What’s Inside?
Wildlife Revealed 1
Field Trips 2
Tundra Swans 3
Importance of lawns 4
Bluestem 4
Safe Homes for birds 5
Conserve engery birding 5
Winterize your yard 6
Big Sit Review 7
Explore the Tropics 8

Coming Events
11/03 Monthly Mtg.
11/05 McDowell Prairie
11/09 Toby Creek Grnwy.
11/12 Beginner Walk
11/19 Clark’s Creek Grnwy.
11/20 Pee Dee NWR
12/01 Monthly Mtg.
12/05 Wintering Waterfowl
12/17 Gaston CBC
12/18 Lake Norman CBC
12/26 Charlotte CBC
12/31 Pee Dee NWR CBC

Who’s New?
B. Quick Chadwick
Diane & Steve Coggin
Jo Ann Darby
Lynne & Paul Dillon
Robert Olson
Jordan Parker
Diane Podolsky

Swoop into our November membership meeting to meet the avian ambassadors from Wildlife Revealed! Mecklenburg Audubon will host Kevin Gaines, owner, operator and Master Falconer of Wildlife Revealed, a non-profit organization dedicated to the education and conservation of our planet’s wildlife. Kevin is in town for the annual seasonal run of the Carolina Renaissance Festival and will bring some of the feathered cast from his Birds of Prey and Falconry Demonstration. For over a decade he and his birds have presented for the Carolina Renaissance Festival with a team of volunteers including our very own Board Member Christy Hill.

Outside of his time spent in North Carolina, Kevin travels across the country educating and entertaining audiences at numerous Renaissance Festivals, birding festivals and school programs. He has performed his Raptor Revealed Program at venues such as the Galveston Texas Featherfest, Moody Gardens, Hawkwatch International, Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain Georgia, Stone Mountain in Atlanta, Silver Dollar City in Branson Missouri and for hundreds of school programs for children nationwide. Kevin will share his up-close and innovative approach of capturing audiences and making connections with nature through the idea of “Edutainment”- promoting education of the natural world with an entertaining twist to create a memorable and up-close connection. Kevin holds a B.S. in Engineering from Texas A&M University. He resides in Bastrop, Texas with his wife and six-year-old son/apprentice and lots of Legos.
Field Trips

All Mecklenburg Audubon Field Trips are free and open to the public. Directions for all trips can be found on the Mecklenburg Audubon website - meckbirds.org/trips/trips.html. 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 they don’t know you are coming, they might leave without you!!

Saturday, Nov. 5th: McDowell Prairie/Copperhead Island
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]

Our first prairie walk of the season. We will be looking for early winter migrants including waterfowl at Copperhead Island. Brief directions: Turn right on Shopton Road off Hwy 49. In 0.7 miles, turn left on Four Horse Road. Follow it about 3/4 mile to the green gate on the right.

Wednesday, Nov. 9th: Toby Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy* • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]

A late fall stroll the UNCC campus should provide some early winter migrants as well as a variety of local residents. We’ll meet in the parking lot of Town Center on University City Blvd. in the corner by the light at 8:30 AM.

Saturday, Nov. 12th: Latta Plantation Prairie (Beginner Bird Walk)
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Marcia Howden [howden32@aol.com]

This will be a two-mile walk on dirt and gravel roads. We’ll have power line right-of-way, woods and prairie/field. Fall migration could produce a variety of migrants. We’ll start at 8:30 AM in the parking lot to the right just inside the gate of Latta Nature Preserve.

Saturday Nov. 19th: Clark’s Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]

This heavily wooded greenway provides a surprising variety of birds. All five woodpeckers are possible as well as winter wrens. Meet in the greenway parking lot adjacent to Mallard Creek Elementary School on Mallard Creek Rd. at 8:30 AM.

Sunday, Nov. 20th: Pee Dee NWR
Full Day • Moderate • Contact: Matt Janson [m.janson.geolover@gmail.com]

Winter migrants should be arriving at this gem of a refuge hidden in the NC piedmont. Maximum 15 participants as we will be entering the sensitive waterfowl habitat. Also, please carpool to bring as few intrusive vehicles as possible. Bring lunch, water and snacks. Meet at the kiosk/bathroom area at 8 AM.

Sat., Dec. 5th • 9:00 AM • Wintering Waterfowl
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]

By now wintering waterfowl should have arrived at Coddle Creek Reservoir and the surrounding area. We will meet at Panera Bread across from Concord Mills Mall at 9 AM to check out the wetland behind HH Greg and then car pool up to the reservoir. Depending on time we may even swing by Moss Creek Greenway to see what’s there.

Sat., Dec. 17th • Gaston CBC
Sun., Dec 18th • Lake Norman CBC
Mon., Dec. 26th • Charlotte CBC
Sat., Dec. 31 • Pee Dee CBC

KEY TO PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY

Easy - Trails are level to slight grades usually paved; .5-3 miles walking
Moderate - Trails can be uneven with some hills; 2-4 miles walking.
Strenuous - Trails vary greatly; 4+ miles of walking.
* Trails are handicapped accessible.
Tundra Swans, also known as Whistling Swans in North America, migrate from the far northern reaches of North America to spend the winter in eastern North Carolina every year. North Carolina is one of the most important states in the Atlantic Flyway for this species and supports about 75% of the Atlantic Flyway population—65,000 to 75,000 individuals. The winter flocks of swans at places like Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Lake Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge and Currituck Sound is one of the great wildlife spectacles in our state.

Destruction of southern wetlands has reduced its former food sources in wintering areas, but it has adapted by shifting its habits to feeding on waste products in agricultural fields. This species is projected to lose both summer and winter habitats, raising questions about how this migratory bird will adjust to the disruption in both seasons.

**FEEDING BEHAVIOR:** In the nesting season they forages mainly in water by dabbling at surface, dipping head underwater, or upending with tail up and head straight down (can reach 3 feet below surface). During migration and on wintering territory they feed on land in open fields. They will sometimes feed during moonlit nights. Their summer diet consists mainly of stems, seeds, and roots of aquatic plants, including sedges, pondweeds, arrowleaf, algae, and others; also a few small invertebrates. At other seasons, they eat grain in harvested fields of corn, barley, and soybean.

**BREEDING:** The tundra swans mate in the late spring, usually after they have returned to the nesting grounds; as usual for swans, they pair monogamously until one partner dies. They have a variety of mating displays. In one display, the birds face each other, wings partly spread and rapidly quivering, while they call loudly. Their nest site is near lake or other open water, on ridge or island with good visibility. The nest (built by both sexes) is low mound of plant material, 1 or 2 feet in diameter, with a depression in the center; may be used for more than 1 year.

Tundra Swans lay 4-5 (sometimes up to 7) creamy white eggs that become stained. The female does about 3/4 of incubating, male does the rest. The eggs hatch in 31-32 days. Young: Both parents tend young, leading them to feeding sites in water. Adults may paddle with feet to bring submerged food to surface for young; may rarely feed young directly. The young fledge in 2-3 months but remain with parents at least through first winter.

**MIGRATION:** Birds may leave nesting areas in late summer and concentrate in nearby estuaries. Southward migration begins mid-autumn. Migrating flocks (of up to 100 or more) are made up of family groups. They may fly long distances between traditional staging areas in fall; but spring migration may involve shorter flights and more stopovers.

**COOL FACTS:**
- During the breeding season the Tundra Swan sleeps almost entirely on land, but in the winter it sleeps more often on water.
- Swans have long been associated with ideals of romance. Added to their elegant outlines and all-white plumage is their tendency to form permanent pair bonds by the time they’re 2–3 years old. Once a pair forms, Tundra Swans feed and roost together year-round.
- Based on banding records, the oldest known Tundra Swan was a female and at least 23 years, 7 months old when she was identified by her band in the wild, in Ohio. She had been banded in the same state.
- The whistling swan, the American race of the Tundra Swan, currently is considered the same species as the Eurasian race, the Bewick’s swan. They were considered separate species in the past, distinguished by the large yellow patches on the face of the Bewick’s swan.
- The Tundra Swan stays in flocks except when on a breeding territory. Although most swans spread out to breed, a large proportion of the population on the breeding grounds still can be found in flocks. These swans are not breeding, and may be young birds that have not yet bred, adult pairs whose breeding attempts failed, or adults that bred in the past but for some reason do not in that year.
Audubon News Page 4

The (un)importance of Lawn

While lawns perform some important ecosystem functions, like storing carbon and carrying out photosynthesis, they are biodiversity barrens. They tend to consist of only one or two species of grass, dramatically limiting the potential wildlife they can support. Diversity begets diversity! Some birds, like robins, occasionally visit lawns; however, these heavily-mowed, often chemically-treated, water guzzling, low-diversity areas simply do not provide the elements of habitat needed for supporting diverse wildlife.

Reduce the area devoted to lawn. Around 60% of the average yard in America is lawn. Be mindful. Do you really use all that lawn to its fullest capacity? Or are there parts you use as lawn, for instance, for playing games, having outdoor dinners, or for walking paths, and parts you could let go wild? Take stock.

Reduce your use of chemical aids on your lawn. Most of us are over-fertilizing, over-watering, and over-spraying our yards. Less is more; apply only what your plants can use.

If you have a shady area unsuitable for growing grass, try an alternative ground cover like mosses, ferns, or rock gardens.

EVERYTHING IN MODERATION

“Thats great,” you say, “but I enjoy having some lawn.” If you really use your lawn a lot and soil testing has revealed that you should fertilize it, be aware that more is not always better. What can you do instead?

Leave grass clippings or mulched leaves to decompose on the lawn over time- their nutrients stay put even if you happen to get significant rain.

Use compost or compost tea, “slow-release” organic rock fertilizers, or limestone to fertilize lawns.

Consider replacing your lawn with native grass mixes, which need less interventions than exotic grasses, and make darn fine lawns, too!

For more information about how to smother an unwanted lawn go to YardMap - http://content.yardmap.org/learn/lawns/

Bird Friendly Plant of the Month

Little Bluestem

Planting Little Bluestem in your yard is like planting a living bird feeder. A classic American tallgrass prairie plant, Little Bluestem, Schizachyrium scoparium, will grow nicely in your yard, in a perennial border, flower bed or meadow garden.

This perennial grass can be surprisingly colorful, with “leaves green to bluish, turning orangish to reddish in fall and into winter,” according to Dr. Larry Mellichamp, author of Native Plants of the Southeast: A Comprehensive Guide to the Best 460 Species for the Garden.

BIRDS THAT LOVE BLUESTEM

The seeds of the Little Bluestem will attract a variety of birds – cardinals, buntings, finches, grosbeaks, sparrows and towhees – from October through March. Little Bluestem seeds are an especially important food for sparrows during their southward migration each fall, but the seeds will keep feeding birds all winter long.

One bird you might be especially happy to have in your yard during winter is the Song Sparrow. According to Donald Kroodsma in The Singing Life of Birds, young males move away from their parents’ territory during their summer and settle in a new place. Once there, their mission is to learn their neighbors’ songs and polish them in time to impress a potential mate in the spring. That means they practice all winter long, when many of our common backyard birds are relatively quiet. Their juvenile efforts at the three-part song are sometimes endearingly comic.

The dapper White-throated Sparrow – a far-north breeder who joins us in NC only in winter – is another bird that will cheer your wintry days with his sweet, clear whistled song if you have a good supply of seeds.

Many birds like to build nests in Little Bluestem clumps in fields and meadows, including Field Sparrows and Common Yellowthroats. The plant also supports six species of moths and butterflies, so birds might be able to pluck a few caterpillars off these grasses for their babies.

HOW TO GROW

Little Bluestem is native to the Mountains, Piedmont and Coastal Plain of North Carolina. This bird-friendly native plant is a perennial grass that will grow 1 to 4 feet tall. It forms clumps that range from 6 to 24 inches across. Choose a sunny spot with moist to dry soil.

For a meadow garden, plant Little Bluestem with other clump-forming native grasses such as Indian Grass (Sorghastrum nutans) and Broomsedge (Andropogon virginicus). Broad-leaved perennials like Black-eyed Susan are best planted at edges since they won’t compete well with the grasses.

**Safe Homes for Birds**

Most of us have experienced the heartbreaking thud of a bird hitting a window. Windows are everywhere — in our houses, condos, apartments, even balconies. Unfortunately, birds that make their homes in meadows, woods, or wetlands have no concept of ‘glass’. This is especially true for birds migrating during spring & fall. For them, glass can be deadly.

Windows deceive birds because they reflect trees or sky and the birds think they can fly through the space created by the reflection. The same is true if windows provide a view straight through the house. Even a potted plant sitting in a window can be a tempting but deadly hiding place. Birds that do not die on impact can go into shock, becoming easy prey for predators.

**BIRD-SAFE DESIGN:**

Be creative by treating your glass like a canvas. Uniformly cover the outside of your windows with a contrasting pattern of any shape, keeping the visual makers no more than 10 cm (4 inches) apart vertically or 5 cm (2 inches) horizontally. To help keep smaller birds such as hummingbirds and warblers safe, a window must have no reflective openings more than 5 x 5 cm (2 x 2 inches). Alternatively, you can hang ribbons or string on the outside of your windows 10 cm (4 inches) apart or purchase Acopian BirdSavers at birdsavers.com. Another technique is to draw patterns on your windows with a bar of soap or highlighter pen. You will need to repeat this after every rainfall. Less creative but just as effective is installing externally mounted window screens (ex. birdscreen.com) using window mounts or suction cups. Or apply special film on the outside of your windows avail at abcbirds.org.

**WHAT DOESN'T WORK**

**Hawk Silhouettes:** A hawk-shaped window decal will not frighten birds. The shape of a window decal is inconsequential in bird/window collision prevention. It’s the use of multiple window decals, of any shape, on the outside of a window that helps make glass visible to birds.

**Single Window Decals:** The use of a single decal or a few decals affixed to a window will not deter birds. Unless the bird is headed for that spot it will not be alerted to danger. Only if 80% of the window is uniformly covered, as shown below, will birds see the entire pane of glass and stay safe.

The illustration below of an effective application of window decals may seem exaggerated, but it is the only way to stop collisions using silhouettes or decals. Completely covering your window in this fashion is neither practical, desirable nor cost-effective in most cases.

**POSITIONING YOUR FEEDERS:**

Where you put your bird feeders and birdbaths can also impact the number of bird/window collisions. Position the feeders and birdbaths closer than 5 meters (16 ft.) to your house. Ideally they should be less than a meter (3 feet). Over this short distance, birds cannot build up enough momentum to injure themselves should they hit the window. The closer the feeder to your window, the better for the birds & your viewing.


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**Conserve Energy while Birding**

**Buy less “stuff”** from overseas. Much of the merchandise sold in American stores, including a lot of birding clothing and equipment, were shipped here in container ships burning highly polluting bunker oil. When you can, choose used or locally-produced items.

**Limit birding in SUVs** to terrain that requires a rugged vehicle. Most good birding spots are easily accessible in small cars. When you buy a new vehicle, do a cost comparison to find out if a small, economical car will save enough money to allow you to rent a larger vehicle when you need it for more rugged birding.

**Carpool** to chase rare birds or to travel to far-flung places. Birding festivals and field trips can be an excellent way to maximize the number of birds you see per birder-mile driven.

**Conserve fuel.** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency lists recommendations for driving habits to conserve fuel at www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/drive-Habits.shtml.

**Reduce the number of miles you drive.** Public transportation is sometimes another option. Remember that flying usually uses more fuel than driving.

**Skip the fast food** when birding. Prepare meals and snacks at home ahead of time. When you do eat out, choose local restaurants, especially those that specialize in locally produced ingredients. You’ll be eating healthier as well as saving energy.

**Skip the bottled water.** Bottle your own tap water rather than purchasing bottled water, which must be transported from the bottler to the store and also uses petroleum products in manufacturing the plastic.

**Conserve electricity.** Plug in your computer, electronics, and battery recharging equipment on a power strip and shut off when not in use.

**Skip the heated birdbath.** Set out a pan or sturdy plastic bowl of lukewarm water on cold mornings rather than using an electric birdbath heater.

Courtesy of Laura Erickson - Birdscope - Cornell Lab of Ornithology. For conservation tips check out Laura Erickson’s book, 101 Ways to Help Birds.
Winterize Your Yard For Birds

BY STEVE KRESS

WITH THESE 9 STEPS, YOU CAN CREATE AN AVIAN WINTER WONDERLAND AND GET A JUMP ON SPRING MIGRATION SEASON.

Get Planning

Choose trees, shrubs, vines, and groundcovers native to your area. In northern climates this will ensure that new plants are in place and ready to resume growing in the early spring; it’s also a good idea in the South, so plants can begin growing outside of the hot and dry seasons. One note of caution: Fall plantings are especially vulnerable to predators. Take steps to protect trees from bark-gnawing mice, rabbits and deer by covering sapling trunks with plastic wrap.

Provide Water

Make sure there’s ample water near protective shrubs. Many kinds of birds bathe in and drink from open water in frigid weather. Avoid ceramic baths; they can crack in cold weather. Baths on pedestals are ideal for reducing risks from predators such as cats, but if neighborhood cats are a regular threat, it’s best not to use birdbaths at all. Clean birdbaths as needed with a stiff, rounded hand brush. Frequent refills are necessary in winter because the water quickly evaporates in dry air.

Out With the Old

Clear out nest boxes in the fall. It’s wise to remove bird and mouse nests because some birds will use these boxes as winter roosts. Clean them a second time in early spring to prepare for the coming nesting season.

Push the Limits

Create a songbird border along your property edge with plants that meet birds’ needs year-round. Mimic natural flora communities by including indigenous plant species in varied heights that offer a mix of food, cover, nesting, and singing perches. A border that takes the form of a hedge can double as a wind-break if planted on a home’s north side. Ideally, yours should serve to connect any isolated patches of habitat.

Make Mulch

Rake fallen leaves under shrubs to create mulch and to protect natural ground-feeding areas for such birds as sparrows, towhees, and thrashers. Birds prefer leaf mulch to woodchip and bark mulches. Earthworms, pillbugs, insects, and spiders—songbird delicacies—will thrive as the mulch decomposes.

Discard Old Seed

You should get rid of old birdseed, especially if it has been kept in a hot, humid place like a metal garbage can during the summer months. Although these cans are ideal for protecting seed from rodents, they can also encourage mold growth if the seed gets wet and then heats up.

Pile On

Build a brush pile in a corner of your property to offer songbirds shelter in extreme weather. During fall cleanup, set aside downed branches and tree trunks for construction. If they’re available, use large logs as a foundation, then heap fallen and cut branches in successive layers.

Grab a Brush

Clean feeders with a bottlebrush and a 10 percent solution of nonchlorinated bleach. Rinse thoroughly and dry in the sun before re-filling. Rake up soggy seed from under feeders and bury it far away to prevent the growth of bird-toxic mold. Scrub and store hummingbird feeders so they will be ready for spring.

Protect Your Windows

About a billion birds die from glass collisions each year. See article in this issue on how to protect birds from window collisions.

Complete article can be found at http://www.audubonmagazine.org/articles/living/winterize-your-yard-birds
Another Successful Big Sit!

Everyone agrees it was a day of great weather, fellowship, food and birds.

- Canada Goose
- Mallard
- Double-crested Cormorant
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Black Vulture
- Turkey Vulture
- Osprey
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Cooper’s Hawk
- Bald Eagle
- Red-shouldered Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Killdeer
- Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)
- Mourning Dove
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo
- Great Horned Owl
- Chimney Swift
- Belted Kingfisher
- Red-headed Woodpecker
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Peregrine Falcon
- Eastern Wood-Pewee
- Eastern Phoebe
- White-eyed Vireo
- Blue Jay
- American Crow
- Northern Rough-winged Swallow
- Tree Swallow
- Carolina Chickadee
- Tufted Titmouse
- Red-breasted Nuthatch
- White-breasted Nuthatch
- Brown-headed Nuthatch
- House Wren
- Sedge Wren
- Carolina Wren
- Eastern Bluebird
- Veery
- Wood Thrush
- American Robin
- Gray Catbird
- Brown Thrasher
- Northern Mockingbird
- European Starling
- Common Yellowthroat
- American Redstart
- Palm Warbler
- Pine Warbler
- Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle)
- Chipping Sparrow
- White-throated Sparrow
- Song Sparrow
- Swamp Sparrow
- Eastern Towhee
- Northern Cardinal
- Red-winged Blackbird
- House Finch
- American Goldfinch
In 1967, far-sighted Audubon members rallied to raise enough money to buy Spring Hill Estate and its famous Oilbird Cave in Trinidad. With this innovative step, they created the first non-profit, conservation-focused trust and eco-lodge in the Caribbean. Based in a former cocoa-coffee-citrus plantation, the re-named Asa Wright Nature Centre has lived up to its mandate to protect and conserve habitat and wildlife, and to educate. Today, the Centre protects 1500 acres of mainly forested lands, offers a wide variety of education programs to local audiences of all ages as well as international visitors, coordinates baseline research projects, and supports community outreach, local employment and training.

Highlighting the amazing role that Asa Wright Nature Centre has played in tropical conservation, a wonderful selection of celebrity birders, conservationists and artists will visit the Center in 2017. Celebrities will offer a lecture or workshop in their specialty, join tour groups on guided walks, and be available at the Centre for informal conversation and birding on the verandah. You are welcome to join a tour timed to overlap with a celebrity.

- March: Scott and Amy Weidensaul – Author, conservationists & educators
- June: Edward and Janice Rooks – Trinidadian artist and Santa Clara University (CA) Biology professor
- October: Keith Hanson and Patricia Briceño – Artists and conservationists

If you have always dreamt of visiting the Centre, doing so in 2017 will benefit you as well as your chapter! For 50 years, Audubon chapters and members have made important contributions to conservation in Trinidad by sponsoring tours to the Centre, contributing sightings to eBird, and making direct donations. In recognition of those contributions and in honor of the anniversary, in 2017, Caligo Ventures (the US booking agent for the Centre), will provide a $100 donation to their chapter for every Audubon member who books a tour as a result of seeing this article in their chapter newsletter or website.

And the birding is amazing! A visit to the Centre is one of the best introductions to tropical birding. While coffee still grows on site (and is available for sale in the gift shop), most of the estate is now covered by original and secondary tropical rainforest, providing habitat for over 166 species of montane forest birds. From the Centre’s famous verandah, over 40 species can been seen in comfort before breakfast, or over late-afternoon rum punch. The Trinidad Mot-Mot, one of the island’s only two endemic species, makes frequent visits, and the nearby Crested Oropendola colony, perching Ornate Hawk-eagles, and Channel-billed Toucans are spectacular sights. The Dunston Cave on property still provides one of the world’s easiest access to roosting Oilbirds, and numerous leks of White-bearded and Golden-headed Manakin and Bearded Bellbird are within an easy walk. In addition, modern hotel facilities, an amazing dining experience, and a wide range of field trips offered by highly trained Centre naturalists round out your stay.

Join in the anniversary year celebration! For more details about dates and tour options, please contact Caligo Ventures at 800.426.7781 or www.caligo.com.

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