



Roanoke Valley Bird Club



April 2023

Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be **in-person** with a Zoom option on Monday, April 10th at 7pm at the Garden Club Building (3640 Colonial Ave, Cave Spring, VA 24018). We will continue to engage in best practices regarding Covid moving forward. We value everyone's safety and health. If you feel more comfortable wearing a mask, please feel free. If you choose not to wear a mask, please respect those who do. Thank you!

Birds of Legend and Lore

Presented by Gwyn Calvetti



Gwyn has been retired as a special educator for several years, but have had a keen interest in birds since childhood. She has been on the board of our Coulee Audubon Society for a lot of years, and while she loves seeing new birds when she travels. Gwyn does almost all of her birding within 15 miles of her home in southwestern Wisconsin. In addition to spending time outside looking for birds, she is a professional storyteller, thus....this program!



Clockwise from top: Purple Gallinule (Garland Kitts); Barred Owl (Nathan Anderson); Painted Bunting (Mary Lou Barritt); Common Tern (Nathan Anderson); Bald Eagle (Bob Crawford); Sedge Wren (Kirk Gardner)

Big Spring Day 2022 Highlights

On May 7th, 2022, the day got off to a cold, dreary, and foggy start. But despite these less-than-optimal conditions for birders, the birds were abundant! The fifteen teams from the Lynchburg and Roanoke Valley Bird Clubs, with over 30 volunteers in the field, observed a total of 128 species for the day. This is the best species count since 2015's 131 species, and among the top three results in the last 20 years.

The total number of 5238 individual birds observed was also significantly better than the prior ten-year average. The cold thick fog seemed to have prompted a warbler fall-out. Warbler highlights included 186 Ovenbirds, 181 American Redstarts, 75 Black-and-White Warblers, 51 Cerulean Warblers, 49 Hooded Warblers, 49 Louisiana Waterthrushes, and 39 Northern Parulas. In contrast, raptors were sparser than usual due to the weather conditions throughout much of the day— with American Kestrel and Broad-winged Hawk both missed, which is atypical.

A bit of good news was the single Bobwhite heard calling at the Claytor Nature Center early in the morning. This species has only spotted one or two at a time in 5 of the last 10 counts. Another encouraging highlight of the day was the total of 170 Bobolinks – this is the second highest count in the entire history of Big Spring Day! Reflecting changes noted during the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas 2, Common Mergansers are becoming increasingly abundant in Central Virginia, and 30 were observed on 2022 Big Spring Day.

A more detailed report including the complete spreadsheet was emailed (or postal mailed) to last year's participants in mid-March. If you were a participant but didn't receive your copy, or even if you weren't able to participate but are interested in the data, contact Donna at mateski@bu.edu and she can send you the information.

Lesson learned, the next time you awake to a cold foggy morning and are tempted to crawl back under the covers, think twice: the dreary conditions might actually yield wonderful birding discoveries!

Submitted by Donna Mateski de Sanchez, Big Spring Day Compiler

Big Spring Day 2023

The Spring Peepers may already be peeping and the Bradford Pear blossoms popping, but both our club history and eBird migratory records indicate the best spring birding is yet to come. Big Spring Day returns on Saturday May 6th, 2023! This fun and historic citizen science tradition is a count conducted jointly by the Roanoke Valley Bird Club and the Lynchburg Bird Club and the Sixteen groups of birders will cover designated areas within 7.5 miles of the Big Spring in the Peaks of Otter Picnic Area. This will be our 52nd annual count.

Early May in the mountains of Virginia is a wonderful time for spring birding. Migrating birds are heading north from the tropics to their northern breeding grounds. Birds that spend the entire year here in Central VA are setting up breeding territories and pairing up, which makes them more active, vocal, and easier to observe in their bright spring plumages. Last year's count was particularly fruitful despite dreary weather to start the day – see separate article in this newsletter.

Past Big Spring Day participants – please contact your group leader to confirm whether or not you are able to participate this year. Note that there will be a tally-up this year at the Amphitheater

behind the Peaks of Otter Visitor Center at Noon. Snacks and cold drinks will be provided.

Never birded on Big Spring Day? Newcomers are always warmly welcomes and appreciated. Please contact Barry Whitt, the Roanoke Coordinator, at ttihwb@gmail.com or 540-309-4353 and he will match you up with a group looking for fresh eyes.

Submitted by Donna Mateski de Sanchez, Big Spring Day Compile

Where to Find Native Plants and Help Out Birds At the Same Time

Many of you are aware of the growing knowledge of the important role that native plants play in a healthy ecosystem. One of our recent speakers provided information about the large numbers of caterpillars that many native plants support, and how many species of birds depend on those caterpillars to feed their young. The fruit from native plants is often more nutritious for birds than similar non-native species. For fascinating details about this topic, read Doug Tallamy's book: [Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard](#) or check out his website.

To help consumers find native plants and to encourage local nurseries to increase their selection of native plants whenever possible, Sharon Burnham (a new member of our bird club), in conjunction with members of the Roanoke Master Gardeners, Roanoke Master Naturalists, Blue Ridge Wildflower Society, Plant SWVA Natives, and other dedicated gardeners, surveyed all independent general nurseries within the Roanoke Valley who offer native plants for sale. You can find the results of the survey at the following link: <https://www.plantvirginiannatives.org/native-plant-nursery-survey> This is a great resource for the Roanoke Valley.



Bald Eagle: Bob Crawford

Field Trips

Note that if inclement weather necessitates a cancellation, an e-mail notification will be sent out. You can also call or text the leader Kirk Gardner at 828-216-9710 or kirk.gardner1980@gmail.com.

● Locher Tract Wetlands Trail (Saturday, April 1st 8am)

Our leader, Bill Hunley (467-3477) will lead us on a special field trip to Locher Tract, located in the Jefferson National Forest. This is a managed wildlife habitat that contains woods, open fields, a beaver pond and good views of the James River. We can expect an excellent variety of birds with our target birds including early migrant warblers, Wood Duck, Brown Creeper, Fox Sparrow and Hairy Woodpecker. In the past, we have seen Rusty Blackbirds here. There will be 2 miles of level walking, but wear sturdy, waterproof shoes. Locher Tract is near Natural Bridge Station in Rockbridge County and Bill will have hand out maps showing the location.

Directions: On I-81, take exit 150B and follow signs to 220N. Go 3/4 miles and take a left on Kingston Rd into the Botetourt Commons shopping center. We will meet in the Bojangles parking area.

● Catawba Greenway and Whispering Pines (Saturday, April 8th 8am)

Join Kent Skaggs (308-627-5414) at The Catawba Greenway Trailhead which is located at 5061 Catawba Creek Road. Please consider using this access area for the AT if you arrive at the top of 311 and see that the parking area is full. The surfaced lot will hold 25 vehicles, but there is optional overflow parking as well. Additionally, another dozen or so parking spots are available at the Roanoke County Catawba Community Center, located at 4965 Catawba Creek Rd.

● 2nd Wednesday Walk at Greenfield (Wednesday, April 12th 9am)

Join leader David Frye (248-459-6783) for a bird walk on the Cherry Blossom Trail at Greenfield. We will walk around Greenfield Lake in search for migrants and incoming waterfowl. The walk will be mostly flat, about 2 miles. We will also cover the grassy area overlooking the lake or the trail down to the lower pond. Bring your spotting scopes. Directions: Take Exit 150B on I-81 and follow signs to Route 220N. Go about 4 miles and take a left at the entrance to the Greenfield Education and Training Center, across from the entrance to Ashley Plantation. Park in the second lot on the right.

● New River Trails State Park (Saturday, April 22nd 8am)

Please join Chief Ranger Visitor Experience Erin Pitts (276- 779-5709) at the Ivanhoe Birding Trail at 8:00 am. The Birding Trail is a 1.2 mile walk (24 minutes) from the Ivanhoe Access Parking Area (Ivanhoe Car Parking Lot - 356 Riverview Rd. Ivanhoe, Va 24350) to the Ivanhoe Bridge. A State Park van will also be available to shuttle participants from the trailhead to the birding trail from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. Expect to hike about 1.5 miles on the birding trail. More about the newly established park "Join us for our inaugural Earth Day Bird Count on the newly developed Ivanhoe Birding Trail. Bird surveys offer a way to learn about population trends; especially our neotropical migratory birds that travel thousands of miles each spring from Latin America to their northern breeding grounds."

● Warbler Road Field Trip (Saturday, April 29th, 7:45am)

Join leaders Tim and Alyce Quinn for one of our favorite trips to see warblers. The group will bird a series of forest service roads between the Blue Ridge Parkway and Arcadia in search of warblers and other Neotropical migrants. This trip usually lasts well into the afternoon, so bring drinks, snacks and a lunch. Dress in layers. There is limited space for pulling off on Warbler Road, so we'll need to carpool as much as possible. In the event of bad weather, the field trip will be held the next day, April 30th. Call Alyce (540-312-6844) or Tim (540-537-1831) if there is any doubt on the forecast. We'll meet at the Botetourt Bojangles.

"We welcome birders of all skill levels.
Don't forget your binoculars,
wear close-toed shoes and bring water."

Field Trip Reports

Greenfield's Cherry Blossom Trail

The cold conditions gradually warmed, but the wind continued for the duration of our monthly hike around Greenfield Lake. It took the birds a while to open up to us, but it was worth the wait (it always is!) Nine participants had a fairly fruitful birding hike, netting 43 species. It started with the trip leader pointing out the specific tree where the previous month we watched a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker working his way around the trunk and sampling the rings of pinpoint holes that it had created in the bark. Sure enough, as the group was looking at the tree trunk, we saw a Sapsucker prowling around the same territory. Same bird? Who can say?

The highlight of the trip was definitely the Eastern Meadowlarks found in the short grass of the meadows just west of the lake. We focused on two birds initially, but then kept finding more and more until we tallied a flock of eight individuals. The sun shining off of their bright yellow breasts was worth making the trip, alone! Another highlight was the observations of Rusty Blackbirds (one fly-over and another group of three). Duck species seen on the lake included Lesser Scaup, not previously observed during these monthly visits this winter.

David Frye

Bluebird News

Carol Whiteside, Bluebird Trails Chairman

Reminder:

April 1 - Hummingbird feeders prepared for their arrival, and bluebird box monitoring begins!

Here we go into bluebird nesting season. After a very early start in February (two bluebird nests on the Parkway Trail), March brought enough cold spells to delay the over-zealous birds into their normal schedule.

There will be a bluebird/box nesters monitoring session for club members on a Saturday in April. If you are interested in attending and have not yet signed-up or have questions, please email Carol whitesidemules@yahoo.com to be added to the list. Once the date has been set (by the birds' activity), I will email those on the list.

We have some important changes in our area structure of the Virginia Bluebird Society with two RVBC members becoming County Coordinators taking on four counties! Thank you, **Dick Hendrix and Dana Glenn**, CONGRATULATIONS!

Dick Hendrix

I was very honored to be named **Virginia Bluebird Society County Coordinator for Bedford and Franklin Counties** late last year. The individual that I am replacing in this role is, to my mind, a legend in the bluebird community - Christine Boran. Several years back when I was renovating the trails at Booker T. Washington National Monument and Smith Mountain Lake State Park, she was instrumental in enabling me to obtain a number of bluebird boxes through the VBS for both locations at no charge. She also was extremely helpful in making sure that all boxes were appropriately situated. I've been monitoring the RVBC trail on the Blue Ridge Parkway for about 12 years - starting shortly after I retired here from New Jersey in 2008. The training I received from the RVBC in proper monitoring technique was instrumental in piquing my interest in bluebirds. In addition to this monitoring I have reestablished bluebird trails at Booker T and the State Park starting in 2014, and currently manage both trails. There are now about 30 boxes on these 2 trails and we have had many birds fledge. I have trained many monitors in this time and it has been very enjoyable to me. My favorite part is watching the reaction of new monitors the first time they open a box and find a nest full of 3-4 day old bluebirds with their little mouths wide open looking for a handout from Mom. After they see that a few times, they're usually hooked for life.

George Earl Morris, Jr.

Sadly, I convey the passing of Earl after a long battle with cancer. For many years he was the VBS Roanoke County Coordinator, and in 2006, the VBS "Bluebirder of the Year." When those closest to him reflect, there is one common conclusion drawn, "Wow, what a ride." He suggested and then guided me to perfect the current monitoring form used on the Blue Ridge Parkway Trail which has also been adapted for the golf club trails. Earl will always be remembered and missed.

Dana Glenn

Dana has been named **Virginia Bluebird Society County Coordinator for Roanoke and Botetourt Counties**. We are thrilled she is bringing her enthusiasm to the RVBC and is a welcomed asset to our bluebird community! Dana tells us, "I am a member of the North Carolina Bluebird Society and Virginia Bluebird Society and North American Bluebird Society. I have been a County Coordinator in NC for over 20 years. Back in 1997, I discovered bluebirds and bluebirding when I first got a computer, just "surfing the Web" looking at birds. Then, I found the Eastern Bluebird; I was hooked; I began reading everything I could about their history. I put a box in my yard and got a family my first year in 1998. I have had trails at the schools where I have taught, church cemeteries and golf courses. Bluebirding is my passion, my favorite hobby. I am a retired middle school science and math teacher, and have lived in Roanoke since 2020. I am looking forward to getting to know all my fellow bluebirders in Virginia."





Roanoke Valley Bird Club
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Roanoke, VA 24018
Editor: Nathan Anderson

2022-2023 Roanoke Valley Membership Form

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Make check payable: Roanoke Valley Bird Club PO Box
20405 Roanoke, VA 24018

Individual \$15 _____

Family \$25 _____

Student \$10 _____

Adopt a Bluebird \$15 _____

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Total Payment _____