Come, extend the holiday cheer into the New Year at Mecklenburg Audubon’s annual Potluck and Photo Share meeting. 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 cold 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. Please, label the drive, so we can get it back to you. Also, it would be very helpful if the picture files had ‘real’ names, not IMG_. If you want them a specific order, start the name of the file with a number, i.e. 01robin, 02bluejay, 03wren, etc.

If you store your photos in the cloud and would rather share them from there, send Judy (birdwalker@me.com) a link to the folder by January 1st. She will then download the photos and incorporate them into the slide show. Contact her directly if you have any questions.

This is 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!

Who’s New?
Jessy Beasley
Jacqueline & Richard Boersema
Angela Caroway
Hilda Francois
Anna Gallant Carter
Beth, Bob & Katie Gibson
Melissa Jackson
Kelly Lojk
Millicent Mitchell
Abizar Rangwala
John Scavetto
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, January 4th - Pee Dee NWR CBC**

**Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]**

There is nothing quite like knowing you are the only one wandering the paths of a wildlife refuge. That’s what it is like at the Pee Dee Count. We have the refuge to ourselves and it’s a wonderful opportunity to see a wide variety of birds and hopefully other animals in a truly wild environment. Habitats include open fields, mixed woodlands and small lakes and ponds. Red-headed Woodpeckers and ducks abound, and if we are lucky, a few Tundra Swans might grace the landscape.

For those who would like to carpool, we will meet at 5:45 AM at the McDonald’s at the Windsor Square Shopping Center on Independence. Let Judy know if you want to car pool. Otherwise plan to be at the refuge’s new office at 7:00 AM, which is on the Wildlife Drive adjacent to Sullivan’s Pond. From the main entrance off of Rt. 52 drive straight past the bathrooms onto Wildlife Drive. It’s about 1/4 mile down the road.

We will be out in the field all day so remember to dress warmly as things can get pretty cold out in the fields. Waterproof shoes would also be helpful but not necessary. There will be a hot lunch to warm our inners and energize us for an afternoon of more birding. If you plan to attend contact Judy Walker.

**Tuesday, Jan. 7th - Wing Haven (Senior MAS members Only)**

**Mid-morning • 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. The cost is $5/person - seniors only! To register, call 704.331.0664 or register online. Remember to bring your binoculars!

**Thursday, January 9th - Little Sugar Creek Greenway**

(a.k.a. Huntingtowne Farms Greenway)

**1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]**

The county has extended the Huntingtowne Farms section of the Little Sugar Creek Greenway into an area that hasn’t been birded at all. So, let’s take a look at this new section and see how the habitat has changed. The bulk of this walk will be paved but a portion may be on dirt. We will meet at 9:00 AM in the parking lot at the end of Huntingtowne Farms Lane (adjacent to the South Park Swim & Tennis Club). There are no facilities.
**Field Trips**

**Saturday, Jan. 11th: McDowell Prairie/Copperhead Island**

½ Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

We will be looking for winter migrants including waterfowl at Copperhead Island. We will be walking 2-3 miles on trails that can be uneven at times. There are no facilities. 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.

**Thursday, January 16th: Colonel Francis Beatty Park**

1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]

Wintering sparrows should be settled in and the area behind the ball fields at this park looks like good habitat for them. We’ll also check out the lake for waterfowl and the adjacent woods for other winter visitors. The trails are natural and basically flat, but the area behind the ball fields although flat can be a bit uneven. Meet at 9:00 AM in the baseball fields parking lot. There are bathrooms available in the park.

**Tuesday, January 21st: Clark’s Creek Nature Preserve**

1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]

Habitat at this nature preserve is great for wintering sparrows, so we will wander the trail to see what we might stir up. Woodpeckers are also abundant and it’s always a delight to see the meadow larks. We will walk about 2 miles on natural, flat paths but there a few small rolling hills. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Hucks Road. There is a port-a-john at the parking lot.

**Weekend, January 25-26 - Huntington Beach State Park, SC**

Full Day • Moderate • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]

Our winter excursion to Huntington Beach State Park in South Carolina is an annual favorite offering some different bird species than our fall trip. Waterfowl - both fresh-water 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 28th: Four-mile Creek Greenway**

1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

Winter migrants should be settled into this productive greenway, which has a variety of habitats that always provide good birds regardless of season. We’ll walk 2.5 - 3 miles on a paved, flat walkway. There is a bathroom at the parking lot. Meet at the Johnson Rd. parking lot at 8:00 AM.

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**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.
A Dabbler or a Diver?

What Kind of Summit Volunteer Are YOU???

When Mecklenburg Audubon hosts the Audubon North Carolina Summit 2020 at the Hilton Charlotte University Place, we’ll have spots for all kinds of volunteers. Got a little time to spare after work on April 17th? You could volunteer for a 1- or 2-hour dabbler shift at the Registration Table. Or you could go full-dive on Saturday or Sunday morning as a Field Trip Lobby Coordinator. You can sign up at the MAS January Potluck on Thursday, January 2 at the Tyvola Senior Center or email Noreen George at heartreen@aol.com if you have questions or are ready to pick your shift. Thanks!

Volunteer Perk! Free admission to the Saturday Night Awards Banquet if you sign up for at least 4 hours of Summit volunteering. Details to come.

Summit Volunteer Job Descriptions

Pre-Summit Preparation: Early April. Assemble swag bags and prep décor.

Registration Table: Nine shifts of 1, 2 or 3 hours each on Friday 4/17, Saturday 4/18 and Sunday 4/19. Duties: Greet guests, pass out nametags, give information and provide directions. The state office will offer a Registration Webinar the week of 4/6.

Banquet Set-up and Décor: 5-7 p.m. Saturday 4/18. Put native plant on each table, move pop-up signage in, etc.

Field Trip Lobby Coordination: 6-8 a.m. and 12-1:30 p.m. Saturday, 4/18; 6:30-8 a.m. Sunday 4/19.

Registration Take Down: 1-2 p.m. Sunday 4/19

We are thrilled to announce that our No. 1 choice for Summit Keynote Speaker has said “Yes!”

Michael S. Regan, Secretary of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, will share his story at the Summit Awards Banquet Saturday Night!

Governor Roy Cooper appointed Michael S. Regan secretary of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality in January 2017. Secretary Regan took over the leadership of the state’s environmental agency after spending 18 years working on environmental regulatory and advocacy initiatives. He served in numerous leadership roles for the Environmental Defense Fund. He also spent a decade with the EPA, working in the air quality and energy programs for both the Clinton and Bush administrations. Regan served as an EPA national program manager, designing programs aimed at reducing pollution and finding market-based solutions to improve energy efficiency and overcome climate-related challenges. Regan has served on a number of boards and commissions focused on environmental issues, including the University of North Carolina School of Law’s Center for Climate, Energy, Environment and Economics, and the N.C. Energy Policy Council.

Online Summit Registration Opens January 15, 2020
Wintertime, and the livin’ ain’t easy. Birds are hungry, and the snow’s piling high. We all know by now that birds can survive without our help in the winter. Some ornithologists have even suggested that bird feeding is more beneficial to us (humans) than it is to the birds. Be that as it may, studies have shown that birds with access to bird feeders in winter survive at a higher rate than birds without access to feeders. The difference between the haves and the have-nots is not huge, but it’s there. Feeding birds in winter, if done right, is a good thing for the birds (and for us, too).

8. Keep extra feeders for use in bad weather. We keep an extra-large-capacity tube feeder in the garage for use when nasty weather comes. It not only gives the birds another place to eat, which means more birds can eat at one time, but it also cuts down on our trips outside for refilling the feeders. Other extras to consider having: peanut feeder, suet feeder, satellite feeder (for the small birds to use), and a hopper feeder.

7. Scatter seed in sheltered places. Not all birds will venture to your feeder. Some species prefer to skulk in the thickets, brambles, and other secure places. For these species, consider scattering some seed (black-oil sunflower, sunflower bits, peanut bits, mixed seed) under your deck, in your hedges and bushes, or even along the edge of a wooded area. At our farm the eastern towhees, dark-eyed juncos, and Carolina wrens much prefer to feed on food scattered under our deck. Many of the white-throated sparrows appreciate the seed we toss into the raspberry thicket on the edge of our woods.

6. Put out high-energy foods such as suet, meat scraps, and peanut butter. Fat gives the biggest energy boost to winter birds, and without enough energy to keep them going, many songbirds would not survive a cold winter night. Suet (the fat removed from processed beef), meat scraps, and peanut butter all provide fat to birds that eat them. If you don’t have a suet feeder, use a mesh onion bag. Suspend it from a tree branch or iron feeder hook. To feed peanut butter, drill one-inch holes in a foot-long section of a small log. Insert a screw eye into one end of the log. Smear peanut butter into the holes and suspend the feeder from the screw eye. And, no, peanut butter will not stick to the roof of a bird’s bill and choke it to death.

5. Use a birdbath heater wisely. A water heater can keep your birdbath open in the coldest of weather, which is good and bad. It’s good because birds need water to drink when it’s cold. If there’s snow, birds can use the snow for water. But if there’s no snow they may have no access to water.

There is some anecdotal evidence that birds will bathe in open water in very cold weather (below 0o F), and the water may freeze on their feathers before it dries up. This can be very bad—even fatal—for birds. I suggest you place several large rocks in your bath so there is not enough room for a bird to bathe, but still plenty of places for a thirsty bird to get a drink. When the weather warms up you can remove the rocks and let your birds get on with their hygiene.

4. Offer mealworms in a heavy dish or small crock. I’m a big mealworm fan, although I don’t eat them. The birds at our house appear for their mealworms every morning, especially in winter. Where else are they going to get live food when the ground is frozen? Use a heavy dish so the wind can’t blow the worms and dish away. We use a small dog dish made of glazed crockery. The worms can’t climb its slick sides.

3. Furnish your bird houses. Imagine you’re a bird roosting in a nest box on a cold winter’s night. Wouldn’t it be nice to snuggle down into some dried grass or dry wood shavings in the bottom of the house? We usually layer three to four inches of clean dry meadow grass in the bottom of our...
Helping Birds

bluebird boxes after the last nesting of the summer. Every one of our boxes is used as a roost site in the off-season. Wood shavings work well, too. Don’t use sawdust, however; it can retain moisture once wet, which does not help the birds keep warm.

2. Plug the air vent holes in your bird houses with removable weather stripping. We use the claylike weather stripping that comes in a roll (Moretite is one brand) to plug the air vent holes in our bird houses. Good ventilation is necessary on a scorching summer day, but it’s a real liability for birds seeking winter shelter. Think how cozy the birds will be in a well-sealed house.

1. Be ready for big changes in weather. If you keep abreast of the weather developments you’ll know when bad weather is coming, and you’ll be able to stock up on seed, suet, and other goodies. You can also be ready to take on some of the activities listed above. Conversely, when the weather breaks, take advantage by cleaning and disinfecting your feeders (one part bleach to nine parts hot water). Whatever you do, don’t let yourself be caught totally unprepared for harsh winter weather. The birds don’t have to live off of your feeder largess, but it sure helps make the winter livin’ a little easier.

How birds keep warm


Birds have a number of ways to beat the cold, but none so important as their feathers. You may have noticed how on a very cold day the birds at your feeder seem rounder and more puffed-up than usual. This is a way of keeping warm by raising the feathers to create pockets of warm air and enhance insulation. In addition, many species change their plumage, molting into a fresh thick set of feathers prior to the colder months.

Especially helpful are the very fluffy and soft body feathers known as down. These feathers provide super insulation, much like the goose down we use in coats and comforters.

At night, birds can dramatically slow down their body’s metabolic rate (the rate at which the body consumes energy) and lower their body temperature to conserve energy. During very cold nights, small birds such as chickadees and nuthatches may find a tree cavity or birdhouse where they can spend the night, huddled together with several other birds of the same species. Such communal roosting permits the birds to share body heat. There have been reports of as many as 20 pygmy nuthatches sharing a single tree cavity. Ducks can swim in water that is almost frozen because their feathers have natural oils and are waterproof. Waterproof feathers retain all of their insulating ability. Ducks have a netlike system of blood vessels in their legs that brings warm blood from the heart alongside cold blood returning from the feet, keeping the feet warm in icy water.

What do birds do when it’s windy?

When it comes to wind, birds have many coping behaviors. They face the wind so moving air does not ruffle their feathers, thereby robbing them of the insulating heat layer between feathers and skin. They stay low to the ground, where the wind speed is lower, and in the lee of any objects that can deflect the wind: tree trunks, power poles, fence posts, shrubs, grass clumps, buildings. Birds also move as little as possible, thus conserving energy. Because they keep to dense cover, birding in high winds may be a bird-free proposition.
New Camera for Christmas?

Some of you may have received a new camera for Christmas, or you have just recently become interested in photographing birds. Here is a condensed version of Audubon’s Guide to Ethical Bird Photography (http://bit.ly/2ORFXGb). You should also check out Audubon’s Photography website (https://www.audubon.org/photography). It has tips and how-tos for advanced photographers as well as newbies. There is also a section on equipment.

The first essential element in bird photography is a sincere respect for the birds and their environment. In any conflict of interest, the well-being of the birds and their habitats must come before the ambitions of the photographer. Here are some basic guidelines.

Avoid causing unnecessary disturbance or stress to birds.

- Use a telephoto lens and maintain enough distance to allow your subject to behave naturally. Blinds offer a great way to watch and photograph birds without disturbance.
- Never advance on birds with the intention of making them fly, whether they are lone birds or flocks of birds.
- If your approach causes a bird to flush (fly or run away) or change its behavior, you’re too close. Some birds may “freeze” in place rather than flying away, or may hunch into a protective, aggressive, or preflight stance. Watch for changes in posture indicating that the birds are stressed, and if you see these, back away.
- Learn the rules and laws of the location.
- Use flash sparingly (if at all), as a supplement to natural light. Avoid the use of flash on nocturnal birds (e.g., owls, nightjars) at night, as it may temporarily limit their ability to hunt for food or avoid obstacles.
- Before sharing locations of specific birds with other photographers or birders, think carefully about potential impacts to the birds or their habitats, both individual and cumulative.
- Remove GPS data from your images for rare or sensitive species like owls.
- Concern for birds’ habitat is also essential. Be aware and respectful of your surroundings. Avoid trampling sensitive vegetation or disturbing other wildlife.
- DO NOT use drones to photograph birds, especially at their nests.

Nesting birds are particularly vulnerable and need special consideration.

- Keep a respectful distance from the nest. Telephoto lenses of at least 500mm are recommended.
- Avoid flushing the adults, scaring the young, or doing anything to draw the attention of predators to the nest.
- Do not move or cut anything from around the nest, such as branches or leaves, as these provide both essential camouflage and protection from the elements.

Beach-nesting birds (shorebirds and seabirds) require special care.

- Respect and give space to the boundaries of roped-off nesting areas. Parents frightened from their nests leave young vulnerable to swift predation from gulls and other animals.
- Situate yourself so that you are not in a direct line from the nest area to the water, which can inhibit the family and/or chicks from heading down to the waterline to feed.
- Luring birds closer for photography is often possible but should be done in a responsible way.

The guiding principle: Could it be harmful to the bird? Always research the species and its behavior.

- Bird feeding stations, whether or not they’re used for photography, should be kept clean, stocked only with appropriate food items, and positioned with the birds’ safety in mind.

Continued on page 8
Photography Ethics

- Never lure birds (including but not limited to hawks, owls, eagles, ospreys, roadrunners) with bait. “Bait” includes live animals (such as snakes, fish, mice, crickets, worms); dead animals or parts of animals; processed meat; and decoys such as fake mice.
- Playback of bird voices to lure them closer for photography should be used sparingly, and not at all in the case of endangered birds, or birds at critical points in their nesting cycle.
- Show respect for private and public property, and consideration for other people.
  - Enter private land only with permission. On public property such as parks and refuges, be aware of local regulations, hours, and closed areas.
  - Be respectful of birds located on private land but viewable from a public vantage point, and also respect the privacy of these private landowners. If they are uncomfortable with your presence, leave.
- In group situations, be considerate of other photographers and birders watching the same bird. Remember that your desire to photograph the bird doesn’t outweigh the rights of others to observe it.
- Remember also that large groups of people are potentially more disturbing to birds, so it may be necessary to keep a greater distance.

Show respect for private and public property, and consideration for other people.

You’re crazy about birds and photography. Now combine your twin passions by entering your best bird photos in the 2020 Audubon Photography Awards. You could win a cash prize or, if you’re our Youth winner, a special trip that will help you become an even better birder or bird photographer. Winning photos will be published in future issues of Audubon and Nature’s Best Photography magazines and will travel across the country in a special Audubon Photography Awards exhibit.

Official rules can be found on the Audubon website (http://bit.ly/2Qtilg)

Win: Cash prizes up to $5,000

Special Youth prize: Six days at the Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine (transportation included)

Check out the 2019 Winners (http://bit.ly/35VsZvH)

Compiled with the help of Jennifer Bogo, Walker Golder, Sean Graesser, Melissa Groo, Erik Johnson, Kenn Kaufmann, Jim Verhagen, Stan Stenner, the Audubon photo and social media teams.
How well do you know Chickadees?

Can you identify these chicks?

We see OUR Carolina Chickadee almost daily and we think we know it pretty well. But what do you know about its cousins scattered elsewhere around the continent?

1. How many species of chickadee reside in the United States?
   a) Three  b) Five  c) Seven  d) Nine

2. What color are chickadee eggs?
   a) White  b) Blue  c) Brown  d) Purple

3. Which of the following is true of most chickadees?
   a) They are cavity nesters  b) They have dark caps and bibs  c) They say chick-a-dee  d) All of the above

4. True or false? Most chickadee species are nonmigratory.

5. True or false? Male and female chickadees are indistinguishable to humans.

6. Which of these feeder offerings is best for attracting chickadees?
   a) Millet  b) Cracked corn  c) Nectar  d) Sunflower seeds

7. The black-capped chickadee is the state bird of which two U.S. states?
   a) Ohio and Maryland  b) Massachusetts and Maine  c) Missouri and Oklahoma  d) North Carolina and Arizona

8. Which species is most closely related to the black-capped chickadee?
   a) Boreal chickadee  b) Chestnut-backed chickadee  c) Gray-headed chickadee  d) Mountain chickadee

Adapted from BirdWire - http://bit.ly/34ZqEyu

Top to bottom: Boreal, Black-capped, Chestnut-backed, Mountain chickadee ©Brad Kuntz
Resolutions for a Healthy Yard

Think, plan and plant around the 10 Commandments. Choosing strong native trees, shrubs, and grasses is your best defense against pests and weeds. Test your soil before planting. Adjust nutrients and pH accordingly. Post a sign designating your property a Wildlife Sanctuary.

Go Organic
- Just say NO to toxic chemicals
- Use “brown gold” (compost), slow release organic rock fertilizers or limestone.

Make Your Turf Tough
- Use grass varieties developed for your area.
- Use sharp blades to mow 3-4 inches high. Short clippings decompose fast to add nitrogen instead of thatch.

Go Native!!
- Native plants mean less care, less time, less expense.
- The more native plants in your yard, the more healthy the habitat for birds and other wildlife.
- Challenge– REDUCE LAWN AREA by 25%.

Know Your Enemies
- Get a guide to identify insects.
- Match control to pest,
- Use control only if a high number of insects exist.

- Learn life cycles so you do not treat unnecessarily.

Treat Only When Necessary
- Use nontoxic methods first.
- Pick off and dispose of insects, vacuum, prune out infestations, or hose off garden plants.

Pick Your Pesticides
- Not all chemicals are equal.
- “Shotgun” killers harm beneficial insects.
- Ask your lawn-care service to list pesticides used.
- Look for EPA toxicity ratings: caution (least toxic), warning, poison (most toxic).

Use Biological Controls/Pesticides
- Most have very little environmental impact, act quickly and affect only the target pest.
- Most decompose quickly and affect only the target pest.

Teach Tolerance, Be Tolerant
- Enjoy controlled untidiness, not time-consuming lawn maintenance.
- Show by doing.
- Encourage neighbors to build continuous habitat from yard to yard.

Civic Engagement
A Reminder

Many of us have passion around the various issues of our times, especially those related to the natural world. As individuals we have a responsibility to make our voices known on those issues and a constitutional right to do so. Please keep in mind however, that while acting as individuals we must not appear to be representing or speaking for Mecklenburg Audubon Society, unless it is an activity specifically authorized by the MAS board of directors. The board has created an Advocacy Policy which contains guidance for advocating on issues as individuals. That policy may be found on our website at http://meckbirds.org/MAS_Advocacy_Policy.pdf. If you have any questions, please contact a board member.

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