Butterflies, Skippers & Moths, Oh My!!

Thursday, February 1, 2018
7:15 PM

After many years spent searching for birds in the field, some birders slowly metamorphose into butterflies! Those that do discover another new and exciting hobby is an excellent complement to birding as a pastime. As a day in the field warms up and bird activity slows – butterflies and skippers become more obvious and active; thus giving the birder an entirely new catalog of critters to pursue. As nighttime descends – moths can become a focus too.

The Carolinas provide habitat for almost 200 species of butterflies and skippers and over a thousand kinds of moths. Each has its own unique host plant associations and habitat needs. Most of these small scale-winged insects are truly a joy to behold.

At this month’s meeting, three staff with Mecklenburg County’s Division of Natural Resources will join together to share with us some details about butterflies, skippers, and moths in Mecklenburg County and the inventory and monitoring work the county has been involved with for the past two decades.

Don Serif – will share with us an introduction to “The State of the Butterflies” in Mecklenburg County. He is a founding member of the Carolina Butterfly Society and has been working with the Division for 25 years.

Lenny Lampel – will provide the group with a look at Mecklenburg County’s moth inventory program and will share with you his findings. Lenny has been a biologist with the division for over a decade.

Chris Talkington – will introduce everyone to the Greater Charlotte Chapter of the Carolina Butterfly Society and the field trips and activities planned for 2018. Chris is an expert in butterflies, moths, and in dragonflies as well.

Flutter on over to the Tyvola Senior Center (2225 Tyvola Rd.) on Thursday, February 1st to learn more about these diminutive winged creatures. Refreshments start at 6:45 PM with the program starting at 7:15 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!!

Thursday, February 1st: Cane Creek Park (Union County)
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Martina Nordstrand [fishycats@msn.com] • MAP

Although this is a new destination for us, a number of our members have been birding the park for a while. This park has a large lake, woods and fields which should produce a variety of species this time of the year. Meet in the main parking lot at 8:30 AM.

Saturday, February 3rd: McAlpine Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]

We haven’t birded this area for a while. With its varied habitat - ponds, fields & woods, it can often hold some surprises. We’ll mee in the parking lot off Monroe Rd. at 8:30 AM.

Saturday, February 10th: Torrence Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com] • MAP

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.]

February 16th - 19th: Great Backyard Bird Count

Get out an bird anywhere you like or just keep track of what’s in your own backyard from the comfort of your own home.

Sunday, February 18th: Six-Mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Martina Nordstrand [fishycats@msn.com] • MAP

Celebrate the Great Backyard Bird Count at this short 1 mile greenway that produces an amazing number of interesting birds. Meet in the parking lot at 8:30 AM.

Sunday, February 18th: Woodcock Walk
Evening Walk • 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 5:30 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, February 24th: McDowell NP/Copperhead Island
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

We will be looking for winter migrants including 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. We will meet at 8:30 AM.

Physical Difficulty Key

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.
Wes Craven, Hollywood director

“Why do birds matter?” is one of those questions like “What is love?” or “Why are we here?” or even “Is there a God?” Unanswerable, I think, by logic. One could cite facts like, birds eat lots of harmful insects, charm us at our feeders, or challenge us to learn their field marks, molts, and names both common and scientific. But perhaps the answer lies deeper. Since the beginning birds have lifted our eyes to the skies. They’ve shown us we’re not gravity’s slave, that flight is possible and limitless. It can hover and soar, dive and display, and take us from one end of the planet to the other in a single, impossible burst of energy and purpose. Inspiration is the gift birds have given us from the start. But now they give us a question as well. Like the canary in the mine, they hold the planet up to us like a mirror and ask: “Can you not see that if we pass away, soon you will as well?” That’s a good question, and since birds pose it, they matter a lot.

In 2018, we mark the centennial of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the most powerful and important bird-protection law ever passed. In honor of this milestone, nature lovers around the world are joining forces to celebrate the “Year of the Bird” and commit to protecting birds today and for the next hundred years. You can help build a better world for birds by taking simple but meaningful actions each month. Each month we will suggest an activity you can participate in that will help protect birds and their habitat. This month’s activity is the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). You don’t even have to leave the warm comfort of your home to participate in this international project. There is more information about the GBBC elsewhere in this newsletter. But first here’s a crash course about the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA).

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act - Explained

At 100 years, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) is among the oldest wildlife protection laws on the books. Its creation was one of the National Audubon Society’s first major victories, and in the years since its enactment, the MBTA has saved millions, if not billions, of birds from depredatory human activities.

Now, it’s about to save even more. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced that it would be strengthening the implementation of the bill to better protect birds from modern-day threats (think windmills and cell phone towers), to ensure that the MBTA remains as powerful and effective as possible.

What is the Migratory Bird Treaty Act?

Stated most simply, the MBTA is a law that protects birds from people. When Congress passed the MBTA in 1918, it codified a treaty already signed with Canada (then part of Great Britain) in response to the extinction or near-extinction of a number of bird species that were hunted either for sport or for their feathers. According to the USFWS:

“The MBTA provides that it is unlawful to pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill, possess, sell, purchase, barter, import, export, or transport any migratory bird, or any part, nest, or egg of any such bird, unless authorized under a permit issued by the Secretary of the Interior. Some regulatory exceptions apply. Take is defined in regulations as: ‘pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or attempt to pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect.’ ”

Since its passage, the MBTA has expanded its geographic area (via treaties with Mexico, Japan, and Russia) and the scope of its coverage (adding eagles, corvids, and other birds). In 1962 it was updated to address how Native American tribes can collect feathers from protected birds for religious ceremonies (a practice otherwise banned by the MBTA).

What birds has the treaty already helped?

The most obvious success story is the Snowy Egret, which was hunted almost to extinction for its delicate feathers before early conservationists like the Audubon Society, along with the federal government, stepped in to stop the slaughter. Since then the act has been expanded to include a wide variety of species.

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How many birds are at risk?

According to USFWS estimates, power lines kill up to 175 million birds a year. Communications towers rack up to 50 million kills, and uncovered oil waste pits account for up to another 500,000 to 1 million. Data on wind turbines are harder to come by, but current estimates hover at about 300,000 bird fatalities/year. In The Law's Evolution To Date.

1800s: With essentially zero regulations in place, market hunters decimate U.S. bird populations, in part so that well-to-do women can wear hats adorned with ornamental feathers. By the end of the century, Labrador Ducks and Great Auks are extinct, soon to be joined by Passenger Pigeons, Carolina Parakeets, and Heath Hens. Numerous other species stand on the brink. Outrage over these alarming trends leads to the formation of the first Audubon societies, as well as other conservation groups.

1900: Congress passes the Lacey Act, the first federal law to protect wildlife. It takes aim at market hunters by prohibiting them from selling poached game across state lines.

1913: Congress passes the Weeks-McLean Migratory Bird Act, which, in another broadside against market hunters, bans the spring shooting of migratory game and insectivorous birds and declares them to be under the “custody and protection” of the federal government. However, two district courts soon rule the act unconstitutional.

1916: The United States signs a treaty with Great Britain (acting on behalf of Canada, then part of the British Empire), in which the two countries agree to stop all hunting of insectivorous birds and to establish specific hunting seasons for game birds. The stated goal is to preserve those species considered beneficial or harmless to man.

1918: To implement the new treaty, Congress passes the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which officially makes it a crime to “pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill,” or “sell” a migratory bird or any of its parts, including nests, eggs, and feathers. The newly passed act eliminates “the necessity of watching the legislation of every state and of combating the numberless attempts to legalize the destruction of birds for private gain,” according to famed ornithologist Frank M. Chapman (also founder of Audubon magazine).

1920: The U.S. Supreme Court shoots down a challenge to the constitutionality of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, ruling that it does not violate states’ rights.

1936: Following up on its treaty with Great Britain, the United States signs a similar treaty with Mexico (it would go on to sign additional treaties with Japan and the Soviet Union in the 1970s). As a result, more birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and habitat conservation and pollution abatement is encouraged.

1940: Congress passes the Bald Eagle Protection Act, the first federal legislation to ban hunting or otherwise disturbing America’s national emblem (it would later be amended to include Golden Eagles). Modeled after the MBTA, it nonetheless fails to stem the Bald Eagle’s decline at the hands of DDT poisoning.

1970s: For the first time, U.S. prosecutors begin charging not just hunters who violate the MBTA, but also oil and gas, timber, mining, chemical, and electricity companies. Though not directly targeting wildlife, these industries incidentally cause millions of bird deaths each year that would have been avoided with simple infrastructure modifications, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

1972: An amendment to the MBTA protects an additional 32 families of birds, including eagles, hawks, owls, and corvids (crows, jays, and magpies). Even more species have been added since, bringing the total number to 1,026—almost every native species in the United States. With such additions, the word “‘migratory’” in the act’s title becomes largely symbolic—many birds that do not embark on actual migrations are still protected.

2000: A federal appeals court holds that private citizens (such as conservation groups) may sue the government over alleged violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

2001: Just before leaving office, President Bill Clinton orders all relevant federal agencies, including the Department of Defense and the U.S. Forest Service, to take migratory bird conservation into account as part of their regular decision making.

2013: In a first, the Department of Justice enforces the MBTA against a wind farm operator, imposing $1 million in penalties for the killing of Golden Eagles and other protected birds at two sites in Wyoming.

2015: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces that it will rethink the MBTA’s implementation to hold industries more accountable for the harm they do to birds. Specifically, the changes will address bird deaths due to open oil pits, power lines, gas flares, cell phone towers, and wind turbines—which combined kill millions of birds each year.

2017: The Trump Administration does away with the USFWS’s potential rulemaking updates. Also in 2017, Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY) introduced an amendment to the SECURE American Energy Act that would change liability under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) to no longer cover incidental takes. This would prevent any enforcement of industrial impacts, end accountability from oil spills, and removed incentives to protect birds, all of which Audubon opposes.
The Great Backyard Bird Count

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at http://gbbc.birdcount.org. Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world.

Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. Last year, more than 160,000 participants submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded.

The 21st annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 16, through Monday, February 19, 2018. Please visit the official website at http://gbbc.birdcount.org for more information and be sure to check out the latest educational and promotional resources.

Volunteer at Wing Haven for the 2018 Great Backyard Bird Count

Experts, novices and everyone in between are invited to greet visitors and distribute information and refreshments at the GBBC from Feb 16-19. The gardens will be open for the entire 4-day event, 8am - 5pm. Birders are needed to assist visitors in spotting and identifying birds. Choose your three hour shift here: http://www.signupgenius.com/go/20f0a4aadac290fc1-great2 - and why not sign up with a friend? Questions? Please contact Jill Goodrich, jill@winghavengardens.org, 704.331.0664 ext. 103.

Soaring Back: MESSAGE TO THE FUTURE

Fifty years ago the United States discovered a problem, our national symbol, the bald eagle was disappearing. Loss of habitat, hunting and the use of DDT in the lower 48 states had reduced the species to less than 500 nesting pairs. This is the success story of a species taken off the endangered species list and some of the people who continue to monitor bald eagles to ensure the survival. It is both a celebration of these dedicated volunteers and a warning that the future for the eagle and the rest of us is far from certain.

As an added bonus to this month’s meeting we will view this amazing 20 minute video.
Which Red Finch is It?

The identification of these two finches of the Carpodacus genus found in our area can be extremely difficult. Each species is about the same size and shape, each is colored red with varying degrees of brown streaking, and each is common to feeder areas. What’s more, the ranges of these birds overlap quite a bit, primarily owing to the ubiquitous distribution of the House Finch. Use the chart below to compare and contrast the features of each finch. Visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Online Bird Guide to find species accounts that detail the range, habitat, and food preferences of each species.

**House Finch**

**Male**
- slimmer body with short, stubby bill with curved culmen;
- longer tail faintly notched.
- intensity of red color varies in males from yellow to orange to red; observer should rely on pattern of color rather than hue;
- “headband” of red with brown cap and brown cheek patch;
- red chin, upper throat, and breast fades into conspicuously streaked sides;
- brown wings and back, sometimes lightly washed with red, fades into red rump;
- brown tail

**Female**
- lacks the strong facial pattern of Purple Finch;
- dull white underparts have longer, less sharply defined streaks;
- undertail coverts have broad dark streaks

**Purple Finch**

**Male**
- plumper body with short, conical beak; shorter, deeply notched tail
- deep raspberry color on most of head (including nape, face, and throat) is underlain by darker ear coverts, nape, and malar stripe, making the head appear contrasted at a distance;
- light stripe over eye;
- may have peaked crown;
- raspberry carries onto hindneck (unlike House Finch);
- reddish color of throat and breast diffuses into a variably but usually faintly streaked lower breast and belly;
- extensive red color on back in eastern birds

**Female**
- strong face pattern: dark auricular patch separates a bold white “eyebrow’ and a white mustache;
- underparts show heavy broad streaks;
- back and scapulars are brown and streaked;
- undertail coverts usually white with no streaks
Not Using eBird?

Do you want to use eBird, but feel something is stopping you? Do you have a slight pang of guilt each time you receive an eBird Alert, knowing that you should be submitting your sightings too? It’s okay, many of us have been there. Let 2018 be the year you start using eBird. Here are some common misconceptions for those hesitant to use eBird, along with solutions!

I DON’T HAVE THE TIME

Do you already track your bird records somewhere else? Then there is really no added time by being an eBirder—it’ll probably actually save time since we update your lists for you when splits and lumps happen! eBird provides free proofreading of your lists too! Their worldwide team of experts is constantly inspecting the data to help prevent typos or taxonomic errors. Going forward, eBird Mobile will really speed up your data entry since you record your new sightings right there in the field–no transcribing!

I HAVE BEEN BIRDING FOR MANY YEARS AND IT WOULD TAKE TOO LONG TO CATCH UP!

Being an eBirder doesn’t require having all your lists up to date or that you enter all your past data. The idea is to just get started, and let the historical data entry happen as you have time. The more historical data you enter the more informative eBird becomes for you, but the key is starting by entering your current observations today.

EBIRD DOESN’T WANT MY DATA

You couldn’t be more wrong! eBird is for everyone, and all data are valuable. No matter where you live, they welcome your contributions from anywhere, anytime.

PERSONAL CHALLENGES FOR 2018

Whether you are a new or long-time eBirder, you may be thinking about what new challenges to take on in 2018. Setting personal goals and competing against yourself is one of the best ways to improve your birding skills and to stay engaged with birding. Here are a few interesting challenge ideas for 2018:

FIND 10 BIRD SPECIES NEW FOR YOU

One area where eBird really excels is showing you how to find birds. Whether you want a map of sightings for a specific species of bird, or to know where to go birding near you, it’s all there. In 2018, use the eBird Explore Data tools to help you find ten new bird species—whether they’re new for your yard, your county, your state, or your entire life.

YEAR LISTING

Keeping a year list is one of the great pleasures of birding. They are a New Year’s Resolution commitment to keep up your eBirding coverage and try to learn how to find new species, maybe those that have eluded you thus far. You could try a year list for your state or province, but you might find that keeping a year list for your yard or patch is an even more fun and more personally rewarding. As the year progresses, year lists become a personal challenge to strategize how to find more species than last year and predict where you can intersect with tricky migrants. Invariably, they are full of fun surprises and unexpected successes.

ADOPT A PATCH

Anyone can adopt a “patch”—think of it as any park, walking loop, or birdy area that you like to visit regularly. Start tracking your all-time species total there and see if you can visit strategically to add new species. Use eBird Mobile to compare your 2018 totals to previous years. Select your patch in eBird to quickly access your stats. Best of all, check out the bar chart for your patch. Does your existing patch have gaps in the bar chart? Fill in those blanks!

HELP CREATE AN ILLUSTRATED CHECKLIST

One of eBird’s most exciting new developments in 2017 was the release of our new Illustrated Checklists feature, with photos of each species taken in the actual region displayed by the checklist. Check out the Illustrated Checklist for your county, state, province, or favorite local hotspot. Can you fill in any missing photos? Can you improve upon existing ones? Audio recordings tend to be underrepresented in many places, so a good audio cut—even with your phone—can help fill a gap.

Working together, birding becomes much more: a chance to share your sightings with others—even across language barriers, a way to bolster a global appreciation for birds, and the raw data that leads to new science and informs important conservation.

Winter feeding tips

**Make sure you are using the right seed mix in the right feeder.** For example, tube feeders are designed for birds that perch and feed like chickadees, titmouse, goldfinch and cardinals. They prefer sunflower seeds and peanuts. On the other hand, juncos, white-throated sparrows and doves feed on the ground and although they will eat sunflower chips, prefer millet. So those ‘wild bird mixes’ with lots of millet and cracked corn are not appropriate for the tube feeder since the juncos, sparrow & doves can get to those feeders.

**Use a platform feeder to serve a variety of birds.** As mentioned above juncos, sparrows, robins, doves, towhees and others all like to feed on the ground. However, throwing food is not a good idea. It can create a soggy, unhealthy mess that might attract critters you don’t want around. A platform feeder however, will help the food stay dry and still provide food for the ground feeders. They will also come into hanging platform feeders if it’s not too high.

**Remember feeder hygiene.** Even in cold weather dirty feeders can cause problems. Try to clean your feeders once a month with a 9 to 1 water/bleach solution. Then make sure you dry them well.

**Avoid buying cheap seed mixes.** They usually contain a lot of filler that the birds won’t eat.

**Also avoid using stale leftover seed.** Sunflower seed can go rancid. If you don’t feed all year round. Try to use up all the seed and not keep it over the summer. If you notice moths or cobwebs in the seed, throw it out and get fresh seed.

**Use a variety of feeder types.** As mentioned above birds have different feeding habits. Providing a variety of feeder types – tube, platform, hopper, satellite, etc. – will attract a wider variety of birds.

**Offer suet and/or peanuts for high energy.** The insect eaters like woodpeckers, nuthatches, kinglets, and warblers have a hard time with sunflower seeds if they are in shell. Suet is a sure way to attract kinglets and winter warblers (pine and yellow-rumped). It’s easy for them to eat and provides a lot of energy. As alternative to suet cakes you can offer small ‘suet’ pellets called bluebird nuggets or bark butter bits.

If you are losing the war with squirrels, try feeding them corn. They love corn, but make sure you provide in such a way that you don’t attract deer!
We are all familiar with phrases like a kettle of hawks and a covey of quail to describe a group of birds. Well the readers of Wild Bird News a while back (1990) added a few more to the list.

- a ladle of dippers
- a dash of bitterns
- a gallon of petrels
- a Rockefeller of oystercatchers
- a pack of Larks
- a U of terns
- a marathon of roadrunners
- a family of partridge
- a spread of eagles
- a civilization of Inca Doves
- a liturgy of Vesper Sparrows
- a depression of Blue Grouse
- a revenge of Montezuma Quail
- a hogey of Sandwich Terns
- a grumbling of grousers
- a scaffold of Ladder-backed Woodpeckers
- a reel of Virginia Rails
- a cushion of Pintails
- a hobbling of Limpkin
- a trap of boobys
- a ballet of nutcrackers
- an illusion of Merlin
- a statutory of mynas
- a bushel of Acorn Woodpeckers
- a gulp of swallows
- a construction of cranes
- a bunch of Olive Sparrows
- a tintintabulation of Bell’s Vireos
- an inferno of Lucifer Hummingbirds

Can you come up with any more?

Meet the MAS Board!!

Matt Janson is our Field Trip Coordinator. Matt started birding when he was around 5-6 years old when he convinced his parents to get a birdfeeder for their backyard. When Matt was around 14, he attended his first Mecklenburg Audubon Meeting and started to go on some bird walks. That’s when his birding world expanded. Matt loves to go out in the field any opportunity he has. The Outer Banks and Pee Dee Natural Wildlife Refuge are two of his favorite places to go birding. He loves seeing all Warblers when they migrate through the area. Matt currently works at The Wild Bird Center Store at the Arboretum. Besides birding, Matt enjoys reading, studying maps, and watching football. He is a big Virginia Tech, Buffalo Bills, and Carolina Panthers fan. Matt will attend Cornell University in the fall for his sophomore year, majoring in Environmental and Sustainability Sciences. He is excited to be closer to many family members in the Rochester, NY area and also in seeing some familiar NY birds like Snowy Owls, Northern Shrikes, winter finches, raptors, and ducks. We will all miss Matt when he leaves us in the fall for college. It will be an exciting new chapter in his life!

Patrick McMillan & Hummingbirds

We are in for a real treat next month as our speaker will be Patrick McMillan producer, host, writer, director and co-editor of the Emmy award-winning television program “Expeditions with Patrick McMillan” aired on PBS affiliates across the nation. He is currently the director of the SC Botanical Garden. His topic will very timely, as he will be speaking about the little jewels that will be arriving at the end of the month - hummingbirds. Don’t miss this exceptional speaker and bring a friend!