



May 2011 Newsletter

*Celebrating 54 Years
of Birding! 1957-2011*

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Please note: The RVBC newsletter will not be published June-August. The next issue will be distributed to club members in early September.

Visit our club's website:
www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com

APRIL MEETING

Club members shared their photos.



Baltimore Oriole Jim Stevenson©

RVBC Annual Picnic, August 21, 4 PM

Our annual RVBC picnic will be on Sunday, August 21, 4:00 p.m., at the park shelter at Walrond Park. Bring a dish to share. Picnic tables under the shelter are available as are nearby rest rooms. Please join us in celebrating the summer of 2011. Walrond Park is located at 6824 Walrond Drive which is off of Plantation Road between I-81 and Williamson Road.

Valley Bird Club 2012 Calendar: Get Your Entries Ready

Photos or artwork by members can be submitted at any time up to the September 12 RVBC meeting. The images should be in 8 x 10 horizontal (landscape) format suitable for scanning and reproduction. Please put a brief description on a label on the back of the submission indicating the subject, location and time of year (month or season) depicted. Do not include any self identifying information on the submission label. Do, however, provide your name on an accompanying sheet. A committee will select the final images for the calendar from the received submissions. Submitted materials will be returned.

Please submit entries by September 12 to Carl Boast: 3368 Hickory Cove Lane, Moneta, VA 24121. Or give submissions directly to Carl at the May meeting, the August picnic, or any other time you see him on or before Sept. 12.

If you would like to be on the selection committee please contact Carl at: carlandlinda@earthlink.net or phone: 540-297-7336.

NEXT MEETING:

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

RVBC member Carl Boast will present an update of his *Feathered Friends of Florida*. He and his wife, Linda, visited several National Wildlife Refuges in southern Florida this past January and had some great photo opportunities. Overlapping their visit, Mary Lou & Sid Barritt were also in Florida and Carl has several of Mary Lou's photos in his slideshow. Come out and get some good looks at the *Friends* who have returned to our area as well as some species that require travel to view. Carl and Mary Lou captured some great poses. It should be an enjoyable night of birdwatching.

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**

SHARE THE COST OF GAS WHEN YOU CARPOOL

May 7, Big Spring Day

For details contact Eunice Hudgins at 540-389-4056 (uvaau@aol.com) or Pam Wefel at 540-977-0636 (pewefel@aol.com) to sign up. Let us know if you prefer to drive or hike. (See April newsletter front page article.)

May 14, 7:45 AM, Little Sit

Meet Tim and Alyce Quinn at their house in Burnt Chimney for a sequel to their fall Big Sit. Actually, this one will involve more walking (1 to 2 miles, moderate) though people who do not want to walk as much can stay at the house and bird from the porch and yard. The Quinns have fields, woods, a pond, and a power line cut for excellent birding across a variety of habitats. Birds we may see include blue grosbeak, indigo bunting, brown thrasher, prairie warbler, black-and-white warbler, hooded warbler, common yellowthroat, ovenbird, yellow-breasted chat, Swainson's thrush, wood thrush, scarlet tanager, yellow-billed cuckoo, white-eyed and yellow-throated vireos, and a pair of nesting red-shouldered hawks. Other birds currently on nests are phoebe, bluebird and chickadee. People carpooling from Roanoke should meet Beth Griffin (265-4853) at 7:00 AM under the big sign at Tanglewood Mall. If you're going directly to the Quinns' and need directions, call Tim or Alyce at 719-0109.

June 11, 7:30 AM, Revisiting the Whitesides'

You had a great time at the Whitesides' in the winter; see what it has to offer in the summer. Meet at 7:30 at Carol's (774-2143) property off Cottonhill Road in Roanoke County, or carpool from Roanoke's Towers Mall. Carpoolers meet Beth Griffin (265-4853) at Towers Mall on the lower level by the bank at 7:00 AM. There will be easy to moderate walking around the pond, up a trail by a stream to a waterfall, and down a trail to the mule pasture. Those who do not want to walk far can bird near the house (plenty of feeders) from inside or out on the back porch.

July 9, 7:30 AM, Big Lick Run, 7:30 AM

Summer Saturday morning on Lick Run. Meet at the Upper Washington Park swimming pool/picnic pavilion parking lot at 7:30 AM Saturday, July 9, for a four-mile easy, slow walk on the Lick Run Greenway trail from Addison Middle School to Valley View Mall and back.

Woods, creek bottom, marsh, meadow habitats. Rupert Cutler, leader (345-7653). Parking lot is off Orange Avenue toward Lincoln Terrace School on Burrell Street. Take first left after turning onto Burrell from Orange Ave., parking lot is on the left. Pack a bottle of water.

Butterfly Counts

Saturday June 25, Fincastle Butterfly Count
Saturday July 9, Peaks of Otter Butterfly Count

For more info contact Barry Kinzie at Woodpecker Ridge.

Summer Open House, Saturday, Aug. 6

Allen and Robin Austin will host an open house and bird walk at their home at 8:30 AM with lunch to follow. Meet at the Austins' 10513 Bottom Creek Rd. We will explore Poor Mountain and the Bottom Creek loop. We'll have a camp fire in the evening with the hope of hearing owls and whip-poor-wills.

FIELD TRIP NOTES

April 23, Arcadia

Bill Hunley led 12 birders to Arcadia and Solitude swamp. Over 50 species were sighted or heard, including warbling and yellow-throated vireos, orchard and Baltimore orioles, Louisiana waterthrush, an American redstart singing a northern parula song, osprey, kestrel,



Canada geese with goslings, and an indigo bunting. The highlight, however, was a long, spectacular look at a prothonotary warbler at Solitude swamp. Several



birders birded afterwards and saw ruby-throated hummingbirds and a scarlet tanager.

May 1, Warbler Road

Fifteen people enjoyed a beautiful day on Warbler Rd. We were worried about road conditions after all the recent storms, but most of the blow-down had been cleared. We counted just under 50 species, including a dozen warblers and some life birds for a few participants. Highlights were nice looks at scarlet tanager (male and female), yellow-throated vireo, blue-headed vireo, Canada warbler, black-and-white warbler, cerulean warbler, ovenbird, worm-eating warbler, hooded warbler, and American redstart. We encountered a group of ornithology students from Longwood University who were excited at just having seen a barred owl. It was heartwarming to see a bunch of young people enjoying learning about birds.

May 1, Mill Mountain/Chestnut Ridge

Bill Hunley led eight birders on this cool, overcast morning to Mill Mountain and the trail on Chestnut Ridge. Highlights seen and/or heard: Baltimore oriole, chipping sparrow, northern flicker, brown thrasher, scarlet tanager, red-eyed vireo, northern parula, American redstart, and yellow-rumped warbler. Several birders thought they heard a yellow-billed cuckoo but Bill explained that it was instead the repetitive territorial call of a chipmunk.

SIGHTINGS

April 15: Laurie and Scott Spangler saw their first ruby-throated hummingbird of the season at their feeder.

April 15-16: Rupert Cutler spotted an osprey in the afternoon over the Roanoke River at Memorial Bridge in Roanoke, near Vic Thomas Park. On the 16th, Rupert saw a yellow-crowned night heron at Lick Run Greenway in the afternoon after a heavy rain.

April 11: Alyce Quinn saw a blue grosbeak visiting her feeders in Burnt Chimney.

April 23: Laurie Spangler spotted a great crested flycatcher on the road near their home in Blue Ridge.

American Goldfinches Changing Into Summer Colors

A number of American goldfinches have fed on nyger seeds at my feeders all winter. But they were not gold. In winter, the males are dull yellow-olive, darker above, with blackish wings. The females are the same dull color in both winter and summer.

Now that spring is here the males are beginning to turn bright yellow with black wings, tail, and forehead patch.

In Augusta County, American goldfinches are common permanent residents in a variety of habitats. They breed from Wisconsin to Maine, south to Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. The nest is placed in several upright branches or fork of a horizontal tree limb, 1-33 feet above the ground. It is a neat cup of fine vegetable fibers woven and lined with thistle and cattail down. Our earliest breeding record was a nest on June 27, 2000 at Stuarts Draft. The latest nest record was of adults feeding recently fledged young on September 29, 1998 near Churchville.

The largest number ever seen in one day was 850 on October 23, 2008, of which 700 were feeding in a field of sunflowers near the Boy Scout Camp at Swoope. Now that's a lot of goldfinches!

*Yulee Larner
reprinted from Staunton News Leader*

European Starlings a Nuisance at Bird Feeders

European starlings were absent most of the winter and were not a problem at my bird feeders. Now that spring is here they have returned and often chase away the regular visitors, including cardinals, chickadees, titmice, and many others.

The starling is one of several species introduced into the United States. Others are mute swan, rock pigeon, Eurasian collared-dove, and house sparrow. The story of the starling is an interesting one. In the late 1800s, The American Acclimatization Society attempted to introduce into North America all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's plays. Unfortunately, in the play "Henry IV" there is a line that reads "Nay, I'll have a starling shall he be taught to speak nothing but 'Mortimor'..."

The society failed in its first attempt, but in 1890, they released sixty starlings, and 1891, forty more, in New York City's Central Park. They adapted to the new environment, multiplied, and soon spread across the continent. Within 100 years, it was estimated that there were 200,000,000 starlings throughout the United States and Southern Canada. In the recent Great Backyard Bird Count, 1,377,107 starlings were reported. The "starling story" is a remarkable example of a well-intentioned project that grew into a monster disaster for our native birds.

On the "plus" side, starlings feed on a variety of insects, including cutworms, clover weevils, and Japanese beetles. On the "minus" side, they are major pests in wheatfields, orchards, and vineyards. In competition for nest sites, the hardy, aggressive starlings usually win. The end result is that there are more starlings and fewer native songbirds.

Locally, we have a record of 1,507, 707 during the 1987 Augusta County Christmas Bird Count. That year there was a huge blackbird winter roost near Weyers Cave.

Starlings have learned to survive and are very adaptable to all conditions. They have been around a long time. They were described by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) and Pliny (A.D. 23-79) and they were well established in Europe by the early 1830s.

The starlings scientific name (*sturnis vulgaris*) comes from the Latin word, "sturnis" for "starling" and "vulgaris" which means "common" because it seems to be everywhere at once. The common name "starling" means "little star" which may describe its star-shaped silhouette in flight or its bright, speckled feathers in winter.

I wish the Acclimatization Society had chosen a better project and left the starlings in "Shakespeare's land."

*Yulee Larner
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