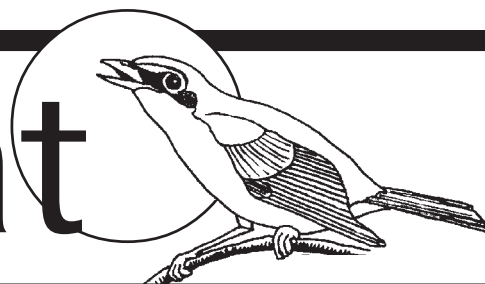


The Chattanooga Chat

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FEBRUARY 2008, VOL. XXX, NO. 4 - A Newsletter of the Chattanooga Chapter, Tennessee Ornithological Society

FEBRUARY MEETINGS

THURS. FEB. 14, EXECUTIVE BOARD
5:30PM, (IMMEDIATELY BEFORE TOS MONTHLY MEETING)

THURS., FEB. 14, MONTHLY MEETING:
BANDING WINTER HUMMINGBIRDS
7:00PM, ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH, 720 SOUTH GERMANTOWN RD.

Mark Armstrong, an employee of the Knoxville Zoo will present our February program about banding overwintering hummingbirds in Tennessee (some summer hummers also). Mark is currently Vice President of Knoxville TOS, and an active bander. Come and learn how you might attract western hummingbirds in the winter! Your executive board will provide refreshments after the program. You do not have to be a member to attend. See you there!

BIRD OF THE MONTH: CANADA GOOSE

Lynn Sauls will present information on the Canada Goose.

11TH ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT IS FEBRUARY 15-18, 2008

The Great Backyard Bird Count, sponsored by Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society will be held between February 15 and 18. People of all ages and levels of experience are invited to take part wherever they are. Observers count the highest number of each species seen during at least 15 minutes of one or more count days. Then you should enter your sightings online at www.birdcount.org. These reports create an exciting real-time picture of where the birds are across the country. In 2007, participants made history, breaking records for the total number of birds reported (11,082,387), and the number of checklists submitted (81,203). For more information, please go to the website listed above.

PLEASE MAIL YOUR 2008 TOS DUES!

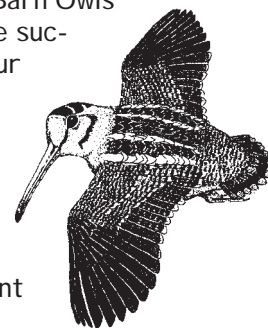
Cathy Lockwitz, treasurer of our Chattanooga Chapter, wishes to thank everyone who has sent in their 2008 dues. *The Chattanooga Chat* will not go out to anyone whose dues have not been received by January 31st. When you join the Chattanooga Chapter, you will automatically become a member of the statewide TOS organization and will receive both *The Migrant*, the TOS quarterly journal and *The Tennessee Warbler* newsletter, published spring and fall statewide. See the back page for info on membership categories and where to send your renewal. Please send dues in soon and join us for another great year of birding!

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS

SAT., FEB. 23: BARN OWLS AND WOODCOCKS AT HAYDEN WILSON'S FARM

MEET: 5:00PM EASTERN IF YOU WANT TO TRY FOR BARN OWL. WAIT UNTIL 6:15 IF YOU ONLY WANT TO SEE THE WOODCOCK. LEADER: HAYDEN WILSON (423) 949-3092) FOR MORE INFO

Hayden Wilson's field trip for Barn Owls and Woodcocks has been a huge success in past years. After we get our fill of birds all are welcome to get their fill of hot dogs, snacks and drinks. Hayden asks that anyone staying for hot dogs, please call so he knows how many hot dogs to buy. Plan to bring a dessert or side dish to compliment the hot dogs.



DIRECTIONS: From Chattanooga go north on U.S. Hwy. 27 to Soddy-Daisy. When highway splits after crossing Soddy Lake take Hwy. 111 towards Dunlap. After you cross the mountain, take the first exit (East Valley Rd.). Turn right on East Valley Road and go approximately 1 mile and then turn left at Kelly's Crossroads. When road forks at cemetery, go left. Hayden's house is less than 1/2 mile on left at top of hill. His house number is 1664.

You might want to leave a bit early and check waterfowl at Soddy Lake as you head toward Hayden's. There are often several species of ducks there in the winter. If you do this, you'll want to take the Hixson Pike exit, (next exit past Sequoyah Road coming from town), turn right, and then take another right to get to the lake on Old Dayton Pike. Stopping on busy Hwy. 27 causeway over the lake is probably not a good idea.

SAT. MARCH 1: CHESTER FROST PARK AND PINKY'S POINT AREA

MEET: 8:30AM AT THE BOAT LAUNCH RAMP AREA, LEADER: HAROLD BIRCH, (842-4626 FOR INFO)

Join Harold for an early morning walk. Chester Frost Park is a good birding spot any time of the year. We should see many winter visitors, including ducks and gulls. Bald Eagle is always a possibility. Other expected species are Brown-headed Nuthatch and Red-headed Woodpecker. Dress in layers and wear comfortable walking shoes.

RAMBLINGS FROM THE LOOKOUT

By Bill Haley

COUNT MEMORIES

January 1, 2008: My alarm went off at the absolutely insane time of 3:45am. I had to get moving so I'd have plenty of time to drive to Middle Valley and meet up with Harold, Jimmy and Cynthia by 5:00am. Happy New Year!

It was my third Christmas Bird Count of the season and I looked forward to this one with a bit more trepidation than the earlier two. We'd hit it lucky so far this year with fairly decent weather, but our luck had run short for today's Hiwassee count. The coldest Canadian air of the winter had pushed into Tennessee and a strong, blustery north wind was predicted to blow all day.

While this is not the forecast you wish for on any kind of count, we had a job to do. We met at Jimmy and Cynthia's home and set out for the wilds of Birchwood.

Having subscribed to this particular form of craziness for almost 20 years now, let me state that I enjoy doing Christmas counts. It seems every count I do produces one experience that stands out above others.

At mid-day, having been in the wind for several hours and thoroughly chilled, we decided to visit McClurff Cemetery. This quiet cemetery is situated amid open fields on a rise not far from Birchwood. Northern Harrier was our "target bird" here. These weedy, open fields have long been a favored spot for wintering Harriers. None were in evidence as we pulled up, and the wind continued to howl. Despite the cold, Harold, Jimmy and I decided to walk over the edge of the rise and Cynthia waited near the car. I've discovered Harriers commonly like to sit on the low-cut grasses in that area. Our walk paid off! A young Harrier took to the air at my approach, coursing low over the weedy field. It was certainly a wonderful look as this long-winged, long-tailed raptor distanced itself from us. We all got good looks and headed back.

I noticed as we walked back toward the car, Cynthia was training her binoculars on three very large red cedar trees at the very top of the rise...the only trees for several hundred yards. A constant stream of American Robins were flying in, fighting into the strong wind all the way. Among them were also flocks of Cedar Waxwings and smaller numbers of Eastern Bluebirds, Yellow-rumped Warblers and Northern Flickers. Every single bird that reached the cedars set to work gorging on the abundant small blue cedar berries, stocking up for the frigid weather. What a sight to see Robins, Bluebirds and Cedar Waxwings feeding in the same binocular view! It is that beautiful image I'll carry with me to commemorate the 2008 Hiwassee Christmas Count.

21st Season for Project FeederWatch

The 21st season of Project FeederWatch, another great citizen science program overseen by Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, is currently underway. If you love to sit inside and stay warm while watching the activity at your feeders, this is the project for you! Although this year's project has already started you can join at any time. Your counts will help scientists monitor changes in feeder-bird populations over the winter from year to year. New participants receive a kit with a handbook, bird identification poster, calendar and instruction booklet. There is a \$15 fee to defray the cost of materials (\$12 for Lab members). For more information about Project FeederWatch, or to sign up, visit www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/ or call (800) 843-2473.

NICKAJACK CHRISTMAS COUNT

The Nickajack Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 29, 2007. Thirteen participants found a total of 93 species and 19,508 individual birds. Noteworthy finds included one Peregrine Falcon; 11,085 American Coots; 1 Red-breasted Nuthatch (despite the fact they seemed to be widespread earlier in the winter, they were decidedly tough to find on Christmas Counts); 12 Brown Creepers (a good number); 3 House Wrens; 1 Orange-crowned Warbler; 2 White-crowned Sparrows; and 212 Rusty Blackbirds. Big misses included: Wood Duck; Northern Pintail; American Wigeon; Green-winged Teal; Northern Bobwhite (a once-common species that now seems to be in real trouble in Tennessee); Bonaparte's Gull; Barn Owl (not found in the silo where it has been located the past two years, probably because of brush clearing around the silo's base); American Pipit; Vesper Sparrow; and Purple Finch. Dave Spicer, count compiler, and Bill Haley wish to thank everyone who participated.

HIWASSEE CHRISTMAS COUNT

The Hiwassee Christmas Bird Count was held Tuesday, January 1, 2008. 25 participants found 92 species, which is below average. The weather was cold and windy and it seemed there were not as many birds in the area as some years. Highlights were 4 goose species, a first for the Hiwassee count! 3 Ross's Geese, 15 White-fronted Geese and 11 Snow Geese were located in addition to the usual Canada Geese. Other notable finds were 521 Hooded Mergansers (an all-time high); 16 Great Egrets (all-time high); 31 Bald Eagles (8 adults, 23 immatures...another all-time high); 18 Red-headed Woodpeckers (all-time high); 38 White-crowned Sparrows (all-time high); and one Vesper Sparrow (rare for this CBC). "Lowlights" included: 8164 Sandhill Cranes (below average count compared to the past few years, probably due to the fact there was very little corn left on the refuge and the cranes have been forced to disperse over a wide area to find food this year); no Cooper's Hawk; only 1 Pine Warbler; no Barred Owl; no Northern Bobwhite; and waterfowl numbers seemed to be down almost across the board. Kevin Calhoun, count compiler, wishes to thank everyone who participated.

What Have You Seen?

Dec. 22: Harold Sharp sent an e-mail with the information that the January issue of *Birds and Blooms EXTRA* has a photo of the sculpture of the Riverwalk Birdwatcher featured on page 57. Note, this is the issue of *B&B EXTRA*, not the regular issue of *Birds and Blooms*.

Dec. 27: Dennis Harris had Red-breasted, Brown-headed and White-breasted Nuthatches come to his feeder within a ten minute period. A first for his place in East Brainerd.

Dec. 28: Harold Sharp sent a breakdown of nest box successes this past summer. At Greenway Farms in Hixson, out of a total of 24 Bluebird boxes, they fledged 58 Bluebirds, 19 Chickadees, 8 Tufted Titmice, 8 Tree Swallows and a Purple Martin house fledged 12 Purple Martins. 24 Bluebird houses on the Riverwalk fledged: 64 Bluebirds, 16 Chickadees, and 49 Tree Swallows. 12 Bluebird boxes below Chickamauga Dam fledged: 17 Bluebirds, 20 Chickadees, 4 Tufted Titmice and 6 Tree Swallows. 7 boxes at Chattanooga State fledged 14 Bluebirds and 2 Chickadees. Congratulations to Harold and his Riverwalk bird crew for these outstanding success stories! Harold also reported Flying Squirrels occupied two of his boxes, which your editor thinks is pretty neat too! (Flying Squirrels need somewhere to live, just like the birds do).

Dec. 29: The Nickajack Christmas Bird Count found 93 species. (More info on pg. 2).

Dec. 29: A new Riverwalk Bird Club website was announced. Check it out sometime! The website's address is <http://rwbc.home.att.net/index.html>. There is a lot of info on the Peregrine Falcons here, in addition to nest box results, shot-of-the-month, etc.

Dec. 30: Kevin Calhoon reported his first East Tennessee four goose day with Canada Geese, 3 Ross's Geese, 18 White-fronted Geese and 19 Snow Geese. This was the largest flock of Greater White-fronted Geese he's seen in this area. He also spotted a Merlin, 6 Canvasbacks and 2 Redhead Ducks.

Jan. 1: 92 species were found on the Hiwassee Christmas Bird Count, (see pg. 2 for more info).

Jan. 5: Charles Dean checked on the Bald Eagle nest on Raccoon Mountain to see if it is active. He observed two adult Bald Eagles perched in the nest tree, one in the nest and the other on a nearby limb. Charles estimates this tree is about 1/2 mile from the Raccoon Mtn. observation deck.

Jan. 21: While walking around 8:30pm on a street near his home, Bill Haley saw a large bird fly from a yard 30 feet away. It flew up and landed on a phone line directly in front of a streetlight. The Barred Owl was perfectly silhouetted by the light. Although Bill hooted a couple of times, the owl didn't answer. Since it was looking right at him, he probably didn't resemble another Barred Owl closely enough.

Jan. 23: Harold Birch reported he's heard a Great Horned Owl several times in his neighborhood lately, sometimes right outside his front window. This night around 9pm, he heard one calling from across the road during a light rain, which he thought was quite unusual.

HOW CHICKADEES WEATHER WINTER

The following excerpts are taken from a Backyard Birding article written by George H. Harrison for National Wildlife, Dec./Jan. 2008 issue. In this article, the Black-capped Chickadee is featured, but some things are probably true for our Carolina Chickadees as well. - Editor

If you live in the northern part of the country, the odds are good that a black-capped chickadee will visit your property this winter. The most widespread of North America's seven species of chickadees, it also is one of the most commonly seen backyard birds, particularly during the cold months when most other feathered creatures head south.

For years, scientists have been intrigued by the ability of these tiny imps to survive-and thrive-during the most frigid days. As a result, today biologists have a clear understanding of many of the species' survival techniques, which likely are employed by the other members of the chickadee clan.

"Black-capped chickadees have a wonderful assortment of adaptations for the winter," says biologist Susan M. Smith, who has studied the birds' biology and behavior for more than a quarter century at Cornell University and Mount Holyoke College. "Carefully hidden food items, dense winter coats, specially selected winter roost cavities and, perhaps most remarkable of all, the ability to go into nightly hypothermia, thus conserving large amounts of energy, greatly increase the chances of survival."

The chickadee's ability to go into regulated hypothermia enables it to actually lower its body temperature, in a controlled manner, to about 12 or 15 degrees F below its normal daytime temperature of 108 degrees F. This allows the bird to conserve almost 25 percent of its hourly metabolic expenditure when the outside temperature is at freezing. The lower the outside temperature, Smith found, the more energy the bird conserved.

"Chickadees are not the suburban wimps that some people think they are," says wildlife ecologist Margaret Clark Brittingham. For three winters in Wisconsin in the 1980's, Brittingham kept track of 576 black-capped chickadees. Her research at the University of Wisconsin showed that during milder winter weather, chickadees that had been exposed to feeders as a supplemental food source apparently did not become dependent on the feeder food. They survived at the same rate when the feeder food was removed as did chickadees that subsisted solely on insect eggs and wild seeds and had never been exposed to feeder food.

However, Brittingham's research did find that during harsh weather (below 10 degrees F), black-capped chickadees benefited from supplemental food they obtained at feeders. The survival rate of her subjects, compared to those birds that obtained less-accessible food from the wild during severe winters, nearly doubled when they consumed sunflower seeds at feeders. "The thing that really impressed me about chickadees", she says, "is their metabolism. We weighed birds in the morning and found that they had virtually no body fat. Yet the same birds examined in the afternoon of the same day were bulging with fat."



Chatanooga TOS website: www.chattnoogatos.org

Bald Eagles continue a strong comeback in Tennessee as evidenced by totals from area Christmas Counts, with a new record being set at Hiwassee. In contrast, only 11 Bald Eagles were found statewide in 1980.



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TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome to "The Wonderful World of Birds"...Join in the fun... come to one or all of our events and bring your friend(s) if you wish.

Membership in TOS is:

- RECEIVING The Chattanooga Chat, monthly chapter newsletter, The Tennessee Warbler, spring and fall statewide newsletter, The Migrant, quarterly journal.
- PARTICIPATING in your chapter's monthly meetings, field trips, and other special events. Fellowship and fun with those of like interest.
- MEETING with fellow members from across the state and working with members in other chapters on important conservation and educational projects.
- INCREASING knowledge and enjoyment of birds in our natural world.

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For the Birds and Birders of Tennessee