

FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, October 10 Huntington Beach State Park, SC [Full day]

Now that most of the summer visitors have migrated back to their permanent residences, the birds and birders beginning to flock to Huntington Beach St. Park on a weekly if not daily basis. Fall birding at the can turn up a variety of species. Migrating Peregrines can be seen patrolling the ponds and a fair number of warblers are still hiding in the bushes. One spectacular not to be missed is the thousands of tree sparrows that roost in the trees and put on some amazing aerial displays.

There is camping in the park, on a first come basis. The park fee has gone up to at least \$5 per person. The birding is well worth the cost.

We will meet at 7:30 AM in the parking lot on the east side of the causeway. We will bird all day and weather can be very variable. Bring a lunch, snack, plenty of water, and protection from the sun and mosquitoes.

If you are planning to go on this trip contact Judy Walker at 704-537-8181 [leave a message] or birdwalker@mac.com.

Saturday, October 18 Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge [Full day]

In celebration of National Wildlife Refuge Week we will visit our very own NWR just north of Wadesboro, NC. We should encounter the last of the summer migrants moving out and the first of the winter migrants moving in. If the weather stays warm we should also have a fair number of butterflies. There will be a lot of different habitats to explore so who knows what we will turn up.

We will meet at the Mc Donalds at Windsor Square Shopping Center on Rt 74 at 7 AM. Don't forget a lunch, water and good walking shoes. If you want to go on this trip contact Judy Walker at 704-537-8181 [leave a message] or birdwalker@mac.com.

Saturday, October 25 Mc Dowell Prairie [1/2 day]

Although still a diamond in the rough this site great place for birding just about any time of the year. But in the fall this acreage is a paradise for migrant sparrows and other grassland birds we don't usually get to see. Last year the winds of one of the late hurricanes blew in a ground dove as well as some very interesting butterflies.

To see the best parts of the prairie we will be doing a lot of walking, so wear sturdy shoes. If it has rained you can expect mud. Although this is a 1/2 day trip snacks and water are recommended.

If you are interest going on this trip contact Taylor Piephoff at PiephoffT@AOL.COM or 532-6336



- ...keep members abreast of local, state and regional conservation issues?
- ...lead a field trip? [You don't have to be an expert birder to do this.]
- ...us maintain our membership database and print out lables?
- ...write an article for the newsletter?
- ...contact educators about Audubon Adventures?
- ...address newsletters?
- ...give a program on bird or other related topics for local groups?
- ...a school with their Project Feeder Watch?

If you answered yes to any of these questions please let one of the board members know ASAP.

In the past year several folks have left the MAS board. Those of us left are feeling a little overly stretched and stressed. So if you can help out in any ways we would love to have your assistance.

What's growing in Your Backyard?

Besides watching the migrating birds fall is a great time to think about what to plant in your yard that will provide the best habitat for both migrants and resident birds alike. While you are considering what to plant think about this:

- ⊗ According to the North Carolina Botanical Gardens "Biota of North America" study, at least 4,000 species of non-native plants occur outside cultivation in the United States. Most of these escaped species cause few problems, but **79 species cost the U.S. economy more than 97 billion dollars annually** in lost crops, failed recovery efforts for endangered species, and control efforts.
- ⊗ Invasive species have contributed to the decline of 42% of U.S. endangered and threatened species, and for 18% of U.S. endangered or threatened species, invasives are the main cause of their decline. Invasive species compete directly with native species for moisture, sunlight, nutrients, and space.
- ⊗ Additionally, some studies suggest that the fruit produced by invasives may not be as nutritious for local wildlife, requiring them to eat more frequently. Fruits and seeds of invasive species are the "junk food" of the natural world.

Do you have some these thugs in your yard?
If so try these alternatives.

Buddleia davidii (Butterfly Bush) try
Callicarpa americana (American Beautyberry); *Hydrangea arborescens* (Wild Hydrangea); *Oxydendrum arboreum* (Sourwood); *Rhododendron* spp (Azalea); *Sambucus* spp. (Elderberry); *Symphoricarpos* spp. (Snowberry); or *Viburnum*

Elaeagnus angustifolia (Russian Olive) try
Ceanothus spp. (Ceanothus); *Eleagnus commutatus* (Silverberry); *Myrica* spp. (Bayberry)

Just for fun



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 grumbling of grouse
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
a statutory of mynas
a bushel of Acorn Woodpeckers
a gulp of swallows
a construction of cranes
a bunch of Olive Sparrows



IDENTIFYING SPARROWS

THE GENERIC APPROACH

For many birders, it seems that *all* sparrows are difficult to name. There are various reasons for this, often including the secretive nature of the birds themselves, but magnifying all other problems is the fact that the “field marks approach” works very poorly on sparrows.

Here is a typical encounter between a beginner (myself, a few years ago) and a sparrow. The sparrow sets off the encounter by flying up onto a fence wire. Fighting off a sense of panic, the birder tries to focus on field marks. Does the bird have a streaked or plain breast? Streaked; okay. Is there or is there not a pale central stripe on the crown? Can't see that at this angle. What about a central breast spot? And wing bars; do those pale lines qualify as wing bars? At this point the bird drops back into the grass. The observer has noted only *one* definite field mark: the streaked breast; that would rule out some species, except that even most plain-breasted sparrows have streaks in juvenile plumage.

On the other hand, an experienced birder will often know what a sparrow is after a split-second glimpse—narrowing down the choice, if not to species, at least to a group of two or three related forms. Can practiced eyes really tabulate field marks so fast? Not likely; the expert is probably using a different system entirely, one that begins not with field marks but with the characteristic shape and behavior of each group of sparrows.

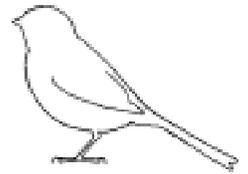
Consider, for example, a comparison between the typical eastern forms of Savannah Sparrow and Song Sparrow. They are quite similar in *plumage pattern*, but their *shapes* are so different that the practiced birder will never confuse them.

Here are the major groups of eastern sparrows are described and compared. When you see the sparrows you know in the field, think of them as members of these groups, and try to see how shape, habitat, and behavior help to make them distinctive.

Spizella. Chipping, Clay-colored, and Field. Small sparrows with rounded heads, small bills, and medium-long tails that are usually notched at the tip. Generally found in wooded or brushy areas, not open grass or marshes. In migration and winter usually in small flocks; often feed on the ground, but also seen high in trees, and likely to perch conspicuously in the open. Most call notes are thin and lisping.

Vesper Sparrow. A medium-large sparrow with a medium-length, square tipped tail, the outer tail feathers noticeably white. Inhabits fields, including dry fields and brushy areas. In winter often found in small, loose flocks; not particularly secretive, often perching in the open. Call note a loud *hsip*.

Spizella



Vesper



Lark



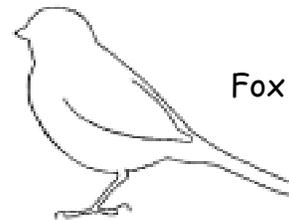
Savannah



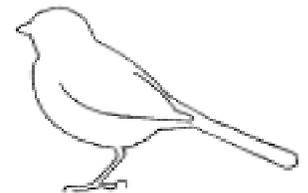
Ammodramus



Fox



Melospiza



Zonotrichia



Lark Sparrow. A rather large sparrow; tail rather long, with a broad rounded tip and conspicuous white outer edges and comers. Inhabits brushy country near areas of bare ground; often perches conspicuously in the open. Often in small, loose flocks in winter. May fly rather high, giving a sharp, metallic call note.

Savannah Sparrow. A small, short-tailed sparrow, similar to *Ammodramus* (next) but not as chunky, large-headed, flat-crowned, or large-billed as the field-inhabiting members of that genus. Inhabits fields and marshes. Not particularly secretive. Often in loose flocks in winter. Thin, lisping call notes; often calls when flushed.

Ammodramus. **Grasshopper, Henslow's, Le Conte's, Sharp-tailed, and Seaside sparrows.** Chunky, short-tailed birds with flat foreheads; the first three species listed above look large-headed and large-billed, while the latter three have proportionately smaller heads and thinner bills. Inhabit fields, wet meadows, and marshes, tending to be secretive, not perching freely in the open except when singing. Never found in flocks. Most call notes are thin and lisping; usually silent when flushed.

Fox Sparrow. A large sparrow; rather chunky, with a medium-long tail. Bill shape varies regionally: some races have a large bill with a swollen lower mandible. Usually on the ground in woods or brush, foraging by scratching with its feet among dead leaves. Often mixes with other sparrows in winter, but seldom forms flocks of its own kind. Call notes sharp and distinctive.

Melospiza. **Song, Lincoln's, and Swamp sparrows.** Robust, medium-large sparrows, with longish tails that are rounded at the tip. Usually found low in dense vegetation, and can be secretive. Never in large flocks: usually solitary, or in pairs at the most. Call notes are loud and distinctive.

Zonotrichia. **White-throated and White-crowned.** Medium-large to large sparrows, with tail fairly long and square-tipped, crown slightly peaked, bill not disproportionately large. In winter found in brushy areas, almost always in flocks; feed on the ground but often perch conspicuously in the open when disturbed. Call notes sharp and distinctive.

Some Pitfalls of Sparrow Identification

Median crown stripes: In several cases among the sparrows, the presence or absence of a pale stripe down the center of the crown is a significant field mark. But there is a potential hazard here: some sparrows with crowns that are either solidly colored or evenly patterned with fine streaks may show a short, pale median stripe on the forehead, just above the base of the upper mandible. Viewed from some angles, this could be interpreted as a median crown stripe.

Central breast spots: The central spot on the breast is an often quoted field mark for the Song Sparrow, American Tree Sparrow, and some others, but it is not an infallible mark. The streaks may or may not seem to coalesce into a central spot on any of the streak-breasted sparrows. On plain-breasted species, any ruffling of the feathers can expose their darker

basal areas, briefly creating the impression of a dark spot.

Breast streaking: Bird guides often separate sparrows into broad categories by noting whether they have streaked or plain underparts, but it can be misleading to use this as an absolute field mark. In almost all sparrows, the juveniles have finely streaked breasts, and some species (for example, Chipping Sparrow) retain these streaks for some time after they are independent. Even adults of some plain-breasted species can show a vaguely streaked or mottled effect in this area. Conversely summer adults of some streaked-breasted sparrows can be in such worn plumage that they appear unstreaked.

Other sparrow-like birds:

It is worth remembering that a confusing little thick-billed brown bird does not have to be one of our sparrows. There are some other common candidates, like Pine Siskins, winter-plumaged longspurs, and female-plumaged *Carpodacus* finches. Although they are not closely similar to any particular sparrow, they can cause temporary confusion. A "sparrow" that looks truly confusing could turn out to be an escaped cage bird or zoo bird of some kind—many exotic finches are kept in captivity—or even a stray individual of some migratory species from Eurasia.



What have you learned can you? Can you ID this bird? The first one to email me [birdwalker@mac.com] with the correct ID will win a prize!!

President's Perch

the island. They were the protectors of the island making sure flying predators such as gulls were kept far away. This provided protection for everyone else nesting on the island.

Although this was a wonderful experience, I think got as much fun and pleasure from Eleanor's encounters with new species. She helped me see things I hadn't noticed before about birds I was pretty familiar with, such as the brilliant red feet and mouth of the black guillemot. The look on her face when a ruff grouse drummed very close to us was as exciting as feeling the deep vibrations of the drumming.

I wasn't able to do much other birding this summer which was a let down after two weeks in the north country. But I still was able to experience the joy and excitement of birding by watching the hummingbirds cavort around the yard and adult cardinals feeding young. Looking out the kitchen window recently I watched a mini-wilderness in the fig tree in my neighbors yard. Birds [thrashers, catbirds, towhees, finches, cardinals, hummers, robins, bluebirds], butterflies, bees, squirrels, and who knows what else were enjoying the ripe fruits of the tree. The tree looked like it was doing a dance with all the activity.

There is a reason I am sharing these musings with you, and it's not just to 'brag'. I know that most of you have experienced these special birding moments. I also know the rest of us would like to hear about them. So I am challenging and encouraging

National Wildlife Refuge Month



Although there was a big Centennial Celebration in March for the National Wildlife Refuge System, October is designated NWR month. To celebrate we going to spend time at 'our own' refuge - Pee Dee NWR. The refuges are often miss understood, so here are the -

Guiding Principles of the National Wildlife Refuge System

- We are land stewards, guided by Aldo Leopold's teachings that land is a community of life and that love and respect for the land is an extension of ethics. We seek to reflect that land ethic in our stewardship and to instill it in others.
- Wild lands and the perpetuation of diverse and abundant wildlife are essential to the quality of the American life.
- We are public servants. We owe our employers, the American people, hard work, integrity, fairness, and a voice in the protection of their trust resources.
- Management, ranging from preservation to active manipulation of habitats and populations, is necessary to achieve Refuge System and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service missions.
- Wildlife-dependent uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and education, when compatible, are legitimate and appropriate uses of the Refuge System.
- Partnerships with those who want to help us meet our mission are welcome and indeed essential.
- Employees are our most valuable resource. They are respected and deserve an empowering, mentoring, and caring work environment.
- We respect the rights, beliefs, and opinions of our neighbors.



you to jot the experiences down and send them to me via email [birdwalker@mac.com] or snail mail and they will be included in the newsletter. It doesn't have to be very long -

a 1/2 page would be great. Poetry would be wonderful! So don't be shy, become an author and see your name in print. Who knows it might be the beginning of a new career!

The Saga of Feral Cats and the Florida Wildlife Commission

by Dr. Larry Barden

On May 30, 2003, The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) adopted a new policy on feral and free-ranging cats. The purpose of this policy was to protect the health and well-being of native Florida wildlife on lands owned or managed by the FWC. The policy would also protect imperiled or endangered native species, such as four sub-species of the beach mouse (*Peromyscus polionotus*), the Lower Keys marsh rabbit (*Sylvilagus palustris hefneri*), and the Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii dougallii*), as provided for under the Federal and Florida Endangered Species Acts. Under these narrow conditions, the FWC would work with local animal control authorities or humane rescue groups to trap and remove cat colonies in the most humane way possible.

Almost immediately, Alley Cat Allies (ACA), a national organization that espouses non-lethal control of feral cats with trap-neuter-release programs (TNR), filed a petition challenging the new policy. TNR programs consist of volunteers who feed colonies of feral cats that have been trapped, neutered, and released. On July 9, 2003, Judge David Maloney denied the FWC's motion to dismiss the ACA's petition. He set a hearing date of September 11, 2003, for the plaintiffs to present their case against the new FWC feral cat policy.

The contention of ACA is that their TNR programs reduce cat populations through sterilization rather than euthanasia. They argue feral cats that have been neutered and released back into their home territories exclude other feral cats that have not been neutered, thereby preventing further increase of feral cat populations. The ASA further contends that their managed cat colonies are well fed by dedicated volunteers and therefore cause little harm to native wildlife.

In 2001, graduate student Daniel Castillo completed his Masters of Science research on managed cat colonies in Miami-Dade County Parks. Castillo has now published his research in a peer-reviewed scientific journal (*Castillo, Daniel, and Alice L. Clarke. 2003. "Trap/Neuter/Release methods ineffective in controlling*

domestic cat "colonies" on public lands." *Natural Areas Journal 23: 247-253*). As the article's title implies, Castillo found that TNR programs do not reduce the size of cat colonies because irresponsible pet owners dump unwanted cats illegally and because the provisioned food supply continually attracts stray cats.

Numerous other scientific studies have documented the depressing effects of feral cats on native mammals, birds, and reptiles. The one rodent species that appears to survive predation by feral cats is the non-native house mouse (*Mus musculus*). In addition, feral cats harbor diseases such as rabies and toxo-plasmosis, both of which affect humans. Furthermore, feral cats do not defend territories when food is abundant, as it is in managed cat colonies.

On 8/29/03, Judge Maloney dismissed the case filed by Alley Cat Allies challenging the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) "Policy on Impacts of Domestic Cats on Native Wildlife." However, in his ruling, the judge made it clear that unless and until the commission formally adopts a rule to manage cat populations, the policy adopted by the FWC is simply a policy without the force of law. Both sides are claiming victory:

"Since the commission's policy is not enforceable by law, the programs to help feral cats can continue," said Becky Robinson, national director of Alley Cat Allies. "Right now, they cannot legally stop someone from carrying out trap, neuter and return."

"This ruling clears the way for us to start implementing our plans," said Angie Raines, spokeswoman for the wildlife commission. "We're going to start a serious assessment and determine what are the most urgent things to take care of. People can be assured that we will handle this in the most humane and socially acceptable way."

Stay tuned for the next exciting episode.



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Mecklenburg Audubon is a chapter of National Audubon. Meetings are held at Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church, 920 N. Sharon Amity Rd. on the first Thursday of each month, September - May at 7:30 PM.

Euonymus fortunei

(Wintercreeper) or *Hedera helix* (English Ivy) try *Gelsemium sempervirens* (Carolina Jessamine); *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* (Virginia Creeper)

Ilex aquifolium (English Holly)

try *Ilex opaca* (American Holly)

Ligustrum species (Privet) try

Ilex vomitoria (Yaupon);
Myrica spp. (Bayberry);
Rhododendron minus vars.
(Carolina Rhododendron)

Lonicera japonica (Japanese honeysuckle) try *Lonicera ciliosa* (Orange Honey-suckle); *Lonicera flava* (Yellow Honeysuckle); *Lonicera sempervirens* (Trumpet Honeysuckle)

For more native alternatives check out <http://www.newfs.org/conservation/docs/invalt2.pdf>

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ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

Sat. 9/27 - Hawk Watching [Full day]
Sun. 9/28 - Jackson Park [Full day]
Thu. 10/22 - Spectacular Spiders [Monthly Meeting]
Sat. 10/11 - Huntington Beach [Full day]
Sat. 10/18 - Pee Dee NWR Work Day [Full day]
Sat. 10/25 - McDowell Prairie [1/2 day]
Thu. 11/6 - Let's Talk Turkey [Monthly Meeting]
Sat. 11/8 - Lower McAlpine/McMullin Creek [1/2 day]
Sat. 11/29 - Brunswick County, NC [Full day]

For additional activities and information go to <http://meckbirds.org>