



# March 2012 Newsletter

*Celebrating 55 Years  
of Birding! 1957-2012*

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Visit our club's website:  
[www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com](http://www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com)

## February Meeting

Bill Grant gave a talk on the two rufous hummingbirds that have been wintering in the area. Bill showed outstanding photos and videos of the birds feeding and being captured and banded by Bruce Peterjohn of the National Geological Survey's Hummer Banding Program. Mr. Peterjohn said feeders should be kept up until November 15th if you want the possibility of feeding a Rufous Hummingbird. At this time there have been ten sightings of the Rufous Hummingbirds in Virginia this year, as compared to only one sighting last year.

*Reminder:* Put out your hummingbird feeders by April 1st.

## Big Spring Day, May 5,

### Mark Your Calendars!

Big Spring Day is a cooperative birding event of the Roanoke Valley Bird Club and the Lynchburg Bird Club and is held as scheduled regardless of the weather.

The RVBC has ten assigned team territories. Most areas require little walking, but there are a few areas for those of you who like moderate hiking. This is a great time for beginning birders to get with experienced birders who can help with identifications. If you are new to the area, it's an opportunity to get acquainted with new birds, discover new territories, and socialize with club members. We need your eyes and ears, so please join us.

Starting out between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m., teams will count all the birds seen in their assigned territory. At noon, all participants will meet at the Peaks of Otter Picnic Grounds for lunch and a tally of the birds recorded. It's time to start organizing the teams, so please contact Eunice Hudgins at 540-389-4056 ([uvau@aol.com](mailto:uvau@aol.com)) to sign up.

## Next Meeting:

March 12, 7:00 p.m.  
Grandin Court Baptist  
Church

### Amazing Tails!

State and Federally Permitted Wild Bird Rehabilitator and RVBC member, Maureen Eiger will present a program on case histories of rehabbed birds with an intimate look at unusual bird behaviors and interesting facts. Birds species covered include sora, yellow-billed cuckoo, Coopers hawk, and more.



*In rehab: Young yellow-billed cuckoo with a waxworm*

*Please bring a roll of paper towels and/or a box of tissues to the meeting to help save a bird!*

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

# FIELD TRIPS

CHAIRMAN

LAURA BELTRAN (266-3773)

SHARE THE COST OF GAS WHEN YOU CARPOOL

## Monthly Mid-week Walk at the Cherry Blossom Trail, Botetourt County

Wednesday, March 14, 8:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Join Laura Beltran (266-3773) at the Cherry Blossom Trail in Botetourt County each month to see how the bird life changes from winter to spring. Off of 220 in Botetourt County, take the entrance to the Greenfield Education and Training Center (across from the entrance to Ashley Plantation). Park at the SECOND parking lot for the Cherry Blossom Trail on the right. The trip involves mostly flat walking for about a mile.

## Bent/Poor Mountain, March 24, 8:30 a.m.

Meet leader Robin Austin (929-9071) at Bent Mountain Elementary School at 8:30 a.m. We'll bird some new areas, along the road to Stoneridge and the Bottom Creek Loop. Expect early migrants. Little to no walking.

## Locher Tract, Rockbridge County, March 31, 8 a.m.

Meet leader Bill Hunley (774-2397) to visit the Locher Tract, in Rockbridge County to search for waterfowl on the James River and the nearby beaver pond. Meet at 8 a.m. at Botetourt Commons Shopping Center in Daleville (near the Bojangles). We will then carpool to Locher Tract near Natural Bridge Station. There will be about 1/2 mile of level walking and we will return about noon.

# FIELD NOTES

## Cherry Blossom Trail Near the Greenfield Education Center, Feb. 15

Laura Beltran led 14 people on the Cherry Blossom Trail monthly bird walk. It was great weather, and they birded for over 2 hours.

Sighted: Pied-billed grebe, Canada goose, gadwall, mallard, northern shoveler, blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, ring-necked duck, bufflehead, ruddy duck, American coot, killdeer, turkey vulture, mourning dove, belted kingfisher, northern flicker, red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, American crow, blue jay, Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, Carolina wren, northern mockingbird, eastern bluebird, American robin, cedar waxwing, yellow-rumped warbler, eastern

meadowlark, dark-eyed junco, northern cardinal, house finch, American goldfinch, eastern towhee, white-throated sparrow, field sparrow, song sparrow, black vulture, snipe, and an unidentified raptor.

They also saw a very large woodchuck, several white-tailed deer, and heard a spring peeper.

## Eagle Rock & Gala Wetlands, Feb. 18

Good numbers of waterfowl were sighted: Canada goose, mallard, gadwall, black duck, wood duck, green wing teal, bufflehead, hooded merganser, ring-necked duck, and a few northern pintails.

## Duck Walk, Feb. 25

Tim and Alyce Quinn led birders to local ponds and sighted mute swan, gadwall, ring-necked duck, scaup sp., hooded merganser (all female), green-winged teal, bufflehead, coot, and one wigeon. They also had red-tailed, and Cooper's hawks, kingfisher, bluebird, robin and white-crowned sparrow.

# SIGHTINGS

*Feb. 15:* Katie and Bill James sighted a red-winged blackbird at the Greenfield pond.

*Feb. 23:* Alyce Quinn reported the following at Smith Mountain Lake Community Park: brown-headed nuthatches; common loon; pine warblers; and a red-headed woodpecker along the road near the parking lot.

### Sightings Reported at February Meeting:

Robin Austin: At the Allstate building there were over 100 cedar waxwings feasting on holly tree berries. Robin also heard a woodcock in January at her home. She noted that the turkeys are out early this year.

Carol Whiteside: Carol saw great blue herons, wood ducks and mallards at her pond. She also saw a red-tailed hawk in her yard.

Eunice Hudgins: In Fincastle, Eunice and a group saw a Wilson's snipe, pine warblers and two red-headed woodpeckers.

Mary Jo Reed: Mary Jo and Don hosted four Carolina wrens in the thatch house they won at one of our meetings.

Laura Beltran: Laura saw a pine warbler in her yard.

Alyce Quinn: Alyce spotted woodcocks in her yard.

Maureen Eiger: Maureen counted 42 turkeys on Apperson Road.

Bill Grant: Bill saw an early brown-headed cowbird.

Dan James and Sally Evans attended the VSO trip to Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge and Pea Island. One-hundred thirty-two species were seen including an American bittern and a Virginia rail.

## Field Trip with Arizona Visitor

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David Dunford, a former U.S. ambassador and an expert on the Middle East, was in Salem from January 29 through February 4 lecturing and teaching at Roanoke College. He is a 29-year veteran of the U.S. Foreign Service and now lives in Tucson where he teaches at the University of Arizona.

Dave, an avid birder, requested a bird-watching excursion while he was in our area. So, on Wednesday, February 1, Elly & Pam Wefel, Laura Beltran, Sissy Logan and Eunice Hudgins arranged a Botetourt County field trip.

A beautiful double rainbow greeted us on our arrival at Greenfield and we tallied the following: Canada Goose, gadwall, mallard, blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, ring-necked duck, bufflehead, ruddy duck, pied-billed grebe, black vulture, turkey vulture, red-tailed hawk, American coot, mourning dove, belted kingfisher, red-bellied woodpecker, northern flicker, blue jay, American crow, Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, Carolina wren, eastern bluebird, American robin, northern mockingbird, European starling, cedar waxwing, yellow-rumped warbler, song sparrow, white-throated sparrow, northern cardinal and American goldfinch.

Our next stop was Martin's Lane near Fincastle where we recorded the following: Canada goose, turkey vulture, American kestrel, killdeer, Wilson's snipe, rock pigeon, mourning dove, red-headed woodpecker, downy woodpecker, blue jay, American crow, Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, eastern bluebird, American robin, northern mockingbird, European starling, yellow-rumped warbler, eastern towhee, song sparrow, white-throated sparrow, dark-eyed junco, northern cardinal, palm warbler, and eastern meadowlark.

## Birding Basics Class at Greenfield Education & Training Center

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Those who enjoy watching birds and want to go to the next level in identification are invited to join a beginner's class on Birding Basics at Greenfield Education and Training Center. The class includes field trips to try out new skills on March 27, April 17, 24, May 5, and 12.

The cost is \$60 per person. Contact Laura Beltran at [wook@earthling.net](mailto:wook@earthling.net) or 706-220-0980 for more information.

## Virginia Society of Ornithology Foray, June 9–June 17

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The 2012 foray will be in Loudoun County in northern Virginia. The foray is being done to support the 2009 to 2013 Loudoun County Bird Atlas, organized by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

For more information on protocols or to see training materials, check the following website: [http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird\\_Atlas.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird_Atlas.htm). The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy will hold a training session during the next VSO board meeting, held in Loudoun County, on March 10, 2012. The board meeting will be held at Audubon Naturalist Society's Rust Nature Sanctuary on the western edge of Leesburg, VA.

If you're interested in helping with the foray or attending the training session on March 10th, contact Elisa Enders at [elisaenders@hotmail.com](mailto:elisaenders@hotmail.com) or 757-879-1034.

## Nonnative or Native Plants in Your Garden

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Over the next few weeks many people will be planting in their yards and flower gardens, and a trip to the nursery can be confusing and frustrating. Before purchasing and planting consider where to plant, what to plant, and why plant, a particular herb, shrub or tree. What conditions are needed for optimum growth and survival and what type of soil is in your garden or yard?

Birds and wildlife need food plants and cover plants. Consider planting both types. Popular choices include: butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidi*) for feeding butterflies. Aesthetically pleasing, it's a native of Asia and Central America and it spreads aggressively. *Buddleja's* seeds are dispersed by the wind and it invades natural habitats. It can be controlled by cutting the branches as soon as the flowers begin to die which prohibits its spread. Native alternatives include sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*), buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) and blazing star (*Liatris spicata*).

Sawtooth Oak (*Quercus acutissima*), a small oak, planted for its foliage and acorns is an Asian native that competes with native oaks. A good native alternative is American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), which has beautiful bark, persistent leaves and fruit which is a favorite of many wildlife species. Red oak (*Quercus rubra*) is another choice as it provides a good supply of acorns and colorful red leaves in the fall.

Wineberry (*Rubus phoenicolasius*), an Asian native is popular for its edible fruit. It provides a delicious treat for wildlife but it's one of the most aggressive exotics in our countryside, and it spreads rapidly. Consider these alternatives: common blackberry (*Rubus allegheniensis*), flowering raspberry (*Rubus odoratus*), spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), and winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*). Winterberry is a favorite of cedar waxwings, and provides spectacular color through the winter. Spicebush provides color and red berries which are eaten by catbirds, robins, thrushes, crested flycatchers, and eastern kingbirds. It also serves as a host and food plant for the spicebush butterfly.

Cover plants are varied in growth habits and size. Popular cover plants include the Asian native burning bush (*Euonymus alata*)—one of the most invasive on the market. Shade tolerant, it

takes over in the woodland edges. Some native alternatives are mapleleaf viburnum (*Viburnum acerfolium*), silky dogwood (*Cornus amonium*), and red chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*). All can form dense cover as well as provide food for birds. Meadowlarks and chickadees like chokeberry. Cardinals, brown thrashers and pileated woodpeckers all find favor in viburnum as cover as well as food.

Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) is a popular hedge plant and its name gives away its origin. It's spread to forests by turkeys, grouse, small mammals, and by vegetative means. (It was recently announced that it harbors ticks that spread lyme disease.) Sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*), spicebush, and highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosom*) are all good alternatives. Blueberries are popular with bird species such as yellow breasted chat, blue jays, orioles, and yellow shafted flickers.

As you can see there are many plants that can be troublesome to our landscape. Many gardeners want color, hardiness, and few insects. Insects, however, are important food sources for birds and animals, and they're also necessary for pollination. Fortunately, we have many native plants to choose from that can provide color and serve as food and cover for wildlife.

I'm amazed at how people will drive for miles to enjoy naturally beautiful landscapes. At the same time, our yards and gardens are full of Asian plants! Try going native. The critters that visit your yard will be grateful and more plentiful.

Sources:

*Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas* by the National Park Service & U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

*American Wildlife & Plants A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits* by Alexander C. Martin, Herbert S. Zim, and Arnold Nelson: Dover Nature Books

*Native Alternatives to Invasive Plants* by C. Colston Burrell: Janet Mrinelli and Bonnie Harper-Lore Editors Brooklyn Botanic Garden All-Region Guides

*Bringing Nature Home; How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens* by Douglas W. Tallamy: Timber Press

*Richard Kelly*

## Raptor Count Results

Six teams braved the weather to count hawks on Sat., Feb. 11. Newcomers Dave Brunstetter and David Kirk are this year's winners.

The team with Liz Williams, Millie Smith and the Holts received 10 extra points for the most turkey vultures.

The Biggs and Hudgins team picked up the 10 bonus points for the most black vultures.

**Team A:** Andy & Bob Biggs, Eunice & John Hudgins - Botetourt County

**Team B:** Connie Marsh, Alyce & Tim Quinn - Rural Franklin County, around Callaway

2012 Raptor Count Results							
SPECIES	TEAM A	TEAM B	TEAM C	TEAM D	TEAM E	TEAM F	TOTAL SPECIES
Turkey Vulture	32	46	76	103	50	76	383
Black Vulture	38	8	23	21	11	27	128
Red-Tailed Hawk	5	4	7	6	10	6	35
American Kestrel	3	3	4	2	8	3	23
Screech Owl							0
Raven							6
Cooper's Hawk		1					1
Sharp-Shinned Hawk	3		2		1		6
Loggerhead Shrike							0
Red-Shouldered Hawk	1			2			3
Great Horned Owl					1		1
Barred Owl							0
Barn Owl							0
Northern Harrier							0
Short-Eared Owl							0
Rough-Legged Hawk					1		1
Golden Eagle							0
Bald Eagle				1			1
Peregrine Falcon							0
Merlin							0
Goshawk							0
Long-Eared Owl							0
Saw-Whet Owl							0
Northern Shrike							0
Unidentified Raptor			1				1
Total Birds	82	59	115	139	82	112	589
Total Points	*237	117	236	*302	327	160	1379
* Received 10 Bonus Points For Peak Counts							

**Team C:** Katie & Bill James, location unknown

**Team D:** Liz Williams, Millie Smith, Joyce & David Holt - Hanging Rock, Craig County, Fenwick Mines

**Team E:** Dave Brunstetter, David Kirk - Roanoke, Botetourt, Craig, Rockbridge and Bedford Counties

**Team F:** Bill & Anne Tucker - Franklin, Pittsylvania and Bedford Counties, around SML

Thanks for the great participation. Let's do it again next year!

## Now Is Time to Prepare Nest Boxes for Bluebirds

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There is an old adage that bluebirds choose their mates on Valentine's Day. I can't vouch for that adage; however I know it is time to build nest boxes and place them in appropriate locations. Bluebirds are already searching for nesting sites. You can help them by building boxes and perhaps build enough to make a bluebird trail. For years I maintained twenty-two bluebird boxes on my trail in the Swoope area.

The bluebirds came close to extinction in the 1960s, with their population reduced by about 90 percent. In the Augusta Bird Club we initiated a program to "bring back the bluebirds." In 1972, the club placed 150 nest boxes throughout the county. Each year more boxes were added so that by 1992, 1,533 fledged from 254 boxes that year. By 1995, more boxes were added and the estimated total number of fledglings since 1972 exceeded 16,000.

In recent years tree swallows have discovered the nest boxes, and in some areas, more tree swallows fledge than bluebirds. If you would rather have bluebirds than tree swallows you might be tempted to remove the swallow nest. Remember there are laws to protect the native birds. We can legally remove only nests of the house sparrows and European starlings. These are introduced species and not protected.

If bluebirds nest successfully in your box, you should remove the nest after the young have fledged. Often they will build another nest, and one year, when I maintained a bluebird trail, a pair built a third nest.

In 1978, the North American Bluebird Society was formed. The Society placed nest boxes all across the country. These efforts along with individuals maintaining bluebird trails have helped the bluebird population recover.

It is not unusual to see bluebirds entering nest boxes in the winter. They are seeking shelter and trying to keep warm.

The eastern bluebird is a common permanent resident of Augusta County, but less common in winter. Our highest count in winter was 372, on December 30, 2000, during the Augusta County Christmas Bird Count.

Feeding from a perch, bluebirds will fly down to the ground to catch insects. They also might come to feeders for peanut butter mixes, berries, mealworms, and raisins.

This winter, look for the bluebirds. Valentine's Day is almost here and you will soon see a pair of bluebirds checking your bluebird boxes.

*Yulee Larner*

*Reprinted from The Staunton News Leader*

## He's Back Again

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*Feb. 16:* It is nothing less than amazing that a large rough-legged hawk that spends the summer in the Arctic; circumpolar, could find its way to Augusta County for three consecutive years. It has been seen flying over open fields in the vicinity of Hall School Road near Stuarts Draft for the past three winters. There were a few other sightings during this time period: one at New Hope and one near Swoope. It spends the winters to southern United States and central Eurasia.

In Augusta County the rough-legged hawk is considered to be a rare fall transient and winter resident. Our extreme dates are from October 29, 1983 to February 28, 2009.

The rough-legged hawk is so named because the feathers growing on its legs giving a rough appearance. It feeds almost entirely on medium sized mammals, reptiles, and insects. It has long wings and tail, dark or blotched belly and black patch on the underwing. It has a white tail with a broad black band at the tip. A large hawk, it is 19-24 inches long.

Since our extreme date is February 28, keep watching. A large hawk near Hall School Road probably is the rough-legged hawk soaring over the fields.

*Yulee Larner*

*Reprinted from The Staunton News Leader*

## Thanks to Allen Austin and Scott Spangler

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Thanks to Allen and Scott for volunteering to build tables with rollers for the club's books-for-sale, and for our pamphlets and magazines.

We really appreciate it and are looking forward to putting the tables to use.

Vinton, VA 24179-0074  
P.O. Box 74



**ROANOKE VALLEY BIRD CLUB 2011 OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

President: Elly Wefel 977-0636  
VP (Programs) Bill Grant 389-3294  
VP (Membership): Eleanor Dye 890-1627  
Treasurer: Robin Austin 929-9071  
Secretary: Candy Andrzejewski 365-2508  
Directors at Large: Eunice Hudgins 389-4056 & Alyce Quinn 719-0109  
Field Trips: Laura Beltran 266-3773  
Publications: Carol Siler 725-1609  
Publicity: Maureen Eiger 342-4890  
Bluebird Trail: Alyce Quinn 719-0109 [www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com](http://www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com)

How did you hear about the club?

**2012 Membership Dues**

**Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **ST:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Mail To: Roanoke Valley Bird Club**  
**c/o Eleanor Dye**  
**P.O. Box 74**  
**Vinton, VA 24179-0074**

**Dues**

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