



December 2008 Newsletter

*Celebrating 51 Years
of Birding! 1957-2008*

INSIDE:

<i>The Christmas Bird Count.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Roanoke Valley Fincastle Peaks of Otter</i>	
<i>Field Trips.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Field Notes.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Sightings.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>First Sighting of Buff-breasted Sandpiper in Augusta County.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>VSO Pelagic Trip Friday – February 20, 2009 with Brian Patteson.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Unusual Sightings from Project Feederwatch.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>How Does Bird-feeding Affect Birds?.....</i>	<i>4</i>

NOVEMBER MEETING

Tim and Alyce Quinn presented a PowerPoint tour of their 2007 trip to Costa Rica: from the temperate Central Valley, to the heights of Cerro de la Muerte (the Mountain of Death), down to the steamy Pacific Coast, and back inland to the magnificent Arenal Volcano and Tirimbina Rain Forest.



*Silver-throated Tanager ©
Photo by Alyce and Tim Quinn*

Volunteers Needed for Girl Scout Duck Watch and Habitat Walk, Dec. 13, 9:30 a.m.-12 noon

The Girl Scouts are requesting assistance from adult club members for the Duck Watch and Habitat Walk which will take place around the lake at the Botetourt Center at Greenfield. We hope you will consider volunteering for this important community event. Please contact Elly Wefel if you wish to volunteer: (pewefel@aol.com) or phone (977-0636)

2009 RVBC Calendar Still Available!

These calendars are available for sale to members as well as the general public at \$12 each. They will be available at the December RVBC meeting. If you cannot attend, contact Carl at 540-297-7336 or carlandlinda@earthlink.net to arrange your purchase. Proceeds from sales will go into the RVBC General Fund.

Visit our website: www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com

NEXT MEETING:

**December 8, 7:00 p.m.
Grandin Court Baptist Church**

We welcome Sam and Liz Williams back to center stage to give us a fresh look at *Backyard Birding in Togo, West Africa*. Please join us to see and hear about the surprising variety of flora, birds, and fauna that can be experienced and/or photographed while staying on the same compound for months at a time.

Please join us for dinner before the meeting at 5:30 p.m. at the Brambleton Deli at 3655 Brambleton Road.

Have something savory or sweet to share?

December 8th is our Holiday/Food meeting, so please feel free to bring something delightfully good.

FIELD TRIPS

CHAIRMAN **BETH GRIFFIN 265-4853**

REMEMBER TO SHARE THE COST OF GAS WHEN YOU CARPOOL

The Christmas Bird Count

Thousands of birdwatchers participate each year in this all-day census of early-winter bird populations. The results of the observers' efforts are used to study early-winter bird populations.

Roanoke Valley Christmas Bird Count

This count will take place Saturday, December 20. Bill Hunley (540-774-2397) is organizing this event. and he will attend the December 8 meeting to discuss the plans. (If you can't attend the meeting please contact Bill.) Results will be reported to the Virginia Society of Ornithology. Please see the enclosed *Roanoke Christmas Bird Count Participant Census Form*.

Christmas Bird Count Potential Sites for Roanoke:

- Bennet Springs
- Airport, Thirlane Rd. UPS, pond on Dent Rd. Naval Reserve, Hollins
- Hollins College, Peters Creek Road, 581 North to Williamson Rd. Lock Haven, Barn Owl silo, 581/ Hersherger to Hollins interchange, Woodhaven Rd. (ValleyPointe) 581 golf course.
- Hollins, Hancock Farm
- Read Mountain, Blue Ridge, Cloverdale
- Stewart's Knob, Vinton Reservoir
- Roanoke River Gorge, Dundee/Explore Park
- Bedford side of Explore Park, Vinton, Tinker Creek
- Salem
- Cave Spring, Starkey Rd.
- Bandy Rd.
- Hanging Rock
- Carvin's Cove (Float) boat landing
- STP, Roanoke River, Roanoke Memorial to STP
- Mill Mountain, Roanoke Mountain, VA Hospital
- Fairland Lake, Lakeview, Murray's Pond, Tinker Creek, Berkley's Bottom
- City and/or county parks
- Roanoke Campground, Spur Road, Chestnut Ridge Trails
- Science Museum parking lot
- Catawba Valley Rd., Rt. 311, Brushy Mountain
- Blue Ridge Parkway (approx. from 200/Back Creek to a little beyond Rt. 460 exit)
- Feeders.

Fincastle Christmas Bird Count

This Bird Count is a great chance to spot winter birds and have a hot bowl of stew for lunch. The Count is on Sunday, December 21 and will cover areas in Botetourt County within a 7.5 mile radius of N. Fincastle. This is an official Audubon Christmas Bird Count and requires a \$5.00 fee per person if you can afford it. We will count birds that morning, meet for stew at Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center/Barry Kinzie's house for lunch at 12:30 (stew provided), compile what we've seen, and go back out and try to find what we missed...or give it up for the day. Eunice will be at the December RVBC meeting to organize the event. If you can't attend the meeting you may contact Eunice Hudgins at (540) 389-4056 or uvaau@aol.com; or contact Barry Kinzie at (540) 992-2743 or peckerridge@ntelos.net.



Peaks of Otter Christmas Bird Count

This Count is Tuesday, December 23. If you would like to participate please contact Barry Kinzie at (540) 992-2743 or peckerridge@ntelos.net. This count is done above an elevation of 1500 ft. Observers should dress warmly and keep in mind that not many species are sighted at this elevation. We will meet at the Peaks of Otter Lodge for breakfast and planning at 7:30 that morning.

FIELD NOTES

November 8, 8:00 a.m., Woodpecker Ridge

Seven birders enjoyed a cool, but pleasantly sunny stroll through the nature center's diverse habitat. Species sighted were Purple Finch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, flocks of Cedar Waxwings, Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, Dark-eyed Junco, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Golden-crowned Kinglet, White-throated Sparrow, Common Raven, Great Blue Heron, Red-tailed Hawk, unidentified Accipiter, Blue Jay, Northern Mockingbird, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, Northern Flicker, Black Vulture, White-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Towhee, American Robin, Eastern Bluebird, House Finch, Turkey Vulture, and Mourning Dove.

November 15, 8:00 a.m., Cowpasture River in Irongate Area

Leader Bill Hunley led the group to the river and sighted Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker,

Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue-headed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Purple Finch, and American Goldfinch.

SIGHTINGS

At Botetourt Center at Greenfield on Oct. 31, Zach Thompson sighted: Green-Winged Teals, 4; Common Goldeneye, and Swamp Sparrows. Zach also visited Carvin's Cove and saw 2 Pied-Billed Grebes.

Zach Thompson saw 2 Northern Harriers over the field behind his house in Daleville on Nov. 1.

On Nov. 1, Carol Siler saw a Great Blue Heron fishing at a pond on Colonial Avenue near the Ogden Road intersection.

On Nov. 2, Connie Marsh spotted a Winter Wren near her home in Boones Mill.

Evening Grosbeaks were seen at Harvey's Knob on Nov. 5 and 6. Bill Grant reported as many as 30 on Nov. 5. Joyce Holt reported one Evening Grosbeak on Nov. 6, and also saw 2 Ruffed Grouse run across the parking lot, and the parkway, into the woods.

Mike Purdy saw a Black Scoter and a Surf Scoter in the company of a few Bufflehead on the New River just below the Claytor Lake dam.

On Nov. 9, Rupert Cutler reported a flock of a dozen Cedar Waxwings at Lick Run Greenway. Rupert visited Peaks of Otter on Nov. 10 and sighted two Bufflehead on Abbot Lake.

On Nov. 12, at Harvey's Knob, Bill Grant watched a male Ruffed Grouse display his ruffled neck and tail feathers.

On Nov. 15, Zach Thompson sighted 3 Pied Billed Grebes, Canada Geese, Green-winged Teals, Mallards, 2 Gadwalls, 3 Ring-necked Ducks, and 2 Hooded Mergansers at the lake at The Botetourt Center at Greenfield.

Zach Thompson birded Botetourt Center at Greenfield on Nov. 22 and sighted 16 Green-Winged Teal. Other species present, included American Coot, Common Snipe, and Gadwalls.

First Sighting of Buff-breasted Sandpiper in Augusta County

The Buff-breasted Sandpiper is a rare fall transient throughout Virginia: Coastal Plain, Piedmont, and Mountains and Valleys, with most records from the Eastern Shore. I saw 350 at Chincoteague in September 1980, the peak count for the State. There are records from seven Piedmont counties and until two years ago, the only records from the Mountains and Valleys were from Roanoke for ten years beginning in 1977 and one on September 12, 2007.

In 1966, I bought a copy of *Birds of North America*, in which I kept a record of all the birds on my life list. I wrote under the bird's picture, the location and date that I first saw it. Recently, when I heard that a buff-breasted sandpiper had been seen in Augusta County, I checked my book, and under its picture I had written: "Roanoke, August 22, 1977." In those days I would drive to almost any location in the state to add a bird to my life list.

On last September 27, after several days of rain, Brenda Tekin discovered a Buff-breasted Sandpiper in a flooded field near Stuarts Draft. She lives nearby and rushed home to get her camera hoping to photograph the rare visitor, but when she returned, it had flown away. She will write a complete description of the field marks of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper and submit the documentation to the Virginia Avian Records Committee (VARCOM) for review.

In addition to the Roanoke records, the only other sightings in our region were from Rockingham County, where one was identified on August 29, 2006 near Weyers Cave, and two were seen near Mt. Crawford on September 8, 2007. It is very significant that Augusta County is only the third county in the Mountains and Valleys Region to report a Buff-breasted Sandpiper.

This rare shorebird is found in summer in the far North American Arctic tundra, and it winters in Argentina. Usually it migrates through the Great Plains, but occasionally a few reach the East Coast. Eight inches long, it has a buffy face, breast, and belly, with some dark spotting along the side. It has a short bill, white eye ring, and yellow legs.

Of the 466 bird species documented in Virginia, 308 have been seen in Augusta County. I wonder if other rare species might have passed through without our knowing.

Yulee Lerner

Reprinted from the Staunton News Leader

Roanoke Christmas Bird Count Participant Census Form

Date: _____

Areas covered: _____

Time: _____ to _____

Temp: _____

Wind: _____

Observers: _____ in _____ Parties

Total Party Hours: _____ (_____ on foot _____ by car)

Feeder Observers: _____

Total Party Miles: _____ (_____ on foot _____ by car)

100 Expected Species		25 Unusual Species
<input type="checkbox"/> Common Loon <input type="checkbox"/> Pied-billed Grebe <input type="checkbox"/> Horned Grebe <input type="checkbox"/> Great Blue Heron <input type="checkbox"/> Canada Goose <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Duck <input type="checkbox"/> Green-winged Teal <input type="checkbox"/> American Black Duck <input type="checkbox"/> Mallard <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Pintail <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Shoveler <input type="checkbox"/> Gadwall <input type="checkbox"/> American Wigeon <input type="checkbox"/> Canvasback <input type="checkbox"/> Redhead <input type="checkbox"/> Ring-necked Duck <input type="checkbox"/> Lesser Scaup <input type="checkbox"/> Bufflehead <input type="checkbox"/> Hooded Merganser <input type="checkbox"/> Ruddy Duck <input type="checkbox"/> Black Vulture <input type="checkbox"/> Turkey Vulture <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Harrier <input type="checkbox"/> Sharp-shinned Hawk <input type="checkbox"/> Red-tailed Hawk <input type="checkbox"/> American Kestrel <input type="checkbox"/> Ruffed Grouse <input type="checkbox"/> Wild Turkey <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Bobwhite <input type="checkbox"/> America Coot <input type="checkbox"/> Killdeer <input type="checkbox"/> Common Snipe <input type="checkbox"/> Ring-billed Gull <input type="checkbox"/> Rock Dove <input type="checkbox"/> Mourning Dove <input type="checkbox"/> Barn Owl <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Screech-Owl <input type="checkbox"/> Great Horned Owl <input type="checkbox"/> Barred Owl <input type="checkbox"/> Belted Kingfisher <input type="checkbox"/> Red-headed Woodpecker <input type="checkbox"/> Red-bellied Woodpecker <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-bellied Sapsucker <input type="checkbox"/> Downy Woodpecker <input type="checkbox"/> Hairy Woodpecker <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Flicker <input type="checkbox"/> Pileated Woodpecker <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Phoebe	<input type="checkbox"/> Horned Lark <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay <input type="checkbox"/> American Crow <input type="checkbox"/> Common Raven <input type="checkbox"/> Black-capped Chickadee <input type="checkbox"/> Carolina Chickadee <input type="checkbox"/> Tufted Titmouse <input type="checkbox"/> Red-breasted Nuthatch <input type="checkbox"/> White-breasted Nuthatch <input type="checkbox"/> Brown Creeper <input type="checkbox"/> Carolina Wren <input type="checkbox"/> Winter Wren <input type="checkbox"/> Golden-crowned Kinglet <input type="checkbox"/> Ruby-crowned Kinglet <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Bluebird <input type="checkbox"/> Hermit Thrush <input type="checkbox"/> American Robin <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Mockingbird <input type="checkbox"/> Brown Thrasher <input type="checkbox"/> Water Pipit <input type="checkbox"/> Cedar Waxwing <input type="checkbox"/> Loggerhead Shrike <input type="checkbox"/> European Starling <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-rumped Warbler <input type="checkbox"/> Pine Warbler <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Cardinal <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Towhee <input type="checkbox"/> American Tree Sparrow <input type="checkbox"/> Chipping Sparrow <input type="checkbox"/> Field Sparrow <input type="checkbox"/> Savannah Sparrow <input type="checkbox"/> Fox Sparrow <input type="checkbox"/> Song Sparrow <input type="checkbox"/> Swamp Sparrow <input type="checkbox"/> White-throated Sparrow <input type="checkbox"/> White-crowned Sparrow <input type="checkbox"/> Dark-eyed Junco <input type="checkbox"/> Red-winged Blackbird <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Meadowlark <input type="checkbox"/> Rusty Blackbird <input type="checkbox"/> Common Grackle <input type="checkbox"/> Brown-headed Cowbird <input type="checkbox"/> Purple Finch <input type="checkbox"/> House Finch <input type="checkbox"/> Pine Siskin <input type="checkbox"/> American Goldfinch <input type="checkbox"/> Evening Grosbeak <input type="checkbox"/> House Sparrow	Double-crested Cormorant Green Heron Tundra Swan Greater Scaup Oldsquaw Common Goldeneye Bald Eagle Northern Goshawk Rough-legged Hawk Golden Eagle Merlin Peregrine Falcon American Woodcock Bonaparte's Gull Herring Gull Short-eared Owl Fish Crow House Wren Gray Catbird Solitary Vireo Palm Warbler Common Yellowthroat Vesper Sparrow Northern Oriole Red Crossbill <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Other Species</u></p> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ Precise, extensive details for these birds should be written on the back of this sheet. <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Observers</u></p> _____ _____ _____ _____

VSO Pelagic Trip: Friday, February 20, 2009 with Brian Patteson

A special thanks to Brian Patteson who has offered to run a pelagic trip for the VSO as an early extension of our Outer Banks weekend. The maximum number for the trip is 20 and the special VSO rate is \$145 per person for 15-20 VSOers, 11-14, \$155, and if fewer, the trip will be opened to non-members. These rates are based on diesel fuel at less than \$4.00/gallon and could rise if that changes. If you are not a VSO member, and wish to join, see the registration form at <http://www.virginiabirds.net/memberinfo.htm>.

In case of inclement weather on Friday, you will be able to reschedule for Brian's regular trip on Saturday or his Sunday weather date depending on available space.

Join Brian and his crew aboard the Stormy Petrel II for a pelagic trip to look for winter seabirds. The waters off Cape Hatteras are even better than those off Virginia for Great Skua, Red Phalarope, and Razorbill. There is also a good chance to see Northern Fulmar, Manx Shearwater, Little Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Dovekie, and Atlantic Puffin.



Northern Gannets are common to abundant here and the chumming usually attracts many gulls including Lesser-Black-backed, and sometimes Iceland, Glaucous, Thayer's, and California Gulls. Bottlenose Dolphin are usually

seen in good numbers, and there is a good chance to see Loggerhead Sea Turtles and Humpback Whales. Basking Sharks and the endangered Northern Right Whale are sometimes seen.

Many of these birds and animals can be found just a few miles offshore, in contrast to the Virginia Capes where winter trips typically range 60 or more miles offshore! The Stormy Petrel II has a full walkaround layout as well as a heated cabin, high railings, and excellent stability. Warm clothing and a two piece rainsuit are nevertheless essential for these trips. Check out <http://www.seabirding.com/Winter%20Gallery.htm> to see a selection of photos from past winter trips off Cape Hatteras.

We will meet at 6:00 a.m. at either Hatteras Landing Marina, in Hatteras, NC or Wanchese, NC (we will send directions to you via email with your confirmation). Those wishing to stay at the Nags Head Clarion prior to the trip, will receive the special VSO rate, but there will be no early breakfast Friday morning.

To register: Contact Peggy Opengari at gramby@pemtel.net or 540-921-4340 to add your name and send your payment of \$145 to Peggy, 4278 Eggleston Road, Pearisburg, VA 24134. Checks made payable to Margaret Opengari. (We are assuming from early interest that we will reach the needed needed 15 people for this trip).

Unusual Sightings from Project FeederWatch



Since the start of Project FeederWatch on November 8, watchers have already reported some rare sightings. Confirmed, photographed sightings include a Dickcissel in Blue Hill, Maine. Far north of its typical range, this bird usually winters in Central America and northern South America.

Also sighted, in Mays Landing, NJ, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, which generally winters in southern Mexico to northern South America and the Caribbean.

How Does Bird-feeding Affect Birds?

Remarkably little research has been conducted to evaluate the effects of bird-feeding on birds, but the existing studies were recently surveyed in an article in the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*. The analysis highlighted many potential benefits of bird feeding, with the biggest impacts recorded in cold years, on low quality territories, and for younger birds. Some studies have documented increased breeding success following supplemental feeding, with increases in the numbers of eggs laid, the size and quality of the eggs, hatching success, growth rate of the chicks, and ultimately the number of young that leave the nest.

Although research demonstrates some clear benefits, there are also some concerns. Feeders may concentrate the activity of predators or increase the likelihood of disease transmission. Further, supplemental feeding may lead birds to lay eggs earlier in the breeding season. Earlier nesting can be beneficial and often contributes to a better survival rate for the young, but it can also reduce reproductive success if breeding earlier leads to a mistiming of nesting with peaks in food availability. Additional studies on the effects of bird-feeding are clearly needed.

*from Winter Bird Highlights 2007-2008
Cornell Lab of Ornithology*

