

Growing up with the Rallies

Author's note:

I am writing this article in hopes that others will share their memories of past Spring and Fall Naturalists Rallies, as well as, the earlier "Wildflower Rally" from which they evolved. It also would be great if folks would share their photographs. Then we could put them on a disc to show at future Rallies or put them on our webpage.

— Debby Neves

When did this great adventure start, I guess I was about eight or nine years old? It was early spring and I was birding with my parents, Bill and Marjorie Dyer, somewhere in the mountains of Carter County, when we came upon a little man about my height. He was walking through the woods looking down at the ground, while we were looking up into the trees following the spring warblers. The man was Fred Behrend. We exchanged our finds, we the spring warblers and he the spring wildflowers. I believe Mr. Behrend had lost a daughter about that time. He mourned her loss by walking in the woods. He would later claim that we got him looking up again, as we credit him for our beginnings with wildflowers. Sometime following this Mr.



Hiking with Mother

Behrend held an organizational meeting for the "Wildflower Rally" either at the Elizabethton Star or at the Lynwood Hotel in Elizabethton.

Then in about 1958, we were off enjoying the Spring wildflowers on The Roan.

My earliest memories of the Rally, were the early morning gatherings at Twin Springs. Jim Potter and Tom Gray would have a fire going, for those Spring mornings were cool. Mr. Potter prepared pots of loggers coffee, which were welcomed by many even at our picnic lunch break. This was also my introduction to ramps, probably by Jim Potter! Much to the amazement and chagrin of my mother, I would dig mine, wipe them on my pants, and eat them. I

would still do the same, except now I have also learned from the Rally to be a conservationist. I am afraid that my habits and tastes,

however, have not changed! Though now my search is for mushrooms. I may not eat my find on the spot, but I still wipe my hands on my pants!

My first memories of evening programs were slide shows of wildflowers. These were held upstairs at the Giant Grocery in Elizabethton. I remember one especially, I think by Dr. Barclay, of a wildflower expedition to the Rockies. My memories of the first Fall Rallies were the dining tables at the old Cloudland Elementary decorated with Dahlias from "Hummingbird Hill". I believe the Garden Club of Roan Mountain fixed our dinners. I am sure it was Edna Potter that made certain it all was a success!

It doesn't take many Springs to find myself at College. I couldn't get too far from my beloved mountains, so I went to Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, NC. Though school schedules kept me from attending the Rallies, I still have a special memory from that period. I was dining in the cafeteria when a large group of faculty came in. In their midst was a little man. I am sure that faculty, as well as, my friends were shocked when I ran over and gave him a big hug! Yes, it was Fred Behrend. Shortly after that the University started their "Nature Rallies". This was probably the last time I got to visit with Fred. I married in college and on graduation, started work and graduate school. Life and schedules continued to keep me away from the Rallies.

After we moved to Black Mountain, NC, and when my son, James, was old enough to tag along, I again started attending Rallies. Many of you will remember James following and sometimes leading Ed Schell to wildflowers. (A special interest and young eyes closer to the ground are often very helpful.) Or maybe you will remember him while wiping the sleepy seeds from his eyes to better view the birds at the early morning Bird Walks at Sycamore Shoals with Gary Wallace. James is now working on his doctorate in chemistry at the University of Georgia Complex Carbohydrate Research Center. Maybe a love for science, or a close examination of the minute, was encouraged by the Rallies.

One of my special memories will be of a Fall Rally and a viewing of the heavens at the Miller Homestead. I was there with my father and James. The telescopes were set on some nebula and the astronomers were pointing out stars, planets and constellations. Dad always enjoyed the night sky and tried to teach these locations to his daughter. Three generations stood there together among our Rally friends taking in the wonders of our universe; Dad died the following Christmas of cancer.

Thanks to all the folks who have kept the Rallies going and evolving. Though my husband, Ed, may be off trout fishing during the walks and has to pick up his knowledge of birds, wildflowers and now mushrooms from his wife or son; all three of the Neves appreciate the memories!

Debby Neves, daughter of Bill and Marjorie Dyer of Johnson City, lives in Black Mountain, North Carolina where she is a retired Speech Pathologist and Program and Placement Specialist from the Buncombe CO Public Schools. She and her husband Ed (not retired) spend as much time as possible at their new cabin in Carter County. At home and at the cabin, Debby continues to enjoy all the "naturalist" activities generated by the Rallies and her parents (birding, wildflowering, mushrooming, journaling, etc.) She studies genealogy and the early culture of the East Tennessee, Western North Carolina, and Upper South Carolina. She is now a breast cancer survivor. She states that her mother Marjorie London Dyer is 94, lives at Wellington Place in Johnson City and has a much more accurate memory than Debby! She would also like to add a comment her article...it is based on memories not facts!



Young Naturalist

Fifth Consecutive Year of Fall Banding on Roan Mountain

--by Rob Biller

The science of banding birds (or “ringing” as it is known in Europe) has been around for centuries. In 1595, Henry IV’s banded Peregrine Falcon was lost while pursuing an Old World game bird (bustard) and, because it was tagged, they knew it when the bird showed up 24 hours later and about 1350 miles away. (Patuxent Wildlife Research Center)

The tradition of banding birds in North America dates back to 1803 when John James Audubon first “banded” a family of phoebes with a silver wire. During the following year, the same birds were found near where the nest had been. Because of the “band,” the observers knew these birds were the same ones as the previous year. (PWRC)

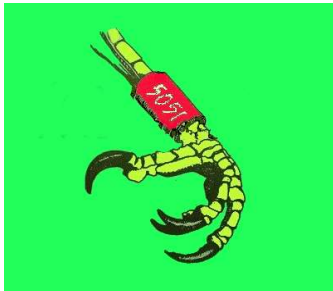
As the popularity of bird banding blossomed and the different styles of bird banding grew, the American Bird Banding Association (as part of Linnaean Society of New York) was formed in 1909, and by 1920, the Biological Survey (then part of Fish and Wildlife, now part of the U.S. Geologic Survey, Biological Resource Division) took over the supervision of bird banding (Eastern Bird Banding Association). This was, in part, to help monitor the persons banding, but more importantly, to better protect the birds from inexperienced handlers.

Banding to track migration was the primary focus of the early studies but has expanded greatly over the years. Statistical data can now be used to “study avian behavior and ecology, monitor populations, restore endangered species, assess the effects of environmental concerns, set hunting regulations, and to address concerns about human health...” (PWRC) and can be expanded more each day.

For the fifth straight year, Rick Knight manned his fall banding site atop Roan Mountain at Carver’s Gap. This marks the seventh year (out of the last nine) that he has set up his banding operation at this site. His banding station was up for 21 days (September 3rd – October 7th) in which he banded 42 species of birds.



The most popular style of banding includes erecting mist nets in prime migration areas to capture a small sample of the migration flight. The birds are caught and carefully taken out of the nets. This causes very mild discomfort for the birds as the nets are regularly checked at set intervals. The bird is then taken back to the banding area (which is behind Knight’s car with an upside down bucket for a stool) where they are identified to species, banded, measured, and even have their age and sex checked. Knowing the age can give indications to monitor the success rate of the current breeding season, and the numbers and species help with population trends of certain migratory birds.



The bands are like small anklets that are put on the bird’s leg. There is a special number on the bands that other banders will recognize if the birds are caught later. Special tools are used to set the band in place and this process is performed with a delicate touch and with as much care given to the bird as possible. This number, along with the other vital information, is written down in Knight’s records and then reported to the Bird Banding Lab at the end of the season. The band weighs next to nothing and does not hamper the bird in the least. The process for each bird takes about five minutes but can vary depending on how many people are watching and waiting to take a picture.

After all information is thoroughly checked (and all pictures taken), the bird is released back to the wild. Some of the most wonderful moments witnessed are when Knight allows a young child to release a bird. He sets the bird in the palm of the young naturalist’s outstretched hand. As the bird starts to gradually move, the young hand twitches just a bit from anticipation and the eyes widen with excitement seeing the bird fly away.

Knight's totals of 42 species and 452 birds are somewhat low this year as he got a slightly later start and because of three hurricanes which hampered banding efforts. His report showed that was "just two-thirds the average number of birds of the previous six years."

The biggest declines were with Tennessee Warblers (only 27 banded with an expected average of 160) and Swainson's Thrushes (only 52 banded with an expected average of 111). The reasons for the drop in these birds are still unclear. New to Knight's banding station this year were Saw-whet Owl and Philadelphia Vireo. Six hummingbirds were also released unbanded because you need a separate permit to band these little guys.

Other interesting sightings this season were: juvenile Hermit Thrushes from local populations, which is close to the southern end of the species' breeding range, two of the Palm Warbler banded were "Yellow Palms" which is the eastern subspecies of the bird (we normally observe the western subspecies – west of the Appalachian Mountain range), and an abnormally high numbers of Red-headed Woodpeckers. With the addition of the two new birds this season, Knight's total number of species over the seven years banding stands at 72.

Here is the complete list for the fall of 2004:

Sharp-shinned Hawk - 1	Swainson's Thrush - 52	Bay-breasted Warbler - 4
Northern Saw-whet Owl - 1	Hermit Thrush - 6	Black-and-white Warbler - 3
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - 1	Wood Thrush - 9	American Redstart - 5
Eastern Phoebe - 5	American Robin - 1	Ovenbird - 11
Blue-headed Vireo - 2	Gray Catbird - 4	Common Yellowthroat - 9
Philadelphia Vireo - 1	Brown Thrasher - 1	Hooded Warbler - 7
Red-eyed Vireo - 3	Tennessee Warbler - 27	Wilson's Warbler - 1
Blue Jay - 1	Chestnut-sided Warbler - 8	Eastern Towhee - 3
Carolina Chickadee - 1	Magnolia Warbler - 18	Song Sparrow - 1
House Wren - 1	Black-throated Blue Warbler - 104	Dark-eyed Junco - 80
Winter Wren - 1	Yellow-rumped Warbler - 1	Rose-breasted Grosbeak - 8
Golden-crowned Kinglet - 18	Black-throated Green Warbler - 5	Pine Siskin - 10
Ruby-crowned Kinglet - 9	Blackburnian Warbler - 2	American Goldfinch - 1
Veery - 1	Palm Warbler - 21	
Gray-cheeked Thrush - 4		

Modern banding stretches across the North American Continent. It does not matter if it is in the cold grips of Antarctica, Greenland, Siberia, the tropical weather of Latin America and the far Pacific Islands, the humid subtropical climate of Tennessee, or the high elevation, "Pleistocene relicts," that somewhat simulate the northern latitudes Moist Continental Climate of the northern Boreal Forests, as it is on top of Roan Mountain (World Climates). If birds are to be found, there will be persons to band them.(PWRC)

Thanks to persons such as Rick Knight, the banding program has expanded greatly from the small start in the early 1900's. If you have ever wanted to see birds up close or are interested in the banding process, Rick is open to visitors at his banding site. It is worth the time and effort to make the trip to Carver's Gap on top of Roan Mountain to watch a seasoned professional carefully handle the birds and record this much-needed information about the birds that migrate through and live in our area. Thanks go out to Rick for all his hard work and to Cherokee and Pisgah National Forests for allowing Rick to conduct his band project in such a prolific area.

Rick Knight has been birding over 25 years and banding birds for over 20 years. He is one of Tennessee's most active birders and is the author of The Birds of Northeast Tennessee(1994). He has contributed over 30 articles to the The Migrant (published by the Tennessee Ornithological Society) and The Chat (published by the Carolina Bird Club). His more recent projects include the Zeiss search for the Ivory-billed Woodpeckers and the Migration Over the Gulf Project in Louisiana, and has spent two summers in western Alaska conducting shorebird and waterfowl surveys.

Rob Biller, a charter member of Friends of Roan Mountain, is also a member of the Bristol Bird Club (affiliated with the Tennessee Ornithological Society [TOS] and the Virginia Society of Ornithology [VSO]) and the Lee and Lois Herndon Chapter of TOS [Elizabethton]. Rob is a regular visitor to Rick Knight's Banding Station on Roan Mountain.

Sources:

Blue Planet Biomes – World Climates - <http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/climate.htm>

Eastern Birding Banding Association - <http://www.pronetisp.net/~bpbird/>

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (PWRC) - <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/>

Tennessee Ornithological Society - <http://www.tnbirds.org/>

Rick Knight – Professional Ornithologist / Licensed Bander



A Little Help From Our Friends

A lot of work goes into making the Naturalists' Rallies a success each spring and fall. It takes the efforts of many people to pull off such an event. With more than 200 people participating, it is impossible to please all of the people all of the time. However, the Friends of Roan Mountain Board tries to ensure that it is a pleasant experience for everyone. In an effort not to tax the time and energy of our volunteers, we're looking for some extra help. Would you be willing to assist with distributing lunches on Saturday at the rallies, or assisting our treasurer with registration at the convention center or in the field? Is there some other way you would like to contribute your time and talents to the rallies? You can contact our rally directors, Jennifer Bauer 423 772-4772 or Gary Barrigar 423-543-7576.

TELLING OUR STORIES

The Roan Mountain Naturalists' Rallies had a grassroots beginning. More than forty years ago, people who loved nature got together and organized hikes for anyone who wanted to come along and learn more about the beautiful, abundant flora and fauna of this area. Little did they realize that their efforts would grow to the scope of today.



There is no formal history of the rallies. But we are sure that there is a wealth of informal history in your memories, your photograph albums and scrapbooks. The Friends of Roan Mountain would like to gather the stories and photographs of rally participants through the years. Do you have photographs that can be scanned and placed on our web site? Do you have a favorite story about a hike, a slide show, a dinner, a great discovery? If you have something you can share, please contact Nancy Barrigar. The contact information is listed on the back page of this newsletter.

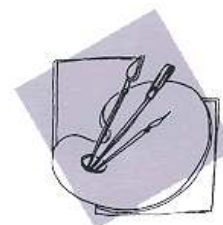
<http://www.etsu.edu/biology/roan-mtn/>



Did you know that you can read our newsletters on the Friends of Roan Mountain website? From the home page, just click on the link for newsletters. If you would like to save paper and the cost of postage for the Friends, you can request that you be notified by email when a new edition is added to the web page. Just send your email address to barrigargn@earthlink.net with your request that our newsletter not be mailed to your home. If you prefer to receive a regular paper copy of the newsletter, you do not need to do take any action. We'll continue to send it by regular mail.

WATERCOLORS BY ANNA HESS

THE ARTS DEPOT IN ABINGDON, VA, IS SHOWCASING FOUR LOCAL ARTISTS IN THE MEMBERS GALLERY FROM JANUARY 13 THROUGH FEBRUARY 26. WORKS BY MEMBER OF FRIENDS OF ROAN MOUNTAIN AND RALLY LEADER, ANNA HESS, ARE ON DISPLAY. GALLERY HOURS ARE THURSDAY, FRIDAY & SATURDAY FROM 11 AM TO 3 PM (276) 628-9091



The question is not what you look at, but what you see.

It is only necessary to behold the least fact or phenomenon, however familiar, from a point a hair's breadth aside from our habitual path or routine, to be overcome, enchanted by its beauty and significance ... To perceive freshly, with fresh senses is to be inspired.

— Henry David Thoreau



Johnson City Symphony to Feature Ed Schell's Photography

“The Symphony Goes Visual”

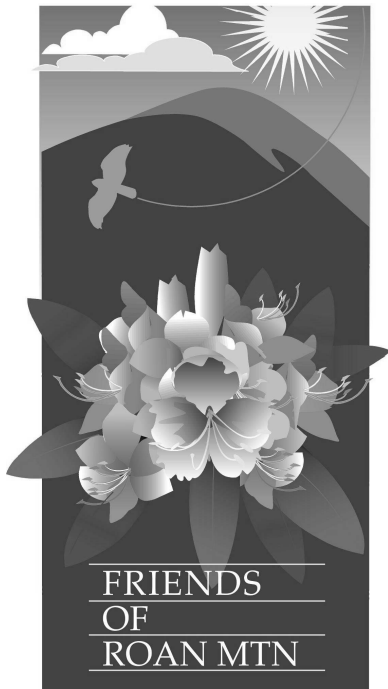
February 12, 2005 8:00 p.m. Seeger Chapel, Milligan College

Ed Schell, a former director of the Fall Naturalists' Rally, is one of our most treasured naturalists and hike leaders at the rallies. His wildflower hikes never fail to draw long lines of cars as we gather in the field, and his slide programs have delighted audiences at our evening programs.

This year the Johnson City Symphony's popular February Valentine's concert will feature the beauty, power and grace of southeastern Tennessee's nature through the artistic eye of Edward Schell, an Ansel Adams Award winner for Nature Photography. To enhance your enjoyment, the breathtaking photographs will be shown in concert with the orchestra in a performance of appropriate symphonic music from the classics.

This Valentine program will also introduce film maker Ross Spears (born in Johnson City) celebrating the 50th anniversary of James Agee (1909-1955). The film examines the life and work of writer James Agee, "a sovereign prince of the English language". Spears will illustrate "James Agee's Documentary", with music composed by Johnson City's international composer in residence, Kenton Coe.

For more information go to <http://www.jcsymphony.com/> or phone: 92 MUSIC or (423) 926-8742



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