



The Mountain Chat

Newsletter of the Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society

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Winter 2010

“Coming Home, Our Lives in the Appalachians”

“Coming Home, Our Lives in the Appalachians” will be the topic of our banquet headliner on April 23. The banquet will be held at the WVU Westvaco Natural Resources Center at Cooper’s Rock State Forest. See the registration form on page 5 of the newsletter for more information.

Our speaker, Marcia Bonta, is the author of nine books, which are all currently in print, and over 300 magazine articles. She also manages a blog website which includes her popular “Naturalist’s Eye” column from Pennsylvania Game News, the publication of the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Her illustrated talk will focus on the human uses and natural history of our Appalachians to illuminate land-use patterns and conservation issues.

Marcia Bonta was born and raised in the wooded fringes of a suburban South Jersey town, Woodbury, NJ. Daughter of Harold and Leona Myers, she inherited her father’s love for forests, streams and swamps. Her earliest memories are of a childhood enchantment with nature.

She went to Bucknell University because she loved the natural beauty of central Pennsylvania. Her college education gave her a broad knowledge of the liberal arts, a B.A. degree, and a husband, Bruce, whose jobs

took the family to Washington, DC, Maine, and, since 1971, back to central PA. They raised their three sons on an isolated, forest-covered, mountaintop farm near Tyrone, where, inspired by the works of such authors as Hal Borland, Edwin Way Teale, Joseph Wood Krutch and Rachel Carson, Marcia began a writing career based on her daily explorations of the natural world.

Marcia wrote weekly columns for local newspapers for ten years before changing her career emphasis to books, magazine articles, lecturing and slide shows on nature and natural history topics. Her work has been reproduced in a number of anthologies, and she has received several awards for her writing. But she treasures most the letters, calls and conversations with people who have been moved by her writing or her slide shows to appreciate nature more strongly, and to join her in trying to protect the natural world.

She will bring along some of her publications to sell and sign if anyone is interested. They will include ESCAPE TO THE MOUNTAIN, APPALACHIAN SPRING, AUTUMN, SUMMER, and WINTER, WOMEN IN THE FIELD, and AMERICAN WOMEN AFIELD. All these books are timeless. For more information, check out her website, <http://marciabonta.wordpress.com>.

Cold and Snowy Christmas Bird Count 2009

Submitted by LeJay Graffious, CBC Coordinator

Snow, snow, snow, slush, low visibility, cold temperatures and more snow sums up the 2009 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in Morgantown on December 19. Inclement weather once again played a major factor during the official count day, shaping the overall results of the Mountaineer Audubon’s annual bird count. Eighteen participants logged 87.5 miles by car, 29.0 miles on foot and 43.0 party hours birding to identify 60 species of avian fauna. I feel anytime we achieve sixty species in the winter in Monongalia County, it is a good day!

The brave (Nancy used other adjectives.) bird

watchers covered three of the four sectors of the 177 square miles. Generally speaking, numbers of birds were lower than usual, but we did have three new high species counts for Buffleheads (96 in 2009, previous high of 68 in 2003), Red-shouldered Hawks (3/2009, 1/2008) and American Pipits (79/2009, 8/2008). Some notably low census numbers were found with Canada Geese (371/2009, 736/2005), Mallards (230/2009, 714/2003), Red-tailed Hawks (5/2009, 25/2008), Rock Pigeon (118/2009, 588/2008), Eastern Bluebirds (29/2009, 67/1986), Yellow-rumped Warblers (10/2009, 43/1994), House Finches (27/2009, 410/1987) and House Sparrows (61/2009, 288/1988). Terry Bronson’s

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President's Message

Dear Members,

Last fall was a particularly active one for Mountaineer Audubon. We sponsored three programs for the public, all well-attended and enthusiastically received, had our traditional birdseed sale, and once again coordinated the CBC. In addition, several members are working on projects that will occupy us for much of 2010. Four of these are especially interesting. 1) Efforts to coordinate a school program to select a bird for the city of Morgantown (this would include publishing a brochure with tips on local birding). 2) Organize our archives and write a history of Mountaineer Audubon (coordinated by the Public History Program of WVU). 3) Initiate a proposal to form a sister-relationship with an Audubon Club in Mexico. 4) Help coordinate an educational program with 4H groups. We will keep you informed as these efforts develop. Please contact me if you are interested in working on these projects. One way to stay current is through our Mountaineer Audubon website (www.mountaineeraudubon.org). It is looking very good.

In this newsletter you will see an article by John Hall on the spoliation of Dunkard Creek. It is an important statement, and reminds us of the fragility and vulnerability of our local ecosystems. Many of you have become involved in trying to understand the cause and scope of the disaster, and in exerting pressure on local and state officials to correct the problem. As your president, I wrote to state officials expressing our concern about the problem and urging action to prevent recurrences. At this point, I do think it is imperative for all of us to continue insisting that some type of meaningful standards for the region's waterways be imposed. The future of wildlife in West Virginia depends on it.

Please mark April 23rd on your calendars. We have an excellent venue, a noted speaker, and a fine meal planned for our annual banquet. I hope to see you there.

Best wishes,

Joe

Events Calendar

9 February Heritage Village , 7:00 pm
Terry Bronson, “**Birds of New Hampshire**”

12-15 February **The Great Backyard Count**, sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. For details and reporting go to www.birdcount.org

9 March Rob Tallman, Ornithologist,
WVDNR
WV Breeding Bird Atlas Project
Public Safety Building, 7:00 pm

23 April **Mountaineer Audubon Banquet**
Details are in the newsletter.

Spring Arboretum Bird Walks. Tuesday mornings from April 20 – May 18. All walks start at 7:30 am . LeJay Graffious will help to lead/coordinate leaders.

Neighborhood Bird Walk

13 May This will be our inaugural neighborhood walk. South Park, Meet in Morgantown High Parking lot, 5:00 pm
Kelly Williams will lead.

Mountaineer Audubon Chapter Membership Application

Enter or renew my membership (family or individual) to the Mountaineer Audubon chapter.

I understand that this category of membership does not include membership in the National Audubon Society.

I will receive information on all chapter activities, and have voting rights in Board elections.

I'd like to join, renew or extend my current membership. My \$15 payment is enclosed.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____

Make check payable to Mountaineer Audubon Society and mail to: Mountaineer Audubon Society P.O. Box 422, Morgantown, WV 26507-0422

Christmas Bird Count *continued from page 1*

team and Bill Kennel's team added a new species, White-crowned Sparrow, on count day for the Mountaineer CBC. Lower numbers can be contributed to many factors, especially the weather this year. Observers had less than ideal observation conditions and many birds demonstrated that they were smarter than the humans by taking shelter and not moving about. Rescheduling is always difficult; therefore, I did not cancel the count. I believe, in the future, it may be prudent to schedule a back up date in case of inclement weather.

Birders added an additional nine species during the count week. Count week is the three day period prior to and following count day. This year Derek Courtney added a new bird, a Bonaparte's Gull, to our historical CBC list during count week.

National Audubon's 109th annual Christmas Bird Count is the longest running Citizen Science survey in the world. CBC data not only helps identify birds in most urgent need of conservation action; it reveals success stories. The Christmas Bird Count helped document the comeback of the previously endangered Bald Eagle. In Morgantown this year, we found three adult Bald Eagles. We recorded our first eagle in 1999 and have had them in eight of the past ten years. The CBC documents significant increases in waterfowl populations. After mid-November Cheat Lake becomes a major waterfowl birding area when the water is open. Both eagle and waterfowl increases are the result of conservation efforts.

"Everyone who takes part in the Christmas Birds Count plays a critical role in helping us focus attention and conservation where it is most needed." said Audubon Chief Scientist, Dr. Tom Bancroft, "In addition to Audubon's reports on the impacts of Climate Change on birds and our analysis of Common Birds in Decline, it is the foundation for Audubon's WatchList, which identified species in need of conservation help."

"The Christmas Bird Count is all about the power of Citizen Science" says Geoff LeBaron, Audubon's Christmas Bird Count Director. "Our theme is 'I Count' because the work of tens of thousands of volunteers, extending one hundred and ten years, really adds up for the conservation of birds and our environment."

As local coordinator, I praise all who participated to make this year's event successful. Thanks to sector team leaders for organizing their teams for count day: Sue Olcott; Alan Clark; and Hillar Klandorf. Special appreciation goes to all the citizen scientists who gave their life energy to this event: Kyle Aldeinger; Nancy Bronson; Terry Bronson; Derek Courtney; Dee Fulton; Doug Hoehn; Bill Kennel; Bruce Ludwick; Gail Ludwick; Bob Lueckel; Tommy Lueckel; P J Murray; Katherine Payne; Mike Peters; Todd Schnopp; and Larry Schwab. Also, we are also grateful to Bob Burrell and John Hall

DUNKARD CREEK SITUATION, SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 2009

by John Hall

who provided feeder count data. A full report, photos and complete bird list may be found on the Mountaineer Audubon's web site, mountaineeraudubon.org.

Mountaineer Audubon members have been concerned about the fish kill in Dunkard Creek in September 2009. This creek runs for over 30 miles in Monongalia County and Pennsylvania before leaving WV near Mount Morris, and emptying into the Monongahela River near Poland Mines. Over 98% of the fish, belonging to at least 18 species, and all of the 14 species of freshwater mussels have been lost.

Several agencies and organizations have joined the investigation. These include both the West Virginia and Pennsylvania Departments of Environmental Protection, the US Environmental Protection Agency, the WV Division of Natural Resources, and the Upper Monongahela River Association.

There seem to be several factors involved. A golden alga, *Prymnesium parvum*, now appears to be directly responsible for the killing. This is a microscopic alga, oval in shape, and about 15 by 8 micrometers in size. (There are about 25,000 micrometers in an inch.) It has 2 chloroplasts, and 2 flagella, so it is capable of both photosynthesis, and movement; it can also ingest food particles. When it reproduces in large numbers, or "blooms", it releases a toxin which damages the gills and interferes with the breathing of aquatic organisms. Like the algae causing red tides, *Prymnesium* occurs mainly in marine or brackish waters, but unlike the red tide algae, it has no direct toxic effect on humans.

This situation represents the first known case of golden algae causing problems in the Mid-Atlantic states. *Prymnesium* is widely distributed in oceans and brackish waters throughout the world and has been reported from both coasts of the United States and from Texas. However, it requires a salt or brackish water environment, with total dissolved solid (TDS) levels considerably higher than those normally occurring in freshwater, in order to flourish to the extent that it can cause toxic blooms.

In the Monongahela River, TDS levels have increased to levels which have threatened potable water supplies and caused concern in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania has water quality standards which limit TDS (chlorides, sulfides, sodium) levels in streams to 500 parts per million (ppm). West Virginia does not have such standards, and the TDS levels have been measured at 15,000 to 25,000 ppm in some places. Not only does a high TDS level facilitate growth of the toxic algae, but it can also exert considerable stress on fish and other aquatic life, and contribute to mortality. Problems of this nature were anticipated by

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Dunkard Creek *continued from page 3*

the Morgantown Green Team, and House Bill 2960, which would limit stream TDS levels, was introduced into the West Virginia Legislature in 2009 by Delegate Barbara Fleischauer of Monongalia County. It had the support of the entire Monongalia County delegation, and 8 other delegates, but did not pass, and is being reconsidered in light of the recent chain of events.

According to figures mentioned in one of the local radio programs, about 40% of the TDS in Pennsylvania streams come from acid mine drainage; another 40% can be attributed to "fracing" solutions used in gas well drilling to break through the Marcellus Shale. The remaining 20% comes from other sources, including power plants. Similar figures probably apply to West Virginia streams. In this instance, some of the solids came from Consol's Blacksville #2 mine which was permitted to discharge drainage into holding ponds which eventually enter the creek. Salt solutions used to break through the Marcellus Shale appear to have been included in the permit, up to a limit of 25,000 ppm, although the salt concentration of fluids entering the holding ponds may have been 10 times higher than this. Seawater has a salt content of 30,000 ppm, and it is evident that water with high TDS content has been entering Dunkard Creek to the extent that the Creek can support the growth of marine algae.

The algal blooms are facilitated by higher temperatures and lower water levels. Removing water from the stream for use in gas drilling or mining may have contributed to the problem. The precipitation in fall and the fact that Consol has stopped its discharge of solids into the area may have had an ameliorating effect on the situation.

There are several ways in which these algae could have been introduced into the area. They produce resistant cysts, which remain viable for long periods. They may have been brought in from the coast or from inland Texas on a fisherman's boot, or on a tanker truck or on drilling equipment; or they could have been present in small numbers in isolated areas for years but unable to grow and disperse to the extent where they could kill fish and other aquatic organisms until the right conditions were present. Their flagella would aid in their rapid dispersal under these conditions.

The solutions to the problem include (1) passing legislation in West Virginia which would limit the amount of total dissolved solids allowed in waste water, (2) frequent or continual monitoring of streams to insure the maintenance of conditions which will permit the growth and survival of aquatic life, (3) realization on the part of gas and coal companies and power plants that they must keep their discharges within acceptable limits, and (4) effective enforcement of current Clean Water Act Standards.

Steps to correct the situation must be taken in the

immediate future. According to WVDEP, 21 other West Virginia streams have conditions which could support the growth of Prynnesium or similar toxin-producing algae, and seven of these streams are in Monongalia County. In October, 2009, golden algae were detected in Cabin Creek in Kanawha County, and studies in November revealed six more streams with the algae.

In December 2009 the WVDEP allowed Consol to resume discharging into Dunkard Creek from January until April 30, 2010 when the water temperature will be high enough to permit algal blooms. Such a decision was deemed necessary in order to protect miners who are endangered when the waste water is stored underground.

The TDS levels are to be closely monitored and kept below a level of 860 ppm when water temperatures are above 40 degrees F, and below 1400 ppm when temperatures are above 40 degrees. Pennsylvania's state law limits TDS/chloride levels to 500 ppm and attempts are still being made to pass a West Virginia law which will require a similar limit. Consol is being required by the WVDEP to build treatment facilities which will remove the TDS/chlorides from the discharge water before it is returned to the stream. These facilities are required to be in operation by May, 2013. This will help correct the current situation, but may not be

2009 Bird Seed Sale

By Sue Olcott

The recent heavy snow and cold temperatures have brought birds flocking to our feeders. Black oil sunflower, nyger, and Audubon mix are brightening our days by bringing in cardinals, chickadees, and juncos among others.

Mountaineer Audubon continued its success with this year's seed sale. Over sixty individuals pre-ordered seed, netting Mountaineer Audubon approximately \$975 to help support conservation education and wildlife conservation. Over 3000 pounds of black oil sunflower seed was purchased, and over 5000 pounds of additional seed products and over 620 suet blocks are finding their way to area feeders. Thank you to everyone who purchased seed from us.

As in past years, the bulk of the seed was distributed from Southern States Cooperative in Sabraton with the help of Bill Kennel, Hillar Klandorf, Katherine Payne, Terry Bronson, Alan Clark, Norma Venable, Ella Belling, and Sue Olcott. Thank you to Butch McConnell and the staff at Southern States for working with us ordering seed and providing the facility for distribution. If you run short, consider stopping by Southern States for additional seed or other supplies.

National Audubon Society

A gift membership to Audubon will be enjoyed for the entire year. First year dues of \$20.00 include local chapter membership.

National Audubon Society

Chapter Membership Application

YES, I'd like to join. Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and the Mountaineer Chapter. Chapter code:C92Y5107. Send Audubon magazine and my membership card to the address below.

Please send a gift membership to the National Audubon Society and the appropriate local chapter to the person and address below.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS _____

Please make checks payable to the National Audubon Society

Send this application and your check to:
 National Audubon Society
 Chapter Membership Data Center
 PO Box 422250
 Palm Coast, FL 34142-2250

Mountaineer Audubon Directory

President	John Super	292-4336
Vice President	LeJay Graffious	379-4492
Secretary	Vicky Shears	296-7249
Treasurer	Bill Kennell	288-3093
Fundraising	Sue Olcott	825-6787
Publicity	Alan Clark	724/ 437-2524
Education	Norma Venable	328-5128
Conservation	Kathryn Payne	284-9127
Membership	Mary Ann Tokarz	599-7683
Field Trips	vacant	
Newsletter	Sally Wilts	379-7567

www.mountaineeraudubon.org

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