



Monticello Bird Club

March 2006

Volume 20, Number 7

March Meeting Topic

Create a Bird-Friendly Backyard

Sad but true, many of our native Virginia wildlife species are in decline, and loss of habitat is a primary factor. On March 9, Lou Verner will review the critical components of habitat required by all species and discuss simple but effective ways you can provide or improve habitat for songbirds, butterflies, and other wildlife in your own backyard.

Mr. Verner is the Wildlife Mapping Coordinator for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Watchable Wildlife Program. He received advanced degrees from Michigan State University and the University of Illinois. Prior to coming to Virginia, Mr. Verner was an Urban Wildlife Biologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife in the Dallas area.

In addition to his work as Coordinator of the Wildlife Mapping Program, Mr.



MBC March Speaker, Lou Verner

Verner is also involved with the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail, the nation's first statewide program linking wildlife-viewing sites throughout the Commonwealth. He is especially concerned with the effects of urbanization on wildlife.

Please join our speaker for dinner at Wild Greens Restaurant in Barracks Road North Shopping Center at 5:30 pm prior to the meeting.

Mark Calendars for Future Meetings

April 13: Teta Kain

Teta Kain has researched the history of Christmas Bird Counts in Virginia and will relate some interesting tidbits about the birds, people and places from the past century of Xmas bird counts.

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

Recipe for a successful potluck supper: You bring a favorite dish. You sample the special dishes of others. Conversation flows. Everyone has a fine time.

Comments From the President

The magical time of the year is almost upon us. Spring migration will be underway before the end of the month and reach its peak in late April and early May. There are two events that I encourage you to attend if you wish to experience the joy of birding in new environs with people who share your passion. The first is the annual meeting of the Virginia Society of Ornithology. This year it takes place May 5-7 at the Breaks Interstate Park in the mountains of southwest Virginia. There will be lots of field trips and the birds you can expect to see will be Cerulean, Golden-winged and Swainson's warblers and many more. The banquet speaker on Saturday night is Don Kroodsma, author of *The Singing Life of Birds*. Annual meetings are great fun and very welcoming to newcom-

ers. You do not have to be a member of VSO to attend. For more information: <http://www.bcpnet.org/birdclub/VSO.htm>

The second event is the Mountain Lake Migratory Bird Festival, May 19-21. It takes place at the Mountain Lake Hotel in Giles County. This is the second year of the festival. In 2005 it was a whopping success and the organizers say it will be even better this year. If you are unable to attend the VSO annual meeting you will probably be able to see many of the same birds two weeks later in Giles County. Beside bird walks they offer

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Monticello Bird Club

Unique Bluebird Box Solution May Solve Predator Problems

Bluebird boxes are often the victims of predators, both four-legged and slithering. Brenda Tekin forwarded the following readers submission to BIRDS & BLOOMS that may interest those with bluebird boxes. It's timely and cheap advice!

"I used to have trouble with snakes entering my bluebird house and destroying the eggs, until I came up with a solution that's simple and inexpensive. I went to a hardware store and purchased several 3-foot sections of wooden carpet strips--the kind with multiple wire nails sticking out of them. Then I attached the strips to the post supporting the birdhouse. No more snakes! The spiky strips discourage four-legged nest box invaders as well, including pesky raccoons. Our support post is metal, so I attached the carpet strips with wire. If your birdhouse is on a wooden post, you can simply nail the strips in place."

Geri Balanag, St. Louis, Missouri



Eastern Bluebird. Photo by: Robert Herron at www.ascabird.org

Brenda Tekin's Observation:
If you've never come into contact with these strips, I can attest it can be a nasty encounter. Cost-wise, I believe this is a lot cheaper than most baffles.

—Brenda Tekin

Bird Notes & News...

NEWEST MEMBERS

Please say hello to our newest club members!

Barbara Grzymala, Keswick

Polly Haynes, Scottsville

Elizabeth Mathias, Charlottesville

Stauffer & Ellie Miller, Charlottesville

Bonnie Sexton, Gordonsville

NATURAL HISTORY DAY

Mark your calendars for Ivy Creek's Natural History Day -- scheduled for Sunday, April 30 from 1-3pm at the Ivy Creek Natural Area. Lots of environmental groups will be there and the Virginia Native Plant Society will have its famous wildflower sale.

WANTED

MBC NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Qualifications: Sense of humor, a few hours each month, a computer.

Contact Nancy King for information.
"It's really easy," she says.

Bird Club Key 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 April issue is March 27.** Please email information to Nancy King at turnermtn@mindspring.com or send to P.O. Box 22, Ivy, VA 22945.

Monticello Bird Club
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Please visit our website at
www.ecoventures-travel.com/mbc

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Publicity	Ellen Dudley	emdudley@nexet.net	244-2688
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Membership	Robyn Kells	rkells@ntelos.net	970-1044
Birdseed Sale	Howard Davis	howardsuedavis@juno.com	964-1242

Spring Field Trips Travel Near and Far

North of Charlottesville Wednesday, March 8

Take a mid-week break for a little birding just north of Charlottesville. Stauffer Miller will lead an early Spring foray along some back roads for a few hours of roadside birding. This will be an easy trip. **Meet at McDonalds across from Hollymead Town Center, Route 29 North in Charlottesville at 8:00 am.** Questions? Contact Stauffer Miller at 964-1365 or stauffer@seepub.com.



Washington Post photo (L) from 2/3/06 of birders scoping out the Snowy Owl visiting Dulles Airport. The owl (L), alas is not the *actual* Dulles bird.



Lake Anna Saturday, March 18

Waterfowl will be our goal on this mid-March trip to Lake Anna. Mark Adams will lead the group. **Meet at the parking lot above Hardee's at Pantops at 6:15 am.** We'll check out a few sites at the lake and nearby areas as we enjoy a full day of birding. We anticipate returning by late afternoon. Pack a lunch, water and snacks. Questions? Please contact Mark at mtadams@nrao.edu or 434-245-2250.

Dragon Run Saturday, April 22

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. **Ten people maximum. Registration for the trip is required by April 15.** Call Jenny at 434-293-6275.

MBC Minutes for February 9, 2006

President Jenny Gaden presided; 50 attended. Newcomers were recognized: including Mary Walker (a former volunteer trail guide at ICNA), Drew Johnson (a UVA graduate student who is new to the area) and D. K. Feldman.

Special Anniversary Announcement: This meeting marks the 20th anniversary of the Monticello Bird Club. Some founding members were cited, including Theresa Shaner and Leigh Surdukowski. The first meeting was held at Stonehenge and, through the years, the meetings were held at various sites, including the Prism Coffee House, the library, and NRAO (national radio and astrological observatory) building before moving to the Ivy Creek Natural Area's education building. A delicious Chandler's Bakery carrot

cake, decorated with a picture of a mockingbird, was served to celebrate our 20th birthday.

Treasurer's Report: Bob Gilges reported that 20 delinquent members have rejoined. Income for the period was \$1,395 over expenses and the club has \$14,588 in the bank. Bob will be stepping down as treasurer at the end of his term this year and he made an appeal for members interested in taking over his position to contact the nominating committee.

Nominating Committee: Dede Austin is chair of this committee and she reminded members that the newsletter editor, Nancy King, is also stepping down at the end of her term. The remaining board members will continue.

Field Trips: John Zimmerman and Jenny Gaden gave details for the upcoming field trips in February and March. John also mentioned that he will be co-leader of a birding excursion being planned by naturalist Doug Coleman of

the Wintergreen Nature Foundation. The trip will take in the tall grass prairie of the Prairie National Park near Kansas City, Missouri, June 6-13, 2006. Contact Doug Coleman at 434-325-7453.

Announcements: Jenny had available copies of *The Raven*, the newsletter for the American Birding Association, information on a nature camp for young people in West Virginia, and the Bird Conservation magazine.

Jenny also gave an update on the recent message email from the American Bird Conservancy urging for a moratorium on horseshoe crab harvesting to help prevent the extinction of the Red Knot *rufa* subspecies. Legislation was introduced by Delegate H. Morgan Griffith (R) to declare a moratorium on landings or importation of horseshoe crabs in Virginia until the Red Knot subspecies reaches its target population of 240,000 birds. Unfortunately, the bill was not passed at this time. For more information, log on to www.abcbirds.org.

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Gardening for Wildlife: Staghorn Sumac

(Part One of Two Parts)

The species *Rhus typhina* is native to the Northeastern United States and Southern Canada. Staghorn Sumac is the easiest of our native trees to identify in the winter. Usually found as a thicket of 10 to 15 feet high, leafless vertical branches topped with reddish "candles." Up close these "candles" turn out to be clusters of hairy dark red berries closely packed into ten inch upright cone-like panicles. Individual branches resemble the "horns" of a male deer or stag, hence the name. The velvety surface of the upper branches (in contrast to Smooth Sumac, *Rhus glabra*) is said to resemble the appearance of newly emerged deer antlers before the "velvet" is worn off.

Staghorn Sumac is easily transplanted and adapted to many soil types. It thrives in places where the soil is too thin or too dry for larger forest trees. It often occu-



Staghorn Sumac, leaves (l) and candles (r).
Photo: www.wsu.edu

save these shrubs for bluebird winter feed." Imagine my chagrin when I visited "Omanu" to check on construction progress to find my sumac colony bush-hogged to the ground. The builder commented, "I thought I would do you a favor and clear out these scruffy looking trees!" All was not lost, however, as I read that all you need to do to rejuvenate a straggly looking clump of sumac is to cut it to the ground in late winter. I now have a healthy 6-foot stand of sumac from the root suckers.

Sumac is most often viewed as a "weed" and cut down. It really is a valuable native shrub with spectacular autumn foliage and striking red seed heads that stand out vividly against a background of winter snows. Close to a hundred bird species have been recorded feeding on sumac including Bluebirds, American Robins, Gray Catbirds, Wild Turkeys, Northern Cardinals, and Hermit Thrushes. Sumac is a good winter food because the seeds are very persistent and are available even late in the winter. The birds resort to sumac seeds after all other fleshy fruits are consumed. If you have limited space, try it as a specimen shrub to be cut back to the ground annually.

—Bill Leaning

President's Message

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butterfly, wildflower, geology and moth walks in addition to raft trips, a bat demonstration and an optics workshop – and lots more. It's really a celebration of nature in the springtime. For more information: www.mountainlakebirding.com

Jennifer Gaden, president



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Backyard Bird Count: Members are encouraged to take part in the 9th Annual Backyard Bird Count, February 17-20, sponsored by the National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology. For more information, contact www.audubon.org.

Rappahannock Group: Members of the Rappahannock Bird Club are seeking help from MBC members for individuals interested in leading a bird walk or giving a program/presentation for their group. Contact Jenny Gaden for more information.

Club Sponsored Bird Feeding Kit: Jenny reported that the club has received several thank-you notes from students at Stone Robinzon Elementary who received the bird feeding kit provided by MBC.

Notable Bird Sightings: There was much discussion about the two-year-old female Rufous Hummingbird that has been visiting Paul Blair's feeder in Ruckersville every day throughout the winter. It is believed the bird, which is banded, will fly west after March 1. A Sandhill Crane was seen south of Stuart's Draft.

—Reggy Cornett, secretary