


Whistler

The Audubon Society of Forsyth County Newsletter

February-March 2010

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| February 2 | Board Meeting – 7:00 pm, Arbor Acres Clubhouse |
| February 6 | Audubon North Carolina Chapter Day – NC Zoo |
| February 13 | Second Saturday Birdwalk – 9 am, Salem Lake (Susan Jones, leader) |
| February 23 | Chapter Meeting – 7:30 pm, Bethabara Visitor Center (social hour at 7:00)
Hop Hopkins, “Antarctica Revisited” |
| March 2 | Board Meeting – 7:00 pm, Arbor Acres Clubhouse |
| March 13 | Second Saturday Birdwalk – 9 am, Archie Elledge (John Haire, leader) |
| March 23 | Chapter Meeting – 7:30 pm, Bethabara Visitor Center (social hour at 7:00)
Dennis Burnette, “Butterfly Identification for Birders” |

Great Backyard Bird Count

Don't forget to take part in this year's Great Backyard Bird Count! It will be February 12–15. Participation is easy. Count the birds in your yard or favorite birding spots and report what you see on line at <http://birdsource.org/gbbc/>. Count as many days and places as you like.

Many of us birders tend to be competitive, and the Great Backyard Bird Count provides an opportunity to show others that Forsyth County is a hot area for birds and birding. Last year, Winston-Salem was ninth in North America in participation and second only to Charlotte in the state for species reported. Let's see if we can do even better this year.

Also you can choose among several activities scheduled for Saturday the 13th. Meet us at the Salem Lake marina for our regular Second Saturday Birdwalk at 9 a.m. Or, go out to the Park Administration Office/Nature Education Department on Nature Trail Drive at Tanglewood for a GBBC program that will include guided walks and displays. There will be an early walk at 9:30 a.m., followed by more walks and activities between 10 and noon. In addition, we will lead a walk through the Walnut Bottoms conservation area. Meet at the Bethabara Visitor Center.

Chat

Over a month. Over a *month!* That's how long it has taken for the white stuff to finally melt in front of our house from the December snow. I've lived in Winston-Salem off and on for more than six decades (and I'm following four other local generations) and I don't ever remember snow hanging around that long. Any snow left around three to four days after a storm was, as my older relatives would say, “waiting for more”. Well, it's the end of January, it's 40 degrees and raining. The only “waiting” I'm doing is for spring! We've just come back from the ASFC winter trip, I haven't ordered all my seeds from garden catalogues, Juncos and greenish American Goldfinch still cover my yard and feeders. And, like I said, it's 40 degrees.

But spring will come and, as always, make us wish that the month of May with its birds and wildflowers was about two months long with about fourteen days worth of Saturdays. But with careful planning and little or no sleep we birders manage to make the best of it. But don't wait until spring to take advantage of the changing season and the opportunity to meet with fellow Audubon chapter members.

(continued on page 5)

"Year of the Birds"

The Town of Bethania's protected properties are the focus of ASFC's conservation efforts this year. The largest of these properties are Walnut Bottoms, which has trails beginning behind the Visitor's Center, and the Southwest Bluff and Bottomland property on the other side of Muddy Creek on the southwest side of Bethania. Walnut Bottoms is 35 acres along the Muddy Creek floodplain that has been used mostly for farming since the initial settlement of Bethania. It is adjacent to Walnut Bluffs, a 20-acre forested bluff rising along the south side of Laurel Creek. The Southwest Bluff and Bottomland property contains over 60 acres.

The town, community members, Piedmont Land Conservancy, the Conservation Fund of Arlington, Virginia and the State of North Carolina have worked in partnership to preserve these historical landscapes, which are now owned by the state as part of a Bethania Land Protection Plan.

One project area will center on land management issues such as the removal of invasive non-native plant species and replacement with native species. The other major project area will include educational activities and the creation of educational materials. Inventories of the flora and fauna will form the foundation for many of these projects. You can help build these inventories by sharing your bird or butterfly lists. We especially need photographs of birds and butterflies taken on the Bethania properties.

Lois Schneider, Lisa Gould, and Shelley Rutkin from ASFC are working with representatives from the Town of Bethania to coordinate these projects. There will be volunteer opportunities for everyone, starting with the upcoming Great Backyard Bird Count. Please contact Shelley Rutkin (shelleyr@windstream.net) if you would like to volunteer or share your bird or butterfly lists or photos.

Get acquainted with Bethania by starting at the Visitor's Center, which is open Tuesday – Saturday, 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Then walk the well-maintained Walnut Bottom trails behind the Visitor's Center. Maybe you'll see a Pileated Woodpecker as we did on the Christmas Bird Count. In the summer you might find a Common Nighthawk soaring over the fields. Whenever you visit, you'll discover the quiet Bethania trails are almost like a step back in time.

Shelley Rutkin

North Carolina's state parks celebrate 2010 as the "Year of the Birds," according to the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. Throughout the year, birds and bird-watching will be the focus of special education programs and activities in the state parks, many of them in partnership with Audubon North Carolina. The state parks system is also making available a special bandana of some of the signature birds found in the parks.

Whether they are Wild Turkeys in the mountains, Bald Eagles in the Piedmont or Piping Plovers on the coast, birds greatly contribute to the nature experience in state parks. They also are "indicator species," reflecting the health of the natural resources and ecosystems on North Carolina's publicly-held lands.

"Putting this special emphasis on birds in 2010 can give added depth and clarity to our interpretive programs and education efforts," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director.

State parks are regularly involved in annual bird counts, and the parks are among Audubon's Important Bird Areas, sites for research about the health of bird populations and habitats. Audubon North Carolina, the state parks and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission also are among partners that helped establish the North Carolina Birding Trail.

"Birds and state parks share some of the most important habitats in our state," said Chris Canfield, executive director of Audubon North Carolina. "They also share the distinction of providing a pathway for people to connect with nature. I'm excited by this focus for 2010 and hope all North Carolinians take advantage of it."

In addition to preparing interpretive programs, state park rangers and natural resource biologists are actively involved in projects to protect and restore habitats for some of our rare and threatened birds, such as the red-cockaded woodpecker and colonial nesting shorebirds. Park rangers and biologists also participate in multi-year bird tagging projects.

State park educational programs hope to appeal to North Carolina's bird enthusiasts, as well as inspire new bird-watching families. A 2009 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report estimated one of every five Americans is a "bird-watcher," defined as someone who took a trip of at least one mile for the primary purpose of observing birds, or someone who closely observed and tried to identify birds around their home. These enthusiasts contributed \$36 billion to the national economy in 2006, according to the report.

Birding Dreams

When I picked up Fifty Places to Go Birding Before You Die, edited by Chris Santella, I immediately started day-dreaming about future trips to see birds we are not likely to see in Winston-Salem. The 50 places are a good mix of locations in this country and around the world, recommended by many of the best known names in the birding world — people like Kenn Kaufman, David Allen Sibley, Victor Emanuel, Julie Zickefoose.

I am ready to go to each one, including a couple I have already visited. You can begin close to home on the East Coast, with the Smokies, Cape May or New York's Central Park. Of course, other locations like the Rio Grand Valley and Southeast Arizona also are included. But why not save for that big trip to Tanzania, Australia or South America?

Contributors explain why they love their destinations and offer highlights of what you might see there, plus some tips if you decide to go. Of course, you can always quarrel about some of the choices. I would pick the Blue Ridge Parkway over Great Smoky National Park, for example. Or, what about Pea Island, the Everglades or, more distant, the Galapagos? However, the 50 places in the book are bound to keep you happy, even if you only get to a few of them. Good birding, in your dreams and in the real world.

Phil Dickinson



Phil Dickinson

Winter Trip

Forsyth Audubon had a great trip to Chincoteague Island National Wildlife Refuge, Blackwater NWR, and other parts of the Eastern Shore of Virginia over a long weekend from 14 through 18 January. Nineteen birders from Forsyth were joined at Chincoteague and Blackwater by local residents George Budd and Jack Collins, who were generous with their time and shared their expertise on local birds. Despite some challenging weather, the group found 111 species over the five day period.

A highlight of the trip occurred on Friday the 15th when 16 of the group birded the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel. The weather that day was unusually mild and helped in spotting birds typical for the area such as Greater and Lesser Scaup, Surf Scoter, Black Scoter, Great Cormorant, Bufflehead, Brant, Ruddy Turnstones, and Purple Sandpipers. After the morning activity on the bridge, the group worked its way north by birding at Cape Charles, the Virginia Coast Reserve, and along the highways en route to Chincoteague Island.

Saturday the 16th was spent at Chincoteague NWR where we were entertained by huge flocks of Snow Geese, Tundra Swans, and flocks of thousands of Red-winged Blackbirds. The usual water birds were seen, such as American Wigeon (alas, no Eurasian variety), Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, and some shorebirds.

The weather report for Sunday was unfortunately right on the money but 12 hardy souls braved the elements and drove to Blackwater NWR and birded mostly from their cars. We were rewarded with some good sightings of very tough Bald Eagles, over 25 of them, clouds of Snow Goose, including a number of the "Blue Goose" morph, and a few other species that we had seen elsewhere. Nevertheless, it was a good last day for all. We finished our activities with a count dinner on Chincoteague Island. All agreed that the trip was a resounding success, with good fellowship and good birding in beautiful settings.

The group continued to count birds on the way home, as far as I-95, and some were rewarded with good sightings. Phil and Mary Dickinson and David Shuford were able to find an elusive Ash-throated Flycatcher in Virginia Beach; several of the group had tried and came up empty but they were rewarded with some good views of the bird. Thanks go to Andrew Baldelli, local birder, who guided the Forsyth birders to the correct spot.

Don Adamick





One Broad-winged Hawk? Or Two?

Snow stopped the Christmas Bird Counts one time at the New River Corridor Important Bird Area, but the cold and ice failed to deter intrepid birders from Forsyth Audubon a second time. On December 30, Kim Brand, Bill Gifford, Ron Morris and Jeremy Reiskind headed up to Allegheny Access at the north end of New River State Park. Icy road conditions kept them out of the camping area itself, but they improvised, birded other nearby habitats and came up with 39 species. Four days later, Ron and Phil Dickinson braved 5-degree temperatures and discovered 34 species around the south end of the park.

Count numbers were below normal because of the weather, but all agreed that the beauty of the area made the effort worth it. On the first count, Bill discovered a Broad-winged Hawk, which should have been in Central or South America by now. Then, lo and behold, Phil spotted one close up on the second account. Was this the same bird? The chances are good. Both were pale underneath, and the two sightings were only about 9 miles apart as the hawk flies. Bill and Phil both filed rare bird reports.

Crows are the dominant species in the mountains at this time of year, and both groups saw plenty of them. More interesting sightings included Common Raven, Ruffed Grouse, a curious Eastern Screech Owl, and more than 40 Black Vultures..

Phil Dickinson

The Carolina Herp Atlas: A Citizen-Science Project For Reptile and Amphibian Enthusiasts

Have you ever seen an Eastern Kingsnake in your backyard or found a Fowler's Toad on your porch and wondered if wildlife biologists needed to know about it? These observations are important and now there is a place to submit your observations that can help with the conservation of amphibians and reptiles in the *Carolinas: The Carolina Herp Atlas (CHA)*. The CHA, developed by the Davidson College Herpetology Laboratory and Davidson College Information Technology Services, is an online database that uses observations by citizen scientists to track reptile and amphibian distributions in North and South Carolina. Funded by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, the CHA also allows users a simple way to maintain a personal database of the reptiles and amphibians they observe. County-level distribution maps can be viewed by anyone who visits the website. Wildlife biologists and herpetologists can use these data to understand activity periods, habitat relationships, distribution, conservation status and other facets of amphibian and reptile ecology in North Carolina.

How does the CHA work? Before you can submit records, you must first register and set-up a "My Herps" account. Once you register, you are able to add records and keep track of your observations. Each observation should include: 1) state and county, 2) genus and species, 3) date, 4) location, 5) geographic coordinates (using our GeoLocator) 6) remarks, 7) and a digital photo for verification of the species identification. The GeoLocator allows the user to pinpoint the exact location of their herp observation.

Since March 2007, the CHA has collected over 15,000 reptile and amphibian observations in the Carolinas. Please submit your reptile and amphibian observations to the Carolina Herp Atlas at www.carolinaherpatlas.org. Contact Steven Price at sjprice@davidson.edu with any questions.



(continued from page 1)

Every second Saturday there is a walk, every fourth Tuesday there is a chapter meeting and every day, twenty-four hours per day, there is our website at www.forsythaudubon.org and our list serve at for-sythbirds@lists.wfu.edu. And every committee that the chapter offers has an opening for you, your energy and your expertise.

The snow has melted and the growing season is about to begin. Let that growth also include participation in this local Audubon Society of Forsyth County. We don't want to do it without you.

Susan Jones

Audubon NC on youtube

Learn more about the Amphibolite Mountains Important Bird Area in northwestern North Carolina. Join Curtis Smalling as he introduces you to the ins and outs of early successional habitats and explains why these areas are so important for bird species like the Golden-winged Warbler. This is one of seven videos now available on youtube from Audubon NC.

Christmas Bird Count

Thanks again to all who participated in this year's Christmas Bird Count, and especially to Susan and Warren Jones for hosting the count dinner. 58 participants logged over 100 hours and spied 77 species (four additional species were seen during count week).

The most unusual finds (based on the past 25 Forsyth CBC's) were: Wild Turkey (found once in the past 25 counts), Double Crested Cormorants, Bonaparte's Gull, Northern Pintail, Lesser Scaup Pine Siskin and Rusty Blackbird. The most unusual species missed were: American Black Duck (found this year during Count Week), Common Grackle, Red-winged Blackbird (count week), Purple Finch and Red-headed Woodpecker. Only eight species were found by every count group: Red-bellied Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, American Robin, Northern Cardinal and Eastern Towhee. Fifteen species were found by only one count group: the six unusual ones listed above, plus Northern Pintail, Gadwall, GW Teal, Ruddy Duck, American Coot, Western Snipe, Bonaparte's Gull, Eastern Screech Owl and White-crowned Sparrow.

This was the 67th Forsyth County Christmas Bird Count, the first one having been held in December 1939.

John Haire

Greenway Accessibility

If you're birding our local greenways under your own head of steam on your own two feet, be grateful. But if you happen to be in a wheelchair you are not so lucky. Even with the passage of Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 most of our greenways here in Winston-Salem are not wheelchair accessible. Because of the efforts of a few people in the Audubon Society of Forsyth County that is beginning to change. Come spring three local greenways will be made accessible. The two paved parking spots at the Muddy Creek greenway Meadowlark entrance will finally be connected with asphalt to the paved greenway. This is a small job that simply was not installed properly but, without our calling this to the city's attention, even that small piece of work would not be scheduled. The Bethabara trail at Oldtown Road will now have a paved sidewalk and crosswalk with appropriate signage along Oldtown Road. This still means that caution must be used in crossing Oldtown Road but at least the two trail segments will have a better accessible connection. The Salem Creek Greenway entrance near the tennis courts will be completely redone. The gravel path will be closed and a new paved path installed. A new parking area will be created with accessible parking and entrances to the greenway.

This is just the beginning of this process with the city. Other areas that we plan to address are Salem Lake, Civitan Park, Tanglewood and the Waterworks access to the Brushy Forks greenway. Please contact me at sljones@triad.rr.com should you know of any other areas that we should address.

Susan Jones



Our Mission

To conserve and restore natural ecosystems—focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and North Carolina’s biological diversity

Audubon Society of
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The Audubon Society of Forsyth County

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For membership information, please contact Lois Schneider at 768-6645. If you don't wish to join the National Audubon Society, but would like to join the local chapter, send \$15.00 (make your check payable to ASFC) to: Audubon Society of Forsyth County, P.O. Box 15111, Winston-Salem, NC 27113. Please include your name, email, address and zip code.