



# Monticello Bird Club

December 2014 Newsletter

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

Volume 29

Facebook: [Monticello Bird Club](https://www.facebook.com/MonticelloBirdClub)

Issue 4

## *MBC Monthly Meeting—Thursday, December 11th at 7:00pm*

*For our December meeting, attendees traditionally bring a food offering or a bird-related (gently-used is fine) door prize. After the meeting, we share the holiday goodies and raffle off the non-edible treats.*

*We hope you will join us for this **annual seasonal celebration!***

## Comments from the President

Doug Rogers

Last year I heard about the Northern Saw-whet Owl banding operation near Broadway, VA - north of Harrisonburg. I drove up there twice, only to have no owls caught either night. This year Joanne and I went to Harrisonburg, checked in to a B&B, had a nice dinner, and then drove to the owl banding station.

Dr. Clair Mellinger, a professor emeritus of Eastern Mennonite University, runs the banding operation. Dr. Mellinger taught botany, ecology, earth science and other courses. He chaired the biology department at EMU for a number of years. He is also an ornithologist, and in October and November of every year he spends as many night hours as possible at Highland Retreat, banding migrating Northern Saw-whet Owls.

Dr. Mellinger is a gracious host. He welcomes visitors of all ages, and a wide range of ages was present at the banding station when we arrived. Our arrival coincided with Dr. Mellinger's first foray to the mist nets of the evening. Joanne joined the group. They returned with a young female saw-whet owl that had been banded there just three days earlier.

Then we were treated to a discussion on how the birds are aged and sexed, details on the data that is collected, and detailed information on the Northern Saw-whet Owl species. These tiny owls are found year round on their breeding grounds to the North and West, but some venture south during the winter months; and, according to Dr. Mellinger, there is a small breeding population of saw-whets in the mountains of Virginia and western North Carolina.

If you plan to visit the Highland Retreat banding station, I suggest you contact Dr. Mellinger (540-433-1752 or [mellinac@emu.edu](mailto:mellinac@emu.edu)) to ensure that he will be banding on the night of your trip. This was our first time seeing this species. It was a great evening and well worth the trip to Harrisonburg!



Northern Saw-whet Owl  
Photo by Doug Rogers

## Speaker of the Month: Elizabeth Evans on Monarch Butterflies

Stauffer Miller



Monarch Butterfly  
Richiebits  
Wikimedia Commons

Elizabeth Evans of the Loudoun County Wildlife Conservancy in northern Virginia will be with us December 11th to talk about Monarch Butterflies. She will speak about the remarkable life cycle of Monarchs, their threats and perils, and ways the public can help protect them. Elizabeth has also been in the mountains of central Mexico where the Monarchs winter and will discuss that aspect of their existence. As is well known, Monarch populations have been on a decline, so this is a timely talk. When not volunteering with the Conservancy, Elizabeth is a teacher at Purcellville in the Loudoun County school system.

As is our custom, we take speakers out to dinner. However, Elizabeth is unable to make it for dinner, so there will be no speaker dinner on December 11th. See you instead at Ivy Creek.

Looking ahead to January of 2015, our speaker on January 8th will be Suzanne Shoemaker, who will talk about the biology of the Screech Owl, the small owl that is fairly common around this area.

## Birding Tidbits

...about a bird you might find on the Bird Walk at Ivy Creek in December  
by Jenny Gaden

### Red-shouldered Hawk

Eating habits of birds can be both predictable and surprising. I am thinking of experiences that I have witnessed and heard about with the Red-shouldered Hawk. This buteo, a bird with wide wings designed for soaring, is a common resident of this area, with a particular liking for wet, rather than dry woods. I have seen them lifting off from the ground carrying a long snake in their talons, and watched one by a stream bank as it bent over a turtle, working to extract its flesh. Other denizens of wetter areas such as frogs, toads, and crayfish are typical of their diet. The Red-shouldered Hawk is a "perch and pounce" species; it often sits quietly on a branch and drops down on prey that wanders into its territory. Sometimes, however, opportunistic as all birds of prey are, it will fly into feeder areas in an attempt to snag an unsuspecting diner.



Red-shouldered Hawk  
Photo by Jenny Gaden

Most surprising to me, was the hawk that turned up at my suet feeder in 2011. Over a period of several days it returned repeatedly to the Serviceberry (Amelanchier) tree in my front yard to cling upside down on the wire feeder and tear at the beef fat. The photograph nicely shows the adult field marks with orange barring on its underside, and wide black and white bands on the tail. Not visible is the red shoulder patch on the upper side of the wings.

## First Saturday Bird Walk

December 7th at 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 - Fall 2014

Sept 6....Tom Jones

Oct. 4 Leigh Surdukowski

Nov. 1 ... Stauffer Miller

**Dec. 6 ... Dave Hogg**

For information about opportunities and events at Ivy Creek Natural Area, follow this link to the [Ivy Creek Foundation Public Program Calendar](#).



## Field Trips

Organized by Gabriel Mapel



## Christmas Bird Count

**Date:** Sunday, December 14th

**Meeting Place & Time:** Arrange with your individual Team Leader

**Charlottesville CBC Compiler:** Jenny Gaden  
[jengaden@gmail.com](mailto:jengaden@gmail.com)  
434-293-6275

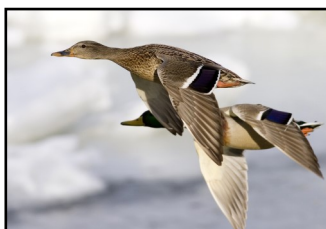
Refer to Jenny Gaden's full article on the Christmas Bird Count ([page 3](#)) to learn how to become part of a local CBC team and participate in this important national, annual event.

## Western Albemarle County

**Date:** Saturday, December 20th

**Meeting Place & Time:** 7:30am  
Harris Teeter Parking Lot  
Route 250, Crozet

**Leader:** Leigh Surdukowski  
[lsurdukowski@gmail.com](mailto:lsurdukowski@gmail.com)  
434-295-8241



Leigh will lead us on a tour of some of the lakes and ponds of western Albemarle County. We will be looking for incoming winter birds, particularly sparrows and perhaps ducks.

# CBC — The Christmas Bird Count

by Jenny Gaden

The 2014 Charlottesville Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will take place on Sunday, December 14. We will join tens of thousands of other volunteers around the country who, from December 14 to January 5, will count the number of individuals of each species they observe on one day during that period. The day can begin before dawn and continue until dark. The CBC, run by the National Audubon Society, began in 1900.

All levels of birders, from beginners to professional scientists, participate in the count. These citizen scientists are taking action for conservation. For a wealth of information about the history, data collection, and importance of the CBC, follow this link to the [Audubon website](#).

Each count occurs in a designated circle 15 miles in diameter, and is organized by a "compiler," who is Jenny Gaden for the Charlottesville CBC. Those interested in participating should let Jenny know (434-293-6275; [jengaden@gmail.com](mailto:jengaden@gmail.com)). Everyone is welcome – newcomers, inexperienced or experienced birders. All will join one of the already-established teams. Participants should be prepared for the weather; if it's cold bring hand and foot warmers, snacks, lunch, and hot drinks and/or water. If it is raining, dress accordingly. By all means, bring a camera to support your case, should you spot a rare bird.

A potluck gathering will follow the count at the home of Nancy O'Brien and Francis Fife. Directions will be available through the team leaders.

## Treasurer's Notes

by Maynard K. Davis



November marked the conclusion of the Bird Seed Sale, our major fundraiser for the year. We sold over \$9,700 in seed, just short of our \$10,000 goal. Profit was \$1,874 — \$257 under our budget goal. There were 109 customers, up 20 from last year. Sales set a new record. We are grateful to the Bird Seed Sale Team and to all our club members who helped make our fundraiser a success.

*Maynard*

## Membership Notes

by Lesslie Crowell



MBC nears the end of its fall membership drive with a total of 138 members, 17 of whom are new.

Please welcome Kristin Glover and Lenore Savage, who most recently joined. Thank you to all who renewed or upgraded their memberships, especially our generous Contributors and Sponsors! Your support enables us to provide a great speaker series as well as programs and activities that benefit birds and birders.

*Lesslie*

## MBC Minutes, November 13, 2014

Submitted by Peggy Cornett, Secretary



President Doug Rogers opened the meeting with a PowerPoint on the Bird Seed Sale results. We sold 6.5 tons of seed, 62 cases of suet, and thirteen cedar Bluebird houses.. Members of the Bird Seed Sale team—Maynard Davis, Jenny Gaden, Lesslie Crowell, John Holden, Joanne Bricker, Lou Tanner, Jon Rockett, Stacey Aikman, Tom Leback, and Janet Paisley—were recognized, and those present stood for applause.

-There were **52 attending the meeting**, including a number of visitors who were welcomed: Graham and Jane Fallon (recently moved here from Baltimore); Nancy and Jeff Wallace, and a couple from Madison. Daryll and Jackie Marshall (from Seattle) and Guy and Susan Babineau are new members.

-Several members **recently sighted** Red-headed Woodpeckers in various locations, including Ragged Mountain Natural Area. Dan Bieker mentioned that they prefer mature oak forests with an open, grassy floor. John Holden requested help in identifying birds at Jackson Via school.

-Carol Hill passed around a dead Flicker that had flown into her window. Jenny Gaden recommended Wild Birds Unlimited and the American Bird Conservancy as sources for reflectors and items to hang in windows to deter birds. Follow this link to read about [specific ideas from ABC to prevent bird/window collisions](#).

-The **Field Trips report** was given by Doug for Gabriel Mapel. He thanked trip leaders, including Dave Hogg, who reported 15 species at Secluded Farm; and Gabriel Mapel, who led 27 birders (including 9 from the Blue Ridge Young Birds Club) on a walk at Crozet and recorded 40 species. Leigh Surdukowski's recent walk on the Rivanna Trail in Belvedere recorded 29 species and included nonstop calling Blue Jays. Stauffer Miller is leading a walk at Panorama Farm and Gabriel will be at Riverview Park, November 15.

-Jenny Gaden made an announcement about the upcoming **Christmas Bird Count** on December 14. There are 20 teams and the count takes place rain or shine. (See Jenny's article above.)

The late Nancy King, a sorely missed friend and enthusiastic gardener, was a frequent visitor to "Omanu," which we named our Earlsyville property in the early years of our Gardening for Wildlife project, started in the spring of 1998. Nancy took over the role of Newsletter Editor for the Monticello Bird Club and asked me if I would submit some articles to the Newsletter on the plantings in our wild garden. This I did some ten or more years ago.

I thought it might interest MBC members who have joined the club more recently, to reissue some of these articles edited with experience updates and, of course, where possible, pictures of the bird visitors enjoying the fruits of our very pleasant labor. The initial criteria were to plant natives or garden cultivars of natives as well as non-invasive, non-native shrubs or trees with nuts, fruits or berries that would attract the birds.

## That Other Holly: *Ilex verticillata*

Common Winterberry is a deciduous native holly found from southern Maine to Georgia. It is sometimes known as Winterberry Holly, Northern Holly or Swamp Holly. In the wild, Common Winterberry is found throughout the Northeast on wet soils near swamps and ponds or in wet woods. Best growth is in full sun or partial shade. I have several specimens growing well in shady locations, but they do not fruit as heavily as those in full sun. Winterberry Holly prefers acid soils with fairly high organic content.

Male and female plants should flower simultaneously and preferably be located within 40 feet of each other for best cross-pollination and berry production. Male flowers are borne in clusters and female flowers are borne singly or in smaller clusters, depending on the cultivar or variety. Flowering can vary from late May to late June, with berries showing their wonderful red color from August on. Berries will persist into the winter and provide a valuable food source for fruit-eating birds.

One of the best cultivars of Winterberry Holly is Winter Red, and I have at least eight specimens in the wild garden on Omanu. Most of these I grew inside a deer-proof fence for the first three years, deliberately pruning them to be five to six feet tall before planting them out in the hedgerow and in groups. Deer browsing is, now, not preventing fruiting in the top one third of the bushes. Winter Red will grow to about eight feet high and wide at maturity.

Over the intervening years since planting the original nursery grown Winter Red specimens, I have nurtured numerous seedlings, the females of which are now fruiting throughout the property, much to the birds' enjoyment. If deer are not a problem, you can keep the Winterberry Holly fairly compact. I, on the other hand, have to let my specimens grow tall enough that deer browse does not interfere with fruiting.

I also have several specimens of Maryland Beauty, a prolific but smaller fruiting variety. Apollo and Southern Gentleman are the preferred males for Winter Red and Maryland Beauty.

Birds that we have observed feeding on berries at Omanu:

Northern Mockingbird, Gray Catbird, American Robin, Hermit Thrush, Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing.



Other birds reported by the National Wildlife Federation as feeding on hollies:

Ring-necked Pheasant, Mourning Dove, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eastern Phoebe, American Crow, Brown Thrasher, Wood Thrush, Swainson's Thrush, Veery, White-eyed Vireo, Red-winged Blackbird, Northern Cardinal, Purple Finch, Eastern Towhee and White-throated Sparrow.

## Well-deserved Recognition for Mo Stevens

by Peggy Cornett

At the November 12th meeting of the Charlottesville Board of Supervisors, MBC Lifetime Member Charles E. "Mo" Stevens was honored with a commendation for his significant contributions to the knowledge of natural history, botany, and ornithology in this region. Mo tabulated the first Checklist of the Birds of Albemarle County and started the Christmas Bird Counts. He contributed 25,000 pressed herbarium specimens to Longwood College. He kept meticulous records of first bird sightings, and Dan Bieker stated that he always called on Mo when tracking the earliest dates. The Proclamation, made by members of the Albemarle Natural Heritage Committee, read as follows:



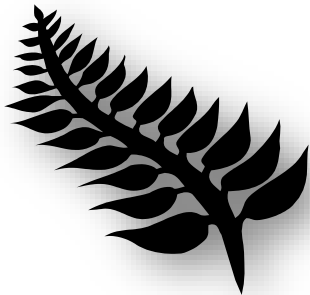
**Whereas** Charles E. "Mo" Stevens has made many significant contributions to ornithology in Albemarle County, including his annotated checklist of birds of Albemarle County, which was a "milestone in the ornithological history of Albemarle County" [*The Birds of Albemarle County and Charlottesville Virginia: An Annotated Checklist*, compiled and edited by Jennifer Gaden, David Hogg, Stauffer Miller, Jim Nix, Brenda Tekin, and John Zimmerman | First edition, September 2010];

**Whereas** he made remarkably extensive discoveries in botany in Albemarle and throughout the state, and added over 25,000 specimens to the Longwood Herbarium (now the Harvill-Stevens Herbarium) and was a significant contributor to the recently published *Flora of Virginia* [Alan S. Weakley, J. Christopher Ludwig, and John F. Townsend; Bland Crowder, editor | BRIT Press, Fort Worth | 2002];

**Whereas** his participation with the Biodiversity Workgroup, as well as his explorations and remarkably extensive notes, have been invaluable to the County by documenting many of our most special places and species;

**Whereas** he served as a mentor to some of the Commonwealth's most respected field scientists;

**Therefore**, let it be known that the Board of Supervisors recognizes and honors the considerable life achievements of Charles E. "Mo" Stevens as a citizen scientist and naturalist who has greatly deepened our understanding of the natural world in Albemarle County and the Commonwealth of Virginia.



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**Monticello Bird Club**  
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Visit our website at  
[www.monticellobirdclub.org](http://www.monticellobirdclub.org)  
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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