

# Monticello Bird Club

April 2006

Volume 20, Number 8

April Meeting Topic:

## Counting Birds at Christmas-time

Just about everyone who belongs to a bird club has heard of the National Audubon Society's famed Christmas bird counts. Over the years thousands of bird watchers world-wide have participated in these events and for some, the Xmas bird count is their first introduction to bird-watching. But how many have given any thought to the history and dynamics of this colossal effort? What is the real purpose of it? What happens to the data collected? How many counts are conducted? And how long have they been going on?



MBC April Speaker, Teta Kain.

April 13 meeting, Ms. Kain will present "Virginia Xmas Bird Counts, from Abingdon to Accotink, Winchester to Wachapreague," in which she will relate interesting tidbits about birds, people, and places she has gleaned over the years. It's a fascinating history, delving back over 100 years and covering the width and breadth of the Commonwealth. She'll also have a few slides of birds and places from

her Xmas Count travels and can relate some statistics that will really surprise you. Please join Teta for dinner at Wild Greens Restaurant in Barracks Road North at 5:30 pm prior to the meeting!

Teta Kain, regional editor of Virginia Xmas birds counts for NAS since 1990 and state editor of Virginia counts that appear in the Raven since 1985, has been amassing data about this massive effort that takes place every year between mid-December and early January. At our

## Spring Meetings Feature Photos, Food, and Fun

**May 11: Members Night**  
On Members' Night we ask YOU to share some of your favorite nature slides or display photographs. We'll also hear a special report from the Stone Robinson fourth-graders who received out birdfeeder kit.

**June 8: Annual Potluck**  
Please bring your favorite dish to share at this popular MBC tradition. Lucky you can sample the special dishes of other members. Conversation flows. Everyone has a fine time.

## Comments From the President

Everybody loves the bluebird, right?... the symbol of happiness. Yet both males and females can be vicious when competing for a mate. A neighbor of mine told me of an experience she had last spring. It was about 6 am when she looked out of her kitchen window and saw two male bluebirds chasing one another around the edge of her woods. A Barred Owl sat quietly on a branch and watched. In a few moments the two songbirds flew into



USPS 1996 "America's Stamp."

the air, collided, and grappling with inter-twined feet, fell to the ground, still inter-locked. One pinned the other on the ground and pecked fiercely at its head. Shortly the roles were reversed and the bird that had been on its back was now on top jabbing at its rival's head. My friend watched aghast. But soon it was over. The owl dropped down, then arose, a bluebird in each foot.

—Jennifer Gaden

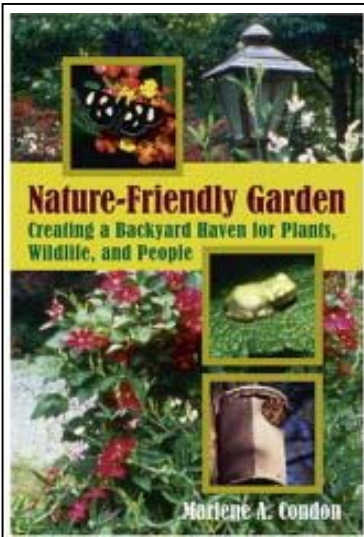
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## Local Author Writes New Book

Albemarle County resident (and former MBC Newsletter Editor!) Marlene Condon has a brand new book about gardening. Here is a glowing review of *The Nature-friendly Garden: Creating a Backyard Haven for Plants, Wildlife, And People, Too* from Carol Haggas at the American Library Association:

“Native wildlife” and “suburban gardens” seem to be mutually exclusive, but not according to Condon, who cheerfully invites insects, reptiles, birds, and mammals to her half-acre yard. Such detente can even extend to such legendary pests as Japanese beetles and rapacious rabbits when the right combination of conditions are created. Whereas predominantly grass-centric gardens may only encourage visits from a few select birds and butterflies, Condon envisions a world in which lawns are reduced to mere buffer zones sur-



rounding vistas of diverse plantings of shrubs, trees, and flowers that provide lush habitats for numerous species. And Mother Nature isn't the only beneficiary; humans can experience emotional, spiritual, and physical improvements from such an ecumenical approach. ...Condon covers all the bases in a thoughtful and passionate treatise on the benefits of gardening—and living—in harmony with nature.”

Marlene’s new book is published by Stackpole and available online at many sites —just Google the title. If you want an autographed copy, mail \$22.95 to Marlene Condon at P.O. Box 235, White Hall, VA 22987 along with the inscription you want. She will send the book right out.

## Annual VSO Meet in Scenic, Bird-y Southwest Virginia

The Annual Meeting of the Virginia Society of Ornithology will be held May 5-7 at Breaks Interstate Park. It will be hosted by the Buchanan Country Bird Club.

The Breaks Interstate Park is located in the beautiful mountains of Southwest Virginia. There will be a variety of field trips to local birding spots including a trip to the new U.S. Forest Service observation tower atop Pine Mountain, several driving and hiking trips within the park, as well as a trip to a reclaimed mine site with Grasshopper Sparrows. We will be looking for many different species of migrating warblers including cerulean, golden-winged, and swainson's.

Don Kroodsma, a world authority on bird vocalizations, and author of *The Singing Life of Birds* will be the guest speaker on Saturday night. Click <http://www.bcplnet.org/birdclub/VSO.htm> for more information.

## Bird Club Info

The Monticello Bird Club normally meets at 7:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month, September through June, at the Education Building of the Ivy Creek Natural Area on Earlysville Road, 1/2 mile north of Hydraulic Road.

The editor of the MBC Newsletter welcomes submissions including articles, photographs and notices. **DEADLINE for the May issue is April 24.** Please email information to Nancy King at [turnermtn@mindspring.com](mailto:turnermtn@mindspring.com) or send to P.O. Box 22, Ivy, VA 22945.

Monticello Bird Club  
P.O. Box 4362  
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Please visit our website at  
[www.ecoventures-travel.com/mbc](http://www.ecoventures-travel.com/mbc)

## Monticello Bird Club Board Members

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<b>Membership</b>	Robyn Kells	<a href="mailto:rkells@ntelos.net">rkells@ntelos.net</a>	970-1044
<b>Birdseed Sale</b>	Howard Davis	<a href="mailto:howardsuedavis@juno.com">howardsuedavis@juno.com</a>	964-1242

# Upcoming Spring Field Trips...Oh My!

## *Southeast Albemarle Wednesday, April 5*

Our first mid-week field trip was so successful; Stauffer Miller has offered to lead a second, a bit further afield. Meet at 7:30 am in the cemetery parking lot at the southeast corner of Red Hill (Rte 708) and Old Lynchburg (Rte 631) Roads, south of Exit 120 off I-64. We'll drive a loop, including Walnut Creek Park, walking as much as possible. Except for the park, this will be roadside birding. These are back roads, so there will be **no restroom facilities**. Contact leader Stauffer Miller at 434-296-5505 or [stauffer@seepub.com](mailto:stauffer@seepub.com).

## *"Birding Before Work" May 1-5*

During the first week in May, Monday through Friday, we will again be "Birding Before Work at Ivy Creek." Start your day off right with a one hour bird walk on a beautiful Spring morning. Meet at the Ivy Creek Natural Area parking lot at 7:00 am. Questions? Contact John Zimmerman at [Jozimmva@aol.com](mailto:Jozimmva@aol.com) or 434-974-9293.

## *Ivy Creek Natural Area Saturday, May 6*

Our First Saturday Bird Walk is an excellent way to introduce a friend to birding, brush up your own skills, or just enjoy a morning with the birds. Jim Nix will lead the group this month. Extra binoculars are available. Meet at 7:30 am in the parking lot of the Ivy Creek Natural Area. Contact leader Jim Nix at [jnix@cstone.net](mailto:jnix@cstone.net) or 434-980-7472.

## *Dragon Run Saturday, April 22*

What better way to celebrate Earth Day than in Dragon Run? **There are still slots available for this unique field trip.**

Dragon Run is a beautiful waterway on Virginia's Middle Peninsula forming the boundary line of Essex, King & Queen, Middlesex and Gloucester counties. It is a narrow river lined with cypress trees and deep swamps along most of its length, affording perfect habitat for a great variety of plants and animals. It will be the peak of migration time. Teta Kain will escort us down the river in kayaks (one person in each) provided by Friends of Dragon Run. It is not a strenuous trip, but for anyone not used to kayaks it can be tricky. Be prepared to get wet because spills can occur. Jenny Gaden will meet participants at the parking lot above Hardees on Pantops at 6:30 am. 10 people maximum. Registration for the trip is required by April 15. Call Jenny at 434-293-6275.



Majestic Bald Cypress at Dragon Run.  
Photo: [www.dragonrun.org/](http://www.dragonrun.org/)

## *Observatory Hill April 25 & April 27*

To take advantage of all those Spring migrants passing through, Dave Hogg will lead two weekday trips to that excellent migrant stopover point, Observatory Hill during the last week of April. Each walk will last one hour, starting at 7:00 am. Please meet and park in the NRAO Parking Lot, and we will carpool to the top of the hill to minimize congestion. Contact leader Dave Hogg at [dhogg@cv.nrao.edu](mailto:dhogg@cv.nrao.edu)

## *South River Falls Saturday, May 13*

John Zimmerman will lead this trip which will cover several different habitats. At least 10 species of warblers are possible including cerulean, Blackburnian, Canada, hooded, black-throated blue, chestnut-sided, and ovenbird. We might also spot Yellow-throated Vireo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Veery, and Scarlet Tanager. The trip is a moderately difficult climb - a 3.5 mile loop descending from an elevation of 2940' on Skyline Drive to 2120' at the brink of the falls through a second growth deciduous forest of oak, maple, hickory and patches of pine and back up to Skyline Drive. Meet at 6:15 am. parking lot of Giant, Seminole Square on Rte. 29. Will return to Seminole Square around noon. Contact leader John Zimmerman at 434-974-9293 or [jozimmva@aol.com](mailto:jozimmva@aol.com).

## *Cowbane Prairie/ Rte 610 Saturday, May 20*

Mark your calendars for this one!  
More information coming next month.

# Gardening for Wildlife: Cutleaf Staghorn Sumac

(Second of Two Parts)

**Cutleaf Staghorn Sumac.** There are two sophisticated cultivars of *Rhus typhina*, named 'Laciniata' and 'Dissecta.' They have been in cultivation for a long time but, apparently, grown only by an appreciative few. Like their parent species, they are tough-as-nails natives, drought-tolerant, pest-resistant and friendly to wildlife. 'Laciniata' leaves are finely "cut," giving a feathery textured look. 'Dissecta' leaves are even more deeply divided. The beautiful autumn color and rich red fruits are the principal attributes. This plant or giant shrub is never boring in the garden where space is not a problem. The Cutleaf Staghorn Sumac has the potential to grow over 20 feet in height with an even greater spread. It gradually forms a large dense grove.

One method of controlling the size and spread is to cut all or some of the stems to ground level in early spring before



Lacy leaved *Rhus typhina* 'Laciniata.'  
Photo: [www.bbg.org](http://www.bbg.org)

growth begins. Re-growth is vigorous. Another option for restricted areas is to encircle a selected group of plants with a foot deep aluminum root barrier. This enclosure fences in the sucker roots and, eventually, causes a "pot-bound" condition dwarfing the entire grouping. This option requires annual fertilizing and reasonably regular watering.

After about 10 years, the plants may show evidence of decline in vigor and appearance. Simply tear the shrub out, re-propagate from suckers, and begin again. Seedlings of 'Laciniata' and 'Dissecta' do not have the fern-like cut-leaved trait. Grow new plants from root cuttings or by digging up some of the abundantly produced "suckers" complete with roots.

—Bill Leaning

## MBC Minutes for March 9, 2006

President Jenny Gaden presided; 51 in attendance. New attendees included Ann Garrison and J. Wade, as well as Jim Shepherd with daughter Natalie, who just moved to Charlottesville.

**Treasurer's Report:** Bob Gilges said the club has a surplus of \$1,091, with \$14,284 in the bank. We have paid dues and made donations to the American Bird Conservancy, the Bird Conservation Alliance, and the Virginia Society of Ornithology. Bob also noted there is a new book by local naturalist Marlene Condon (see page 2).

**Field Trips:** John Zimmerman reviewed the upcoming March field trip to Lake Anna. May will be very busy.

**Nominations Committee:** Dede Austin reported that the treasurer's position has been filled but we still need a newsletter editor. (Job has since been filled.)

**Binocular Gathering:** Jenny Gaden proposed the club host a gathering to do a "show and tell" of members' binoculars and to assess what's available. Those attending would be able to try the various brands and decide what suits them best. The date is still to be determined.

**Announcements:** The ABC publishes information on migratory birds and hosts an event on the second Saturday of May. MBC participated in one of these events in 1996 and Jenny is hoping that the club will do so again in 2007.

**Bird Sightings:** Some members have gone to Dulles Airport to see the Snowy Owl. Dede Austin had a Carolina Wren without tail feathers at her feeder. Bob Gilges reported seeing a Wood Duck, Red-winged Blackbirds, Red-breasted Nuthatch, bluebirds, and a phoebe at his home. A female Baltimore Oriole was sighted in Earlysville and Mary at Wild Bird Crossing said she's been feeding a Baltimore Oriole oranges since November 10. Barb Fehse saw an immature Red-tail Hawk. Pam Howie showed a picture of an immature Red-tail on the side of I-64 eating a dead opossum. Many have had

sightings of Bald Eagles. The latest on the Rufus Hummingbird was reported. The bird has visited Paul Blair's feeder in Ruckersville since October 24, but is expected to be moving on soon. A massive flock of Turkey Vultures on Rte 29 North was mentioned. One member noted that he has not heard a Great Horned Owl all winter at his property in NW Albemarle County, but has seen woodcocks displaying. Bill Leaning has had a pair of Great Horned Owls at his home in Earlysville. Jenny then did a demonstration of the difference between the hoot of the male and female Great Horned Owl. Other significant sightings have included Pine Warblers, Pine Siskins, catbirds, meadowlarks, and Field Sparrows. Finally it was mentioned that a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers was seen at a feeder.

**The scheduled speaker,** Lou Verner, was ill and could not come. His presentation on bird-friendly backyards has been rescheduled for the October 12. Chris Pravena, with the Wildlife Center of Virginia in Waynesboro, gave a presentation about the Center's activities.

—Peggy Cornett, secretary