



# The Mountain Chat

Newsletter of the Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Volume 38, No. 2

Fall 2013

## Annual Christmas Bird Count Events Planned

By LeJay Graffious

Our Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society is conducting a Winter Bird Identification workshop in preparation for the Morgantown Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Anyone wanting to learn birds found in the Morgantown area is welcome on Tuesday, November 12 for the Winter Bird Identification Workshop at 7:00 pm at the Spruce Street United Methodist Church. During the winter months, over 80 species of birds may be seen. The workshop, by Derek Courtney, is for beginning birders, or experts wanting to brush up on birds of the area.

On Saturday, November 23, the club will host a Winter Bird Identification Field Trip. Anyone wanting to participate is welcome. The trip will meet in the Cheat Lake area at Ruby and Ketchy's Restaurant at 8:00 am. If you would like breakfast beforehand, meet there at 7:00 am. The leader will be Derek Courtney.

The Morgantown CBC will be Saturday, December 14. It is centered on the Morgantown Airport and, like all counts, is a circle with a diameter of fifteen miles. Our impossible goal is to count all the birds within 7-½ miles of where the two runways intersect. We don't worry about our impossible goal, but just have a fun day counting birds. The CBC circle is divided into areas, which are covered by teams. We encourage team efforts. The team is usually out from dawn to dusk, with individual participants joining in for as much of the day as they choose. Once again this year, LeJay Graffious is the compiler and will determine the number of teams based on how many people contact him about participating. Smaller areas give teams a better chance at getting a good sample of species and numbers. . The count usually has four teams covering the count area.

Owling is another phase of the count. It extends the time period up to the entire twenty-four hours.

Owling is listening for owls, and the few other nocturnal calls or sightings that might be made. The Morgantown CBC Owling effort has great growth potential.

Feeder Counts are another phase of the count. People interested in this phase tally the greatest number of each species seen at their feeders at any one time during the day of the count and contact LeJay Graffious with their totals Saturday evening through Wednesday, December 17.

Count Week Birds are yet another phase of the effort. Species that are completely missed on count day can be footnoted as "seen during count week", if seen during either the three days prior to, or the three days following the count day. Count Week for the Morgantown CBC is Wednesday, December 11 to Tuesday, December 17.

The Count Day Dinner is the most social phase of the effort. The teams and all interested friends join for the evening meal and tally up the day's results. The final count comes when all feeder counts, counts for teams not represented at the dinner, and any after-dinner owling birds are added in with any count week birds footnoted. The final tally of species and numbers of individual birds, participants, and miles covered in the effort, and number of feeder counts is submitted for inclusion in the collective record of National Audubon Society's 113th Christmas Bird Count.

The workshop, field trip and the Christmas Bird Count are free to public. People who want to get involved may register on-line at <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>, email [lejay@oldhemlock.org](mailto:lejay@oldhemlock.org), or call 304-379-7505. Come join one or all three events. Birding is a great activity to enjoy outside and be with nature and friends.

## President's Message

As the heat and humidity of summer start to wane we all look forward to more pleasant weather in the fall, which is my favorite time of year. The striking colors of deciduous tree leaves that result as trees shut down their growth for the year are always a beautiful uplifting sight, and West Virginia, with its panoramic mountain vistas, is right up there among states famed for their fall foliage.

This year, on October 5, Mountaineer Audubon will have a special nature walk at White Park in Morgantown as part of that city's year-long Year of the Tree celebration. I am delighted to lead this walk, which will emphasize the several roles trees play in the lives of birds. Do join us at 8:00 am at the Morgantown Ice Arena parking lot.

Fall also marks that bittersweet time of year for birders—fall migration, which is eagerly anticipated for the new birds making their way south for the winter. That means ducks will be returning to Cheat Lake, shorebirds will be stopping off to refuel at Pleasant Creek and Prickett's Fort, and songbirds, many in muted fall plumage, will be everywhere. It's always a bit sad, though, since we know that once they've passed through the cold dreary winter won't be far behind.

I am excited that we are offering many opportunities to get out and enjoy migration and nature in general this fall. We have expanded our field trip offerings to include almost every weekend from mid-August through the end of October. We'll be going to several new locations, led by several members who have volunteered their time and expertise as leaders, for which I thank them profusely. It should be exciting. Check out the complete schedule on another page of this newsletter.

See you on the trails!

*Terry Bronson*

## Fall Programs for 2013

We are trying out a new meeting site this year for our fall programs. All programs will be held in the Seekers Hall room at the Spruce Street United Methodist Church at 386 Spruce Street (corner of Spruce and Fayette Streets) in downtown Morgantown. The room will be available beginning at 6:30 pm with the program starting at 7:00. Parking is available in the adjacent metered city lot.

**September 10:** Doren Burrell will speak on "Wings over West Virginia". What really happens when we speak of "birds flying south for winter"? This presentation explains many of the challenges that confront birds in their migration to and from our area and the amazing adaptations of birds for these journeys. Although examples from around the world are included, this talk also focuses on the birds that visit and breed in West Virginia.

**October 8:** WVU Wildlife Graduate Students

Creating Habitat for WV Birds with

Fire: Christina Slover will share her research comparing bird species in burned and non-burned Appalachian forests.

Flight Behavior of Vultures: Julie Mallon will share her research on the under-appreciated Turkey Vulture. She will describe how their flight behavior benefits from their physical and social environments.

Golden Eagles of Eastern US: Andrew Dennhardt will describe the natural history of Golden Eagles and share his research on migration routes and population estimates. He will explain how WV is important to this eastern group of eagles.

**November 12:** Derek Courtney, MD, will present our annual Winter Birds Workshop. The program will be for all levels of birding on identifying winter birds in the Morgantown area. This is a prelude to the Mountaineer Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC).

## FALL 2013 MOUNTAINEER AUDUBON FIELD TRIPS

All trips are free and will be on Saturdays except as noted. They will only be canceled for extremely inclement weather. Bring binoculars and dress appropriately for the weather. For more information, contact Terry Bronson, [bronsonwv@gmail.com](mailto:bronsonwv@gmail.com) or 304-225-0999, except as indicated for the Nov. 16 and 23 trips.

\*Indicates WVU home football game, so trips will be out of town to avoid game traffic.

Aug. 10, Pleasant Creek WMA, Barbour County. Meet at Mountaineer Mall near water tower at 7:30 am or at first WMA parking lot on right on Upper Pleasant Creek Road west of Routes 119/250 at 8:30 am. Leader: David Daniels.

Aug. 17, Friendship Hill National Historic Site, Fayette County, PA. Meet at Suncrest Town Center at side of Kroger store at 7:30 am or at the Friendship Hill trail parking lot along entrance road at 8:15 am. Leader: Gretchen Nareff.

Aug. 24, Cooper's Rock State Forest Ken's Run regeneration area, Preston County. Meet at Mountaineer Mall near water tower at 7:30 am or at parking lot on Chestnut Ridge Road on the right just north of turnoff to Chestnut Ridge Park at 8:00 am. Leader: Terry Bronson

\*Aug. 31, Youghiogheny Reservoir and trail, Garrett County, MD. Meet at Mountaineer Mall near water tower at 7:30 am or at Bruceton Mills park-and-ride lot at I-68 and Route 26 at 8:00 am. Leader: Derek Courtney.

Sep. 7, Core Arboretum, Morgantown. Meet at Arboretum parking lot at 7:30 am. Leader: Alan Clark.

\*Sep. 14, Prickett's Fort State Park, Marion County. Meet at Mountaineer Mall near water tower at 7:30 am or at rail trail parking lot across from fort at 8:00 am. Leader: Joey Herron.

Sep. 21, Cooper's Rock State Forest, Monongalia County. Meet at Mountaineer Mall near water tower at 7:30 am or at Raven Rock Trail parking lot at 8:00 am. Leader: Sue Olcott.

\*Sep. 28, Decker's Creek Rail Trail, Preston County. Meet at Mountaineer Mall near water tower at 7:30 am or just north of Reedsville where the trail crosses Burke Road at 8:00 am. Leader: David Daniels.

Oct. 5, White Park, Morgantown. Year-of-the-Tree Walk—focus will be on birds and their relationship to trees. Meet at Morgantown Ice Arena parking lot at 8:00 am. Leader: Terry Bronson.

Oct. 12, Dorsey's Knob Park, Morgantown. Meet at parking lot next to mosaic wall at 8:00 am. Leader: Terry Bronson.

\*Oct. 19, Pleasant Creek WMA, Barbour County. Meet at Mountaineer Mall near water tower at 7:30 am or at first WMA parking lot on right on Upper Pleasant Creek Road west of Routes 119/250 at 8:30 am. Leader: David Daniels.

Oct. 26, Core Arboretum, Morgantown. Meet at Arboretum parking lot at 8:00 am. Leader: Terry Bronson.

\*Nov. 9, Prickett's Fort State Park, Marion County. Meet at Mountaineer Mall near water tower at 7:30 am or at rail trail parking lot across from fort at 8:00 am. Leader: Joey Herron.

Nov. 16, White Park, Morgantown. Meet at Morgantown Ice Arena parking lot at 8:00 am. Leader: Alan Clark, [eftwood@juno.com](mailto:eftwood@juno.com) or (724) 437-2524.

Nov. 23, Cheat Lake waterfowl trip, Monongalia County. Meet at Ruby & Ketchy's Restaurant on Route 857 at 8:00 am. If you'd like breakfast beforehand, meet there at 7:00 am. Leader: Derek Courtney, [derek.dana.courtney@gmail.com](mailto:derek.dana.courtney@gmail.com).

Dec. 14, Morgantown Christmas Bird Count. See article elsewhere in this newsletter. Leader: LeJay Graffious.

Join our Facebook page. Just search Mountaineer Audubon and click on Like.

We will post bird news, reminders for outings and programs and interesting items about local environmental programs.

## **Caden Spencer Haines attends ABA Camp**

Caden Spencer Haines attended Camp Colorado, a camp sponsored by the American Birding Association for young birders aged 13-18, during the week of July 21-27, 2013. The camp is based out of the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park. In addition to numerous prairie and mountain birding opportunities, the camp is expected to host workshops on bird sounds, banding, conservation, photography and more. Caden also simply looks forward to meeting other young birders.

Caden is a Mountaineer Audubon member. He has lead walks and presented a program on his birding activities. He won a \$500 scholarship from ABA and the Mountaineer Audubon board has also presented him a \$500 scholarship. These will almost meet the total tuition cost. His family will provide his transportation to Colorado. The board is pleased to support this local ninth grade student as he pursues his interest in birding.

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## **Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia is hosting a Chimney Swift watch in Downtown Morgantown on August 9**

In case you haven't noticed, downtown Morgantown is home to many chimney swifts! On summer evenings, scores of the small, insect-eating birds can be observed chittering and diving over our buildings and homes.

Join us on Friday, August 9 at 7:30pm (rain date Saturday, August 10) at the historic chimney at the Seneca Center to watch the aerial display overhead. In addition, you will learn about chimney swift natural history, threats this species faces, and why they've chosen downtown Morgantown as their summer home. Everyone is welcome at this free event!

## **Migratory Bird Mortality from US Fish and Wildlife Service (dated 2002)**

### **Many Human-Caused Threats Afflict our Bird Populations**

#### **Are Birds in Danger?**

Of the 836 species of birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, about a quarter are known to be in trouble. There are 78 bird species listed as Endangered and 14 species listed as Threatened in the US. An additional 144 species are on the National List of Birds of Conservation Concern 2001 (some of whose populations are declining precipitously). It cannot be assumed that the remainder of US birds are safe, as population data on approximately a third of these species are lacking, making status determination very difficult, if not impossible. The problems that birds face in the US are symptomatic of the problems they face globally.

#### **What are the Human-Caused Threats to Birds?**

Birds face tremendous challenges to their survival every day. The majority of these challenges are related to human activities. Vast numbers of birds are killed due to collisions with human structures and equipment, poisoning by pesticides and contaminants, and attacks by cats and other introduced predators.

Diseases such as botulism, avian cholera, salmonellosis, and West Nile virus can also have significant population impacts. Human activities, such as overuse of pesticides (enhancing the survival of pesticide-resistant mosquitoes) for example, can help spread certain diseases.

The greatest threat to birds and all wildlife, continues to be loss and/or degradation of habitat due to human development and disturbance. For migratory birds and other species that require multiple areas for wintering, breeding, and stopover points, the effects of habitat loss can be complex and far-reaching.

Added to deaths from natural causes, such as adverse weather, predation, or starvation, human-related bird deaths may result in greater mortality than a population can stand.

## How Many Birds Are Killed?

USFWS estimates that a minimum of 10 billion birds breed in North America. Fall populations may be on the order of 20 billion. (These are only educated guesses). Based on modeling and other approaches, estimates have been made for some of the most visible threats.

### Collisions

Building window strikes may account for 97 to 976 million bird deaths each year. Communication towers conservatively kill 4-5 million birds annually (possibly closer to 40-50 million). Strikes at high tension transmission and distribution power lines very conservatively kill tens of thousands of birds annually, but actual mortality could be as high as 174 million deaths annually. Electrocutions probably kill tens of thousands of birds but the problem is barely monitored. Cars may kill 60 million or more birds each year, private and commercial aircraft far fewer, while wind turbine rotors kill an estimated 33,000 birds annually.

### Poisoning

In one recent study pesticides were estimated to result in the direct deaths of at least 72 million birds annually. This is an understatement, given that delayed deaths from poisoned prey, orphaned chicks, and neurological problems were not included in the study and the study site was limited. Up to two million birds are killed annually in oil and wastewater pits, mainly in the western states.

### Cats

Domestic and feral cats kill hundreds of millions of songbirds and other avian species each year.

### By-catch

Tens to hundreds of thousands of seabirds are estimated to die in US fisheries each year, but monitoring for this is limited.

### What Are We Doing to Reduce Mortality?

While the “incidental, accidental or unintentional take” of migratory birds is not permitted by the Service and is a criminal violation of the Migra-

tory Bird Treaty Act, the Service attempts to work with those industries and individuals whose actions result in bird deaths rather than pursuing criminal prosecution first.

For over 25 years the Service has been a partner of the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee helping develop voluntary guidance documents to reduce bird strikes and electrocutions. Recently the Service co-founded the Avian Subcommittee of the National Wind Coordinating Committee, working to reduce bird strikes at wind turbines. We are also working to reduce bird strikes at communication towers and implementing a national plan of action to reduce seabird by-catch in the long line fishing gear.

We support initiatives such as the Cat Indoors Program and the Fatal Light Awareness Program, which encourages building owners to turn off skyscraper lights during spring and fall night-time migrations. For threats that can be addressed by individual citizen action, we design public education materials such as encouraging homeowners to reduce home pesticide use and consumers to select environmentally-friendly products.

Declining bird populations are probably most often the result of combined or cumulative impacts of all mortality, thus addressing each of the contributing factors is a priority. What Else Is Needed to Reduce Mortality? Research is critical. In the case of collisions, we don't understand specifically how light attracts birds to communication towers, tall buildings, wind turbines, transmission towers or other lit structures. We need to learn if deterrents such as low-frequency sound, colored markers, or structural modifications reduce avian collisions. The cumulative impacts of collisions on bird populations must be assessed – they are currently unknown.

We also lack an understanding of how birds select stopover areas during migration. Without it, we cannot effectively manage habitats and recommend against building new structures in critical bird-use areas.

For more information: <http://birds.fws.gov>

## Audubon Bird Seed Sale

We listened to your comments and have moved our annual bird seed sale up earlier in the fall this year. This is the primary fundraiser for Mountaineer Audubon. Projects that received funds from the sale last year included donations to the WV Raptor Rehabilitation Center, the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, and to Bruceton School for conservation education materials.

Southern States in Sabraton is again providing high quality seed and suet products for the sale. They've done a good job this year in keeping prices down – we're able to offer many items at the same prices as last year. New this year are a few inexpensive basic feeders: a platform feeder, a hopper feeder, a thistle sock, and a suet basket. You can see more detailed images of these below and on our website ([www.mountaineeraudubon.org](http://www.mountaineeraudubon.org)). We hope you will consider these items. Let us know how you like them, and what we might change for next year. We want to hear from you!

**The deadline for ordering seed this year is Monday, September 9, 2013.** Mail your completed order form and a check for full payment (made out to Mountaineer Audubon) to: Susan Olcott, 305 Paul Davis Rd, Independence WV 26374. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Sue at (304)288-2999, or email at [solcott@frontiernet.net](mailto:solcott@frontiernet.net).

**Seed pickup will be on Sunday, October 20, 2013** at the following locations. Remember to indicate which location you want to use on your order form.

Morgantown: 11am – 3pm - Southern States (BFS) in Sabraton on Earl Core Rd near I-68

Hopwood, PA: 4:30pm - 6:30pm – Adrian's Market on Old Rt 40

Clarksburg: 1pm - 3pm – Meadowbrook Mall parking lot next to Outback Steakhouse



Platform Feeder



Hopper Feeder



Thistle Sock



Suet Basket

<b>ORDER FORM</b> <b>Mountaineer Audubon Bird Seed Sale 2013</b>	Last Date to order is: 9 Sept 2013 Orders postmarked after 9/9/2013 will be returned																																																																																																																		
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Platform Feeder—size 13 X 13 inches, made of recycled green plastic resin, metal screen bottom, can be hung from a tree or structure		\$26.00																																																																																																																	
Suet Basket—coated wire easy fill basket holds one suet cake		\$3.00																																																																																																																	
Thistle sock—perforated nylon sock allows finches to feed in any location on it—holds 13 oz of nyger seed		\$3.00																																																																																																																	
<b>Make your check payable to: Mountaineer Audubon. Thank you!</b> Mail this form and your check to: Susan Olcott, 305 Paul Davis Rd, Independence WV 26374	<b>TOTAL</b> \$																																																																																																																		

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Mountaineer Audubon  
P.O. Box 422  
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**Thank you for your support!**

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