



Roanoke Valley Bird Club

Celebrating

67 Years of Birding

1957-2024

Next Meeting:
February 12, 7:00 pm
Roanoke Council of
Garden Clubs

www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com

RVBC NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2024

PHOTOGRAPHER
MARY LOU BARRITT



PINE SISKIN *Spinus pinus*

DREW'S BIRD OF THE MONTH

Flocks of tiny Pine Siskins may monopolize your thistle feeder one winter and be absent the next. This nomadic finch ranges widely and erratically across the continent each winter in response to seed crops. Better suited to clinging to branch tips than to hopping along the ground, these brown-streaked acrobats flash yellow wing markings as they flutter while feeding or as they explode into flight. Flocks are gregarious, and you may hear their insistent wheezy twitters before you see them. (See more on page 3.)

~ The Cornell Lab

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Alison Nichols Gwen Wagner Anne Beckett



Next Meeting:

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 7:00 PM

Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs, 3640 Colonial Avenue, Roanoke, VA 24018

"ATTU - THE GREAT ADVENTURE" WITH DON BURLETT

Attu is the last island in the Aleutian chain before Russia. It's location in the North Pacific lends itself to the "deposition" of many Asian bird species, which in turn makes it a great spot for American Birding Association birders who go to add special birds to their lists. In 1995, 1996 and 1998, Don Burlett attempted to go on an organized birding adventure on Attu. The story of these trips will be provided so the attendee will appreciate the scope of this adventure and all the many birds seen on these trips.

Don was a Research Scientist working in the rubber industry for almost 40 years, having retired in 2016. He has been an avid birder since he was a young boy (started off on his own without assistance) and has birded on all 7 continents and 49 countries and all 50 states. Statistically, he has seen 5889 species in the world (over 50% of all species), 775 species in the ABA area (815 including Hawaii) and 356 species in his home state of Michigan.

He is President of Oakland Audubon Society (has been for the last 17 years) and was a board member at Seven Ponds Nature Center (6 years). He is an ABA member and member of National Audubon. He supports Sierra Club, Greenpeace and other environmental groups.

He loves to bird and travel and is also very active in helping others learn about birding and the environment.

CONTACT US!



ROANOKE VALLEY BIRD CLUB

P.O. Box 20405
ROANOKE, VIRGINIA 24018

Email: rvbc2015@outlook.com
www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com

2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS OFFICERS:

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David Frye

Vice President, memberships

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Field Trips

David Frye

Meeting Refreshments

Mary Lou Barritt

Newsletter Editor

Carol Whiteside

RVBC/BRWS Annual Picnic

Carol Whiteside

Website:

Carol Siler

The RVBC Newsletter is published monthly **September through May** with the deadline for each issue on the **20th of the month** prior to that publication. Photos and articles are gladly accepted for publication as room allows, and may be sent electronically.

Thank you!

Carol Whiteside
Newsletter Editor

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whitesidemules@yahoo.com



President's Musings

When writing my monthly musings, I have tried to highlight topics that pertain to birds. This is one time I will deviate from the norm and concentrate on a subject that gets my blood pressure up.

While taking Iris shopping (I drive and she shops, just to be clear) I pulled up at the dry cleaners and parked while she picked up the clothing. The parking lot was littered with bags from fast food restaurants, trash that had blown out of someone's pickup, and everywhere there was my nemesis - Styrofoam cups!!! My blood pressure was beginning to take over my valsartan (blood pressure medicine).

The next stop was a retail clothing store. I let her out at the door and proceeded to drive around the parking lot checking out the trash. Oh my, it was everywhere. At this point I had to wonder how people must live at home if they throw this much trash out around town. I have come to the stark realization that people just don't care. Whole bags of fast-food trash, more and more Styrofoam cups, and get this, bags from the retail store. Couldn't wait to wear their new purchases, cut the tags, put on the clothes, and threw the bag out the window. Unbelievable!!!

On the way to our local food store, we were stopped at several traffic lights and being in the outside lane I could view the islands at each light. You could pave the road with layer upon layer of cigarette butts. Like Styrofoam, cigarette butts don't breakdown in the soil over time, unless it's a millennium! No smokers have ever lived that long, so who knows?

Upon arriving at the grocery store, I was astounded at not only the trash, but the plastic bags blowing around the parking lot. How hard is it to take your trash and bags to the trash receptacles in front of the store???

After leaving the grocery store, we went by the local recycle center to drop off our recyclables. I was appalled at the trash up against the fence at the center. One good gust of wind and away it goes into the neighborhood. Seems the County could do a better job of keeping the litter picked up at their recycling center. I know labor is in short supply as is money, but the person taking the bins to empty could spend 15 minutes a week to pick up the trash? Do you ever stop to think where this trash might end up? Check out the Roanoke River after a heavy rain! I have to salute the numerous civic groups and volunteer organizations who sponsor trash pickup days during the year. Sounds like a great Bird Club project to clean up some of our birding hotspots!

In conclusion, it appears only a small portion of the population cares about taking pride in their community, while the balance thinks their vehicle window is the trash can. This should have been taught at home years ago; so now, a new generation has seen their parents do it, and they think it okay for them to do the same thing. This just shows the complacency of our society, slobs at home and slobs in public - deplorable!!! Well, blood pressure is up, but I got it off my chest! Do I feel better - NO!

And by the way, while you are out birding, stick a plastic bag in your pocket and pick up trash as you go.

President Drew Daniels
ddaniels2627@cox.net
540.314.6069

DREW'S BIRD OF THE MONTH

Pine Siskin

Spinus pinus

Uncommon and irregular spring and fall transient and winter resident; very rare and irregular summer resident. Extreme dates, breeding and peak counts occur in higher elevations such as Poor Mountain and Harvey's Knob.

~Barry Kinzie's *Birds and Birding of the Roanoke Valley*



Mary Lou Barritt, photos

Pine Siskins are very small songbirds with sharp, pointed bills and short, notched tails. Their uniquely shaped bill is more slender than that of most finches. In flight, look for their forked tails and pointed wingtips. They are brown and very streaky birds with subtle yellow edgings on wings and tails. Flashes of yellow can erupt as they take flight, flutter at branch tips, or display during mating.

Siskins often visit feeders in winter (particularly for thistle or nyjer seed) or cling to branch tips of pines and other conifers, sometimes hanging upside down to pick at seeds below them. They are gregarious, foraging in tight flocks and twittering incessantly to each other, even during their undulating flight. Although Pine Siskins prefer evergreen or mixed evergreen and deciduous forests with open canopies, they are opportunistic and adaptable in their search for seeds. They'll forage in weedy fields, scrubby thickets, or backyards and gardens. They'll flock around feeders, especially thistle feeders, in woodlands and suburbs.

Pine Siskins often nest in loose colonies where neighboring nests can be just a few trees away. Over the course of 5 or 6 days, the female builds a shallow saucer of twigs, grasses, leaves, weed stems, rootlets, bark strips, and lichens, 2.5–6 inches across. The male, who stays close, may contribute nest material as well. Nests are only loosely attached to branches and can be vulnerable to gusty winds. She lays 3-5 pale greenish-blue with brown spotted eggs. Pairs may visit other pairs' nests before and after brooding. During brooding, the female stays on the nest and the male feeds her. They have 1-2 broods a year.



~The Cornell Lab



Calendar of Events



Roanoke Valley Bird Club
Dave Frye, Vice President Programs, Field Trip Chairman, 248-459-6783
American Kestrel, Photographer **Garland Kitts**

Note: if inclement weather necessitates a cancellation, an e-mail notification will be sent out. You may also call or text the leader. Please do not call any of the trip leaders after 8 pm the night before the field trip, in consideration of having to get up early the next day to lead the field trip.

FEBRUARY 2024

- 2-4 VSO Outer Banks Trip**, Weekend visit to Outer Banks. Nags Head, North Carolina with VSO leaders: Meredith Bell, Lee Adams, Jerry Via and Bill Akers. See the Virginia Society of Ornithology website for more information.
- 10 Annual Raptor Count** - Drive around the area within 100 miles of Woodpecker Ridge on Saturday (inclement weather date Sunday, Feb. 11). Earn points for each hawk you see. The tally sheet lists the various points awarded for the various hawks (included in this newsletter). Try something different - grab your birding buddies and go out looking for raptors! No skill required because this isn't a contest!
Contact Anne Tucker (540-204-5693) if you have any questions. The completed tally sheet can be emailed to billt3256@gmail.com or mailed to 3256 Lakewood Forest Road, Moneta, VA 24121-2477.
- 10 Greenfield Saturday Morning Walk – Greenfield Lake at Botetourt Center, 9:00 am. Leader: Barry Whitt (540-309-4353).**
Join us for a Saturday morning bird walk on the Cherry Blossom Trail at Greenfield. This is one of the most diverse habitats anywhere in the Roanoke area—birdy at all times of the year. We will walk around Greenfield Lake and possibly to the pond beyond. The walk will be mostly flat walking for about 1 mile each way. Bring your spotting scope, if you have one.
Directions: Take Exit 150B on I-81 and follow signs to Route 220N. Go about 4 miles and turn left at the entrance to the Greenfield Education and Training Center, across from the entrance to Ashley Plantation. Park in the second lot on the right.
- 12 RVBC MEETING, Monday 7:00 pm.** Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs, 3640 Colonial Avenue, Roanoke, VA 24018.
Featured Program: "**Attu - The Great Adventure**" with **Don Burlett**. Details on page 2.
- 14 Second Wednesday Midweek Walk – Greenfield Lake at Botetourt Center at Greenfield, 9:00 am. Leader: Dave Frye (248-459-6783).**
Join us for a bird walk on the Cherry Blossom Trail at Greenfield. We will walk around Greenfield Lake and possibly to the pond beyond. The walk will be mostly flat walking for about 1 mile each way. Bring your spotting scope, if you have one.
Directions: Take Exit 150B on I-81 and follow signs to Route 220N. Go about 4 miles and turn left at the entrance to the Greenfield Education and Training Center, across from the entrance to Ashley Plantation. Park in the second lot on right.
- 17 Evergreen Bird Hike - Evergreen Burial Park, Wasena, Sat. 9:00 am. Leaders: Kent Davis (540-355-6388) and Linda Cory (540-580-5214).**
Pre-registration is required through their website: evergreenmemorialtrust.com or call them (540-342-2593). This is a community outreach walk, co-sponsored by Evergreen Burial Park. We will be walking the perimeter of the cemetery looking for winter resident birds.
Wear sturdy weatherproof shoes, and be prepared for uneven surface walking.
Directions: 1307 Summit Ave. SW, Roanoke, 24015. Summit Avenue is off of Main St. in Roanoke. Park along the road in front of the main office.

MARCH 2024

- 2 Smith Mountain Lake State Park - 8:00 am. Leader: David Frye (248-459-6783)**
We will visit several areas of interest within the park looking for winter residents.
Directions: Meet at the Fallon Park parking area (off of Dale Avenue) at 8:00 am. We will carpool from there approximately 55 minutes to the park (entrance fee will be split by members of each vehicle). Bring your scope if you have one. We will probably return to Fallon Park around 12:45 pm.
- 11 RVBC MEETING, Monday 7:00 pm.** Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs, 3640 Colonial Avenue, Roanoke, VA 24018.
Featured Program: **Butterfly Journeys Near and Far.** **Dr. Mark Adams** will help us forget about winter for a while as he discusses and highlights beautiful butterflies from around the world. Stay tuned for more information regarding his program.
- 13 Second Wednesday Midweek Walk - Greenfield Lake at Botetourt Center, 9:00 am. Leader: David Frye (248-459-6783)**
Join us for a bird walk on the Cherry Blossom Trail at Greenfield. We will walk around Greenfield Lake and possibly to the pond beyond. The walk will be mostly flat walking for about 1 mile each way. Bring your spotting scope if you have one.
Directions: Take Exit 150B on I-81 and follow signs to Route 220N. Go about 4 miles and take a left at the entrance to the Greenfield Education and Training Center, across from the entrance to Ashley Plantation. Park in the second lot on right.
- 23 Bent Mountain Woodcock Walk - 6:30 pm. Leader: Robin Austin (540-676-0951)**
Meet Robin Austin at the Bent Mountain Community Center for an evening walk of birding and Woodcock watching. We will visit the boardwalk at the community center (formerly Bent Mountain Elementary school) and then walk the surrounding area. The group will then carpool to a nearby area to observe the Woodcocks that start their courtship flight at sunset. Walking is level, but wear waterproof shoes as we will be walking on the grassy roadside. **Directions:** The Community Center is at 10148 Tinsley Lane, Bent Mountain VA 24059.

Eastern Screech-Owl

Allen Austin presents

Screech-Owl Boxes

Available at the meeting on February 12

\$25

Should be mounted in Jan. or Feb.

For reservations and questions

Call Allen 540-676-0950



Mary Ellen Belcher
Photographer▲



Mary Lou Barritt
◀Photographer▲



December and January mark the beginning of the Eastern Screech-Owl courtship. Females are normally positioned inside the nest box by February or early March preparing to lay 2-6 white eggs. So, installing a nest box in spring is often too late in the season. The longer a new nest box is visible to local owls, the more accustomed to it they become.

Screech-Owl boxes should be placed 10-30 feet up in the air either in a live tree or on a pole close to a woodland edge and a natural water source. Although untreated bedding may be used (like rabbit bedding), there is no need to put any nest material inside the box. Screech-Owls will regurgitate pellets, consisting of undigested bones and fur into the box, and the female will create a soft nest for the young by carefully breaking the pellets apart.

Eastern Screech-Owl pairs usually are monogamous and remain together for life. Breeding occurs only once a year from February through March, and then the owlets emerge in April and May. During breeding season they can be aggressive when defending a nest site. The birds may be very vocal at night, especially when the chicks are nearly grown, they spend a lot of time near the box entrance begging for food. Perhaps the box placement should be fifty feet or more from a house. They may use the same cavity for several years in a row, so clean it out at least once per year in the fall after the end of the nesting season. This owl spends the day roosting in holes or in dense cover, becoming active after sunset. Flight is noiseless with soft wingbeats and gliding. They hunt by sitting and waiting for "food" to appear, and take it to the babies - everything from worms to snakes, turtles, chipmunks and squirrels. They have asymmetrical ear openings; one ear is higher than the other to help them pinpoint sound.

These owls have two color phases, rufous or red morph (reddish brown) and gray morph. Rufous individuals live mainly in the south (more pine trees) and gray individuals in the north (more oak trees). Males are often brighter than females, but feather color is no indication of gender. Size is the noticeable difference between the male and larger female Screech-Owls. According to the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy website, females average 9.2 inches tall and weigh 7.3 ounces.

Credits: American Bird Conservatory, Animalia, Chesapeake Bay Program, Cornell Lab, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, National Audubon Society, National Zoo, The Wildlife Center of Virginia, Wikipedia

2024 NEW YEAR'S DAY BIRD LISTS

Submitted by Linda Cory

Our New Year's Day tradition is now a decade old! Thank you to the 30 bird club members that braved the cold and turned in their bird sightings on January 1, 2024. Members reported 55 species.

All reports were from the Roanoke/Botetourt/Bedford area except for the trio birding team (**Kirk Gardner, Kent Davis and Dick Grubb**) who also dipped into northern Tennessee. Their prize sightings included: Swamp and Field Sparrows, Hermit Thrush, Winter Wren, both Kinglets, Common Raven, Bald Eagle and 17 Wild Turkeys. They also saw 58 Gadwall, a Snow Goose and 3 Red Junglefowl.

A description of the day was best said by **Linda Christenson**, "It was a cold and windy day, birds weren't as active as usual (I thought)." But her list was impressive with Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Common Raven and more.

Joanne Spetzler also described the day, "It was not only cold all morning, but also very windy for some of the time, especially at the ridgeline. Not many birds were seen and/or heard, and the few that were, showed themselves mostly in one sheltered, sunny pocket of woods as we hiked down from the Brushy Mountain Fire Road back toward the Bennett Springs parking lot." Note: Joanne's group was the largest including birders **Katherine Hoffman, Jimbo and Mary Harshfield, Nancy Brattain, and Shara and Wes Wyatt**. Their species included Dark-eyed Junco, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a Downy Woodpecker.

Highlights: **Scott Spangler** sighted a Brown Creeper and Bald Eagle at Explore Park. **Barry and Carol Whitt** reported Sharp-shinned Hawk, Pileated Woodpecker and Northern Flicker. **Carla Barrell** in Coopers Cove, Hardy, reported Downy, Red-bellied and Hairy Woodpecker species. A Hairy was also seen by **Drew Daniels** who also reported Barred Owl, Common Raven, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Cedar Waxwing (you never see just one). **Linda Cory** reported a Bald Eagle flying over Salem Rotary Park. From the Greenway Bridge Street trailhead, **Robert Steele** sighted Hooded Merganser, Great Blue Heron and Kingfisher. **Brian and Cyndy Unwin** in Garden City near Mill Mountain reported Robin, Northern Cardinal and more. Also, from near Mill Mountain, **Chip and Louise Morris** reported similar species with the prize of a Black-capped chickadee and Coopers Hawk. **Nancy Hill** viewed a mix of 100 Black and Turkey Vultures in Bedford. **Eric Coffey** and his family enjoyed the day viewing several species including a Song Sparrow. **Sid and Mary Lou Barritt's** list included a Red Phase Eastern Screech-Owl that has chosen to reside in an owl box in their yard. (Photos on page 5.) Thanks to all that started their birding year with the hopes of a great 2024.

Field Trip Reports



Wed, Jan. 10 – Greenfield Lake at Botetourt Center – A decent morning unfolded as **Annie Downing** led a handful of participants around Greenfield Lake, through the woods to the pond at the back of the property, completing their trek by hiking past the meadows and construction areas to the west. They observed 28 species, with the highlights being Black Ducks, Hooded Mergansers (including a couple beautiful drakes), Double-crested Cormorant, and Hairy Woodpecker.

Sat, Jan.13 – Roanoke Sewage Treatment Plant and Ponds – Sixteen members, guided by **Kent Davis**, found the mostly cloudy morning wind chills bracing, but managed a terrific trip, just the same. The settling ponds and surrounding woods yielded 32 species (including 5 species of raptors). Highlights of their trip included Northern Pintail, nearly two dozen Killdeer, Bald Eagle, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, American Kestrel and Fox Sparrow.

WINTER RAPTOR COUNT

February 10, 2024

Participants _____

Time Started _____ Time Completed _____

Location _____

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>POINTS</u>	<u>QUANTITY</u>	<u>NOTES</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Turkey Vulture	*1			
Black Vulture	*2			
Red-tailed Hawk	5			
American Kestrel	10			
Common Raven	10			
Eastern Screech Owl	**10			
Cooper's Hawk	20			
Sharp-shinned Hawk	20			
Great Horned Owl	30			
Red-shouldered Hawk	30			
Barred Owl	35			
Northern Harrier	40			
Bald Eagle	50			
Barn Owl	50			
Loggerhead Shrike	50			
Merlin	75			
Peregrine Falcon	75			
Rough-legged Hawk	75			
Short-eared Owl	75			
Golden Eagle	100			
Northern Goshawk	100			
Long-eared Owl	125			
Northern Saw-whet Owl	125			
Northern Shrike	150			
Unidentified Raptor	5			

POINT TOTAL _____

- * Maximum of 50 Points
- ** Maximum of 100 Points

Be sure to keep your totals! There is a 10-point bonus for peak counts of these three species.

RULES: Teams must be at least 2 people. Teams may bird any area within a 100-mile radius of Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center. Birds must be seen or heard by at least 2 team members. Count period cannot exceed a total of 12 hours.

Completed forms can be emailed to billt3256@gmail.com or mailed to Anne Tucker
 3256 Lakewood Forest Rd. Moneta VA 24121. Call Anne at 540-204-5693 with any questions.



Roanoke Valley Bird Club
P.O. Box 20405
Roanoke, VA 24018



Roanoke Valley Bird Club

Membership Application/Renewal Form

Memberships expire on August 31, each year

2024

(Current Year)

Please print

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

*Email _____

*Required to receive newsletters and communications

Annual Dues are as follows:

- Individual \$15
- Family \$25
- Student under 18 - No Charge

Additional Contribution \$ _____

Adopt a Bluebird \$ _____

Total Payment \$ _____

Make check payable to:
Roanoke Valley Bird Club

Mail To:
Roanoke Valley Bird Club
P.O. Box 20405
Roanoke, VA 24018

www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com