

Volume 3, No.2

Spring 1999

TAKE A HIKE!

It's time for the Rally. You wake up and look out the window and see a cloudy sky, maybe even a few sprinkles of rain. So, what is your decision? Do you roll over and snooze a little more, or do you get yourself dressed, pack a lunch, and head for the mountain? Choose the latter. You never know what treasures and adventures will be your reward when you hike with knowledgeable naturalists at the Roan Mountain Naturalists' Rallies. The following is a letter written by Anne Whittemore last year after the Spring Naturalists' Rally. We hope for beautiful, warm, sunny weather, but just in case . . . perhaps this will inspire you.



[This is a letter I wrote to my "adopted" grandchildren last year after our hike up Doe River Gorge during the May rally 1998. You may remember that Saturday last year was rainy and quite messy but trips went out anyway. Last year's walk up the DRG was led by Sandra Perry and Ed Schell (wild- flowers) and Bob Whittemore (geology).]

Dear Lauren, Sarah & Josh - I thought of you all last Saturday as we were hiking the railroad tracks at Doe River Gorge. We were really glad to be in the tunnels out of the rain! but all 13 of us on the trip were dressed for rainy weather with ponchos or raincoats. One lady even carried an umbrella! The oldest person on our hike was the trip leader who is 75 years old. He knows all the names of the flowers, shrubs, ferns and trees along the trail. Many of the flowers were beaten down by the rain and were probably past their peak of beauty. I was amazed by the great number of dwarf iris lining the cliffs below the tracks. Also blooming this time was the Carolina rhododendron, a bush-like plant that grows on the steep slopes above and below the track and over the tunnels. The blossoms are white, light pink and a deeper shade of pink. Really gorgeous! Especially against the black and gray rocks. We also saw many varieties of violets - small white ones, the large white Canadian violet, yellow ones, pinkish lavender long spur violets, the common blue (purple) violet. The delicate showy orchis is also in groups along the tracks here and there; it actually looks like a snapdragon and is white and pink. We only saw two flowers of the red/yellow columbine; I hope no one has picked it because it would be a shame to never see it in the Gorge

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Winter Birds at Roan Mountain

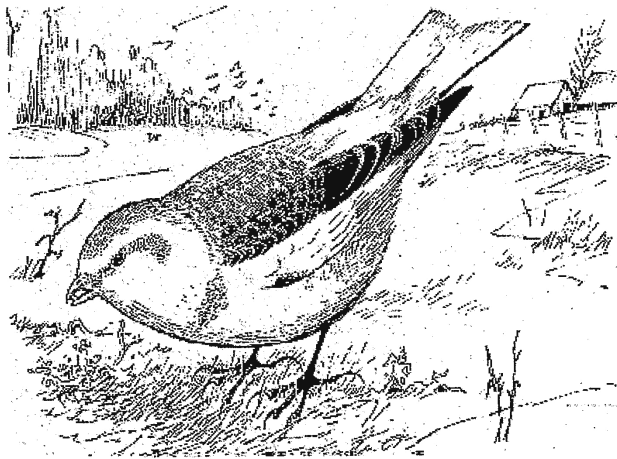
— Tom Laughlin

During this past winter naturalists from around the region, and further afield, were present in the Roan Mountain environs. Because of the high elevations and concomitant cold temperatures, there are many days when the bird life is scarce, especially at the higher elevations. For this reason one might conclude that the Roan Mountain area is a place to be avoided by birders during the winter months. Of course, one who did think such a thing would be quite mistaken. Though the birds can be few during the winter months, they can also be extraordinary. This past winter, though relatively warm, was no exception. The usual species were to be found at the higher elevations, most notably the Common Raven. Roan Mountain is one of the very few locations in Tennessee or North Carolina where the Common Raven can be regularly, and even reliably sighted.

The mildness of this past winter was reflected in the species observed during the annual Christmas Bird Count. The Roan Mountain Christmas Count includes the area within a 15 mile diameter circle centered at Carvers Gap. A total of 52 species were observed by count participants on December 20th. Count coordinator Rick Knight noted that this number was slightly above recent averages. Record highs were posted for Dark-eyed Juncos (396) and Fox Sparrow (26). Two Red-shouldered Hawks were also spotted, which was a first for the count. Other notable results from the count were twenty-two Common Ravens, seven Red-tailed Hawks and three Barred Owls.

The highlight of the wintertime birds seen at Roan Mountain this past year would probably be the Snow Bunting seen on Round Bald. Ed Schell spotted a single bird just off the Appalachian Trail on November 8th. This was a fairly early sighting of this species, though they have been observed as early October 25th. Never seen in great abundance, the largest number of individuals seen on Roan were fifteen birds spotted by the great Fred Behrend on December 25, 1960.

The Snow Bunting is an unusual species anywhere in the southern United States, but if one wanted to pick a spot to see this bird, then they should ask Ed Schell. He knows. Since they were first seen on Hump Mountain by Fred Behrend, the Roan Mountain Massif has been a prime Snow Bunting area. The apparent affection shown for Roan by the Snow Bunting is an indication of the past and present nature of the mountain. A recent article by longtime friend of Roan Mountain, Travis Knowles, nicely synthesizes the likely ecological history of Roan Mountain (Twilight on Roan Mountain, The Sciences, March/April 1999). In his article Knowles relates that the windswept balds are very likely an ecological relict from a climate that was present about 10,000 years ago. Since that time many plant species have persisted over the centuries that are characteristic of or similar to treeless regions of Northern Canada. Those treeless regions, the tundra, are the breeding habitat of the Snow Bunting during the summer season. Little wonder that the Snow Bunting is one of the few species of songbird known to line their nests with the feathers of other birds. And little wonder also that they seem to be attracted to the treeless balds of the Roan Mountain Massif during the winter months. There's no place like home.



Scientific name: *Plectrophenax nivalis*
Family name: Emberizidae
Size: 6.75 inches long
Oldest known individual,
from bird banding data:
8 years, 9 months

Kids' Pages!!

Roan Mountains' Fabulous Frogs!



Wood Frog - Calling early in February, the quiet calls of this frog signal it as being our earliest egg layer - even when ice might still form on the water! It is identified by the dark patch extending from the back of the eye.



Spring Peeper - This tiny frog measures only 0.75 - 1.5 inches. Their loud call, a high pitched "preep" begins in March and can be heard throughout the summer on warm nights.

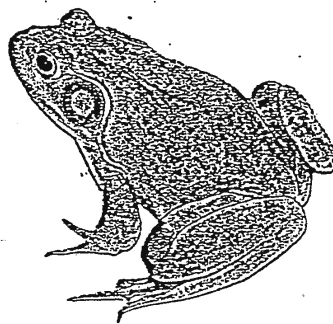


Cope's Gray Treefrog - Though seldom seen, their melodic series of trills can be heard throughout the summer months. They forage among trees and shrubs for insects.



Green Frog - Living around ponds, the loud, explosive "c'tung" call of this frog can be heard throughout the summer. The call has often been described as sounding like a single pluck of a banjo string.

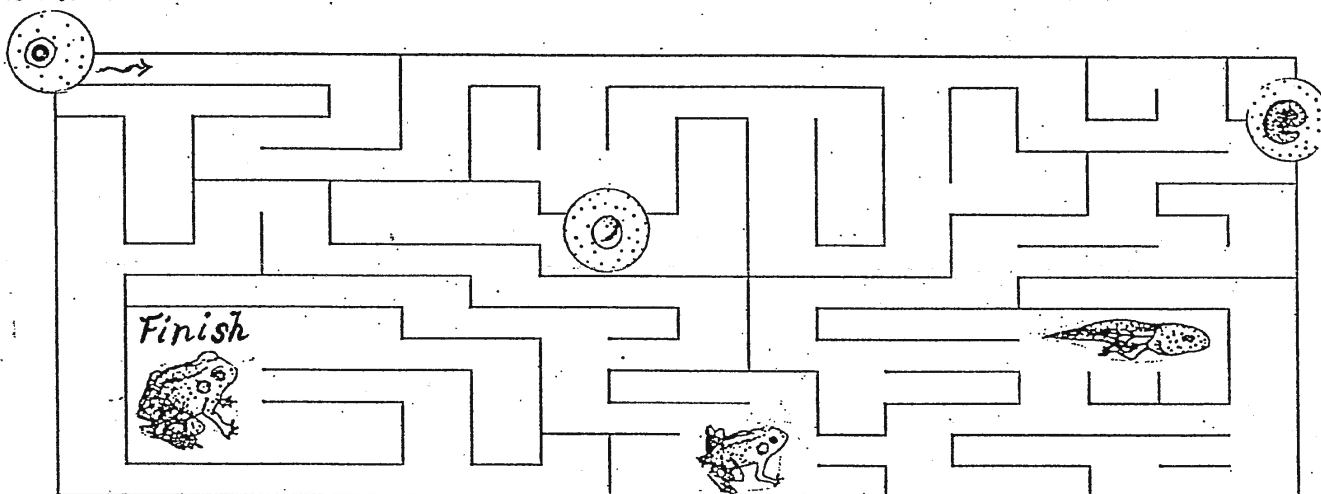
Bullfrog - Our largest frog, growing to up to 8 inches, can be found around ponds. Their call begins in late spring and continues through the summer. They can be heard for a long distance, with their deep, bass, "jug-o-rum" call. Each female can lay up to 12,000 eggs!



* * * * *

Follow the maze and help the egg change from a tadpole into an adult frog!

Start



Try to find the names of our fabulous frogs in the word search.....

A R T M I S X A N E G O L L B C
 S O D R U V F L H O C N I E A S
 M P E A T O E L R P S D B X G A
 P E G W O O D F R O G Y U I E T
 L S M O B R N R Y E E O L X M Q
 A A N O R E E N U L L C L O S A
 R Y I F E B Z H S D C P F O K M
 W S P R I N G P E E P E R H K C
 I O G Y L C R R U D A S O O B N
 O G R A Y T R E E F R O G G A R

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again. There is a vine that grows along the track in 2-3 places. The flowers look like small brown pipes, and it is, in fact, called Dutchman's Pipe. Hopefully, this year I was able to get a good picture. We also saw miter's (or bishop's) cap - these look like tiny caps with fringed edges and occur on a stalk. Dog hobble was in bloom, as well as striped maple which has small clusters of green flowers attached on top of the new leaves. And the heart-shaped ginger was in blossom with the flowers camouflaged and hidden under last fall's leaves. We also saw yellow swamp bacon and white-colored dead men's fingers (these grow in or close to the water that accumulates along the tracks and ties). Fire pink, one of my favorite flowers, was there in rock crevices on the drier slopes. Altogether, in spite of the rain, which was intermittent (we even ate lunch between showers!), it was a good trip with many photographic opportunities. We also saw a 1.5 inch red salamander, several different lengths of millipedes and caterpillars, AND I found a large moth with about a 4-inch wing space clutching to a gravel on one side of the tracks. At first I thought it was a piece of fungus, but on closer examination, I could see legs. One of the biologists along picked it up, and just his warm breath caused the moth to "wake up" and begin to move its wings. Had it been a sunny warm day, we would not have seen it, because the cool weather causes butterflies/moths to "sleep" - they need the sun and warmth to fly and find food. I hope that one day you will all be able to take a spring hike up the Gorge with me. I don't think you'd have the same experience as you did last fall with yellow jackets because they just aren't about in the spring.

Has Your Membership Expired?

Take a look at the expiration date on your membership card to see if your annual membership fee is due. If so, simply fill out the information below and mail it along with your check. If you are unsure about your status, call Gary Barrigar at 423-543-7576.

Name _____ Phone (_____) _____

Address _____

Check appropriate membership category:

Individual (\$10) _____ Dues: \$ _____
Family (\$15) _____ Contribution: \$ _____ (optional)
Student (\$5) _____ Total Enclosed: \$ _____
Corporate (\$45) _____

Check if you would like to be contacted to assist in some way.
Please make check payable to **Friends of Roan Mountain** and return to:
Gary Barrigar, 708 Allen Ave, Elizabethton, TN, 37643

Upcoming Special Events at Roan Mountain State Park

Miller Homestead Saturdays – June 12, July 10, & Aug. 14 12:00 - 2:00 p.m.

Young People's Talent Exhibition – Saturday, June 19 7:00 p.m.

53rd Annual Rhododendron Festival – Saturday & Sunday, June 19 & 20

Independence Day Activities – Saturday, July 3

Game Show Weekend – Friday, July 9 – Roan Mtn. Jeopardy

Saturday, July 10 – Roan Mtn. Price Is Right

7th Annual Roan Mtn. Butterfly Count – Saturday, July 17 10:00 a.m.

Young Naturalists' Workshops – Thurs. & Fri., August 12 & 13 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Saturday, August 14 3:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Camper's Night Lights Contest – Saturday, September 4

37th Annual Fall Naturalists' Rally – Friday - Sunday, September 10 - 12

19th Annual Fall Festival – Saturday & Sunday, September 18 & 19

Haunted Halloween Trick or Treat Trails – Saturday, October 23

Summer in the Park - Friday & Saturday nights, Memorial Day through Labor Day
Concerts, programs, music, clogging, storytelling & much more

Brochures with more detailed information are available at Roan Mountain State Park,
527 Hwy 143, Roan Mt., TN 37687 or by calling 1-800-250-8620 or 1-423-772-3303.



Nancy Barrigar

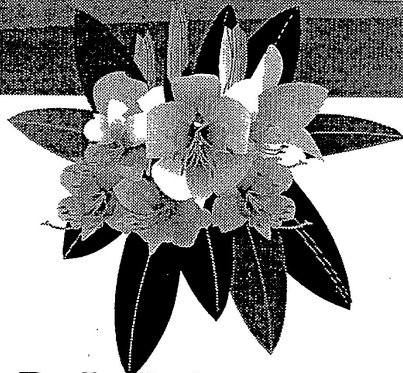
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F R I E N D S O F R O A N M O U N T A I N

