

The Roanoke Valley Bird Club

Next Meeting:
January 13, 7:00 pm
Grandin Court Baptist
Church

Celebrating
57 Years of Birding
1957-2014



www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com

RVBC NEWSLETTER

January 2014



YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT

This photographer, Marty McGraw of Bassett, Virginia, was originally from Richlands, Virginia, where he was one of the most active members of Ed Kinser's Richlands Middle School Bird Club, back in 1976-1979.

Kent's Bird of the Month, page 3

**MESSAGE FROM YOUR PRESIDENT
KENT DAVIS**

Dear Roanoke Valley Bird Club Members,

I hope everyone had a Happy Holiday season. In 2013 we had a good seed sale and calendar sales. The Christmas bird count was successful. Now we're looking forward to 2014 for the best birding year ever!



Thanks and good birding in the New Year!



kedjr@cox.net
540-344-8377

Next Meeting:

MONDAY, JANUARY 13, 7:00 PM

Grandin Court Baptist Church

Featured Program:
"Red Knot"



Sarah Karpanty of the Department of Fish and Wildlife & Conservation at VPI&SU will be our speaker. She is an Associate Professor, Assistant Department Head and the Graduate Program Coordinator. Sarah will share her knowledge and experience with the Tech research on the red knot. The red knot is a shore bird that has been declining in recent years.

With many thanks, the meeting refreshments will be provided by
Rita and Jerry O'Brien

**Please join us for dinner before the meeting
Brambleton Deli, 3655 Brambleton Road, 5:30 pm**

The previous program during the December Meeting featured "Shared Memories" by the membership.



The Roanoke Valley Bird Club

Roanoke, Virginia



2014 Executive Board

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Linda Cory 580-5214

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Laura Beltran 706-220-0980

Website:

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www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com

CONTACT US!

The RVBC Newsletter is published monthly from September through May with the deadline for each issue on the **20th of the month** prior to publication. Photos and articles are gladly accepted for publication as room allows and may be sent electronically, but if original photos are mailed please include a SASE for photo return.

Thank you!

Carol Whiteside

6487 Shingle Ridge Road • Roanoke, VA 24018
whitesidemules@yahoo.com 540.774.2143



Sightings

12/7/13 Around noon **Joanie and Ed Kinser** spotted a bald eagle soaring right overhead at their home on Bent Mountain. Ed noted, "With binoculars, we were able to keep the bird in view for at least 15 minutes, during which it soared out over the valley toward the drop-off into the Roanoke Valley, and then came right back overhead. For a while it was circling with both black and turkey vultures, and before it disappeared to the SW, it was being harassed by a raven. Markings led us to believe it to be a third year bird."

12/10/13 As **Kent Davis and Mike Smith** birded Greenfield, they watched as an Adult Bald Eagle flew over their heads.

December 9 Membership Meeting Reported Sightings

- ✓ **Liz Williams** had a Cooper's Hawk eyeing some Mourning Doves for a meal.
- ✓ **Maureen Eiger** saw a Grebe on a parking lot!
- ✓ **Kent Davis** noted how bad weather will often bring in lots of birds. He saw Redhead ducks, American Wigeons, Green-winged Teals, Coots, Black Ducks, Buffleheads and a Tundra Swan at Greenfield on a bad-weather day.

Field Trips



11/30/13 8:00 - 10:30 AM Lick Run Greenway Trail, Roanoke, from Washington Park pool to 581 bridge and return. Led by **Rupert Cutler** (left) on this cold and clear morning with six RVBC members: (left to right) **Tom Johnson, Candy Andrzejewski, Mary Harshfield, Pat Johnson, Bill Hunley and Sherman Bamford**. There were 21 species viewed featuring: Brown Creeper and Golden-crowned Kinglet.

Kent's Bird of the Month

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT

Icteria virens

From **Barry Kinzie's *Birds and Birding the Roanoke Valley***

Status: Fairly common spring and fall transient and summer resident (April 30 – October 10)



Described as an "aberrant warbler" by Roger Tory Peterson, the Yellow-breasted Chat is an odd example of a North American wood warbler – twice as large as most, with a stout bill more like a vireo's. Debate continues about whether the chat is in fact a warbler or something else altogether.

Whatever it may be, its song, sometimes heard at night, is as distinctive as the bird itself: a bizarre collection of cackles, clucks, whistles, and hoots. P.A. Taverner, a Canadian ornithologist, describes the bird perfectly:

"With his stealthy elusiveness, wild outpourings of song and fund of vituperation, the Chat is a droll imp . . . He is full of life and boiling over with animation. It bubbles out of his throat in all manner of indescribable sounds. He laughs dryly, gurgles derisively, whistles triumphantly, chatters provokingly, and chuckles complacently, all in one breath."

The male Yellow-breasted Chat has a distinctive display flight, hovering above its brushy haunts with slow, deep-flapping wings and dangling feet, often while singing its unique song. The Chat is more often heard than seen, however, as it tends to be a shy and skulking species.

Since the Yellow-breasted Chat is a bird of successional habitats, it has declined in the east as farmlands and pastures disappear, revert to forests, or are developed for human use. Collisions with wind turbines and brood parasitism from Brown-headed Cowbirds are other threats to this species.

From the **American Bird Conservancy**



Calendar of Events

Linda Cory, Field Trip Chairman, 580-5214

Please do not call any of the trip leaders after 8pm the night before the field trip, in consideration of having to get up early the next day to lead the field trip. Thank you.



JANUARY 2014

- 4 **Birds of the Blue Ridges** -Five Sat. classes taught by **Ed Kinser** 9am-noon at the Bent Mountain Community Center. See ad on page 7.
- 8 **Second Wednesday Midweek Walk - Greenfield Lake, 8:30 am.** Please join naturalist **Laura Beltran (706-220-0980)** for a walk around Greenfield Lake in Botetourt County. We will search for waterfowl and songbirds. Mostly flat walking for about 1 1/2 miles. Meet at the second dirt parking lot (off of International Parkway) on the right across the road from the lake.
- 11 **Northern Botetourt Saturday Field Trip – Trip Leader, Wes Teets, 540-521-5379** Meet **Linda Cory** at the Botetourt Commons parking lot next to Bojangles at 7:30AM. From there we will carpool to meet Wes at the Arcadia Bridge at 8AM. See driving directions below. We will bird around the bridge, then the Short Hills and Natural Bridge area, traveling along Buffalo and Frontage Roads. Wear warm clothes and comfortable shoes for some level walking. Although there is plenty of parking at the Arcadia bridge, parking will be limited at some of the stops, so plan on carpooling. The “target bird” will be golden eagles! Bring a scope if you have one.
Driving Directions: Botetourt Commons is on Route 220 North, 1 mile from exit 150B on I-81. From Botetourt Commons, go 1 mile south on Rout 220 to I-81 and go north on I-81 to exit 168. Take a right onto Arcadia Rd (Rt. 614) and continue on to the Arcadia Bridge. Parking is on the right.
- 13 **RVBC MEETING, 7:00 PM** Sarah Karpanty of the Department of Fish and Wildlife & Conservation at VPI&SU will be our speaker. She is an Associate Professor, Assistant Department Head and the Graduate Program Coordinator. Sarah will share her knowledge and experience with the Tech research on the red knot. The red knot is a shore bird that has been declining in recent years.
- 18 **Tinker Creek Greenway:** Meet **Bill Hunley 774-2397** at 8AM Saturday at the trail head in Fallon Park. There will be about 3 miles of walking on a paved surface, with some moderately steep parts if we decide to walk up and view the top lagoon at the STP. We can expect to see a good variety of woodland birds with good possibilities for waterfowl and raptors.
Driving Directions: Follow Elm Avenue East toward Vinton. The road will change names many times From Elm Avenue to Bullitt Avenue to Jamison Avenue to Dale Avenue (what were the city planners thinking?). Fallon Park will be on the left just after the elementary school and before the municipal pool.
- 25 **Ponds and Rivers:** Meet **Linda Cory 580-5214** at the Botetourt Commons parking lot next to Bojangles at 8:30AM. We will carpool to various ponds. Bring a scope if you have one. We will then proceed to the James River near Eagle Rock and then Craigs Creek and Roaring Run. Wear sturdy shoes for moderate walking. If you prefer not to walk at Roaring Run, picnic tables are available for “stationary birding”.

FEBRUARY

- 15 **The Annual Raptor Count:** Plan to spend a few hours driving away the winter blues on Saturday. The annual **Raptor Count** is a great excuse to get out of the house and do some winterbirding! No skill required, just a little time and effort. We count all the hawks that we can find. Just a reason to get together with your birding buddies and enjoy a winter outing! More details in the February newsletter. In the unlikely event of inclement weather, an alternate date of Sunday, February 16 has been set. Contact **Anne Tucker (540) 721-1573** if you have any questions.

RVBC CALENDAR



Orders still taken for purchase during

**January 13
MEETING**

\$12

Please Contact **Carol Whiteside**

whitesidemules@yahoo.com or 540.774.2143

RVBC Store

Avian Life Savers	\$7 - \$9
Bluebird House	\$15
Pole/Predator Guard additional	\$20
Books, gently used	\$ Make Offer!
Hummer Feeders, handmade	\$5
Kinzie, <i>Birds and Birding the Rke. Valley</i>	\$15
Nesting Material	\$2 - \$5

Available at the January Meeting

Meet a Member

BILL HUNLEY

RVBC LIFETIME MEMBER

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joined the RVBC in 1979 when I read about the club in John Pancake's nature column in the *Roanoke Times*. My first bird club event was Big Spring Day where I birded along the James River with **Jim Ayers** and **Barry Kinzie**.

For many years I have been mostly involved with leading field trips and I also really enjoy the Christmas Bird Counts. I have served as President, Second Vice President and Field Trip Chairman.

As a kid I was interested in birds, but I wasn't really a birder until I took an ornithology class while studying Wildlife Science in college. We went to Chincoteague on our first field trip! I grew up on a farm near Fincastle. My mom always seemed to be raising some orphaned wild critter, especially young raccoons. For the last 23 years I've been a science and math teacher at Community School; I have been lucky enough to combine my interest in nature with my employment. I worked for many years in forestry and wildlife management, even had a short stint as a zookeeper. Any other hobbies or interests always involve contact with the natural world. My primary naturalist crony is **Mike Donahue**.

I have had great mentors and birding companions over the years: **Mike Donahue, Barry Kinzie, Jim Ayers, Mike Purdy, Bill and Peggy Opengari, Woody Middleton, Liz Williams, Bill Akers, Jerry Via** and many others. I am also still in touch with Ed Haverlack, the professor who mentored me as a biologist and naturalist.



Welcome New Members!



Annie Downing, Fincastle
Betsy Kayser, Catawba



Who Gives the Hoot!

Map Your Backyard for Birds The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has created another way for you to help birds; by mapping your backyard. This citizen science program asks volunteers to map their backyards or their favorite birding location so Cornell ornithologists may gain better knowledge of birds' habitats and what birds prefer. This project is called the YardMap Network and can be found at www.yardmap.org. This website also provides information on landscaping, gardening, and native plants, and allows you to network with other gardeners and birders. So if you like both hobbies of gardening and birding, YardMap may be the right choice for a citizen science project.

The Amazing Flight of Red Knot 1E7

Bill Dunson, Englewood, Florida, and Galax, Virginia • wdunson@comcast.net

My Christmas present arrived one day late this year. While walking on the beach at Knight/Palm Island on Dec. 26, I encountered a flock of 32 red knots feeding in the surf just after dawn. I scanned them carefully since these are now considered birds of special interest since some migrate more than 9,000 miles from Argentina to the northern shores of the Arctic tundra. North American populations are highly dependent on regaining weight lost during this extraordinary migratory trip by feeding on horseshoe crab eggs in Delaware Bay. Horseshoe crabs are in decline due to over harvesting and there is concern about the shorebirds that are dependent on their eggs for food. To gain a better appreciation of what coastal way stations are needed to support their heroic journey, some have been marked with leg bands and flags. Sightings can be reported to www.bandedbirds.org and information obtained on the history of the individual.



This time I was very fortunate to find a bird marked with a lime green flag on its upper left leg as number 1E7. This red knot was banded April 12, 2012, on Deveaux Bank, SC. It has since been spotted twice in May 2012 and 2013 in NJ and SC, and four times in the fall and winter in September through January, 2012 to 2013 on the western coast of Florida.

I am always amazed and dumbfounded by such records. First it is remarkable that any of these tiny (about 1/3 of a pound) marked birds are ever re-sighted. They are moving over large distances annually and subject to many dangers. Apparently the obvious problems of such a long migration were offset during their evolution by advantages of breeding so far from their wintering grounds. We can only hope that their courage in the face of so many dangers will be rewarded by years of successful breeding. Let's resolve to help them while they are in Florida by protecting their resting and feeding areas on local beaches and mud flats.

http://lemonbayconservancy.org/dunson_archives.htm

<http://www.galaxgazette.com/blogs>

IN BRITAIN, BIRD-WATCHING GONE WILD

By Anthony Faiola, Karla Adam contributed to this report

GREAT YARMOUTH, England — Garry Bagnell is cruising down an English country road when his beeper lights up with a bulletin. A shorelark — a distinctive bird with yellow and black markings — took a wrong turn somewhere over Norway and is getting its bearings on a beach an hour's drive north.

Time to step on the gas

"I need that bird, I need it," said Bagnell, a 46-year-old accountant and hardcore practitioner of British twitching, or extreme — and extremely competitive — bird-watching. "When a bird you haven't seen drops, you've got to chase it. That's going to bring me up to 300 [different species] spotted for the year. You don't understand how competitive this is. For some people, this is life and death."

Beyond these shores, the world of bird-watching may be a largely gentle place ruled by calm, binocular-toting souls who patiently wait for their reward. But in Britain, it can be a truly savage domain, a nest of intrigue, fierce rivalries and legal disputes. Fluttering somewhere between sport and passion, it can leave in its path a grim tableau of ruined marriages, traffic chaos and pride, both wounded and stoked.

This is the wild, wild world of British twitching

Britain isn't the only place that has hatched a culture of fierce bird-watching. In the United States, book-turned-Hollywood-film "The Big Year" chronicled the quest of three men vying in long-held American competitions to spot the most number of species in a single year. Nevertheless, observers say the intensity of the rivalries and the relative size of the twitching community here — which numbers in the thousands — have singled out British birders as some of the most relentless in the world.

One of the fiercest rivalries, for instance, pits Bagnell's former mentor and now nemesis, Lee Evans, against 41-year-old grocer Adrian Webb. Evans, 53, dubs himself the "judge, jury and executioner" of British bird-watching and keeps his own twitcher rankings.

To take on the master, Webb took 12 months off from work in 2000, spending \$22,000 and driving 88,000 miles to break Evans's record of 386 species of birds seen on the British Isles in one year. They trash-talk on the birding circuit like prize fighters.

Evans "is a bit of a strange bloke," said Webb, who is known to drop his grocer's apron and turn on a dime to chase a rare bird and claims to have broken Evans's record in 2000. "He doesn't like people who he thinks are a threat to him. If someone has seen more birds than him, he doesn't like it. If someone sees a bird that he hasn't, he doesn't like that, either."

Evans — a figure so polarizing on the birding circuit that his name is routinely smeared on rivals' blogs and in online forums — does not recognize Webb's claim to the title.

Over the years, Evans has wracked up big legal bills defending himself against allegations of slander for allegedly undercounting the tallies of rivals and questioning whether they've actually seen all the birds they claim.

He dismissively calls Webb a "checkbook birder" — one of those who will spend any sum to reach birds spotted even on distant islands miles off the British coast. Evans also insists that he has been the victim of underhanded tricks, citing an incident when he was racing to see a rare bird in Scotland. He had lined up a plane to take him to a sighting on a remote island only to find that a group of rival birders had stuffed the palm of his pilot "with a few extra quid" to take them instead.

"In America, bird-watching is still mostly a pastime," said Evans, who is on his fourth marriage and blames his divorces partly on his obsession with twitching. "But in Britain, bird-watching can be bitter. It can be real nasty business."

Deadly serious

A term coined in the 1960s to describe the jaw-rattling sound of chasing after rare birds on rumbling motorbikes, "twitchers" are narrowly defined as bird-watchers willing to drop everything to chase a sighting. More broadly, it includes those who make their way to see a bird within a few days of an urgent bulletin.

Such bulletins are typically sent out by services such as the Rare Bird Alert, which obtains its information in real time from a vast network of bird-watchers across Britain. Once notified of a sighting, the service issues urgent messages to its 21,000 subscribers via pay-by-the-month pagers and smartphone apps.

In one of dozens of similar scenes of "twitcher madness" here, local police were forced to cordon off streets after hundreds of desperate bird-watchers descended on a suburban home in Hampshire last year when a rare Spanish sparrow fluttered into somebody's garden.

For a mostly male sport with an average age over 50, however, twitching can also tempt fate. In October, a top British twitcher, Tim Lawman, had a heart attack while on the trail of a Radde's warbler in Hampshire. "It was a new bird for him, and in all the excitement of rushing to see it, he just keeled over and died," Evans said.

A popular smartphone app to help British birders is being advertised as an essential tool when "there have even been recent cases of violent clashes between bird watchers as people desperately try to get the very best spots." In 2009, Bagnell said, he and other twitchers were aghast when two elderly rivals on the circuit went for each other's throats. "One was saying he'd seen a bird, and the other said he didn't believe him," Bagnell said.

The thrill of the pursuit

Though most twitchers are bird-lovers, the sport is mostly about the chase. Bagnell, for instance, drove 90 minutes and searched the ground for a half-hour before he spotted the coy shorelark in beach scrub. He eyed it for a few moments before tweeting his find, then moved on. "I've got another bird to get three hours away," he said.

The most unfortunate twitchers race many miles to spot a bird only to find that their flighty subjects have flown off — a bummer known in the twitching world as a "dip." One of the most infamous dips came as Webb pursued a long-tailed shrike in the Outer Hebrides off mainland Scotland. The boat he and 12 others had hired died in choppy waters, forcing a daring rescue by Her Majesty's Coastguard. "We were worried for our lives for a bit, but we were more worried about not seeing this bird," he said.

Within the world of twitching, there are countless rankings — lifetime lists, annual lists, semi-official lists, slightly more official lists. Such rankings are partly predicated on evidence. When you saw that velvet scoter wading in Wales, were there witnesses? How about photographs? If not, claims all come down to trust.

Many see twitching as an outcrop of the British fascination with "spotting" things — most notoriously, trainspotting, a hobby that involves the obsessive pursuit of seeing as many locomotives with your own eyes as humanly possible. But others say it may simply be a case of boys who refuse to grow up.

"Years ago, British boys used to spend their childhoods collecting birds' eggs — now you wouldn't dream of doing such a thing," said Brian Egan, manager of the Rare Bird Alert. "But what they can do as adults is chase sightings of rare birds. So that's what they do."

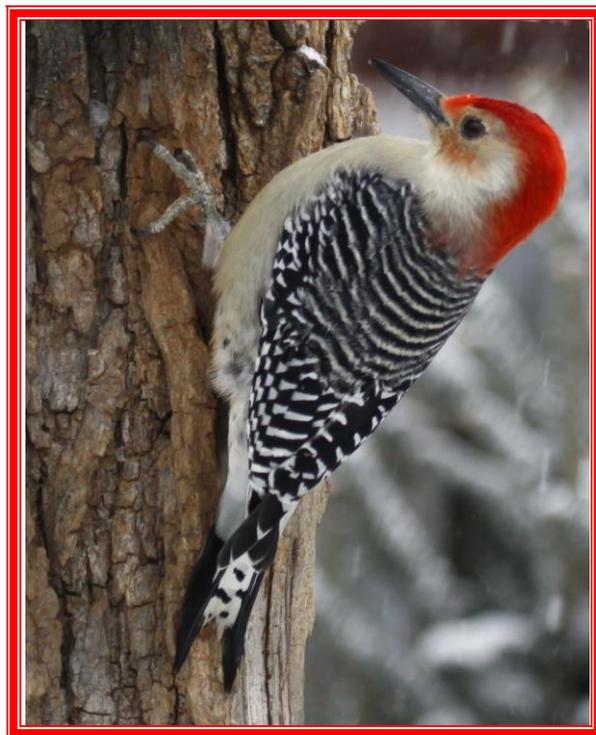
BENT MOUNTAIN CENTER

RECREATIONAL CLASS

BIRDS OF THE BLUE RIDGES—five sessions

This class will meet on each Saturday in January and the first Saturday in February, from 9am until noon, and will be taught by Ed Kinser. There will be a classroom session the first hour and a local field trip during the remaining time. Each of the topics covered will be centered on finding and identifying locally-found birds. Field trips will be within a few miles of the Community Center. Class topics will include:

- Equipment, field guides, and other resources
- Birding using shape, color, songs, and behavior
- Bird adaptations and ecology



Register online: www.bentmountaincenter.com/contact-us

Fee: \$50—mail to: Bent Mtn. Center, P.O. Box 22, Bent Mt., VA 24059



The Roanoke Valley Bird Club
 c/o Eleanor Dye
 P.O. Box 74
 Vinton, Virginia 24179

Happy New Year!



The Roanoke Valley Bird Club

Roanoke, Virginia

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL FORM

All memberships expire on August 31

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

How did you hear about the club? _____

- Student \$ 7 _____
- Individual \$12 _____
- Family \$20 _____
- Adopt-a-Bluebird \$15 _____
- Sustaining \$30 _____
- Additional Contribution \$ _____
- Total Submitted \$ _____**

Mail with check payable to RVBC
 to:
 Eleanor Dye
 P.O. Box 74
 Vinton, VA 24179

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Deadline:

January 20