



# The Mountain Chat

Newsletter of the Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Volume 38, No. 1

Winter/Spring 2013

## Annual Spring Banquet for Mountaineer Audubon scheduled for April 27

“High Mountain Habitats: Natural Communities of West Virginia’s Allegheny Mountains” will be the subject of Elizabeth Byer’s presentation at our annual banquet on April 27th. The banquet will again be held at the WVU MeadWestvaco Natural Resources Center in Coopers Rock State Forest. See page 5 for directions and registration information.

The banquet serves as our annual membership meeting as well as our biggest fundraiser. We’ve had to raise the price three dollars to cover the cost of renting the building, and hope that won’t deter you from attending.

Elizabeth works for the WV Division of Natural Resources as a Vegetation Ecologist. I first heard her speak on WV Public Radio about rare plants inhabiting an ice-scoured island in the Cheat River and I will never forget the wonder and absolute joy that she was able to convey during the interview.

As a scientist, she has never lost the childlike capacity for appreciation of the wonders and beauty of the intricate world of plant ecology. Learning to appreciate the biodiversity of these high mountain habitats will be a treat with this exceptional woman as an interpreter.

## Mountaineer Audubon Christmas Bird Count 2012 Sets Records

LeJay Graffious, Coordinator

This year’s annual bird count set new historical records. Birders recorded the highest number of species in the history of the club. Seventy-four species were identified. Counters also recorded 4375 individual birds. An additional six species were found during count week. The weather was mild with a low of 32 degrees F and a high of 57 degrees F. The waterfowl species and numbers were lower than usual. Bird census added high counts for nine species to the history books: Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, Merlin, Barred Owl, Mourning Dove, Pileated Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, and Northern Mockingbird. Alert birders added six species to our historical list of winter birds in the Morgantown area. Derek Courtney found a Northern Shoveler a few days before the count qualifying it as count week bird. David Daniels spied and identified a Peregrine Falcon with Hillar Klandorf’s Team. Derek Courtney found a Long-eared Owl during a mid-night owling foray. Katie Fallon added a new species doing her feeder count. At the end of the day, she spied and photographed a Red-headed Woodpecker. Joe Hildreth found an unusual winter

straggler, a White-eyed Vireo. He photographed the bird on the day prior to count date and alerted the leaders. Team 3 then relocated the vireo on count day. Alan Clark and his team found an Indigo Bunting. This bird in winter plumage with a few blue feathers yet to molt was a great find.

The field observers put in 27.75 hours and 34.5 miles on foot. An additional 20.5 hours and 159.5 miles were added by car. We had a new mode of transportation during this year’s count. Joe Hildreth used his canoe to bird the hard-to reach areas of Cheat Lake from Sunset Beach to Cheat Lake Park. In addition to the field observers, we had five folks add to the count by observing their bird feeders. This included our youngest birder, Laurel, at four months old.

We were pleased to have the folks from Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia (ACCA) to join our teams this year. Their good work with bird rehabilitation has shown great progress in their first year. We want to give kudos to Clear Mountain Bank for their support again this year and donating \$150 to both the Mountaineer Audubon and ACCA.

*Continued on page 3*

## President's Message

Spring will soon be upon us here in Morgantown, and what better way to enjoy it than getting out into Wild and Wonderful West Virginia on one of our field trips? See the schedule elsewhere in this newsletter for details. Although these trips focus on birds, we take the time to enjoy other aspects of the flora and fauna of the locations.

Once again, the City of Morgantown Bureau of Parks and Recreation is sponsoring a series of four Introduction to Birding Classes on the third Saturdays of February, March, April, and May. LeJay Graffious and I will again be teaching these classes. Although geared to new birders, even those with some birding experience may find these informative. Details again are elsewhere in this newsletter.

Lastly, attendance at our spring and fall monthly programs has dwindled to only 10-15 people, on average, a third of whom are Board Members. Perhaps Tuesday nights are the problem; perhaps its our changing locations—surprisingly difficult to find in a city this size; perhaps it's the general tendency in society not to attend such programs very frequently due to the hassle of going out at night, other alternatives, and home entertainment options. Consequently, we are suspending such programs this spring. In the coming months, I will be asking the Board to see if there are ways we can rejuvenate such programs in the fall.

As always, the Mountaineer Audubon web site, [www.mountaineeraudubon.org](http://www.mountaineeraudubon.org), will contain the schedule of our activities and other information.

*Terry Bronson*

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[info-subscribe@mountaineeraudubon.org](mailto:info-subscribe@mountaineeraudubon.org)

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### Spring Field Trips

For more information on all field trips, contact Terry Bronson, [bronsonwv@gmail.com](mailto:bronsonwv@gmail.com) or (304) 225-0999.

**March 9:** Cheat Lake field trip. Meet at 8:00 am at Ruby & Ketchy's Restaurant, Route 857 south of Cheat Lake Animal Hospital, or at 7:00 am for breakfast.

**March 17:** Snake Hill WMA Woodcock Walk. Meet at 5:00 pm at Dee Fulton's home, 1030 Snake Hill Road, which is 3.0 miles from Tyrone Road. First driveway on RIGHT after main parking lot for Snake Hill Wildlife Management Area (Cheat View Trailhead). Bring a covered dish to share for a pot-luck St. Patrick's Day dinner. Walk will begin at 7:00 pm.

**April 20:** Prickett's Fort State Park field trip, hosted by WV Division of Natural Resources. Meet at 8:00 am at Prickett's Fort parking lot at end of rail trail.

**April 23 (Tuesday):** Core Arboretum field trip. Meet at 7:15 am at Core Arboretum parking lot next to WVU Coliseum.

**April 27:** Prickett's Fort State Park field trip, hosted by WV Division of Natural Resources. Meet at 8:00 am at Prickett's Fort parking lot at end of rail trail.

**April 30 (Tuesday):** Core Arboretum field trip. Meet at 7:15 am at Core Arboretum parking lot next to WVU Coliseum.

**May 4:** International Migratory Bird Day at Cooper's Rock State Forest, sponsored by Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia. Meet at 7:00 am at Raven Rock Trail parking lot or Canyon Overlook parking lot.

**May 4:** Prickett's Fort State Park field trip, hosted by WV Division of Natural Resources. Meet at 8:00 am at Prickett's Fort parking lot at end of rail trail.

**May 7 (Tuesday):** Core Arboretum field trip. Meet at 7:15 am at Core Arboretum parking lot next to WVU Coliseum.

**May 11:** White Park field trip. Meet at 8:00 am at Morgantown Ice Arena parking lot.

**May 14 (Tuesday):** Core Arboretum field trip. Meet at 7:15 am at Core Arboretum parking lot next to WVU Coliseum.

**May 18:** Core Arboretum field trip (jointly with Introduction to Birding class). Meet at 8:00 am at Core Arboretum parking lot next to WVU Coliseum.

## Christmas Bird Count continued from page 1

A full report on our Christmas Bird Count can be found on the club's website. Here you can find a map of the count, a complete list of participants, and census totals.

We were given excellent press coverage this year. WBOY reporter, Krista Baker, reported our count during their evening news. Tacy Layne of Your Bulletin Board provided a third of page complete with photos in their publication that covers a large area of northern West Virginia. The Dominion Post ran two articles. One column prior to the day announced the event and invited community participation. Their follow up by Evelyn Ryan summarized the day. Links to these stories can be found on the Mountaineer Audubon Facebook page. Of course, the count is only made possible by the time given by all the volunteers. May 2013 be your Big Year.

### Nominating Committee

The following members have been approved by the Board of Directors to serve as a nominating committee to solicit candidates for election as Officers at the 2013 Annual Meeting, scheduled for April 27 at the annual banquet. If you are interested in being a candidate or wish to suggest someone who might be interested, please contact one of the committee members by March 15. Officers include President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

Katherine Payne, [paynekw@gmail.com](mailto:paynekw@gmail.com), (304) 284-9127

Dee Fulton, [dfvet@aol.com](mailto:dfvet@aol.com), (304) 864-0044

Jan Quailey, [vojq@msn.com](mailto:vojq@msn.com), (304) 296-9377

Larry Schwab, [larryschwab@gmail.com](mailto:larryschwab@gmail.com), (304) 598-0241

## Introduction to Birding Class

Introduction to Birding Class (presented by City of Morgantown Bureau of Parks and Recreation) —All classes meet at 8:00 am at Dorsey's Knob Park Groscup Center and will last until 11:00 am or shortly thereafter. Free of charge.

Pre-registration required—contact BOPARC at [info@boparc.org](mailto:info@boparc.org) or (304) 296-8356 from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday.

Instructors: Terry Bronson and LeJay Graffious.

For more information, contact Terry at [bronsonwv@gmail.com](mailto:bronsonwv@gmail.com) or (304) 225-0999.

February 16: Basic identification techniques; Dorsey's Knob field trip

March 16: Habitat; Cheat Lake field trip

April 20: Migration; Mon River Trail field trip

May 18: Song; Core Arboretum field trip (jointly with regular Mountaineer Audubon field trip)

## Great Backyard Bird Count Goes Global in 2013

After 15 years of success in North America, the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will open up to the entire world for the first time in 2013. Anyone, from anywhere on earth, can participate by visiting [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) and reporting the kinds and numbers of birds they see during the 16th annual count, February 15—18, 2013.

A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with partner Bird Studies Canada, the four-day count typically receives sightings from tens of thousands of people reporting more than 600 bird species in the United States and Canada alone.

"This year's count will give us a whole new perspective as sightings pour in from around the globe in real time," said Marshall Iloff at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "Millions of people encounter birds every day all over the world. Imagine what scientists will learn if each one of us shares observations from our own area!"

*Continued on next page*

**Great Backyard Bird Count** *continued*

During the 2012 count, participants reported 17.4 million bird observations on 104,000 checklists. Snowy Owls thrilled many participants when these striking birds-of-prey ventured south from the Arctic in record numbers. In 2013, scientists predict that U.S. and Canadian bird watchers will see an influx of Red-breasted Nuthatches and winter finches (such as Pine Siskins) because of scarce food supplies on their northern wintering grounds.

“The GBBC is an ideal opportunity for young and old to connect with nature by discovering birds and to participate in a huge science project,” said Gary Langham, Audubon’s Chief Scientist. “This year, we hope people on all seven continents, oceans, and islands, will head out into their neighborhoods, rural areas, parks, and wilderness to further our understanding of birds across the hemispheres.”

Participating is easy. Simply watch birds for at least 15 minutes at the location of your choice on one or more of the count days. Estimate the number of birds you see for each species you can identify. You’ll select your location on a map, answer a few questions, enter your tallies, and then submit your data to share your sightings with others around the world.

The global capacity for the count will be powered by eBird, an online checklist program for all of the world’s 10,240 bird species. Participants will be able to view what others are seeing on interactive maps, keep their own records, and have their tallies recorded for perpetuity.

**Outdoor Cats: Single Greatest Source of Human-Caused Mortality for Birds and Mammals, Says New Study**

A new peer-reviewed study authored by scientists from two of the world’s leading science and wildlife organizations – the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) – has found that bird and mammal mortality caused by outdoor cats is much higher than has been widely reported, with annual bird mortality now estimated to be 1.4 to 3.7 billion and mammal mortality likely 6.9 – 20.7 billion individuals.

The study, which offers the most comprehensive analysis of information on the issue of outdoor cat predation, was published in the online research journal *Nature Communications* and is based on a review of more than 90 previous studies. The study was authored by Dr. Peter Marra and Scott Loss, research scientists at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and by Tom Will from the U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service’s Division of Migratory Birds. It is available at [http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/pdf/Loss\\_et\\_al\\_2013.pdf](http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/pdf/Loss_et_al_2013.pdf).

According to Dr. George Fenwick, President of American Bird Conservancy, one of the leading bird conservation organizations in the U.S. and a group that has called for action on this issue for many years, “This study, which employed scientifically rigorous standards for data inclusion, demonstrates that the issue of cat predation on birds and mammals is an even bigger environmental and ecological threat than we thought. No estimates of any other anthropogenic (human-caused) mortality source approach the bird mortality this study calculated for cat predation.”

The study’s estimate of bird mortality far exceeds any previously estimated U.S. figure for cats. In fact, this magnitude of mortality may exceed all other direct sources of anthropogenic bird and mammal mortality combined. Other bird mortality sources would include collisions with windows, buildings, communication towers, vehicles and pesticide poisoning. “The very high credibility of this study should finally put to rest the misguided notions that outdoor cats represent some harmless new component to the natural environment. The carnage that outdoor cats inflict is staggering and can no longer be ignored or dismissed. This is a wake-up call for cat owners and communities to get serious about this problem before even more ecological damage occurs,” Fenwick said.

The study estimated that the median number of birds killed by cats annually is 2.4 billion and the median number of mammals killed is 12.3 billion. About 69 percent of the bird mortality from cat predation and 89 percent of the mammal mortality was from un-owned cats. Un-owned cats are defined to include farm/barn cats, strays that are fed but not granted access to human habitations, cats in subsidized colonies, and cats that are completely feral.

The study charges that “Despite these harmful effects, policies for management of free-ranging cat populations and regulation of pet ownership behaviors are dictated by animal welfare issues rather than ecological impacts. Projects to manage free-ranging cats, such as Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) colonies, are potentially harmful to wildlife populations, but are implemented across the United States without widespread public knowledge, consideration of scientific evidence or the environmental review processes typically required for actions with harmful environmental consequences.”

# Mountaineer Audubon Annual Banquet

Saturday, April 27, 2013

WVU MeadWestvaco Natural Resources Center (MWNRC)



Take Exit 15 off I-68 at Coopers Rock State Forest. Eastbound – turn left off exit ramp. Westbound – turn right off exit ramp. Turn right at T. Take next left (Sand Springs Road-University Research Forest). Go approximately 2 miles. MeadWestvaco Natural Resources Center (MWNRC) is on left just over the covered bridge.

**Guest Speaker: Elizabeth Byers, WV DNR Vegetation Ecologist**

**Title: High Mountain Habitats: Natural Communities of West Virginia’s Allegheny Mountains**

Natural upland and wetland communities above 2400 feet in elevation are characterized by exceptionally high biodiversity. More than one-half of the 46 communities that make up this system are considered to be globally vulnerable or imperiled. Red spruce and northern hardwoods form the matrix forests, with wetlands including ancient peatlands, sedge fens, ice-scour meadows, and balsam fir swamps, providing habitat to hundreds of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, snails, crayfish, Odonata, Lepidoptera, spiders.

Social time will begin at 4 pm with *hors d'oeuvres, wine, beer, tea and coffee.*

Dinner is at 5:00 pm. The menu is peach cinnamon baked chicken, vegetarian stuffed shells, marinated fresh green beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, parsley potatoes, rolls and desserts.

If you have special dietary needs, contact [lejay@oldhemlock.org](mailto:lejay@oldhemlock.org), or 304-379-7505.

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Reservation Form:

Name:		
Email:		Phone:
Number of Meals:	@ \$28	Total:

**Makes checks payable to Mountaineer Audubon**

Return to: Katherine Payne  
 519 Jefferson Street  
 Morgantown, WV 26501

Questions: Contact [paynekw@gmail.com](mailto:paynekw@gmail.com) or 304-284-9127

**Register before April 17, 2013**

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Chapter Code: C2ZY510Z

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

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*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: \_\_\_\_\_*

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**Thank you for your support!**

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**www.mountaineeraudubon.org**

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