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.

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-
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

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.

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.
**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@seepub.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!

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**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.

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**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, ewbirds@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 wel-
comed 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. Speak-
ing in his absence, Jim Hill reported that there remained a number of in-
voices from the bird seed sale still to be paid. Jim reminded everyone to
pay their 2008-2009 membership dues.

Birdseed Sale: Jim Hill thanked eve-
ryone 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, how-
ever, that the Augusta Bird Club did
ever $20,000 in sales this season. Af-
fer expenses are paid, our club will
clear about $1,430, which supports
our monthly progrmas and donations
to area schools, the Ivy Creek Foun-
dation, and other organizations.

Field Trips: Field Trip report was
given by John Zimmerman, who re-
minded 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-

Annual Christmas Party will fol-
low 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 wood-
peckers (Downy, Hairy, and
Pileated) visiting their bird feeders.
Ron Kingston has watched a Her-
mint Thrush and Yellow-bellied Sap-
sucker. Jenny Gaden reported an
unusual sighting made by Leah Sur-
dukowski of a Le Conte’s Sparrow in Crozet. Stauffer also photographed
the bird. Jenny further noted observ-
ing 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 spe-
cies.

The Le Conte's Sparrow nests in wet
meadows, primarily in North Dakota, Minne-
sota 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

Le Conte’s Sparrow at Crozet is First Albemarle Record