Birds that feed largely on the nectar of flowers or the juices of fruit, such as hummingbirds.
- **Omnivorous:** Birds that eat anything that is considered digestible/edible. American Crows are a common example.
- **Piscivorous:** Fish-eating birds. The Osprey is piscivorous.

**Predation:** When one animal kills another for food. The animal that is taken is the prey, and the animal doing the taking is the predator.
- **Raptors:** Generally hawks, eagles, falcons, and owls. These birds prey upon mammals, smaller birds, and other animals.

**Feather Words**

- **Crest:** A tuft of feathers on the top of a bird’s head.
- **Field Mark:** A characteristic or combination of characteristics such as color, shape, or specific marking (eye rings, wing bars, breast stripes), by which a species of bird can be distinguished from other species.
- **Molt:** The process by which a bird renews part or all of its plumage by shedding old, worn feathers and growing new ones.
- **Plumage:** The feathers that cover a bird’s body.
- **Preening:** The process by which a bird cleans, arranges, and cares for its feathers, usually by using its bill to adjust and smooth feathers.
- **Sexual Dimorphism:** When male & female birds differ in plumage.
At the end of April, local birding teams will be conducting our annual spring bird count. The teams work hard to find as many species & individual birds as possible. The data collected during the count is submitted to eBird and becomes part of a national/international database to help scientists determine the effects of habitat loss and climate change on bird and the environment. The data also helps us locally to determine what areas of our ever-growing county needs protection from development.

This year the Board is adding another dimension this important annual event – a BIRDATHON! What is a birdathon? It’s a way to raise funds for conservation efforts (locally, nationally and/or internationally). It works much like any other ‘athon’ but in this scenario folks pledge a certain amount for each species seen by a specific team. It will also provide another incentive to each team knowing their efforts will benefit a conservation project as well as support citizen science. We will be announcing the teams in the March issue of the newsletter.

The board has decided to donate the funds from this first Birdathon to the Catawba Lands Conservancy (CLC) in honor of David Wright. Many great birding areas in the Charlotte are being protected by CLC, so it only makes sense to collaborate with them to help continue and possibility expand this protection.

Stay tune for more details in the March issue of Audubon News.

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Join now and your membership will be effective until June 2018.
Local Membership covers cost of the newsletter, web site, meetings and other administrative commitments.

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Return to: Treasurer, Mecklenburg Audubon Society, P. O. Box 221093, Charlotte, NC 28222

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