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December

Down swept the chill wind from the mountain peak,
From the snow five thousand summers old;
On open fold and hill-top bleak

It had gathered all the cold,
And whirled it like sleet on the wanderer's cheek;
It carried a shiver everywhere

From the unleafed boughs and pastures bare;
The little brook heard it and built a roof

'Neath which he could house him, winter-proof;
All might by the white stars' frosty gleams

Slender and clear were his crystal spars
As the lashes of light that trim the stars:

He sculptured every summer delight
In his halls and chambers out of sight;

Sometimes his tinkling waters slip
Down through a frost-leaved forest-crypt,

Long, sparkling aisles of steel-stemmed trees
Blending to counterfeit a breeze;

Sometimes the roof no fretwork knew
But silvery mosses that downward grew;

Sometimes it was carved in sharp relief
With quaint arabesques of ice-fern leaf;

Sometimes it was simply smooth and clear
For the gladness of heaven to shine through, and here

He had caught the nodding bulrush-tops
And hung them thickly with diamond drops,

That crystallized the beams of moon and sun,
And made a star of every one!

No mortal builder's most rare device
Could match this winter-palace of ice;

It was as if every image that mirrored lay
In his depth serene through the summer day,

Each fleeting shadow of earth and sky,
Lest the happy model should be lost,

Had been mimicked in fairy masonry
By the elfin builders of the frost.

- James Russell Lowell
(From the prelude to the second part of The Vision
of Sir Launfal)

The Fourth Annual Christmas Bird Count

All is set for another foray into the wilds of Christmas Bird Count territory. This Sunday - December 17th - is the day. We rare had the census the end of December but are changing this year - a decision made at the November meeting - taking our early chances with mother nature. Sunday seems to be the best of the seven days since few work or shop then. The two week count period begins Saturday the 16th and ends Monday, January 2nd. We have set a rain date: Saturday, December 30th if we are hit with heavy downpours, heavy snowstorms or winds on the 17th. This is important to keep in mind. Rain, heavy clouds, heavy falling snow all present miserable conditions for the birdwatcher-census-taker. (last year was a good example of this). All is "go" if there is no extreme weather pounding the area on the 17th. We are now setting up the territory - assigning people to areas, assigning people to groups, attempting contacts with local residents for help in counting. If you know anyone in Sinking Valley, Bellwood, Tyrone, Point View, Greenwood, Tipton, Spruce Creek, Scotch Valley, Water Street, Ironville, or Ganoce Valley, let us know - or ask them to help us. Feeders especially are great providers of species. Who can find a farmer with a barn owl? A hunter with turkeys, quail, grouse, or pheasant? A friend with house finches at their feeder?

If you wish to take part call John Orr at 943-5629 as soon as possible! You might want to go all day - from 6:00 A.M. to dusk or just for a few hours - perhaps picking up with a group. If there is any snow on the ground it might be possible to see horned larks and snow buntings, in Sinking Valley.

Dress warmly - gloves, long underwear, hot drink, oatmeal cookies (homemade), etc; come armed with binoculars, guides and extreme caution in making identifications. (If you can't be 100% sure of the bird don't count it. (Report it to another group that might have time to double back for it.)

Our 15 mile diameter circle touches on Bellwood, including the reservoir, Spruce Creek at the bridge, Canoe Creek at the new dam and the Kettle reservoir. One party will cover Canoe and Scotch Valleys to include the new dam and Point View (home of Bill Murray). Several parties will cover Sinking Valley proper - our largest area - from the Kettle reservoir to the very lower end. Another group will cover Water Street, Eton Hill (Spruce Creek area), Greer School (Birmingham) and Ironville. We are always weak in covering Bellwood, Tyrone, and Tipton. No group set up yet for that area. The center of the circle is the crossroads at Culp in Sinking Valley. We had 13 people helping last year. Let's improve our coverage. If you have any questions whatsoever or suggestions please call 943-5629 right away.

Our covered dish dinner - an annual social event - is planned for the count day - the 17th - at the Skelp Grange Hall in Sinking Valley. It is a nice place to meet, talk, tally results, and eat and drink. Bring your friends and come to a very worthwhile and pleasant gathering at dusk (5:30/6:00 or so). Everybody is welcome, members or not. There will be maps, past counts, charts, guides, etc. to inform people of what happens on a Christmas Bird Count.

Call Truth Close (942-7886) or Margaret Chonko (942-8070) to indicate what you plan to bring. Bring one item - main dish casserole, vegetable casserole, salad, relish, bread/rolls, coffee tea or milk, butter, sugar, desserts or small contribution to cover cost of meal. It is important to coordinate with Truth or Margaret on what you'll bring. (Oatmeal cookies are nice). Items should feed 8 - 10 and will be served buffet style.

A \$1.00 participation fee is charged those who actually count. This fee is necessary to cover costs of publishing the count in American Birds. We subscribe as a group to this journal. Anyone wishing to subscribe independently may do so by paying \$6.00 to the compiler. All fees are payable to "American Birds" and should be given - check or bill (Washington) - to John Orr the day of the count.

Owls will again be sought after. A barn owl is reported to be residing in the belfry of the St. John's Lutheran Church in Sinking Valley. We should check this out. An owl hunt is planned - at night, of course. Sign up at the Grange Hall. Birds to expect early as we are operating this year are: red-winged blackbird, purple grackle, ducks, gulls, swamp sparrow, brown-headed cowbird, rufous-sided towhee, robins, yellow-bellied sapsucker, vesper sparrow, flicker, eastern bluebird, myrtle warbler and ruby-crowned kinglet. In three bird counts we've seen 50 different species. Earl Higgins and John McGill were out Saturday, December 10th when they saw a rough-legged hawk in the lower end of Sinking Valley. John Orr spotted a bonaparte's gull December 3rd. - at Canoe Creek dam.

The Gnatcatcher
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