



November 2008 Newsletter

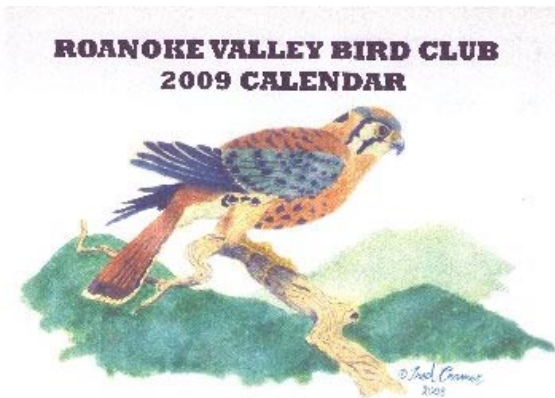
*Celebrating 51 Years
of Birding! 1957-2008*

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OCTOBER MEETING

Paul D. Chapman, Mill Mountain Park Supervisor, presented a lively and informative program about the Discovery Center: its goals, recent achievements, and future direction.



2009 RVBC Calendar Now Available!

At the October RVBC meeting, Carl Boast unveiled the club calendar. It includes photos from club members and depicts birds from locations around the world. The audience was thrilled and orders were taken for more than 40 copies! These calendars are available for sale to members as well as the general public at \$12 each.

They will be available at the Bird Seed Sale November 1st as well as at the November and December RVBC meetings (11/10 & 12/8). If you cannot attend one of these activities, contact Carl at 540-297-7336 or carlandlinda@earthlink.net to arrange your purchase. Proceeds from sales will go into the RVBC General Fund. They make great gifts!

Have You Remembered to Pay Your Club Dues?

According to the by-laws: **members who have not paid dues prior to November 1, shall be dropped as club members in good standing and will not receive further newsletters or notices of Club meetings/events until payment is made.**

So please complete order form on back of newsletter and send it and your check to Eunice Hudgins. Thank you!

Visit our website: www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com

NEXT MEETING: November 10, 7:00 p.m. Grandin Court Baptist Church

Enjoy the sights of Costa Rica as Tim and Alyce Quinn relive their January 2007 trip to this awe-inspiring Central American country. Join them on a trip through 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. Their PowerPoint program will have you planning your own trip to see this gorgeous country.

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

New RVBC Members

Please welcome to the club:

Darrin & Gwinn Firing - Roanoke

Dick Hendrix - Huddleston

Brian & Lisa Shaw - Roanoke

Harvey's Knob Hawkwatch Update

As of Oct. 23, hawkwatchers at the Knob have reported sighting 6252 Broad-winged Hawks; 119 Osprey; 67 Bald Eagles; 23 Northern Harriers; 10 Peregrine Falcons; and 2 Golden Eagles along with a host of other raptors.

For a detailed listing of sightings at Harvey's Knob and other hawkwatch sites in North America visit https://www.hawkcount.org/month_summary.

If you are available to hawkwatch please contact Bill James: 563-9248; Baron Gibson: 268-5958; or Joyce Holt: 384-6674.

Virginia's Birdlife: An Annotated Checklist

The Virginia Society of Ornithology's fourth edition of *Virginia Birdlife: An Annotated Checklist* is a comprehensive statewide list of species for each of the main physiographic regions of the state. Those regions are the Coastal Plain, the Piedmont, and the Mountains and Valleys region. Information includes extreme dates, relative abundance, peak counts, and more. This book is particularly useful for relatively new birders who aren't sure how likely it is that a particular species would be where they think they've seen it. Contact Alyce Quinn to purchase a copy (\$20.00).

FIELD TRIPS

CHAIRMAN **BETH GRIFFIN 265-4853**

REMEMBER TO SHARE THE COST OF GAS WHEN YOU CARPOOL

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

We don't have an assigned leader for this trip so we will pool our ID skills. We will meet at the Bojangles at Botetourt Commons at 8:00 a.m. and carpool to Woodpecker Ridge. Some level walking and if birders want to explore hillier areas they may do so. Contact Beth Griffin if you have questions (265-4853).

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

Good wetland and river habitat. Some level walking. Meet leader Bill Hunley (774-2397) by the Bojangles at

Botetourt Commons at 8 a.m. From there we will carpool to the river.

FIELD NOTES

September 27 Peaks of Otter

Unfortunately this trip was rained out.

October 12, All Day, The Big Sit!

Club members watched from two circles at the Quinns' house in Burnt Chimney. We had a paltry 26 species, with the best being Great Horned Owl, Dark-eyed Junco, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. It's too bad we couldn't count the best bird of the day, but it was outside the circles down at our farm pond. That was a Cerulean Warbler, the first we've seen on our property.



Species sighted: Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, Common Raven, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Towhee, Northern Cardinal, House Finch, American Goldfinch, Great Horned Owl, Northern Flicker, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Chipping Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Junco.

October 25, 8:00 a.m., Woodpecker Ridge

A party of one birded Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center. Although it was pouring rain, a loud chorus of White-throats was heard. Species seen were: White-throated Sparrows, Eastern Towhees, Carolina Chickadees, Song Sparrow, Tufted Titmouse, Northern Cardinal and American Crow.

You may bird here any day of the week. Please register your vehicle when you arrive. Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center is supported by donations which can be sent to PO Box 276, Troutville, VA 24175.

SIGHTINGS

In late Sept., Connie Marsh spotted an immature Nashville Warbler near her home in Boones Mill.

On Sept. 30, Zach Thompson birded a tract of land off Sunset Drive in Botetourt County. Highlights were Philadelphia Vireo and White-throated Sparrow. Also saw female Chestnut-sided Warbler *or* female Cerulean Warbler.

Andy Biggs saw a White-crowned Sparrow near her home in Daleville on Oct. 11.

On Oct. 18, Mike Purdy birded the lake at Botetourt

Center at Greenfield and saw lots of Song Sparrows and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Highlights included 9 species of sparrows including Lincoln's and Vesper, a bright yellow Palm Warbler, an immature Yellow Warbler, a male Ruddy Duck, and a Great Egret.

Mike Purdy reported sighting several flocks of Pine Siskins fly over Harvey's Knob on the Blue Ridge Parkway on Oct. 21. They were in groups of 4 to 35 for a total of 104. Also sighted that day at the Knob were two flocks (90 and 40) of Double-crested Cormorants.

Brown Booby at Claytor Lake

A Brown Booby was reported on Claytor Lake in Pulaski County on Oct. 4 and was still present on Oct. 19. The normal range of this species is in the southern Atlantic along the Florida coast, and although there are a few coastal records in Virginia, this is the first report of the species in the mountains.

Source: Article in *The News and Advance* by Thelma Dalmas (*The Booby was still at the lake as of Oct. 27.*)

Red-headed Woodpeckers Migrating Past Rockfish Gap

In addition to counting hawks at Rockfish Gap, the birdwatchers take note of many other species of birds and insects that pass the lookout. This year they have seen a good number of Hummingbirds, Chimney Swifts, Nighthawks, several species of warblers and other songbirds.

Of special interest this year was the high count of thirty-two Red-headed Woodpeckers that flew past the lookout on September 27th, the highest number ever seen in one day in Augusta County.

Of our seven species of woodpeckers, the Downy, Hairy, Red-bellied, Pileated Woodpecker, and Northern Flicker do not migrate. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is here only in winter. The Red-headed Woodpecker is present the year round, but many of them migrate farther south in the fall.

The Red-headed Woodpecker has a completely red head, and in flight, the white underparts, white rump and wing patches contrast sharply with the black back and tail.

Hawkwatching at Rockfish Gap is not just about counting hawks. Several rare birds have been documented at the lookout, and peak counts of a number of other species. The hawkwatch continues until mid November, when the weather is favorable, and especially on weekends when more counters are available.

Yulee Larner

Reprinted from the Staunton News Leader

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.

This a popular event. Last year fifty girls attended and that was the maximum the group could take. All troops that come will be accompanied by at least two adult leaders that will stay with their group the whole time.

Nancy Kuebler, Scout leader has requested:

- Volunteer adult birders to accompany a group of girls to view and identify ducks.
- Scopes and binoculars to use during the event under the supervision of an adult birder. ***The leader has only 14 pairs to provide so if you have an extra pair please consider loaning them.***
- Field guides for girls to reference.

Volunteers that assist will receive a box of Girl Scout cookies AND a beautiful Duck Watch Patch.

The schedule for the walk and watch:

9:30-10:15 – Waterfowl Life History Presentation

10:15-11:30 – Groups go out with an adult birder with a scope to look for and identify ducks.

11:30-12 Noon – Scouts do their service work picking up trash (they have bags and gloves) around the pond and road. *Club members' assistance with this task would be most welcome.*

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).

2008 Bluebird Monitoring Results

The club's Bluebird Committee would like to acknowledge the following volunteers for their contribution towards a successful 2008 BlueBird monitoring year on the Blue Ridge Parkway, Hanging Rock Golf Course and the Botetourt Country Club: Liz Williams, Bill and Anne Tucker, Carol Siler, Joe Riggins and Jean Marie Sawtelle, Tim and Alyce Quinn, Bob and Sherri Miller, Carole Massart, Connie Marsh, Susan Kidd, Ardy Kidd, Lily Johnston, Polly Holloway, Bill Grant, Deborah Ingram, Eleanor Dye, Bob and Andy Biggs, Ann Allen, and Pam and Elly Wefel. Without their weekly monitoring from March through August our high fledgling rate would not have been possible. (*cont. on page 5*)

The Parkway had a total of 195 eggs laid, of those 173 hatched and 156 fledged. Losses were due to snakes, damaged eggs, and unknown reasons.

Hanging Rock had a total of 149 eggs laid, of those 124 hatched, with 109 fledging. Loss was due to snakes, damaged eggs, and unknown reasons.

Botetourt Country Club saw a total of 139 eggs laid, of those 116 hatched and 105 fledged. The majority of our losses were attributed to damaged eggs, and unknown reasons.

Please consider joining us for the 2009 Monitoring Season of the BlueBird Boxes, so we can strive for an even higher fledging rate next year.

Project Feederwatch Begins November 8

The 2008-09 season of **Project FeederWatch gets underway November 8** and runs through April 3. Participants count the numbers and kinds of birds at their feeders each week and send the information to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Participants submitted more than 115,000 checklists during the 2007-08 FeederWatch season, documenting unusual bird sightings, winter movements, and shifting ranges—a treasure-trove of information that scientists use to monitor the health of the birds and of the environment.

FeederWatch has generated the world's largest database on feeder-bird populations. Since the project started in 1987, more than 40,000 people have submitted observations.

Scientists learn something new each year, whether it's about the movements of common backyard birds or unusual sightings of rarely-seen species. Highlights of the most recent season include the largest southward movement of Red-breasted Nuthatches in the history of the project—part of an expected influx of northern birds that fly farther south when their food supplies run short. Other northern species showing up in record numbers included Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins. Among the rare birds reported was a Streak-backed Oriole in Loveland, Colorado—the state's first report of this bird, native to Mexico. A December nor'easter deposited a Dovekie in Newton, Massachusetts, the first time this North Atlantic seabird has ever been reported to Project FeederWatch.

Long-term data show some species increasing in number, such as the Lesser Goldfinch in the Southwest. Other populations continue a downward trend, such as the Evening Grosbeak throughout their range. Once one of the most common species seen at feeders in the northern half of the continent, the grosbeaks are declining for unknown reasons. Project FeederWatch welcomes participants of all ages and skill levels, from scout troops and retirees to classrooms and nature center visitors. To learn more and to sign up,

visit www.feederwatch.org or call (800) 843-2473.

In return for the \$15 fee (\$12 for Lab members) participants receive the *FeederWatcher's Handbook*, an identification poster of the most common feeder birds in their area, a calendar, complete instructions, and the FeederWatch annual report, *Winter Bird Highlights*.

Winnie the Whimbrel Update

After Winnie the Whimbrel, carrying a tiny satellite transmitter, flew nonstop from Virginia's Eastern Shore in June — 3,200 miles in 146 hours — to the MacKenzie River near the Alaska-Canada border (scientists had expected her to head for breeding grounds at Hudson Bay), she spent five weeks on the Alaskan North Slope. She was there long enough to breed but scientists don't have proof that she nested there.

From Alaska, Winnie flew to Washington state, and after staying there for several weeks, flew east (a surprise, as biologists expected her to fly south along the western U.S. Coast) and landed on the shores of Lake Superior in August where she either lost the transmitter or died. The transmitter is sending a signal from head-high scrub and poison ivy beyond the beach, but searchers haven't been able to locate it, and the beach in this area is covered with Coyote and Red Fox tracks which may explain what happened to Winnie.

On August 17, biologists on the VA Eastern Shore tagged a male Whimbrel, dubbed Willie, that had stopped along the shore on his way south after nesting in the Hudson Bay area. Willie launched himself over the Atlantic on August 29 and flew to the Bahamas. He survived Hanna and then Ike; most likely taking refuge in the mangroves during the storms.



Winnie's and Willie's Migratory Journey

Willie left the Bahamas on September 26. The following day the transmitter signal showed Willie over the eastern Caribbean Sea, heading south towards the Venezuela coast. Willie traveled about 120 miles in just over five hours.

Transmissions on Sept. 30 showed that Willie had landed in South America on the coast of Guyana, where he was moving around the mouth of the Essequibo and Demerara rivers.

Biologists plan to tag about 20 Whimbrels in the upcoming year. The solar-powered satellite transmitter weighs 9.5 grams and is fastened on the bird with a Teflon harness. Anything less than 3 percent of the bird's body weight is considered ideal and this is about 1.5 percent. The load is equivalent to a 200-pound man carrying a three-pound pack.

Winnie's flight, and now Willie's, highlights the critical importance of the Virginia Coast Reserve for migratory shorebirds. Tracking their migration will aid scientists in developing conservation strategies for migratory species.

from *The Nature Conservancy: Virginia Whimbrel Update*

Bar-tailed Godwit Breaks Record

Forgoing layovers and snack stops, a Bar-tailed Godwit has broken the record established for the world's longest known nonstop bird flight, according to a new study.

The honor goes to a female named "E7" that continuously flew 7,257 miles across the Pacific Ocean, breaking the previous record set by a Far-Eastern Curlew, who flew 4,038 miles nonstop.

"Bar-tailed Godwits use forward flapping flight and seldom ever glide," author Robert Gill, Jr., told Discovery News.

Gill, project leader of the shorebird research program at the U.S. Geological Survey, explained that climbing midair while gliding is costly in terms of energy for birds, so continuous wing-flapping surprisingly saves on "fuel."



He and his team tracked multiple Bar-tailed Godwits as they flew from their summer breeding grounds in the western Alaska tundra to New Zealand, where they spend the rest of the year. Females were surgically implanted

with transmitters, while males, which in this species are smaller and lighter, were affixed with external transmitters.

The migrating birds' flights lasted between five and 9.4 days.

The findings, published in the latest issue of *Proceedings*

of *The Royal Society B*, suggest that oceans, mountain ranges, deserts, ice fields and other vast, open spaces may not always be barriers to migration, as had previously been thought. Instead, like a fast lane on a low-traffic highway, they might provide some animals with optimal, near hassle-free travel routes.

So long as weather events follow fairly predictable patterns, the Pacific Ocean appears to provide such a preferable route for the Bar-tailed Godwit, which must load itself with fuel in preparation for the long journey.

Before leaving Alaska in the early fall, the birds use their thin beaks to gorge themselves on food, such as tiny clams.

"Their bodies can consist of 55 percent fat at this time," said Gill, who added that the birds still have a streamlined, airplane-like shape despite their "boxy appearance" in the midsection just before take off.

Both this study and prior work conducted by the team determined that the birds take advantage of low-pressure systems.

"Tailwinds give them a nice, free ride for several thousand kilometers," he said.

In flight, the birds also encounter few, if any, predators and avoid parasite infestations that can occur on land.

Flapping for over nine days, though, does take a toll.

Rob Schuckard, who helped document E7's flight last year and is a team leader at the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, said it's "like running for a week," with the human equivalent being a super-athlete who could somehow sprint without resting at 43.5 mph throughout a week-long haul.

The birds may even burn protein tissue in addition to stored body fat during the flight, which adults make yearly throughout their 15- to 20-year lifespan, Gill said.

Both he and Schuckard are concerned for the Godwit's future, however. In the mid 1990s, around 155,000 birds were recorded as having made the north to south trip, but those numbers have dropped to 70,000 in recent years.

By Jennifer Viegas at *Discovery.com*

Are Golf Courses Good Habitat for Eastern Bluebirds?

Recently on the radio show *With Good Reason* (WVTF 89.1 FM) Dan Cristol, Professor of Biology at the College of William and Mary talked about his bird research. Dan and his students are studying Eastern Bluebirds that nest on golf courses to find out if the greens are good places for birds to raise young. The research is ongoing but studies have shown that bluebird babies raised on golf courses are not as large as the young raised in non-golf course areas (and small size doesn't bode well for survival). A

possible reason may be pesticide use on the courses, this hypothesis, however, is still being tested. If scientists determine that pesticide use is the culprit, then alternative turf management practices could be introduced to provide a healthier habitat.

To read the full text of the article published in *Wildlife Professional* go to: http://people.wm.edu/~dacris/pdfs/burdge.cristol_golf.courses.pdf

To listen to the podcast of the show go to: <http://www.virginiafoundation.org/media/wgr/>.

Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge Guided Tours

The Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge is offering free tours of Fisherman Island from October through March on Saturday mornings 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Staff and trained volunteers will concentrate on identifying and discussing wildlife as they lead the participants through the refuge out to the beach. The tour is a 3-4 mile guided walk across soft and hard-packed sand. Be prepared for cold and wind. Participants under 12 years of age are not recommended due to the length of the walk and the lack of onsite facilities. Pets are prohibited.

Meet at the Visitor Center at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge by 8:45 a.m. to convoy across the bridge to Fisherman Island. Reservations are required but there is no fee. Contact the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge at 5003 Hallett Circle, Cape Charles, VA 23310 or by phone, 757-331-2760 for more info and to make a reservation.

Managing Land in the Piedmont of Virginia

The American Bird Conservancy, the Piedmont Environmental Council, and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries have recently made available an excellent, detailed, 28-page guide titled *Managing Land in the Piedmont of Virginia for the Benefit of Birds and Other Wildlife*.

Derived from authoritative references, the guide is engaging and accessible to the public. This second edition covers the entire piedmont of Virginia and provides specific habitat recommendations for implementation in agricultural, grassland, shrubland, forest, savanna and wetland habitats, as well as in developed urban and suburban areas.

Landowners, land managers, and proponents of conservation (whether as members of organized entities or as individual citizens) will find the text valuable in planning and making decisions concerning land use.

The guide is available as a free download at http://www.acjv.org/documents/VAPiedguide8_08.pdf

Francis Beidler Forest, South Carolina: A Rare Ancient Forest

Audubon's Francis Beidler Forest has been an *Important Bird Area* since 2001. In 2008 it was also designated a *Ramsar Wetland of International Importance*, further highlighting the need to protect this vital resource from threats including sprawl. The site boasts over 15,000 acres and is a popular resting stop for many thousands of birds that migrate to South Carolina after wintering in South America. A number of these species are on *Audubon's WatchList* and *Common Birds in Decline*, including the strikingly-colored Prothonotary Warbler, prolific in this particular area.

One of Beidler Forest's most unique features is the largest remaining virgin forest of Bald Cypress and Tupelo Gum trees in the world, including 1500 year-old trees long vanished from the rest of North America. It is able to support a unique number of species, including large numbers of colonial waterbirds, such as the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Little Blue Heron, Great Egret, Anhinga and White Ibis. Over 25 years of spring breeding bird survey data reveal this site also hosts some of the most dense nesting populations of song birds in the Eastern US, with nesting Hooded Warbler, Swainson's Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Kentucky Warbler, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo, to name a few.

The center has been key in Audubon's mission to connect people with nature, with an educational visitor center, 1.75-mile boardwalk trail (both are wheelchair accessible), several hiking miles of old logging roads and a canoe trail on which guided trips are led, providing visitors the chance to explore deep into the swamp's interior.



Prothonotary Warbler. (c) Bill Stripling

National Audubon Society

