

GGG

Granville Gardeners Gazette

Promoting Education and Recreation through Gardening Activities

Oxford, North Carolina

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Some of the threatened birds found in NC



Piping plover



Brown headed nuthatch



Barn swallow

DECLINING BIRD POPULATIONS IN NC: What is Happening and What We Can Do About Reversing the Decline

By Dave Southwick, Member of Wake Audubon Society's Education Outreach Team

Monday, January 22 at 7 p.m., Granville Co. Expo Center, 4185 U.S. Hwy 15 S, Oxford, NC

About the Program

There has been a 30% decline in the total number of birds living in North America over the past 50 years. That's an estimated loss of nearly 3 billion birds over the past 50 years! Come to hear what is contributing to this loss of more than 1 in 4 birds. Additionally, come to learn what we can all do locally, regionally, and globally to reverse this downward trend in bird populations!

About the Speaker

Dave was introduced to the art of bird watching by his grandmother over 50 years ago. For the past 25 years he has been fine tuning his birding skills in the northeast and has become an advocate for introducing newcomers to the awe and wonder of bird exploration. Dave has added life birds throughout the US, Canada, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. His passion is leading walks and engaging folks in bird conversations. Since moving south in 2021, his most recent bird crush is the Carolina Wren.

By Marty Finkel and Lawrence Zoller

Photo credit: Marty Finkel

Outgoing President's Notes

On a not-very-cold, dreary day between Christmas and New Year's, I am reflecting on the upcoming year in the garden. Will we be overwhelmed in the spring by pesky bugs that weren't tamped down with the usual winter freezes? Will our winter sown native seeds get enough chilling hours over the winter to germinate in the spring? Will our in-coming migratory birds arrive too late to find enough insect larvae for their babies? (Come to our January meeting to hear from the Audubon Society about ways to help the birds!)

As I hope you know, we are not "just" a garden club; we are a club with the mission to promote education and recreation through gardening! We have such a variety of interests – but in the end, all our collective interests are plant-related. I see gardening as life-giving. After all, plants are the primary producers which turn the sun's energy into food for the rest of life on earth. And with our mission of education, we can educate ourselves, as well as the community, and know which of our gardening - and other - practices are beneficial to life on earth and which are detrimental. And that is the reassurance: there is hope that our children and grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and great nieces and nephews will grow up in a world where people understand the impact we have on earth and act accordingly.

This past year as a president of the club, I have learned a lot – and not just about plants! It has been an honor. I plan to stay active in the club, so I'll just say here, "See you around!" And to David, I pass the gavel.

Kat

Incoming President's Notes

Happy New Year!

Is it me, or did December just fly by? I honestly don't know what happened to the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The club has a lot to look forward to in 2024. This is made possible in part by the wonderful folks that make up your board and committees that bring you programs, field trips, our newsletter and the Expo. These are just a few of the things to look forward to in 2024.

Are you doing anything in your garden?

This is one of the busier times for me. Lots of trips to the street with yard waste. I have already put out several truckloads of mulch as I work the various beds in the yard. And there is the inevitable relocation of plants. Somehow, weeds already have my attention. I guess there is never a break from them.

Happy Gardening,

David Quinn
President, 2024

Remembering Sylvia Matthews

Longtime Granville Gardeners member, Sylvia Matthews, died peacefully on November 25, 2023 at age 94. She and her husband, Moody, were members when the name was changed from the Oxford Men's Garden Club to the Granville Gardeners in January 1999. Sylvia continued in the club after Moody's death, remaining in their house on Front Street in Oxford.

Sylvia was active in the club for many years and a mentor to me in 1999, inviting me to her home to discuss a committee I was helping with, probably programs. For a few years, her monthly reports of our meetings were published in the *Oxford Public Ledger*, an example of which is a clipping dated March 4, '99 and titled "Gardeners learn about outdoor lighting." Another clipping is from July 3, 2003 titled "Gardeners Enjoy Covered Dish Supper."

Sylvia and Moody hosted several GG socials over the years, and you could always find Sylvia helping at our fund-raiser plant sales at the Agriculture Extension Building on Wall Street.

Both Sylvia and Dot Jordan contributed many hours of leadership, committee work, and generosity to the club, and for years whenever one thought of the Granville Gardeners, the first who came to mind were Tom and Dot and Moody and Sylvia. Sylvia loved to read the GG Gazette, and long after she stopped using her computer, she received the GG in the U.S. mail.



Sylvia, on right, at the December 2013
Installation and Awards Dinner



At the 2013 September plant sale

By Marty Finkel
Photo: Marty Finkel

JCRA plants for January 22, 2024 auction

WOW! Have a look at what 2024 (and Rob and Sophia) is bringing us – an unbelievable five plants that would satisfy the lust of any plantaholic, connoisseur, or just plain plant nerd. And the GG get them!!!! But not free – as you know, your bid goes to our NCSU horticulture scholarship fund.



Camellia ‘Anacostia’ (*Camellia japonica* ‘Anacostia’). “This is a hybrid selected in the 1970s by Sylvester March for its outstanding spring floral display, rich dark green foliage, and cold hardiness . . .” (quote is from the National Arboretum in Washington, DC.) Anacostia is a late winter to mid-spring bloomer, and in good years the up to 4” pink semi-double blooms can cover this camellia. A large plant at 10-12’ tall and 7-9’ wide, it will be a searchlight in your late winter garden. Plant in acidic well drained soil in part to full shade and apply 3” of mulch. Water one to two times a week through its first summer and your new beauty should thrive!



Alstroemeria ‘Red Valley’ (*Alstroemeria* ‘Red Valley’) Not everyone knows that some of these commonly called Peruvian lilies (not lilies at all) are hardy here and that we can grow them. Several are listed in the Plant Delights Nursery catalog, but NOT this one! Here’s what Digging Dog Nursery in Albion, CA says about them: “ A passionate drama is played out when this cultivar’s seductive blooms unfurl in sassy shades of bright red with scarlet overtones. Staged above thick, ribbed green foliage, the bold floral presentation is heightened by cocoa-colored streaks amid primrose-yellow splashes on the upper petals. .”

Plant in well-drained soil and protect from afternoon sun for an outstanding show of blooms from June to August. They reach 2 1/2’ tall by 2’ wide and are quite easy to divide. Provide mulch in the winter. They have performed very well at the JCRA. And you know how long they last in a vase !!!!

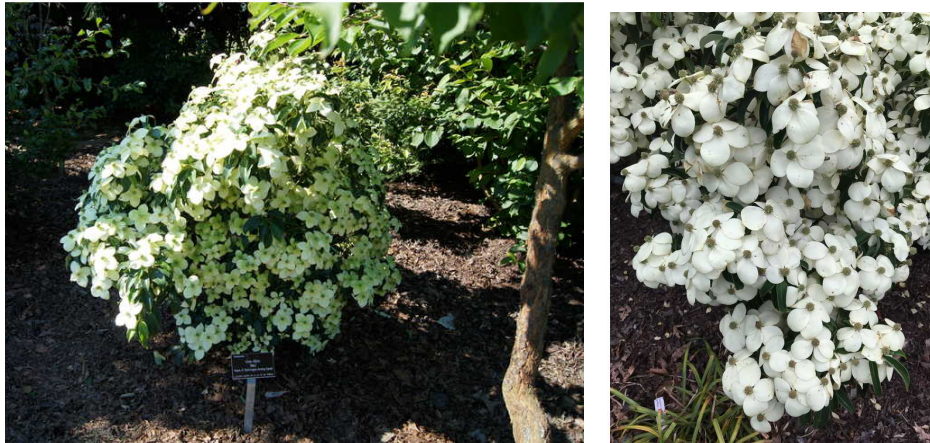


River Lomatia (*Lomatia myricoides*): This I've-never-heard-of evergreen shrub is a native of S.E. Australia, was introduced in 1816, and received an Award of Merit in 1955. There is one growing at the JCRA, and a close-up of its flowers is on the right. These pollinator-attracting clusters of lightly scented white flowers bloom in late spring and summer. Its thin, willowy leaves are a good texture contrast to most other trees and shrubs. Plant in acidic, well-draining **lean** soil in full sun to part shade. In 10 years it can reach 12' tall and wide. During its first summer, water one to two times a week, and to quote Rob's description ". . . While it does not like prolonged drought, the neglect it appreciates makes it my kind of plant!" After your river lomatia is well established and growing strongly, you can prune it back by 1/3 **after flowering** to keep it bushy. (If I still lived at my house, this one would be MINE!)



Campbell's Maple (*Acer campbellii*) This uncommon maple comes to us from Southeast Asia and parts of China and Northern India. It has a spreading habit and can grow to 45' tall. This one has been grown from seed obtained on a plant collection trip into China, so it really is one of a kind! Plant it in full sun in well-draining soil of average fertility. It has average water requirements but keep watered regularly if there are prolonged dry periods. It's quite unusual to find this tree in the U.S. Your winning bid gets a rarity and cooling shade.

Evergreen dogwood (*Cornus* ??) You absolutely can't go wrong with an evergreen dogwood, even if it came from seeds collected in Asia and is an unknown variety, as this one did. We do know that evergreen dogwoods thrive in well-drained soil with protection from hot afternoon sun. Water it well after planting; if planted in the spring, water once or twice a week during the summer until it's established, then average water conditions will be enough. Expect a mature height and width of about 20' x 15'. The blooms on some evergreen dogwoods are larger and later than our natives (more like Kousa dogwoods). You can expect it to **look similar** to some of the ones at the JCRA:



Empress of China evergreen flowering dogwood *Cornus elliptica* 'Elsbry' (at JCRA) **Note:** The one at my house in Oxford was spectacular – covered in flowers.

By Marty Finkel and Rob Thornton

Photo credits: Camellia, Peruvian lily, and evergreen dogwood: JCRA Photo Collection

Campbell's Maple: Crowley, D. (2020), '*Acer campbellii*' from the website *Trees and Shrubs Online* (treesandshrubsonline.org/articles/acer/acer-campbellii/). Accessed 2023-12-23.

'*Lomatia myricoides*' from the website *Trees and Shrubs Online* (treesandshrubsonline.org/articles/lomatia/lomatia-myricoides/). Accessed 2023-12-24. The close-up is from the JCRA Photo Collection

Did You Know

Did you know "A single corn kernel coated with a neonicotinoid can kill a songbird. Even a tiny grain of wheat or canola treated with the oldest neonicotinoid, imidacloprid, can poison a bird. As little as 1/10th of a corn seed per day during egg-laying season is all that is needed to affect reproduction with any of the neonicotinoids registered to date." Article "Pesticides," American Bird Conservancy

Almost every seed of U. S. field corn and cotton is coated with a neonic insecticide, and about half the soybean seeds. Article "Viewpoint: Neonicotinoid use on field crops should be reined in" by John Tooker, July 2, 2018 on the Genetic Literacy Project site.



Crop dusting



Field corn grown from coated seeds



Snails unaffected by neonics

[A 2015 study](#) by American Bird Conservancy and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health has found bird- and bee-killing insecticides in nearly every food eaten by the nation's Senators, Representatives, and others who dine in the cafeterias of the United States Congress. [Read the report.](#)

Articles on the dangers of using this class of insecticides in our gardens have been reported in the GGG before, but as more evidence of their lethality is publicized, it's a subject that needs revisiting – especially since it's hard to find an insecticide that doesn't have at least one neonic ingredient.

What is a neonicotinoid? "Neonics are a class of synthetic, neurotoxic insecticides that are used on agricultural crops, lawns, gardens, golf courses, and in flea and tick pet treatments. Developed in the mid-1990s, neonics are now the single-most popular insecticide class in the United States.

The way they work is by permanently binding to the nerve cells of insects, overstimulating and destroying them. Exposed insects often exhibit uncontrollable shaking and twitching followed by paralysis before eventually dying. Even at nonlethal doses, neonics can weaken critical functions, such as an insect's immune system, navigation, stamina, memory, and fertility." Quoted from "Nicotinoides 101: The Effects on Humans and Bees", an article by Courtney Lindwall in the May 25, 2022 post on the Natural Resources Defense Council website.

Nicotinoides were first introduced in the 1990s as the use of the deadly organophosphates and carbamates was proven to be highly damaging to people and to wildlife. Also widespread pest resistance to these compounds was occurring. As a result, pesticide use regulators rushed to register alternatives and approved more and more neonicotinoid products for increasing numbers of uses. Their own expert scientists raised questions about this new class of pesticide's persistence in the environment, cumulative

effects, and irreversible damage. See the March 20, 2013 report “The Impact of the Nation’s Most Widely Used Insecticides on Birds”, the American Bird Conservancy:

https://dariuszdziedk.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Neonic_FINAL.pdf

How do we know the soil in the pots of the plants we buy hasn’t been drenched with a neonic insecticide, or that the plant hasn’t been sprayed with one? We don’t, for sure, but many large retailers have started phasing them out. Unfortunately, a large number of commercially grown milkweeds contain neonics: “I am sad to report that some butterfly gardeners who have purchased plants commercially, with no disclosure that they have been treated, have had their caterpillars die after consuming them. This is unacceptable and we must do better,” says Heather Andrews, aka the [Thoughtful Gardener](#). What to do? 1) Ask: if the store can’t confirm they’re selling untreated seeds/plants, don’t buy them, 2) buy organic plants, 3) check labels – most labels won’t have this information, but some stores, like Home Depot, require disclosure if treated with a neonic, 4) buy from local growers, 5) grow your own plants.

Early in 2019, Ace Hardware joined Home Depot, Lowe's and 140 garden retailers including True Value, Walmart, Costco, Kroger and Whole Foods by committing to eliminate neonicotinoids from the products it sells, [Medium reported](#). Source: “Nicotinoides: What Gardeners Need to Know” by Tom Odon, updated July 5, 2022 in Treehugger online.

Collateral damage – neonics are water soluble (most other classes of insecticides aren’t), and there are many studies showing residues in drinking and freshwater systems across the U.S. One example of damage to aquatic life is the report “**Neonicotinoids disrupt aquatic food webs and decrease fishery yields**” in the journal *Science* at <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aax3442> And what about pests such as snails that aren’t affected by neonics when ingested but are harmful and in some cases lethal when eaten by predators such as birds, beetles, snakes, toads, salamanders, and moles?

Using integrated pest management practices can reduce a lot of insect damage. If you must use an insecticide, read the label and do not buy if it contains one or more of the following neonics: acetamaprid, imidacloprid, dinotefuran, clothianidin, and thiamethoxam.

The internet is full of reports from just about every type of scientific study of neonicotinoids, and there are many responsible organizations such as the American Bird Conservancy, the Xerces Society, Natural Resources Defense Council, and countless others that also provide invaluable education on this subject.

*By Marty Finkel from sources cited as well as many other online articles on nicotinoides
Photos: Left and middle from Pixabay free images; right from hello@itsgonewrong.com*

Q & A

Q: How do birds stay warm in winter?

A: Evolution has enabled birds to adapt and strategize ways to keep from freezing during harsh weather. One is trapping body heat by fluffing up. This technique traps heat by creating hundreds of air pockets between feathers and maximizes their natural insulation. The base layer of fine, downy feathers helps keep frigid air out. Another is the ability to stay dry – the feathers repel water. Birds in colder climates may also develop heavier plumage.

A good strategy is to find shelter from sharp winter wind using tree crooks, cavities, manmade structures – anywhere to keep out of the wind. Even very dense trees and shrubs offer some protection for small birds like juncos.

Handy food stashes: in fall, part of the flurry of birds coming to and from feeders is carrying seeds to hiding places. Having food supplies cached saves life-giving energy in severe cold. Andrew Del-Colle writes that “. . . A single chickadee can store up to 80,000 seeds – and remember where they all are.” (From the article “When the Temperature Drops, *Audubon*/Winter 2023).

Sharing body warmth: huddling. You may see lines or clusters of birds, typically bluebirds and sparrows, huddling together.

Tucking in and crouching: Both help keep birds’ feet warmer. They are built to withstand the cold, as they are made mostly of bones and tendons and not much muscle. We’ve all seen cold birds balance on one leg with the other tucked up into its feathers. They will also crouch down, especially when fluffed up, over their feet to provide some warmth.

Finally, birds maintain different temperature zones in their feet and in their bodies. This ability helps to limit heat loss through those featherless legs and feet and to save energy in the process.



Fluffing



Huddling



Stocking up

By Marty Finkel from source cited

Photos: Left and right: Pixabay free online downloads; middle: Palomar Audubon

Q: What has happened to whippoorwills?

A: That’s a good question. When I and my siblings and I were small children, we spent weeks in the summer at our maternal grandmother’s in East Tennessee. Her daughter, my aunt Lois, lived just across a very small creek and up a hill. We often spent the night with Aunt Lois and Uncle Bill, and we heard whippoorwills every night. Aunt Lois told us they nested on the ground and were hard to see, that she had seen one’s nest, and that No, she wouldn’t take us to see it because the birds were quiet, shy, and needed their privacy.

Much later, after moving to NC and buying 44 wooded acres near Oxford, NC in the mid-1980's and roaming those woods for about 4 years, we built a house and moved in in 1990. In the early years, we often saw bobwhites along our unpaved, mile-long access road from Rt. 96 to our house. We frequently heard their calls, and at dusk we often heard the whip-poor-wills.

A report in the Bird Library of the American Bird Conservancy tells us that the population of this bird is decreasing as forests are cleared for agriculture and development, killed by cars (they often forage close to roads), and as prey declines from pollution and pesticide use.

“What’s Happened to the Whippoorwill?” a Neal Murphy April 30, 2021 post in the **Shelby County Today News Online** reveals that: “A robin-sized nocturnal bird, the whippoorwill is rarely seen. A mottled brown bird, it blends in with the forest floor. During the day the only way you can see them is if you flush them off the forest floor. If you’re driving at night you might see them at the edge of the road. Whippoorwills essentially fly low about the forest with their large mouths open, eating moths and other flying insects. These birds forage at night, catching insects in flight, and normally sleep during the day. The female nests on the ground in shaded locations among dead leaves, and usually lays two eggs at a time. The bird will commonly remain on the nest for around twenty-one days until the eggs hatch. The male seldom is seen around the nest, but rests horizontally on a low tree limb, which is an unusual posture for a bird.

The whip-poor-wills usually fly around livestock at dusk to feed on insects swarming over the animals. It was once believed that they sucked the milk from goats’ udders and caused them to dry up, hence their family name, “Caprimulgidae”, from the Latin ‘capri’ and ‘mulgus’, meaning “goat-milker”. The birds usually sing their loudest at dusk and dawn. The record number of calls in a row by a single bird is 1,088, perhaps accounting for their species name, vociferous. A group of whip-poor-wills are collectively known as an “invisibility” and a “seek” of whip-poor-wills.”



Eastern Whippoorwill (*Antrostomus vociferous*)

Again, from the Bird Library – “Soul-snatcher: One New England legend says the Whip-poor-will can sense a person's soul departing, and capture it as it leaves. Native American lore considered the singing of these birds a death omen.”

We lived in southern Granville County nearly 30 years and over time the calls of the bobwhite and the whippoorwills ceased, and large numbers of songbirds at our feeders dwindled.

By **Marty Finkel** from sources cited

Photo: Pixabay free online downloads

To Do List

- Seed catalogs started arriving in October and are still arriving, so make your choices and order this month. Some kinds of seeds are already sold out (Jan. 2022) in some catalogs. For less than the price of one transplant or one 4-cell pack of vegetables or flowers, you can have from 10 to 500 plants if you plant all the seeds in a package. The most fun, though, is that you get to choose from so many varieties that aren't on the market, and you get to watch them grow.
- Sow seeds of broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage inside or in a cold frame. Inside, when seedlings appear, put their containers about 2 inches under fluorescent lights. Grow lights are not necessary unless plants are flowering. Strong light & cool temperature result in compact, sturdy seedlings.
- If you didn't have a soil test done in the fall, there is still time; boxes are available from the Extension office, and instructions are printed on the boxes.
- Fertilize pansies with an organic slow release fertilizer. Re-apply every 6 weeks.
- Dig and divide liriope and mondo late this month and early Feb. Cut back lirope before new growth emerges using a lawn mower or string trimmer.
- Spray for overwintering aphid, scale, and mite eggs, nymphs, and adults using dormant oil according to directions. **Spray only when the temperature is 40 degrees or warmer for at least 24 hours.**
- Remove and destroy bagworm pouches on junipers and other needle-leaved plants.
- Check houseplants for insects. Any eggs that were on them when they were moved indoors may have hatched. Mites and scale are especially sneaky.
- Walk around with a notepad and note what needs to be done: overgrown azaleas, ligustrum, eleagnus, other shrubs that need pruning and thinning (or removed), walkways that need attention, new paths to make, removing over-populated plants (hellebores, daylilies, iris, lily of the valley, others), etc. You won't remember if you don't write it down.
- Give serious thought to making raised beds for vegetable growing. There are many good instructions and suggestions on the internet. If you have voles, discourage them by putting hardware cloth on the ground and turning it up the sides before you add the soil. Don't use chicken wire because it rusts too quickly and the openings are too large. Some of the heavier plastic mesh fencing material might work. Of course, they can always climb up and over . . .
- On the warmer, sunny Jan. days, visit other gardens to see how the bare "bones" of the garden create winter interest. A few suggestions are: the J C Raulston Arboretum in Raleigh, Duke gardens, Paul J.Ciener Botanical Garden in Kernersville, Daniel Stowe in Belmont (near Charlotte), Juniper Level Botanic Gardens on the winter open garden dates of Plant Delights Nursery – check the internet for the dates (located south of Raleigh). Many nurseries in the area have excellent display gardens as well.

Plant of the Month



Viburnum tinus

Viburnums are an essential shrub for the winter garden, giving much needed scent and flowers when there is little else in bloom. They are hardy and easy to care for and look fantastic in a woodland garden planted with hellebores and cyclamen. Birds also love the berries. They are not self-pollinated so you will need two plants of the same species to produce berries. They like cool roots, moist, well-drained fertile soil and can be planted in full sun or partial shade. They prefer a neutral pH of 5.6 – 6.6.

Also in Bloom This Month

Note that bloom times vary, depending on climatic and meteorological conditions, and many plants bloom several months in a row (and sometimes rebloom).

Autumn flowering crocus
Compact strawberry tree
Camellia
Chinese tea-olive
Dwarf fragrant winterhazel
Fatsia japonica
Flowering quince
Grapeholly
Hellebore
Japanese flowering apricot

Late red hot poker
Magnolia cavaleriei
Mahonia
Purple heart tradescantia
Sempervivum
Sweet box
Viburnum
Winter flowering iris
Winter honeysuckle

By Ed Neal

Photos of Some of the Plants in Bloom This Month



Hellebore



Grape holly



Winter-blooming iris



Fragrant wintersweet



Japanese camellia