



# The Mountain Chat

Newsletter of the Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Volume 40 No. 2

Fall 2015

## Mountaineer Audubon's CBC Continues to Break Records

By LeJay Graffious, CBC Coordinator

Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society continues to break our previous records during the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC). The past three counts have exceeded each of the previous counts. In 2014 we tallied 84 species on count day and an additional 9 species during count week. The ninety-three species identified during count week is a very respectable total for this section of the Appalachian Mountains. I attribute the count's success to more experienced, expert birders volunteering and doing more scouting prior to the count day. Plus we have more "eyes" in the field supporting the effort. Join our growing participation on Saturday, December 19, 2015. Mountaineer Audubon volunteers take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations by being with a team in the field or submitting feeder counts from your home. We welcome the novice and expert birder. Families and students along with birders and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists go out on an annual mission - often before dawn. For the past quarter century, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house during the Holiday season. Each of the citizen scientists who annually braves snow, wind, or rain, to take part in the Christmas Bird Count makes an enormous contribution to conservation both nationally and locally. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations - and to help guide conservation action. From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of

birds and the excitement of friendly competition -- and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation. If you are interested in participating, contact LeJay Graffious at [lejay@oldhemlock.org](mailto:lejay@oldhemlock.org) or 304-379-7505.

## ATTENTION: HOW WE COMMUNICATE

Members and non-members are welcome to all events hosted by the Mountaineer Chapter of National Audubon.

We communicate events in multiple ways. First, if you are a member of our chapter you will receive two newsletters a year through the postal system. Typically, these are in September and January. These will have a list of events and other news items.

Next, we maintain a website with programs and outings listed. This site also has links to the past newsletters and much more.

Third, we publish all events on the Greater Morgantown Convention and Visitors Bureau webpage. Often the Dominion Post will publish these events in their Thursday edition.

Fourth, we are replacing our list serve with announcements on our Facebook page. The Mountaineer Audubon Facebook page will include all events, general information about birds and often photographs by our members. All events of the Mountaineer Chapter of National Audubon are open to any interested community members. We welcome all who are interested in the avian fauna of our area. Join us.

Website: <http://mountaineeraudubon.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mountaineeraudubon>

Morgantown Events Page: [http://](http://www.tourmorgantown.com/events-morgantown/)

[www.tourmorgantown.com/events-morgantown/](http://www.tourmorgantown.com/events-morgantown/)

## President's Message

It's hard to believe but summer is quickly coming to an end and the all-too-brief fall and then the seemingly all-too-long winter are just around the corner. Despite the coming harsh weather, the fall and early winter are an exciting time of year for Mountaineer Audubon in that it is again time for our annual bird seed sale, interesting and informative fall presentations, fun fall bird outings, and the ever-popular Christmas Bird Count. The fall and winter can be great for birding activity as well.

In this volume of the *Mountain Chat* we have included information about our fall presentations, fall bird outings, bird seed sale, and the annual Christmas Bird Count.

The fall presentations and bird outings have long been popular activities hosted by Mountaineer Audubon. The presentations provide members with informative talks and slide presentations about birds or other aspects of the natural world, and the bird outings give us a chance to get together to look for, and learn about, birds in local hotspots. (And as one of our feature articles in this volume of the *Mountain Chat* indicates, this has been a great year for vagrants in the state. By going along on one of our bird outings, there is a possibility you could observe something unexpected and rare.) Neither the presentations nor the bird outings would be possible without our volunteers who take time out of their busy lives to make a positive contribution to our organization. To that end, I would urge members to attend as many presentations and bird outings as possible, not only to learn new things and have an enjoyable time, but also to support our volunteers, as well as Mountaineer Audubon.

Over the years, many of you have taken advantage of our bird seed sale. Board members and volunteers work hard to make this sale possible, so we will look forward to your continued support. Not only do you have the chance to buy quality bird seed at reduced prices, but you provide the birds with a much-needed source of

food during the winter months, as well as help support Mountaineer Audubon.

And finally, the annual Christmas Bird Count allows us to count as many species and numbers of birds as we can find. The data gathered by participants helps scientists to assess bird population trends, which can be useful in determining conservation needs. So by participating in the Christmas Bird Count, we not only get together, enjoy finding the birds, and have a good time overall (sometimes in spite of the weather!), but our efforts contribute to scientific understanding as well.

Happy Birding,  
*David Daniels*

## Mountaineer Audubon Fall Programs

**All programs take place at Spruce Street United Methodist Church, 348 Spruce Street, which is next to the Farmers Market Pavilion in downtown Morgantown. Enter at rear of church. The room is available at 6:30 pm and the meeting will begin about 7 pm. The program will begin about 7:15 pm.**

### September 8: Birding Central Columbia

Spinetails. Conebills. Euphonias. Brush-Finches. Barbets. Wood-Creepers. Ant-Tanagers. Ant-Shrikes. Ant-Wrens. Ant-Vireos, Ant-Birds, Ant-Pittas. Tropical avian gems unseen in North America plus 163 (that's not a typographical error) varieties of hummingbirds that are among the approximately 1,900 bird species in Columbia. That's nearly 20% of the world's total. Columbia is home to 70 endemic bird species and dozens more that are near-endemic. Join LeJay Graffious, P.J. Murray and Larry Schwab as they take you with them to Bogota, the Eastern Andes, Magdalena Valley, Rio Clara Reserve, the Cerulean Warbler Reserve and other amazing Columbian birding hot spots. Share their birding encounters, ride with them through Columbian history and experience the

(continued on next page )

## Fall 2015 programs continued

sights and sounds of a fascinating array of beautiful tropical avian delights.

### **October 13:** The Value Of Early-Successional Habitat

Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) is a partnership between NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. WLFW was developed to achieve conservation efforts focused on seven declining wildlife species. The goals of the WLFW project are to restore populations of the target species and increase habitat for those declining species while also benefitting other species with similar habitat requirements. The initiative is funded under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and West Virginia's focal species is the golden-winged warbler. The golden-winged warbler is currently a species of concern due in part to the decline of early-successional habitat in its summer breeding range. NRCS provides funding and technical assistance for program-eligible landowners to create, sustain, and/or enhance early successional habitat for the golden-winged warbler.

Idun Guenther has worked as a partner wildlife biologist for NRCS and the WV Division of Natural Resources since 2012. Her primary work is with the Golden-winged Warbler Initiative program in West Virginia. She graduated from Arkansas Tech University with a B.S. in Biology and her M.S. in Fisheries and Wildlife Management.

**November 10:** DNR Action Plan by Sue Olcott  
Biologist Sue Olcott will share the newly revised Department of Natural Resources Action Plan. These plans conserve wildlife to prevent endangered species listings, using proactive, non-regulatory, incentive-based solutions; make states eligible for federal funding, and support jobs that help sustain the \$730 billion active outdoor sports industry; and are supported by over 6,300 businesses and organizations representing millions of outdoor enthusiasts.

## Tribute to Mountaineer Audubon Chapter member Dr. John Hall

Written by Larry Schwab, M.D.

Mountaineer Audubon has lost a member and friend.

Dr. John Hall, microbiologist, naturalist, teacher, musician and friend died July 24, 2015 in Morgantown at age 85 years.

He was a longtime member and past president of Mountaineer Audubon.

He was a Pennsylvanian by birth. John Hall received his PhD in Biology from Purdue, Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees in zoology from University of New Hampshire.

He served as professor of microbiology at West Virginia University from 1958 onward to 1997, a distinguished tenure of teaching and research that spanned 39 years. He studied at the London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene and carried his knowledge forward as a founder and teacher in the WVU Tropical Medicine course.

John's intellectual and service interests included teaching at Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) for nearly two decades, working with the Boy Scouts as a volunteer and District Commissioner in the Mountaineer Area Council, the Morgantown Green Team and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. He also was a musician in the Morgantown Collegium. He was a regular participant in the North American Migratory Bird Day counts and Audubon Christmas Bird Counts. His gentle manner in conversation and his commitment to birds and wild and natural things were gifts to us who were fortunate to know his friendship.

Mountaineer Audubon extends sympathy to his wife Judith, daughter Martha Gach and husband, Gerard and daughter Kathy deGraaf and husband Bruce and their families.

## FALL 2015 BIRD WALKS and EVENTS

All events are on Saturdays and are free to all. Except as noted most will end by noon. 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 or 304-225-0999.

Sep. 12—Allegheny Front Migration Observatory bird banding station, Dolly Sods. 6:30 am at Mountaineer Mall near the water tower. Trip takes 2+ hours so arrival back in Morgantown will be mid afternoon. Leader: Terry Bronson.

Sep. 19—West Virginia Botanic Garden Bird Day Event, Tyrone Road, Morgantown. 8:00 am-noon. Leader: John Boback. Sponsored by Garden. Activities include a fall bird walk, ideas for winter birding, live bird presentations by the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, and more!

Sep. 26—Prickett's Fort State Park, Fairmont. 8:00 am at rail trail parking lot next to fort. Leader: Joey Herron.

Oct. 2-4—Tygart Lake State Park Fall Bird Migration Banding & Survey Weekend. Saturday and Sunday mornings join birder Joey Herron as he bands various breeding and migrating birds of West Virginia. Learn to identify birds by both sight and sound! One of WV's popular birding weekends that attracts visitors from across the United States to see bird species in the Tygart Lake area. Sponsored by the park. Lodging available at Tygart Lake Lodge during the weekend; ask for the 'birders' discount of 20% off standard rates. Contact: 304-265-6144.

Oct. 3— Core Arboretum, Morgantown. 8:00 am at Arboretum parking lot on Monongahela Boulevard. Leader: Zach Fowler.

Oct. 17—Decker's Creek Trail/Rehe Wildlife Management Area, Reedsville. 8:00 am at the

Decker's Creek Trail parking lot on Route 92 about 0.3 mile south of Route 7 intersection. Leader: David Daniels.

Nov. 7— Pleasant Creek Wildlife Management Area, Barbour County. 8:00 am at first parking lot on Upper Pleasant Creek Road west of Routes 119/250. For those coming from Morgantown, meet at 7:00 am at Mountaineer Mall near the water tower. Leader: Terry Bronson.

Nov. 21—Cheat Lake waterfowl trip. 8:00 am at Ruby and Ketchy's Restaurant on Route 857 east of Cheat Lake. 7:00 am if you'd like breakfast first. Leader: Derek Courtney.

Dec. 19—Morgantown Christmas Bird Count. People who want to get involved may register on-line at <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count> beginning in November, or email or call compiler LeJay Graffious at [lejay@oldhemlock.org](mailto:lejay@oldhemlock.org) or 304-379-7505.



**Black-bellied Whistling- Ducks**

See description in article on Rare Birds in WV on next page

## A Great Year So Far for Rare Birds in West Virginia

By David Daniels

For those of us who are serious birders, or those who just appreciate birds in general, there are many aspects of the hobby of birding that bring joy and excitement to us, whether it's marveling at the beauty of a bird, observing interesting behavior, learning songs, studying distribution patterns, or just keeping lists. The ways we can enjoy the birds are almost endless. One of the most exciting things about birding for me is the anticipation of what I might find when I go out birding.

Because birds can fly, they are among the most mobile of all creatures and can therefore travel great distances during migration. Although most birds are exceptional navigators, many do get lost or are swept up by storms or weather patterns and can show up almost anywhere outside of their normal ranges. Such birds are called vagrants or accidentals. It is these vagrants that many birders anticipate finding when they go out birding.

So far, 2015 has been a great year for vagrants in West Virginia because birds from the far west, the Arctic, the deep south, and even Europe, have shown up in our state.

January got the year off to a good start with a rare Rufous Hummingbird that had actually been coming to a private hummingbird feeder in Morgantown since November 2014. Rufous Hummingbirds are western birds that occasionally migrate to the east rather than the south, and at least one shows up somewhere in the east during the winter. Anyone who keeps a hummingbird feeder out well into the late fall should keep an eye out for this gem of the far western mountains.

Later in January, a Snowy Owl from the Arctic was seen in Taylor County by many birders. These mostly white owls generally spend all their time in the Arctic, but every few years the population of lemmings, their main food source, crashes, forcing the owls to seek alternative food sources well south of the Arctic. Snowy Owls are very rare as far south as West Virginia, but there have been a handful of records of this Arctic wanderer over the years.

January and early February were great months for rare gulls. Because West Virginia is mountainous, far from the coast, and lacks relatively large bodies of water, the number and variety of gulls to be found in the state are generally limited. However, when

the Great Lakes freeze, many of the gulls that usually winter on the lakes move to the south in search of open water. This last winter was no exception, and such rare gulls as Iceland, Lesser Black-backed, Glaucous, and Great Black-backed were present on the Ohio River in Ohio County, giving local birders the chance to see birds that may not be seen in the state again for decades to come, as well as to hone up on their gull identification skills.

The rare birds continued into late March and early April, with a couple of European ducks showing up in West Virginia. In late March, a Eurasian Wigeon was discovered in Grant County by a careful observer. It was the first state record of this very rare bird. The Eurasian Wigeon is closely related to our American Wigeon, but its appearance is different enough to make it stand out from the locally common ducks. The wigeon stayed only five days, but was seen from birders who traveled from all over West Virginia to add this once-in-a-lifetime vagrant to their state lists.

Also in late March, and lingering for almost two weeks into early April, yet another European duck made an appearance in the state. A "Eurasian" Green-winged Teal was found at Rehe Wildlife Management Area in Preston County. At present, this European duck is considered to be a subspecies of our Green-winged Teal by American taxonomic authorities, including the American Ornithologist's Union, the American Birding Association, and the Clements Checklist of Birds of the World. However, most European authorities, as well as the International Ornithological Committee, consider this a good species, and there have been indications that the "Eurasian" Green-winged Teal may one day be split into its own species by the American authorities as well. Whether that happens or not, the "Eurasian" Green-winged Teal is very rare in this part of the world and was also a first record for West Virginia.

During much of the spring there were no further reports of exceptional rarities, despite many birders being out in the field to experience spring migration. However, in late May things heated up again when there were two different reports of Common Gallinules in the area. The Common Gallinule is closely related to coots and looks rather like a coot except for its red-and-yellow bill and white feathering on its flanks. Its range extends from the deep south north throughout the Midwest. The first gallinule was spotted in Monongalia County, but unfortunately it stayed for a short period and was seen by only two people.

(continued on next page)

## Rare Birds continued

However, just a few days later another was discovered at Stonewall Jackson Lake in Lewis County. This bird lingered for over a week, giving local birders the chance to see this rare vagrant to our state. There was speculation that this was the same bird seen in Monongalia County just a few days earlier, but it could also have been part of a “mini invasion” of this species from its normal range into our area. As so often happens when a rare bird is found, a sharp-eyed birder looking for the Common Gallinule found another rarity in almost the same place. This bird turned out to be a Red-necked Phalarope, a colorful shorebird that is almost never seen in West Virginia. Although the phalarope’s range includes much of the eastern half of the continent, they are rarely spotted in West Virginia because our mountainous topography doesn’t provide good habitat for shorebirds, namely shallow lakes and ponds with extensive mudflats. So when a shorebird as rare as this phalarope was discovered, birders who had been at Stonewall Jackson Lake to see the gallinule made the repeat trip to see the phalarope. The latest of the rare birds found in the state were four Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks that showed up in a city park in Elkins in Randolph County in late June. They were discovered by a non-birder. Noticing unusual ducks of a kind that he had never seen before, he photographed them and sent the pictures to a state biologist, who identified them and posted the finding on the state listserv. Unfortunately, these ducks that range from Florida and Texas south through Central and South America were “one-day wonders” and were seen by only a couple of birders. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were reported from several eastern states at about the same time. The strong weather patterns that brought so much rain up from the Gulf of Mexico in June and July may have swept whole flocks of whistling-ducks into our region. As I write this, it is summer and the bird activity is at a low point. No rare vagrants have been reported for over a month. However, fall is just around the corner and the birds will soon be making their way south for the winter. Late fall, especially from late October through November, is a time when vagrants generally start showing up in West Virginia again. So birders, whether they are the “hard-core” type or those who casually observe the birds at their feeders, should be on the lookout for that rare bird. Who knows what might show up?

## Audubon Bird Seed Sale

Winter will be here before you know it, so that means it’s time to order your bird seed to help our feathered friends make it through the winter.

This is Mountaineer Audubon’s primary fundraiser, so please help us fund worthy bird-related projects. The WV Raptor Rehabilitation Center, the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, and Prickett’s Fort State Park and Morris Park in the Fairmont area have all received funds from last year’s sale.

Southern States in Sabraton is again providing seed and suet products and a few inexpensive basic feeders for us. You can see more detailed images of these feeders on our website, [www.mountaineeraudubon.org](http://www.mountaineeraudubon.org).

**Because it takes about a month to obtain the seed and feeders, the deadline for ordering is Thursday, September 17, 2015.**

Mail your completed order form and a check for full payment (made out to Mountaineer Audubon) to: Terry Bronson, 905 Southpoint Circle, Morgantown, WV 26501. If you have any questions, please contact Terry at (304) 225-0999 or email at [bronsonwv@gmail.com](mailto:bronsonwv@gmail.com).

**Seed pickup will be on Sunday, October 18, 2015** 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 Route 7 just north of I-68

Hopwood, PA: 4:30pm - 5:30pm – Adrian’s Market on Old Route 40

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

<b>ORDER FORM</b>	<b>Last date to order is: Sep. 17, 2015.</b>		
<b>Mountaineer Audubon Bird Seed Sale 2015</b>	Orders postmarked after that date will be returned.		
Customer contact information (all fields required)			
Name _____			
Address _____			
City, State, Zipcode _____			
Phone number _____			
Email _____			
Pick up Location (check one): Morgantown <input type="checkbox"/> Clarksburg <input type="checkbox"/> Hopwood <input type="checkbox"/>			
If order is \$250 or more, check if you wish free delivery. <input type="checkbox"/>			
<b>Bird Seed Products</b>	Quantity	Unit Price	Total
<b>Mountaineer Audubon Custom Mix</b> —45% black oil sunflower, 4% striped sunflower, 33% cracked corn, 17% safflower, 1% peanuts 20 lbs		\$14.00	
40 lbs		\$26.00	
<b>Regional Mix</b> —33% black oil sunflower, 5% striped sunflower, 47% white proso millet, 12% wheat, 2% canary seed, 1% peanuts (no corn) 20 lbs		\$17.00	
40 lbs		\$31.00	
<b>Black Oil Sunflower</b> 20 lbs		\$14.00	
50 lbs		\$31.00	
<b>Chickadee Select</b> —black oil sunflower, peanut pieces, mixed nuts, sunflower kernels, striped sunflower 8 lbs		\$11.00	
20 lbs		\$28.00	
<b>Safflower</b> —20 lbs		\$24.00	
<b>Nyger</b> —20 lbs		\$28.00	
<b>Whole peanuts in the shell</b> —25 lbs		\$30.00	
<b>Whole corn on the cob</b> 6.5 lbs		\$ 5.00	
20 lbs		\$13.00	
<b>Cracked corn medium</b> 10 lbs		\$ 6.00	
20 lbs		\$10.00	
<b>Suet Products—case of 12</b>			
<b>Regular</b> —beef suet, cracked corn, white proso millet, peanut pieces		\$12.00	
<b>Peanut</b> —beef suet cracked corn, peanut pieces		\$17.00	
<b>Specialty and Gift Items</b>			
<b>Fruit, Berry, and Nut Bell</b> —black oil and striped sunflower, white proso millet, peanut pieces, sunflower kernels in a bell shape with a hanger		\$ 3.00	
<b>Feeders</b>			
<b>Hopper</b> —4 ports accommodate nyger and other seed types, wide mouth for easy filling, removable top allows easy cleaning, holds 2 lbs		\$12.00	
<b>Platform</b> —size 13 X 13 inches, made of recycled green plastic resin, metal screen bottom, can be hung from a tree or structure		\$26.00	
<b>Suet Basket</b> —coated wire easy fill basket holds one suet cake		\$ 3.00	
<b>Thistle sock</b> —perforated nylon sock allows finches to feed in any location on it—holds 13 oz of nyger seed		\$ 2.00	
<b>Make your check payable to Mountaineer Audubon</b> and mail along with this form to: Terry Bronson, 905 Southpoint Circle, Morgantown, WV 26501.			TOTAL \$

**JOIN MOUNTAINEER AUDUBON TODAY!**

Chapter Code: C2ZY510Z

(Do not use this form if you are currently a member of National Audubon)

Join Mountaineer Audubon and receive all the benefits of Chapter membership. For \$5 more also receive a National Audubon membership and receive the AUDUBON magazine. Mark your choice below.

\_\_\_\_\_ \$15 – Mountaineer Audubon Membership Only

\_\_\_\_\_ \$20 – Mountaineer & National Audubon Membership

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

*Mountaineer Audubon does not share email addresses with anyone. Your email will be added to the Mountaineer Audubon listserv to receive Chapter updates on trips, bird sightings, etc. If you do not want to receive these emails, please check here: \_\_\_\_\_*

**Clip and mail this form with your check made payable to Mountaineer Audubon**

Mountaineer Audubon  
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Morgantown, WV 26507-0422

**Thank you for your support!**

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**www.mountaineeraudubon.org**

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