



# Monticello Bird Club

November 2006

Volume 21, Number 3

## November Meeting Topic: *Volunteering on Bird Projects*

Sandra Breil retired from Longwood College after teaching biology there for 30 years. Dr. Breil is far from your average retiree, she regularly travels the world volunteering for Earthwatch Institute, a non-profit organization that offers people the opportunity to do scientific research around the world on projects that support environmental sustainability. Dr. Breil will share some of her experiences volunteering on bird projects.

Originally from the Northeast, Dr. Breil has spent the last 40 years living in Farmville, Virginia. She became interested in birds at a very young age. Her mother would read the bird book to her when she was still too young to read. She considers herself more of a "bird watcher" rather than a birder, as she rarely goes chasing after birds but enjoys being able to identify what she sees. Since her expeditions take her far and wide, she

has assembled a large collection of bird books from all over the world.

Please join MBC members and our speaker for dinner at Wild Greens Restaurant in the North Wing of Barracks Road Shopping Center on November 9th at 5:30 pm prior to the meeting.

## Upcoming Meeting Topics

**December 14:** Faren Wolter, Piedmont Environmental Council, will discuss habitat enhancement for the Piedmont.

**January 11:** Aimee Weldon will speak on the Important Bird Area program through Audubon.

**February 8:** Ken Klotz will speak on Birding Guyana: The New Frontier.

## *Comments From the President*

On a splendid October morning a few weeks ago four members of the Monticello Bird Club set off on one of the club's field trips to visit Stauffer Miller's marsh just over the state border in West Virginia. On our way we stopped at Sky Meadows State Park in Loudon County, VA. We knew of this place because one of us had consulted Discover Our Wild Side, the Mountain Area – a free publication put out by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF). It is one of three books that describe the sites along the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail, the other two covering the Coastal and Piedmont areas. The book said that Red-headed Woodpeckers, along with other special species, might be seen there.

As we were leaving the beautiful park we stopped to inspect a grove of oaks edged with several locust snags. We thought this looked like a suitable place to find Red-headed Woodpeckers. We were right. Within moments we glimpsed in the foliage a woodpecker-type bird with a smoky-brown

head and white belly. We recognized this as a young bird in immature plumage. Seconds later an adult with its scarlet head, white underparts and black and white wings landed on a branch of a dead locust. The adult worked a spot on the branch with its bill and then flew back into the oaks and out of sight. Moments later it returned to the locust branch carrying a nut in its bill, and appeared to pound the nut into the branch. We watched the birds for about twenty minutes during which time the adult made several forays, seeking food in the oak trees and caching it in the locust snags. The young bird also moved back and forth between the interior of the grove and the snags on the edge but appeared to be less industrious in its pursuits.

The Red-headed Woodpecker is one of only 4 woodpeckers world-wide that commonly stores food. It isn't always nuts. Sometimes it's insects. It was a thrilling experience and we can thank VDGIF for pointing us in the right direction.

- Jennifer Gaden, president

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## Monticello Bird Club

### MBC Minutes for October 12, 2006

President Jenny Gaden presided over the meeting and welcomed newcomers. There were 43 attending.

**Treasurer's Report:** Henry Konat reported that we have orders for \$4,000 worth of bird seed to date. Only 34% of the membership has renewed for the coming year. The club has \$16,340 in the bank. We just purchased a new Power-Point Projector for programs but have not yet purchased a laptop computer.

**Field Trips:** John Zimmerman gave a preview of upcoming field trips and referred to the newsletter for more details. He mentioned the "Sparrow Road" hike and Jenny Gaden's walk on the Pen Park Nature Trail, scheduled for November 11. Registration for the Chincoteague trip reached the minimum required for visiting the CBBT islands.

**Bird Seed Sale:** Currently there are orders for 6,174 pounds of seed, which is still well below last year's total of 18,000 pounds. We have orders also for 6 blue bird houses and 7 bird feeders. Members were reminded that the deadline for ordering is October 19<sup>th</sup>. Howard Davis

was not present and Jim Hill was taking orders and signing up volunteers to help with the sale.

**Christmas Bird Count:** Jenny reported that the bird count has been scheduled for Sunday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, with a warm-up count set for December 9<sup>th</sup>. All are welcome to participate, even inexperienced birders.

**Announcements:** The annual meeting of the Bird Conservation Alliance takes place in Arlington, Virginia, November 16<sup>th</sup> at The Nature Conservancy's world headquarters. Jenny Gaden plans to attend this all-day event and welcomes any who would like to join her. Peggy Cornett mentioned that Monticello's manager of the Thomas Jefferson Parkway on Route 53 is interested in having organized bird walks on the trail and would like to have help in creating a comprehensive listing of birds sited. If anyone is interested in helping to organize and participate in this project, please contact Peggy at [pcornett@monticello.org](mailto:pcornett@monticello.org) or 434-984-9816.

**Bird Sightings:** Bill Leaning has noted a Screech Owl, Barred Owl, and Great Horned Owl on his property. Jenny Gaden saw Ruby-crowned Kinglets and also found a Black-throated Blue Warbler that was killed by a win-

dow near the Afton Mountain overlook. Blue Birds and immature Sapsuckers have been seen by a number of members. Dark-eyed Juncos have been spotted in Scottsville and at Afton Mountain. Two Ospreys were seen on the Rivanna River at Free Bridge. Two Pied-billed Grebes were spotted at Chris Greene Lake.

- Peggy Cornett, secretary



Photo by Brenda Tekin.

This beautiful immature male Ruby-throated Hummingbird was still actively feeding at Brenda Tekin's feeder as of October 25<sup>th</sup>. In addition to the feeder, the hummingbird has been feeding on her Pineapple Sage, which is still blooming.

### 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 December issue is November 25.** Please email information to Amy Gilmer at [akgilmer@adelphia.net](mailto:akgilmer@adelphia.net) or send to 3166 Welsh Run Road, Ruckersville, VA 22968.

#### Monticello Bird Club

P.O. Box 4362

Charlottesville, Virginia 22905

Please visit our website at  
[www.ecoventures-travel.com/mbc](http://www.ecoventures-travel.com/mbc)

### Monticello Bird Club Board Members

<b>President</b>	Jennifer Gaden	<a href="mailto:jgaden@earthlink.net">jgaden@earthlink.net</a>	293-6275
<b>Vice President</b>	Jim Hill	<a href="mailto:jimcarhill@adelphia.net">jimcarhill@adelphia.net</a>	975-6523
<b>Secretary</b>	Peggy Cornett	<a href="mailto:pcornett@monticello.org">pcornett@monticello.org</a>	984-9816
<b>Treasurer</b>	Henry Konat	<a href="mailto:henryk54@verizon.net">henryk54@verizon.net</a>	540-948-4771
<b>Field Trips</b>	John Zimmerman	<a href="mailto:jozimmva@earthlink.net">jozimmva@earthlink.net</a>	974-9293
<b>Speakers</b>	Pat Wilczek	<a href="mailto:patwilczek@earthlink.net">patwilczek@earthlink.net</a>	985-4444
<b>Publicity</b>	Ellen Dudley	<a href="mailto:emdudley@nexet.net">emdudley@nexet.net</a>	244-2688
<b>Hospitality</b>	Priscilla Kingston	<a href="mailto:kingston@cstone.net">kingston@cstone.net</a>	293-5173
<b>Newsletter</b>	Amy Gilmer	<a href="mailto:akgilmer@adelphia.net">akgilmer@adelphia.net</a>	825-2170
<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 Field Trips

### Pen Park Nature Trail Saturday, November 11

Join Jenny Gaden for an easy 3 mile hike on the Pen Park Nature Trail. **Meet at 7:30 am by Shelter #2 in the Pen Park picnic area.** Questions? Contact Jenny Gaden at 434-293-6275.

### Northeast Albemarle Loop Wednesday, November 15

Stauffer Miller will lead us on this loop through northeastern Albemarle County on Burley Station Road, Route 640, visiting a large bottom-land basin and returning via Route 20 and Proffit Road. **Meet in the parking lot at Forest Lakes Food Lion at 8 am.** We will return to the Food Lion about noon. Questions? Contact Stauffer Miller at 434-296-5505 or [stauffer@scepub.com](mailto:stauffer@scepub.com)

### VSO Virginia Beach Field Trip December 1-3

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 on Sunday. The Howard Johnson will serve as the field trip headquarters. Make reservations by November 18, 2006, specifying that you are with VSO. Call 757-437-9100 or 800-258-1878. For more information and to register contact Clark White at 757-875-7649, [cwbirds@cox.net](mailto:cwbirds@cox.net), or see [http://www.virginiabirds.net/trips/VA\\_Beach\\_06.htm](http://www.virginiabirds.net/trips/VA_Beach_06.htm)

### Chincoteague NWR & Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel November 17-19

Join field trip leader, John Zimmerman on a visit to this birding hotspot. We plan to meet at the south end of the CBBT in the administration building parking lot at 9:45 am on November 17th. The visit to CBBT islands is limited to 15 with prior submission of an information sheet for security clearance. Depending on the number of participants, there will be a fee of ~\$10/person fee, payable at time of the trip to the CBBT. You must also present a picture ID (e.g. driver's license) to the security officer. If you do not choose to do the CBBT, meet at the Visitors Center, Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge at 1 pm. Reservations for Chincoteague can be made at the Island Motor Inn (757-336-3141). Mention you are with the Monticello Bird Club for the group rate of \$88/night. There is a 7-day prior cancellation limit.



**Mark your calendars!**  
**The Charlottesville Christmas Bird  
Count will be held on Sunday,  
December 17th, 2006.**

### 2006/2007 Membership Dues Reminder

Just a gentle reminder to pay your dues for those members who have not yet paid their 2006/2007 fiscal year dues. Dues paid now will extend your membership through June 30, 2007. As of October 14, only 42.3% of MBC members have paid. Our dues are a bargain in this day and age. Just think -only \$15 for an Individual membership brings you:

- 10 months of one of the best newsletters in the area;
- Months of wonderful programs featuring a wide variety of subjects presented by knowledgeable speakers;
- Fun-filled meetings of fellowship with your friends and fellow birders at a wonderful meeting venue;
- The opportunity to participate in a wide variety of field trips with leaders who know where those elusive birds are. Who knows? Maybe the next field trip will add some more birds to your life list.

## Gardening for Wildlife: Persimmon *Diospyros virginiana*

I was prompted to write an article about Persimmons as I watched our resident Mockingbirds hopping from fruit to fruit attempting to guard the late fall bounty of several wild American Persimmon trees. When we started our 'Gardening for Wildlife' in the spring of 1998, an inventory of our under-story trees revealed a number of (some quite old) wild Persimmon trees. As the seasons progressed, it was obvious that, only, a small number were fruit bearing female trees.



Photo by Bill Leaning.

Persimmon trees are mostly dioecious, meaning that individual trees produce either male or female flowers. In the wild, you nearly always need a male pollinator to produce a crop. Some Persimmons can produce fruit parthenocarpically, literally, 'Virgin Fruit'. Parthenocarpic is, usually, a mutation in nature allowing the ovules to develop to mature (usually seedless) fruit.

Several American Persimmons have been selected as self-fertile and they, also, have larger fruit than their wild cousins. Three readily available varieties are Yates, Meader and Ruby. I have a five year old specimen of Yates that has fruit on it for the first time. I purchased my American Persimmon from Edible Landscaping in Afton, Virginia.

Persimmons grow best in well-drained and slightly acidic soil. They do best in full sun. American Persimmons will tolerate some shade and a wider variety of soil types than their Asian relatives.

Over the past eight years, I have been nurturing a dozen or so self-sown seedlings. Several have reached fruit bearing

age but the majority have proven to be males. In hind sight, I should have purchased several of the self-fertile American Persimmons to start with.

The generic name for the Persimmon, *Diospyros*, means "Fruit of the Gods". This is in reference to the delicious (to birds, man and beast!) golden-orange fruits that often hang on the trees long after the leaves drop in autumn. Persimmon fruit fall into two categories astringent and non-astringent. The American Persimmon is in the former. When fully ripe, they are very sweet. If you attempt to eat one too soon, your mouth will pucker from the bitter taste of soluble tannins. Ripe fruit is a real treat. Native Americans relished them and they are popular food for Mockingbirds, Robins, Cedar Waxwings, Wild Turkey, Deer, Raccoons, Foxes, Squirrels and other wildlife.

In addition to its fruit-bearing contribution to the wildlife garden, the American Persimmon makes an attractive mid-size yard tree. The large drooping leaves give it a soft look and the dark checkered bark of mature trees provides winter interest. In the spring, the bell-shaped flowers are an attractive creamy-yellow, very fragrant and an excellent nectar source for honeybees. The smooth, lustrous dark green leaves turn a blaze of orange and red in the autumn.



Photo by Bill Leaning.

If you have the room, a grouping of several trees 15 to 20 feet apart can make a good wildlife planting. The tree is tough and adaptable, grows rapidly and its deep tap root gives it good drought resistance.



Photo by Bill Leaning.

The Oriental Persimmon or Kaki *Diospyros kaki* is native to China and has been cultivated for centuries. It spread to Korea and Japan and there are, now, more than two thousand varieties. The Oriental Persimmon was introduced to California in the mid 1800's. Oriental or Asian Persimmons come in, both, astringent and non-astringent varieties. I have one specimen of Saijo, an astringent variety that has borne a good fruit crop for the last three years. In the interest of sharing, I pick the fruit I can reach from a standing position for our consumption and leave the out-of-reach fruit for the birds.

My other variety is Jiro that is fruiting for the first time, this year. This non-astringent Persimmon is ready to harvest when the fruit is fully colored but for best flavor allow them to soften slightly after picking. Mature hard astringent Persimmons can be stored in the refrigerator for, at least, a month. They can, also, be frozen for 6 to 8 months. Soft, ripe, astringent Persimmons can be washed and dried and frozen whole in their skins in plastic bags for up to 3 months. They can, also, be pureed in the blender after removing the skin and seeds. Add ¼ tsp Lemon Juice per cup of fruit. Pack in plastic bags and freeze. Thawed Persimmon pulp can be fed to fruit eating birds in the spring, particularly, those of you hosting Orioles. For anybody interested, I, also, have recipes for Persimmon Bread, Rice Pudding, Cake, Persimmon-Raisin cookies and Persimmon-Pineapple-Coconut compote.

Give Persimmons a try. The birds will thank you.

-Bill Leaning