

www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com

### **RVBC NEWSLETTER**

**MARCH 2025** 



## Drew's Birds of the Month Black Vulture Turkey Vulture

Coragyps atratus Mary Lou Barritt, Photographer Cathartes aura Garland Kitts, Photographer

In cowboy movies, the bad guy usually threatens to leave the hero in the desert for the buzzards, meaning the vultures. Although buzzard is a colloquial term for vulture in the U.S., the same word applies to several hawks in Europe. With sooty black plumage, a bare black head, and neat white stars under the wingtips, Black Vultures are almost dapper. They are compact birds with broad wings, short tails, and powerful wingbeats; whereas the slightly larger Turkey Vultures are lanky birds with teetering flight, and a bright red head. The two species often associate: the Black Vulture makes up for its poor sense of smell by following Turkey Vultures to carcasses. To find food Black Vultures soar high in the sky riding thermals, and keep an eye on the lower-soaring Turkey Vultures. When a Turkey Vulture's nose detects the delicious aroma of decaying flesh they descend on the carcass. Black Vultures lose out to the slightly larger Turkey Vulture, but flocks of Black Vultures can quickly take over a carcass and drive the more solitary Turkey Vultures away. They are a consummate scavenger, cleaning up the countryside one bite of their sharply hooked bill at a time, and never mussing a feather on their bald heads. The vulture's stomach acid is extremely acidic, so they can digest just about anything. This also allows them to eat carcasses tainted with anthrax, tuberculosis, and rabies without getting sick. By taking care of the carrion, vultures provide an essential service for the health of our ecosystems. Without them, carcasses would accumulate, and diseases would spread from rotting flesh. *~The Cornell Lab* 

### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Glenn Purvis Dave & Betsy Kibler

## Next meeting: MONDAY, MARCH 10 7:00 PM

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

Featured program:

### ENHANCING WOODLOTS FOR WILDLIFE SPEAKERS: BRUCE AND ELAINE INGRAM

This month's program will highlight the importance of creating/enhancing wildlife habitat through a variety of means, and timber stand improvement projects. Topics covered will include various plantings, habitat improvement tactics such as timber thinning, creating



hinge cuts, girdling trees, cutting and spraying, eliminating invasive plants, and making plantings.

Bruce Ingram is the author of over 2,900 magazine and web articles, and 11 books. Bruce and Elaine were named the Landsavers of the Year in 2014 by the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy. With their writing income, they were able to purchase about 640 acres, 442 of which have been placed under conservation easements. They also co-wrote *Living the Locavore Lifestyle*, about living off the land.

Elaine is a retired elementary teacher and Bruce teaches English and Creative Writing for Lord Botetourt High School.



## Who Gives the Hoot!



• Cornell Lab has opened up voting! The 10 finalists for the BirdSpotter Photo Contest have been announced. Now it's up to the people's choice. View the gallery and make your selection! Simply go to their website www.allaboutbirds.org and the voting pop-up will immediately appear.

• Recently, we had a couple of confrontations on Martin's Lane in Botetourt County involving an irate farmer. Well, it has happened again, and I just want to make everyone aware that these confrontations, while not normal, are becoming a problem we need to be cognizant in going forward. I was talking with Garland Kitts at our last meeting, and he told me about an incident he experienced in Augusta County while photographing Roughlegged Hawks. I realize in both situations, we were in the right as we were on a state road and not anyone's property. That doesn't change the landowner's perspective of the situation, plus the fact that he/she is already wound up. Please DO NOT confront these people, just leave. Remember, **your safety** is the utmost concern! ~Drew





ROANOKE VALLEY BIRD CLUB P.O. BOX 20405 ROANOKE, VIRGINIA 24018

### NONPROFIT 501(C) (3)

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

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The RVBC Newsletter is published monthly **September through May** with the deadline for each issue on the <u>20<sup>th</sup> of the month</u> prior to that publication.

#### Photography is provided by members.

Photos and articles are gladly accepted for publication as room allows, and may be sent electronically in JPEG or word docx..

Thank you! Carol Whiteside Newsletter Editor 540.774.2143 whitesidemules@yahoo.com



## President's Musings

President Drew Daniels ddaniels2627@cox.net 540.314.6069



During this time of upheaval around every corner, there is always time for a good news story. This is a story about Wisdom;

no, not knowledge acquired through the years, but about an extraordinary bird, a Laysan Albatross named Wisdom. She was captured in1956 while nesting in Hawaii and banded. Wisdom is the oldest confirmed wild bird in the world and the oldest banded bird in the world, establishing her birth year as 1951 which makes her 74 years old!

What makes this bird so extraordinary is the fact that scientists believe Wisdom has produced between 50-60 eggs, and raised as many as 30 chicks to fledging. NPR reports that of the more than 250,000 birds banded by biologist Chandler Robbins since banding Wisdom in 1956, the next oldest bird is just 52 years old. In 2011, Wisdom has survived a tsunami as well as plastic debris and fishing nets over the years. Scientists also believe that Wisdom has flown millions of miles over the open seas during migration, and provided food for her chicks.

Wisdom laid her latest egg in December at the Bikini Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, and was captured last month returning to her nest with food for her chick. She was in good shape and showed no signs of slowing down. My, aren't birds remarkable?!!! Wisdom photo courtesy of **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**.

## **DREW'S BIRDS OF THE MONTH**



Highly social birds with fierce family loyalty, Black Vultures share food with relatives, feeding young for months after they've fledged.

The word vulture likely comes from the Latin vellere, which means to pluck or tear. Its scientific name, Cathartes aura, is far more pleasant. It means either "golden purifier" or "purifying breeze."



# 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. Field Trips begin at 8:00 am unless otherwise announced; morning field trips in December through March will begin at 9:00 am. Thank you.

## March 2025

8 Roanoke River Greenway Walk, West from Bridge Street, Saturday 9:00 am. Leader: David Frye (248-459-6783). A much anticipated connection of the Roanoke River Greenway was completed last year and we'll introduce everyone to it. The trail is flat and paved and should afford us a nice hike with, hopefully, some nice resident birds.

- Directions: The car park is brand new and located off the west side of Bridge St. just south of Roanoke River in Norwich.
- 10 RVBC Membership Meeting, Monday 7:00 pm. Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs, 3640 Colonial Avenue, Roanoke, VA 24018. Featured Program: Enhancing Woodlots for Wildlife with Speaker Bruce Ingram. Bruce and his wife, Elaine, will be with us to describe how our backyards and wooded areas can be made more suitable for birds and other wildlife. Their program highlights experiences with their own property and their drive to develop enhanced habitat there.
- Second Wednesday Bird Hike Greenfield 9:00 am. Leader: David Frye (248-459-6783) Join us for a Wednesday morning 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 1-81 and follow signs to Route 220N. Go about 4 miles, turn left at the entrance into International Parkway and the Greenfield Education and Training Center, across from the entrance to Ashley Plantation. Park in the second lot on right.
- 16 Roanoke Sewage Treatment Plant, Sunday 9:00 am. Leaders: Kent Davis (540-353-6388) and Linda Cory (540-580-5214). Join us for a walk around the Sewage Treatment Plant. Entrance to the STP is by special permit and trip participants must all enter at the same time and stay together with our leader. This site is one of the best spots for viewing shorebirds in the Roanoke Valley. The property includes impoundments, sludge ponds, mudflats, riparian habitat and woodlands. Besides shorebirds, we can expect to see resident hawks and possibly ravens and fish crows. The walking is mostly flat with a short steep trail. Sturdy waterproof boots are recommended as it often is muddy. Directions: Meet at the Greenway parking lot off of Bennington Street near the bridge over the Roanoke River; the entrance to the parking area is between the bridge and Brownlee Avenue. Note that Thirteenth Street SE changes names to Bennington Street at the bridge over the Roanoke River. After the group has gathered, we will caravan or walk the short distance to the STP, so please arrive a few minutes early.
- 22 Woodcock Walk on Bent Mountain, Saturday 6:30 pm. Leaders: Robin Austin (540-676-0951) and Linda Cory (540-580-5214) Meet Robin and Linda at the Bent Mountain Community Center for a late afternoon 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.
- 29 Evergreen Burial Park Saturday 9:00 am. Leaders: Linda Cory (540-580-5214) and Kent Davis (540-353-6388) Pre-registration is required through their website: evergreenmemorialtrust.com or call (540-342-2593). This is a community outreach walk, cosponsored 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 Avenue SW, Roanoke 24015. Summit Avenue is off of Main Street in Roanoke. Park along the road in front of the main office.

## APRIL 2025 (A QUICK LOOK AHEAD)

- 5 Hinchee Trail Hike. Saturday 8:00am. Leaders: Kathy Clemo (540-314-7049) and George Clemo (540-798-5370) Join the Clemo's as they lead you on the Hinchee Trail up towards Carvins Cove. The trail is two miles long, but the group will turn around after walking about 1 ½ hours. The trail goes uphill and part of it is a gravel road. We'll meet at the Hanging Rock trailhead on Dutch Oven Rd just north of the Orange Market at the intersection of Routes 419 and 311 in Salem.
- 9 Mid-Week Wednesday Bird Hike. 8:00 am. Keagy Village. Leader: Drew Daniels (540-314-6069) Join us for a Wednesday morning bird walk in the parks local to Keagy Village. Drew Daniels will lead this one and will provide more details in next month's newsletter.
- 12 Vinyard Park, Vinton. Saturday 8:00am. Leaders: Kent Davis (540-353-6388) and Drew Daniels (540-314-6069) This Saturday trip will feature two park areas that are a bit under-birded in Vinton. Glade Creek runs through both east and west sections and should provide good habitat for early migrants.
- 19 Locher Tract Wetlands Trail. Saturday 8:00am. Leader: Bill Hunley (467-3477) Join us on a special field trip to Locher Tract, located in the Jefferson National Forest. This is a managed wildlife habitat that contains woods, open fields, a beaver pond and good views of the James River. Locher Tract is near Natural Bridge Station in Rockbridge County.
- 26 Warbler Road, Arcadia. Saturday 7:30 am. Leaders: Tim and Alyce Quinn (540-537-1831) This is our annual trek along several roadways that attract spring migrants and more specifically... wait for it... warblers! Join leaders Tim and Alyce Quinn for one of our favorite trips to see warblers.

## Avian Flu - Public Health in the News

Roanoke City and Alleghany Health District – 2/12/25 Updates and Newsletter Health updates for residents of the Roanoke City & Alleghany Health Districts (RCAHD) Alleghany, Botetourt, Covington, Craig, Roanoke City, Roanoke County, Salem

Until recently, Virginia has been mostly spared from the worst impacts of bird flu (avian flu, H5N1). But since January, wild birds, several birds at the Richmond Zoo, and a commercial flock in Accomack County have all tested positive for H5N1. Appropriate steps were taken to minimize human contact and to prevent the infected commercial flock from entering the food supply.

We have had no identified human cases in Virginia, but winter virus activity is extremely high at this time, especially the flu, which increases the opportunity for increased transmission. Commonwealth agencies are taking more steps to respond to this evolving situation. For example, more samples from hospitalized people will be tested for H5 typing once seasonal flu strains are ruled out as the cause for their hospitalization. VDH advised clinicians to consider avian flu in patients with acute respiratory illness or conjunctivitis who have a relevant exposure history. These steps are designed to help us identify any severe H5N1 cases more quickly.

The risk of avian flu to the general public remains low; however, people with job-related or recreational exposures to birds are at increased risk and should take precautions to protect themselves. Here are some general precautions we can all take:

- Stay away from sick or dead birds or livestock. Avoid contact with surfaces that have bird feces.
- Do not drink unpasteurized (raw) milk or eat raw milk products, like raw cheese.
- Get the seasonal flu vaccine, particularly if you are at increased risk for exposure to bird flu. Talk to a healthcare provider if you have questions.
- If animals you own are sick, contact the State Veterinarian's Office- 804-692-0601 or vastatevet@vdacs.virginia.gov.
- To report groups of sick or dead wild birds (excluding carcasses found along the road), contact the Department of Wildlife Resources - 855-571-9003 or wildlifehealth@dwr.virginia.gov.
- If you or someone in your family had contact with sick or dead birds or livestock within 10 days before the onset of respiratory or conjunctivitis symptoms, explain your exposure history to your healthcare provider and be seen for testing.

**If you keep a backyard flock**, here are steps to help keep disease away from your birds and your household:

- Wash hands well before and after handling and caring for your birds. If soap and water aren't available, clean your hands with hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Wear dedicated shoes in areas where you house and care for your birds.
- Avoid eating and drinking in areas where poultry live or roam.
- Keep wild birds and rodents out of poultry houses and coops.
- Monitor the health of your birds. Contact your veterinarian or local extension agent if you notice any signs of illness in your birds.

Visit the Virginia Department of Health webpage: VDH avian flu , the CDC, or visit the Department of Wildlife Resources to learn more.











Photographer: Carol Whiteside

## Ways We Interact With Birds ~ Feeding, Nesting, Observing, Photographing

Top to bottom: Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Brown Creeper, Pine Siskins, Eastern Bluebird nest box and eggs, Indigo Bunting and Northern Cardinal

# February Híghlíghts

Saturday, January 8, Greenfield Lake Dave Frye, Katherine and George Clemo

## Field Trip Reports

### Saturday, February 1, Greenfield Lake

This morning, eight birders from the Roanoke Valley and Lynchburg Bird Clubs joined **leaders Kirk Gardner and Ashley Lohr** for a delightful walk at Greenfield in Botetourt County, Virginia. The two clubs came together to enjoy a morning of birdwatching, and their combined expertise proved fruitful! In total, the group spotted an impressive 43 different species. Among the highlights were the sighting of three majestic Tundra Swans, a somewhat unusual find for this time of year, and the exciting discovery of an overwintering Brown Thrasher.

### Saturday, February 22, Greenfield Lake

**Leader Bill Hunley** was joined by eight hardy souls who enjoyed the brisk, 24 degree weather at Greenfield this morning. We counted 32 species including a Tundra Swan and an Eastern Screech Owl.

## Meeting Notes

### Mary Lou Barritt, Photographer

### Monday, February 10,

Featured Program: "Vultures: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird" with Katie Fallon.

**Secretary Karen Frye** noted: "There were 66 members and guests present as Ms. Fallon explained the turkey vulture and black vulture are primarily scavengers, and they provide a great service. They eat dead animals including dangerous pathogens on the carcasses that have no affect on them. California condors are coming back, but still critically endangered. American vultures are rebounding; however, worldwide there are many threats to this raptor species. Lead poisoning and harmful chemicals in the wildlife they eat are primary sources of threat. Also, vulture parts are thought by some Africans to protect them from disease or give them second site. White backed and hooded vultures are crilically endangered in Africa, bearded vultures are near threatened. Turkey vultures are the most widespread, and black vultures are among the most abundant worldwide. They make their home in the Americas. They have adaptive features – serrated tongue, nostrils on top of their head, a very keen sense of smell even allowing them to find lightly buried carcasses. Much is still unknown, but is being studied by tagging the birds."



Greenfield Lake and dam, Botetourt County









## THE 2025 ANNUAL RAPTOR COUNT

Compiled and submitted by Anne Tucker

The Annual Raptor Count was held Saturday, February 8, 2025. We had 6 teams, with 13 birders participating. The winner for the FIFTH year in a row is the team of Charlie Kahle, Rodney Davis, and Brian Hirt. Congratulations guys, you CRUSHED it, and us!!! Congratulations, also to the Spangler's. They had their first Bald Eagle for this count! Just a reminder (for Allen and Dave), fighter jets do not count! A big thank you to Tim Quinn for taking over the Raptor Count!

Hopefully, next year (the second Saturday of February), we will have better weather.

Consider joining us next year; it's a great way to waste a Saturday in winter!

#### Carol Whiteside, Photographer

							TOTAL
SPECIES	TEAM A	TEAM B	TEAM C	TEAM D	TEAM E	TEAM F	SPECIES
TURKEY VULTURE (***)	64	30	110	54	42	50	350
BLACK VULTURE (***)	34	38	26	9	22	25	154
RED-TAILED HAWK	5	14	6	6	1	3	35
AMERICAN KESTREL	6	5	1	5		2	19
COMMON RAVEN	5	12	4	1		1	23
EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (***)							
GREAT HORNED OWL							
COOPER'S HAWK				1			1
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK					1		1
RED-SHOULDERED HAWK	2	1		2	2	1	8
BARRED OWL							
NORTHERN HARRIER			1				1
BALD EAGLE	7	16	3	1			27
GOLDEN EAGLE							
UNIDENTIFIED RAPTOR				2			2
TOTAL BIRDS	123	116	151	81	68	82	621
TOTAL POINTS	645	1160	380	298	171	175	2829
		***	***				

### 2025 RAPTOR COUNT TALLY

\*\*\* RECEIVED 10 BONUS POINTS FOR PEAK COUNTS

TEAM A - Jim & Judy Phillips - Summers, Mercer & Monroe Counties WV, and Giles County VA

TEAM B - Charlie Kahle, Rodney Davis, Brian Hirt - Summers, Monroe & Greenbrier Counties WV, Alleghany & Craig CountiesVA

TEAM C - Allen Austin & Dave Brunstetter - BRP, Fincastle, Bedford & Roanoke Counties

TEAM D - Laurie & Scott Spangler - Roanoke & Botetourt Counties

TEAM E - Alyce & Tim Quinn - Wirtz & Westlake areas of Franklin County

TEAM F - Bill & Anne Tucker - Franklin & Bedford Counties

## Big Spring Day 2025

Donna Mateski de Sanchez, Big Spring Day Compiler, and Barry Kinzie, Roanoke Coordinator

favorite local birding tradition, Big Spring Day, returns on Saturday, May 3, 2025! With all this snow on the ground, it's hard to believe that this annual spring count is just two months away. This historic citizen science tradition is conducted jointly by the Roanoke Valley Bird Club and the Lynchburg Bird Club, with a few members of the Rockbridge Bird Club aiding the effort. Sixteen groups of birders will cover designated areas within 7.5 miles of the Big Spring in the Peaks of Otter Picnic Area. This will be our 54<sup>th</sup> annual count!

The weather was not our friend last year, so let's all think warm and dry vibes for May 3, this year. No matter the weather, the migrating birds will be heading north from the tropics to their northern breeding grounds. And our year-round bird species will be setting up breeding territories, pairing up, and building nests, making them more active, vocal, and easier to spot in their bright spring plumage.

Each of the sixteen groups independently chooses their starting time and continues as long into the day as they desire. As per tradition, a mid-day tally will be held for those interested in sharing the day's findings and having a chance to chat with other enthusiastic birders. This year's tally will be held between 12:30 and 1:30 PM in the amphitheater behind the Peaks of Otter Visitor Center. Restrooms are available, and snacks and cold beverages will be provided.

This year Barry Kinzie will be stepping back in (after 50+ years of prior Big Spring Day dedication!) to help coordinate things for the Roanoke sectors of the count. Past Big Spring Day participants, please contact your group leader to confirm whether or not you are able to participate this year. Big Spring Day group leaders, please confirm to Barry whether you will be covering the same route again.

Never birded on Big Spring Day, or haven't been able to participate in last few years? Newcomers and birders returning to the volunteer flock are always encouraged and warmly welcomed. Please contact Barry at peckerridge@lumos.net or 540-580-0059, and he will match you up with a route in need of coverage or an existing team looking for additional eyes.

# Big Spring Day 2024 Re-Cap Donna Mateski de Sanchez, Big Spring Day Compiler

n May 4, 2024, the day got off to a cold, dreary, foggy start. But despite the less-than-optimal conditions for birders, the birds were abundant. Fourteen teams from the Roanoke Valley and Lynchburg Bird Clubs, with 32 volunteers in the field, observed a total of 126 species for the day. This is fifth time in the last 12 years that our total species for the day has been 126. A total of 4,993 individual birds were observed.

Nineteen of the species were spotted by just one team, while 16 species were observed by just two teams. The unique Big Spring Day count circle boasts a wide variety of habitats along the ridge line and both slopes, so every team plays a role in contributing to the species count.

Similar to 2022, the fog seemed to have prompted a warbler fall-out. Warbler highlights included 207 American Redstarts, 155 Ovenbirds, 74 Black-and-White Warblers, 70 Hooded Warblers, 61 Northern Parulas, and 52 Louisiana Waterthrushes. We had a total of 26 warbler species for the day. In contrast, raptors were sparser than usual due to the weather conditions – with Bald Eagle, Osprey, and Broad-winged Hawk all missed.

A single Bobwhite was heard calling at the Claytor Nature Center, which makes the third Big Spring Day in a row for this species. Bobolinks also put in an appearance, though not in numbers as numerous as some recent years. It was a good year for nocturnal species with the three owl species, Eastern Whippoorwill, and American Woodcock all observed. Red-headed Woodpeckers are becoming more abundant and were seen by three teams this year. Sadly, still no sign of any Loggerhead Shrike since the barbed wire fencing was removed on Parker Road. And Prothonotary warbler has not been spotted since 2012.

The cumulative total of species observed over the history of the count remains at 200 species, after Fish Crow and Great Egret were added in 2023, though not seen again in 2024. A total of 65 species have been observed all 53 years in which the count has been conducted. In contrast, there are 42 species which have been observed in five or fewer years since the count started in 1971.

In addition to the Redstarts and Ovenbirds noted above, the most abundant species in 2024 were Red-eyed Vireo (267), American Goldfinch (177), Northern Cardinal (171), Tufted Titmouse (165), Mourning Dove (140), and Indigo Bunting (137).

Despite the challenging weather, some of the teams did huddle in the portico at the visitor center for the tally up, with snacks, drinks, and camaraderie. Please consider going for the 2025 Big Spring Day on May 3.



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

# Happy Saint Patrick's Day

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**RVBC NEWSLETTER** 

**MARCH 2025** 

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Roanoke Valley Bird Club Membership Application/Renewal Form Memberships expire on August 31, each year 2025	Annual Dues are as follows: Individual \$15 Family \$25 Student under 18 - No Charge
Please print (Current Year)	Additional Contribution \$
Name(s)	Adopt a Bluebird \$
	Total Payment \$
Address	Make check payable to: Roanoke Valley Bird Club
City STZip	Mail To: Roanoke Valley Bird Club
Phone	P.O. Box 20405 Roanoke, VA 24018
*Email *Required to receive newsletters and communications	www.roanokevalleybirdclub.com