Bluebirds, like hummingbirds, are loved by birders and non-birders alike. In the early twentieth century populations of this beloved species fell drastically due to habitat loss and nest hole competition by aggressive introduced species such as the European Starling and House Sparrow. Thankfully, the establishment of bluebird trails and other nest box campaigns in the 1960s and 1970s alleviated much of this competition. The nest box used then (and are still being used now) were designed to keep out the larger starlings and sparrows. Since then the species has steadily increased and are no longer threatened.

But what do we know about this beautiful species that grace many of our backyards? In particular why are they so blue? Dr. Lynne Siefferman, Associate Professor of Biology at Appalachian State University, has been looking closely at this very question. Her primary research has been in the evolution and function of plumage coloration in Eastern Bluebirds. And she will be sharing results of her research with us at our May meeting.

So, flock on over to the Tyvola Senior Center (2225 Tyvola Rd.) on Thursday, May 2nd to hear this fascinating presentation about one of our favorite birds. Refreshments will start at 6:45 PM with the program beginning at 7:15 PM.

The Mecklenburg Audubon Board is pleased to announce the candidates for the MAS board. We will vote on the slate at the May meeting.

2019 Board Candidates

- Chris Bolling
- Steve Coggin
- Jenny Swofford
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, April 27th: Spring Count
Full Day • Moderate/Strenuous
Contact: Jeff Lemons [birdsalot@gmail.com]

There’s nothing more exciting and rewarding than wondering the various greenways, parks and special birding haunts in Mecklenburg County during our Annual Spring Bird Count. Like the Charlotte Christmas Bird Count (CBC), the roots of this count go way back - the 1940s. And like the CBC, we spend the day within a specific circle with a 7.5-mile radius with the intersection of Woodlawn and South Blvd. Several new greenways have opened with in the circle, so we need as many folks as possible to make sure we find all those neotropic migrants as well as our resident birds.

Jeff Lemons coordinates this count and will be assigning folks to various teams. Even if you can only help for a couple of hours, every pair of eyes are helpful. Also, if your yard is within the circle you can count birds in your yard. Jeff will explain how to do this. There will be a tally-up dinner, which includes a fabulous salad created by Jeff, at Wing Haven Gardens. So, contact him to get your assignment.

Sunday, April 28th: Catawba College Ecological Preserve
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Steve Coggin [scoggin@catawba.edu]

We will be birding on the Catawba College Ecological Preserve. This 189 acre natural area has a creek, mature swamp forest, ponds and upland forest. The swamp has a healthy population of nesting Prothonotary Warblers. We can expect to see other summer resident and migratory warblers, flycatchers, vireos, thrushes and more. Meet at 8:30 AM in the circle by the Chapel. Take exit 76 Off I-85. Drive 2.9 miles north on Innes Street to Catawba College. Turn RIGHT on Faculty Staff Circle.

Tuesday, April 30th: Pee Dee NWR
Full day • Moderate • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]

We tend to focus on Pee Dee in the winter because of all the ducks that come to the refuge, but spring is also an amazing time to bird there. Early spring migrants should be arriving and lingering winter migrants should also be around to provide an wider variety of species. Although we will be doing a lot of driving from one section to another, we’ll probably walk 2-3 miles as well on gravel roads and dirt trails. We will meet at 8:00 AM at the main entrance bathrooms on Rt. 52. Depending on how many folks come, we will car pool onto the refuge from there. Remember to bring a water, lunch, snacks and bug spray (just in case). Sunscreen & hat might also be helpful.

Latta Park (Dilworth)
Thursday, May 2nd and Tuesday, May 7th
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]

It’s that time of the year again - the warblers are coming. There will be several walks at this spring migrant hot spot. Judy will be at the park on the dates listed above. We’ll probably stroll about 1 mile on mostly paved trails but there will be a bit of hill climbing and a lot of standing looking up at the tops of the trees. There are bathrooms. Meet in the parking area by the gazebo at 8:00 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.

See Birds. Share Birds. Save Birds.
Field Trips

Saturday, May 4th: Beginning Bird Walk
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Bill & Laura Blakesley [lclemons@mindspring.com]
Latta Plantation is a great place to begin learning about birds and birding. Although folks of all levels are welcome, we will concentrate on helping folk new to birding learn the basics of using binoculars, spotting a bird, and identification. This will be a two-mile walk on dirt/gravel roads including several moderately steep hills. We’ll have power line right-of-way, woods and prairie/field. We’ll start at 8:30 AM in the parking lot to the right just inside the gate of Latta Nature Preserve. There are bathrooms at the Nature Center.

Tuesday, May 7th: Wing Haven (Senior MAS members Only)
10-11:15 AM • Easy • Contact: Patty Masten [pmasten31@gmail.com]
Do you love nature and birds? Whether you are a novice or bird expert, you are sure to find delight in this special bird walk experience led by Mecklenburg Audubon Society volunteers. MAS has partnered with Wing Haven to offer these special, guided bird walks for Mecklenburg Audubon members. Wing Haven has many benches to sit and observe the birds, brick pathways to stroll and seek, as well as wooded areas to explore. A number of the pathways are ADA compliant and conducive to walkers and wheelchairs. The entire property is about 3 acres. Bring your binoculars and meet/pay at 10:00 AM at the main Garden Gate! The cost is $5/person - seniors only! To register, call 703.331.0664 or register online.

Saturday, May 11th: Latta Park (Dilworth)
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]
Late spring migrants like the Blackpoll warbler should be moving through the park. We’ll probably stroll about 1 mile on mostly paved trails but there will be a bit of hill climbing and a lot of standing looking up at the tops of the trees. There are bathrooms. Meet in the parking area by the gazebo at 8:30 AM.

Thursday, May 16th: Landsford Canal, SC
Full Day • Moderate • Contact: Janet Palmer [jgailpalmer@gmail.com]
Have you birded Landsford Canal State Park in SC yet? If not, consider joining us in this beautiful spot where we are likely to see Prothonotary Warblers and Northern Parula! We will walk two trails beside the river and along the remains of a canal used in the early 19th Century, with a little luck seeing one of the nesting Bald Eagles. Our timing puts us early in the blooming season of the Rocky Shoals Spider Lily—a spectacular sight!

We will meet at 7:30AM in the Food Lion parking in Ft. Mill, SC (1046 Regent Pkwy., Fort Mill, SC 29715). Bring snacks, water, lunch and a $5 park fee per person. It may get buggy so bring spray as well. We will be walking about 3 miles on woodland trails that are well maintained but could be muddy.

Saturday, May 18th: Blue Ridge Parkway (Boone Area)
Full Day • Moderate • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]
We will explore a variety of habitats along the BRP as well as take a stroll around the Valle Cruses municipal park. We will be looking for nesting warblers, a variety of flycatchers and other birds unique to this environment. We will meet at 7:30 AM at the Bojangles in Boone (1141 Blowing Rock Rd.). You will need to pack a lunch. There are several local hotels if you want to come up on Friday night. Otherwise it is about a 2 hr. drive from Charlotte. Warning - temperatures can vary greatly as we go up and down in elevation so bring a jacket just in case.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4
Cool Eastern Bluebirds Facts

- The male Eastern Bluebird displays at his nest cavity to attract a female. He brings nest material to the hole, goes in & out, & waves his wings while perched above it. That is pretty much his contribution to nest building; only the female Eastern Bluebird builds the nest and incubates the eggs.

- Eastern Bluebirds typically have more than one successful brood per year. Young produced in early nests usually leave their parents in summer, but young from later nests frequently stay with their parents over the winter.

- Eastern Bluebirds occur across eastern North America and south as far as Nicaragua. Birds that live farther north and in the west of the range tend to lay more eggs than eastern and southern birds.

- Eastern Bluebirds eat mostly insects, wild fruit and berries. Occasionally, Eastern Bluebirds have also been observed capturing and eating larger prey items such as shrews, salamanders, snakes, lizards and tree frogs.

- The oldest recorded Eastern Bluebird was at least 10 years, 6 months old. It was banded in New York in May 1989 and was found dead in South Carolina November 1999.

What is that bird doing at my window?

During nesting season, most birds are extremely territorial. Typically, the male aggressively defends the edges of the territory, while the female tends to defend the area around the nest site. When birds display territorial behaviors at windows, they may be reacting to what they perceive to be a rival bird. While seldom resulting in death or injury, this behavior can increase stress levels (for both the birds and the house occupants!) and is a waste of energy. The behavior generally ceases once egg laying has occurred.

The only effective way to deal with this problem is to eliminate the reflection. Closing the curtains does not usually work, so other options include: covering the window on the outside with cloth, newspaper, or any other type of paper; hanging garden netting over the windows; rubbing the surface of the window with a bar of hand soap; placing a window screen over the window; tying several rows of string across the window (tie several thin pieces of colorful cloth or ribbon from the string); or hanging long, thin pieces of reflective Mylar over the window, allowing them to blow in the breeze.

Field Trips

Weekend, May 31st; June 1st-2nd: Charleston, SC area

**Weekend Trip** • **Moderate** • **Contact:** Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

The Charleston area trip is back. For those who can get there on Friday, we’ll meet at 1:00 PM at Botany Bay Plantation Heritage Preserve (1066 Botany Bay Rd. Edisto Beach, SC). We’ll do the driving loop and walk some trails, one to the beach.

On Saturday, we’ll visit Bear Island and Donnelley Wildlife Management Areas. We’ll start on Sunday with the Edisto Nature Trail, and then finish at Caw Caw County Park around lunch time. Last year, we had 100 species for this trip. Some of the ones we’ll be looking for are Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Painted Bunting, Mississippi and Swallow-tailed Kites, Swainson’s, Kentucky and Prothonotary Warblers, Least Bittern, Bachman’s Sparrow and King Rail. Bring lunch for Saturday. Bug spray is a good idea. At a couple of spots, the mosquitos are banging at your window before you leave your car.

The trip is limited to 20 people. Lodging info will be sent out soon. As we get closer, Ron will let you know starting time and place for the two mornings, close to that area. Drive home on Sunday afternoon.

Tuesday, June 4th:

**Wing Haven (Senior MAS members Only)**

10-11:15 AM • **Easy** • **Contact:** Patty Masten [pmasten31@gmail.com]

Do you love nature and birds? Whether you are a novice or bird expert, you are sure to find delight in this special bird walk experience led by Mecklenburg Audubon Society volunteers. MAS has partnered with Wing Haven to offer these special, guided bird walks for Mecklenburg Audubon members. Wing Haven has many benches to sit and observe the birds, brick pathways to stroll and seek, as well as wooded areas to explore. A number of the pathways are ADA compliant and conducive to walkers and wheelchairs. The entire property is about 3 acres. Bring your binoculars and meet/pay at 10:00 AM at the main Garden Gate! The cost is $5/person - seniors only! To register, call 703.331.0664 or register online.
Attracting Hummingbirds - Safely!

A good number of you may have heard of my amazing trip to Ecuador to see hummingbirds. We tallied 52 species of hummingbirds and that is only a small portion of those that live in South America.

Along with seeing these amazing creatures, we also learned a lot about hummingbird behavior. Susan Campbell, hummingbird expert for the Carolinas was one of our guides. We discussed a variety of issues related to our only hummingbird in the Carolinas - the Ruby-throated hummingbird.

One bit of information that surprised and worried me was that hummingbird feeder manufacturers in an effort to keep insects (especially yellow-jackets) away from the feeders have been making the hole smaller. Some are so small that hummingbirds actually can damage their bills, which is fatal for them. With that in mind Susan suggests that you look very closely at the holes of feeders you buy. The hole needs to be twice the width of the birds bill. To take the guess work out of the equation she recommends only using the feeders shown to the right of this article.

The following are additional suggestions from Susan on how to feed hummingbirds safely. I hope you find her suggestions helpful.

- Judy Walker

Hummingbirds have excellent eyesight and have great fidelity to established feeding stops along their migration route. Attracting hummers to your yard will require a bright splash of color. This can be accomplished by selective plantings or by artificial means such as surveyor’s ribbon or silk flowers. These methods will attract the hummers to your yard making it easier for them to find your feeders. See our list of favorite plants for hummers.

Caring for Feeders

FOOD - Older literature indicates that hummingbirds primarily feed on flowers and your feeders for the sugar water (nectar). However, more recent observational studies strongly suggest they also feed on small soft-bodied insects in much the same manner as flycatchers do. We believe that perhaps one-half of their diet is made up of small arthropods such as fruit flies, gnats, mosquitoes, aphids, spiders, caterpillars and insect eggs.

Hummers are capable of living for extended periods without nectar as a component of their diet. They can quickly convert fat reserves and recently ingested arthropods to energy when deprived of nectar. Foraging is done by “hawking” from an exposed perch, gleaning bark and leaves and robbing sapsucker wells. The ratio for your feeder is one-part sugar to four-parts water.

Please NO food coloring. It is not necessary to buy ready-made nectar because the birds get all the vitamins, minerals and proteins they need from the natural nectar and insects they eat. If the hummers are not emptying your feeders, just partially fill them. Definitely, NO honey or artificial sweeteners in the feeders, this may be harmful to the birds.

CLEANING - Flush the feeders every week with hot tap water and clean with a bottle brush, rinse. Do not use soap. At least once a month, clean the feeders thoroughly with a solution of 1/4 cup bleach to one gallon of water, let it set in this solution for about an hour then if necessary clean with a bottle brush.

Almost all feeders can be dismantled for easier cleaning. Rinse well with running water and let the feeders air-dry completely before refilling. This can be done at night and refilled the next morning, so you don’t disrupt the feeding of the birds. When the temperature is over 80°F, change your feeder solution every 3 to 4 days, flushing the feeders with hot tap water and a bottle brush. We recommend clear glass or plastic feeders so you can keep track of the amount of sugar water and its condition.

Dealing with Pests

ANTS: Dip a pipe cleaner in vegetable oil and wrap it around the wire from which the feeder hangs. Ants will not cross the oil. Re-oil occasionally.

ANT TRAPS: A cup that holds water from which you hang the feeder. This makes a water barrier the ants will not cross.

YELLOW JACKET, WASP AND HORNET TRAP: A plastic jar with special ports that is baited. It is an excellent way to reduce the numbers of these pests at your feeders and in your yard.
The Prothonotary Warbler is a vibrant, bright little Yellow Bird with a song that sounds like “Sweet, Sweet, Sweet, Sweet, Sweet”. It is a favorite of birders to see in the spring and summer. Prothonotary Warblers are referred to as “Swamp Warblers of the southeast.” They love stagnant, swampy standing water with a tree canopy so there are abundance of bugs and insects. This bird breeds in our area and is the only eastern warbler that breeds in holes created by woodpeckers, chickadees in natural holes, dead standing trees and in nest boxes. Their nesting season starts now (April) to the end of July and they can have two clutches in a nesting season.

Unfortunately these birds are on the decline due to habitat loss. Since last fall, MAS has been working on a conservation project with Cabarrus County to help Prothonotary Warblers in our area by installing nest boxes in appropriate habitat. Installing nest boxes to help them has been very successful in other areas such as Virginia, South Carolina, Ohio, Louisiana and Georgia. We are hoping they will be successful here as well.

To help us with this project Tanner Heintz, a Boy Scout, made this his Eagle Scout Project. Alycia Hagler and Carly Miller, also made this their Girl Scout Gold Project. We have just finished installing all the boxes in 10 locations in Cabarrus County with a total of 30 boxes. These locations are in Rob Wallace Park, Vietnam Veterans Park, McEachern Greenway, Pharr Mill Park, Moss Creek Greenway, Weddington Dog Park, Future Greenway across from Weddington Dog Park, Hector Henry Greenway below Embassy Suites off Bruton Smith Blvd, Rocky River Golf Club, and BFI Waste.

The boxes will be monitored weekly by our Conservation Chair, Patty Masten, and several volunteers from the Concord Wildlife Alliance, (we are excited to have their help.) We will be sending out updates and let you know when we see the birds using the boxes. We are super excited with this project and are looking forward to the Prothonotary Warblers coming back.
This bird observation platform is one of the inviting features at the new SEED (Student Environmental Education and Discovery) Wildlife and Children’s Garden at Wing Haven Gardens and Bird Sanctuary. It was made possible by the financial support of Mecklenburg Audubon: your dues, donations and a special donor bequest.

The SEED garden grand opening was Saturday April 27. In addition to the viewing platform, there is an outdoor classroom, bird feeders, a running water feature, bird blind, painting wall, worm digging area and many other outdoor features for children to experience nature in an unstructured environment. It will also be the site of many children’s programs including the Wing Haven summer camp, story time and others. The plantings are all native plants.

This continues our long-standing relationship with Wing Haven, the site where Mecklenburg Audubon was founded in 1940. Visit the SEED garden at Wing Haven and take pride in our club’s contribution to the outdoor education of the next generation. Visitor information at www.winghavengardens.org.
Birds, Nature & Community

A NEWLY CREATED FESTIVAL!

MAS is co-sponsoring an event with the North End Community Coalition on May 25 at Druid Hills Neighborhood Park. Our main emphasis is going to be targeted to the children but we will have a table for adults to learn about birds also. We hope we can provide, along with some of our community partners many varied activities to teach these children in this community about birds and the wonderful creatures they are. Children are our future conservationists and environmentalists. Teaching them to love and respect nature at a young age will want them to contribute as adults to these efforts to help birds for years to come.

At least 10-12 volunteers from MAS are needed to help facilitate this festival. More would even be better so we can have 2 per activity. The commitment of hours is from 9:00 AM for Set up to 2:00 PM after take down. Festival is open 10:00 AM until 1:00 PM. You can work the full festival or the morning or afternoon shift. We can actually have volunteers to set up from 9-10 then help intake down from 1-2. You will be trained by current MAS volunteers who are doing festivals like this 5-8 times per year. Come out and discover why some of us do these events and love the interaction with adults and children. I’d be willing to bet you could be a new MAS member who talked with us at such a festival this past year.

MAS has many varied activities for festivals we attend. I’d like to bring most of these activities to the children in these 7 communities we are targeting.

Thanks for giving time to a very worthwhile cause.

Contact Jill Palmer [jpalmer53@earthlink.net] to help out.

When It’s Just Too Darn Hot!

Right now the weather is great for birding, but in another month or so it will be just too darn hot to be out. So while you are keeping cool, dreaming of birding, why not try Fantasy Birding (https://fantasybirding.com)?

This isn’t a joke. It’s a game for armchair naturalists of all ages and interest levels. Like fantasy sports, it allows you to enter a variety of contests with other players, make moves over the course of a “season,” and earn points based on real-world results. Here those results are based on data from eBird, the world’s largest citizen science biodiversity project, where some 400,000 birders have submitted over 30 million checklists.

Try it! You’ll learn a lot.

Audubon News is published monthly from September through May by the Mecklenburg Audubon Society, a chapter of National Audubon. Local members receive the newsletter via postal mail and/or electronic mail. It is also posted on the Mecklenburg Audubon website - meckbirds.org.
As the MAS activities wind down for the summer, here’s a reminder that it’s time to **Renew your membership**. Don’t worry if you recently joined you are good until June 2020. But the rest of us have to dig into our piggy banks to find some funds to renew our memberships for another year.

Local membership dues help cover administration costs such as the website, programs, printing display materials and much more. In contrast, all of the monies we raise through coffee sales, raffles, auctions, etc. are used for conservation and education efforts.

Take a fews minutes to fill out the form below and send it to our illustrious treasurer. Or go to the website (meckbirds.org/membership.html) and pay with a credit or debit card.

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**Mecklenburg Audubon Society**

Renew now and your membership will be effective until June 2020.

Local Membership covers the cost of the newsletter, web site, meetings and other administrative commitments.

- Renewal
- Individual Membership [$10]
- Family Membership [$15]
- Additional Donation $ _____

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