



Audubon News

Audubon News is published nine times a year, September – May by Mecklenburg Audubon Society
Serving Cabarrus, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg and Union Counties in NC and York County SC.

September 2004

A publication of Mecklenburg Audubon

Volume 10, Number 1



DON'T FORGET

If you want to receive the MAS monthly newsletter, you need to be a local member.

Check the expiration date on your address label. If it doesn't say Jun 05, this is the only newsletter you will receive for the year. Or contact Lucy Quintilliano if you have a question.

Monthly Meeting

MIGRANTS ON THE MOVE

Fall and spring for birdwatchers are defined by the movement of birds. Birds leaving wintering grounds for breeding territories and then returning. But why do they move around so much. If they were children we would probably label them hyperactive because they always seem to be going and coming. Even our 'local' birds migrate. Goldfinches that breed in Charlotte are replaced in the fall by birds who bred somewhere else.



Why all this moving about? Well there are a lot of reasons and Dr. Rob Bierregaard, of UNC Charlotte will fill us in on some of the facts and theories of bird migration at our first fall meeting on **Thursday, September 9th. Note this is the Thursday after Labor Day.** As always we will meet at 7:30 PM in the fellowship hall of the Sharon Seventh Day Adventist Church [920 Sharon Amity]. Hope to see you there.

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 [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



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, SEPTEMBER 12: BUTTERFLY WALK AT McALPINE GREENWAY

Half Day. Birds are not the only beautiful winged creatures found in the Charlotte area. Butterflies are at their peak in September when a variety wide variety can be found. The Mecklenburg Park and Recreation Department has created wonderful habitat for butterflies at McAlpine Greenway. We will take a leisurely Sunday afternoon stroll around the greenway to see what we can find.

We will meet at 1:30 PM at the Monroe Rd. entrance to McAlpine Greenway. If you are interesting in participating contact Taylor Piephoff [532-6336 or piephoffT@aol.com].

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 18: JUMPIN' JACKSON PARK

All Day. You may have heard about how fabu-lous spring migration is in Central Park, NY. Well, Jackson Park in Hendersonville, NC is a close rival, especially in the fall. Hopefully, we will hit one of its wonderful waves of warblers. In past years birds were dripping off the trees.

We will meet at the McDonalds on Four Seasons Blvd. (Exit 18 of I-26) at 7:30 AM. It's on the right as you are heading into Hendersonville. Rt. 74 makes this a quick 2 hour drive from Charlotte if you plan to drive out in the Saturday AM.

If you are interested in this trip contact Judy Walker [704-537-8181 or birdwalker@mac.com].

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 25: HAWK WATCHING MAHOGANY ROCK OVERLOOK, BRP

Full Day. Cars aren't the only ones who use the Blue Ridge for transportation. During the day Hawks, Eagles and Falcons use the warm therm-als created along the mountain ridges as their highway to their wintering habitats.

Neotropical migrants also use the mountain ridges as guides to their winter abodes. They do most of their traveling at night to avoid those 'nasty' raptors on the move during the day. But during the day they can be found foraging through the tree tops along the parkway. So we will have an opportunity to observe two very different types of birds in their migrant travels.

This is probably the easiest type of birding except for perhaps watching your feeder. You should bring

along a lunch as well as something to sit on (blanket, lounge chairs, whatever). Most of the day we will let the birds come to us.

But there will be some forays into the woods looking for migrating warblers as well. I guarantee (except if it's pouring rain) when you leave this field trip you will be able to identify at least one raptor (if not 4-5) in the air and one butterfly.

We will meet at the Mc Donald's at the Cornelius Exit (Exit 28) of I-77 at 7:15 AM. If you are interested in going contact Taylor Piephoff at 532-6336.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2: LATTA PLANTATION PRAIRIE

Half Day. Larry Barden will lead us on a hike through this unique habitat. He'll talk about the research being done by students at UNC Charlotte and the flora and fauna that have been making a come back in the prairie environment. Of course we will be looking at birds, butterflies and a wide variety of other creatures as we go along.

Continued on page 3

A Mecklenburg Rarity **Schweinitz' Sunflowers**

Explorers, as early as 1540 reported open "savannas" in the Carolina Piedmont. These open expanses were probably created by fires set by Native Americans to clear land for planting and by fires caused by lightning. The many streams and rivers in the Piedmont created natural fire-breaks that caused these prairies to be much smaller than the ones occurring in our Midwest.

Native Americans have lived in the Piedmont for at least 12,000 years and over time, prairie plants and animals of the Midwest moved eastward to the Carolinas. Little bluestem, Indian grass, Switchgrass, Georgia aster, Tall larkspur, Smooth coneflower, and Schweinitz's sunflower found in the Piedmont today are probably part of the original prairie ecosystem. The early settlers found these open areas ideal for agriculture and over time they have all but disappeared. Today only a few small remnant Piedmont prairies exist. The Schweinitz's sunflower is so rare that is on the Federal Endangered Species List.

The Latta Plantation Prairie restoration project is one of few places on earth that you can see the Schweinitz's sunflower in bloom. And the best time to see them is from the middle of September to the middle of October.



YEAR AT A GLANCE

All activities are tentative. Check the Mecklenburg Audubon's Web Site – meckbirds.org for specific dates and times.

SEPTEMBER

Monthly Meeting

Migrants on the Move

Field Trips

Butterfly Walk, McAlpine Grnwy
Jackson Park, Hendersonville
Hawk Watch, Mahogany Rock

DECEMBER

Monthly Meeting

Snowbirds

Field Trips

Wintering Waterfowl
Gaston Christmas Bird Count
Lake Norman Christmas Count
Charlotte Christmas Count

MARCH

Monthly Meeting

Beautiful Brazil

Field Trips

Sandhills NWR, Mc Bee, SC
Others TBA

Evergreen Preserve Clean-up
Birding 101 Workshop

OCTOBER

Monthly Meeting

Splendid Spiders

Field Trips

Latta Plantation Prairie
Huntington Beach Park, SC
McMullen Creek Greenway
Birding 101 Workshop

JANUARY

Monthly Meeting

Traveling Birder [Members
photographs and potluck
dinner]

Field Trips

Pee Dee NWR Christmas Count
Huntington Beach Park, SC
Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge

APRIL

Monthly Meeting

Congaree Swamp Nat Park

Field Trips

Congaree Swamp Nat Park
Latta Plantation Preserve
Others TBS

NOVEMBER

Monthly Meeting

Wonderful Woodpeckers

Field Trips

Pee Dee NWR, Wadesboro, NC
McDowell Prairie
Evergreen Preserve Clean-up
Birding 101 Workshop

FEBRUARY

Monthly Meeting

Backyard Habitat

Field Trips - TBA

Birding 101 Workshop
Great Backyard Bird Count

MAY

Monthly Meeting

Wildflowers

Field Trips

Latta Park
Blue Ridge Parkway
International Migratory Bird Day

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Continued from page 2

We will meet at the Latta Plantation Nature Center just inside the gate at 8 AM. [Directions can be found at <http://meckbirds.org/birdingspots/lattaplantation.htm>] If you are planning on joining us contact Larry Barden at 704-595-6325.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11TH: HUNTINGTON BEACH, SC

All Day. This is our fall sojourn to a South Carolina birding mecca. Fall migrants - hawks & warblers - will still be moving through, wintering shorebirds will have settled in & a few ducks may also have begun arriving. This is one of the best times of the year to see falcons and merlins. And I am sure we will be delighted with spectacle views of hundreds if not thousands of tree swallows.

Best of all most of the people have moved out! It's a wonderful time of year to be on the beach.

We'll meet in the parking lot on the eastside of the causeway at 7:30 AM. It can get pretty hot so remember a hat, sunscreen & plenty of water. We'll eat lunch in the park so you will need to bring food.

Since most participants stay for the weekend, we will plan to go out to dinner Saturday night. At dinner we'll plan where to go on Sunday. A favorite, inexpensive Mom & Pop motel in Murrel's Inlet is the Brookwood Inn [843-651-2550]. If you are planning to go contact Judy Walker at 704-537-8181 or birdwalker@mac.com.

Help the birds during Migration

With the development of land and destruction of birds' natural habitat, there are fewer and fewer places for these migratory birds on their way north and south. Here are a few things you can do to help the birds during migration:

- * keep your feeders full
- * plant bushes and trees for cover
- * plant flowers and bushes for food
- * Make sure there is plenty of water

This will help the hungry, weary traveling birds. And you can sit back and enjoy the show.



From the President's Perch

Well, I can't walk in my yard without being nearly hit by either goldfinches or hummers zipping around so it must be August, which means September and a 'new' Mecklenburg Audubon season is upon us. I hope you all had a great summer and got to see a lot of good birds.

We will start the season off with a short but certainly informative course on migration by Rob Bierregaard. And as always our September field trips will also focus on migration. Fall migration is a bit-sweet time. For Carolina birders fall migration means many of our most colorful birds – hummers, tanagers, indigos and warblers will be leaving us. But we are also blessed to have other birds that may not be as colorful join us for the winter – sparrows, sapsuckers and lots

of ducks. Birders up north aren't as fortunate. Rob's program will discuss why birds migrate and hopefully give us a peek into their arduous journey.

For the rest of the year the MAS board has put together a tentative schedule of programs and field trips. But we would like your input. At the September meeting we will have survey for you to complete that will ask for your suggestions for programs, projects and field trips. If you want to give us feedback before then or won't be at the first meeting, please go to <http://meckbirds.org/membership/surveyform.htm> and complete the survey online.

Speaking of the MAS board I first want to thank those presently on the board for all their hard work. But you may have noticed there has been a migration of members off the board with no new migrants to replace them. As a result we have had to put the MAS board on the endangered species list. When a species is listed as endangered a recovery plan needs to be developed. The re-

covery plan for the MAS is simple we need new folks to join the team. However, this plan has very difficult to implement. How can you help? Migrate onto the board!!!! We are in desperate need of folks to help with the newsletter, education projects, field trips, program development, and membership. Notice I said 'help with'. The MAS board is a team and we work as a team. You won't have to do it alone. What we really need is new blood, that's essential for the survival of the species.

I don't want to sound like an alarmist but I am afraid if we don't see some results soon the club will become extinct in the next few years. I know that's now a great way to start a new year but the truth must be told. I am confident though, that we have it within our power to implement the recovery plan and bring the club back from the brink of extinction. But we can't do it without your help! Please consider very carefully, becoming part of this recovery plan and let one of the current board members know of your interest.

Backyard Habitat Tip

One of the most colorful and cheerful birds to have around the backyard is the American Goldfinch. Their song and color bring a vibrance to the yard that can be greatly appreciated during the long, hot dog days of summer.

Many people use a thistle feeder to attract these birds to their yards. But I have discovered a less expensive and more 'entertaining' way to attract them. Plant black-eyed susans [*Rudbeckia*] and coneflowers [*Echinacea*]. These easy to grow, quick spreading perennials will brighten up a summer yard. They are also magnets for goldfinch and butterflies.

Goldfinches do not begin to breed until July when these flowers and thistles begin to bloom. Milkweed is another native plant they enjoy but this doesn't seem

to bloom early enough for them around here.

Just the other day, I had the privilege to watch 8 goldfinch [3 males, 3 females and 2 juveniles] feeding on a small patch of black-eyed susans right under my living room window. I was less than 5 ft. away from them. Watching their balancing act was entertaining to say the least! In years past I have watched them on my coneflowers.

The black-eyed susan, also sometimes called the gloriosa daisy, is adaptable to almost any type soil, but should be grown in full sun and watered regularly to achieve the best flowering performance. The cone-flower is well suited for hot, dry weather. They do best in rich, well-drained soil and under the full sun or partial shade. They, like



rudbeckia, have a long blooming period of June through October.

Although, gardeners will recommend that you deadhead the flowers for more blooms, that would defeat the purpose of growing them for goldfinches. They need to go to develop seeds or they are no interest to the birds.

It's never too early to start thinking about what you are going to plant in your yard. So find a sunny spot in the yard, and put black-eyed susans and coneflowers on your list for next spring.



Adapted from "The Mystery of Bird Migration" by Christine Tarski [birding.guide@about.com]. Original article can be found at - <http://birding.about.com/library/weekly/aa032898.htm>

Mysteries of Bird Migration

Have you noticed the absolutely astounding and fascinating phenomenon happening outside these days? Yes, it is migration time with millions of birds traveling to their fall/winter homes in the southern half of the world.

Birds that breed in the northern hemisphere especially those in regions with definite seasonal differences tend to migrate traveling down into the southern hemisphere. The Arctic Tern makes the longest journey, migrating from the North Pole in the fall down to the South Pole and then back again in the spring. Birds that breed in the southern hemisphere also migrate. However, very few, except perhaps sea birds, migrate from the southern to the northern hemisphere in their non-breeding season. The warm temperatures close to the Equator are the wintering home of many birds. Other birds will choose a spot that is not as far but still warmer and has more food than where they left.

Fall migration allows birds to move to a different location so that they will continue to be able to find food. In the spring they return to the places where they will breed and raise their young. It may be the slant of the sun's rays, hormonal changes, the change of the weather and/or a combination of factors that contribute to the birds' urge to migrate.

Hungry birds, however, do not set off on migrations. If their food supply diminishes in a region, they may move to find a better source of food. But it is not the immediate lack of food that triggers the seasonal migration. A bird needs a reserve of fat

within its body to be able to travel the long distances, especially for those birds that attempt very long, non-stop flights. These fat deposits are partly due to hormonal changes that store the food necessary for the bird to survive migration. Birds that migrate shorter distances to their final destination are less dependant on adequate and abundant food prior to the trip and need not store the large fat reserves.

Many small birds double their body weight before migration while larger birds, such as the Canada goose, will gain proportionally less than this. (If a Canada goose did somehow gain the same percentage as a warbler, the poor goose would not be able to take off and fly!) These small birds store enough fat that many can fly non-stop for remarkably long lengths of time - sometimes up to 90 hours! In the best of conditions during migration, their body may use less than a half a gram of fat per hour.

When are the conditions right for migration? The winds must be blowing in the direction that the birds want to go. Birds will usually wait until the most favorable weather conditions then set off on their journey. Ornithologists watch the weather to help predict when large numbers of birds will be passing through their area. A strong wind in the right direction will speed the birds on their way. If there are strong headwinds, the birds' speed will be greatly reduced. Therefore the bird will need more fat reserves to travel the same distance. Many birds that encounter storms and strong headwinds while migrating over water will perish. If weary birds are over land, they will drop down and land, find food and rest before continuing.

The route birds instinctively take may seem strange until you look at

the winds. For instance, many birds on the east coast of the U.S. will head out across the Atlantic Ocean during a fall cold front. The northwest winds take them on a south-eastern course over Bermuda and beyond. Then they pick-up the northeast trade winds which will take them to South America. {Remember, South America is east of the U.S.} This remarkable journey will take them over 1,800 miles of water and can last over 80 hours. But it is actually easier for them than the land route along the coast, down through Central America, and then onto their destination in South America. The land route is longer and they would encounter more dangers from predators. The winds are the key factor here.

Flapping of the wings uses quite a bit of stored energy. Therefore, many birds, especially the larger ones, will soar and glide as much as possible, using the winds and thermals. However, the journey will take longer than if the migration was made by a more flapping flight. Spectacular kettles of hawks are seen at various places where thousands of hawks climb to the greatest height possible then glide and ride the thermals, soaring without flapping for great distances.

Continued on page 6



BIRDS MIGRATE AT NIGHT

By Jan Haag
10-16-99

Birds migrate at night.
Be quiet, listen carefully:
you can hear the lift and fall of the wings,
two notes of a song,
you can see the black images bisect
the retina of the moon,
you can guess their pattern, their flight
their destination
far away to the south in winter,
north in spring.

You can hear the lift and fall of the wings,
the single cry of a mate,
millions of birds flying through
darkness over the sea and the land
in silence, through the sleep
of other creatures.

You can guess their pattern, their flight:
formations of birds in the night,
covering the sky with the grid of their wings
making the stars blink -- intermittent.

Millions of birds flying through
as you stand on the shore in the night
over the glittering, rattled ladders of shale
hearing their wings and their flight.

You are used to rain-pattered roofs, the drumming,
as abundant and isolated as tears in the night.
You can guess their pattern, their flight.
But the birds fly in silence,
swift as the wind,
invisible to the casual eye.

Over the glittering, rattled ladders of shale
the birds cross, tangential to the sea at night.
Hour upon hour you can sense the undulation of wings.
If you lift your cheek quite carefully
you can feel the kiss and the wisp of air
stirred by the inaudible glide.
You can guess their pattern, their flight,
and, once or twice in the night, sense
the splash of a songbird's spent body caught
in the sea's phosphorescence.

Continued from page 5

Mysteries of Migration

How high do birds fly during migration? Pilots have reported seeing birds as high as 26,000 feet! A bird's lungs are different than human's so the colder air at these high altitudes actually helps the birds. However, most birds fly less than 3,000 feet in the air.

Many people are unaware of the thousands of birds that may pass in the skies near them. Part of the reason may be that many birds travel at night. Many birders watch the full moons and count the birds cross in front of it. Smaller birds elude their predators, who migrate during the day, by this night travel. Birds not flying non-stop over water, will usually land in the very early morning hours, find a safe place to rest and then find food during the daylight hours. Night migrants include vireos, various waterfowl, sparrows, cuckoos, warblers, thrushes, and flycatchers. Those who prefer a daytime trip include hawks, eagles, pelicans, storks, swifts, swallows, shrikes and some finches. Most of these birds use thermals for soaring.

How do birds know which way to go? How do they stay on course? Various studies have been conducted that suggest that birds use the sun or stars as guides. Birds may also use the physical characteristics of the land below, following rivers, shorelines, foothills and valleys as guides. There is also the "homing" instinct that has been studied. There have been studies where birds have been taken in closed boxes to remote locations and released. The birds found their way back to their colonies. This 'homing' instinct may be due to the birds ability to detect magnet fields.

Birds do get lost sometimes, thrown off course by huge storms, fierce winds, or other weather conditions. Young birds, perhaps those who fledged late in the season and unable to migrate with the older birds, may become confused and stray.

There is much still to learn and know about migration. Banding of birds, observations, and radio tracking by use of small transmitters on the birds all gather information and add to the knowledge.

Historic Beliefs about Migration

Recorded observations of migration date back 3000 years. In the Bible in Job (39:26), "Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom and stretch her wings toward the south?" And in Jeremiah (8:7), "The stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed time; and the turtledove, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming. Aristotle noted that cranes traveled from the Steppes of Scythia to the marshes of the headwaters of the Nile.

Some early recordings have turned out to be not so accurate. Aristotle offered the hypothesis that birds hibernated. Ornithologist Dr. Elliott Coues, in 1887, listed over 180 papers dealing with the hibernation of swallows, a theory that lasted for over 2000 years. One account stated that flocks of swallows congregated in marshes until their accumulated weight bent the reeds into the water submerging the birds where they fell into deep hibernation. It was even recorded that fishermen in northern waters found a mixed catch of fish and hibernating birds when they pulled in their nets.

*From "Birds & Migration: Why and How Do They Do It" By Don Richardson
For the complete, fascinating article go to <http://birding.about.com/library/weekly/aa011599.htm>*



Book Nook

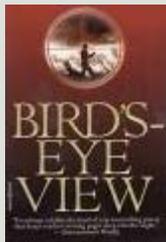
***Birds-eye View.* by J. E. Freedman. Warner Vision, 2002.**

Even if you don't typically read suspense thrillers, you might enjoy this book, because some of the characters are birdwatchers. The main character witnesses (and photographs) a murder in a remote area near the Chesapeake Bay while photographing birds. He later recognizes the victim as a missing Russian diplomat. Things really get interesting when he learns that a government official with a shoddy past owns the property where the murder occurred.

He confides in a woman (an ornithologist from Harvard) who has taken an interest in the birds he is photographing, telling her about the murder. Soon it becomes obvious that the bad guys are after him, and his bird-watching adventures get very exciting.

It's available in paperback, so if you like this genre, check it out.

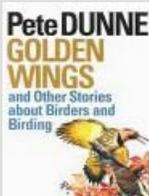
Review by Lucy Quintilliano



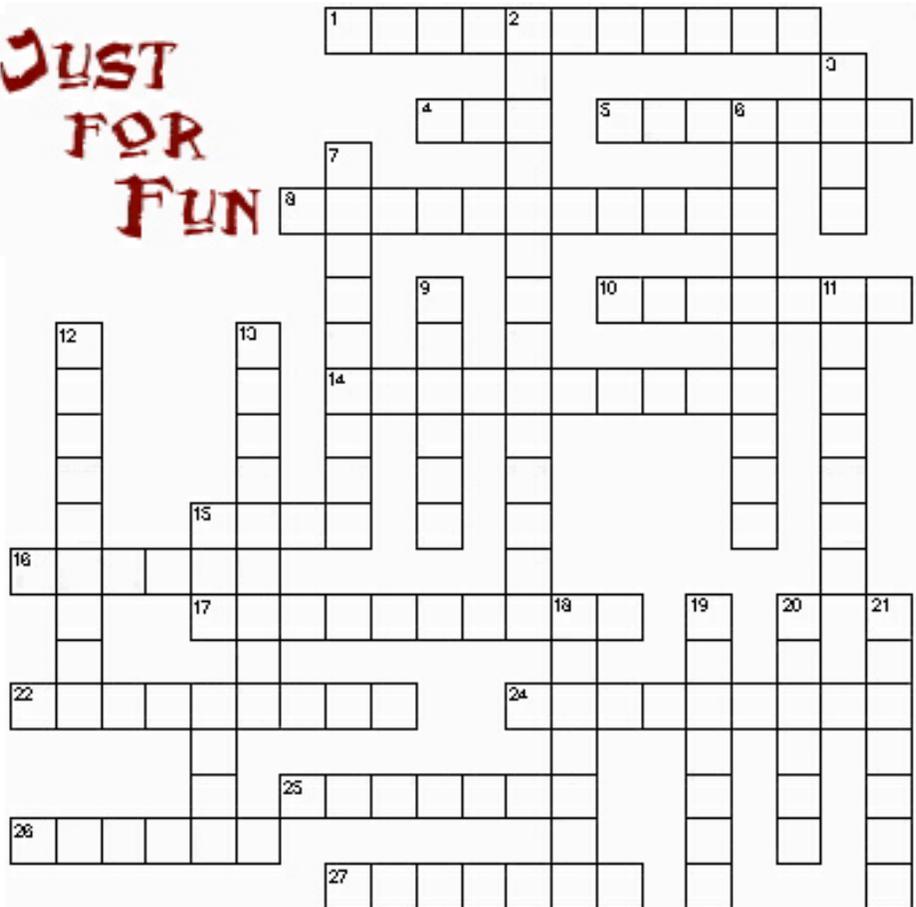
***Golden Wings & other Stories about Birds & Birding* by Pete Dunne. University of Texas Press, 2003.**

This book is a collection of forty-one of Pete Dunne's recent essays, drawn from his columns in various publications. Written with his signature wit and insight, they cover everything from a moment of awed communion with a Wandering Albatross to a bird of Pete's own creation. The title essay

pays whimsical, yet heartfelt tribute to his mentor, Roger Tory Peterson.



JUST FOR FUN



DOWN

2. Introduced back to Maine
3. Small ducks
6. Cardinal causing problems in Hawaii
7. Decorates it home in blue
9. Northern Atlantic seabird
11. Brood parasite
12. Sunshine at your feeder
13. Swan with pink bill and legs
18. Penguin dad who incubates egg on feet
19. Subfamily Thraupidae
20. Has a hanging nest
21. Naked head
22. Poor eyesight, no tail

ACROSS

1. Man o' war bird
4. Silent hunter at night
5. Raptor
8. Mimic at midnight
10. Ratite
14. Gull with black head and red legs
15. Only true stork in US
16. Desert woodpecker
17. Beep, beep
22. With a coal black cap
24. In the mangroves
25. Eurasian swan
26. Corvid
27. Secretive in the marshes

Resources on Bird Migration

***Living on the Wind: Across the Hemi-sphere with Migratory Birds.* By Scott Weidensaul. North Point Press, 1999.**

***Gatherings of Angels — Migrating Birds and Their Ecology.* Kenneth P. Able, Ed. Cornell University, 1999.**

***How Birds Migrate.* By Paul Kerlinger. Stackpole, 1995.**

Clemson Radar Ornithology Lab -

<http://virtual.clemson.edu/groups/birdrad/>

Journey North - <http://www.learner.org/jnorth/>

Operation Migration - <http://fathergoose.durham.net/index.html>

Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center

<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds/>

Audubon News

Published by Mecklenburg Audubon
A Chapter of National Audubon
P. O. Box 221093, Charlotte, NC 28222
meckbirds.org

Nonprofit Organization
US Postage
PAID
Permit No. 1779
Charlotte, NC

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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.

*It's time to Flock Again
Our first meeting is
Thursday, Sept. 9th
The Thursday AFTER Labor Day*

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Monthly Meeting	1
Membership Info	1
Field Trips	2
Year-at-a-Glance	3
Presidents Perch	4
Migration	5
Crossword	7

ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

Fri. 8/27	- Butterfly Program - Friends of the Pee Dee
Sat. 8/28	- Butterfly Walk - Pee Dee NWR [1 PM]
Thu. 9/9	- Migrants on the Move - Monthly Meeting
Sun. 9/12	- Butterfly Walk - McAlpine Greenway [1:30 PM]
Sat. 9/18	- Jackson Park, Hendersonville - All Day Field Trip
Sat. 9/25	- Hawk Watch, Mahogany Rock BRP - All Day FT
Sat. 10/1	- Latta Prairie - 1/2 day Field Trip
Thu. 10/7	- Spiders - Monthly Meeting
Sat. 10/8	- Huntington Beach, SC - All Day Field Trip
Sat. 10/23	- McMullen Greenway - 1/2 Field Trip



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