

The Piedmont Birder



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The Great Backyard Bird Count: Citizen Science at its Best

by Lucy Sullivan



The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a joint project of the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada. It is held in mid-February to keep track of birds typically found in winter months, coinciding with migration of certain species in order to note changes in northward migration. Last year participation hit record levels with a total of more than 97,300 checklists from all fifty states and Canada. An estimated 63,000 volunteers took part in the project, resulting in sightings of over 602 species, 11.2 million birds.

Surprisingly, the data collected showed none of the common irruptives* occurred in elevated numbers this

past year, which was quite a disparity from the two previous years. Irruptive species include Red- and White-winged Crossbills, Common and Hoary Redpolls, Pine Siskin, Evening and Pine Grosbeaks, Glaucous-winged Gulls, and others. The top ten list for overall birds counted was headed by the American Robin (one roost in St. Petersburg, FL, consisted of nearly 1.5 million Robins); the Canada Goose came in a distant second; the Snow Goose, the American Crow, and the European Starling, respectively, were the next three most frequently seen species. Additionally, the Tree Swallows increased dramatically in number from the last count, as was true for the invasive Eurasian Collared-Dove.

Our state of North Carolina was in third place for the number of checklists submitted: 5,047 in number; we also were in sixth place for the greatest number of birds counted: 378,831 total; and our neighboring city of Durham, North Carolina, was in ninth place for the number of checklists submitted in localities: 358 lists. We are delighted with our area's outstanding participation and hope that even more individuals will become involved this year.

The 2011, 14th annual GBBC will be held from February the 18th to the 21st, so it will soon be that time again. It is free and open to all birdwatchers of any age and skill level; birders may watch for any length of time on one or more days of the count. Participants should enter their results at <www.birdcount.org>.

There is also a GBBC photo contest which may be entered by uploading images taken during the count: many of these photos will be featured on the GBBC website photo gallery. Participants in the photo shoot are automatically entered in a drawing for prizes such as bird feeders, binoculars, books, CDs, and other birding products. Above all, involvement in this project not only is enjoyable and educational, but also is invaluable to scientists who study bird populations.

How to Participate

- 1) Count the birds at any location for at least 15 minutes. Keep track of how long you count.
- 2) Record the highest number of species you see at one time.
- 3) Submit a new checklist for each day that you count. It is OK to count the same location on subsequent days. You can submit more than one checklist per day if you count at different locations on that day.
- 4) Go to www.birdcount.org and click on the "submit your checklists" button at the top. The process is easy to understand and complete.

Complete details and FAQ at www.birdcount.org

* An irruption is an unpredictable incursion of large numbers of birds into areas outside of their normal range. It is believed that the most common cause is a lack of food in the birds' normal wintering grounds.

Field Trip Report: White Street Landfill - January 8

– by Jean Murdick Photos (except kestrel) by Dennis Burnette

Neither the forecast of snow nor an environment redolent with the aroma of methane failed to deter twenty-five hardy birders, unrecognizable in their layers of warm clothing, who turned out to see what might be stirring at the White Street Landfill.

Skies were still blue when trip leader Carolyn Allen took us first to the small pond across from the parking area. Here we found Ring-necked Ducks, Buffleheads, Ruddy Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, 2 Great Blue Herons, and a Belted Kingfisher, a nice start to the day.



The landfill is too vast to bird on foot, so we carpoled from place to place. Spotting a bird on a wire, we all disembarked from our vehicles to get a closer look. Backlit against the now-dreary sky, it appeared as a silhouette. We crept closer and closer, the bird obligingly stayed put, and everybody was able to get a good look at a beautiful male American Kestrel.

Farther down the road we caught a glimpse of a flock of Eastern Meadowlarks in low flight over a hill, but by the time we climbed it, they had disappeared. A couple of raptors far in the distance claimed our attention next, one obviously a Turkey Vulture. The other soared flat-winged and caused a little excitement when it banked in a turn and the light reflected white off its tail. Not a Bald Eagle, however, as some of us hoped it might be. As it came into the proximity of the vulture, it became apparent by the relative size that the bird was not large enough to be an eagle. The conclusion was that it was a Red-tailed Hawk.

By this time the sky was starting to spit a little snow at us, strange roundish flakes that looked a lot like particles of styrofoam. And the wind picked up. We strode along the hills and found sparrows in the underbrush, Savannah and Field Sparrows. It wasn't long, though, before the snow started to come down in earnest and the wind increased in intensity. The birds all sought shelter and Carolyn wisely curtailed the rest of our outing so that we might as well. Our species total for the couple of hours we birded was 28, not a bad count given the conditions.



Snow was blowing sideways as Julien McCarthy searched in vain for movement in the greenery. Below, the group heads for home.



Species List

Canada Goose
Ring-necked Duck
Bufflehead
Ruddy Duck
Hooded Merganser

Great Blue Heron
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Red-tailed Hawk
American Kestrel

Wilson's Snipe
Ring-billed Gull
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Belted Kingfisher

Red-bellied Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
American Crow
Carolina Chickadee
Carolina Wren

Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
Field Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Song Sparrow

White-throated Sparrow
Northern Cardinal
Eastern Meadowlark



American Kestrel by Lou Skrabec

Field Trip Report: Greensboro Lakes - January 11

- by Elizabeth Link

The January 11 field trip was well attended, with 16 birders looking for winter waterfowl on local reservoir lakes and ponds. The weather was very cold and cloudy, with temperatures never rising out of the 20s, and a light wind. The trip met at Buffalo Lake, and after looking at the slim offering of birds there, took off for the Yanceyville St. causeway over Lake Townsend, where Henry Link had seen 2 Long-tailed Ducks while scouting earlier in the morning. The viewing conditions were not good, however, and the ducks were not to



Horned Grebe in non-breeding plumage

be found. The highlight of that stop was a pair of Horned Grebes that gave a great show as they circled the lake, flew over the causeway, and landed in the water nearby. Stops

at the Plainfield Road marsh, the Lake Brandt Marina, and Trooper Pond yielded a fair selection of waterfowl and winter land birds. The trip ended with a return trip to Lake Townsend, which failed again to turn up the Long-tailed Ducks. Despite that disappointment, the trip yielded a respectable total of 42 species.

As a footnote to the trip, which highlights the roaming (shall we say 'flighty?') nature of birds, a small group of birders tried again in the afternoon to find the Long-tailed Ducks. We did not find them, nor did we see the Horned Grebes from the morning, but we did see Double-crested Cormorant, Green-winged Teal, Black Duck, Bonaparte's Gull, and Herring Gull that hadn't been

seen in the morning. The temperature was warmer, the viewing conditions were much better, and we all agreed that future winter lake trips should be held in the afternoon instead of the morning.

Species List

Canada Goose	Blue Jay
Gadwall	American Crow
Mallard	Carolina Chickadee
Bufflehead	Tufted Titmouse
Hooded Merganser	White-breasted Nuthatch
Ruddy Duck	Brown-headed Nuthatch
Wild Turkey	Carolina Wren
Pied-billed Grebe	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Horned Grebe	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Great Blue Heron	Eastern Bluebird
Red-shouldered Hawk	American Robin
Red-tailed Hawk	Northern Mockingbird
Killdeer	European Starling
Ring-billed Gull	Cedar Waxwing
Rock Pigeon	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Mourning Dove	Eastern Towhee
Belted Kingfisher	Song Sparrow
Red-bellied Woodpecker	White-throated Sparrow
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Dark-eyed Junco
Downy Woodpecker	Northern Cardinal
Northern Flicker	American Goldfinch

Field Trip Report: Highland and Augusta County, et al - January 15-17

- by George Wheaton

A small band of PBC members journeyed north to Virginia in hopes of finding some winter birds ordinarily not found close to Greensboro. Headquarters for birding in Augusta County on Saturday was Staunton, VA. We canvassed the area around Monterey, VA, in Highland County, on Sunday. We spent most of our time birding in the Bluegrass Valley, which lies northwest of Monterey.

The weather was comfortable. Highs were in the 40s on both days and lows were in the low 20s at night. Winds were relatively light. We enjoyed sunny to partly cloudy conditions and encountered no precipitation. In fact, there was no snow cover on the ground in Staunton and only modest snow pack in the Bluegrass Valley and environs. With only a couple of exceptions, small ponds were completely ice-covered.

Our group tallied 69 species from door to door. Some of the best birds were: Snow Goose, Merlin (Augusta County one-day high count in winter of two birds), Bald Eagle (high one-day count of four in Augusta County and another along the flanks of Snowy Mt.), Horned Lark, Black-capped Chickadee, Common Raven, Wilson's Snipe, Purple Finch, and one very lost Black-crowned Night-Heron. The hoped for Rough-legged Hawks did not disappoint. We found and had good looks at six of these visitors from the far north – four light-phase birds and two dark-phase birds. (An Egyptian Goose vied for



Horned Lark by [Alan Vernon](#)
Wikimedia Commons

most handsome bird, but was not countable!)

Each trip to this "Little Switzerland" area of Virginia differs from others. This year we saw very few Red-tailed Hawks, which have been abundant on previous trips. On the other hand, we tallied a minimum of 36 American Kestrels – the most we have seen on a single birding trip of comparable length. They were everywhere! The biggest surprise was the target birds we missed. For the first time in four

years we were unable to find Cackling Goose, Barn Owl, or Golden Eagle. American Tree Sparrow also eluded us.

In any event, we returned home satisfied, with memories of beautiful mountains, rime-coated trees, and (mostly) cooperative birds.

We would like to acknowledge and give special thanks to Allen Larner, who once again guided us around his "patch" of Augusta County. (A trip list is available by contacting George Wheaton.)

Bird Story: A Claws Encounter

- by Peggy Ferebee

We had an interesting bird-related near-tragedy at the Natural Science Center. We have several Japanese Bantam chickens that run around the farmyard. Last week one of the keepers saw a Red-shouldered Hawk suddenly swoop down and grab the little hen, Bittersweet. She was such a load for him that he could only make it to a fencepost with his catch. At this point two keepers ran at him and he dropped

Bittersweet. She was a little dazed, and as the keepers stood there with her the hawk dove at her again, right between the keepers. But between them waving their arms and her maneuvering she escaped. A trip to the vet found no injuries and she has been reunited with her mate. However, they were very wary about being out in the open for awhile. That was a hawk with no self-confidence issues – or a desperate one.



Press Release: *The Legend of Pale Male*

A hawk. A city. A love story.

The Legend of Pale Male is more than an extraordinary piece of New York history. It documents the mysterious power possessed by a single Red-tailed Hawk to open the eyes and hearts of die-hard city dwellers to the wonders of nature. Join filmmaker Frederic Lilien, whom we meet as a young man from Belgium looking to change his life, on an eighteen-year journey through life, death, birth, hope, and redemption.

This film is showing at the Aperture Cinema in Winston-Salem for two nights only: Sunday, February 6; and Monday, February 7. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to [Forsyth Audubon](#).

The Legend of Pale Male is appropriate for ages 7 to 107. Length is 85 minutes. Check the [Aperture website](#) for ticket information and schedule.



February Calendar

Sunday & Monday, February 6 & 7

Film: *The Legend of Pale Male*

A great new film is coming to Aperture Cinema in Winston-Salem, sure to please nature lovers and film buffs alike. See article at left for details.

Thursday, February 17, 7:00 p.m.

Program: "Optics for Birding"

Cynthia Fox, owner of the [Wild Bird Center](#) in Chapel Hill, and Clay Taylor of [Swarovski Optik](#), will present examples of various quality products and price ranges for examination and discuss recent changes in Swarovski's high end products. Clay will also talk about the [CD 1000 Project](#) and show some of his photographs

Friday-Monday, February 18-21

Great Backyard Bird Count

See article, page 1

Saturday, February 26

Adopt-A-Park Cleanup at Country Park

Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the [parking lot](#) reached by turning left off Orman Road. Drinks and snacks will be served after the cleanup. Contact: Janet Morien, 299-9756, jmorien@triad.rr.com

Holiday Dinner 2010



- photos by Susan Weimer



Honorary member Grace Draper is still the belle of the ball.



Kathy Treanor admires a hand-carved party favor.

Sharing the Good Stuff

This section contains links to interesting/fun sites that PBC members would like to share with the rest of the Club.

[John James Audubon prints](#) – the NC Museum of Art permanent exhibition of Audubon's art

[Faithful](#) – video of a squirrel who tries to protect the carcass of another from the inevitable scavengers

[Eagle's Nest](#) – Center for Conservation Biology's blog and still photos following a pair of Bald Eagles nesting at the Norfolk Botanical Gardens in Virginia. Live nest cam video of the pair is presented by WVEC News. See it [here](#).

[Photo Contest: You Be the Judge](#) – cast your vote for best photo in the Nature Conservancy's photo contest

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"You better watch out, you better not pout, better not cry..."
Don Allen gives daughter Emily a few seasonal tips.



Judie Underkoffler gives the door prizes a close inspection.