



January 2008 Newsletter

*Celebrating 50 Years
of Birding! 1957-2007*

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DECEMBER MEETING

Of the 8,432 animal facilities open to the public in North America, Mill Mountain Zoo is one of only 210 that has received accreditation from the American Zoo and Aquarium Association. AZA accredited facilities help preserve thousands of animals regionally and around the world through wildlife conservation programs.

David Orndorff, the new Director and General Curator of the Mill Mountain Zoo, presented a fascinating program on Mill Mountain Zoo's plans for 2008 and beyond.

The new master plan will double the size of the zoo over the next 4 years. Many of the new exhibits will be in place in spring 2008. The zoo will promote species and habitat conservation with a focus on local as well as exotic species.

Virginia Wild will include 14 exhibits on 4 acres with species historically and currently indigenous to Virginia. The exhibit will highlight Virginia wildlife and focus on the species our state has, and the species we may lose, without active conservation efforts.

Red Wolves will be returning to the zoo as part of a breeding program to reintroduce them into the southeastern states (the reintroduction will be heavily managed). The public will be able to view them through remote controlled cameras accessible via the internet.

New exotic zoo residents will include Black Hornbills, Andean Condors (the Condors will be bred at the zoo and their offspring will be released in Venezuela), Eurasian Black Vultures (the largest raptor in Asia), and Sandhill Cranes

NEXT MEETING:
January 14, 7:00 p.m.
**Grandin Court Baptist
Church**

JANUARY MEETING



Penguins!

**Our first 2008 Program will
feature Dr. Ed Williams'
program on penguins.**

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

Other new exhibits will include:

- A Prairie Dog exhibit with an eye level view of the dogs.
- A walk-through aviary (visitors will be able to hand feed the birds) with 22 species of birds including Lorikeets, Laughing Thrushes, Victoria-crowned Pigeons, Argus Pheasants, and Metallic Starlings.
- A walk-through hummingbird and indigenous butterfly exhibit.
- A *Year of the Frog* walk-through amphibian exhibit with six enclosures for various species (including Poison Dart Frogs). AZA has declared 2008 the *Year of the Frog* in a concerted effort to save hundreds of species of amphibians threatened by habitat destruction, bacterial problems, the pet trade, and other environmental hazards.

A new hospital will be completed in early spring and the zoo is getting a new train.

(continued on page 2)

(Mill Mountain Zoo)

The zoo has planned a trip to Costa Rica, one of the most bio-diverse areas on the planet, from March 10-18, 2008. Cost is \$2,395 per person.

A migration safari to Tanzania is planned July 4-10. Cost is \$5,995 per person.

For more information or to book reservations please contact David Orndorff at 540-343-3241, ext. 31.

BOARD NOTES

Club members may receive an electronic membership list by contacting Eunice Hudgins at uvaau@aol.com. Members may also pick one up at the monthly meetings.

A Big Thank You to everyone who brought food to share at the December meeting. It was a deliciously good way to close our meeting.

Correction: The December newsletter incorrectly stated that one of the Audubon Print Raffle Winners was Liz Williams. The actual winner was Carole Massart.

Above And Beyond

Many club members have contributed extra donations to the club. Their support is greatly appreciated. We thank the following members for their generous support.

Sustaining Memberships

Carol Siler
Elly & Pam Wefel
Drake T. Calton
Bill & Katie James
Virginia Shields
Blanche E. Hawks
Jane M. Ambrose-Cosby
Liz Cole
Conrad H. L. Schuette, III

Adopt-A-Bluebird

Anne T. Hanna
Carol Siler
Elly & Pam Wefel
Susan Angle Kidd

Other Contributions

Mary Lou Agee
Elly & Pam Wefel
Drake T. Calton
Margaret Brown
Sherri O. Krantz
Ray & Ann Allen
W. E. & Kathleen Von Appen
David, Betsy & Harrison Freund
Phil & Libba Lemon
Margaret A. Martin
Michael L. Purdy



*Eurasian Honey Buzzard
photographed by Liz
Williams in Kenya, Great
Rift Valley 2007.*

Welcome New Members

Please welcome Jan Wiley from Woolwine, VA and Gerry & Marge Coates from Troutville, VA.

FIELD TRIPS

CHAIRMAN BETH GRIFFIN 265-4853

***DON'T FORGET TO SHARE THE COST OF GAS
WHEN YOU CARPOOL***

January 12, 8:00 AM, Pond Hopping

Meet leader Mary Lou Agee (540-265-4415; cell: 540-588-1339) at the Bojangles at Botetourt Commons on Rt. 220N off I-81, exit 150B.

Mary Lou will lead a trip to several ponds in Botetourt County in search of waterfowl.

January 26, 8:00 AM, Highland County and Lake Moomaw

Meet leader Bill Hunley (540-774-2397) at the Bojangles at Botetourt Commons. This trip may yield sightings of hawks and eagles.

This will be a long trip so bring a lunch, snacks and drinks. It may be cold so dress warmly, preferably in layers.

Annual Raptor Count

Plan to spend a few hours driving away the winter blues on Saturday February 9, 2008. The Annual Raptor Count is a great excuse to get out of the house and do some winter birding with your birding buddies. The New River Valley Bird Club also participates in this event. No skill is required, just a little time and effort.

Plan on a leisurely drive around your area, counting all of the different hawks you see. Points are awarded for each hawk, although this is not a serious competition. The winners gets bragging rights! We compile the results from everyone's efforts and keep an eye on trends in hawk populations. In the event of inclement weather, an alternate date of Sunday February 10 has been set.

Contact Anne Tucker (540-721-1573) if you have any questions.

The tally sheet can be emailed to billt3256@att.net or mailed to 3256 Lakewood Forest Rd. Moneta, VA 24121.

See attached Tally Sheet.

Christmas Bird Count Highlights

The tallies for the Christmas Bird Counts are not in at the time of this writing, but highlights include:

Fincastle Count: Blue-headed Vireo, Pine Warbler, and Merlin.

Roanoke Count: Northern Goshawk, Bald Eagle, Merlin, Fish Crow, and six Bonaparte Gulls.

Peaks of Otter Count: A Golden Eagle was sighted ²/₃ of a mile north of the Peaks on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Also, three Pied-billed Grebes were spotted on Abbott Lake.

SIGHTINGS

On November 10, Bill Grant saw a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak at his feeder.

Alyce and Tim Quinn report seeing Chipping Sparrows and Field Sparrows year round at their home in Burnt Chimney.



Fincastle Count: L to R: Joyce Holt, Stephanie and Clark Hill, Barry Kinzie, Carol Siler, Marge Coates, and John Hudgins

On November 23, Carol Siler spotted a Palm Warbler in a field on Colonial Avenue near Colonial Green.

On December 8, Alyce And Tim Quinn sighted Horned Grebe and Common Merganser at Bernard's Landing at Smith Mountain Lake.

On December 9, Rupert Cutler saw a Golden-crowned Kinglet on the Lick Run Greenway.

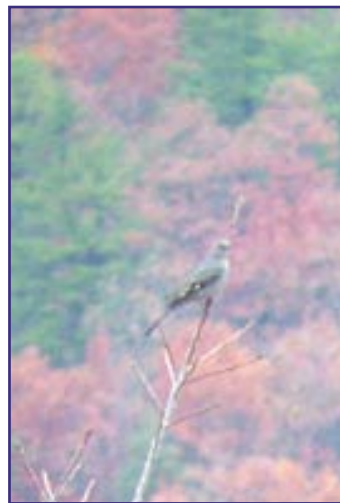
On November 26, Mike Purdy spotted the following on a rainy afternoon at Murray's Pond: 11 Mallard, 48

Gadwall, 6 Green-winged Teal, 1 Black Duck, 3 Hooded Merganser, 5 Bufflehead, and 12 Ring-necked Duck (only one female).

Recently, at Fenwick Mines, Bill Hunley saw six Winter Wrens, and one male Red Crossbill. He also spotted Swamp Sparrow and Fox Sparrow. Bill says that the alder swamp at Fenwick Mines is a good watch site.

On December 24, Rupert Cutler spotted a Palm Warbler at Lick Run Greenway. This is the second time Rupert has seen this species there.

Townsend's Solitaire Sighting at Harvey's Knob



On November 19, 2007, a Townsend's Solitaire was observed and photographed at Harvey's Knob hawk watching site by Matt Hafner of Maryland and until recently, Blacksburg. The Townsend's Solitaire is a thrush that lives in the mountains of the western US. There are several records of vagrants in the East, but nearly all of them are from the NE states. Written details and

photographs of the bird will be reviewed by VARCOM, the Virginia Avian Records Committee, and if accepted, it will become the first record of this species in Virginia.

Matt arrived at Harvey's Knob around 9 AM and as soon as he got out of his car the bird flew up to a branch in the top of a tree on the west side of the parking lot. When he realized what it was he grabbed his camera and snapped three photos. Matt was able to observe the bird for about three minutes before it flew across the road and perched briefly before taking off and heading south. No one else was at Harvey's at the time so Matt called a friend in Maryland who he knew was subscribed to the VA-BIRD Listserv. He asked his friend to post to the listserv to get the word out about the bird. Word spread quickly and several local birders headed for the parkway to look for it. Unfortunately it was not relocated. I should mention that four days later, Nov. 23, Matt was back at Harvey's and identified two Cave Swallows and a male Red Crossbill, the Cave Swallows being a new species for the Roanoke Valley.

Matt Hafner, 24, is already a very accomplished birder.



He has been actively birding since he was 15. Until recently he had been living and working in Blacksburg while his wife, Kim, finished up in Veterinary School. Matt recently moved back to Maryland to take a job. Matt

currently serves as a committee member on the Virginia Avian Records Committee, and has served in the past on the Maryland/DC records committee. He is co-authoring the next edition of Maryland's "Yellow Book", which is the record of all Maryland bird species. It will be out in 2008. Matt spent undergraduate summers working bird-related jobs such as the Maryland Breeding Bird Atlas, bird banding, and studying Grasshopper Sparrows in Queen Anne's County, Md. He represented the Maryland Ornithological Society on the Maryland Important Bird Area Technical Committee. For the past two years Matt has captained the MOS Yellowthroats at the World Series of Birding, winning the Cape May County Award in 2006 and 2007. Matt was a member of the Great Texas Birding Classic team, Swift WildBirders from 2002 –2005, winning the full week competition in 2002, 2003, and 2004. He has also been a leader on pelagic trips out of Delaware. In February of this year Matt will be giving a talk at the New River Valley Bird Club meeting about Pelagic Birding.



Mike Purdy

Central Columbian Habitat for Cerulean Warbler Saved

The American Bird Conservancy and partner Fundación ProAves recently acquired 3,300 acres of forest and shade-coffee plantations in central Colombia—significant wintering habitat for the declining Cerulean Warbler and other neotropical migrants.

The new reserve has been named Pauxi pauxi, the scientific name of the threatened Northern Helmeted Curassow, a resident species which occurs there along with the endangered Chestnut-bellied Hummingbird.



Pauxi pauxi is only eight miles across the valley from the existing Cerulean

Warbler Bird Reserve. It is part of a key watershed for towns and cities in the region, and an area that is densely populated by neotropical migrants.

The timing of the new land purchase could not be better. ProAves has already reported that Cerulean Warblers are back on their wintering grounds, along with Canada Warblers and other migrants in the new reserve.

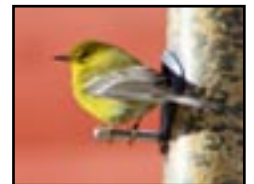
from *Bird Conservation* Winter 2007/2008
An American Bird Conservancy Publication

More Unusual Sightings from Project Feederwatch

Feederwatchers report the birds they see at their feeders through the winter months for 21 weeks to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. This year the watch began on Nov. 10. Since then, confirmed, photographed sightings include:



- Yellow-rumped Warblers in Ontario and Ohio. This species is typically in Central America at this time.
- Rose-breasted Grosbeaks have been spotted in North and South Carolina. This species usually winters in Central America.
- Pine Warblers have been documented in Nova Scotia and also Ohio. They typically winter in the southeastern United States.
- A Yellow-breasted Chat has been seen in Nova Scotia. This bird usually winters in Mexico.



For a complete list and photos of confirmed rare sightings from current and past seasons, visit the FeederWatch web site.

ON BIRDS AND NATURE

Story of a Hawk Watcher

(When I met Baron Gibson at Harvey's Knob I was struck by his passion for spotting and identifying raptors. I asked him if he would write about his evolution as a hawk watcher: – Carol Siler)

In 1998 my wife (girlfriend at the time) suggested we take a ride on the Blue Ridge Parkway and go to a hawk watching site known as Harvey's Knob. That day we saw over 300 Broad-winged Hawks kettle (glide circularly on the air currents) slowly up over the knob on the northeast side and then soar on. I could not believe how the people there knew what these hawks were. That was my first lesson in hawk watching and being a spectator. I learned not to count out loud (and it is hard not to count out loud to this day) so that

the counter(s) (the people who keep track of the number and species of raptors that pass over) do not get confused and can make an accurate count. Heck, I had no idea people were actually counting these magnificent creatures. Tina and I left that day in awe that we saw such a magical moment. I also realized just how beautiful hawks are; and when the sunlight is just right they are an awesome sight.



So from there the rest is history. I got into the guidebooks and saw the different species and was intrigued by the challenge of identification and am still intrigued and find it an absolute challenge to spot, and identify a raptor. The hardest of course have been the Accipiters. The Sharp-shinned Hawk and Cooper's Hawk are probably the most misidentified hawk in North America and if you ID it as a Sharp-shinned or a Cooper's, you are within 50% of being right. But believe me, we try very hard to correctly identify all hawks that we see.

I became so intrigued with hawk watching that I started going to Harvey's Knob every chance I got. I asked lots of questions and was very surprised at how willing the hawk watchers were to pass on their knowledge to me. They seemed like a big family. I also realized that these people were really nice and I wanted to get to know them better. Soon Tina and I were regulars during the Broad-winged season and not long after that I started going up in October and November to see what other raptors were flying. One day, during this period Tad Finnell, (the current organizer of the hawk watch at Harvey's Knob) said, "Here, you keep the count for the rest of the day." So with Tad's and others' help, I learned how to be the keeper of the count and I continue to learn each time I do it.

I schedule vacation time during the Broad-wing season to be there every day in the chance of seeing that magical moment of hundreds if not thousands of Broad-winged Hawks passing overhead. I really enjoy being a spectator also. My favorite spot is at Harvey's Knob: it feels like home. Tina and I also go to Kiptopeke State Park on the Eastern Shore of Virginia during the first week of October to hawk watch on the platform. This is my second favorite spot. Kiptopeke has often been called the "poor man's Cape May." There you'll see a lot of Sharp-shinned, Cooper's, all three Falcon species, Northern Harriers, Bald Eagles and Osprey. There is also a songbird banding and hawk banding station there.



We see a lot of hawks in hand on the platform and the people there are great to be with. We also enjoy the food

at Stingray's, a great place to eat. We went to Cape May in 2002 and it was OK but very expensive. Some day we hope to get to Corpus Christi after the Broad-winged season at the Knob and from there go to Veracruz Mexico to see the "River of Raptors" where many thousands of Broad-winged and Swainson's Hawks fly over. I also aspire to go to Waggoner's Gap and some of the other Pennsylvania sites.

During the Broad-winged season there are lots of watchers at the Knob. Sometimes the overlook is so full there's hardly a place to park. Before and after the Broad-winged season only the hard-core watchers go up on a regular basis. I go as much as I can all season long. Sometimes you can be on the mountain by yourself the whole day (except for parkway goers) or you could have one, two, three or more come up in anticipation of seeing something unusual, like a Golden Eagle or a Rough-legged Hawk. We start the fifteenth of August when it's extremely hot, and go until the end of November or into the early part of December when it can get downright cold and you sit in your car with the heater running looking through the windshield and side windows in hopes of seeing a few raptors.

On occasion we see raptors diving on prey in mid-air or to the ground. We see Osprey carrying fish (packing lunch) and hawks coming through with a full crop. At Kiptopeke this year we saw hawks grabbing dragonflies and eating them on the wing. There we also saw two Peregrine Falcons harassing an Osprey for its fish. A little later a Peregrine was caught in the nets (nets are used to catch birds for banding) with fish scales on its feathers (coincidence or was it one of the harassing Peregrines we had just observed?).

The season will be over by the time this comes to print, but there is always next year. So, bring a chair, eats, drinks, and clothing articles for current weather conditions, other comfort articles and your binoculars and/or scope and join us for some hawk watching.

Thanks to all who have helped me through the years to become a Hawk Watcher.

May we have many more years together waiting for those magical moments.

Happy Hawk Watching

Baron Gibson

Northern Saw-whet Owls Arriving in Large Numbers

Northern Saw-whet Owls are rare fall transients and winter residents in Augusta County, VA; we have only seven records, of which four were road-kills or injured birds. To learn more about this rare species, Dr. Clair Mellinger, a biology professor at Eastern Mennonite University, initiated a Saw-whet Owl banding station in 2001, at the Highland Retreat Camp, near Bergton, less than 0.5 mile



from the West Virginia Line.

The Bird Banding Lab at Patuxent, MD supplies the bands and the data are submitted to them. Dr. Charles Ziegenfus, professor at James Madison University, joined Mellinger in this effort in 2003.

Their goal is to open the banding station every night

in November, weather permitting, beginning about 6 PM and continuing at least until midnight.

Along a wooded ridge, they erect a row of six 12-meter nets, strung end to end. In the middle of the net row are two speakers that run a tape deck playing the beep-beep-beep call of the male Saw-whet Owl. Migrating birds hearing the taped call fly into the net. They are removed from the nets, taken to a room in the house where they are measured for weight, wing length, tail length, and bill length. Then the birds are released to continue their migration, or possibly to remain in our mountains through the winter, especially at high elevations.

This year has been an irruption year for the tiny, robin-size Saw-whet Owls, at least in eastern United States. Since opening the Rockingham County banding station, the season totals range from 49 in 2002 to 157 in 2004. During the first five days this November, they banded almost 150 owls, a number comparable to a complete month in previous years. The banding records indicate that Saw-whet Owls are more common in fall in our region than we thought previously.

There are more than eighty banding sites throughout the United States and Canada, including five in Virginia's Piedmont and Coastal Plain. This station is the first in our Mountains and Valleys Region. This year, Mellinger and Ziegenfus banded about 220 birds. In addition to newly banded birds, they trapped thirteen that were banded previously at other stations. An amazing fact is that one

that was banded at Mellinger's station on November 24, 2006 was recaptured on November 24, 2007! Just one of the wonders in the world of birds.

Yulee Larner

Reprinted from the Staunton News Leader

Watch for These Birds at Your Feeders



As predicted by Canadian biologists, several northern species of birds are moving southward because some conifers in the north did not produce a large crop of seeds this year. If you feed birds, watch for these species at your feeders: Purple Finch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Pine Siskin. There

have been numerous recent reports of these birds in our area.

- Purple Finch – little larger than the House Finch, which is a common permanent resident. Look for the differences in coloration: male Purple Finch is a deeper wine-colored red, and white underneath. The female has a broad dark jaw stripe, and dark ear patch, and is heavily streaked with brown.
- Red-breasted Nuthatch – smaller than White-breasted Nuthatch, which is a common permanent resident. Look for the broad black line through the eye and white line above it. Sides and underparts are rusty.
- Pine Siskin – the rarest of the northern visitors often associates with goldfinches. It is heavily streaked with brown, has two narrow yellow stripes on the wings, deeply notched tail, and small pointed beak.



If you see any of these three species at your feeders, please contact

YuLee Larner at 540-886-7815 or larnery@ntelos.net.

Yulee Larner

Reprinted from the Staunton News Leader

WINTER RAPTOR COUNT FEBRUARY 9, 2008

Participants _____

Date _____ Time started _____ Time Completed _____

Location _____

SPECIES	POINTS	NUMBER	NOTES	TOTAL
TURKEY VULTURE	1*			
BLACK VULTURE	2*			
RED-TAILED HAWK	5			
AMERICAN KESTREL	10			
SCREECH OWL	10**			
RAVEN	10			
COOPER'S HAWK	20			
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK	20			
LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE	50			
RED-SHOULDERED HAWK	30			
GREAT HORNED OWL	30			
BARRED OWL	35			
BARN OWL	50			
NORTHERN HARRIER	40			
SHORT-EARED OWL	75			
ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK	75			
GOLDEN EAGLE	100			
BALD EAGLE	50			
PEREGRINE FALCON	75			
MERLIN	75			
GOSHAWK	100			
LONG-EARED OWL	125			
SAW-WHET OWL	125			
NORTHERN SHRIKE	150			
UNIDENTIFIED RAPTOR	5			

*Maximum 50 points }
 **Maximum 100 points } However, keep your totals. There is a 10 point bonus on peak counts for these three species.

RULES: Teams may bird any area within a 100 mile radius of Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center. Birds must be seen or heard by at least 50% (minimum of two) of team members. Count period not to exceed twelve hours.

