



# THE MAIL BAG

A PUBLICATION OF THE BROOKS BIRD CLUB OF WEST VIRGINIA  
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JANUARY – FEBRUARY – MARCH 2014

RYAN TOMAZIN - EDITOR

## Editor's Note

Wow! What a great winter for birding! Snowy owl invasions. Sea ducks on the rivers and lakes. Great numbers of buntings, larks and longspurs. What more could we hope for, other than maybe one or two siskins or Red-breasted Nuthatches, which have been almost completely absent from much of the region. I hope you have been enjoying the sightings, wherever you are, and keep your eyes peeled for lifers!



The last year of the Breeding Bird Atlas is underway. Read more about the details inside. Rich Bailey of the Department of Natural Resources would love all the help he can get in targeting species and areas, so contact him and help out in whatever way you can



Don't forget to mark June 13-20, 2014, on your calendars for the Foray, which is in Randolph County at Camp Pioneer. The location is comfortable and close to Elkins. There is even the rumor of cell phone service for those who need it, as compared to our dead zone in Pocahontas County last year. In case you don't know, anything within a certain range of the Greenbank Satellite Observatory is a dead zone to allow maximum fine-tuning of the deep space radio transmitters.

Anyway, Foray will be fun and informative. We are working on the details now, and will mail out the Foray notice with all of the information you need. If you can make it, great! If you can only stay for a day or few, great! If you can't make it, but can send someone else, great! Don't forget, local youth with a penchant for nature are always welcome, and scholarships are available.

## MESSAGE FROM OUR (NEW) PRESIDENT



President Carol with husband Fred  
Photo by Mike Breiding

This is the beginning of my first year as President of the club and I'm looking forward to my term. It's a two-year term in case you are curious. The club has been a big part of my life for over 40 years and I am happy to 'give back' a little.

The Brooks Bird Club is an active club as most of you probably know. Not only do we conduct an intensive nature study period at our annual foray and sortie, we also sponsor several weekend activities for study and for fun. We always have fun when we are together and look forward to having new people join in whether they are people new to the club or existing members who are now able to participate in our activities.

Something you may not be aware of is that the club has several chapters, each of which is very active. This is on my mind as my husband and I just returned from the annual trip to Killdeer Plains in Ohio organized by the Mountwood Bird Club. This club is based in the Parkersburg area. Due to a last minute tip, we were able to see thousands of Snow Buntings and Horned Larks plus hundreds of Lapland Longspurs - an exciting experience. Other chapters of the BBC are the Handlan Chapter based in Charleston, the Headquarters Chapter based in Wheeling and the Bibbee Nature Club based in Hinton and Pipestem State Park.

Each chapter plus The Brooks Bird Club publishes its calendar of events on the club's website, <http://brooksbirdclub.org/>. This is a great way to get involved. So check this out and join in. I look forward to seeing you at one of our events.

– President Carol McCullough

## WEST VIRGINIA 100 BIRDING 'COMPETITION'

A neat little competition takes place in West Virginia in January: a challenge to record 100 species of birds in state within those 31 days. A number of West Virginians attempted the feat. Below are some month-ending reports from the WV Listserv.

*After birding with Wendell Argabrite, Mike Griffith and David Patick on January 1 this year and getting 52 species, I decided to try Matt Orsie's "Get 100 species in January" suggestion. Last year I only got 92 species in January, but I had a better start this year.*

*Today, I broke 100, ending the day at 102. I started this morning at 93 species for the year and picked up Common Raven driving up Rte 219 shortly before reaching the turnoff toward Cranberry Glades. I was able to get to the Cranberry Glades Nature Center around 8 am and was greeted by a flock of about 20-30 Red Crossbills. A Red-breasted Nuthatch was also calling near the Nature Center, which was new for the year.*

*I then headed to Canaan Valley, where the wind was really blowing. After 1.5 hr of searching for something other than a Crow, I gave up and headed to Hougeland Lane, seeing a Cedar Waxwing along the way. Within a few minutes of driving alone Hougeland, I found the light morph Rough-legged Hawk mentioned in other's emails, a pair of Purple Finch and an immature Bald Eagle circling with a Red-tailed Hawk and being harassed by a Crow. The Bald Eagle was a wonderful 100th!*

*Heading toward Moorefield, I took a detour down River Road and located several Brown-headed Cowbirds (101) mixed in with Red-winged Blackbirds and European Starlings. More Cedar Waxwings were flying among the junipers. After driving through Moorefield, I took Rte 55 toward Virginia and found an adult Golden Eagle (102) soaring near the Baker exit. A nice way to end the day.*

*Good luck to everyone trying for 100 in January.*

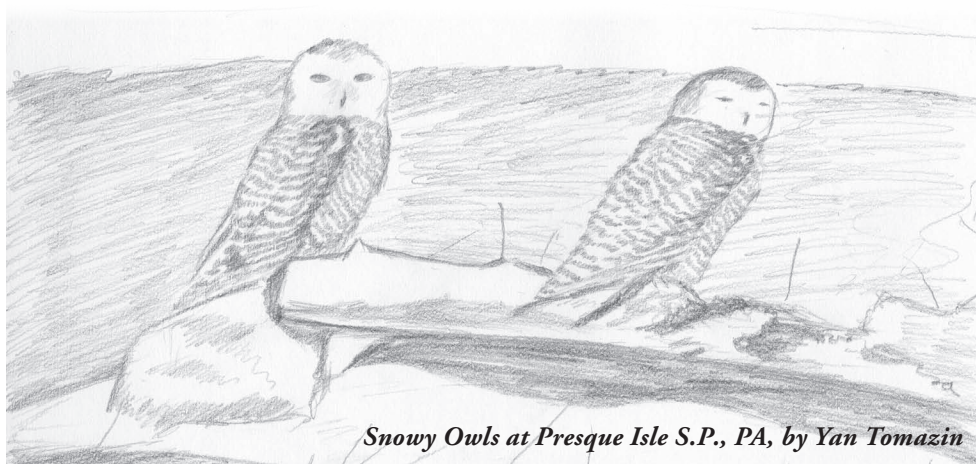
– Gary Rankin, Lavalette, WV, 1/20/14

*I took another shot at 100 species for January in WV. Last year, I finished with 75 species. I had a flurry of activity this past week and improved my score. At Sandstone Falls (Monday)- #74 Gadwall, #75 Green-winged Teal & #76 Greater Scaup; in Monroe County (Wednesday)- #77 Horned Lark; at Bluestone S.P. (Thursday)- #78 Hermit Thrush, #79 Ruby-crowned Kinglet & #80 Swamp Sparrow; at Bluestone Dam (Friday)- #81 Common Goldeneye & #82 Redhead. Looks like I may have to travel a bit to reach 100. All my birds were from Mercer, Monroe, Raleigh and Summers Counties. I seem to remember Gary Felton saying something about not starting his year list until March. Congratulations to all the 100 folks!*

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 2/2/14

*My birding goal in January was to find as many bird species as possible within 5 miles of my house. I ended the month with 84.*

– John Boback, Morgantown, WV, 2/2/14



*Snowy Owls at Presque Isle S.P., PA, by Yan Tomazin*

## CONTACT THE EDITOR

Have an interesting story about the nature around your neck of the woods? Want to contribute an article or travelogue? Have a nature-related event that you'd like to tell the Club about? Please contact me by mail, email or phone:

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## CORRESPONDENCE

We would love to hear from members of the BBC. What have you been doing? Have you taken recent trips? What interesting birds or plants have you seen in your locality or backyard?

The Club looks forward to little notes on Christmas cards and dues notices, but feel free to get in touch with us at other times of the year too. Even just a line or two would be of interest to our readers, especially if we haven't seen or heard from you in a while.

Correspondence may be mailed to: Juanita Slater, Corresponding Secretary, c/o BBC, PO Box 4077, Wheeling, WV 26003.

For those of you who prefer email, correspondences may be sent to: gusind@stratuswave.net

## ERRATUM

The 2014 dues notice had incorrect dates for the AFMO banding station. Correct dates are 8/16-10/4.

## 2013-2014 WEST VIRGINIA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

*Thirty-two birders braved the 32 to 44 degree light rainy day to survey the Morgantown area on Saturday. The preliminary results reveal 80 species on count day and over 4000 individuals counted. An addition seven count week birds were added. Highlights included Cackling Goose, Canvasback, Trumpeter Swan, Common Goldeneye, Greater Scaup, Red-breasted Merganser, Herring Gull, White-eyed Vireo and Chipping Sparrow. The day was wet and cold. The birds were not moving very well, but the birders were able to find enough species to top all species count records for the WVMC count. Thanks to all who participated and the Clear Mountain Bank for their support.*

– LeJay Graffious, Bruceton Mills, WV, 12/15/13

*A few of us braved the cold and rainy weather on Saturday for the Pipestem Christmas Bird Count. (Husband) Allen, Alma Lowry and I covered territory from Forest Hill to Bertha Wildlife Mgmt. area and Zion Mtn. Road to Hinton. Sometimes lousy weather makes good birding and we felt that way for Sat. There were several flocks of flickers, robins and Cedar Waxwings that made it enjoyable. Our highlight was having 4 Bald Eagles in view and close up (a couple hundred feet away) at one time. Then we turned around and another, an adult, was in the top of a tree on the mountain. So we know we had at least 6 Bald Eagles during our time at Bertha. There was one that stayed on the sandbar at the river the whole time we were there. Jim Phillips added 2 Palm Warblers, amongst other species.*

– Mindy Waldron, Surveyor, WV, 12/16/13

*The Charleston Christmas Bird Count was conducted on Saturday, December 14th, 2013, with 10 teams covering the count area. Rainy weather in the middle of the day reduced our numbers overall, but the morning and later afternoon provided better opportunities for birding. We tallied 61 species and a total of 13748 birds. Highlights of the day included 5 American Tree Sparrows and a Swamp Sparrow, which rarely show up in our counts for this area. The count also included a pair of Merlins that have taken up winter residence at a cemetery above the main part of Charleston. Other highlights included two Hermit Thrushes, 53 Gadwalls and 155 American Coots.*

*Although the river levels were too high for waterfowl, we had good tallies of ducks in other areas, including American Wigeon, Shovelers, Pintails, Black Duck, Ruddy Duck, and also Common (40) and Hooded Mergansers (2). Hawks were well represented this day as well.*

– Doren Burrell, Mink Shoals, WV, 12/18/13

*Seven individuals in three groups participated in the Tygart Lake CBC trial run held on Friday, December 20th. Overall we had 69 species on the day, with the high count coming from American Crow, not surprisingly. We also had an additional 6 species during Count Week, bringing the species count to 75 for the week. We were very pleased with the species richness given the few number of participants and the general lack of ducks, winter finches and blackbirds. The highlight was definitely the Red-necked Grebe seen by Dave Daniels and I in the morning from the Pleasant Creek WMA boat ramp. Additional highlights include a Northern Saw-whet Owl, 27 Cedar Waxwings, a Common Grackle, a Winter Wren, and an amazing (to me anyway) 46 Yellow-rumped Warblers. Unfortunately, the Red-necked Grebe was not relocated in the afternoon or the next day, but I find it intriguing that Joette reported one on the 22nd in Jefferson County.*

– Ross Brittain, Philippi, WV, 12/23/13

*We had a great crew of birders who worked hard to count every sparrow, wren, and crow in their 6 count sectors, and as a result, we had a great tally of 69 species (plus 2 count week) including 3 new species for the count, 13 new high counts, and 8 species that have been seen fewer than 5 times on this 35 year old count. The most exciting bird was a Swainson's Hawk found by Casey Rucker at Brandywine. Several people found their way over to look for it, but it could not be found again. The day was warm, rising into the 50s, but some back roads were impassable because of the slushy snow and ice in which even all-wheel drive cars could not get traction. Rivers and lakes were largely open. Smaller ponds were generally frozen. A good variety of waterfowl was found. Significant misses were Killdeer, Great Horned Owl, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Common Grackle. Below is a list of birds and their totals found by Richard Bailey, Todd Schnopp, LeJay Graffious, Kay Leslie, Chuck and Paula Waggy, Terry Bronson, Joette Borzik, Herb Myers, Casey Rucker, Diane Holsinger, me, and 10 feeder-watchers who were organized by Carolyn Ruddle, who was the compiler for this count for 30 years before I inherited it.*

– Fred Atwood, Cabins, WV, 12/24/13

*We had a great day for our Christmas Bird Count and a great group of birders -- 70 species and 34 participants. The numbers for some species were very high, based on the results for the past 10 years -- Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, Gray Catbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler and Chipping Sparrow. And the numbers for some species were low -- American Goldfinch, House Finch, Northern Cardinal, White-throated Sparrow, Tufted Titmouse, Downy Woodpecker and Wild Turkey. Thanks to all who helped with the count.*

– Dick & Jeanette Esker, Washington, WV, 1/3/14

*We had a beautiful sunny day of birding on Saturday January 4th, although it started out below zero for many of us. Many thanks to all who helped out. We found a total of 58 species, including some neat ones like snow goose, pine siskin, and short-eared owl!*

– Marquette Crockett, Canaan Valley, WV, 1/10/14

## EXCERPTS FROM A HOLIDAY LETTER FROM CHAN ROBBINS

*Best Christmas wishes to all my friends, near and far*

I don't have much to report on the Christmas counts this past year. This was the first year I missed all the shore counts; Bruce Peterjohn is the new compiler for Blackwater, which I had been compiling since 1948. I did participate in the Triadelphia and Bowie counts as usual. In the Patuxent section of the Bowie count, Bob Sacha from National Audubon followed me around all day making a video to be used on a new CBC website.

For the past six years the City of Laurel has sponsored a "Sing for King" concert featuring professional soloists. Stu, Kathy, and Jane have participated in past years, but this is the first year I signed up. I didn't have the energy to both stand and sing (I had been out on the midwinter bird count all morning), so I sat and sang for most of the chorus parts, but stood for the final chorus and the encore. It was an amazing performance.

President's Day weekend is the traditional time for Cornell Lab's "Great Backyard Bird Count." Andrea and Melissa took a break from snow-bound New Hampshire to hear a few birds singing their spring songs in Maryland. So Jane and I spent a couple of mornings counting birds with them at specific sites at Patuxent and reported the results on *ebird*. We visited 10 sites in PG County on Feb. 15, and five sites in AA County the next day. Adding everything together for both days, the most common species was Canada Goose, followed by Ring-necked Duck 328, and Red-winged Blackbird 242. Of far greater interest are the species found in smaller numbers: Bald Eagle 10, Wilson's Snipe 10, Pileated Woodpecker 6, Fox Sparrow 3, Ruddy Duck 2, and on Feb. 16, our earliest Patuxent record for Tree Swallow. I don't know whether these counts will ever have any scientific value, but at least they are up on the web for anyone to examine.

The first of several dozen bird clubs I have joined is the Brookline Bird Club (BBC) in the Boston suburbs. Someone up there figured out that I was their longest member, so they invited me to

be the kickoff speaker for their centennial season. April also happened to be my seventieth anniversary at Patuxent, so I chose to talk about my Patuxent years. Jane kindly came along to push my wheelchair through the long corridors at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology which I had not visited since 1940.

Nine Patuxent observers turned out for the annual PG County spring bird count on May 14. Our party had more of each of the following species than any of the other teams in the county. Our total of 92 species tied the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest for this year.

The nest day, Jane and I, together with Stu and Kathy and my granddaughter Michelle flew to Madrid to join a Brooks Bird Club (BBC) birding adventure in Spain. Our leader was Santi Villa of Spainbirds Nature Tours (Spainbirds.com), assisted by his enthusiastic young Catalonian trainee Oriole Baena. Our target species for May 15 was a Great Bustard, a huge heavy bird of the extensive plains of Valdetorres del Jarama, said to be the largest flying bird in the world (since the ostrich and other large birds are unable to fly). We were successful in finding a Great Bustard that was more than a mile away, and Santi set up his scope inside the bus looking through the open door so we could all get a good view of the bustard without getting off the bus. We also had good looks at the first of many Black Kites, a European Kestrel, the first of four harrier species, and the first of hundreds of nesting White Storks.

Early on May 16 we headed for Torreon El Rubio (Extremadura) on the Portuguese border to scan the great cliffs for nesting Booted Eagles, Griffon Vultures, and Egyptian Vultures, and to listen to Blue Rock Thrushes, and we had our introduction to such Spanish specialties as European Bee-eater, Woodchat Shrike, Crag Martin, and White Wagtail. Day 4 was one of the few mornings when we had a pre-breakfast hike at our hotel to hear the Hoopoe and the European Cuckoo and see our first European Blackbird and the endemic Azure-winged Magpie. We saw several dozen European Rollers on one or two days in a

region where hundreds of nest boxes had been erected for them on telephone poles, but we found no more the rest of the trip. Other specialties were the Iberian Grey Shrike, the Great Spotted Cuckoo, and a flying Great Bustard—proving they can fly.

I had had one previous day of birding in Spain, 84 species from Leon to Madrid on September 13, 1981 with some British twitchers, so I had made a wish list of 50 species I hoped to add this year. Thanks to the leaders and birders on this trip, I saw 36 of the 50.

We returned home in time to participate in most of the week-long Brooks Bird Club Foray at the Pocahontas County 4-H camp the first week in June. Jane and I had gotten up at 3 a.m. in order to make some abundance counts in my West Virginia atlas block on the way to the Foray.

The annual family reunion at Berry Bay was as much fun as usual, with the cabin full of busy people every day, but never the same crowd for two days in a row. The loons were swimming right out the window nearly every day, and a family of baby Mallards seemed to enjoy swimming with us day after day. Stu and Kathy persuaded their young granddaughter Victoria to come along with them this year, just her second time in New Hampshire. I think the trip changed her life. She got totally involved in all the activities—even drawing and painting bird pictures under the eye of Melissa. She told me her favorite bird was the Painted Bunting, and I could identify her painting from across the room even without my binoculars. Victoria amazed me with her fascination for sonograms. She would point to a sonogram in the field guide, and say "I just heard one of these." At my 95<sup>th</sup> birthday party George and Andrea gave me a gorgeous life-size singing meadowlark intricately hand-crafted and accurately painted by master carver Bob Lee, who is probably the last of New Hampshire's master wood carvers.

September 22 was the day of the annual fall bird count in PG County. I did not have energy to take even a short hike at Patuxent, so I did a Big Sit in Jane's backyard, counting 200 birds of 22 spe-

cies. Our catbird was fussing, but I did not get up to investigate. A couple of hours later I found its remains at the garden door; some well-fed neighborhood cat must have been to blame, because if our foxes had been out hunting at mid-day they surely would have consumed it. It probably was the same feline deposited our faithful male Blue Grosbeak at the same spot, a bird that had been a daily visitor at our feeder last summer.

The big event in October was the annual meeting of the Brooks Bird Club (BBC), which this year was held at Canaan Valley State Park, WV. This was Stu's final meeting as president of the club. It was fun watching the foliage change from the green leaves of summer here in Laurel through the orange and yellows of Western Maryland to the bare branches in the highlands of West Virginia, and then return to summer time

on the way home.

This is the first time in 70 years that I have not been banding during the fall migration. I use a cane in the house and a rolling walker outside, but it is too cumbersome to navigate the net lanes with a walker. I still drive to the office several days each week, but they are short days because of my afternoon naps and my 12-hour nights.

Huge votes of thanks go to Dr. Bill Warren and my elder daughter, Jane, who make it possible for me to enjoy good health and a close-to-normal list of activities at age 95. David and my other daughter, Nancy, who hand-crafts all my bird shirts and who is also an excellent cook, still live close by.

Chandler Robbins  
7902 Brooklyn Bridge Road  
Laurel, MD 20707-2822



*Jim Phillips, shown here enjoying himself pre-retirement*

## CONGRATULATIONS TO JIM!

Jim Phillips, of the Bibbee Chapter of the BBC, retired as of January 1st from his long-time position of naturalist at Pipestem State Park. Great job, Jim, and we hope that you enjoy retirement and get a lot of birding in!

## CORRESPONDENCES

*Carl and I were happy to receive the following from one of our young members back in the 80's who attended several forays. Welcome back, Andrew, and yes, we found the record of your Life membership purchased by your grandmother, Caroline Wilson.*

– Juanita Slater

Hi Carl & Juanita,

My name is Andrew Wilson Sundelin. I am Caroline Wilson's grandson and I attended a number of Forays back in the 80's when I was a teenager. Maybe you remember me? I'm about the same age as Ashton Berdine, so it was about that time period.

I recently moved back to the east coast after 20 years of living in Colorado. I live in Vienna, VA now. Way back in the '80's my grandmother purchased me a lifetime membership to the BBC. Now that I am back East I am hoping to reconnect with the club at some level and would like to start to receive mailings again. Do you have a record of my lifetime membership?

Thanks & Happy New Year!

– Andrew Sundelin

*Merry Christmas to all. Thanks for all your good work!*

– Eula Elliott, Parkersburg, WV

## BREEDING BIRD ATLAS – FINAL SEASON! STRATEGY & NEEDS FOR 2014

**88,023 Observations and Counting!** – This was a transition year in many ways for the 2nd West Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas. Many observations were submitted in 2012 for many blocks with little to no data, particularly in western and south-western counties. In addition, we had just begun abundance sampling work with our revised and improved point count protocol.

In contrast, work in 2013 began to focus heavily on species mop-up of many incomplete blocks, and our abundance sampling efforts hit full swing. With many parts of the state well covered, we began to target specific blocks with low totals, often in areas difficult to access. Reflecting this, fewer atlasers took to the field and fewer observations were entered into the database. However, in 2013 we greatly exceeded our expectations with abundance sampling, completing counts in 170 blocks compared to the 107 blocks completed in 2012.

### General needs for 2014:

Our final field season will be spent completing all abundance sampling, mopping up remaining undercounted blocks, and conducting surveys for specific species. To get to the finish line, we absolutely welcome as much help as we can get from volunteers!

### Of particular need:

- Target priority blocks in your area for mop-up work.
- Assist us with owl and other species playback surveys in specific blocks
- Assist us with completing abundance sampling in remaining blocks

### Atlas Project Director

Richard Bailey, Ornithologist

Richard.S.Bailey@wv.gov

304-637-0245

## BIRDING IN THE SHETLAND ISLANDS

Lands in the far north with their arctic birds and almost mystic landscapes have always attracted us. Therefore last May my husband Wallace and I decided to go birding in the far off Shetland Islands.

The Shetlands, located north of Scotland and a part of Scotland since the late 1400's, are not far from the Arctic Circle. Despite this chilly-sounding location, the Shetlands—there are about 100 small islands—are warmed by the Gulf Stream. Temperatures are not extreme summer or winter, although the wise birder should be prepared for wind and rain.

The Shetlands have a relatively small population of about 70,000, give or take North Sea oil workers and an influx of summer tourists. Therefore, given their remote location and small population, just getting to the Shetlands can be an adventure. There is no international airport. Some visitors arrive by small plane from Scotland at the Sumburgh Airport on South Shetland; the landing strip is also a highway and vehicles wait for planes to land and take off.

Visitors can also arrive by boat or ferry. Wallace and I took the Northlink ferry from Aberdeen, Scotland, to Lerwick, capital of the Shetlands. This was a 12 hour overnight trip on the North Sea. The sea gods were kind to us, as the often stormy North Sea was calm as were our tummies.

We arrived at Lerwick in early morning. Lerwick is small, so Wallace and I shouldered our backpacks and following our map walked to our lodgings for the week which of course we booked before leaving the States. The presence of many offshore North Sea oil workers staying in Lerwick had made finding lodgings difficult, so we tried something new for us: we stayed at the Islesburgh Hostel. The hostel turned out to be an excellent choice. The hostel staff were friendly and helpful, we had our own room, and there were older travelers there with whom we could share experiences. We also did our own cooking in the hostel's well-equipped kitchen, which saved on expenses.

The hostel was also centrally located to the downtown Lerwick harbor. Next day it was an easy walk to the harbor, where we boarded the regularly scheduled 12-person boat for the half hour scenic ride to the island of Noss. Noss is a National Nature Reserve, and its 300 feet high eroded cliffs with many ledges and proximity to excellent fishing such as sand-eels makes the cliffs ideal nesting for cliff nesting birds—which is what we came to see. The North Sea was relatively calm, enabling the boat's captain to anchor almost under the towering cliffs while birders grabbed cameras and binocs and had spectacular views of nesting gannets, fulmars, kittiwakes, and guillemots. In addition to the visual delights, the audio part of a seabird colony is also impressive.

Upon the return trip to Lerwick, we saw arctic terns, eider, shags, skuas, and red-throated loons. This was one of the best sea-bird trips I had ever taken.

Next day, we took the local bus and visited a puffin colony, located at the southernmost point of the Shetlands at Sumburgh Head, where the Atlantic Ocean and North Sea meet. After a climb up the steep headland, we looked a hundred feet down at the eroded cliffs seeking nesting puffins. This was still early in the season, and the few birds were both far away and elusive. They darted in and out of their burrows almost quicker than we could focus binocs on them. In an attempt to get better views, we moved to another area but saw nothing. Just as we were about to leave—wow! There 10 feet away from me stood a puffin! Orange beak pointed right at me—up close and personal and a birder's supreme moment!

With visions of puffins dancing in my head, we walked back down the steep headland and reached moorlands and Shetland's many stone walls which form both pasture enclosures and wind breaks. Here we saw moorland birds including the lovely wheatear and the rare lapwing. We were near the Atlantic Ocean, and ruddy turnstones ran along the shore, and oystercatchers poked around in the shallows.

In between birding trips, we also found that the Shetlands are rich in archeological sites including Jarlshof, which was inhabited for 6,000 years from the late stone age to medieval times, and the great stone double-walled tower on the Island of Mousa. The Shetlands were the only places these ancient iron age towers called brochs were built.

Our week in the Shetlands was full of fantastic birds and rich history. Then it was time to leave. As our ferry took us back to Scotland and as the Shetlands faded from sight, I was so glad we came—and would in a heartbeat return.

— *Submitted by*  
*Norma Jean Venable*

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## CHARLES BAER PASSES AWAY

Charles Henry Baer Jr., 94, of Morgantown, died on February 3, 2014. He was born in Columbus, Ohio, on September 1, 1919, son of Harry Baer and Bessie (Reedy) Baer.

He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in botany at Ohio State University, and his doctorate from the University of Maryland, in 1961.

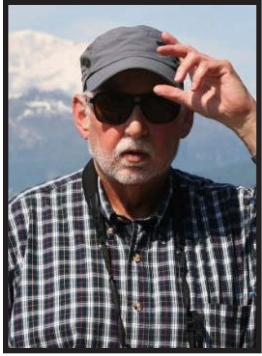
Charlie served as a radio operator in the U.S. Army during World War II. In 1948, he joined the faculty at WVU, teaching plant physiology, and later taught the first ecology class at WVU. His extensive research included many aspects of plant physiology and environmental factors affecting plants.

He was a long-time champion for the protection and preservation of scenic and ecological resources. In the 1960s, Charlie assisted the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior to identify potential landmarks, surveying more than 600 sites from Watertown, NY, to Tuscaloosa, AL. Charlie especially loved West Virginia. His work was instrumental in preserving places of natural beauty and scientific interest such as Coopers Rock State Park, Dolly Sods Wilderness, Greenland Gap, Cathedral State Park and Cranesville Swamp Preserve. In 2000, he was honored as Conservation Hero for West Virginia by the Nature Conservancy, which he was a member of.

He is survived by his wife of 25 years, Elizabeth Baer.

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## GARY FELTON PASSES AWAY



Gary Felton lost his battle with esophageal cancer, passing away on February 1, 2014. His wonderful stories and keen observations will be missed.

We extend our deepest sympathies to his family, friends, and the birding community.

– Wil Hershberger, Hedgessville, WV

*Margaret and I would like to express our sincere condolences to Gary's family, to his friends and to the birding community. This is a tremendous loss, which we have likely only begun to feel. We have lost a good friend and an expert birder. We remember Gary as the source we used for many years regarding questionable sightings, as a fellow birder and photographer, and as one who was always interested in our out-of-state travels. There is little to say to ease the loss.*

– Bob Summers and Margaret Straley, Spencer, WV

*West Virginia has lost a master birder and teacher with the death of Gary Felton. Ron and I met him first in February 2001 on a mad birding trip to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to see an irruption of great grey owls. It was our first real exposure to the dedication, competition, fun and sheer craziness of dedicated birders. He continued to be a source of information and suggestions from that trip onwards. I have posted a series of photos from that trip on the Three Rivers Avian Center facebook page. It is open to the public and you don't have to be signed into Facebook to view the page if you would like to see them. He was an amazing person. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family.*

*Oh, and yes, we did see a great grey owl. And a snowy, and a flock of snow buntings swirling in the sunlight with snow all around... RIP Gary.*

– Wendy & Ron Perrone, Brooks, WV

*Like so many other birders in West Virginia, I was greatly saddened to read of his passing. As a fairly new birder, he was al-*

*ways so kind and helpful to me whenever I had a question about anything.*

*I remember coming home from school one early spring day to find an unknown bird on my suet feeder. I grabbed my books and bins and tried to figure out what I was looking at. I decided that I should snap a picture just in case the bird flew. I could not find a bird anywhere in anything that looked like what I had a picture of. I sent the picture to Gary and within a half hour I learned I had an immature Orchard Oriole and that information was followed by breeding information and all Gary's own data on Orchard Orioles! He also helped me with numerous other birds, bird song and plumage questions over the years.*

*Gary has earned his own wings today. A part of him will live on in those of us who remember his willingness to share his passion for birds with us.*

– Shannon Burner, Keyser, WV

*So sad to learn about Gary. Thus wastes Man. Today he puts forth the tender leaves of hope; tomorrow blossoms and bears his blushing honors thick upon him. The next day comes a frost which nips the shoot; and when he thinks his greatness is aspiring, he falls like autumn leaves to enrich his Mother Earth.*

– Tom Fox, Millstone, WV

*I had just finished telling my wife your various tributes to Gary and reminding her again of my own experiences when a pair of White-winged Scoters floated into the view of my scope, which is housed in our home overlooking Edith Barill Park. They remained there long enough for my son to get a view of this unfamiliar bird. Thank you Gary!*

– Hillar Klandorf

*A few days ago, Gary told me that he'd like for us to go birding if he finds the energy. We both knew that that day would never come. Yesterday, I carried him with me in my thoughts as I spent the day birding in remembrance of him.*

*Over the years we did quite a bit of birding together. Canaan Valley for Rough-legged Hawks. Greenbottom for King Rail. Maryland for Snow Buntings. Berkeley County for Lark Sparrow. And once we did a walking Big Day throughout his beloved UDC (Upper Deckers Creek). Regardless of where we went, he always took the time to talk with curious passers-by about the birds we were seeing and the importance of conservation.*

*Although Gary may have passed from this Earth, he lives on in the lives and memories of those many birders whom he has helped and mentored over the years.*

– John Boback, Morgantown, WV

*Jane and I send out our deepest sympathies to the family. As others have noted Gary shared his experience and insight with others and I was no exception. He helped me a lot during my budding birding years and I will ne forever indebted and remember fondly our times together. He is now soaring with the Eagles.*

*A butterfly lights beside us like a sunbeam And for a brief moment its glory and beauty belong to our world But then it flies on again, and though we wish it could have stayed, we feel so lucky to have seen it. Amen.*

– Matt Orsie, Summit Point, WV

*I birded and worked with Gary since I started with the DNR in 1995. He did point counts for me at UDC for years, and helped out on the Breeding Bird Atlas. And, being a bug photography enthusiast, was one of my volunteers for both the dragonfly atlas and the current butterfly atlas - I'm sorry that I never netted him the Dragonhunter that he wanted. I'll miss him greatly for his knowledge and skills as a birder and overall naturalist, and for his exceedingly dry, quirky, and sometimes goofy sense of humor. One of the funniest things I ever received from him was a photo of a yellow smiley face with the eyes and mouth made from caterpillar frass (droppings) - probably from one of the large sphinx moths that can inhabit gardens - which Gary had a large one.*

*Send us some good leps this year, Gary.*

– Susan Olcott, Farmington, WV

## INTERESTING SIGHTINGS AROUND THE STATE

*Hanging Rock Raptor Observatory highlights: We set a single day record for Golden Eagles today with 11 birds. Season total is 43. 8 Balds today increases our record season total for that species to 192.*

– Rodney Bartgis, Elkins, WV, 11/10/13

*Wendell Argabrite and I relocated the Say's Phoebe this afternoon and watched it gathering insects from a cornfield at Gallipolis Ferry. Congratulations to Gary Rankin who first located it today, as this is West Virginia's first state record.*

– David Patick, Huntington, WV, 11/28/13

*I had some flex time today to go see the Snowy Owl in Preston county. Thanks to all you who posted detailed information on the location of the bird. As mentioned, it was flying around the farm area and the telephone/power poles along the hilltop during the time we were there. The owl flew right to the top of a telephone pole right next to me and allowed me to get some close up shots. Two state birds in four days.... don't think I can take much more of this.... NOT!*

– Matt Orsie - Summit Point, WV, 12/2/13

*Finally got a waterfowl fallout in our area today. Lost power until now to the ice storm but picked up lots of birds: Princeton Sr High School (Mercer Co.) - 50 Ring-billed Gulls; Durr's Pond (along Rt. 20 north of Princeton)- 4 Red-br. Mergansers, 3 Ring-n. Ducks and 2 Redheads; Sun Valley Lake (along Rt. 20 at Pipestem, Summers Co.) - 100 Canada Geese, 15 Ring-n. Ducks, 2 Lesser Scaup and 20 Red-br. Mergansers; Bluestone Lake (mouth of Bluestone River to Bluestone Dam, Summers Co.) - 1 Common Loon, 1 Red-necked Grebe, 42 Horned Grebes, 4 Pied-billed Grebes, 6 Great Blue Herons, 6 Canvasbacks, 26 Redheads, 18 Lesser Scaup, 3 Long-tailed Ducks, 45 Buffleheads, 15 Hooded Mergansers, 8 Common Mergansers, 56 Red-breasted Mergansers and 4 Ring-billed Gulls; Carper's Pond (jct of I-77 & U.S. 460, Princeton, Mercer Co.) - 200 Lesser Scaup, 50 Redheads, 8 Amer. Coots, 10 N. Shovelers, 6 Buffleheads and 4 Hooded Mergansers. 19 species and over 600 individuals!*

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 12/3/13

*I discovered a Trumpeter Swan at about 9:45 am at Cheat Lake Park near the swimming beach south of the first bridge. Originally, it was at the edge of the large mass of about 300 Tundra Swans out in the middle of the lake, but it soon swam towards the beach, where it was attempting to feed barely 10 feet offshore. The bird was tagged on both wings with yellow tags bearing the black code L55. John Boback checked and let us know that this means the bird is from Ontario in Canada. I have submitted a report to the Patuxent Bird Banding Lab. The bird was an adult, and the pointed black loreal streaks--without any yellow--from the bill to the eyes were easily apparent at the ridiculously close range we saw the bird. (This bird was later seen in Grant County on 1/19/14 by Fred Atwood)*

– Terry Bronson, Morgantown, WV, 12/17/13

*I couldn't resist the temptation to look for Horned Larks this afternoon when the sun was shining and the temperature was at its highest. On Dutch Hill road in Jefferson County, a nice flock of about 150 Horned larks were found "marching" like little soldiers in what looked like an army display, all moving in the same direction while feeding. The leader turned and they all turned. The late afternoon sun cast a deep hue of light on their heads that highlighted their lemon yellow and black striking markings. They had acres of field to explore, but they chose to stick close together, moving only inches apart from one another, as if one would "cover the backs of the other." "You watch my back and I'll watch yours." That's what flocks and families are all about -- taking care of each other and keeping everyone safe.*

*After watching them for about 10 minutes, they decided it was time to leave. The flock departed in waves, like a well rehearsed play. Happy holidays from my flock to yours.*

– BIRDMOM, Jefferson County, WV, 12/25/13

*Today I made my yearly trip to one of the Christmas tree drop off sites in the Huntington area. No, I wasn't taking a tree to drop off for recycling, I was making a pick up. In fact, this year I picked up two discarded Christmas trees and carted them home. Our backyard bird feeder area has deciduous shrubs and offers little winter time cover for birds feeding at the feeders or on the ground. So, each year I gather up one or more discarded Christmas trees and tie them upright to the fence behind the feeders. Some years, I lay one tree on it's side along side the feeder area to offer ground feeders extra protection but this year the trees I got have a lot of low limbs and offer ready hiding spots should a Sharpie show up.*

– Gary Rankin, Lavalette, WV, 12/30/13

*Crows started harassing something in hemlock tree, but I couldn't see anything. They were calling like it might be an owl. Quickly dressed and walked out to check. The crows flew off as I approached. There, sitting on a branch looking at me, was a Long-eared Owl. I quickly backed away and came inside. Great bird for me; my first in WV!*

– Wilma Jarrell, Wetzel County, 1/3/14



*Trumpeter Swan while at Cheat Lake  
Photo by Derek Courtney*



## SIGHTINGS (con.)

*At least 2 Snowy Owl Sightings in Seneca Lake, Ohio, area since November.*

– Fred McGee (new BBC member), Senacaville, OH, 1/8/14

*Jim and Judy Phillips followed up on a report they'd received and found a snowy owl in Beckley today. The report said someone had seen it fly up to the top of Kohl's. Allen and I headed to town and were able to find the bird. Life Bird for us! Several "off the street" people came over to see what we were watching. Hopefully it won't be stressed from the attention. We were also told that the bird has been seen for over 10 days by the DNR. I never even thought that I'd see a snowy owl in the middle of Beckley.*

– Mindy Waldron, Surveyor, WV, 1/4/14

*We sat at the mouth of the Bluestone River at Bluestone Lake for about an hour last evening watching at least 20 bald eagles! Two were adults and the rest varied in age.*

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV, 1/9/14

*Derek Courtney invited me along for an Ohio River birding jaunt today, and despite the near-zero temperatures, it turned out to be a great day. The immature male HARLEQUIN DUCK Derek spotted under the Parkersburg-Bel Pre, OH, Bridge was clearly the bird of the day, and maybe bird of the year!*

*First runner-up was the male WHITE-WINGED SCOTER seen just above Hannibal Dam. With head tucked in and no visible wing patch, it was just a dark duck at first, but finally it showed a bit of its wing patch.*

– Terry Bronson, Morgantown, WV, 1/26/14

– *Sightings taken from WVBird ListServ*



*Harlequin Duck near Parkersburg  
Photo by David Patick*

## 2014 BIRD FESTIVALS AT NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

For a jaw-dropping natural spectacle, it's hard to beat a bird festival. Of all the wildlife in the United States, birds attract the biggest following. National wildlife refuges make great bird festival locales because they're bird magnets; many protect important bird habitat along the country's major flyways. To see great masses of birds, look for festivals that coincide with spring or fall migration. Here are some major refuge-centered festivals scheduled for 2014, in the order they will occur:

April 11-13 – John Scharff Migratory Bird Festival, Harney County, OR

April 10-13 – Featherfest, Galveston, TX

April 11-13 – Bayou Teche Black Bear and Birding Festival, Franklin, Louisiana

April 12-13 – Prairie Chicken Festival, Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge, TX

April 16-22 – Godwit Days Spring Migration Bird Festival, Arcata, CA

April 24-26 – Great Dismal Swamp Birding Festival, Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, VA

April 25-28 – Balcones Songbird Festival, Marble Falls, TX

April 25-27 – Santee Birding & Nature Festival, Santee National Wildlife Refuge, SC

April 25-27 – Grays Harbor Shorebird Festival, Hoquiam, WA

April 25-27 – Birding and Crystal Festival, Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, OK

May 6-15 – Biggest Week in American Birding, Northwest Ohio

May 8-11 – Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival, Homer, AK

May 10 – International Migratory Bird Day Celebration, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, VA, and elsewhere

May Date TBA – Upper Tanana Migratory Bird Festival, Tok, AK

May 15-18 – Kenai Birding Festival, Kenai, AK

May 15-19 – Great Salt Lake Bird Festival, Farmington, UT

May 23-26 – Down East Spring Birding Festival, Near Calais, ME

June 11-15 – Potholes & Prairie Birding Festival, Carrington, ND

October Date TBA – Wings over Water Wildlife Festival, Outer Banks, NC

October Dates TBA – Ridgefield Birdfest and Bluegrass, Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, WA

October 10-12 – Eastern Shore Birding and Wildlife Festival, Cape Charles, VA

November Date TBA – Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival, Harlingen, TX

November 18-23 – Festival of the Cranes, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, NM

November 27 - 30 – Assateague Island Waterfowl Weekend, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, VA

*More bird festivals & info: <http://aba.org/festivals/index.php/>*

## 2014 SOUTHERN WV WINTER RAPTOR SURVEY

We conducted our 9th Southern WV winter eagle survey on Saturday, January 11, 2014, from 10am-2pm.

Thanks to the 33 volunteers who endured the rain and fog and located at least 18 eagles in Summers, Monroe & Raleigh counties. We had six sites on New River, one on Indian Creek and one on the lower Greenbrier River. Six of the eight sites located at least one eagle. The nest we have been watching has two eggs.

This year's break down is as follows: 14 Bald Eagles; 3 Golden Eagles; 1 eagle of undetermined species

– Jim Phillips, Pipestem, WV

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## CHAPTER HAPPENINGS

### **BIBBEE CHAPTER**

**May 3, 2014** – Century Day Bird Count. We count total species for the day trying to reach 100 species. Pipestem CBC Circle or Summers County. Jim Phillips will do the tally.

**June 7, 2014** – 8:00-12:00 PM. Birding at Betsy Reeder's Cave Ridge property. Meet at Hinton DQ and travel up Rt. 3 to the property. Contact Betsy Reeder.

### **HANDLAN CHAPTER**

**March 17, 2014** – March Meeting at South Charleston Library at 6:30pm. Herb Meyers from Harmon will give a presentation.

**April 21, 2014** – April Meeting at South Charleston Library at 6:30pm. Joey Heron will discuss Owls and the WV Birding Trail.

### **MOUNTWOOD CHAPTER**

**March Coordinator: Shirley Radcliffe (304-428-8520)**

**March 13-14, 2014** – Funk/Killbuck, OH, overnight. Call Coordinator for details.

**March 20, 2014** – Middle Island area, 8:00am. Burger King, Rt. 68 & I-77, bring lunch.

**March 27, 2014** – Sandy Creek Backwater & area, 8:30am. First parking lot, Northwest Drive.

**April Coordinator: Jeanette Esker (304-863-8765)**

**April 3, 2014** – Elberfeld's Farm, 8:00am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339/Rt. 7; bring lunch.

**April 10, 2014** – Ohio River Islands NWR, 8:00am. ORINWR parking lot.

**April 17, 2014** – McDonough Wildlife Refuge, 8:00am. McDonough parking lot.

**April 24, 2014** – Johnson T Janes Park, 8:00am. Parking lot, east end of 27th Street, Parkersburg.

**May Coordinator: Nina Ott (304-863-6020)**

**May 1, 2014** – Birds & Flowers, Newell's Run, 8:00am. WV Welcome Center, Williamstown, bring lunch.

**May 8, 2014** – McDonough Wildlife Refuge, 8:00am. McDonough parking lot.

**May 10, 2014** – North American Migration Count.

**May 15, 2014** – DuPont Nature Trail & area, 8:00am. DuPont Nature Trail parking lot.

**May 17, 2014** – Mountwood Park, 8:00am. Kroger's on 7th Street; or 8:15am at beach area (near torpedo), bring lunch.

**May 22, 2014** – Ohio Birding Route Trail, 8:00am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339/Rt. 7; bring lunch.

**May 29, 2014** – Hocking Hills, 7:00am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339 / Rt. 7; bring lunch.

**June Coordinator: Jon Benedetti (304-295-8945)**

**June 5, 2014** – "The Wilds", Ohio, all-day trip, 7:00am. WV Welcome Center, Williamstown, bring lunch.

**June 7, 2014** – Birds & Breakfast, 7:00am. McDonough Log Cabin "A", bring finger food and drink.

**June 12, 2014** – Crown City Wildlife Area, Ohio, 7:00am. Park & Ride, OH Rt. 339 / Rt. 7; bring lunch.

## NATURE HAPPENINGS AROUND THE STATE

### POTOMAC VALLEY AUDUBON

*The PVAS has many Spring programs on their website at: <http://www.potomacaudubon.org/calendar>*

### CANAAN VALLEY NWR

**May 3, 2014** – Spring Birdwalk Bird Watchers on Boardwalk, Saturday at 7 am. Join walk leader Casey Rucker for this outing to a favorite birding location on the Refuge. Meet at the Refuge Visitor Center.

### WEST VIRGINIA STATE PARKS

**April 19, 2014** – Annual Spring Bird Walk – First-of-Three, Prickett's Fort State Park.

**April 26, 2014** – Annual Spring Bird Walk – Second-of-Three, Prickett's Fort State Park.

**April 26, 2014** – Osbra Eye Memorial Wildflower Hike, Kanawha State Forest.

**May 2-4, 2014** – Spring Migration - Bird Banding, Tygart Lake State Park.

**May 3, 2014** – Annual Spring Bird Walk – Third-of-Three, Prickett's Fort State Park.

**May 10, 2014** – Spring Bird Walk, Watters Smith Memorial State Park.

**May 8-11, 2014** – 53rd annual WV Wildflower Pilgrimage, Blackwater Falls State Park.

**May 10, 2014** – Migration Celebration, Little Beaver State Park.

**June 7, 2014** – National Trails Day Nature by Night, Watters Smith Memorial State Park.

**June 6-8, 2014** – Family Trails Weekend, North Bend State Park.

*For more information on these events and more, go to: [http://www.wvstateparks.com/Hikes\\_Walks.html](http://www.wvstateparks.com/Hikes_Walks.html)*



## BIRDING AT THE WILDS IN JANUARY COLD

Janice Emrick and I (Rosie Campbell) joined nine BBCers from Parkersburg for a trip to The Wilds on Jan. 30th. It was only four degrees when I left home. (Later, it "warmed up" into the twenties.) We arrived in Caldwell and went on with Jon Benedetti and Mike Wine in Jon's car. This turned out to be a fortunate thing as they knew the roads and the birds. Jon was an excellent spotter.

We went through Cumberland and onto some back roads. I was amazed at how many white-tailed deer we saw! There were hundreds! We saw two good-sized herds of bison. The only other exotics in sight were some Prejelski's horses.

We stopped on a ridge at an observation platform. It was windy and bitterly cold there! I was surprised to see three or four meadowlarks in this inhospitable terrain! At a pond where there was a few square feet of open water, we saw three Gadwall. A Killdeer walked on the ice nearby.

There were lots of hawks, especially Rough-legged Hawks (over 12). Other hawks seen were Red-tailed, Coopers, Northern Harriers, and kestrels. We had a close-up look at a Red-tail eating a small prey. There was a Turkey Vulture seen.

Some of the birds we hoped to see were Short-eared Owls, shrikes and possibly a Snowy Owl. None of the latter, but got into a patch of Short-ears! Two owls flew up from a small brush pile near the road. We stopped to watch them flying around and two more flew up! Then we spotted another, sitting tight in the brush pile! We think 7-8 owls were there at once. We birded on a short ways, then returned and ate our lunch in car, about forty feet from an owl still sitting in the brush pile.

Driving on, we passed some houses with bird feeders and added White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows to our list. Another bit of open water yielded 14 swans, some Canada Geese, a few Ring-necks and a Mallard. The swans were mostly Tundra, one with a yellow-orange neck band. One was a Mute Swan. Soon after, we made our way home.



...

**Oh, Say's can you see...**

*It has been a crazy winter  
for rare birds in WV  
and the region. Read more  
about them in page 8!*

*(Say's Phoebe photo  
by David Patick)*

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