



April 2010 Newsletter

*Celebrating 53 Years
of Birding! 1957-2010*

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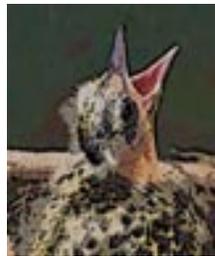
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Visit our website:
roanokevalleybirdclub.com

MARCH MEETING

Maureen Eiger, club member and licensed Avian Rehabilitator, presented an informative and fun program on identifying baby birds and wild bird rehabilitation. A baby bird quiz tested club members on their bird identification skills and they were rewarded with sweet treats! (Though club members were completely stumped by a picture of a fledgling starling.) Maureen taught us about the field marks for identifying baby birds and we also learned about the challenges and rewards of rehabbing wild birds.

The Wildlife Care Alliance is in desperate need of paper towels and tissues (birds poop you know) Please bring a roll of paper towels and/or a box of unscented tissues to the next club meeting and help save wild birds this summer. Thank you!



NEXT MEETING:

April 12, 7:00 p.m.

Grandin Court Baptist Church

We will watch the second half of an outstanding documentary on wading birds by Judy Fieth and Michael Male titled *Watching Waders*.



Great Egret © Birdfreak.com

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

Peggy Spiegel Opengari Memorial Dedication, April 17, 2 p.m.

The club will soon be installing Peggy’s memorial plaque at Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center in Troutville. We welcome everyone to attend a dedication on April 17th at 2:00 p.m.

Attention Bluebird Monitors

Please come to the April meeting to pick up your paperwork.

Interested in Purchasing Bluebird Boxes and Poles from the Club?

Please contact Elly Wefel (977-0636) or Alyce Quinn (719-0109) prior to attending the April meeting if you wish to purchase boxes or poles at the meeting.

Sign up for Big Spring Day, May 1

(see article on page 2) To participate, contact Eunice Hudgins (389-4056 or uvaau@aol.com) or Pam Wefel (977-0636 or pewefel@aol.com).

Membership Drive, March 1 – May 31

Do you have a friend who would like to join the club? From now until May 31, 2010, all current members may renew their 2011 membership for half-price if they bring in a full-paying new 2010 membership.

FIELD TRIPS

CHAIRMAN

BOB MILLER 797-0462

REMEMBER TO SHARE THE COST OF GAS WHEN YOU CARPOOL

Eagle Rock Area, April 3, 8 a.m.

We'll be looking for early migrants. Meet at Botetourt commons, 8:00 a.m. Some level walking. Bill Hunley, leader.

Woodcock Watch on Bent Mountain, April 10, 6:30 p.m.

Meet at Bent Mountain Elementary School at 6:30 p.m. Robin and Allen Austin, leaders (929-9071).

Arcadia/Solitude, April 17, 7 a.m.:

Join field trip leader Bob Miller for a morning of searching for spring migrants in Arcadia and Solitude Swamp. This is a great trip with warblers, vireos and orioles among the expected birds. Little or no walking. Meet at the Botetourt Bojangles at 7:00 a.m.

Big Spring Day, May 1

Late April through mid-May is the best time for enjoying spring migration in our area. Also, birds that spend the entire year here are showing off their bright spring plumages, setting up territories and pairing up to breed. It's an active time in the birding world and a great time for birders.

Every spring at the height of this migration, the Roanoke Valley Bird Club teams up with the Lynchburg Bird Club to do a census of birds in our area (Big Spring Day). The count, done rain or shine, is centered around the Peaks of Otter and covers specific territories within a 7-1/2 mile radius of the Peaks. Small groups are assigned to each of the territories. Most of the areas require very little or no walking (driving the territory and stopping when you see activity or just to walk short distances to observe and listen). For those who like to walk, a couple of territories require hiking for several hours. We attempt to include at least one experienced birder with every group. If you are a beginning birder, your eyes and ears can help locating birds and there will be someone there to help identify what you are seeing.



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Groups usually start birding between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. At noon, all participants gather at the Peaks of Otter Picnic Grounds for lunch and a tally of what has been seen. Bring your own food and drink. It's a great time

for socializing with fellow birders. After lunch, some groups go back out to finish up their territory while others might choose to search for a rarity reported by another participant. The rest of us just call it a day and head home.

To participate, contact Eunice Hudgins (389-4056 or uvaau@aol.com) or Pam Wefel (977-0636 or pewefel@aol.com) to sign up. Let us know if you prefer to drive or hike and whether you feel comfortable identifying species on your own or would prefer to be with someone more experienced than yourself.

Join us for a fun day. It's a chance to meet new birders, discover new birding territories or see a bird you have never seen before

Warbler Road, Sunday, May 9, 7 a.m.

This is one of the most fun field trips of the year and generally lasts through mid-afternoon. Extremely rewarding with lots of good views of warblers, tanagers and other migrants. Meet at the Bojangles at Botetourt Commons at 7:00 a.m. Tim and Alyce Quinn, leaders. There are few areas to pull off the road, so please carpool. Bring a lunch and some warm clothing (it may be chilly as we ascend to higher elevations).

FIELD NOTES

Rockbridge County – Locher Tract, February 27

It was spitting snow at Locher Tract and the temperature was about 36 degrees with icy patches on the trail. After leaving Locher Tract, some of the group ended up at the Botetourt Center of Greenfield pond. Birding highlights for the day: wood duck, cormorant, Cooper's hawk, ring-necked duck, rough-legged hawk, northern harrier and rusty blackbird.

Green Hill Park, March 13

The trails at Green Hill Park were wet, so the group ended up at the Botetourt Center of Greenfield pond. Highlights were: common snipe, eastern meadowlark, tree swallow, field sparrow, and common flicker. From there the group went to the lake at Botetourt Country Club. Highlights were: redhead, American wigeon and green-winged teal. Ending up at Murray's Pond (Waterfall Lake), the highlights were: gadwall, ruddy duck, and green-winged teal.

Fairystone State Park, March 20

On this sunny, warm, first-day-of-spring, leaders Tim and Alyce Quinn and nine birders sighted (highlights): ruby-crowned kinglet, golden-crowned kinglet, eastern phoebe, pine warbler, chipping sparrow, dark-eyed junco, purple finch, common flicker, pileated woodpecker, eastern towhee, belted kingfisher, and wood duck.

Sightings

March 6: Mike Donahue and Bill Hunley birded the Gala Wetland. They saw 5 trumpeter swans fly over, and also saw American wigeon (14), gadwall (2), mallard (2), hooded merganser (4), red-tailed hawk (2), and one adult bald eagle. They also saw lots of yellow-rumped warblers and eastern bluebirds.

March 7: At the Gala Wetlands Bill and Katie James saw a pair of wood ducks, a northern harrier, American kestrel, common ravens, and red-tailed hawks.

March 14: Alyce and Tim Quinn spotted yellow-bellied sapsucker, hairy woodpecker, and a brown creeper at their home in Burnt Chimney. They also tracked down an American woodcock on the small private road that runs next to their property. They watched him do his display flight in the fading light.

March 15: Barry Kinzie saw an American woodcock at the Botetourt Center of Greenfield.

VSO 2010 Annual Meeting April 23 – 25, 2010

Get ready to bird in Virginia's Piedmont! Make reservations NOW for the April 23-25 VSO Annual Meeting in Farmville, VA.

The south-central piedmont is one of the Commonwealth's least birded areas – consequently less is known about its birdlife than that of the more popular mountain and coastal areas. This has earned the location the dubious moniker of "Virginia's birding black hole," but the Margaret Watson Bird Club has been working hard to change that. Fabulous field trips throughout Prince Edward and its neighboring counties will reveal the area's birdlife secrets.

Download the registration form from the Margaret H. Watson Bird Club website: www.farmvillebirders.net/.

Hotel for conference headquarters is Hampton Inn, 300 Sunchase Blvd, Farmville. Special rate for VSO meeting participants is \$109.00 plus tax. Make your reservation by March 23 to get the special rate. Call (434) 392-8826 and ask for the VSO rate!

Banquet Speaker Saturday night: Ted Floyd, editor of the ABA's "Birding" magazine and author of 2008 "Smithsonian Field Guide to Birds of North America."



Field Trips Saturday and Sunday include:

Bear Creek Lake State Park;
Cumberland State Forest; Briery Creek and Sandy Creek Reservoirs; Dick Cross Wildlife Management Area (Sunday only);

Kerr Reservoir (Sunday only); High Bridge Trail State Park & Smith Farm; Holliday Lake State Park; Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest; Red Hill Plantation and Patrick Henry National Memorial; Staunton River Battlefield State Park/Twin Lakes State Park; and Wilck's Lake; Owl and Nightjar Hunt -- Friday and Saturday night
Check the VSO's web site for additional details. <http://www.virginiabirds.net/VSO>

The U.S. Nightjar Survey Network

The network is entering its fourth year as the vital program that documents the population distribution and population trends of these declining species. Nightjars are the group of nocturnal, insectivorous birds that includes species such as the whip-poor-will, chuck-will's-widow, and the nighthawks among others. We would like to invite all birders and conservationists to participate in the program by adopting Nightjar Survey Routes in 2010 and beyond.

We are very grateful to the number of participants already involved in the program and for the quality of the data they have collected. Information gathered over the past four years is helping to explain how the composition of habitats in local landscapes influences nightjar abundance. In turn, these data will help reach the project's near-term goals of explaining habitat-based declines where they occur.

There is still need for longer-term population trend data and broader geographic coverage to cover species' ranges.

Nightjar Surveys are standardized counts conducted along census routes on bright moonlit nights. Observers count all Nightjars seen or heard for a six-minute period at each of 10 stops along the route. The entire survey will not take more than one hour to complete and only needs to be conducted once per year. We have a series of existing routes in each state that are still in need of adoption.

Please consider adopting a Nightjar Survey Route. The continuing success of U.S. Nightjar Survey Network relies entirely on volunteer participation.

Visit the U.S. Nightjar Survey at www.ccb-wm.org/nightjars.htm for location of surveys, data sheets and instructions, and how to adopt a route.

Michael Wilson • Center for Conservation Biology
College of William and Mary & Virginia Commonwealth University • PO Box 8795 • Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795
phone: 757-221-1649 • email: mdwils@wm.edu

Virginia's Strategy to Protect Species

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Virginia Conservation Network, and National Wildlife Federation have published an electronic version of the *Virginia's Strategy to Protect Species of Greatest Conservation Need from Climate Change*. It is available at: <http://vcnva.org/anx/ass/library/35/strategyforwildlife.pdf>

The publication outlines steps that VDGIF and conservation partners can take to address the impacts of climate change on species of greatest conservation need and their habitats. The strategy focuses on conservation actions, education, and outreach.

They also have an online brochure that highlights actions that can be taken to make Virginia's species and habitats more resilient to climate change. This brochure is designed as an outreach tool for clubs, organizations, and events. Brochures are available by contacting Chris Burkett at: Chris.Burkett@dgif.virginia.gov. Brochures can also be downloaded from <http://vcnva.org/anx/ass/library/35/strategyforwildlifebrochure.pdf> and printed onto 11x17 paper.

For more information about the Virginia Conservation Network visit: <http://vcnva.org>

With Deforestation and Regrowth, Songbirds Change Their Wings

Due to deforestation in the woodlands, Eastern North American songbirds have undergone remarkable changes in their wings over the past 100 years.

A close look at museum collections of songbird specimens shows that many birds evolved pointier wings after their forests were fragmented by clear-cutting. Others in re-foresting areas evolved less-pointy wings. The reason for the wing changes: pointier wings help long-distance birds fly more efficiently. More rounded wings, however, are better for birds that travel short distances.

Birds appear to adapt quickly to forest changes. Scientists believe that as forests are broken up, it gets harder for songbirds to find mates. Birds must travel farther from forest patch to forest patch to find a mate. Birds that can do this better tend to succeed in mating and pass on their more efficient mate-searching traits—pointier wings—to their offspring. Once the forests re-grow, however, there is no selective pressure for those pointy wings. In fact, there is a greater need for the birds to develop shorter wings for more maneuverability.

The scientist who led the study says, "The assumption that species do not respond adaptively to rapid environmental change caused by humans is frequent and probably wrong in many cases, and several authors have warned that this may lead to species mismanagement," he concluded.

The study included such birds as the eastern meadowlark, field sparrow, mourning warbler, scarlet tanager, hooded warbler, pine warbler and boreal chickadee.

from: <http://news.discovery.com>

Bird Olympics

The peregrine falcon is widely acknowledged to be the fastest moving bird, achieving astonishing speeds when it dives for prey. Some sources say it can top 200 mph, while others put the figure at about 120 mph. Either way, it would be hard for any other bird to escape it.

On foot, the fastest bird is the ostrich, which can run about 40 mph. It outpaces the greater roadrunner, North America's fastest running bird, which tops out at about 25 mph. Coyotes, incidentally, can also outrun roadrunners with a cruising speed of 25-30 mph and a top speed of 40 mph.

The Olympic Marathon, a paltry 26 miles, doesn't come close to the marathons some animals endure. Take the Arctic tern, it migrates between the North and South Poles, covering a distance of as much as 30,000 miles each and every year. Some birds spend most of their lives in flight. Swifts, for example, have very underdeveloped legs and live almost entirely on the wing. Some seabirds, such as the sooty tern, fly for years without landing. The wandering albatross is named for its propensity to fly thousands of miles on feeding trips.

There is little competition for the deepest diving bird, the emperor penguin, which can dive to a depth of 1,770 feet. Outside of the penguin family, the thick-billed murre may be one of the emperor's nearest competitors; it is thought to dive to 600-700 feet. dovekies (300 feet), loons (250 feet), Atlantic puffins (160 feet), and long-tailed ducks (130 feet) are all superb divers but are no match for the emperor penguin.

from Science Daily

Facts About the Great Backyard Birdcount

During the weekend of February 12 – 15, I joined thousands of birdwatchers in the thirteenth Great Backyard Bird Count, an event sponsored jointly by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon. Results of the 2010 count will not be available until the end of March but the results of the 2009 count were remarkable.

Statistics show the total number of checklists submitted was 94,165; total species of birds 620; and the total individual birds counted, 11,558,638. Of the top ten states and provinces submitting checklists, Virginia ranked 6th, submitting 3,953. The top ten states submitting checklists were Pennsylvania, New York, North Carolina, California, Ohio, Virginia, Texas, Georgia, Florida, and Michigan.

The top ten most frequently reported birds were: northern cardinal, mourning dove, dark-eyed junco, American goldfinch, downy woodpecker, blue jay, house finch, tufted titmouse, American crow, and black-capped chickadee. All these come to my feeder with the exception of the black-

capped chickadee, a northern species; the one that visits our feeders is the Carolina chickadee.

The top ten most numerous birds were: snow goose, Canada goose, American robin, European starling, American crow, common grackle, red-winged blackbird, American goldfinch, dark-eyed junco, and pine siskin.

During the 2009 GBBC, checklists were submitted from several Augusta County locations. The number of checklists and locations were Waynesboro, 29; Staunton, 21; Stuarts Draft, 9; Churchville, 4; Lyndhurst, 2; Mount Solon, 2, Springhill 2; Fort Defiance, 1; Mount Sidney, 1.

Even if you did not participate this year, remember the third weekend in February next year. To see the results of this year's count we followed the progress of the GBBC at:<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>. It was interesting to see the maps showing increasing numbers as checklists were submitted.

Most of us simply watch the birds at our feeders or on field trips, and count only our local records. This GBBC is a tremendous project, connecting birders throughout all the states and provinces. Our records are included in the totals, and we could follow the results as they increased during the four days in February. For the 2010 GBBC, I watched my feeders five hours and fifteen minutes on February 12. I counted sixteen species at my feeders during that time, and then submitted my checklist to the GBBC website. I checked the website frequently through Monday the 15th. Of the tens of thousands checklists from across the country in 2010, one of them is mine!

Yulee Larner

reprinted from The Staunton News Leader

Praise the Vulture

The Bronx Zoo in New York City have two king vultures, Patsy and Dolly, in their birds of prey exhibit. The birds use their big feet to steady packages of thawed rat carcasses which they unwrap with their hooked bills. (Zookeepers wrap the dead rats in paper, tied with string, to make the dining process more interesting.) Patsy and Dolly aren't really birds of prey, however, —they're birds of clean-up.

The eagles and hawks that we admire, true predators, tear their living victims apart. Vulture meals involve no frenzied chase, bloody kill, or suffering. Vultures in fact wait until the gases begin to leak from the corpse before dining.

Vultures are very beneficial. Clean bones on the roadside are far more bearable than rotting carcasses. The details of vulture dining aren't pleasant, however. Vultures, whose name comes from *vellere*, Latin for to tear, begin their eating at vulnerable spots on the carcass—the anus and eyes.

King vultures are cousins to the bald, red-wrinkle-headed turkey vulture that fill the skies from southern Canada to the bottom tip of South America. It's the turkey vulture we're most likely to see on the wing or on the carcass.

Turkey vulture advocates want us to know that the birds do not circle over dying things. The birds circle as they ascend on thermals—columns of warm rising air. They rock and sway, ranging over dozens of square miles, returning to roost sociably with their fellows in late afternoon.

Vultures do not sing. No warble or trill. Hisses, grunts, and a hoarse rattle are their repertoire. But if you were near a nesting site you might here a fourth vocalization—a kind of cough, between ack and ahem—made by a parent upon returning to the nest.

As they ride the wind, vultures seek dead things, not dying things, using a sense of smell far more highly developed than any other bird's. They can detect a dead mouse under leaves from 200 feet up. They are discriminating, preferring corpses between two and four days dead. Another misconception, and one that has caused farmers to shoot them, is that turkey vultures spread disease. In fact the opposite is true. Something in the vulture gut allows them to digest and destroy the agents of diseases such as cholera and anthrax. If another carrion-eater—rat or coyote or hyena or dog—disposed of the infected carcass, contamination would be spread.

If adults are threatened when nesting, they throw up on the intruder or play dead. (The latter seems a poor choice.) Young vultures are also armed with vomit. After successfully repelling a threat the ever resourceful vulture re-eats the spit-up food.

Under threatening circumstances, an angry bird can aim green vomit from as far away as six feet. Normally though, a turkey vulture's sociability extends to humans as well as to its fellows. The people who care for injured wild birds



report that vultures are gentle, inquisitive, and smarter than hawks and eagles. A vulture enthusiast says: "Once they get to know you they don't regurgitate on you."

In the wild, vultures live about 10 years. If death doesn't occur because of old age, it comes from starvation, electrocution at power lines, trapping, shooting, ingestion of lead from animals that have been shot, or getting run over by a car. (A turkey vulture has difficulty getting airborne quickly, a serious problem if it's working on road kill.)

What would happen if we lost our vultures?

A die-off of Asian white-backed vultures provides a clue. The dearth of vultures in Asia has led to a pileup of animal carcasses and an increase in the population of rodents and feral dogs. An anti-inflammatory drug—diclofenac—used on sick livestock kills vultures even in low doses. Though the Indian government is phasing out use of the drug, the vulture population hasn't rebounded.

*Source: "Vulture World" by Constance Casey
<http://www.slate.com/id/2209166/>*

