

Audubon News

May 2004

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

Monthly Meeting

Amazing Amphibians

The spring brings more than the sound of singing birds. Other amazing creatures also begins to sing - frogs and toads. For many of us that's the only way we know they are in our backyard or wherever we are birding. The sound of chorus frogs or spring peepers are a sure sign that spring is coming. I love to see the tree frogs defy gravity and walk up my windows on steamy June nights. Toads in your garden means the yard is healthy.

Eric Stein of the Charlotte Nature Center is going to provide us with an encore performance to talk about amphibians. Most of us are familiar with toads and frogs but what do you know about newts and salamanders?

So, hop on over to the fellowship hall of the Seventh Day Adventist Church on Sharon Amity, Thursday, May 6th at 7:30 PM



International Migratory Bird Day Saturday, May 8th

IMBD was created in 1993 by visionaries at the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Now under the direction of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, IMBD continues to focus attention on one of the most important and spectacular events in the life of a migratory bird -- its journey between its summer and winter homes. Today, it is celebrated in Canada, the U.S., Mexico and Central America through bird festivals and bird walks, education programs, and Bird Day!

The IMBD 2004 theme, *Birds of a feather...nesting together*, explores the fascinating variety & habits of colonial birds, as well as the conservation issues for these birds.

Congregatory nesting behavior has been a successful strategy evolutionarily for 1 in 8 species of bird worldwide. Many colonial-nesting species are aquatic birds, such as frigatebirds, herons, egrets, gulls, terns, and puffins, but several landbirds such as swallows and blackbirds are also colonial.

Colony sites take many forms: mud nests plastered on vertical surfaces; burrows riddling a sea-side cliff, a stretch of depressions in a sandy beach, or bulky stick nests forming a woodland rookery; what defines them is the close proximity and social behavior of the colony members.

Why do birds gather together to nest? It is believed that coloniality evolved in response to shortages in suitable, safe nesting sites within range of food sources. Birds nesting in colonies may enjoy "safety in numbers," for example, when colony members cooperate to

chase off predators. Also, colonial nesters may learn about spotty and scattered food supplies from observing their neighbors.

Congregatory nesting behavior does have disadvantages: colonies may actually attract predators, foster higher rates of disease or parasitism, and members may experience increased competition for nest materials and food.

Coloniality also increases population risks by concentrating birds in a limited area. In other words, a single event or incident can affect the nesting success of a large number of birds. There have always been natural threats to colonies such as storms and predators, but human activities have brought many new threats to colonies. The introduction of exotic species to breeding areas, disturbance of colonies, and outright loss of breeding habitat threaten many species of colonial birds.

Fortunately, colonial birds and their colonies are often highly

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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!!

Sunday, May 2nd Latta Park [1/2 day]

Back by popular demand, this field trip is really just a stroll around the park. A very slow stroll at that. If the birding gods are with us this should be peak time for neotropical migrants - orioles, tanagers, rose-breasted grosbeaks, thrushes, and of course warblers!!! It is not unusual to see ovenbirds, veerys and Swainson's warblers walking around the park with you! Last year we had 20 species of warblers.

We will meet at the park at 7:15 AM. Be prepared to do a little walking and a lot of standing looking up into the trees. If you want to join the group contact Judy Walker at 704-537-8181 [leave a message] or birdwalker@mac.com.

Saturday, May 15th: Huntingtown Farms Greenway

This is a new greenway in the Park Rd. Park area with beautiful mulberry trees that attract a variety of migrant birds. Andrea Owens and the Sprehes will lead this new field trip. If you are interested in going on this half day field trip contact Andrea Owens [insectogirl@yahoo.com] or Vivian and Dean Sprehe at vsprehe@carolina.rr.com for directions and details.

Saturday, May 22nd: Blue Ridge Parkway [Full Day]

Take a break from the heat and head up to the mountains to look for breeding birds that can only be found in the mountains like alder and least flycatchers, Canada warblers, and ruffed grouse. If you are interested in going contact Judy Walker at 704-537-8181 before May 15th for details.



International Migratory Bird Day Field Trips May 8, 2004

Join Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation and Mecklenburg Audubon Society in celebrating the return of neo-tropical migratory birds from their wintering grounds in the tropics to their North American nesting habitats. We have planned an assortment of birding walks, banding demonstrations, fun activities, and programs that we hope will appeal to the entire family.

All of these programs and hikes are free, but space is limited and pre-registration is required. Call Reedy Creek Nature Center at 704-598-8857 to register.

Bird Banding Demonstration Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge

*Ages 7+ * 7:30 – 9:30 a.m.*

Join us at our bird banding station for a unique demonstration of mist-netting and banding procedures and learn how biologists rely on these techniques to monitor individual birds, nesting success, population trends, migration distances, and many other facets of the avian world. Come see why a bird in the hand can truly be more exciting than two in the bush!

Nest Box Hike Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge

*Ages 7+ * 10:00 a.m. – noon.*

Here's your chance to peek into the lives of our resident birds as we monitor our nest boxes within the refuge. Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge has more documented species of birds (206) than anywhere else in Mecklenburg County so while we're observing nesting bluebirds, chickadees, and titmice, we'll keep an eye out for raptors, herons, warblers, swallows, sparrows, and more.

Birds of the Woodlands Hike Evergreen Nature Preserve

*Ages 7+ * 7:30 – 9:30 a.m.*

Join us on a hike through Mecklenburg County's newest nature preserves. With 78 acres of mixed forests and woodland openings, Evergreen Nature Preserve has a remarkable diversity of birds with over 120 species documented since its inception. Participants will look for Indigo Bunting, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Great-crested Flycatcher, Red-shouldered Hawk, migrating warblers & thrushes, & other birds of the woodlands.

Birds of the Forest Hike Reedy Creek Nature Center

*Ages 7+ * 7:30 – 9:30 a.m.*

Participants on this hike will search for birds that are often more difficult to find outside of large, intact forests. With over 727 forested acres, Reedy Creek Nature Preserve is a great place to search for Acadian Flycatcher, Louisiana Waterthrush, Ovenbird, Northern Parula, Wood Thrush, Scarlet Tanager, & other forest birds.

Birds of the Prairie Hike Latta Plantation Preserve

*Ages 7+ * 7:30 – 9:30 a.m.*

In addition to providing important habitat for rare and endangered plants, our Piedmont Prairie restoration sites have also turned out to be excellent birding areas. On this hike we'll look for such species as Indigo Bunting, Eastern Bluebird, Prairie Warbler, Summer Tanager, Eastern Kingbird, and other birds of open habitats.

Birds of the Grassland McDowell Nature Preserve

*Ages 7+ * 8:00 – 10:00 a.m.*

What started as a 30-acre Piedmont Prairie restoration site for rare plants has recently been expanded into a 150-acre grassland benefitting not only the endangered Schweinitz's sunflower, but a number of grassland birds and other wildlife. Explore the McDowell Prairie searching for Grasshopper Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Kingbird, Indigo Bunting, and other grassland species.

Birds of the Greenway McMullen Creek Greenway

Ages 7+ * 8:00 – 10:00 a.m.

One of Mecklenburg County's longest and most tranquil greenways, McMullen Creek and Lower McAlpine Creek Greenway travels through a rich bottom-land hardwood forest providing access to a number of birds found in wetland habitats. Participants will look for Great Blue Heron, Red-shouldered Hawk, Prothonotary Warbler, Red-headed Woodpecker, Northern Parula, and other birds of the greenway.

Birding for Tots McDowell Nature Center

Ages 3-5 * 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

It's never too early to start birdwatching! Here's a program designed just for pre-school aged children that will introduce them to the fascinating world of birds. Through fun activities and crafts, participants will learn about feathers, nests, songs, and more.

Birding for Kids Reedy Creek Nature Center

Ages 5-13 * 10:00 a.m. – noon.

Do you want your children to learn an exciting hobby that helps them appreciate nature as well as conserve wildlife? Birding may be the answer. Participants will become familiar with a few species of common backyard birds, as well as some that are just beautiful to watch. Get ready to have fun as we play games that will help the kids learn bird calls, dissect 'owl pellets' to see what an owl eats for lunch, and have a bird id contest. Finally, we will review our binocular skills & try to scope out a few feathery friends around the nature center.

Eco-Trekkers: Birding Bonanza McDowell Nature Center

Ages 6-8 * 11:00 a.m. – noon.

Join the Eco-Trekkers as we investigate what makes a bird so special. We will discover how different beaks and claws determine what a bird eats and where it lives. We will go on a nature hike to uncover some special tricks it takes to be a successful birder. We will also make special treats for our fine feathered friends!

Fascinating Fact about Frogs and Toads



There are around 3,900 species of tailless amphibians, including the frog and toad. Most people are surprised to hear that all toads actually are frogs!

Frogs are members of the zoological class called *Amphibia*. They are cold-blooded (or poikilothermic) vertebrate animals. They differ from reptiles in that they lack scales and generally return to water to breed.

There are three types of Amphibians: *Anura*, also called *Salientia*, (frogs and toads), *caudate* (salamanders & newts) and *caecilians* (worm-like amphibians).

Generally speaking, when we think of frogs, we picture what are called "true frogs", members of the family *Ranidae*, containing more than 400 species. These frogs have the characteristics of:

- * two bulging eyes
- * strong, long, webbed hind feet that are adapted for leaping and swimming
- * smooth or slimy skin (generally, frogs tend to like moister environments)
- * Frogs tend to lay eggs in clusters.

Frogs from this family can be found on every continent except Antarctica. They are referred to as the "true frogs" because of their generalized body form and life history: the so-called generic frog. Members of this family include the bullfrog, common frog, green frog, leopard frog, marsh frog, pickerel frog, and wood frog.

The term toads refer to "true toads", members of the family *Bufo*, which contains more than 300 species. These types of frogs have are characterized by:

- * stubby bodies with short hind legs (for walking instead of hopping)
- * warty and dry skin (usually preferring dryer climates)

- * paratoid (or poison) glands behind the eyes
- * the chest cartilage of toads is different also.
- * toads tend to lay eggs in long chains. There are some toads (genera *Nectophrynoides*), however, that are the only types of anurans to bear live young!

True toads can be found worldwide except in Australasia, polar regions, Madagascar, and Polynesia, though

Bufo marinus has been artificially introduced into Australia and some South Pacific islands. Besides *Bufo*, the family includes 25 genera, all of which, like the frogs, are *anura*!

The physical distinctions, however, can easily get blurred because sometimes the features appear mixed or less obvious. Certain species even legitimately fall into both categories. It is not uncommon, for example, to find a warty skinned frog that isn't a toad, or even a slimy toad! Even the cartilage structure has been found to sometimes fit both categories!

FROG SONG

Some frogs have vocal pouches that vary in size and stretch like balloons. These sacs serve as a resonating chamber, allowing the frogs to SING! Male frogs vocalize by squeezing their lungs with their nostrils and mouth shut. Air flows over their vocal chords and into their vocal sacs blowing it up like a bubble gum balloon! Other frogs can make noises without such a sac.

In some species of frogs, only the males sing. Other types of frogs

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Frog Facts

appear to have both male and female calls. Large frogs have deep voices, meaning they call at a low frequency. Small frogs sing in high chirps, meaning they call at a high frequency. Cold frogs repeat their calls at a slower rate because the muscles controlling the sounds slow down!

Why do frogs sing? Well...it's actually for a variety of reasons! They sing to attract a mate, mark their territory, when the weather is going to change and they squeak when they are frightened or hurt.

FROGS AND WEATHER

Frogs have been associated with weather in a lot of ancient cultures. I guess this really makes a lot of sense if you consider that they tend to make a lot of noise before a rainstorm.

* Some Australian aborigines and Native American groups believed that frogs were the bringers of rain.

* In India, frogs were believed to personify thunder in the sky. Even the word for "frog" also meant "cloud" in Sanskrit!

* In China, they see the "TOAD", not the "man" of the moon. The toad is also considered "one of the five poisons of yin." They say that eclipses

happen when the "toad in the moon" tries to swallow the moon itself!

FROGS AND LUCK

Sometimes, cultures associated frogs with good and bad fortune.

* In Japan, frogs are the symbols of Good Luck. One myth I read dealt with the idea that bullfrogs are descended from a great ancestor who could suck all the mosquitoes out of a whole room in a single breath!

* Some myths are less favoring to frogs and toads. Some folklorists have claimed that "If the first frog that you see in the spring is sitting on dry ground, it signifies that during the same year you will shed as many tears as the frog would require to swim away in." If, on the other hand, the first frog of spring jumps into the water, you'll experience misfortune all year! However, if the springs' first "hoptoad" come jumping in your direction, you will have many friends; if it jumps away from you, you will lose some.

* Some less enlightened people associate frogs, and toads in particular, as evil incarnations of demons or devils!

FROGS AND WARTS

Some say that you get warts from touching frogs and toads. Frogs have

slimy skin to stay moist when it is dry, and toads have bumpy skin to help camouflage them in their habitat. Some frogs and toads have paratoidal glands which secrete poisons as protection which can cause skin irritations and may be poisonous to some species of animals, but warts have nothing at all to do with the frogs themselves!

Adapted from *AllAboutFrogs.Org*



American Bullfrog tracks

IMBD: Colonial Birds

visible and impressive, and thus can garner positive public attention and support. Join other IMBD celebrants in 2004 as we help the public get to know colonial-nesting birds and the ways people can help them survive!

Time to Renew Your Local Membership

Join now and your membership will be effective until June 2005.

Because National Audubon has reduced the chapter share of the national membership, Mecklenburg Audubon now must offer a Local Membership to cover the cost of the newsletter, web site and cost of meetings.

____ Name _____ Phone _____

____ Address _____ E-mail _____

____ Individual Membership [\$10] ____ Family Membership [\$15]

____ Please, save some trees and send me[us] the newsletter electronically.

____ I[we] would be willing to lead a field trip.

____ I[we] would be interested in participating in a work day at one of the local preserves.

____ I[we] would be willing to do a program.

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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.



International Migratory Bird Day Saturday, May 8th

Bird banding demonstration, 9 field trips, 3 specifically for kids and families.

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- Thu. 5/6 – Amazing Amphibians [Monthly Meeting]
- Sat. 5/8 – International Migratory Bird Day
- Sat. 5/15 – Huntingtown Greenway [1/2 day field trip]
- Sat. 5/22 – Blue Ridge Parkway [Full day field trip]



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