



# Monticello Bird Club

January 2014 Newsletter

Website: [www.monticellobirdclub.org](http://www.monticellobirdclub.org)

Volume 28

Issue 5

Facebook: [Monticello Bird Club](#)

*MBC Monthly Meeting—Thursday, January 9th at 7:00pm*

## Comments from the President

Doug Rogers



Golden Eagle  
Photo by Joan Lacruz  
Wikimedia Commons

In spring, a man's thoughts turn to ...birds, bees, flowers and love. In January of each year, my thoughts turn to Golden Eagles and Highland County, VA. Our first trip there was in the second week of January 2007. We met in the pre-dawn for car-pooling. The temperature in Charlottesville was a balmy 35 degrees that day, with a high predicted to be in the 40's. When we arrived in the town of Monterey in Highland County, the temperature was 11 degrees, with a northwest wind and blowing snow.

The Golden Eagle was a life bird for us at that time, and there was no guarantee that we would even see one. However, as we ascended the final mountain road before arriving at the Confederate Breastworks, we saw this magnificent bird perched in a tree beside the road. It immediately took flight, but we had our Golden Eagle! During the day, we saw several others – a mix of adults and juveniles. We had the best luck on a high ridge on Hardscrabble Road.

The Golden Eagle is one of the best-known birds of prey in the Northern Hemisphere, and it is the most widely distributed species of eagle. Its plumage is gold in color; its body ranges from 26 to 40 inches in length with a wingspan of 5 ft. 11 in. to 7 ft. 8 in. Males and females weigh typically 8.9 lbs. and 14.0 lbs. respectively. They prefer to hunt in open or semi-open areas in mountainous regions, especially where there's a low human presence. Highland County has a population of less than 2,500 humans and many times that number of cows and sheep.

These eagles breed and spend most of the year in western and northern Alaska and northern Canada to the Ungava Peninsula in Quebec. This species occupies the Arctic fringe of North America (it does not range into the true high Arctic tundra), where open canopy gives way to dwarf-shrub heathland with cotton grass and tussock tundra. They think that wintering in Highland County, VA, is like living on the Riviera!

The most significant group of prey for Golden Eagles is mammals. Golden Eagles are opportunists, and virtually any animal of a reasonable size will be taken. Studies have shown an estimated mean prey weight of 3.5 lbs. all across their range. The local farmers in Highland County dislike them, because they have been known to kill and eat newborn lambs.

If luck is with us, for the Highland County outing on January 11, we will see the Golden Eagles, as well as Rough-legged Hawks, Horned Larks and other exciting species. I look forward to this outing every year! Please join us.

## Speaker of the Month: Teta Kain

Stauffer Miller

Teta Kain of the Rappahannock River delta area of the state will present the January 9th program. Her talk will feature and focus on Dragon Run, a small river near where she lives. For the past fifteen years, Teta has dedicated herself to preserving and interpreting the river. Her presentation "Adventures on the Dragon" takes viewers on a trip by kayak that acquaints them with the river's interesting plants and animals. Her photographs from nocturnal kayak trips on the river are especially eye-catching.

Teta has spoken several times to the MBC and her talks can be counted on to be informative and captivating. Don't miss this program. As usual, we take speakers to dinner before their talks. We continue to do this at the Brick Oven Restaurant at Rio Hill Shopping Center. Hope to see you there at 5:30 pm on January 9th.

Following up on an idea of my wife Ellie, we will have a program in February on a somewhat under-appreciated group of birds, the vultures. Julie Maillon will speak to us about these birds, their life and their somewhat unsavory food choice. "Carry-on!" (carrion), as one vulture said to the other.



Teta Kain on Dragon Run  
Photo by Andy Locatell /TNC

## Ivy Creek 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday Walk Hits 20 Years!

by Leigh Surdukowski

2014 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> year that the Monticello Bird Club has led the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday Bird Walks for the Ivy Creek Foundation. The first walk was held in February of 1995. Since then the club has scheduled 227 walks, with only a small number canceled due to poor weather.



Thanks to the support of club members these walks are a huge success; a typical walk has 10-20 participants. In January of 1997, on a balmy, spring-like day, almost 100 people attended. The day before this walk, the Daily Progress featured an article on the Monticello Bird Club and the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday walks.

Thanks to word of mouth, club newsletters and the internet, a variety of folks of different birding levels attend the walks. Most participants are local birding enthusiasts; occasionally, avid birders from other states participate. Typically each month, a few novice birders attend and the club lends them binoculars to enrich their birding experience. In the last couple of years there has been an increase in the numbers of young birders and family groups on the walks.

To date, 32 people have led the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday Ivy Creek Walks. Many leaders volunteer to lead walks year after year. Lou Tanner, Peter Duttell and John Zimmerman have signed up to lead walks for at least 10 years. Ron Kingston served as a trip leader for 15 years. Six club members have signed up to lead walks for 20 years! This group includes Dave Hogg, Teresa Shaner, Peter Brask, Jenny Gaden, Jim Nix and Leigh Surdukowski.

Many thanks to the MBC members who signed up to lead walks for next year. All club members are encouraged to come out and support the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday leaders, as we share our knowledge and love of birding with the Charlottesville community.

## First Saturday Bird Walk

January 4, 7:30am

On the first Saturday of each month, the Monticello Bird Club offers a bird walk, led by a Club member, at Ivy Creek Natural Area. Participants gather in the parking lot at 7:30am. Birders of all levels are welcome.

Walk Leaders

Winter-Spring 2014

**Jan. 4 .... Jim Nix**

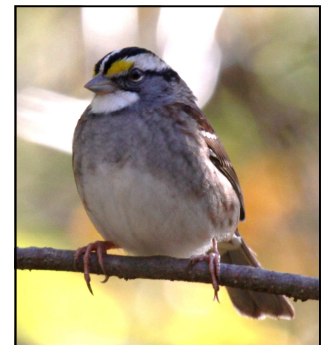
Feb. 1 ... Teresa Shaner

Mar. 1 .... Peter Duttell

Apr. 5 .... Janet Paisley

May 3 ... Stauffer Miller

June 7 ... David White



White-throated Sparrow  
Photo by Doug Rogers

## Birding Tidbits...about a bird you might find on the Bird Walk at Ivy Creek in January

by Jenny Gaden

### White-throated Sparrow

The White-throated Sparrow is another bird, like the Hermit Thrush, that we see only in the winter. In May it leaves to breed in the boreal coniferous and mixed forests of Canada. Typical of sparrows, it forages on the ground for seeds and insects, and thus is a happy visitor at our feeders. Take a look at the feeders at the Ivy Creek Natural Area. There you will likely see a small brown bird with a bright white throat. Through your binoculars you will also notice yellow lores, the feathers between the base of the bill and the eyes. There are two plumage variations – the white striped and the tan striped. These differences in head plumage are not associated with age or gender. Perhaps the most appealing characteristic of this sparrow is the song it sings – even in winter. It is a sweet high whistle that “says”, “O sweet liberty, liberty, liberty.” Look for White-throats in brushy habitats and edges wherever you walk this winter.

### Field Trips

Organized by John Davis

### Highland County

Saturday, January 11, 7:00am

Led by Doug Rogers

Our target bird on this annual trek is the Golden Eagle; other possibilities include Rough-legged Hawks, Horned Larks, various sparrows and winter birds. After a brief pit stop at the Confederate Breastworks, we will pass through McDowell and on to Monterey, where we will bird the beautiful Blue Grass Valley. Plan on having lunch in a local Monterey restaurant. After eating, we may visit a pond on Route 220 that frequently has several species of waterfowl. Dress warmly in layers. Bring spotting scopes. Bring walkie-talkies. Plan on having a great day!

**Directions: Meet at Starbucks in the Giant Food parking lot on Pantops.** We will carpool for the ninety minute drive to Monterey.

## Short-eared Owls in Louisa County

**Saturday, January 18, 4:45pm**  
**Led by Teresa Shaner.**

Teresa Shaner will lead this trip to Louisa County. Short-eared Owls have been seen here over the past several years. We will be monitoring the site, and an announcement will be made by email a day or two before the 18th to confirm or cancel the trip, depending upon the presence or absence of the owls. Those not on the newsletter emailing list may call John Davis (434-296-7613) on Thursday or Friday to check on the status of the trip. It is suggested that participants bring spotting scopes if available.

**Directions: Meet at Starbucks in the Giant Food parking lot on Pantops.**

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## Rivanna River North Bird Walk, Belvedere

**Saturday, January 25, 7:30am**  
**Led by John Holden**

Belvedere is a remarkably pristine area for being right in town. It consists of floodplain with overgrown and open fields along the river, hardwood and pine forests from the bluffs on our way to the river, and then the water habitat of the Rivanna itself. We will walk about 3 miles on trails, turning around at the Railroad bridge. Sturdy footwear and something warm to drink are suggested.

**Directions: Meet at the Rivanna Trail sign at the far end of Belvedere.** Off East Rio Road, turn into the Belvedere development. Go through the first traffic circle, continuing straight back past the many houses, to the far side of the grassy berm where there is a Rivanna Trail sign and parking. You may contact leader John Holden (on the day of the trip only) at 434-249-0806 (cell) or 434-973-9179(h).

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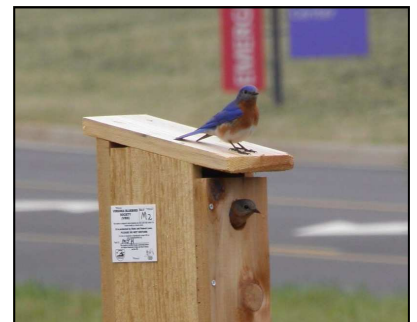
## Charlottesville/Albemarle Bluebirds 2013

*by Ann Dunn, County Coordinator, Virginia Bluebird Society*

Bluebirds and other native cavity nesters fared very well on our monitored trails this summer. We had reports on a total of 477 nest boxes scattered throughout the Charlottesville/ Albemarle area from the Hammond, Kingston, Minor and Graemont West Trails. The ever expanding Hammond trail added four new sites this year: Bundora and Kingfisher farms, Monticello Memory Garden and Quarry City Park.

Nesting activity this year was slow to start, due to a late spring, and came to an early end at many sites by the first of August. Despite the abbreviated season, we had a record high of 2935 native cavity nesters fledging from our nest boxes. The species distribution was similar to that of past years with 2334 Bluebirds and 429 Tree Swallows; the remainder included the usual assortment of Titmice, Carolina Chickadees and House Wrens, plus an unexpected White-breasted Nuthatch. Our productivity was much better than last year, perhaps related to a more temperate summer. Eighty five percent of our eggs developed into fledging birds, a seven percent increase over that in 2012. Our data has been passed on to the Virginia Bluebird Society and will ultimately go to the North American Bluebird Society.

As always, we thank our very dedicated volunteers who monitor and maintain these much beloved trails, helping to keep bluebirds and other native cavity nesters common in our area.



*Photo by Doug Rogers*

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## Notes from BRYBC

*by Gabriel Mapel*

The Young Birders Club is continuing to enjoy birding. We are excited to be participating in two different Christmas Bird Counts, Rockingham on January 4th and Lake Anna on the 5th. Our January 4th meeting has been canceled so that we can participate in the CBC. We have, to our pleasant surprise, recently found several interested Shenandoah Valley Birders, in addition to Charlottesville folks. We will hold our first meeting in the Valley, at the Waynesboro library on February 1st.

If you are doing any online shopping on Amazon.com, please consider supporting BRYBC. Simply go onto [www.blueridgeyoungbirders.org](http://www.blueridgeyoungbirders.org). Then, click on our Amazon link on the right and place your order. This way, by going through our website, BRYBC will receive 5% of your sale. Also, if you are in the market for new optics, through Eagle Optics, please do the same thing by accessing Eagle Optics through the Young Birders website. If you are phoning in your order to Eagle Optics, just mention you are going through the Blue Ridge Young Birders. Thanks for your support!

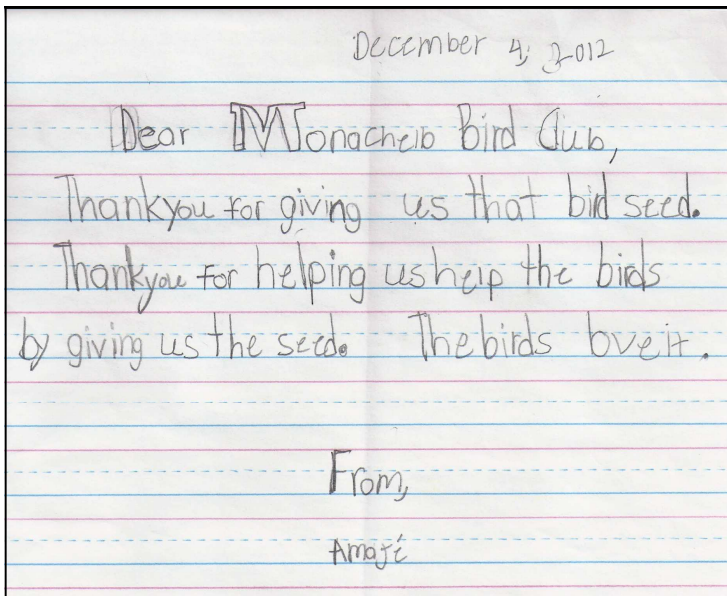


## Stone Robinson Students Love their Birdseed and their Birds!

by Amaje

Diane Lohrer's second grade class at Stone Robinson Elementary School has sent MBC many letters of thanks for their donated birdseed. Amaje's letter (at left) is one of many delightful expressions of gratitude from these enthusiastic, young birdwatchers. With Jenny Gaden's educational visits to the school, Diane Lohrer's facilitation of good stewardship practices, and MBC's birdseed donation, these young birders are experiencing the joys of birding and connection to the natural world in their daily school lives.

*Editor's Note: As a former reading specialist, this editor knows that Ms. Lohrer's language arts teaching must also be first rate, as Amaje's invented spelling of our bird club name could not be more spot on!*



### Membership Notes

by Lesslie Crowell

To date, membership data are as follows:

Individual	71
Contributing	13
Family	29
Sponsor	12
Lifetime	5
<hr/>	
Total	130



This total includes 27 new members. Also, thanks very much to those who recently sent dues in response to a renewal reminder. Welcome, All!

Only two more and we reach our budgeted goal of 132 members!

### Treasurer's Notes

by Maynard K. Davis

We have now paid the final birdseed bill, and the numbers are as follows:

Sales	\$9,026
Cost	- \$6,693
<hr/>	
Profit	\$2,333



We donated birdseed to the following:

Ivy Creek Foundation	\$76
Venable Elementary School	\$39
Stone-Robinson Elem School	\$131

This year's birdseed profit is \$436 over the budgeted goal. The Board is meeting in January and will discuss possible uses of these extra funds. Ideas from club members are encouraged and welcome!

## MBC Minutes, December 12, 2013

Submitted by Peggy Cornett, Secretary



President Doug Rogers began the meeting with a reminder to lock our cars and keep valuables in the trunk. Doug then called for bird sightings. Gabriel Mapel and Eve Gaige saw the Snowy Owl at Manassas Airport that has been causing a flurry of excitement among birders. Nancy Newcomb spotted a Ring-necked Pheasant at the church on 250. John Holden spotted his first Northern Harrier of the year. He also invited members on a trip to the Outer Banks scheduled for the last weekend of February.

Leigh Surdokowski reported on the First Saturday Bird Walks at Ivy Creek. (See her article on page 2.) Doug Rogers gave the field trips report for John Davis. Upcoming walks include a trip to Southern Albemarle County with Leigh Surdokowski on December 21. On January 11, Doug will lead an all-day trip to Highland County. January 18 will be a trip to Louisa County, led by Teresa Shaner, leaving at 4:45 PM to see/hear Short-eared Owls. John Holden will lead a trip on January 25 to the North Fork of the Rivanna River. (For Field Trip details, see pages 2-3.)

Jenny Gaden reminded members of the upcoming Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 15. Gabriel Mapel reported on the Blue Ridge Young Birders Club, which has doubled its membership. The BRYBC has an impressive newsletter that has generated a lot of interest. They are raising money for the club by selling members' artwork. Newsletter editor Joanne Bricker thanked Stauffer Miller and Kay Slaughter for submitting their stories for the "Joy of Birding" column and invited members to contribute more of their personal experiences. Doug Rogers gave the treasurer's and membership reports. (See page 4.)

The Bird Seed Sale was a major success, with over \$9,000 in sales. Because the seed distributor, Wetsel, has been in the process of changing its computer system, we have not yet settled the final bill. There were 50 in attendance, including guests of the speakers.



Hawk Watch Notes by Gabriel Mapel



Gabriel with fellow counters at the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch. To keep up with Gabriel and the Young Birders, visit their website at [www.blueridgeyoungbirders.org](http://www.blueridgeyoungbirders.org)

I spend most of my time in the fall at the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch, located on Afton Mountain, near Waynesboro.

When most people, including myself, think of birding--we think of hiking in the woods tracking down warblers, or driving along a country road looking for sparrows, or scoping out a lake looking for waterfowl. Whatever we think of, it's probably not sitting in a lawn chair for 8 hours a day at one location mountaintop, nearly regardless of the weather, scanning for distant, 'spec' migrating hawks, eagles, falcons, and other raptors. Sure, occasionally they'll be a "great" day with lots of close birds, temps in the 60s or 70s, some sun, and some clouds to 'help spot the birds', but that's not the norm. The other day, for example, I sat out in near-freezing temps, 40MPH north-west wind, overcast skies, and a chance for snow flurries (though that never materialized), and saw about 9 raptors. Fun? Not for most people, or even, most birders, but for me, it's my favorite kind of birding.

On mid-September days with good weather and plenty of Broad-winged Hawks, there will be other qualified counters and observers and quite a few visitors mountaintop with me but as the season progresses, visitors become rare, and some of the counters call it quits for the season. I'm one of only a few that 'last' the entire season through the end of November -- and often late in the season, the only reason there's someone else there with me is because I don't feel safe at the sketchy old motel where the count takes place, by myself.

But for me, regardless of the weather, and the birds, hawk watch is fun. You never know what will turn up, and if you put in enough hours, you're bound to see something unusual. This season, which ended November 30th, we recorded 3 Northern Goshawks, rare visitors from the north that we only see 2 or 4 a year. We recorded 22 Golden Eagles this season, an unreal number for these slightly smaller, darker, smaller-headed, longer-tailed cousins of the Bald Eagle, and a new record total for the Rockfish hawk watch. I was so hoping I could get Rockfish's 7th-ever Rough-legged Hawk, or a very rare Swainson's Hawk. One bird came over one mid-November day and I almost, but couldn't turn it into a Swain. It was a very unusual looking Red-tail. The Rough-leg and Swainson's will have to wait for next year.

I encourage everyone that hasn't, and those that have, to visit Rockfish hawk watch or another hawk watch. Once you 'get hooked', hawk watching is nothing but fun....

*Editor's Note: This article and photograph are reprinted with the author's permission from his "The President's Hoot" column appearing in the Winter 2014 BRYBC Newsletter. Thanks, Gabriel!*

Can't hear the warblers??

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for club and membership information.

The Club meets on the **second Thursday** of each month, September through June, at the **Education Building of the Ivy Creek Natural Area** on Earlysville Rd, 1/2 mile north of Hydraulic Rd.

The editor of the **MBC Newsletter** welcome submissions, including articles, photographs and notices. **DEADLINE** for each issue is **9:00AM on the 20th** of the month.

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