

THE SEVIER COUNTY AREA



MASTER GARDENERS NEWSLETTER

www.SCAMGA.org

January 2010

SCAMGA Meeting January 25th at 6:30 pm

(we are not meeting on the 3rd Monday of January because it is a holiday)

In This Issue:

- ✿ Birds in the Garden — pg. 1
- ✿ Dill— pg. 1
- ✿ Wood Ducks— pg. 2
- ✿ CEU Calendar— pg. 3
- ✿ Wilderness Wildlife Week CEU Program—5
- ✿ Gardening Tips—6
- ✿ Events & Vol Opps— pg. 7
- ✿ Weather Rock— pg. 7

Submissions: If you have information, articles, CEU or volunteer opportunities you would like published in the SCAMGA newsletter, please send to Alison Stokes at P.O.Box 5767, Sevierville, 37864 or lysuwolf@yahoo.com. Deadline is the 26th.

BIRDS IN THE GARDEN

By Donna Little

Birds are organic pest control.

Most people enjoy seeing birds visit the winter garden. Their song, movement, and burst of color are a delight in the dormant landscape. Organic gardeners truly appreciate these feathered beauties for the pest control they provide.

Numerous species of birds migrate through our part of the country but several species spend

the winter months in our gardens. Various bird species will become year round quests in your garden if you provide them with the survival basics of water, food, and shelter. This doesn't mean you have to turn you garden shed into a workshop and start building bird houses and nesting boxes, or shoving the tools and tomatoes cages aside to store tons seed to keep dozens of feeders filled; and you certainly don't have to dig

up the backyard to create a lake.

Many gardeners already have a water source such as a birdbath, garden pond or fountain. The water source doesn't have to be large, just kept fresh and in the winter months kept from freezing. If you don't have an electrical source for a birdbath heater you can simply remove the ice and add water daily.

Several trees, shrubs, annuals and perennials provide food and/or

cont'd on page 3

EASY-TO-GROW HERB WINS 2010 AWARD

by Leo H. Lubke

A look at our gardens, landscapes and kitchens and it is easy to see why herbs have always played a prominent role in man's life for countless centuries. In early civilizations (and even before), this group of plants was held in high regard in politics, romance, religion, health and superstition. Even a visit to our restored colonial sites certainly makes the point of the importance of herbs in the birth of our nation. Herb gardens were nearly always a part of the landscape, usually placed in sunny corners near the house to be readily available to the busy homemaker or even



Dill is an herb that is an attractive plant with its ferny, feathery leaves. While it is a hardy annual plant, it may also be included in a winter windowsill garden. Its flavorful leaves are edible and may be added to vegetables, beets, potatoes or even fish dishes. Dill may be included in the summer outdoor garden where it grows to 3 to 4 feet in height. Near a garden it attracts beneficial insects as well as black swallowtail butterflies. Dill is the International Herb Association's 2010 Herb of the Year.

drive evil spirits away from the home.

Herbs are primarily used for cooking (culinary), aromatic, ornamental and medicinal reasons. They are classified as annuals (completes one life cycle in a season, then dies), biennials (lives for two seasons, usually blooming the second), or perennials (capable of living through the winter and blooms each season once established). There is a huge variety of possible herbs; most are an easy-to-grow addition to the garden or landscape and have so many uses.

Every year since 1995, the International Herb

cont'd on page 4

WOOD DUCKS

By Roger Simpson

After New Year, we start to look forward to the spring. We begin mental lists of what to do outside when the weather turns. But there is something that we can do now, inside and in the warmth, that will make the rest of the year better. This something is building bird-nesting boxes. If you live near water, you might be interested in making nesting boxes for wood ducks. They are a shy bird, but one of the most beautiful in North America. We have wood ducks nesting along the small creek behind our house. The deeper water from a beaver pond seems to attract these medium sized ducks to the area. There are trees along the bank and the wood ducks nest in cavities in these trees. They announce their presence in the spring with early morning whistles along the creek. Sometimes as I walked along the creek, I would flush the wood ducks and ducklings. The adults would fly only a short distance and begin to call a "weep-weep". The ducklings, which had hidden next to the bank would answer back with "beep, beeps" and swim to rejoin the adults. Because they are perching ducks, wood ducks have claws at the end their webbed feet. This allows them to perch. The ducklings make good use of these claws. The day after they hatch, the



Wood Ducks pair up in January and begin breeding in spring. (Photo courtesy of Bing Images)

young ducklings climb to the nest entrance and jump to the ground (or water). The ducklings can jump from great height without injury. The mother calls them to her, but does not help them in any way. The baby ducks can swim and find their own food by this time.

One morning in particular, the parent ducks that I had flushed flew away over the beaver dam. I thought that I would be able to get a good look at the ducklings trapped against the dam. Much to my surprise, the ducklings ran over the beaver dam like chickens and easily rejoined their parents. While wood ducks feed by dabbling like many ducks, they also feed on the ground and in trees, mainly on nuts and berries. Acorns are a favorite food; they are Wood Ducks after all. The ducklings require a different diet for growth. They eat more insects, aquatic invertebrates, small fish, and high protein animal material.

At the beginning of the 20th century, this beautiful duck was on the verge of extinction because of severe habitat loss and market hunting. The wood duck was hunted for its

meat and for its plumage, used woman's hats. Banning market hunting and the regulation of sport hunting along with conservation resulted in its return to sustainable numbers. One part of the conservation effort was the widespread location of nesting boxes in suitable habitat. As odd as it seems, people still shoot this pretty bird. The wood duck is a popular game bird, and is second only to the mallard in numbers shot each year in the United States.

Wind damage and the influence of man pose a threat to any individual nesting site. But a major draw back to nests provided by nature is the raccoon. Only twenty percent of wood duck ducklings live to leave the nest and a major reason is raccoons. A wood duck box provided by humans is guarded and this increases the percentage of duckling survival. Wood Ducks are secretive in selecting nest sites to minimize nest predators and competition from other wood ducks. To increase the chances of your nest box being used, locate it in an area attractive to cavity nesting ducks. Good areas are where wood ducks are seen

along ponds, marshes, or slow moving streams and rivers. Place nest boxes either on land or over the water. They may be placed on a standing tree or mounted on steel posts. Avoid shoreline placement of post-mounted boxes because of increased predation. Instead, when located on land, put them 30 to 150 feet from the water, and faced toward open water. Since the hen must lead her ducklings to the water soon after they hatch, the area between the nest box and the water's edge should be free of any major obstacles such as fences or roads. Cover and food, for both the females and ducklings are the most important criteria. If feeding habitat is present, and wood ducks are present, availability of nest sites may be limiting wood duck numbers.

Something to be aware of is



A male wood duck in breeding plumage is a spectacular sight. (Photo courtesy of Bing Images)

a behavior among wood duck hens called dumping. Dump nests result when nest sites are crowded together and are not visually isolated from each other. Wood duck hens see other hens enter cavities to lay eggs and enter those cavities to lay their own eggs. Dump nesting is a natural part of wood duck nesting biology. However, eggs in dump nests seldom hatch. So space your boxes out of sight of one another and at least 30 feet minimum between any two. It is easy to get plans for



A duckling wood duck leaves the box on jump day. (Photo courtesy Wood Duck Society)

CEU CALENDAR

MGs are required to complete a min. of 8 CEUs (Continuing Education Units). Before completing any CEU Courses, be sure that you get approval from Alan Bruhin.

January 9th thru 16th: Wilderness Wildlife Week

Music Road Convention Center, Pigeon Forge. Free! Lots of pre-approved CEU opportunities! (see page 5 for a complete list) Visit www.mypigeonforge.com for more information.

January 20-23: Practical Tools and Solutions for Sustaining Family Farms Conference

Chattanooga Convention Center, sustainable and organic farming conference including two full days of pre-conference activities starting Wed with a good

variety of courses and field trips. The two full days of general conference sessions will start Fri and conclude with the big banquet dinner Sat. Registration fee \$175/Adult. Visit www.ssawg.org/conference for complete program information and to register.

February 19th-20th: Georgia Organics Reclaiming Agriculture Conference Athens, GA. 10+ farm tours, 70+ presenters, 70 exhibitors and Expo open to public for the first time. Non-

member registration fee \$50-\$250 by Feb 5th. Visit www.georgiaorganics.org/conference for more information and to register.

February 27, 8:30am-5pm: Conifers for Gardeners

UT Visitor Center & Gardens, 2712 Neyland Drive, Knoxville 37996. Educational seminars teaching you how to grow and design your garden with conifers combined with a guided walk through the UT Gardens conifer

collection. Concludes with an exclusive conifer plant sale of some of the most beautiful and choice selections for the mid-South. UT Gardens Members \$40; Non-members \$45. Register online <http://utgardens.tennessee.edu> or call 865-974-8265.

www.eXtension.org Learning Modules Visit the eXtension.org website to view Master Gardener related "self-learning" modules and get CEU credit!

Wood Ducks, cont'd page 2

building these boxes. They are available on line at www.ducks.org or www.woodducksociety.com. The boxes are very similar to large blue bird houses. Cedar is preferred as it is resistant to weather and bugs, but almost any wood will do, even plywood. It takes a little over ten feet of 1"x10" board to make one box. Lumber that is rough on one side (for the inside of the box) is preferred as this gives the ducklings something to grab when they climb out. If you cannot find rough lumber, put wire cloth on the inside of the box wall that contains the exit. The ducklings can use this as a ladder when they make their big escape. The ducks.org plans are worth looking at just for the descriptions of the tree/pole guards. They are some of the simplest I have seen. If you have the habitat, you should really consider making a box for these beautiful and unusual ducks.

Birds, cont'd page 1

shelter for birds.

Many people only think of birds eating a few bugs or seeds but birds are a great help in natural pest control. During the late spring and summer months insects make up the great majority of many birds' diets. Birds need a lot of insects for their growing babies.

Seeds and berries make up the greatest part of the birds winter diet. In the winter months birds forage for seeds, in the process they not only eat seeds you provide for them but also seeds from weeds that you didn't get pulled up before the weed went to seed. Birds also eat seeds from perennials. Some of the seeds you may have meant to leave to reseed the garden or you may have left specifically for the birds. Instead of removing them in the fall a few species of

annuals can be left in the garden to provide seeds for the birds.

Birds will not completely rid your yard of insects or weeds, and even if they could, you wouldn't want them to. Some insects are necessary for a healthy garden. Birds do not distinguish between beneficial bugs or destructive bugs. Birds will eat a lacewing, ladybug or swallowtail caterpillar just as fast as they will aphids, stink bugs or cabbage loopers. But birds can help keep insect populations at a stable, balanced level, benefiting your garden. With a little planning and simple landscaping you can help moderate garden pests naturally in your yard. Your weapon: birds.

Attract birds to your garden by planting some of these ornamentals:
Annuals: Cosmos, marigolds, zinnia, and sunflower, amaranthus,

bachelor button, love-in-a-mist, portulaca, and crimson fountain grass.

Perennials: Coneflowers, black-eyed Susan, coreopsis, goldenrod, Shasta daisy, iron weed, chrysanthemum, columbine, poppy, asters, penstemon, globe thistle, salvia, sedum, blanket flower, and little blue stem grass.

Shrubs: Beautyberry, elderberry, serviceberry, sumac, spicebush, pyracantha, viburnum, witchhazel, southern wax myrtle, blackberry, raspberry, blueberry, crape myrtles, roses, and junipers.

Trees: Hawthorn, holly, oak, red cedar, sassafras, dogwood, hornbeam, maple, sweet bay, ash, hackberry, sweet gum and tulip tree.

Dill, cont'd page 1

Association has chosen an Herb of the Year to highlight. The major purpose of identifying and honoring an herb each year is to bring greater awareness of that herb to the public. While the selection process is complex, herbs are chosen on the basis of fulfilling at least two of the three major categories – medicinal, culinary or decorative.

The 2010 Herb of the Year has been announced and the honor goes to Dill (*Anethum graveolens*). *Anethum* is the Latin version of the Greek word for this plant. The English word “dill” is probably derived from *dillan*, or *dyle* (Old English), which means, “to lull or soothe.” Dill water was used in early times in England and Europe to sooth babies’ colic. *Graveolens* translates to “strong smelling” in Latin.

As with many herbs, dill has an interesting and colorful history in various civilizations. Romans chewed dill seeds to promote digestion and even hung dill garlands in their dining halls to prevent stomach upset. To add fragrance, dill was strewn on banquet

hall floors. Since dill was thought to strengthen the body, gladiators’ food was often covered with this herb; sometimes gladiators rubbed dill into their skin before a fight for extra strength. Puritans were known to place dill seeds in their Bibles so that they could discreetly chew during the long church service; this would prevent stomach rumblings.

For most home gardeners, dill is a very familiar herb. With the season’s freezing cold temperatures, this annual has long ceased to live in your landscape or garden, but glance at your kitchen’s spice and herb collection and you will probably see a form of dill. In our indoor windowsill herb garden, Linda and I are constantly taking a snippet of dill to add extra flavor to salads, soups and casseroles. Dill is NOT just for pickles anymore!

Dill, sometimes referred to as Garden Dill, is an upright hardy annual that grows up to 3 to 4 feet tall. The leaves are thin, wispy and fern like. The yellow flowers form at the ends of the stems in flat clusters called umbels. The seeds, of course, form in the flower location. Dill produces two herb forms—

the dill seed and dill weed that is the top eight inches of the leaves.

Dill is an extremely easy herb to grow as it pretty much grows itself. It even re-seeds itself—often prolifically! It is a hardy annual so you can plant it in days just before the last frost. It does not do well as a transplant, so it is best to plant seeds where you want the dill plant to grow. Dill seeds need some light to germinate so do not bury seeds too deeply. A fellow Master Gardener shared with me (and I with you) a good way to plant dill in warmer spring weather. Lightly rake the planting soil, and then mix the dill seeds in a small bucket of fine compost. Stir to blend the seeds. Rake a thin layer of the compost/seed mixture over the planting site. The compost will indicate where you have planted AND the dill seeds will be close to the soil surface to receive enough light to germinate. In addition the compost will hold moisture and provide gentle nutrients needed for the seedlings and will not crust over as with garden soil. Thin seedlings, as needed, to have dill plants about 12 inches apart.

In addition to growing this popular herb for

your use, there are other benefits. If you are attempting to encourage more butterflies to your garden and landscape, dill is a great plant to include. Black swallowtail butterflies depend on dill, parsley, fennel and carrot plants for their caterpillar stage. You may want to sow some dill seeds for your use and have other dill plants in your wildlife garden.

Finally, if you are attempting to reduce the amount of chemical insecticides you will be using in 2010, perhaps the 2010 Herb of the Year will help you. Many insects are helpful because they eat or parasitize harmful insects. (Remember that less than 1% of insects are garden pests.) Most species of wasps and spiders are beneficial as are ground beetles, praying mantids, ladybugs, pirate bugs, and several species of flies. By planting dill near your garden, you can attract many beneficial insects to join your battle against harmful insects. Dill, with its many other attributes, is a good candidate for companion planting.

Dill, rich in history, flavor and helpfulness in our gardens, deserves the honor of being the 2010 Herb of the Year!

VOLUNTEER FOR WILDLIFE WEEK!

SCAMGA will have a table in the exhibit hall at Wilderness Wildlife Week. It’s a great way for our group to gain exposure, promote Extension and answer home gardeners’ questions. **We will need Master Gardeners to be “on duty” at the table from Saturday, January 9, to Saturday, January 16.** The 2-hour shifts begin at 9 a.m. and will continue until the exhibit hall closes at 6 p.m.

We are hoping for at least 2 volunteers for each shift. Time slots still available include: Saturday/Sunday the first two hours (9 - 11), Monday from 2 - 4, Wednesday 3 - 5, Thursday 9 - 11 and 4 - 5, Friday 1 - 2 and Saturday 9 - 10 and 12 - 2. MG’s can email Leo at LHLubke@aol.com or call 932-9862 (Leo) or 453-3695 (Alan) for specific gaps, or, hopefully, to sign up.

Those volunteering will receive Education hours for time at the table, plus travel time to and from your home. It’s a great way to start the year off right. You may want to look at the presentation schedule (before or after your “table duty”) AND receive approved CEU credit(s), too! Schedule appears at www.mypigeonforge.com, click on “Wilderness Wildlife Week”, then “Class Listing.”

Sevier County Area Master Gardeners

Congratulations! You've been PRE-APPROVED!

Each year Tennessee Master Gardeners are required to complete a minimum of 8 Continuing Education Units to be certified.

Again this year there is an extraordinary **FREE** event right in "our own backyard"! This is Wilderness Wildlife Week held at the Music Road Hotel and Convention Center in Pigeon Forge from January 9 – 16, 2010.

While there is a GREAT VARIETY of events and topics that you're sure to find interesting, many of the topics are related to home gardening. Why not plan now to attend a few of these sessions for CEU credit? You can receive CEU's for Wilderness Wildlife Week activities listed below. Along with these CEU's, we also want to promote diversity by encouraging your attendance at CEU activities through University of Tennessee programs, as well as other local CEU sessions.

If you have received CEU's for these sessions at Wilderness Wildlife Week in the past, please don't submit again. If you see other sessions that you feel will make you better able to work with home gardeners, please see Alan for CEU approval.

You can attend some, or all, of the following sessions for CEU credits:

Saturday, January 9	5:00-6:00	Appalachian People & Their Herbs*
Sunday, January 10	1:00-2:00	Birds the Word
	3:00-4:00	Wildflowers of the Southern Highlands
	4:00-5:00	Water Sources to Attract Song Birds
Monday, January 11	10:30-11:30	Restoring Native Plant Communities
	12:30-1:30	Creating Backyard Habitats/Wildlife
	1:00-2:00	Wildlife of Tennessee
	1:00-2:00	Woodpeckers-Nature's Home Builders
	2:30-3:30	Herbs, Hives & Hens*
Tuesday, January 12	10:30-12:00	Mountain Mushrooms of Tennessee
	12:30-1:30	Wildflowers of the Smokies
	1:00-2:00	Six Months of Hummingbirds
	2:30-3:30	Attracting Butterflies & Caterpillars*
Wednesday, January 13	4:00-5:00	Bluebirds for Everyone
Thursday, January 14	1:00-3:00	Gardening for Monarch Butterflies
Friday, January 15	1:00-2:00	Bird Songs of the Smokies
	1:00-3:00	Gardening for Monarch Butterflies
	2:15-3:15	Do it Yourself: Building a Bird Habitat
	3:45-4:45	Attracting Birds that Don't Eat Seeds
Saturday, January 16	2:00-3:00	Wildlife Habitat for Every Season

**Given by Sevier County Area Master Gardeners*

Of course, there are many other events including hikes and walks (e.g., evening owl prowls). For more information please visit the WinterFest site at: www.mypigeonforge.com or contact Leo for program information. Remember – you're pre-approved for CEU's as you attend any of the above sessions.

GARDENING ADVICE FROM THOSE WHO GARDEN

Submitted by Dean Gulling

Following are some original and creative reader contributed gardening tips excerpted from Garden Gate magazine's December 2009 issue. If you have any great gardening tips, send them to Alison (lysnwolf@yahoo.com) or drop them off at Extension and we'll include them in the next issue of the SCAMGA Newsletter!

seed-starting rolls: Instead of costly peat pots use cardboard paper towel tubes to start seedlings. Cut the tubes in half with scissors, then in half again to make four "pots." Line cylinders up in a cake pan without holes in the bottom and add seed starting mix. The thin cardboard will get soft after watering but if the tubes are packed in tightly they hold each other up. When the seedlings are ready to transplant, pull down the side of the roll so the cardboard is buried underground. Like peat pots, if the edges stick up above the surface, they'll wick moisture away from the roots.

give cuttings a lift: Make sure your easy-to-root plants get a good start with a homemade vase. To make the vase, cut the top off a 12-ounce plastic water bottle where it narrows at the neck. Then cut V-shaped notches for the stems to catch on. It keeps the stems off the bottom so they easily absorb the water. It also holds the leaves out of the water so they don't rot.

floppy foliage fix: If you like growing bulbs but find the

flopping leaves of fading foliage get in the way of planting, try this fix. Take a three-tier tomato cage and, using wire-cutters, cut the cage just above the first tier. This leaves two short cages—a one-tier and a two-tier one. Cut each circle once so that you can open the cages and wrap them around your bulb leaves. The cages hold the foliage up and are easy to remove with the dead foliage later.

confine your twine: If you are fed up with losing balls of twine, try this easy dispenser. Hang a metal funnel by nailing one edge to the wall and drop a ball of twine into it. You can pull out as much as you need through the small end of the funnel without any tangling, and the ball is always in one place.

safe pruning: To avoid getting poked by rose thorns when cutting blooms, protect your hands by holding the top of the stem with a spring-type clothespin. Grasp the rose stem with the clothespin and snip to the desired length.

blooming bed guards: If you don't have a built in watering system, chances are you need something to protect your garden from the dragging hose. Find some 1-foot sections of clay drainage tile (check with a local tiling company or home improvement store) and sink them upright about 5 inches deep into the corners of your garden where plants are likely to get flattened by the hose. Fill the tiles with soil to keep them from tipping

when the hose hits, and plant petunias in each little hose guard/planter.

vegetable pruning: Lots of vegetables keep on producing until cold weather stops them. But some fruit will never have enough time to ripen. Prune your pumpkin plants to keep them from wasting energy on those pumpkins that will just die on the vine anyway. Three to four weeks before the first average frost, start at the ends of the vines and work your way back to a point where the flowers are beginning to form fruits. Cut the vines just above that leaf or fruit. That way the fruit already forming gets bigger and ripens faster. This technique also works on squash, melons, cucumbers, and tomatoes.

snowscaping: Sometimes winter seems to last forever (especially this year!). To satisfy your urge to garden during winter, use snow to plan new garden beds. Shuffle through the white stuff to make a clear line in the shape of the bed or path you're thinking about adding. This works best with a light snow because it's easier to see the contrast between the snow and the footprints. If there's a heavy snow, pile it into mounds to approximate the size and shape of mature plants. This give you an even better idea of how big you need to make your beds.

seed-sharing photos: If friends ask you for seeds from your garden, get out your digital camera and take a photo. Print out the picture and glue it on an

envelope. On the back of the envelope, make notes on the size and care of the requested plant, along with any tips you've found helpful. After the seeds ripen you can put them in the envelope and seal it up. Next spring, when looking through their seeds, your friends will know exactly what they're planting and how big it will get.

easy out: You don't want a back injury to ruin your gardening fun. Here's a tip to make it easier to empty those heavy bags of topsoil, compost or mulch. After transporting a bag in a wheelbarrow to the right spot, most of us cut open one end, then lift and dump out the contents. Try laying the bag flat on the ground and cut a slit across the middle from side to side. Then roll the bag over and, gripping both ends, lift. All the contents pour through the slit and you don't have to lift such a heavy bag. It's a simple change in technique, but it can spare your back for other garden tasks.

keep deer away: Here's a recipe to help keep those four-legged eating machines from munching on your plants: Blend three raw eggs and a quart of water in a blender, pour it into an old milk jug and let it sit for 24 to 48 hours. After that, it's ready to spray on your plants. Eggs contain sulfur compounds which wildlife experts speculate smells like a deer's own "alarm scent." You will need to mix up a new batch and spray it on again after a heavy rain.

SCAMGA EVENTS AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

January 9th-16th: Wilderness Wildlife Week
Music Road Convention Center, Pigeon Forge. SCAMGA's table in the exhibit hall needs volunteers for 2 hour shifts beginning at 9 am to 6pm, especially Sat/Sun 9-11 am, Mon 2-4pm, Wed 3-5, Thu 9-11 & 4-5, Fri 1-2, and Sat 9-10 and 12-2pm. Get in some volunteer hours and CEU credit the same day!

Senior Center Garden & Greenhouse 1st

Saturday & 3rd Wed of each month from 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Great Smoky Mountains Association
Through sales, labour, donations, and volunteer efforts, GSMA provides the National Park Service with additional tools for fulfilling its mission. (865) 436-7318 or toll free 1-888-898-9102 Carolyn@GSMAssoc.org, www.smokiesinformation.org/aboutus.htm

The Weather Rock

January, 2010

Greetings from the Weather Rock!

Cold! Cold! Cold!

The world is waking up to the reality that there is a 'fly in the ointment'.... as I have been relating to you; the non-scientific concept of 'manmade global warming' is taking a hard one on the chin! Anyone can have (or make up) an opinion.... but there can only be one set of facts....; unlike 'the warmingistas',....we cannot state the future. We can only tell you what has happened in the past and what is happening today....and predict the future based on what we do know. For instance.....

Last month I said that sources were telling me this would be the coldest weather in a decade....I personally said; TWENTY

years.....actually, it is a THIRTY year low.... no kidding! It is not that these temps are unusual.... we experienced them just thirty years ago.....it is the rate at which we have fallen back to these levels that is ASTOUNDING!

1) North Carolina and Tennessee are experiencing the coldest weather since 1977. For October, we were DOWN an average of 6 degrees. November was UP 2 degrees. For December we are DOWN at least 4 degrees.... perhaps more, all numbers are not in yet. If you didn't already know, rain isWAY UP.....and more cold is coming next week....about the time this little arctic blast is over, (week 1, of Jan.), the next one will hit. Records are supposed to tumble thru March....we'll see.

2) Snow cover in the U.S. on Christmas was 66%, 62% on New Years. I know there

TAKE OUR WINTER BIRD SURVIVAL CHALLENGE

Dear Friend,

How do birds withstand wicked winter weather and other daily threats to survival, even in warmer climates? We invite you to show us how birds are surviving in your neighborhood this winter. It can be a photo, artwork, video, even a story or a poem describing how birds are finding the food, water, and shelter they need. Celebrate Urban Birds is a free, year-round citizen-science project focused on birds in neighborhood settings. We have more great prizes including a pair of Eagle Optics binoculars, bird feeders, a birdsong calendar, books, posters, cards and more. The first 50 people who enter will receive a copy of the "Little Green Places" poster and selected images and videos will be posted on twww.birds.cornell.edu/celebration/

How to enter:

1. Email entries to urbanbirds@cornell.edu. If you submit a video, post it on YouTube and send us the link.
2. Write "Survival_yourfirstname yourlastname yourstate" in the subject line.
3. Include your mailing address in your email
4. Explain why you submitted your entry—describe your winter conditions and what you observe the birds doing during winter.
5. One entry per person, please.

Deadline for entries is February 15, 2010

was a lot of snow laying around Gatlinburg on Christmas....but alas, no white Christmas....but La Conte had 36 inches!

3) Beijing, China..... One hundred year snow amounts broken.... It also hasn't been below zero in 17 years....it was 9 below (-9) today....brrrrrr....a new record!

4) International Falls.....-37 this morning (a new record).....gee if it weren't for 'global warming'.....it might have been -75 (LOL) and on and on.....and still....

.....We had a whopping 7 (seven) sunspots last month....that is up from 2 or 3....but no upward trend has started....yet. Solar activity (per NASA) is very, very low....and as always.....this is still a great concern. The longer it takes for Sunspot Cycle 24 to kick off....and we are already 3 - 4 years behind on an 11-year cycle, the more trouble we may be in. Don't forget,

we do know that low sunspot numbers (besides colder weather) cause lots of low level cloudiness and precipitation....we are already experiencing that.....but I know,.... all you care about is the forecast.....right?.....guess what?.....

.....it is going to be a colder than normal January (relative to the last thirty (30) years). With this cold arctic air there is less moisture for precipitation....but it only takes the right conditions and ¼ of an inch of precipitation to make four inches of snow, yes snow!.....I love snow!.....don't you?..... let it snow, let it snow.... LIS.....(LOL).

From a cold and spotless 'Weather Rock', with a ruler ready to measure that beautiful white stuff....(I watched "White Christmas" three times this year....just hoping....)

Jack Bailey