



Monticello Bird Club

December 2008

Volume 23, Number 4

December Meeting Topic:

Acorns, chipmunks and ground nesting birds

Our December speaker, Charles Ziegenfus, will talk about the distribution of Dark-eyed Juncos in North America and, in particular, the breeding biology of juncos at the higher elevations near the University of Virginia's Mountain Lake Biological Research Station, west of Blacksburg. Nesting success for ground nesting birds often fluctuates, sometimes dramatically from year to year. The presentation will focus attention on how the variability in mast crop (acorns) relates to rodent populations and the reproductive success of juncos.

Charles Ziegenfus is Professor Emeritus of Mathematics and Adjunct Professor Emeritus in Biology at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He has been a long time colleague of the Val Nolan and Ellen Ketterson (University of Indiana, Bloomington) research team at Mountain Lake Biological Research Station. He has also been a research colleague of Dan Cristol, College of William and Mary, for many years. During winter field work at Mountain Lake Biological Station he has studied

homing abilities as well as spatial memory capabilities of migratory and non-migratory juncos. He is currently doing winter population studies of White-throated Sparrows and juncos with several JMU students.

Please join MBC members and our speaker for dinner at Wild Greens Restaurant in the North Wing of Barracks Road Shopping Center on December 11th at 5:45 pm prior to the meeting.

Upcoming Meeting Topics

January 8th: Marc Puckett will present "The Bobwhites and the Bees"

February 12th: Bob Schamerhorn will present "Through The Camera's Lens"



Comments From the President

I have just returned from the bird club trip to Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel and Chincoteague, led by John Zimmerman. Eight of us from the club met at the entrance to the bridge-tunnel on the morning of November 20. A cold front had just moved in, and it was decidedly unpleasant for birding on the bridge-tunnel islands. Everyone was so bundled up, I scarcely recognized them. It wasn't just the birds donning winter plumage. Most interesting perhaps on the islands were several flocks of Snow Buntings, which swirled overhead in the icy gusts. Unfortunately, they remained aloft and never alit to give us a decent look.

Chincoteague was not much less cold and windy. Making up for that

were clouds of Snow Geese in the skies and sheets of them in the marshes. John Zimmerman enjoyed showing the group an Avocet in winter plumage. I liked hearing the sprightly song of a Fox Sparrow, a song I don't often hear, and identified by Mike Iwanik. Ellie and I rode with Betty and Joe Mooney. While Joe walked around the wildlife trail, Betty and I looked at and photographed thirteen species of waterfowl. If you want to learn to identify our web-footed friends, this is great place for it. In summary, 'twas a great trip and I thank John for making the arrangements.

Christmas counts are coming up. The Charlottesville count, which Jenny Gaden will co-ordinate, will be on De-

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Monticello Bird Club

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December 16th. At the center of the count circle is an area near Farmington Country Club, while Pantops, Red Hill, Crozet and areas north of Free Union mark its eastern, southern, western and northern boundary points respectively. Over fifteen parties will be counting the birds within this circle. At the end of the day we assemble at the house of Francis Fife and Nancy O'Brien to warm up, have some food, and tally what everybody saw.

Two other counts in our area are the Warren Count, in southern Albemarle and northern Buckingham Counties, and Big Flat in the mountainous region along and near southern Skyline Drive. The Warren count will be January 5th. I do not know the date of Big Flat. These counts are lot of fun, and I encourage participation. Get more details at the December meeting of the bird club.

Bruce Gatling-Austin, education co-ordinator of Ivy Creek, contacted

me about staging a binocular show and tell at Ivy Creek on December 6th. After some thought, we decided to put this off till April, when there might be a few more birds around and thus a little more incentive for birders to want to try looking through new binoculars. Good December birding to all.

-Stauffer Miller

Celebrate Some Holiday Cheer

Following the regular December 11th meeting, enjoy a bit of food and time with friends.

Consider bringing a holiday treat or a bird-related door prize. Our Hospitality Chair, Priscilla Kingston, will distribute door prizes.



Anecdote of the Sparrow

by Robert Pack

The modern house, with great glass eye,
 Stared like an idol at the sun.
 Such judgment singed the air that one
 Could almost hear the flowers cry
 Down in the garden below the glass:
 There the broken sparrow lay.
 What silent force will block our way
 Or smash us as we darkly pass
 On some bright noon, to seek a place?
 Prepare, since even gods are blind,
 For things unseen. Be of the kind;
 Or in the glass come see your face.



Bird Club Information

The Monticello Bird Club meets at 7:30 pm 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 January issue is December 20.** Please email information to Amy Gilmer at akgilmer@comcast.net or send to 2341 Highland Avenue, Charlottesville, VA 22903.

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 Please visit our website at
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Upcoming Field Trips

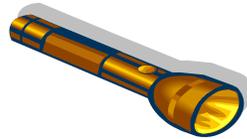
Canoe Trip on Beaver Creek Reservoir Sunday, December 7

Enjoy a Sunday canoe trip on Beaver Creek Reservoir. Canoes for 6 people will be provided. The first six people to call Leigh at 434-295-8241 will have a space. Do not show up if you do not have a space. But if you have canoes or kayaks, you are welcome to bring them and join the trip. Bring extra life vests if you have them. Paddles will be provided. A little canoeing experience would be helpful, but not required. **Meet at the Beaver Creek boat ramp at 8:00 am.** Leaders – Stauffer Miller (434-296-5505 or stauffer@scepub.com) and Leigh Surdukowski.

First Saturday Bird Walks At Ivy Creek Natural Area

On the first Saturday of each month the Monticello Bird Club hosts a bird walk at Ivy Creek Natural Area (ICNA) at 7:30 am. Each month a different walk leader takes groups on the trails to see the birds of ICNA. The walks start in the parking lot of ICNA.

FLASHLIGHTS: Don't forget to bring a flashlight to our monthly meetings to light your way from the Education Building to the parking lot!



Charlottesville Christmas Bird Count Sunday, December 14

On Sunday, December 14, the 84th Charlottesville Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will take place. We will join tens of thousands of other volunteers around the country who, over a three-week period, will head out before dawn in many cases armed with binoculars, telescopes, checklists, bird guides, cameras, hot coffee and bountiful snacks to spend the day counting birds. Everybody can do it – grandmothers, students, soccer moms and even hockey moms. They will be beginning birders or experienced scientists. All are welcome.

These Citizen Scientists are taking action for conservation. By participating in the National Audubon Society's CBC they help scientists understand how birds are faring amid unprecedented environmental challenges. The data they collect informs the world about the State of Birds, and provides the information we need to shape their future and ours. This is the 109th Christmas Bird Count.

Last year thousands of volunteers counted nearly 60 million birds across the Americas and beyond. Each count occurs in a designated circle, 15 miles in diameter, and is organized by a designated "compiler" – Jenny Gaden for the Charlottesville CBC.

If you are interested in participating in the count please let Jenny know (434 293-6275; jgaden@embarqmail.com). If you are an inexperienced birder you will be able to go along with a more experienced person. A potluck supper and tally will follow the count that evening.

VSO Virginia Beach Field Trip December 5-7, 2008

The Virginia Society of Ornithology's annual Virginia Beach Field Trip promises to be an exciting weekend. This year's trip features a Friday afternoon trip to the Whitehurst Tract, a visit to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel on Saturday, and a trip to the Back Bay NWR/False Cape State Park or Craney Island on Sunday.

The Howard Johnson at 1601 Atlantic Avenue, Virginia Beach, VA 23451 will serve as the field trip headquarters. Make reservations by November 7, 2008, specifying that you are with VSO. Oceanfront rooms will be available for \$45 plus tax. Call 757 437-9100 or 1 800 258-1878.

Friday Afternoon - Depart from the hotel at 1:00 pm for a visit to the Whitehurst Tract.

Friday Evening - Trip overview and light refreshments will be served at 6:30 pm at the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum.

Saturday Field Trip - A visit to the CBBT will leave at 8:00 am. This trip requires a fee of \$10 for the security guard and a completed security form submitted by Nov. 21, 2008.

Sunday Field Trips - Back Bay NWR/False Cape State Park tram trip will begin at 9:00 am. Craney Island trip will meet at Craney Island at 8:00 am.

For more information and to register contact Clark White at 757-875-7649, cwbirds@cox.net, or see <http://www.virginiabirds.net/>

MBC Minutes for November 13, 2008

Vice-President Jim Hill presided in Stauffer Miller's absence and welcomed 53 attendees. Visitors to the meeting included friends of MBC members John Zimmerman, Lou and Stephanie Tanner, and Jim Nix. The speaker, Teta Kain, was accompanied by her husband, and J. J., and a UVA student, returned.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Henry Konat was not present. Speaking in his absence, Jim Hill reported that there remained a number of invoices from the bird seed sale still to be paid. Jim reminded everyone to pay their 2008-2009 membership dues.

Birdseed Sale: Jim Hill thanked everyone who volunteered with the seed sale this year. Jim especially thanked Jim Nix for managing the details of the ordering spreadsheet. The total sales came to \$7,471; which is about \$200-\$300 above past sales, but there were eight fewer orders and about a ton less seed. Jim cited increase cost of seed as the primary reason for the reduction of orders. He noted, however, that the Augusta Bird Club did over \$20,000 in sales this season. After expenses are paid, our club will clear about \$1,430, which supports our monthly programs and donations to area schools, the Ivy Creek Foundation, and other organizations.

Field Trips: Field Trip report was given by John Zimmerman, who reminded members of the upcoming walk at Pen Park and the Rivanna River. Also upcoming, the annual trek to the Eastern Shore and Chesapeake Bay Bridge. John reported that the trip was fully registered. This year's Christmas Bird Count takes place December 14th and organizer Jenny Gaden needs more people to partici-

pate.

Annual Christmas Party will follow the December 11th meeting and members are encouraged to bring holiday edibles and items for the door prize drawings.

Recent Bird Sightings: Bird Sightings in recent weeks included a Northern Harrier spotted on the Hardware River. Jim and Carol Hill have watched a myriad of woodpeckers (Downy, Hairy, and Pileated) visiting their bird feeders. Ron Kingston has watched a Hermit Thrush and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Jenny Gaden reported an

unusual sighting made by Leah Surdukowski of a Le Conte's Sparrow in Crozet. Stauffer also photographed the bird. Jenny further noted observing large flocks of Bluebirds recently and Peggy Cornett mentioned that she has seen the same numbers at Tufton Farm.

-Peggy Cornett



Le Conte's Sparrow at Crozet is First Albemarle Record

On Election Day, November 4th, Leigh Surdukowski found an orangy-headed sparrow in tall grass at the edge of the pond at Old Trail Golf Course, Crozet. Later in the day, with other birders, she saw the sparrow again and was able to confirm it as a Le Conte's, a first for Albemarle County. I went to the site the morning of November 5th, saw the bird quite well and photographed it. The photograph shows the streaked nape, one of the more important field marks of the species.

The Le Conte's Sparrow nests in wet meadows, primarily in North Dakota, Minnesota and the Canadian prairies provinces, and winters in Texas and Louisiana. Apparently a small number migrate down the east coast, as in recent years a few have been found at the Chesapeake Bridge-Tunnel of Hampton Roads, about this time of year. Congratulations to Leigh for finding not only a first for the County, but also a beautiful and highly interesting little bird.



- Stauffer Miller