



# Whistler

The Audubon Society of Forsyth County Newsletter

August-September 2010

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

August 14, 8:00 am	Second Saturday Bird Walk — Archie Elledge (Leader: Gene Schepker)
September 4, 7:00 am	Day Trip – warbler migration on the Blue Ridge Parkway (Leader: Ron Morris)
September 7, 7:00 pm	Board Meeting – Arbor Acres Club House
September 11, 8:00 am	Second Saturday Bird Walk – Bethabara Greenway (Leader: Kim Brand)
September 15, 7:15 pm	Swift Watch (Leader: Ron Morris)
September 18	Hawk Migration Public Education Day – Pilot Mountain
September 25, 8:00 am	Mahogany Rock Day Trip
September 28, 7:00 pm	Chapter Meeting – Bethabara Park Visitor Center

## CHAT

The Board of Directors of Forsyth Audubon just had its annual retreat for the purpose of planning our most important goals for the year. We reiterated last year's commitment to improvements at Bethania's Walnut Bottoms and Kiger Tract as our most important conservation focus, with other important initiatives at Historic Bethabara Park and Tanglewood.

We will be adding an additional event each month such as advanced birding, plant-specific or general nature walks, workshops on a variety of topics, and walks for kids, all the while striving to make education, birds and nature fun.

These new events are in addition to the wide range of activities we offer every year, including 12 monthly bird walks, 8 educational programs at the chapter meetings, 2 weekend trips and several day trips to some of the best birding hotspots in the Carolinas and Virginia.

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## PILOT MOUNTAIN HAWK WATCH

September is approaching, and that means the hawks soon will be flying by Pilot Mountain on their way to Central and South America. Peak time for hawk watching at the Pinnacle is usually the third week of the month. That is when thousands of Broad-winged Hawks will be kettling up and riding the thermals along the Appalachian Ridge. It also is a great chance to see about a dozen other species of raptor, including Osprey, Northern Harrier, Peregrine Falcon and Bald Eagle.

At this time we still are formulating plans for our annual hawk watch, with planned dates of September 12-30. We collect migration data and submit it to the Hawk Migration Association of North America, which keeps track of raptor numbers from Canada to Veracruz, Mexico. If you can volunteer time to count hawks and help us collect data, please contact me at 659-2464, [pdick-ins@triad.rr.com](mailto:pdick-ins@triad.rr.com). You are welcome regardless of experience level. It is a great chance to learn about these birds and improve your ID skills. On September 19, the Chapter will hold Hawk Migration Public Education Day at the pinnacle.

**August**

August 14, 8:00 am Second Saturday Bird Walk — Archie Elledge (Leader: Gene Schepker)

**September**

September 4, 7:00 am Day Trip – warbler migration on the Blue Ridge Parkway (Leader: Ron Morris; this is a joint outing with Blue Ridge Birders)

September 7, 7:00 pm Board Meeting – Arbor Acres Club House

September 11, 8:00 am Second Saturday Bird Walk – Bethabara Greenway (Leader: Kim Brand)

September 15, 7:15 pm Swift Watch (Leader: Ron Morris)

September 12-30 Hawk Watch

September 18 Hawk Migration Public Education Day – Pilot Mountain

September 25, 8:00 am Mahogany Rock Day Trip

September 28, 7:00 pm Chapter Meeting – Bethabara Park Visitor Center

**October**

October 2, 9:00 am Big Sweep/Miller Park Clean-up (Leader: Pam Wooten)

October 5, 7:00 pm Board Meeting – Arbor Acres Club House

October 9, 8:00 am Second Saturday Bird Walk – Bethania

Big Sit – Reynolda Gardens (Date and Leader TBD)

October 26, 7:00 pm Chapter Meeting – Bethabara Park Visitor Center

**November**

November 2, 7:00 pm Board Meeting – Arbor Acres Club House

November 13, 9:00 am Second Saturday Bird Walk – Horizons Park (Leader: Phil Dickinson)

November 13 Start of Project FeederWatch (Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

November 23, 7:00 pm Chapter Meeting – Bethabara Park Visitor Center

**December**

December 7, 7:00 pm Board Meeting – Arbor Acres Club House

December 11, 9:00 am Second Saturday Bird Walk – Civitan Park

Christmas Bird Counts (Dates & leaders TBD)

December 19 Christmas Bird Count, Hanging Rock

**January**

January 4, 7:00 pm Board Meeting – Arbor Acres Club House

January 8, 9:00 am Second Saturday Bird Walk – Washington Park

January 14-17 - Winter Trip (Destination and Coordinator TBD)

January 22, 9:00 am Miller Park Clean-up (Leader: Pam Wooten)

January 25, 7:00 pm Chapter Meeting

**February**

February 1, 7:00 pm Board Meeting – Arbor Acres Club House

Audubon NC Chapter Day – NC Zoo (Date TBD)

February 12, 9:00 am Second Saturday Bird Walk – Salem Lake

February 18-21 – Great Backyard Bird Count

February 22, 7:00 pm Chapter Meeting

## March

March 1, 7:00 pm Board Meeting – Arbor Acres Club House

March 12, 9:00 am Second Saturday Bird Walk - Archie Elledge (Leader: Carol Cunningham)

March 22, 7:00 pm Chapter Meeting

## April

April 5, 7:00 pm Board Meeting – Arbor Acres Club House

April 9, 8:00 am Second Saturday Bird Walk – Tanglewood Park (Leaders: G. Gidley & Ron Morris)

Earth Day at Wake Forest University (Date TBD)

Miller Park Clean-up (Leader: Pam Wooten, Date TBD)

April 26, 7:00 pm Chapter Meeting

## May

May 3, 7:00 pm Board Meeting – Arbor Acres Club House

May 14, 8:00 am Second Saturday Bird Walk – Reynolda Gardens

Spring Bird Counts: Forsyth Co New River IBA Hanging Rock (Dates TBD)

Audubon NC annual meeting - Boone (Date TBD)

May 24, 7:00 pm Chapter Meeting

Spring Trip (Destination and Dates TBD)

## June

June 4, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm Board Retreat – Arbor Acres Club House

June 11, 8:00 am Second Saturday Bird Walk – Civitan Park

June 18 Day Trip to White Top Mountain, Virginia (Leader: Ron Morris)

## July

July 5, 7:00 pm Board Meeting – Arbor Acres Club

## BLUEBIRD BOXES AT LOCAL PARKS

Bluebirds were busy this spring and summer at boxes installed at several area parks. At Horizons Park, Historic Bethabara, Reynolda and Shaffner Park, 27 nests have produced fledglings and 13 more were still active in mid-July. Several boxes had at least two successful broods.

The chapter extends much thanks to Lloyd Ramsey for his exhaustive labors repairing, replacing, relocating and controlling box-area vegetation at all these locations, and along Mill Creek in the northeastern part of the county. Thanks also to Randy Agee, Sue Rupp and Phil Dickinson who helped monitor nesting activity. There currently are 84 boxes at these sites.

The birds must overcome much to raise young successfully. They had to contend with cold, wet weather this spring, followed by hot, dry weather for several weeks. Many nests also were subject to predation by blacksnakes, squirrels and other animals. Blacksnakes seem particularly active at Horizons Park, where they attacked several active nests.

**Horizons:** 45 boxes, 15 nests fledged, 9 predations, 4 active

**Bethabara:** 9 boxes, 2 nests fledged, 3 predations, 0 active

**Reynolda:** 12 boxes, 5 nests fledged, 3 predations, 4 active

**Shaffner:** 9 boxes, 6 nests fledged, 0 predations, 0 active

**Mill Creek:** 9 boxes, 0 nests fledged, 1 predation, 0 active

There also is a bluebird trail at Tanglewood, but no data was available.

The Triad Chapter of the Carolina Butterfly Society will have a field trip to the Blue Ridge Parkway on the weekend of September 25 & 26. This has evolved into an annual trip that we'll be doing for the fourth year in 2010. We would like to invite other groups to participate, such as the Forsyth Audubon, TGP Audubon and the NC Native Plant Society.

*Dennis Burnette*

## **FORSYTH AUDUBON SPRING TRIP 2010**

A large group of twenty birders traveled to Asheville and the Blue Ridge Parkway for the annual spring trip and a good time was had by all. The weather cooperated for early morning birding and the birds did also. Of the 89 species observed during the trip highlights were the Alder Flycatcher and the Cerulean Warbler, including the observation of an active nest discovered by Simon Thompson. Charlotte Goedsche, current president of the Elisha Mitchell Audubon Society, had a scope trained on the nest and all had a chance to look. Thanks, Charlotte, for keeping the scope out until all our birders reached your location.

Many other warblers were also observed and several of the birders added birds to their life lists. Special sightings included the Worm-eating Warbler (special thanks to Marilyn Westphal and Terri Maness for helping Don finally get this life bird!), Yellow-throated Vireo, Yellow-billed Cuckoo posing for us, Golden-winged Warbler, Kentucky and Canada Warblers, and many more.

Because we had so many birders and parking space is limited along parts of the Blue Ridge Parkway we split up into two groups. A very special thanks to Marilyn Westphal of the Elisha Mitchell Audubon Society for guiding one of the groups and to Ron Morris, incoming President of Forsyth Audubon, for guiding the other. Marilyn knows the Parkway like the back of her hand and blazed the trail to the best spots for both groups.

After the last day of birding we all gathered at the Crowfields of Asheville home of Sebastian "C" and Nancy Sommer, long time members of Forsyth Audubon, for a "count" dinner and fellowship. As they were in 2007 after that year's outing, "C" and Nancy were very gracious and generous hosts to the group and their hospitality was greatly appreciated.

*Don Adamick*



## **OIL SPILL AND MIGRATION**

Oil-covered pelicans, gannets and plovers! Oily water in marsh breeding habitat! Some of the devastating impact of the Gulf oil catastrophe on birds is easy to grasp. What may be less obvious are the potential consequences on migrating shorebirds and songbirds as they arrive on the Gulf Coast between August and October during fall migration.

Since late July, shorebirds already have been moving to their winter residences. Some stay on the Gulf Coast, while others just stop to rest before moving on to Central or South America. Migrating songbirds are not far behind and they, too, stop to rest along the coast during their journey. Many bird species spend at least part of their life cycle in the Gulf area.

Our migrating birds face two threats from the oil. First, when they land on the Gulf beaches or in the marshes, they likely will come in contact with the oil, eat contaminated food or find less food available in the oxygen-starved waters. Second, when many of the birds attempt to cross the Gulf waters, they will face skies choked with smoke and pollutants from burning oil fires. They could suffer heavy losses from disorientation, fatigue and inhalation of toxic fumes.

We will begin to see the toll on our migrant bird populations with Christmas Bird Counts along the Gulf Coast. However, the real story won't be told until next spring and summer. Numbers of returning birds are likely to be down. And, those that do will face continuing peril along the coast from lingering oil-slicked habitats and little food. The impact of the spill will last for some time.

**What can I do?** Audubon says plenty of wildlife rehabbers wait in the wings, and BP must pay quantifiable costs of the spill's consequences. So Audubon encourages everyone to do things in their own backyards and communities to help birds. One way to help is to join Forsyth Audubon's conservation efforts at Bethania and elsewhere. Also, become a citizen scientist and take part in Christmas Bird Counts, spring counts, breeding bird surveys, Cornell Lab of Ornithology's nestwatch program or eBird. This will help assess the actual long-term environmental impact of the spill.

*Phil Dickinson*

## **BREEDING BIRD CENSUS AT BETHABARA CONCLUDES**

Two years in a row, ASFC volunteers have censused breeding birds at Historic Bethabara Park in an effort to document which species breed in the park and estimate population sizes. The census is designed so that it may be repeated in the future. Many thanks to route observers: Carol Cunningham, Phil Dickinson, David and Susan Disher, John Haire, Hop Hopkins, Terri Maness, Craig McCleary, Ron Morris, Jeremy Reiskind. Census leaders Katherine Thorington and Kim Brand will be busy compiling and analyzing data for months to come.

## BETHANIA UPDATE

Pileated Woodpeckers. Yellow-billed Cuckoos calling. Trillium and other wildflowers. Ocola Skipper. Volunteers planting Redbud trees and Beautyberry shrubs. Volunteers digging, pulling, cutting, and spraying Tree of Heaven, English Ivy, Multiflora Rose and other non-native invasive plants. Have you guessed the location yet? It's Bethania's Walnut Bottoms, which became a major focus for ASFC's conservation efforts last year. The property and the ASFC project were described in the February-March 2010 Whistler (see <http://www.forsythaudubon.org/newsletter/february-march%202010B.pdf>).

In the early stages of the project we did a lot of information gathering, meeting, and planning. That effort set the stage for more visible activities the last few months. ASFC's Spring Bird Count included Walnut Bottoms and several public butterfly walks have been held there. No uncommon birds have been found yet, but Walnut Bottoms is an interesting and pleasant place to bird. We heard Yellow-billed Cuckoos calling during both work days. Common Yellowthroats and Indigo Buntings are consistently found during the summer. Wood Thrushes are usually heard. The butterfly list is quickly growing and includes interesting species such as Longtail Skipper and Ocola Skipper. Because of the large fields, Walnut Bottoms may turn out to be one of the better locations in Forsyth County for butterflies. We have added to the plant list as well with Trillium other spring wildflowers.

Volunteers helped design and plant native trees and shrubs in the parking lot border. Our new plants are thriving. The Fringetree and a few shrubs have already bloomed. We have also begun the hard work of removing invasive non-native plants thanks to committed volunteers. Ken Bridle from Piedmont Land Conservancy was especially helpful with this. In addition to providing guidance, Ken sprayed herbicide on a large number of multiflora rose, one of the most widespread of the non-native plants in Walnut Bottoms.

Plans for the rest of the summer include monthly butterfly walks and work days to attack multiflora rose and other invasive plants. Before the end of the year we hope to start work on a trail guide. We will also continue to add to our inventories of the flora and fauna. If you see something interesting, please share your observation. We'd love to have your bird or butterfly lists or photos. The ASFC committee working with Bethania includes Lois Schneider, Lisa Gould, and Shelley Rutkin.

*Shelley Rutkin*

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We are also adding a key focus to the obligations of Forsyth Audubon – being a forceful advocate for nature and the environment by tracking environmental issues at government meetings, working with local government to improve habitat management practices, and forming a coalition of like-minded groups that will have a stronger voice in support of a healthy environment and sustainable living.

We have a great core of dedicated volunteers who help us achieve these goals, but we need more of them. Please let me know if you would like to help Forsyth Audubon achieve even more this year.

**Ron Morris**



## ASFC, PADDLERS TAKE ON SACRED LOTUS AGAIN

Last summer, Forsyth Audubon members and local paddlers from the Sierra Club began the daunting work of removing Sacred Lotus, a highly invasive aquatic plant. The good news is that it appears that we made some progress last summer: There are gaps in lotus coverage where there were none last July before our two workdays, and the lotus has not spread beyond the areas it covered last year. The bad news, of course, is that there is still a lot of lotus in the wetland.

We need volunteers to bring canoes and kayaks and help remove lotus on Saturday August 7 and Monday August 16 starting at 7:45 a.m. Contact Kim Brand at [kimbbrand@gmail.com](mailto:kimbbrand@gmail.com) or 896-0923.

## 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**

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# The Audubon Society of Forsyth County

## 2009-2010 CHAPTER BOARD

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Treasurer:	Shelley Rutkin	922-4758
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Maybe birds and humans aren't that different? The *New York Times* Science section on July 13, 2010 reported that handsome men may turn the heads of women, but for those less attractive, sociability and friendliness also seem to seduce the fairer sex. The same is true for male house finches, according to a new study.

Female house finches prefer to mate with males with the reddest feathers, but dull-colored males make themselves more appealing by acting more social before mating season, according to a study in the September issue of the *American Naturalist*. The researchers found that the duller a male bird was in color, the more likely he was to engage with multiple social groups. Birds in a social group flock and forage together and any bird can belong to multiple groups.

Drab-looking male finches drifted from group to group in the winter, the researchers found. By mating season in the spring, the less attractive males tended to have the same level of mating success as the most colorful, attractive males. "Females have limited options to choose from and this is a way for males to manipulate their chances to find mates, by placing themselves in certain settings," said Kevin Oh, an evolutionary biologist at Cornell University and the study's lead author. The least attractive, or most yellow, males were four times as likely to interact with multiple social groups than the most attractive, or reddest, males, Dr. Oh said. House finches are found across North America, but Dr. Oh and his co-author, Alexander Badyaev of the University of Arizona, studied wild populations in Arizona.

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.