



The Mountain Chat

Newsletter of the Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Volume 36, No. 2

Fall 2011

Fall Migration is Upon Us

By Terry Bronson

The annual spectacle of avian fall migration is already well advanced. This is one of the best times of the year to see many species of birds that are not resident in West Virginia, but are only passing through. Here are a few suggestions:

SHOREBIRDS

Shorebird migration actually begins in late June, when failed breeders from the Arctic begin to head south, followed by successful breeders, then juveniles. It is a protracted migration, with some species still viewable well into the fall. In WV we get relatively few shorebirds, since most track down the Atlantic Coast or the Ohio and Mississippi River Valleys. The best spot I've found locally is Upper Pleasant Creek Wildlife Management Area in Barbour County south of Grafton along Routes 119/250, but if you know of a wetland that shows a decent amount of muddy shoreline, check it out.

RAPTORS

The star of the show for raptors is clearly the Broad-winged Hawk, whose numbers dwarf all other species. Peak time is mid to late September for Broad-wings, but other species come through well into November. Almost any mountain or ridgetop with a clear view to the north or northeast is a good location, with the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory on Dolly Sods east of Canaan Valley being one of the best.

SONGBIRDS

A few species such as the swallows depart early and are already gone for the year, but most will be moving through our area in September and October. Although migrants can show up virtually anywhere, be cognizant of typical habitats—shrubs and forest edges, often near water, usually yield many birds, but many warblers and vireos prefer tree canopies. Also remember that many species are duller in fall, and young birds have not yet attained adult plumage. Areas to try include the Decker's Creek Rail Trail in the Reedsville area of Preston County,

Dorsey's Knob and White Parks in Morgantown, and Cooper's Rock State Forest east of Morgantown.

WATER BIRDS

Two locations—Cheat Lake and the Monongahela River—stand out as good spots for ducks, geese, swans, coots, loons, grebes, gulls, and terns during fall migration, which really doesn't begin until well into October. Many birds stick around until the water freezes—Cheat Lake freezes first and may remain so all winter long, but the Mon River just downstream from the Morgantown Lock and Dam often has open water all winter long. At Cheat Lake, both Cheat Lake Park and the area near the I-68 bridge are productive. Alpine Lake in Preston County is another good location until freeze-up—although private, the entrance station will give you a permit for the day if you indicate you are there to see ducks.

WHEN AND HOW

Migration is highly dependent on weather patterns, so check the forecast—winds out of the north, northwest, or northeast may yield a good show, but winds from other directions usually won't. Also be very conscious of the temperature and dress accordingly—there's nothing worse than freezing out at Cheat Lake Park in November when freezing winds blow off the lake. Remember, too, that many species of songbirds migrate at night, then stop to refuel during the day. Mornings, of course, usually are when birds are more active, though this is not so much a factor when it gets cold.

So get out there and see a few good birds this fall! See elsewhere in this newsletter for a few field trips geared to this amazing migration spectacle.

Email Alerts: In an effort to communicate with local members and other interested folks on local matters, you can sign-up to email alerts for announcements of meetings, activities, field trips and other items of interest to our chapter. The officers will limit the emails and provide options to unsubscribe or provide feedback to the officers to control the amount of mail received. To subscribe, go to www.mountaineeraudubon.org and click on Email Alerts.

President's Message

Welcome to another year of Mountaineer Audubon Activities. As a repeat president of Mountaineer Audubon, I am excited about the changes in the natural world in our corner of West Virginia. The wide use of the internet since my last presidency has served to connect more like minded individuals than ever before. Through the use of WV-Bird, an e-mail list-serve which serves to post sightings of birds throughout the state, and other states' list-serves, the birding community is more connected and aware of what happens in the avian world. Also, with the leadership of environmental groups such as Friends of the Cheat, Friends of Deckers Creek and other state environmental groups, we have seen a definite and noticeable movement toward a cleaner environment. A prime example is the fishing quality now found in Cheat Lake. This is not only great for anglers, but for diving ducks, too. Birders have seen a gradual increase in the number and variety of waterfowl in our area since the early 1990's. With this all said, there are still threats to our natural world. One of those looming clouds on our horizon is the extractive industries.

Thomas Jefferson, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson all wanted to center rural education around the study of nature. If rural people could grasp the beauty and wonder of the countryside, then they who live there will become the "balancing force" to the urban life whose key feature is "conspicuous consumption." The American culture is becoming more urban with a premium placed on limitless production and consumption. The resources of this urban culture come from our rural home. Our national economy misuses both its rural people and rural resources for short-term gains. This is dramatically demonstrated by the mountain-top removal in southern West Virginia to provide electricity to the east coast megalopolis. The next huge assault will be large scale Marcellus Shale gas drilling in northern West Virginia. Our state government is finally taking steps to upgrade rules and regulations to deal with the industry. The gas industry could potentially be a huge financial benefit to the family farmer and those who eke out a living preserving the rural life. The promise of fiduciary benefit is indeed seductive on both a personal and public scale, especially in these frustrating economic times. But history has seen the unchecked siege to fulfill political promises often comes with an exacting cost. I personally do not want to see a repeat of the environmental damages of the early extractive industries which are only now being corrected by those who have worked so hard to bring our waterways back from the past abuse. (Note: you can follow the latest on gas drilling on the website, <http://www.frackcheckwv.net>)

If nature is the home of human beings, then they must care for that home wisely. The children of today will be the conservationists of the countryside in the future. Rural communities must educate their young persons to undertake wise action to cultivate practices and knowledge that will influence their lives and environment for the better.

How many of us recall our parents saying "Go outside and play"? Sadly, we hear this less frequently nowadays. Unlike earlier generations, many of today's parents see the outdoors as a dangerous place. Fears— of strangers and kidnappings, of drug dealers taking over parks and rural roads, of encroaching wildlife from deer ticks to virus-bearing mosquitoes—while genuine, have also been sensationalized by the media. In Richard Louv's words from his book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, "We have scared children straight out of the woods and fields." No wonder children are driven indoors to the lure of electronic entertainment, iPods, video games, and TV. The virtual world is replacing the natural one. Schools under pressure to increase test scores often eliminate hands-on nature study from the curriculum. Parents forced to work two, and sometimes three, jobs have less leisure time to spend outdoors with their children. And when they do, they find a parks system that is under-promoted, under-staffed, and under-funded. Children are lacking an introduction to get acquainted with Mother Nature. But it only takes a single spark to ignite the most searing and lasting of flames.

Let us help fuel that spark. This year's Mountaineer Audubon programs will reflect an entertaining and educational view of the natural world in the best possible environment in which to begin a lifetime love of nature ... our own backyard. The first program will feature Frank Jernejcic, District Fishery Biologist, giving a wonderful talk on the fish of our great rivers and lakes. In October Todd Katzner, Ph. D. will share with us his research studies of Golden Eagles, one of the largest and most regal raptors in North America, in our Appalachian Mountains and the possible effects wind energy production may have on them. We will end the year on a high note with Bill Beatty, esteemed wildlife photographer and naturalist, regaling us with his twenty-eight years of research with Screech-owls ... who frequently live, largely unnoticed, in our own Morgantown backyards. Furthermore, intermixed with our featured programs, throughout the year we will lead a handful of field trips out into our neighborhoods that will focus on finding and identifying the birds of our area. These will all be excellent opportunities for persons of all ages ... after all age cannot restrain youthful wonderment the first (or any) time we see an eagle take flight.

As the club's president, I urge you to become involved in fostering environmental awareness and understanding in yourself, your neighbors and especially the youth. Our actions can range from something as simple as reading school children nature stories to active involvement in Master Naturalist Programs or local environmental groups. At the very least, we can encourage and mentor individuals who express an interest in the natural world by joining and participating in Mountaineer Audubon Activities. So, bring your child and your neighbor's child with you to our activities and encourage the "Wonder of the Natural World." I look forward to seeing you there!

LeJay

Events Calendar

Birding Trips

September 24- Fall Migration field trip, Core Arboretum, meet at parking lot at entrance, 8 am. Contact Terry Bronson, 304-225-0999.

October 15- Fall Migration field trip, Upper Deckers Creek Rail-Trail, meet at Mountaineer Mall at 7:30 am for carpooling or at rail trail crossing on Burke Road at 8 am. Contact Terry Bronson 304-225-0999.

November 19- Winter Water Fowl Cheat Lake, meet at Ruby and Ketchy's Diner at 8 am to begin the outing. Come at 7 am to socialize over breakfast. Contact Terry Bronson 304-225-0999.

December 17- Christmas Bird Count: Open to any interested birder from beginner to advanced. Check on the Mountaineer Audubon website for details or call LeJay Graffious at 304-379-7505.

Programs: 2011 Calendar

September 13- Frank Jernejcic, WVDNR Biologist. Title: Fish populations, water quality, and fishing opportunities in Cheat Lake and Cheat River. Cheat Lake supports a diverse sport fishery and is a popular bass tournament site. The lake is operated for hydropower and not flood control. Acid mine drainage, which has historically impacted the watershed, has been significantly reduced in the past 20 years but is still a limiting factor for water quality.

Meeting at 7 pm at Arts Mon, www.artsmon.org - 210 High St, Morgantown - 304-291-6720.

October 11- Todd Katzner, Ph. D.; Research Assistant Professor, WVU. Topic: "West Virginia's Golden Eagles and Wind Energy: new threats along historical migration routes." Meeting at 7pm at Arts Mon - 210 High St, Morgantown - 304- 291-6720.

October TBA (between 14-24)- Dinner and a Movie: Audubon get-together to see the movie, "Big Year." Three avid bird watchers compete to spot the rarest birds in North America at a prestigious annual event. Director: David Frankel; Writers: Howard Franklin (screenplay), Mark Obmascik (book) Stars: Owen Wilson, Jack Black and Steve Martin.

November 8- Sue Olcott, WVDNR Biologist. Topic: Winter Birds. Meeting at 7 pm at Arts Mon - 210 High St, Morgantown - 304-291-6720.

Oil and Gas Leasing on the Monongahela National Forest

Proposed oil and gas leasing on the Monongahela National Forest is threatening valuable recreation areas and pristine habitat for our imperiled bats and native brook trout.

WORKING GROUP FORMED TO PROTECT EASTERN NATIONAL FORESTS FROM RUNAWAY GAS DRILLING

The newly formed working group on Gas Drilling in Eastern Forests met in Canaan Valley, West Virginia on July 23rd. Groups represented at the meeting were The Wilderness Society, Friends of Blackwater, WV Trout Unlimited Mountaineer Chapter, Virginia Forest Watch, Allegheny Defense Project, Southern Environmental Law Center, Heartwood and Wild Virginia. Discussion centered around the growing impact of Marcellus Shale Gas drilling on public lands and how to meet this challenge. The Gas Drilling Working Group will create a Citizens Guide to Gas Drilling on National Forests, research strategies for stopping or mitigating the negative effects of gas drilling on these public lands and recruit more organizations to take part in protecting these National Forests. Judy Rodd, Organizer. Send us your National Forest gas drilling story at info@saveblackwater.org

Web Master Wanted

Mountaineer Audubon is looking for an individual to take over maintaining the website. Duties would be updating information submitted by the officers. Either the current format could be used or convert to another system. Duties could be shared. Contact: lejaygrafious@gmail.com

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

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 420235
Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235

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National Audubon Society

Mountaineer Chapter

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