



AUGUSTA
BIRD
C L U B

"A bird never doubts his place in the center of the universe."

~ Barbara Kingsolver

February Meeting

Date: Monday, February 8th, 7:00 PM
Place: AMC Lifetime Building/Blue Ridge Community College Education Center
Program: As the World Turns, The Complex Lives of "Simple" Birds
Speaker: Paul Callo, Mary Baldwin College

We see birds all the time. When we watch our feeders, when we drive the car, when we go on ABC field trips. We even go on special vacations just to see birds, but even the most dedicated birders only see each bird for a brief period of time. How well do we know our birds? Is that the same Phoebe that was here last year? Do those Ovenbirds singing non-stop know they are not alone in the woods? Despite all our watching, do we really know what a bird's life is like? Join us as one of our own, Dr. Paul Callo from Mary Baldwin College, will reveal to us what the birds are doing when we aren't looking!



Field Trips

Due to the unusually cold and wet weather, ABC field trips are on hiatus for the month of February.



WINGBEATS

Birding misadventures: "Draft Dilemma"

This anecdotal offering may be very familiar to some and to others a "dumb" thing to do!

Several years ago my friend George West (from Arizona and Alaska) and I decided to visit the Stuarts Draft Sewage Treatment Plant (SDSTP) to see a few good birds which had been reported in the area by the local list serve. Some of you know what is next. After arriving about 3:30PM and spending about 10 minutes looking for birds, to no avail, we departed and much to our chagrin found the gate LOCKED.

What to do?? We walked to the offices and found doors open, lights on and music playing, but no employees or vehicles in the plant. Obviously we couldn't call the SDSTP, we were the only ones there! Next, we called the Augusta County Police and the dispatcher did not know where the SDSTP was. After giving specific instructions, the dispatcher said they would send someone. Half-hour later after no one arrived we called the State Police, gave them directions and GPS coordinates. Half-hour later, still no shows and no returned calls after giving them our names and cell phone numbers. With daylight fading, still in a quandary and after careful thought, I asked George if he had any tools in his car. He did. I then managed to take apart the lock mechanism on the gate and we drove through. After that, I put it all together again and we left. This ordeal lasted about two hours with no responses or calls from anyone. Very strange.

The lesson: check-in before birding, otherwise a BREAKOUT may be required!!

-Walt Childs, President



13th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count Count for fun! Count for the future!

It's easy and free!
For experts and novices.
Count for 15 min. or all day(s).
Count at your feeder, a park,
or anywhere you choose.

Help scientists by counting the birds.

For more information on how to participate, checklists, tips, why counting birds is so important, and to submit your counts go to:

<http://www.birdcount.org/>

Help spread the word and pass this on to family, friends, and neighbors!

The Great Backyard Bird Count
is a joint project of
the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon

Birding Big Year Update

The Big Year that Bob Ake and I are doing started in Norfolk on Jan 1. We birded the Norfolk/Virginia Beach area for a few days. I then had to bail out to take care of some duties in Pennsylvania for a 3 days. We reconnected in Staunton on Jan 8 where we added Barn Owl and Wilson's Snipe to our list (on Bell's Lane).

At 5 AM the next day, with the temperature 10°F, we started our drive towards Texas. Made it to Baton Rouge 14 hours and 1000 miles later. There we stayed with Bob's friends who were frantically trying to keep 50 hummingbird feeders from freezing for 3 species of hummers, Black-chinned, Ruby-throated and Rufous -- we ticked 2 of the 3. The temp in Baton Rouge was 18°F!

The next day we headed to Galveston where we stayed with a friend from Virginia, Dick Peake, for a night. He showed us the Galveston Island birding hot spots the next morning and we picked up some more new birds. Then we continued south. Made it to the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) Jan 13 after stops in Arkansas NWR (Whooping Cranes) and Alice.

After our stay in the RGV we added over 50 species to our list that now stands at 252 for Bob, a few less for me. However, I did manage several "life" birds such as LeConte's Sparrow, Hook-billed Kite, Mountain Plover, and Smith's Longspur.

We just arrived in St. Louis today, Jan 21, and hope to get Eurasian Tree Sparrow tomorrow. Then to Illinois, Indiana for a few more target species, and then home to Staunton by the 24th.

After almost 2 weeks at home we'll head to the OBX of NC for pelagic trips and then to Arizona for another 2 week adventure.

It's been a hectic but fun quest so far. My heartfelt thanks to Nancy for tolerating (perhaps enjoying)

my absence and allowing me to do such a wild and crazy thing.

I'll try to send periodic summaries for future newsletters. For those who want a day-by-day update check out Bob's blog, complete with pictures, at:

<http://bobsbirds.blogspot.com/>

or read my more limited tweets at

<https://twitter.com/jnbbigyear2010>

Your traveling birder,
John Spahr
January 19, 2010

2nd Annual Rusty Blackbird Blitz

Ithaca, NY--Volunteers are needed for the second annual Rusty Blackbird Blitz taking place January 30 through February 15. Participants report sightings via the eBird program led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. The blitz is coordinated by the International Rusty Blackbird Technical Working Group at the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center along with the Cornell Lab and Audubon.

Rusty Blackbirds have pale "staring" eyes and in late January and early February, males will appear mostly black and females will have rusty edges to the wings and body.

The population of North American Rusty Blackbirds has plummeted an estimated 85 to 99 percent over the past 40 years. Although the exact cause for this decline is not clear, loss of habitat is one likely reason. Data gathered during the blitz will be used to create a map of wintering Rusty Blackbird "hot spots" and will help focus research, monitoring, and conservation efforts.



"We're looking for date, location, the time you began each survey, how long you were birding, and how far you traveled," said eBird co-leader Brian Sullivan. "It's important to submit your observations even if you don't see any Rusty Blackbirds. Nega-

tive data are incredibly valuable and still tell us a lot."

The focus of the blitz is on states that are known to be part of the Rusty Blackbird's winter range: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas (east), Virginia, and West Virginia.

Unlike other species of blackbirds, the Rusty Blackbird inhabits boreal wetlands of the far north during the breeding season and spends its winters in bottomland wooded-wetlands, primarily in American midwestern and southeastern states. Despite its drastic decline, there is no monitoring program specially for these birds.



Two other species are more common and are sometimes mistaken for the rusty. The Common Grackle is larger with a long tail and larger bill. The female Red-winged Blackbird also resembles the rusty but can be distinguished by bold streaking on its underparts, whereas the rusty has plain underparts without streaks.

For more information on identifying Rusty Blackbirds and where they might be found, visit the eBird website and the International Rusty Blackbird Technical Working Group site. Then join the Rusty Blackbird Blitz January 30 to February 15!

The Peggy Spiegel Opengari Memorial Fund

"Watch, observe, embrace life with courage and good sense, make friends wherever you find yourself, and teach others from a place of passion and insight...these are some of the principles we learned from life with Mom."

Thus began the beautiful eulogy for Peggy Spiegel Opengari, presented lovingly by her daughter, Phyllis. A dear friend and fellow birder, Peggy lost her short but courageous battle with pancreatic cancer in mid-July. Peggy will be remembered for many things--her work with the Girl Scouts when her own children were young; as owner of two wild

bird stores called For the Birds; her tireless work promoting birding around the world by organizing field trips both locally and to many exotic destinations; as a much sought-after speaker at bird clubs and other organizations; her many years of dedicated service to the Virginia Society of Ornithology; and as the creator and driving force behind the Mountain Lake Migratory Bird Festival.

But most of all, Peggy will be remembered as a friend. During her mother's memorial service, Phyllis told us all that in the early days of Peggy's relationship with her husband Bill, he had finally asked, "Do you know all of these people you talk to?" after she had gotten into a conversation with someone in an elevator. He thought that everywhere they went she must be running into people she knew because she was always getting into conversations with people. That's just the way Peggy was. Minutes after you met her, you knew you had a new friend.

Shortly after Peggy passed away, a co-worker asked me if Peggy was a "good" friend of mine. That was a tough question to answer. We didn't call each other on the phone just to chat. We didn't go out for the evening together. In fact, we only saw each other a few times a year. But any time I knew our paths were about to cross, I took great delight in the fact that I was going to be able to spend time with her again. She was one of those people who could brighten up your day just by being in it. I cherish the times we spent together and wish there had been many more. I feel blessed to have known Peggy and honored to consider her a friend. My world will be a sadder place without her in it.

To honor one of our most beloved members, the Roanoke Valley Bird Club has established the Peggy Spiegel Opengari Memorial Fund. A small portion of the money donated this year 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, 1230 Viewmont Dr., Evington, VA 24550-2006 with a notation that it is for the Peggy Spiegel Opengari Memorial Fund.

- Alyce Quinn

ABC Meeting Minutes January 11th 2010

The meeting convened just after 7 pm on Jan 11th. We had 2 guests from Stuart's Draft, who also reported sighting a Cooper's Hawk, also another guest, who is a wildlife biologist. We had 1 new member, Lauren Neal from Rockbridge County.

Christmas Bird Count Reports:

- Waynesboro count included about 74 species and 14 degree weather! A White-Ringed Cross-bill was spotted by Tim Hodge.
- the Augusta count had about 74 species, and sightings included a Peregrine Falcon, Snow Goose and immature Bald Eagle.



Field Trips:

- Allen Lerner is planning a trip for Moomaw/ Highland area, weather permitting.
 - Report on Chincoteague trip: It was about 19 degrees with very gusty winds. A highlight was the unique opportunity to witness the struggles of an eagle trying to land a too-heavy Bufflehead it had caught.
 - Report on the John Sphar/Bob Ake "Big Year": As of Jan 10, they had spotted 149 species and were in Galveston, TX. According to a newspaper article their goal is 650 species. There is a blog address on the ABC website.
 - Walt Childs reported on the enjoyable experience of birding with grandchildren in balmy 70 degree weather in Arizona.
- Walt also spoke on the opportunity to get involved with a project at the Plum House Museum in

Waynesboro, identifying bird specimens. Get in touch with him if you're interested in helping.

Last month's Mystery Bird was a Black-bellied Whistling Duck.

This month's program was a power point presentation by Lynn Cameron about the Shenandoah Mountain Proposal. She outlined the goals and progress made by a grassroots organization, with members from all walks of life, in gaining a higher level of federal protection for this and several other wild areas in Augusta, Rockingham and Highland counties. Shenandoah Mtn. is an area of incredible scenic beauty as well as important plant and wildlife habitat, with trails for hiking, biking and many other outdoor activities.

Respectfully submitted,
Jessie Shaw, Secretary

Treasurer's Report
submitted by Catherine Kohus
12/01/2009 – 12/31/2009

REGULAR OPERATING FUND		
BALANCE - 12/01/2009	\$ 4,370.72	
INCOME	\$ 270.00	
EXPENSES	\$ 39.95	
BALANCE - 12/31/2009		\$ 4,600.77
EDUCATION/CONSERVATION FUND		
BALANCE - 12/01/2009	\$ 7,054.63	
INCOME	\$ 406.62	
EXPENSES	\$ 80.25	
BALANCE - 12/31/2009		\$ 7,381.00
TOTAL BALANCE ALL FUNDS - 12/31/2009		\$ 11,425.35

Welcome new 2010 Members !

*Emily & Tom Britt
Russell Brown
Alisha Hammer
Deb Kirtland
Laura Neale
Andrea Popick
Jean Wilkerson*

Thank you, to all of our renewed members. And a **special thank you** to all those who *contributed* and to all those who *purchased* bird seed!

2009 Bird Seed Sale Profit \$2843.83

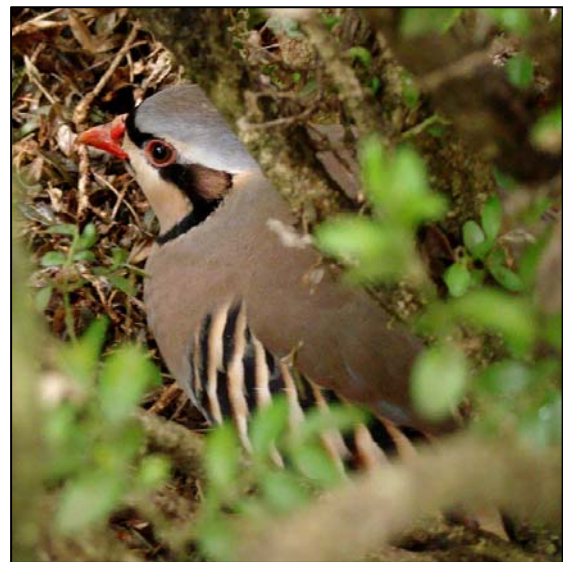
The regular renewals go to financing our operating expenses. For example, the newsletter, speakers, and our annual picnic. *All* additional contributions as well as profits from our annual bird seed sale go to supporting conservation and education organizations.

2009 Conservation and Education Donations were made to:

Nature Camp
Virginia Society of Ornithology
Valley Conservation Council
The Wildlife Center of Virginia
The Nature Conservancy
Hawk Migration Assoc. of No. America
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Virginia Bluebird Society
American Bird Conservancy
Costal Virginia Wildlife Observatory
VA Nongame & Endangered Wildlife Pgm
Important Bird Areas Program
Audubon Society (Christmas Bird Count)

Bird Quiz!

Can you identify the bird below?



The answer will be revealed in next month's newsletter. Happy guessing!

Last Month: Black-bellied Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*)