



February 2010 Newsletter

*Celebrating 53 Years
of Birding! 1957-2010*

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Visit our website:
roanokevalleybirdclub.com

JANUARY MEETING

Dr. Gene Sattler, who teaches at Liberty University presented a program on the banding of saw-whet owls.

To learn about saw-whet owl banding and research visit: Project OwlNet:
<http://www.projectowl.net.org/> and
Saw-whet Owl Research:
<http://nscnaowls.blogspot.com/>



Lesser Yellowlegs, a wader

NEXT MEETING: February 8, 7:00 p.m. Grandin Court Baptist Church

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

The outstanding up-close videography of 20 waders highlights plumages, behaviors and young in detail. Since the video is 1 hour and 35 minutes long we will see the first 10 waders in February and watch the additional 10 at our April meeting.

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 Fund



A portion of the money donated will be used to install a memorial plaque at Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center in Troutville. But the majority of the funds received, as well as any donations in future years, will be used for hummingbird research and conservation projects, as this tiny bird occupied a special place in Peggy's heart.

Donations, which are tax deductible, can be mailed to the Virginia Society of Ornithology, c/o Thelma Dalmas, 1230 Viewmont Dr., Evington, VA 24550-2006 with a notation that it is for the *Peggy Spiegel Opengari Memorial Fund*.

VSO 2010 Annual Meeting, April 23 – 25, 2010

The 2010 annual meeting will be held in Farmville April 23 – 25. Exciting field trips are planned to new High Bridge Trail State Park, Sandy River Reservoir, and other birding hotspots in "southside" Virginia. The banquet will feature a presentation by Ted Floyd, editor of *Birding* magazine and author of the *Smithsonian Field Guide To Birds Of North America*. Due to the relatively early date of the meeting full details and registration information will be in the winter issue of the VSO newsletter. Visit: <http://www.virginiabirds.net>

FIELD TRIPS

CHAIRMAN

BOB MILLER 797-0462

REMEMBER TO SHARE THE COST OF GAS WHEN YOU CARPOOL

Winter Raptor Count, February 13, 2010

Plan on a leisurely drive around your area, counting all the different raptors you see. Points are awarded for each hawk, although this is not a serious competition. The results are compiled to monitor trends in hawk populations. In the event of inclement weather, an alternate date of Saturday, February 20 has been set.

Contact Anne Tucker (540) 721-1573 if you have any questions. (Use the *Winter Raptor Count* tally sheet in the Jan. newsletter or download it from the club website: www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com). Email results to billt3256@gmail.com or mail to 3256 Lakewood Forest Rd. Moneta VA 24121.

Rockbridge County – Locher Tract, February 27, 2010

Meet trip leader, Bill Hunley at the Bojangles in Botetourt Commons at 8:00 a.m. Expect ½ mile level walking.

The Great Backyard Bird Count, Feb. 12-15

Count and report the birds in your yard. For details see Jan. RVBC newsletter or visit: <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/whycount.html>

FIELD NOTES

Botetourt Habitats, Jan. 23, 8 a.m.

On this chilly, overcast morning, trip leader Bill Hunley led birders to the lake at Botetourt Center at Greenfield, Gala Wetlands, Eagle Rock, and Buchanan Bridge on the James River. *Highlights:*



© Jim Stevenson

Greenfield: great blue heron, pied-bill grebe, pintail, American coot, bufflehead, yellow-rump warbler, belted kingfisher.

Gala Wetlands: harrier, great blue heron, Canada geese, red-tailed hawk.

Buchanan Bridge: kettle of black vultures, two river otters.

Sightings



© Birdfreak.com

Jan. 16: Cory Goff and his family took their annual winter trip to Highland and Bath Counties searching for eagles and other wildlife.

They followed 220 North to Monterey and then back down Rt. 34 to the Reservoir

ending at Lake Moomaw. They saw: 1 golden eagle; 14 bald eagles (5 adult, 9 imm.); 18 red-tailed hawks; 1 red-shouldered hawk; 1 kestrel; 1 unid. buteo; 24 ring-necked duck; 8+ hooded merganser; 2 mallard; 1 belted kingfisher; 3 fox squirrel; 1 curious otter @ Lake Moomaw; 1 dead imm. bald eagle (not included above)

The dead eagle was found on the roadside along the Jackson River near the head of the lake (below the bridge). Not much left of the body, but the wings and head were intact enough for ID. Cause of death unknown. The Otter was spotted near the shore just past the first parking area.

Jan. 17: Barry Kinzie saw a black-crowned night-heron in a tree near Waldron Pond.

Jan. 20: Kent Davis and Mike Smith reported northern bobwhite and swamp sparrow at Greenfield Lake.

Jan. 21: Barry Kinzie sighted trumpeter swans at the Gala Wetlands.

Sightings reported at January 11 meeting:

Mary Lou Agee, fox sparrows at her home.

Bob Miller, bald eagle.

Bill Grant, male red-winged blackbird, female Cooper's hawk, sharp-shinned hawk at his home in Salem.

Zach Thompson, spotted sandpiper, purple finch at Peaks of Otter, common loon at Claytor Lake.

Tina Kemper, (sighted in August at Tina Kemper's farm in Bath County) an immature American white ibis sitting in the top of a cherry tree. This is the first sighting of this species in the mountains and valleys of Virginia (accepted by VARCOM).

Rusty Blackbird Blitz, Jan. 30-Feb. 15

Get out of the house and look for rusty blackbirds.

The Blitz is a citizen-science effort to document rusty blackbird locations across their wintering range in a centralized database (eBird) as the first steps in assessing the distribution and habitat associations of the species' wintering population and to lay the groundwork for researchers to conduct future work. For more information go to: <http://www.virginiabirds.net/> or <http://ebird.org/content/va>

Roanoke Christmas Count

Due to wind and bitter cold, birds were hard to find. We tallied only 52 species. Highlights: Barry Kinzie sighted a brown-headed nuthatch, Mike Donahue, Gary Brunk and Bill Hunley saw a tree sparrow, and Joyce Holt, Liz Williams and Katie James spotted a common merganser.

Bill Hunley

Fincastle Christmas Bird Count and Peaks of Otter Count

The weather was “raw” with 25 mph winds and the temperature in the teens. Nevertheless, 24 birders got out and found 67 species of birds, identifying 9568 individuals. Lots of snow was still on the ground so most birding was done from the car. We got together for traditional stew at Woodpecker Ridge and warmed in front of the fires. Bill James identified a red-shouldered hawk from inside the house. Needless to say most of the ‘warm inclined’ birds were not found. Birds such as gray catbird, brown thrasher, house wren, and ruby-crowned kinglet had gone south! We didn’t find any rarities this year but counters did a good job in spite of the weather.

The Peaks of Otter CBC was held on the last day of the count period. John, Eunice, Barry, and Zach Johnson braved the cold and snow and found 33 species and counted 328 individuals near the Peaks above 1500 feet elevation. It was very quiet and beautiful.

Barry Kinzie

Frostbitten Pelicans Arrive at Tri-State Bird Rescue and Research

A group of frostbitten brown pelicans found in southern Maryland along the Potomac River arrived at Tri-State Bird Rescue and Research in Delaware for care. (Tri-State rehabilitated the eared grebe that was bitten by a snapping turtle at the Roanoke Sewage Treatment Plant last year.) The pelicans didn’t migrate and the recent cold snap and lack of food weakened them—pelicans do not tolerate cold weather as well as other birds.

The flock was found on Smith Creek in Ridge, Md., where bait fish—the birds’ main food source—are still abundant. With the pelicans able to feed, many failed to follow nature’s course.

David Heilmeier, southern region manager for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, said the harsh



weather caught the migratory birds off guard. “When they have food, they don’t want to migrate out like they should,” Heilmeier said. “Then they get hit by the cold and are too weak to leave.”

Some numbers (as of Jan. 20):

- Thirty-one brown pelicans were moved from Smith Creek in Ridge, Md., to the Tri-State Bird Rescue & Research Center in Newark after suffering from frostbite.
- Twelve birds have fully recovered.
- There are more than 2,000 brown pelicans nesting in the Chesapeake Bay area.
- The birds were placed on the endangered species list in the 1970s, but were removed in 1987.

Donations needed: Pelicans consume large quantities of herring and are expensive patients. Help care for them by donating to Tri-State: <http://www.tristatebird.org>. **You may want to donate to Tri-State by shopping online.** Go to <http://www.tristatebird.org/> and from there click on the link to Amazon.com. Amazon will donate up to 15% of your total purchase to Tri-State—a great way to give to the birds.

Tri-State Bird Rescue and Research rehabilitate injured, orphaned, and oiled native wild birds, with the goal of returning healthy birds to their natural environment.

Sources: Delmarvanow.com and www.tristatebird.org

Evolution in the Backyard

We tend to think that evolution is something that happens over eons, not something that happens in a few decades. But a study in the journal *Current Biology* suggests that feeding birds can influence their evolutionary course.

The birds in this study were European blackcaps, a common warbler in Europe. In spring, they breed in southern Germany, and fly south to the Mediterranean in winter. At least they used to. In the 1960s, folks in Britain started putting out seed in winter. And the blackcaps split into two distinct groups. One goes to Spain to feed on fruits and olives, the other heads north to take advantage of the seed spread at feeders.

As a result, the two populations may be splitting into two species. The blackcaps that winter in England tend to mate with each other when they return to Germany. So they’re starting to look different from the birds that migrate to Spain. Their beaks are longer and narrower, and less suited to eating fruit and olives.

*summarized from the Scientific American article:
Backyard Feeders Driving Bird Evolution*

