Spring 2019 Programs

Program: Lead Exposure in Raptors
Tuesday, March 12, 6:30pm at the Village at Heritage Point

Vince Slabe has over 15 years of experience working on avian research projects around the country and currently lives with his family in Morgantown. He is currently finishing a Ph.D. at WVU and will graduate in May of 2019. Vince will present his dissertation research on lead exposure of raptors. Everyone is welcome at the Village for this presentation.

Program: Screening of Albatross
Thursday, April 25, 6-8pm, Room 334 Percival Hall, WVU Evansdale Campus

Everyone is welcome to join Mountaineer Audubon, the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, and the Monongahela Master Naturalists to watch the new film Albatross. From the film’s website:

“ALBATROSS is a powerful visual journey into the heart of an astonishingly symbolic environmental tragedy. On one of the remotest islands on our planet, tens of thousands of baby albatrosses lie dead on the ground, their bodies filled with plastic. Returning to the island over several years, our team witnessed the cycles of life and death of these birds as a multi-layered metaphor for our times. This story is framed in the vividly gorgeous language of state-of-the-art high-definition digital cinematography, surrounded by millions of live birds in one of the world’s most beautiful natural sanctuaries. The viewer will experience stunning juxtapositions of beauty and horror, destruction and renewal, grief and joy, birth and death, coming out the other side with their heart broken open and their worldview shifted.”

2018 Christmas Bird Count is In the Books

LeJay Graffious

The results are in from the 2018 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) around the Morgantown area and, by all measures, it was a very successful CBC season. The Mountaineer Audubon Society’s participation in the National Audubon CBC is an annual tradition dating back to the 1970’s. It is held jointly with the national count dating back to 1900, when ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then-nascent Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a “Christmas Bird Census” that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunting them as had previously been done.

Each year, from December 14 through January 5, thousands of volunteers across the Americas brave snow, wind, or rain, and take part in the effort. The National Audubon Society and other organizations use this data to assess the health of bird populations, and to help guide conservation action. At 118 years old, the annual Christmas Bird Count is the longest-running citizen science project in the nation!

“2018 was a great year for the Christmas Bird Count although the weather damped some participation,” says LeJay Graffious, count coordinator. “It was 46° F and light rain in the morning. Twenty-nine volunteers just put on their rain gear and counted the birds.” Our dedicated nocturnal birder, Derek Courtney, started at mid-night in Cooper’s Rock State Forest. He reported “The first bird of the count was once

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President’s Message

Welcome to 2019

Do you make New Year’s resolutions? I usually don’t, but this year I’ve set a bird-related goal for myself: I plan to submit an eBird checklist every day of 2019, even if it’s just a list of birds at my feeder outside my kitchen window.

Also, some bird watchers try to do a “January 100”—see or hear 100 species of bird in an area during the month of January. This can be difficult in West Virginia, especially if you don’t have the capacity to chase uncommon birds around the state or if many of our waterways are frozen. I attempted a half-hearted January 100; instead of 100 species, I tallied 45. Not even halfway there! I did, however, make it to the Canaan Valley on New Year’s Day and saw the Evening Grosbeaks on Cortland Road. I’ve also been fortunate to have a Red-breasted Nuthatch that has visited my feeders every day since November, and during a recent cold snap, my yard hosted Golden-crowned Kinglets and White-crowned Sparrows. And I was glad to see Tundra Swans and Canvasbacks on nearby Cheat Lake. The rest of my January birds are fairly typical for our area this time of year, but that doesn’t make them less fun to watch at my feeders. I have a pair of Carolina Wrens that find their way into my garage to stay warm, several Song Sparrows, a pair of Downy Woodpeckers and a pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and a Red-shouldered Hawk that I see in my neighborhood almost every day. I’m also happy to see our local group of resident Black Vultures—8 or 9 usually—between exits 7 and 4 of I-68.

In other New Year’s news, there will be some changes to Mountaineer Audubon’s Board of Directors in 2019. Our long-time Treasurer, Vicky Shears, will be stepping down. We will miss Vicky’s humor, dedication, and meticulous financial recordkeeping. Also stepping down from the post of Field Trip Coordinator is David Daniels; although he won’t be coordinating the trips, we hope to see him in the field at many of our birding events. Thank you, Vicky and David, for your service to our Mountaineer Audubon community. Orion Metheny plans to take over both positions, and we are grateful for his willingness to serve. Orion is a senior at WVU, and he is a former student of LeJay Graffious. Welcome Orion!

I hope to see many of you at Mountaineer Audubon events this spring. We have a lot of interesting and exciting events to look forward to!

See you soon,

Katie Fallon

Bald Eagles by Joey Herron

Introduction to Orion Metheny

Hi, I’m Orion Metheny. A little bit about me: I’m a Morgantown native and I love this state we call home. In May I will be graduating from WVU with an Accounting degree, as well as a minor in Leadership. Later this year, I’ll be getting married to my high school sweetheart in October! On to birds, I first fell in love with birds when I was 9 years old. I had a particular fondness for waterfowl. At the encouragement of LeJay Graffious, who was my elementary school principal at the time, I expanded that into a passion for birding. While I still enjoy waterfowl, I’ve found joy in all birds and continue to be amazed every spring during migration. I’m excited to be active with the Mountaineer Audubon Chapter and look forward to connecting with you on field trips and walks.
Mountaineer Audubon Field Trips

All walks are free and will be on Saturdays except as noted. They will only be canceled for extremely inclement weather. Bring binoculars, snacks, and be sure to dress appropriately for the weather. Included are a few events sponsored by other area organizations. For more information, contact Orion Metheny at waterfowler98@yahoo.com or (304) 608-3959.

March 16 Waterfowl Trip. Cheat Lake. 8 am at Ruby & Ketchy’s Restaurant on Rt. 857 east of Cheat Lake. Meet at 7 am if you’d like breakfast. Leader: Derek Courtney

March 20 @ 7:30AM, Old Hemlock: Join LeJay Graffious for this first in a series of monthly bird walks at Old Hemlock to watch the arrival of spring migrants and experience the breeding season develop. We will walk approximately two miles and stop at 10 predetermined locations to census birds for three minutes. Contact LeJay for directions: lejay@oldhemlock.org.

March 23 @ 7PM, WV Botanic Garden: LeJay Graffious will lead a search for American Woodcocks displaying over the old reservoir from sunset to dusk. Join us for this unique experience that is sure to excite all ages! Dress warmly and bring a flashlight. Sponsored by the West Virginia Botanic Garden. Register a week in advance at www.wvbg.org.

March 29 @ 7PM, Snake Hill WMA: Join Orion Metheny for an evening of fun as we search for the American Woodcock! Its unique aerial display occurs from sunset to dusk. Meet in the last parking lot for a short walk to the fields for viewing. Be sure to dress warmly and bring a flashlight!

April 13 @ 10AM, WV Botanic Garden: Do you know some little birders? Or maybe you have some in training? Join the West Virginia Young Birders Club for a mid-morning walk! This emersion into nature is a great chance for young birders to learn and experience. Register in advance at www.wvbg.org.

April 23 @ 7:30AM, WVU Arboretum: Migration offers the unique experience to see many neo-tropical migrants. Join us on a weekly series of walks to experience the spring migration! Meet at the entrance to the arboretum. LeJay Graffious will lead you through this local hotspot and point out the morning chorus.

April 24 @ 7:30AM, Old Hemlock: LeJay Graffious leads monthly Bird Walk Series

April 27 @ 7:30AM, WV Botanic Garden: Join Orion Metheny on a walk through an old reservoir as we experience the vibrancy of spring migration. This opportunity offers a chance to see and hear many wonderful species! Register in advance at www.wvbg.org.

April 30 @ 7:30AM, WVU Arboretum: Migration offers the unique experience to see many neo-tropical migrants. Meet at the entrance to the arboretum. LeJay Graffious will lead you through this local hotspot and point out the morning chorus.

May 7 @ 7:30AM, WVU Arboretum: Migration offers the unique experience to see many neo-tropical migrants. Meet at the entrance to the arboretum. Larry Schwab will lead you through this local hotspot and point out the morning chorus.

May 14 @ 7:30AM, WVU Arboretum: Migration offers the unique experience to see many neo-tropical migrants. Meet at the entrance to the arboretum. Larry Schwab will lead you through this local hotspot and point out the morning chorus.

May 18 @ 7:30AM, Coopers Rock State Forest: Morgantown Migratory Bird Day. Katie Fallon and LeJay Graffious will lead a walk to experience the birds of our local state forest. Meet at the Raven Rock trail head.

May 27 @ 7:30AM to Noon, Old Hemlock: Bird Banding

June 2 @ 7:30AM to Noon, Old Hemlock: Bird Banding

June 8 @ 7:30AM, Cheat Lake Park. Meet in the upper parking lot at the end of Morgan’s Run Road for a walk led by Katie Fallon

June 15 @ 7:30AM, Brucceton Mills, I-68 Exit 23: LeJay Graffious leads a day of four-wheeling and birding in Preston County. We will meet at the Park & Ride off I-68 Exit 23 and carpool to Cranesville Swamp. From Cranesville will use the Orr-Tannery Road (high clearance vehicles recommended) to the Screech Owl Brewery for lunch.

Continued on next page
Again this year, Katie Fallon organized the WV Young Birders on a two hour CBC team at Ridge Way Farm. The weather disappointingly limited participation. As is typical, the CBC wrapped up with a ‘counting dinner’ at Taziki’s Mediterranean Café. Volunteers convene to compare notes, report totals, and tell just a few ‘bird tales’ about the count day. The camaraderie is one of the best parts of this citizen science program.

Here are some breakdowns from our count.

December 15, 2018– Mountaineer Chapter Christmas Bird Count

- Total number of species: 77 plus 2 additional species seen during count week.
- Total number of birds: 4220
- Effort: Walking- 43 hours & 37 miles; Car- 20 hours & 238 miles; Owling- 8 hours, 58 miles.
- Number of volunteers: 29 and 3 giving feeder counts.
- Notable Sightings: New species for the count were Lincoln’s Sparrow (D. Courtney and H. Clipp) and 2-Vesper Sparrows (A. Clark and C. Lituma). Some of the notable species were 2-Northern Saw-whet Owl, 1-Long-eared Owl, 2-Bald Eagles, 2-Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, 1 -White-eyed Vireo and 1- Ruffed Grouse. Also, notable was the lack of waterfowl. Due to the warm November and December the northern waterfowl had not been pushed south to the Morgantown area.
- Full report can be found at mountaineeraudubon.org
Science in the Scope: The Latest in Bird Research
By Hannah Clipp

Have you ever wondered about discoveries that scientists make while doing bird research? Have you ever been confused by complicated science jargon? Then this brand-new article series is perfect for you! I'm a Ph.D. student studying birds at West Virginia University and a self-proclaimed science communicator. My goal here is to briefly and simply explain some interesting studies that were published recently.

Big news in bird migration:
Numbers and survival of North America's migratory birds
Weather radars don’t just sense precipitation like rain and snow --- they can also detect birds in the air as they migrate during the night. Researchers from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology have taken full advantage of this awesome ability to answer some ambitious questions. For example, they used data from the national network of 143 weather radars to estimate the number of nocturnally migrating birds that pass through the northern and southern United States each year. From 2013 to 2017, as many as 4 billion birds came down from Canada and entered the United States during fall migration each year, and up to 4.7 billion passed through the southern United States, on their way to the tropics or beyond. However, the following spring, only about 3.5 billion returned from where they wintered south of the United States, and just 2.6 billion passed through the northern United States into Canada. That’s nearly 25% of birds that don’t return to the United States in the spring, likely because they died during migration or during the winter. Interestingly, the death toll is higher (~35%) for birds that leave Canada and primarily winter in the United States, like American robins and dark-eyed juncos. So it appears that long-distance migrants that spend the winter south of the United States (like many warblers, orioles, and tanagers) may have higher survival rates than shorter-distance migrants that spend the winter in the United States, even though they are usually traveling much longer distances. But that doesn’t mean that long-distance migrants are doing better than those shorter-distance migrants. Although more adults survive during the winter, birds that travel to the tropics tend to have less offspring than birds that winter in the United States. Because long-distance migrants seem to be favoring a strategy that emphasizes adult survival over producing more offspring, they are particularly sensitive to changes in habitat in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. If the quality or amount of habitat where these birds spend the winter decreases, then their survival rates may not be so high, and their populations could be in real trouble.

Patterns of bird migration across the Gulf of Mexico
If you birded along the Gulf Coast from 2004 to 2011 and entered your sightings into eBird, then you may have contributed to this next study, led by researchers from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. They combined eBird data from citizen scientists and data from weather radars to estimate bird numbers and examine trends in the timing, location, and intensity of bird migration through the Gulf Coast region from 1995 to 2015. What were the findings of the study? First, they were able to calculate that an average of 2.1 billion birds, ranging from hummingbirds to shorebirds, pass through the Gulf Coast each spring. You know what's pretty amazing? Most of those birds made the long, potentially dangerous flight north all the way across the Gulf of Mexico. That's over 600 miles of nonstop flying! Previous estimates of birds migrating through the Gulf Coast ranged rather wildly from millions to billions, so this study gives us the first evidence-based estimate of that number. Second, the timing was consistent over the 20 years of the study, with approximately half of the total birds (~1 billion!) passing through during the 18-day period from April 19 and May 7. In terms of location, the majority of migrating birds pass through the Texas coast rather than the central or eastern Gulf Coast. (So if you want to witness bird migration along the Gulf Coast, your best bet is to travel to the Texas coast between April 19 and May 7.) In the grand scheme of things, this study provides baseline information about bird migration in this region, allowing scientists to assess long-term trends and the potential effects of future global change.

Bright light at night attracts migrating birds
Have you heard about birds colliding with buildings while migrating during the night? Brightly lit buildings shine like a beacon in the night, and birds
seem attracted to them, almost like insects to a lamp. But collisions aren’t the only sinister effect of bright light at night. A study conducted by University of Delaware scientists used weather radars to find that light-polluted skies also affect the selection of stopover habitat, which birds use to rest and feed between migratory flights. Researchers found that, from 2008 to 2014, bird densities in stopover habitat in the northeastern United States increased with proximity to brightly lit (i.e., urban) areas, but decreased within a few miles of those areas, probably because there isn’t much suitable habitat in or around urban areas. This trend indicates there is a broad-scale attraction to bright light at night during migration. Because extensive forest habitat is generally the highest in quality, with the best shelter and food resources for birds, this attraction to light could cause birds to select lesser-quality habitat, which could lead to trouble with predators and finding enough food. Thus, light pollution isn’t just deadly for birds flying at night --- it could affect the ultimate success of a bird’s migratory journey by influencing where it stops to rest and feed. Programs that encourage buildings to reduce night lighting during periods of high migration may prove important in conserving migratory bird populations.

**How you can help birds:**

*Prioritize native plants to support local food webs*

Researchers monitored Carolina chickadees and their nests within residential yards of Washington, DC, and investigated how the amount of nonnative plants in each yard affected the numbers of insects, what the chickadees ate, and whether the chickadee babies survived to fledging. The results of the study make a strong case to plant native. As the amount of nonnative plants increased: the number of caterpillars and spiders decreased, the relative amount of spiders (which aren’t as good as caterpillars) eaten by chickadees increased, and the number of chickadee babies that survived to fledging decreased. In fact, many breeding chickadees tended to avoid yards with a lot of nonnative plants. Overall, the study found that Carolina chickadee populations could not be sustained in yards dominated by nonnative plants, since they couldn’t successfully produce enough young. The researchers recommend that yards contain at least 70% native plants to support Carolina chickadees and other songbirds that depend on feeding insects to their young during the breeding season.

**Cerulean (and other WV Warblers, Too) Blues**

*By Larry Schwab*

West Virginia is a warbler wonderland. It is in West Virginia that nearly half of the Cerulean Warbler population breeds. If you haven’t read our Mountaineer Audubon President Katie Fallon’s delightful book *Cerulean Blues*, then find a copy and enjoy it. She documents the natural history of the bird and its status as a near-threatened species and her West Virginia adventures with the bird. The Cerulean Warbler is one of 39 species of wood warblers known to occur in West Virginia, and it is not the only species in declining numbers. The Golden-winged Warbler shares the same status. Both species breed in the state and are listed as “near threatened.” Conservation efforts to conserve these beautiful birds include protection legislation (international bird migratory act) and habitat creation and protection through federal and West Virginia state-sponsored recovery activities. There are two other warbler species, the Blackpoll and Kirtland’s, that are on threatened bird lists. Both are passage migrants and have not been recorded breeding in West Virginia. The Yellow-breasted Chat, a curious large passerine that sings at night, was formerly listed as a warbler, topping the West Virginia warbler species list at 40. It has been re-classified in family Icteridae. A birder’s favorite, it is unpredictable in occurrence and distribution.

Come out this spring with your binoculars to Mountaineer Audubon’s guided field trips (or pick up your bins and enjoy birding with your friends). You could encounter these uncommon warblers as well as other returning passage Neotropical migrants. While you are enjoying West Virginia’s birds, check out the lush profusion of flowering plants and trees in our beautiful state. And please visit online conservation resources on migratory birds including the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources, National Audubon Society, West Virginia Nature Conservancy, Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, and the American Bird Conservancy.
Mountaineer Audubon
Annual Spring Banquet

Saturday, April 13, 2019

West Virginia Botanic Garden Welcome Center
1061 Tyrone Road, Morgantown, 26508 (same location as last year)

6:30pm: Social Time
7pm: Our Annual Meeting, followed by dinner from Ali Baba’s

After dinner:

Presentation by Joey Herron: “West-bird Virginia...A State of Many Colors”

Joey Herron began bird watching at age 12. He graduated in 1980 from Glenville State College with a BS in Biology. A member of the Brooks Bird Club since 1975, Joey has had more than 25 articles on bird research published in The Redstart. As a Master Bander with the USGS, he has banded hundreds of birds from more than 100 species, and currently operates banding at Prickett’s Fort, Tygart Lake, and Valley Falls State Parks (Northern Saw-whet Owls). Joey is also an avid bird photographer with many awards and magazine credits, and he has published three bird photography books: Birds of Prickett’s Fort State Park, Birds and Words, and Birds of Tygart Lake State Park.

Reservation Form:

Name(s):

____________________________________________________________

Email: _______________________________ Phone: ________________________

Number of meals: _____________ x $20 each = Total: __________________

Make checks payable to Mountaineer Audubon and return to Katie Fallon, 87 Morgan Hill Road, Morgantown, WV, 26508. Please register by March 31, 2019.
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.

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