

Audubon News

March 2004

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Serving Cabarrus, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg and Union Counties in NC and York County SC.

Monthly Meeting

It's Time for a Trip Down-under!!

If you think some of the names for our birds are odd try these - shags, stitchbird, saddleback, rifleman, wrybill, or morepork. Have any idea where they live or what they look like? Well if you don't, join us for the March meeting. Ron Clark and Anne Giles will fill us in on the details, the details of their month long trip to New Zealand that is.

New Zealand is 1,200 miles ESE of Australia and about the size of Colorado. Ron and Anne visited the two main islands plus three smaller ones. The islands are covered with immense grassy hills, black sand beaches, geothermal areas, glaciers and snow-capped peaks. The total bird count for the country is 326 but that includes rarities, vagrants

and those found only on the smaller islands. With those removed there are about 180 species of which Anne and Ron saw 106. Their species list includes 3 penguins, 6 shags, fairy tern [only about 50 left], stitchbirds, saddlebacks, riflemen, wrybills and moreporks. They were able to take a pelagic trip and added giant petrels, wandering albatrosses and Australasian gannets.

So get ready to take a trip to the southern hemisphere and meet some new birds. Join us on Thursday, March 4th at 7:30 PM in the fellowship hall of the Seventh Day Adventist Church on Sharon Amity for a wonderful view of down-under.



We did it Again!!

Once again the Charlotte/Gastonia area has turned out in force to count birds. An unofficial total of 465 checklists were submitted from Charlotte which is slightly less than last year. But it's still tops in the country. If you include the entire metropolitan area 871 checklists were submitted, which is about 100 more than last year. We were also 6th in the nation for the number of individual birds counted. Interestingly, Charlotte led the state in the number of species with 87. The weather in Wilmington must have been pretty bad since they usually lead the state in the number of species.

North Carolina as a whole was very productive. We were 3rd in the nation with the number of checklist submitted—2,308. That was right behind CA & NY. The state was 8th for most birds seen and 9th for the most species—172.

Although we do make this into a little game, it is really the birds that win. The data collected from this event and others throughout the year help scientists understand the habits and need so birds. Knowing that we will be better able to help them survive.

Thanks to everyone who participated. You guys did a great job!

New Zealand In a Nut Shell

New Zealand is 1,200 miles ESE of Australia and about the size of Colorado. It was first settled by Maori tribe. Then in 1800's English came and basically took over. The culture still exhibits much of the Maori influence, especially on North Island. The only endemic mammals are 2 bats and there are no snakes. This is why so many flightless birds evolved on the island. One of the most endangered is the kakapo, a nocturnal flightless parrot. Mammals have been introduced, of course, and are causing the usual havoc. Many of the island birds are endangered.

New Zealand has the largest pigeon in the world, the kekeru or wood pigeon, which is the size of a red-tailed hawk but fatter. It was the home to the moa, which was extirpated by the Maori. It is also where the kiwi lives, the "is it a bird or a mammal?" creature. It does not have any kangaroos, platypus or emus. The wooded areas or "bush" are very lush and tropical, almost impenetrable. The people are very friendly and laid-back. But New Zealand is 16 hours ahead of us so you lose an entire day going over and get back before you left. Most importantly, water goes down the drain counter-clockwise!



FIELD TRIPS

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 we don't know you are coming we might leave without you!!

Friday, March 5th Ribbon Walk Owl Prowl

[Rescheduled] This field trip is being held in conjunction with Ribbon Walk. If you have not been to this gem just north of downtown Charlotte you are missing a treat. Barred owls nest in the old Beech trees and I am sure there is a Great Horned around somewhere.

We will meet at the entrance to the forest at 6:30 PM. We should be out about an hour to hour half. Depends on how cooperative the owls are. Remember to dress warmly. If you are interested in going contact Judy Walker [704-537-8181 or birdwalker@mac.com].

Saturday, March 13th: Mint Hill Park

This is a new field trip location. There are so many great places to bird in Mecklenburg County its hard to fit them all in. Lucy Quintilliano has been birding this park for a couple of years now and it can be very productive. Early March can produce some surprises since winter visitors are gathering for the big push north and there may be some eager neotropical migrants.

Meet at the Bruegger Bagels at Matthews Festival shopping center (Independence and 51) at 7:30. If you are interested in going, contact Lucy Quintilliano at 704-364-9028 or LucyAQ@aol.com.

Saturday, March 27th: Sandhills NWR

We haven't gone to this refuge which outside of McBee, SC in several years so we thought we would add it to the list this year.

The early neotropical migrants should have arrived. But the big draw of this trip is the red cockaded woodpecker. They should be pretty active since it's the beginning of their breeding season.

This is a full day field trip but not a lot of walking. Bring lunch and water. Bathrooms may or may not be available. We will meet at 7 AM at the McDonalds in Windsor Square, which is on Rt. 74 [Independence Blvd.] about a mile or so past Sardis Rd. on the left going towards Monroe. You will have to go into the Windsor Square shopping center to get to it. If you are interested in going, contact Taylor Piephoff at 704-532-6336 or piephofft@aol.com.

Saturday, April 3rd Congaree Swamp NP

Spring in a southern swamp can be a magical time. The Congaree Swamp is a great place to see that magic. Located southeast of Columbia, only about 1.5 hours from Charlotte the swamp is situated along the meandering Congaree River. It is home to champion trees, primeval forest landscapes, and diverse plant and animal life. This 22,200-acre park protects the largest contiguous tract of old-growth bottomland hardwood forest remaining in the United States. Known for its giant hardwoods and towering pines, the park's floodplain forest includes one of the highest canopies in the world and some of the tallest trees in the eastern United States.

Many neotropical migrants - hooded and prothonotary warblers, tanagers, etc. - should have begun to arrive. Pileated woodpeckers and barred owls will

be target residents birds. We will probably encounter some other interesting critters - butterflies and amphibians - as we stroll along the boardwalk. This is always a great trip.

We will meet at the Bojangles on Carowinds Blvd. at 6:30 AM. That should get us to the swamp around 8 AM. We will be doing a lot of walking but it will be on board walk. Remember to bring snacks, water and lunch. If you are interested in joining the group contact Judy Walker at 704-537-8181 or birdwalker@mac.com

Saturday, April 10th: Green Swamp, Brunswick Co.

For those of you who might be in the Wilmington area over the Easter holiday, Taylor Piephoff will be leading a field trip into the Green Swamp in Brunswick County. This Nature Conservancy property is a unique habitat that is fast disappearing in NC. Target birds for the trip will be the Bachman's Sparrow and Red-cockaded Woodpecker. You will also have an opportunity to see endangered venus flytraps and sundews. Butterflies should also be abundant.

If you are interested in this trip please contact Taylor Piephoff at 704-532-6336 or piephofft@aol.com before April 5th for details.

Saturday, April 10th: Redlair Farm, Gaston County

For those of you who are staying in the area for the Easter weekend we will have a 1/2 trip to the Catawba Land Conservancy property in Gaston County. Although we will mainly be looking for birds, there will also be a lot of flora to look at, especially the big leaf magnolias.

Rob Bierregaard will be leading this trip so if you are interested in going contact him at 704-333-2405 or rbierreg@email.uncc.edu for details.

Audubon of North Carolina

Annual Meeting
April 16th & 17th

Join fellow bird and nature enthusiasts from across the state as the Audubon Society of Forsyth County hosts the 11th Annual Audubon North Carolina Meeting on April 16th & 17th in Winston-Salem, NC. This year's event features a private screening of the award-winning "Winged Migration" at the North Carolina School of the Arts, many field trips and programs, and the exciting addition of a Chapters' Breakfast where Audubon leaders from around the state will present topics related to key organizational areas, such as membership, education and finance.

Registration and a reception take place late Friday afternoon at the Hawthorne Inn in historic downtown Winston-Salem. Saturday opens with the new Chapters' Breakfast in the morning followed by a full day of exciting programming.

This year the annual meeting features daylong field trips to Pilot Mountain and Hanging Rock State Parks. Shorter programs include field trips to some of the Piedmont Triad's most popular birding spots, such as Reynolda House and Gardens, Tanglewood Park and Greensboro Lakes, as well as a special trip to the Emily Allen Wildflower Preserve.

On Saturday morning, there is an opportunity to attend a special indoor presentation on seabirds hosted by Dr. David Anderson, Associate Professor of Biology at Wake Forest University, an expert on the evolutionary and behavioral ecology of birds. The festivities on Saturday continue with a reception at the Inn, followed by a seated dinner and dessert. NC Audubon Executive Director Chris Canfield will deliver his annual report during dinner. Later Saturday evening, join us for a private screening of Jacques Perrin's highly acclaimed film, "Winged Migration," at the North Carolina School of the Arts. Participation is open to the public, so members please invite your friends!

If you have questions regarding the annual meeting, contact Sebastian "C" Sommer at 336.761.8216 or via email at nancsom@triad.rr.com. You can also receive information from the NC Audubon office at 919.929.3899. Complete information on the meeting can be found in your February newsletter or on the MAS web site - meckbirds.org.

Migrants, Raptors, & Residents

Saturday, April 24

Get outdoors and learn about migratory birds of the Southeast and how to recognize common birds of western North Carolina forests. Perform bird surveys with a wildlife biologist. Join in on a migrants field trip.

Topics are birding skills, migratory bird issues, successional habitats, and ways to make these topics relevant to students in middle and high school grades. The USDA Forest

Service offers this workshop in partnership with the North Carolina Wildlife Commission and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The workshop qualifies for North Carolina environmental education criteria III credit and a 0.6 continuing education unit.

Registration is \$12 and includes lunch, snacks, and materials. The workshop will be held at the Cradle of Forestry in America. Contact Alice C. Goldstein call (828)877-3350, x203 to register.

Pinewoods Bird Festival

Pebble Hill Plantation
Saturday, April 3rd
www.pinewoodsbirdfestival.com

The second annual Pinewoods Bird Festival takes place on April 3, 2004 at beautiful Pebble Hill Plantation near Thomasville, GA. The Pinewoods Festival held in 2003 was the first event of its kind in Georgia, and we hope state and local non-for-profit organizations and government agencies will help us publicize this year's event in their upcoming newsletters, civic programs, and e-flyers. The 2004 festival features a program that includes:

- Field trips to ancient longleaf pine forests (with many trees >400-years old)

- Research field trips where participants will help band Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, quail, and Bachman's Sparrows

- The Georgia Southern University Raptor Show.

- Hummingbird banding in the Pebble Hill Butterfly Garden,

- Field trips to Birdsong Nature Center.

- Hourly field trips to mature pinewoods on Pebble Hill Plantation.

- An expanded kid's activity area sponsored by the Thomasville Wildlife Arts Festival.

- Lectures on Georgia hummingbirds and butterflies

- Wildflower trips on Pebble Hill Plantation.

Many field trips require pre-registration and will have limited space (typically 20-30). Spaces can be reserved on the festival web page beginning in mid-February. Last year, more than 500 people enjoyed the sights and sounds of the beautiful pinewoods of southwest Georgia.

Continued on page 5



Audubon at Home

Our backyards are our private spaces, but also part of a larger landscape we share with our human and wildlife neighbors. With the right tools and information, we all can do simple things to create a healthier place to live for our families, our communities, and birds, plants, and other wildlife.

The *Audubon At Home* web site [http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/index.html] is about taking personal conservation action to improve the environmental health and habitat quality of our yards and neighborhoods. Together, our actions can have a substantial effect.

Explore the *Audubon At Home* links and resources here for the information, and inspiration, to make conservation actions a part of your everyday life - at home and in your community.

5 Simple Actions... Can make a world of difference.

Reduce pesticide use

Nearly 3/4 of all U.S. households use some type of pesticide, often unnecessarily. Learn more about pesticide risks and healthier alternatives at http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/ReducePesticideUse.html.

Conserve water

Nearly 8 billion gallons of water are used daily in the U.S. for outdoor purposes, mostly landscaping. Read more about the role you can take in water conservation at http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/ConserveWater.html.

Protect water quality

Stormwater runoff is a leading cause of pollution of our nation's waterways and water bodies. Did you know 1 quart of oil dumped down a storm drain can cause an oil slick 2 acres in size? Learn more at http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/ProtectWaterQuality.html.

Remove exotic plant pests

Purple loosestrife, English ivy, kudzu, Japanese honeysuckle... Did you know that these and other familiar plants pose a growing threat to native wildlife? Read more at http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/InvasivePests.html.

Plant native species

What are native plants? Why are they important to birds and other wildlife? Explore these and other questions at http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/PlantNativeSpecies.html.

Attention Educators

Learn about one of the hottest topics around. Not fire, but invasive species. Geared toward 4-6th grade, the National Wildlife Refuge System will be hosting a FREE electronic field trip, eFieldTrip, that your local schools can participate in. In this eFieldTrip, your students will learn about invasive species and why they are a menace.

During April 2004, we will offer schools nationwide the opportunity to participate in the eFieldTrip titled, "Invasive Species ... America's Least Wanted!"

The eFieldTrip has 4 components:

1. Virtual Visit - An interactive multi-media web experience that your students can complete at their own pace.
2. Trip Journal - A worksheet that you can download for students to complete as they participate in the Virtual Visit.
3. Ask an Expert - Students can post a question to the eFieldTrip web site on April 19-21, 2004, and receive an answer from the experts within 1-2 days.
4. Live Web Chat - A live, text based web chat that will allow your students to ask questions of the experts and receive their answers during the chat scheduled for April 22.

There is no cost for schools or students to participate. The National Wildlife Refuge System offers this program as a free educational outreach opportunity.

Registration will open in March. For more information about this efield trip adventure, contact Deborah McCrensky [deborah_mccrensky@fws.gov].

To learn more about efieldtrips visit the website www.efieldtrips.org.

What's All the Noise About?

A man's home is his castle may be a sexist cliché, but it's one rooted in biological fact. Implied in the statement is that a man will defend his home as knights once defended their castles.

Biologists call any defended area a "territory". The defended area may be a food supply, a place to mate or a place to nest. In any case, something within the territory is valued enough by the owner to defend it.

Mammals use a scent to mark the boundaries of their territories – usually with urine [even dogs and cats do this]. Sunfish and bass chase intruders away from their nests during spawning. And lizards get their message across with aggressive displays of 'push-ups' when competitors show up.

Most examples of territoriality are difficult to observe. They occur at night, or under water or require sensory abilities we simply do not possess. But one group of animals flaunts its territorial nature right under our noses – birds. From well before dawn until sunset and beyond, birds sing to claim and defend their territories.

It may come as a surprise to greeting card manufacturers and Disneyesque animators, but birds do not sing for joy, to entertain or just because they feel good. Bird song has much greater meaning. The enjoyment we derived from it is purely incidental.

Usually only males sing, and their song has three purposes.

First, it simply announces to other members of the same species that, "I am here." For example, when the first phoebe arrives this spring, his repetitious "fee bee, fee bee" informs later arriving male phoebes something to the effect that, "I was here first, and

possession is nine-tenths of the law."

Furthermore, song also acts as a keep-out signal to other males. Sung from various perches around the perimeter of the territory, the message seems to be, "You're not welcome here, so keep out." Song has developed as a ritualistic substitute for physical combat. It's a terrific system that seldom breaks down. So injuries occur rarely.

When female phoebes show up a week or so after the males, song fulfills its final purpose. It announces the availability of a bachelor male, "I'm single, a good provider and ready to start a family." Once a male attracts a female's attention, repetitive singing reinforces the pair bond between the male and female.

But many birds communicate in a much more complex manner. In fact, few birds sing just one song. Most sing many. Song sparrows may have a repertoire of 10 songs, wrens and mockingbirds sing hundreds and brown thrashers may master 2,000 songs.

Don Kroodsma, an ornithologist at the University of Massachusetts, lumps bird songs into one of two categories – primary and secondary. Primary songs attract and hold the attention of females. Secondary songs announce to other males territory ownership.

In nature it works like this. An unmated chestnut-sided warbler, for example, sings his primary song, "please-please-please-to-MEET-cha." He begins before dawn and continues throughout the day. Only when a neighboring male trespasses on his turf does he launch into a secondary song.

After pairing with a female, though, he adopts a different approach. He begins each day



with an hour or so of secondary song, a lower pitched growl. The female is now content to stay within her mate's territory, so he can devote more time to keeping other males out. After all, he must not let an intruder breed with his mate.

Once the female lays her eggs and begins incubating them, the male alters his behavior once more. The female is no longer receptive to the male song – she's got more important things to attend to. So the male sings more primary songs and sometimes attracts a second mate. And so it goes.

Yes, a man's home may be his castle, but more correctly, it's his territory. Maybe that's why he sings in the shower.

Continued from page 3

Pinewoods Bird Festival

Pre-registration does not cover the entrance fee, which is \$5.00 for adults (standard entrance fee to Pebble Hill) and \$3.00 for kids under 12.

Children under 12 receive free entrance if they color the Brown-headed Nuthatch displayed on the festival web page www.pinewoodsbirdfestival.com.

Photos and notes from last year's festival can be seen on the festival web page and at www.nettally.com/necox/pinewoods.htm.

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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.

Bird Trivia

- There are more birds per square foot outdoors in August than at any other time of the year in North America.
- 87% of all the individual birds in North America at any given time are blackbirds, grackles, starlings and cowbirds.
- There is no blue pigment in a bluejay's feathers. They are blue because tiny transparent particles in the feather bounce blue light at the on-looker while screening out other wavelengths of light.
- Most incubating birds have a 'brood patch' where the feathers have been shed to allow warmth to pass directly from the bird to the eggs.
- Adult cedar waxwings feed on small fruit and berries, but feed their nestlings nothing but insects.

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Monthly Meeting	1
GBBC Results	1
Field Trips	2
Audubon NC Mtg.	3
Workshops, Festivals	3
Audubon at Home	4
eField Trips	4
What's all the Noise?	5

ACTIVITIES CALENDAR



Thu. 3/4	– Traveling Birder: New Zealand [Monthly Meeting]
Sat. 3/13	– Mint Hill Park [1/2 day field trip]
Sat. 3/27	– Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge [Full day field trip]
Thu. 4/1	– Wandering Warblers [Monthly Meeting]
Sat. 4/3	– Congaree Swamp National Park [Full day field trip]
Sat. 4/10	– Green Swamp Preserve [Full day field trip]
Sat. 4/10	– Redlair Farm [1/2 day field trip]
Sat. 4/18	– Audubon of North Carolina Meeting - Winston-Salem

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