Our Nicaragua Connection

Thursday, September 8th

Each fall, millions of songbirds migrate south from the United States to spend their winters in Central and South America. Of particular interest to North Carolina birders, some of our most familiar warblers and thrushes prefer to winter in Central American highlands quite similar in elevation and terrain to what they know here. Small shade-grown coffee farms have been found to be ideal wintering homes for these migratory species. It turns out that ninety percent of coffee production worldwide is in developing countries. Tens of millions of small producers provide the world’s coffee. The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center (SMBC) observed in the 1990’s that, increasingly, these producers were tempted to cut down their tree cover and shift production to poorer quality but more profitable full-sun coffee. This trend was threatening to the survival of our songbirds. Thus was born the SMBC criteria for bird-friendly coffee. When the countries of Central America were considered, it was concluded that Nicaragua would have the best yield of habitat saved by promotion of bird-friendly coffee.

For three years, Mecklenburg Audubon Society has supported this mission with our coffee sales of Birds & Beans bird-friendly coffee. A portion of the cost of every bag sold by MAS goes to support conservation in Nicaragua. This past January, a small group from MAS traveled down to Nicaragua to see firsthand the birds of several coffee farms that support bird conservation. Among the highlights of the trip was a day spent

Continued on page 3
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!

Thursday, Sep. 8th: RibbonWalk Nature Preserve
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]
This area is mostly wooded, and includes three ponds and a large eld. We’ll cover about 1 1/2 miles. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Hoyt Hinson Rd.

Saturday, Sep. 10th: Latta Plantation Prairie, Beginners walk
1/2 Day • Easy • 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.

Sunday, Sep. 11th: Six-mile Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Matt Janson [m.janson.geolover@gmail.com]
This greenway may be short (1 mile in length), but it has produced some interesting birds over the years. It has some interesting habitat that attracts migrating birds. We will also take a look at the large wetland across Marvin Rd. Meet in the parking lot at 8:30 AM.

Saturday, Sep. 17th - Jackson Park, Hendersonville, NC
Full Day • Moderate • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]
This Hendersonville city park is the fall equivalent of Latta Park in the spring, with a 20-warbler day possible. This is an all-day trip, so bring a lunch. We’ll meet at 7:30 AM at the McDonald’s on Hwy. 64 (Exit 49-B on Interstate 26 ) in Hendersonville. It’s on the right after you cross the interstate.

Wednesday, Sep. 21st: Campbell Creek
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]
Located on the east side of town, this 2 1/2 mile walk is on asphalt. It is mostly wooded with a creek. The parking lot is on Margaret Wallace Road. Meet at 8:30 AM.

Saturday, Sep. 24th: Toby Creek Greenway
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]
Most of the construction along this greenway through the UNCC campus has been completed. In the fall this greenway has always managed to provide a few surprising migrants. We’ll meet in the parking lot of Town Center on University City Blvd. in the corner by the light at 8:30 AM.

Tuesday, Sep. 27th: Latta Park (Dilworth)
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]
Although not as active in the fall migration this park close to the city center always produces interesting birds. Meet in the parking area near the gazebo at 8:30 AM.

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.
Field Trips (cont.)

Saturday, Oct. 1st: RibbonWalk Nature Preserve
1/2 Day • Moderate • Contact: Ron Clark [waxwing@bellsouth.net]
This area is mostly wooded, and includes three ponds and a large field. We'll cover about 1 1/2 miles. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Hoyt Hinson Rd.

Saturday, Oct. 8th: Six-mile Creek Greenway (Beginner’s walk)
1/2 Day • Easy • Contact: Bill & Laura Blakesley [lclemons@mindspring.com]
Designed for beginner birdwatchers, we will concentrate on the basics on this leisurely walk along this relatively short greenway (1 mile) on the NC/SC border. Meet at 8:30 AM in the parking lot on Marvin Road.

Sunday, Oct. 9th: Big Sit (Cowan’s Ford Refuge)
All Day • Easy
This is a fun-filled day of birding with minimal walking. It takes place in the viewing stand at Cowan’s Ford Refuge. It will start before daybreak and end around 5-6, whenever the last folks leave. You can come for an hour or all day. Bring a chair, snacks and your binoculars. This is a great way to meet folks, and one of the few outings where talking is okay. We will have grill for some hot dogs around noon. Sign-up isn’t necessary, just come and enjoy.

Saturday/Sunday, Oct. 15/16th: Huntington Beach St. Park, SC
Weekend • Strenuous • Contact: Judy Walker [birdwalker@me.com]
This is our fall sojourn to a South Carolina birding hot spot. Fall migrants – hawks and warblers – will still be moving through, wintering shorebirds will have settled in and a few ducks may also have begun arriving. This is probably the best time of the year to see Peregrine Falcons and Merlins, and I am sure we will be delighted with spectacular views of thousands of tree swallows.
We will meet in the parking lot on the east side of the causeway at 7:30 AM. It can get pretty hot so remember a hat, sunscreen and plenty of water. We will eat lunch in the park so you will also need to bring food.
Since many participants stay for the weekend, we usually go out to dinner on Saturday night. At dinner we will plan where we will go on Sunday.

Continued from page 1

Nicaragua

visiting the El Nisperal farm of Sally Gladstone. She is an American scientist who has become a booster and coordinator of bird-friendly coffee production in Nicaragua. In this first monthly meeting of the year, Christy Hill, Jim Pugh, and Ken Kneidel will present the sights and lessons of this MAS conservation outing.
Join us Thursday, September 8th at the Tyvola Senior Center (2225 Tyvola Road.) at 7:15 PM. Refreshments and fellowship from 6:45 PM. Although we offer disposable cups, if you think of it beforehand, please consider bringing your own cup or mug to ease the burden on the environment. Ice will be provided. Birds and Beans Bird Friendly coffee will be available too!
NC Priority Bird: Chimney Swift

The small, agile, fast-flying Chimney Swift is readily identified by its characteristic “flying cigar” profile. Swifts range from 5-6” and can be recognized by their gray-brown plumage and their stiff wing flight pattern. Members of this family are among the fastest fliers in the bird world, spending all of their daylight hours on the wing and coming down to rest only at night. Chimney Swifts rely exclusively on flying insects for food.

The Chimney Swift was named after its habit of nesting and resting inside of chimneys. Until the European settlement of North America, Chimney Swifts nested in hollow trees. Now, they have adapted to urbanization and prefer nesting in chimneys and other artificial sites, including air vents, garages, silos and barns. They are known to breed from southern Canada east of Saskatchewan, south through Texas and to the Atlantic seaboard, and winter in the tropics.

Because of the bird’s nesting habits, they can be easily captured and banded in such situations. Hence, it has been studied much more thoroughly than other North American swifts. In late summer, hundreds or even thousands of individuals may roost in one large chimney, gathering in spectacular flocks overhead near dusk.

In recent years swift nesting in our area has been disturbed because of the lack of suitable nesting sites. People are capping chimneys or building them with slick surfaces that the birds can’t hold on to. In addition many of the large ‘commercial’ type chimneys found at older schools and warehouses are being torn down. Audubon encourages citizens to leave chimneys uncapped during swift nesting season from early April through mid to late summer.

Fast facts about Chimney Swifts:

- Swifts are more closely related to hummingbirds than any other groups of birds, even swallows which they resemble. Swifts and hummingbirds make up an Order of birds called Apodiformes.
- Chimney Swifts do everything on the wing – eating, drinking, bathing; even snapping off twigs for nesting material. If they’re not sitting on their nest or roosting, they are flying.
- Swifts stick their nests together with their spit, which basically glues the nest together and sticks it securely to the wall of the chimney.
- Swifts have toes that are kind of like our opposable thumbs – two of their four toes can point backward, as they do in flight, or swing forward for clinging to a tree or chimney. This toe arrangement is called “pamprodactyl.”
- Large numbers of Chimney Swifts roost together in a single chimney during the nonbreeding season. There’s warmth in numbers: during cold nights, the temperature inside a chimney roost can be 70°F warmer than outside.
- Unmated swifts continue roosting together in the summer, sometimes in large groups. But the species does not nest colonially: you’ll find only one breeding pair nesting in any one chimney. The pair may tolerate other nonbreeders roosting in their chimney.
- The oldest Chimney Swift on record was at least 14 years old when it was captured and released by an Ohio bird bander in 1970.
WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT CHIMNEY SWIFTS?

• Chimney Swifts eat nearly one third of their own weight in flying insect pests such as mosquitoes, biting flies and termites every day.
• Chimney Swifts historically used large, hollow trees for nests and roosts. As the ancient forests were cut down, they learned to use chimneys and other structures instead.
• Today, just like Purple Martins, Chimney Swifts rely almost entirely on man-made structures for nest sites.
• Because they cannot perch like songbirds, Chimney Swifts must have deep shafts in which to raise their families and roost at night.
• Chimney Swifts are protected by State Wildlife Codes and Federal law under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1916.
• Like all Neotropical Migrants, Chimney Swifts are declining in numbers and need our assistance.
• Like watching a beautiful sunset, the aesthetic value of observing Chimney Swifts’ aerial acrobatics and interactions is a simple pleasure that nature has to offer.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP CHIMNEY SWIFTS?

• If you have a masonry or clay flue-tile chimney, keep the top open and the damper closed from March through October to provide a nest site for these insect-eaters. Metal chimneys should be permanently capped to prevent birds and other wildlife from being trapped.
• Have your chimney cleaned in early March before the Chimney Swifts return from their winter home in South America.
• Work with local conservation groups to construct Chimney Swift Towers and educate your friends and neighbors about Chimney Swifts.

Make it a Swift Night Out

A SWIFT NIGHT OUT is a continent-wide effort to raise awareness about and encourage interest in Chimney Swifts and Vaux’s Swifts. The project was originally inspired by John Connors (retired) formerly with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh, North Carolina. In 2001 Paul and Georgean Kyle took John’s suggestion and developed the program for the Driftwood Wildlife Association (now the Chimney Swift Conservation Association) that has become a favorite late summer event for biologists and amateur birdwatchers alike.

As summer draws to a close and the swifts have finished raising their young, these fascinating aerial acrobats begin to congregate in communal roosts prior to their migration in the fall. Some roosts may consist of an extended family group of a half a dozen birds or so, but the larger sites can host hundreds or even thousands of swifts! We encourage you to involve local scout groups and neighbors in this exhilarating spectacle.

Here is how it works: Keep your eyes to the skies at dusk in late July and watch for areas where swifts are feeding. Look for a tall shaft, chimney or similar structure to locate where Chimney Swifts go to roost in your area.

On one or more nights in September observe the roost starting about 30 minutes before sunset and estimate the number of swifts that enter. After the last swift enters the structure, please fill out the online reporting form. The form works best when using Google Chrome as your browser. Enter your report here! (http://www.chimneyswifts.org/page239.html)
Food and Shelter: Chickasaw Plum offers many services to our wildlife friends. The rambling and sometimes thorny hedgerows shelter bobwhite, thrasher, catbirds and mocking birds. The shrubby trees are also excellent larval host plants for swallowtail, hairstreak, and admiral butterflies.

Chickasaw Plum fruits are more often relished by wildlife than people. The plum fruits are a bit sour for our modern taste, unless you can wait until they are fully red or orange. There is evidence that Chickasaw Indians also consumed the fresh fruits and used the dried fruits in winter. The fruits have also historically been used to make jams, jellies and wines.

If you do want to produce Chickasaw Plum fruit, be sure to plant two or more individual plants in close proximity to achieve cross pollination.

Plum Choices: While we have several native plums, Chickasaw Plum might be the desirable selection for your landscape. Chickasaw Plum is typically longer lived and more attractive than its cousin, American Plum, Prunus americana.

Plant Chickasaw Plum in full sun. and it will grow to about 10 feet tall. Being deciduous, Chickasaw Plum is lovely in early spring in full flower before the leaves develop. Chickasaw Plums tend to form spreading colonies and are drought tolerant once established. They can be used to stabilize a stream bank or gully.

Chickasaw Plum could be an alternative to invasive exotic Bradford Pear trees, if you are focusing on wildlife benefits. The form of the two trees is quite different—Chickasaw Plum is a rambling hedge compared to the tree form of Bradford Pear.

Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month is a joint effort of the NC Native Plant Society and Audubon North Carolina.

Elect The Bird-Friendly Native Plants of the Year

Help finalize Audubon NC’s 2018 Bird-Friendly Native Plants of the Year list by casting your vote! Our native plant experts have compiled a list of NC native plant candidates, and now it’s up to YOU to vote for the winners.

Audubon North Carolina’s Bird-Friendly Native Plants of the Year program works to bring back native plants that specifically benefit birds, our environment and our local economy. Growing more native plants will help our birds with food and shelter as their natural habitats continue to disappear.

Learn more (http://nc.audubon.org/node/9831)
Birding Tips & Tricks

Where to bird?

You can bird anywhere and everywhere, but certainly some places are much better than others. Although a myriad of habitat types attract different species, the following general situations apply to most parts of the country.

**Edges:** Carefully observe habitat edges, which often hold a greater variety of birdlife and activity than areas of uniform habitat. Boundaries between forest and field, hedgerows, watery edges, and coastlines are attractive to many species because they tend to offer a greater variety of food items as well as nearby cover. During migration these edge habitats are particularly favored as feeding and roosting areas. In the morning, look for forest edges that catch the first warming rays of the sun. Insects become active earlier in these areas and hungry birds gravitate to them. The same holds true in the evening, so check those areas that catch the last light.

**Sheltered Areas:** Birds are rarely bothered by light winds, but they seek shelter from strong winds when possible. In open situations, birds shelter by getting on the lee side of any ground irregularity or structure. In vegetated areas the lee side of a windbreak of trees offers shelter & stays warmer. These small, temporary microclimates are worth checking carefully.

**Water:** Water is a magnet for various birds. The attraction level increases when there is movement in or sound from the water. Any water feature or damp spot, natural or artificial, is worth investigating, especially around its edges. The more arid the surrounding countryside, the more attractive any available water is to resident and migrants alike.

**When to Bird?**

Dedicated birders, always vigilant, try to make smart decisions about when to bird and how to maximize the chances of seeing more birds or particular species. Timing visits to coastal locations often depends on knowing the local tides; timing a search for migrants is affected by large-scale weather patterns like the passage of a warm or cold front. Local weather conditions can have as great an effect on birding as the changing seasons do.

**First Light:** Land bird activity usually peaks during the hour or two just after sunrise. Songbirds have high metabolisms and need to feed in the morning. Most migrate at night, which can further deplete their energy stores. Note, though, that adverse weather conditions and low temperatures can curtail early morning activity.

**Tides & Coastal Birds:** Many coastal species synchronize their feeding activity with the stage of the tide. Birds feeding on mudflats are particularly attuned to tidal activity. Some of the best shorebirding is done on an incoming tide, when the rising water pushes feeding flocks closer to dry land. If you're positioned correctly, the birds will be pushed closer and closer to you. Low tide is prime feeding time, and birds tend to spread out over a large area; you need a scope in these situations. During high tide look for resting & roosting flocks in sheltered areas of dry beach. In complex waterways with numerous bays and inlets, the tidal stages arrive at different times, so you'll need to check a local tide table.

**Weather Fronts & Migration:** Weather affects the movement of migratory birds profoundly. Like climate, the seasonal movement of migrants is predictable & regular (on average, that is) but whether there are any birds to see in your area has more to do with the weather that day and few previous day. If you want to optimize your birding during migration, pay attention to the weather and learn to interpret it. The best conditions for spring migrants in the East seem to be on the back side of a high pressure system where the temperature is elevated and the winds are from the southwest. A warm front with warm temperatures, low clouds, and light rain or drizzle is best. In the fall, cold fronts with northwest winds seem to bring about the best migration conditions throughout eastern North America, especially along the Atlantic Coast. A number of species have long offshore, trans-Atlantic flights to South America that are assisted by northwest winds. Catching a major fallout of migratory birds is one of the most exciting birding events on the continent.

Adapted from National Geographic Birding Essentials by Jonathan Alderfer & Jon L. Dun.
As the MAS activities wind down for the summer, it’s a reminder that it’s time to Renew your membership. Don’t worry if you recently joined you are good until June 2017. But the rest of us have to dig into our piggy banks to find some funds to renew our memberships for another year.

Local membership dues help cover administration costs such as the website, programs, printing display materials and much more. In contrast, all of the monies we raise through coffee sales, raffles, auctions, etc. are used for conservation and education efforts.

Take a fews minutes to fill out the form below and send it to our illustrious treasurer. Or go to the website (meckbirds.org/member-ship.html) and pay with a credit or debit card.

Learn more about Chimney Swifts:
1. Chimney Swifts (All about Birds) - https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chimney_Swift/lifehistory
3. Shedding some light on Chimney Swifts (Nestwatch) - http://nestwatch.org/p=1704
5. Wake Audubon Bird of the Year - http://wakeaudubon.org/p=111

Mecklenburg Audubon Society Membership

Join now and your membership will be effective until June 2017. Local Membership covers cost of the newsletter, web site, meetings and other administrative commitments.

Name: __________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________
________________________________________________

Phone: _______________ Email: ______________________

Individual Membership [$10]
Family Membership [$15]
Additional Donation $ _______

Volunteer Opportunities
Lead field trips
Do a program
Help at events

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