



February 2009 Newsletter

*Celebrating 52 Years
of Birding! 1957-2009*

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DECEMBER MEETING

We watched a Roger Tory Peterson video, *Attracting Birds to Your Backyard*. The video provided intimate glimpses of Peterson's backyard bird garden with close up footage of hummingbirds, bluebirds, owls, and more. Food suggestions, bird shelters and other tips were also covered.

Girl Scout Duck Watch and Habitat Walk Feb. 28, 9:15 a.m.

Our walk in December was so successful that the local Girl Scout Council has asked us to put on another one. So please consider volunteering for this enjoyable outing. Meet at Greenfield Pond at Botetourt Center at 9:15 a.m. Dress warmly. We expect to be finished by noon.

February Raptor Count, Feb. 14

Take your best buddy on a Hawk Hike. Just drive around in the car and count all the hawks you see. Count area is within a 100 mile radius of the Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center. The tally sheet is enclosed. Plan on a count on Sat., Feb. 14, with an inclement weather date of Sat., Feb. 21. Contact Anne Tucker (540-721-1573) if you have any questions. The tally sheet can be emailed to billt3256@att.net or mailed to 3256 Lakewood Forest Rd. Moneta, VA 24121.

If you need help identifying raptors go the Hawkwatching page of our club's website and download the *Northeast Hawkwatch Raptor Guidesheet*.

Rusty Blackbird Blitz, Feb. 7-15



Remember to journey out and spy for Rusty Blackbirds and submit your data to <http://ebird.org/content/va>, reporting the following:

- Date, time, location (as precise as possible) of the observations
- Rusty Blackbird flock size; number of males vs. females.
- General behavior: flying, feeding, loafing, roosting
- Habitat
- A complete checklist of the birds you identified on your outing.

NEXT MEETING:

**February 9, 7:00 p.m.
Grandin Court Baptist Church**

Please join us for a Canadian birding video tour of Churchill and Southern Manitoba. We'll see Red Phalaropes in breeding plumage and Golden Plovers on the nest. We'll also see King Eiders, Spruce Grouse, Hoary Redpolls, Smith's and Lapland Longspurs, Hudsonian Godwits, Three-toed Woodpeckers, and much more.

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

FIELD TRIPS

CHAIRMAN

BETH GRIFFIN 265-4853

REMEMBER TO SHARE THE COST OF GAS WHEN YOU CAR-POOL

Green Hill Park Feb. 21, 8 a.m.

Leader Bill Hunley (774-2397) will lead a walk at Green Hill Park in Salem on Feb. 21. We will walk about one mile on the recently constructed greenway along the river—easy walking. We will meet at the trailhead just inside the entrance to the park.

Green Hill Park is on Diuguid Lane, off Lee Highway just west of Salem. From the West Salem exit on I-81, go to the stoplight and turn right. Turn left at Diuguid Lane, the park is on the right just past the bridge over the Roanoke River.

FIELD NOTES

January 10, 8:00 a.m., Pond Hopping for Waterfowl

On a bright, clear morning Tim and Alyce Quinn led a group of 10 members, on a pond-hopping look for waterfowl in Botetourt and Roanoke counties. Species sighted: immature Black-crowned Night Heron, Great Blue Heron, Tundra Swan, Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Snow Goose, Mallard, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Mockingbird, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Field Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, House Finch, Pine Siskin, White-crowned Sparrow, American Goldfinch, Eastern Towhee, and European Starling.

Christmas Bird Count Highlights

Roanoke CBC

72 species were sighted. Highlights included: (1) Ross's Goose at Plunkett's Pond on Rte 311 near Hanging Rock—found by Joyce Holt and Katie James. This bird has been viewed by many birders and was still in the area in early January. (1) adult Bald Eagle at Carvin's Cove—found by Joyce Holt and Katie James. (2) Red Crossbill and (1) Blue-headed Vireo found by Liz Williams and Linda Barker at Carvin's Cove. Cedar Waxwing (587) are a new Roanoke peak count. Previous highs were:

- (500) 2 Nov. 1977, Roanoke STP by Mike Purdy.

- (416) 16 Dec. 1979, Fincastle CBC.
- (375) 30 Jan. 1984, Troutville by Barry Kinzie.

Compiler: Bill Hunley

Fincastle CBC

68 species were sighted by 24 observers on Dec. 21. Highlights: a group of 13 Double-crested Cormorants flying over Troutville were observed by Joyce Holt and Andy Biggs. Other good finds included a Snow Goose, 8 'small race' Canada Geese, Northern Bobwhite at Greenfield, an American Tree Sparrow, and a Northern Harrier. Generally throughout the area there have been good numbers of American Robins, Cedar Waxwings, and Pine Siskins.

Species not spotted were: Blackbirds, Brown Creeper, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Swamp Sparrow, Snipe, Killdeer, and Pied-bill Grebe.

Compiler: Barry Kinzie

Peaks of Otter CBC

The Peaks of Otter Christmas Bird Count, started about 40 years ago by Almon English (Roanoke) and Dr. Ruskin Freer (Lynchburg), has attempted to record the mid-late December bird population above 1500 feet elevation in a 7.5 mile radius circle with the center being the Peaks of Otter Visitor Center.

Some species that are found somewhat regularly now that were not found often in the 1970s include Cooper's Hawk, Red-Shouldered Hawk, House Finch, European Starling, Mourning Dove, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Wild Turkey. Species that are decreasing in numbers include Northern Bobwhite, Evening Grosbeak, Brown Creeper, Ruffed Grouse, and Golden-crowned Kinglet. After forty years of counting, we believe that there are regularly fifty species that are there to be found (not including accidentals). This year we found forty-three of those fifty species. We have never found all fifty in one year.

Compiler: Barry Kinzie

Sightings

Dec. 29, Kent Davis, Barry Kinzie, Mike Smith and Mike Purdy saw a Long-billed Curlew which had been reported in Buchanan County.

Jan. 8, Mike Smith, Barry Kinzie, Kent Davis and Mike Purdy went to Rockingham Co. and sighted a reported Townsend's Solitaire.

Jan. 9, Kent Davis, Fenton Day, Barry Kinzie, Mike Smith, and Mike Purdy visited Virginia Tech in Blacksburg and saw an Ash-throated Flycatcher that had been reported on the campus.

On Jan. 10, Barry Kinzie reported 50-100 Pine Siskins, 20-30 Purple Finches, and four Fox Sparrows at Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center. Barry also saw, on Jan. 17, two Brown-headed Nuthatches in large pines in a residential area near Mountain Pass Road.

In mid-January Laurie and Scott Spangler saw a Cooper's Hawk with a squirrel in its talons in a pine tree near the Hotel Roanoke.

Deadly Lighting

Tragically, on September 29, 2008 at the peak of fall migration, 500 birds were killed at Tucker County High School in the West Virginia Highlands. Dead birds were found near the school's walls, on the roof, and in the parking areas and athletic field. Wildlife biologists, conservation officers, and county health department officers who were called to the scene recognized it as a "large scale collision event"—an all-too-familiar occurrence at this time of year along mountain ridges. According to Rob Tallman, Ornithologist at the Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Section in Elkins three days of rain before the 29th had kept the birds on the ground, a cold front had brought wind out of the north, and a dense fog had collected over Backbone Mountain. The birds, flying in the fog, encountered a dome of light thrown up by the high school's security lights. The birds circled the lighted area until they died from colliding into structures or from exhaustion.

Three-quarters of the birds killed belonged to three species: Blackpoll, Black-throated Blue, and Cape May Warblers. Besides the warblers (twenty species in all), only Red-eyed Vireos were represented in double digits. There were thrushes, cuckoos, sparrows, and one each of Sora, Gray Catbird, Scarlet Tanager, and Bobolink. Five birds could not be identified.

Neotropical songbird migration depends on cues from star constellations and phases of the moon. Birds flying in fog can be confused by artificial lighting. Researchers suspect the birds are trying to re-orient themselves in the absence of natural cues.

Tucker County's high school was built in an isolated location on a mountain top. Forty-four wind turbines were put up nearby, and in 2003 a "collision event" occurred at the wind facility's brightly lit electrical substation. Since then, the substation's lights have been turned off except when people are working there. On September 29, Rob Tallman and others who had been called to the high school drove to the wind facility to check for bird fatalities. They found one carcass that had lain there for a long time. No white lights, no collisions. Fortunately

blinking red lights on the turbines don't seem to confuse or attract migrating birds.

The high school's lights were installed by Allegheny Power. On hearing of the bird kills, the power company turned off the lights until it could reduce the wattage, pivot the lights downward, and place special lenses on the lights to direct the light downward. The company suggested to school officials to turn off the lights during the peak migration period.

From the *West Virginia Highlands Voice*
http://wvhighlands.org/wv_voice/

Fatal Light Awareness Program

To find out what you can do to help prevent such devastating deaths visit the *Fatal Light Awareness Program* at http://www.flap.org/new/nestegg_3.htm

This excellent site includes an online form for reporting bird collisions and also provides valuable information for preventing daytime and nocturnal collisions.

Tri-County Forestry & Wildlife Association Program on Gypsy Moths, Feb. 9

Presented by Andy Roberts, Entomology, Virginia Tech

Andy Roberts is a Senior Research Associate in Entomology at Virginia Tech and spends most of his time with the gypsy moth Slow the Spread (STS) project. Andy will present a program on his work at a meeting of the Tri-County Forestry and Wildlife Association on February 9, 2009 at the Hanging Rock Moose Lodge. The doors open at 6 p.m. with dinner at 6:45 (\$10). The program begins at 7:30. Make dinner reservations by Feb. 2. Call Ellen Hornat 540-864-6701 or Thecla Frantz at 540-864-5542 or email: Lfrantz@tds.net for more information. Guests are welcome and encouraged.

Great Backyard Bird Count Feb. 13-18



A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this event is a chance for everyone to make an important contribution to conservation. Participants count birds and report their sightings online at www.birdcount.org.

Anyone can take part, by counting birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and reporting

their sightings online at www.birdcount.org. Additional online resources include tips to help identify birds, a photo gallery, and materials for educators.

The data collected helps researchers understand bird population trends: a comprehensive picture of where birds are in late winter and how their numbers and distribution compare with previous years. In 2008, participants submitted more than 85,000 checklists.

Contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at (800) 843-2473 (outside the U.S., call (607) 254-2473), or Audubon at citizenscience@audubon.org or (215) 355-9588, Ext. 16.

Life Bird Quest for a Snowy Owl

On Tuesday, December 9th, a carload of Lynchburg birders (Jim Elder, Mark Johnson, JoAnne Pierce, Sandra Weigand, and Rexanne Bruno) went up to search for a reported Snowy Owl near Ruckersville in Greene County. We arrived around 1:30 p.m. and quickly began searching the fields where the owl had been reportedly seen for several days. Almost immediately we saw something snow white moving at the edge of a field. Could it really be this easy to find the bird? But this white object turned out to be a white cat! Then a farm hand, who realized we were looking for the owl, told us that it had been seen that morning on the other side of Highway 29. On our way back towards Highway 29 we ran into former Lynchburger, Bob Schamerhorn. He followed us across the highway where we all began scanning for the bird again. After a few minutes,



a VDOT employee stopped to tell us that if we were looking for the owl, it was along the far fence of a field about 100 yards further down the road. We couldn't see the bird from our vantage point as the owl was below a ridge. We hurriedly walked down the road and sure enough there it was about 50 yards away, across a green field of rye sitting beside a

fence row. We admired and photographed this spectacular bird for 30 to 40 minutes. And most of our group performed their life bird dance on the spot!

*Rexanne Bruno
Lynchburg Bird Club*

Virgil Caine Spends the Winter in Highland County

Virgil Caine, a three year old Golden Eagle was banded and fitted with a telemetry unit last March in Highland County by eagle biologists from the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary. Virgil Caine is part of a cutting edge research project that tracks the

migration of turtles, seals, storks, and many other birds and animals.

After being released in Highland County, Virgil stayed a short time, then migrated north. She spent the months of July and August on the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec, Canada. Starting Aug. 4, she began her journey southward and headed back to the United States. She spent the month of August and half of September in the northwest portion of Maine, along the Canadian border. By Sept. 20, she had reached the northern tip of New Hampshire and spent a few days there before heading west into northern Vermont. On Sept. 26, she travelled south and was in Highland County on Oct. 7.

She spent two days there, and then flew to the east of Red Oak Knob, not far from her place of release and her northern migration path of last spring. Oct. 9, in the late afternoon, she crossed U.S. 250, flew south over Monterey Mountain and crossed U.S. 220 south of Monterey. She crossed the border at Bath County, spent a day in Pocahontas County, W.Va., changed her course to an easterly direction, and settled near Grayson Highlands for about two weeks. On Oct. 29, she headed north and was back in Highland by Oct. 31.

For a week, she stayed in the vicinity of Trimble in the Lantz Mountain range. Nov. 8 she made a bee-line east, crossing over U.S. 250 in the eastern part of the county. She took a sojourn into Augusta County, changed her mind, and returned to Highland near Bullpasture Mountain. As of mid-January she has stayed in the Highland County area.

Please consider supporting this project by adopting Virgil Caine. To adopt, go to www.seaturtle.org/tracking/adopt. Search using "Virgil Caine" and click "Adopt this animal." You can choose from various levels of adoption packets, from \$25 to \$100. With each packet, you get maps, pictures and information about the eagle. You can also sign up to receive maps by email, which will keep you informed of the eagle's location.

Tax-deductible contributions go directly toward payment of the satellite telemetry project. Funds are needed to keep this project going for at least three years. Golden Eagles mature and breed at age 5, so it is essential that they have the funds to keep the tracking going until the eagle reaches breeding age.

For more information about this project, call Patti Reum at 540-474-3860 or email her at pareum@gmail.com.

Source: The Center for Conservation Biology

