



Audubon News

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photo by J. L. Hanula

About the size of the common cardinal, the red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) is approximately 7 inches long, with a wingspan of about 15 inches. Its back is barred with black and white horizontal stripes. The red-cockaded woodpecker's most distinguishing feature is a black cap and nape that encircle large white cheek patches. Rarely visible, except perhaps during the breeding season and periods of territorial defense, the male has a small red streak on each side of its black cap called a cockade, hence its name.

The red-cockaded woodpecker feeds primarily on beetles, ants, roaches, caterpillars, wood-boring insects, and spiders, and occasionally fruits and berries.

Red-cockaded woodpeckers are a territorial, nonmigratory, cooperative breeding species, frequently having the same mate for several years. The nesting season lasts from April through June. The breeding female lays three to four eggs in the breeding male's

Monthly Meeting

Cockaded? What's that mean?

Many birders are puzzled by the name red-cockaded woodpecker. But they aren't puzzled about where they can be found - in south-east. They also know these birders are endangered and a rarity to behold.

Susan Miller will speak on the biology, management, and politics of red-cockaded woodpeckers. She is the USFWS point-person in the Southern Pines area, the best RCW habitat in North Carolina. She will explain the No Surprises/Habitat Conservation Plan concept, which has worked very well in her territory. She has climbed many trees to capture and band RCWs. She, her husband, and her two children live in Southern Pines.

So come find out what a cockade really is and why we need to work hard at protecting this North Carolina treasure. Join us in the Fellowship Hall of the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church on Thursday, Nov. 4th at 7:30 PM for another informative presentation.

roost cavity. Group members incubate the small white eggs for 10 to 12 days. Once hatched, the nestlings remain in the nest cavity for about 26 days.

Upon fledging, the young often remain with the parents, forming groups of up to nine members, but more typically 3-4 members. There is only one pair of breeding birds within each group, and they normally raise only a single brood each year. The other group members called helpers, usually males from the previous breeding season, help incubate the eggs and raise the young. Juvenile females generally leave the group before the next breeding season, in search of solitary male groups.

Historically, this woodpecker's range extended from FL to NJ and MD, as far west as TX and OK, and inland to MO, KT, and TN. Today it is estimated there are about 5,000 groups of red-cockaded woodpeckers, or 12,500 birds from FL to VA and west to southeast OK and eastern TX, representing about 1% of the woodpecker's original range. They have been extirpated in NJ, MD, TN & MO.

The red-cockaded woodpecker makes its home in mature pine forests. Longleaf pines (*Pinus palustris*) are most commonly preferred, but other species of southern pine are also acceptable. While other woodpeckers bore out cavities in dead trees where the wood is rotten and soft, the red-

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FieldTrips

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!!

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30TH: OWL PROWL [TENTATIVE]

Owls are as much a part of Halloween as witches, ghosts, tricks and treats. And as Rob Bierregaard has discovered Charlotte is chock full of owls for a spooky Halloween evening. Take a break from tricks and treats and join us for some really spooky encounters. The exact location hasn't been determined yet but if you are interested in finding a few of these nocturnal denizens contact Judy Walker at 704-537-8181 or birdwalker@mac.com.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 7TH: PEE DEE NWR [FULL DAY]

When birders think of National Wildlife Refuges places like Pea Island, Chincoteague or Merrit Island spring to mind. Places on the coast. But there are literally hundreds of smaller refuges across the country that protect unique habitat for both flora and fauna.

Pee Dee NWR is one of the smaller refuges tucked away in a not so glamorous place - the NC Piedmont. But the refuge is a unique and wonderful place to wander for hours at a time and not see anyone else. Especially this time of the year.

One never knows what you might encounter on a field trip to Pee Dee but we should see the vangard of waterfowl, wintering sparrows and perhaps some lingering migrants. There's always the probability of eagles and red-headed woodpeckers.

We will meet at the McDonald at Windsor Square [Independence



Blvd.] at 7 AM. There will be a fair amount of easy walking so wear comfortable shoes. We will eat on the refuge so remember to bring a lunch, snacks and plenty of water.

If you are interested in helping out contact Judy Walker at 704-537-8181 [leave a message].

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20TH: MC DOWELL PRAIRIE [1/2 DAY]

Located in the southwest corner of Mecklenburg county, this site is a piedmont prairie restoration project. Originally created to protect the endangered Schweinitz's sunflower the site has become a very productive birding area. It is especially attractive to winter sparrows which should be showing up just about now. It is also the most reliable place to shrikes in the county. Although the walking isn't very strenuous, we will cover about 2 miles. So wear sturdy walking shoes, bring water and snacks since it will take all morning to cover the area. We will meet at the Burger King located at the Westinghouse exit of I-77 at 7:30 AM and car pool over to the site since there is a limited amount of parking. If you are interested in going on this trip contact Taylor Piephoff at 532-6336.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4TH: WATERFOWL [1/2 DAY]

Coddle Creek Reservoir has become the place to see waterfowl in the Charlotte area. Although there are several other spots we will check as well. Hopefully, the weather up north will be co-operative this year and push the ducks our way. This trip will be a warm up for the numerous Christmas counts later this month.

We will meet at 8 AM at the McDonalds at University Place and will return about 12:30 PM. If you would like to join the group contact Taylor Piephoff at 704-532-6336.

Evergreen Preserve Work Day



Now that you have your own yard bedded down for the winter, it's time to see what we can do to help our winter visitors feel comfortable in their new home. Actually, we really want to make it safe for folks to look at those visitors. Robert Bustle has gotten us started on the right foot with a wonderful new bench in the opening closest to the pond. Larry Barden and Sharon Freedman are heading up this project. Bring work gloves and if you have them - shovels, rakes and clippers. One major project will be to fill in some of the holes in the trails to make it safer for folks to walk.

If you are interested in helping out let Larry know. We'll meet at the Winterfield School parking lot at 8:30 AM. See you all there.



If you have any items for Carolina Wild Care, bring them to the meeting.

We'll get them to Vicky.



Knock on Wood

Can you imagine what it would feel like to be punched by a professional boxer? Or hit by a bowling ball traveling 20 miles per hour? Ouch!

Now imagine a force more than 20 times greater! Believe it or not, some scientists have measured the force with which woodpeckers drive their heads against trees and found it to be just that great.

Faster than a Speeding Bullet

When hammering on a tree, a woodpecker's head can actually travel faster than a speeding bullet. If a person were to hit his head against a tree with the speed and force of a woodpecker, he would no doubt suffer severe brain damage - assuming he lives to tell about it.

So how can woodpeckers drill holes in trees without knocking themselves silly?

Woodpeckers hammer and drill on trees to find food, build nests, and to communicate with other woodpeckers. They're equipped with some amazing adaptations to allow them to do this!

A woodpecker's brain is packed tightly into its skull, surrounded by specialized spongy bones that serve to protect it. Because there's almost no space between the brain and the skull, the woodpecker's brain can't rattle around on impact.

Scientists also believe the woodpecker's sling-like tongue, which actually coils once around its brain before anchoring to the skull, helps to reduce the shock of hammering.

A Pain in the Neck

Just as important as those shock-absorbing features are the very strong muscles in the woodpecker's head and neck.

These muscles make sure that the woodpecker's head and body are perfectly lined up. There's no room for error; if its head bobbed even a little bit forward (as if nodding "yes") or sideways (as if shaking "no") the resulting force could be great enough to break the woodpecker's neck!

If you watched a slow-motion video of a woodpecker hammering, you'd be able to see the bird's head and body remaining in a perfectly straight line, with the bill hitting the tree straight on every time.

Don't Try This at Home!

Banging your head on a tree might seem like a pretty simple - or simple-minded - thing to do. But the next time you see a woodpecker in action, you'll know just how remarkable it really is!

From *Ranger Rick*: Share it with a child you know
and love!
<http://www.nwf.org/gowild/kzpage.cfm?siteid=3&deptmentid=76&articleid=188>

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RCWs

cockaded woodpecker is the only one which excavates cavities exclusively in living pine trees. The older pines favored by the red-cockaded woodpecker often suffer from a fungus called red heart disease which attacks the center of the trunk, causing the inner wood, the heartwood, to become soft. Cavities generally take from 1 to 3 years to excavate.

A group of cavity trees is called a cluster and may include 1 to 20 or more cavity trees on 3 to 60 acres. The average cluster is about 10 acres. Cavity trees that are being actively used have numerous, small

resin wells that exude sap. The birds keep the sap flowing apparently as a cavity defense mechanism against rat snakes and possibly other predators. The typical territory for a group ranges from about 125 to 200 acres, but observers have reported territories running from a low of around 60 acres, to an upper extreme of more than 600 acres. The size of a particular territory is related to both habitat suitability and population density.

The red-cockaded woodpecker plays a vital role in the intricate web of life of the southern pine forests. A number of other birds and small mammals use the cavities excavated by

red-cockaded woodpeckers, such as chickadees, bluebirds, titmice, and several other woodpecker species, including the downy, hairy, and red-bellied woodpecker. Larger woodpeckers may take over a red-cockaded woodpecker cavity, sometimes enlarging the hole enough to allow screech owls, wood ducks, and even raccoons to later move in. Flying squirrels, several species of reptiles and amphibians, and insects, primarily bees and wasps, also will use red-cockaded woodpecker cavities.

Digiscoping is for the birds!

By Terry Hamilton

Do you remember your high school Algebra: $A + B = C$? Today in the birding world there's a relatively new twist to that formula: spotting scope + digital camera = Digiscoping.

Digiscoping, the practice of taking digital photos through a spotting scope, has been steadily gaining popularity among birders in the past few years. The spotting scope serves as an extra-long telephoto lens and magnifies the image for the digital camera.

Besides the obvious advantage of close-up photos, this technique provides a convenient way to document a rare or uncommon species. It eliminates the discomfort of carrying a scope plus 35 mm equipment with multiple lens in the field, and it provides the ability to take hundreds of photos that you can sort through and delete poor shots, keeping only your better photos.

Digiscoping is actually easy to do, although it does take practice to get good, clear photos. Many digiscoping birders have said that getting one really good shot out of 10 taken is an excellent ratio. A number of things affect the quality of a digiscoped photo, but poor lighting and camera/scope shake are the two biggest culprits.

The biggest disadvantage is that the bird must sit still while you attach the camera to the scope hand-held or use an adaptor. Other disadvantages are the minimal depth of field, the difficulty in viewing the camera's LCD screen in bright sunlight, and the amount of battery power used by a digital camera.

There really is no one "best" scope/camera option. If you have a scope but not a digital camera, the best suggestion is to review the online information available (see below) for learning to digiscope, then take your scope to a camera store and try out some of the digital cameras.

There is also an internet digiscoping group that is free to join and has thousands of members world-wide (digiscopingbirds@yahoogroups.com). If you would like information about a particular scope/camera combination, chances are good that someone on the listserv has already tried it and can offer suggestions. Most digital cameras can be used with a spotting scope, although the



more effective ones will have at least 3x optical zoom.

An intrepid digiscoper on the Digibird.com website worked out the magnification comparison of a digiscoped photo with a traditional 35 mm camera shot. A typical digital camera has a lens focal length comparable to a 35-115 mm length in a 35 mm camera. Attach that digital camera to a spotting scope with a 20x to 60x eyepiece and the result is a maximum focal length comparable to about 6900 mm in a 35 mm camera lens.

Three of the many websites that devote space to digiscoping and come highly recommended are 1) www.laurencepoh.com, the home site of the man considered to be the pioneer of digiscoping, Laurence Poh, 2) a site maintained by Stephanie Moniotte (<http://www.md.ucl.ac.be/peca/test/a.html>), and 3) Digibird.com. All three sites come complete with photos of the same subject taken both alone with a digital camera and with the digiscoping technique. Poh's site also contains links to many other digiscoping sites. The Moniotte site includes articles written by the late Poh, and numerous other successful digiscopers..

The Digibird.com website has an excellent manual which includes information for beginners as well as more experienced photographers and which can be downloaded to a personal computer. This site also has a good reference for using Photoshop to edit or cleanup your digiscoped photos.

Several members of the Mecklenburg Audubon Society have taken it up, and digiscoped photos have appeared in a number of photo presentations to the group within the past year. Digiscoping is also frequently offered as a workshop at nature festivals, such as Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival where it is taught by a professional photographer.

Birding at Duke Power's Thermal Pond

by John Bonestell

The so called Thermal Pond at Duke's McGuire Nuclear Power Plant has been a perennial favorite for observing wintering waterfowl. The Pond is located along Rt. 73 just east of the Cowan's Ford bridge. The best viewing spot is looking down into the Pond from the railroad track which parallels Rt. 73. This spot also overlooks the two main MuGuire nuclear reactor buildings. A few years ago a Common Merganser was located at this Pond during the Lake Norman Christmas Bird Count. Normally there are numerous species on the Pond and they continuously come and go.

Following 9/11, McGuire's security staff has tried to prevent birders and others from stopping on the railroad track because highway drivers have called 911 on different occasions and reported possible terrorists eying the nuclear plant. Duke's security forces together with Huntersville Police and North Carolina State Police have responded. The overlook area is easily visible from the road

Rick Jiran, who is responsible for Public Affairs and Community Relations at the McGuire facility, was contacted and he has arranged for birders to again view waterfowl at the Pond **provided** a few simple rules are followed.

1. All birders must first stop at the reception desk at the Duke's Energy Explorium, located within the McGuire facility, sign the log and pick up two signs that read "**Mecklenburg Audubon Bird Survey in Progress**". These signs are then to be

placed on both sides of Rt. 73 facing traffic near the railroad track before walking to overlook area.

2. The signs are to be taken back to the reception desk after use and again sign the log indicating the date and time when they are returned.
3. The Energy Explorium is open 7 days per week, 8 - 5 on weekdays and 12 - 5 on weekends and holidays. If someone wants to bird the Pond at other times, the signs can be picked up the previous day and/or returned the following day. But the receptionist should be informed what day the signs will be used so plant security can be notified accordingly. Please keep in mind that there is only one set of signs so no one else can use them when someone has taken them from the reception desk.

This seems like a win-win situation for both Duke and birders. McGuire's senior management has approved the arrangement. Hopefully, motorists will see the signs and not call the police. Time will tell. This procedure will not work if a terrorist alert is further elevated as this would cause McGuire to close access to the Energy Explorium until the threat is again lowered.



Local Membership

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

Because of changes in National Audubon membership structure, Mecklenburg Audubon now must offer a local Chapter Membership to cover the cost of the newsletter, web site and cost of meetings.

Name _____

Phone _____

Address [Street, City, ST, and Zip] _____

E-mail _____

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

Please, save 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.

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

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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 through May at 7:30 PM.



Who's New?

MARIANNE BARROWMAN
ROB BIERREGAARD
BYRON & DIANA BROGAN
CATHY DOLAN
JOHN CHAPMAN
PHYLLIS M O'NEAL
BEVERLY STEWART
MR & MRS HANK TRUFAN

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ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

Thu. 11/4 - Woodpeckers - Monthly Meeting
Sun. 11/7 - Pee Dee NWR - All day field Trip
Sat. 11/13 - Evergreen Preserve Work Day [1/2 da
Sat. 11/20 - McDowell Prairie - 1/2 day Field Trip
Thu. 12/2 - Snowbirds - Monthly Meeting
Sat. 12/4 - Waterfowl - 1/2 day Field Trip
Sat. 12/18 - Gaston Christmas Count
Sun. 12/19 - Lake Norman Christmas Count



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