

## Backyard Briefs

*A weekly column*

*By Judy Jessop, A Nature Conservancy Volunteer*

### Winter Paddling on the Roanoke

It is a great time of year to paddle the creeks and swamps of the Roanoke region. The weather is mild, yet pesky insects are gone. As you paddle through back swamps and up shady creeks the shroud of summer's leaves have fallen, to blanket earth and water, leaving tree skeletons to admire. One can scan from trunks to limbs to delicate branches of trees, reaching with grace, toward the clear blue sky. Bring binoculars along for you can peer deep into, forests, wooded levees and swamps with a much better chance of catching the movement of a mink, raccoon, deer or bear.

Many of the feathered voices of summer have taken wing, migrating south to hunt tasty insects in warmer places like Mexico, Central and South America or the Caribbean. Now we receive our winter guests that arrive from forests and wetlands of Canada, Alaska and the Arctic. Twittering juncos perk about among dry leaves. Dashes of yellow attract your eye as pine or yellow-rumped warblers zip through the sunlight. Occasionally you will hear the pure plaintive melody of the white-throated sparrow (*Old Sam Peabody-Peabody-Peabody*), haunting in its minor key, as it drifts among the bare trees of the forest.

Paddle with quiet strokes around the bends of the river and expect to see, not only permanent residents like great blue heron and egrets, but also mallards, ringed necks, and American Black ducks who have traveled from points north to winter in the sheltered waters of the Roanoke and its tributaries. You may also see snow geese and tundra swans flying overhead as they continue to arrive from nesting grounds as far north as above the Arctic Circle.

A night on the river in winter is accented by the calls of barred, great horned and screech owls. Barred owls are very social at this time of year and, if you can mimic their call, will fly in close to check you out. There are several day or overnight camping trips that can be taken along the Roanoke River Canoe Trail that afford you the opportunity to experience the abundance of wildlife that hunt, gather and browse in the Roanoke flood plain. You can get more information on this canoe trail, which also features camping platforms, by contacting: Roanoke River Partners, P.O. Box 488, Windsor, NC 27983, 252-794-2793 ([www.roanokeriver.com](http://www.roanokeriver.com)).