



# Northern Neck Audubon News

*The Northern Neck of Virginia Chapter of the National Audubon Society*

P.O. Box 991, Kilmarnock, Virginia 22482

[www.northernneckaudubon.org](http://www.northernneckaudubon.org)

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A Sandhill Crane looks straight into the window of the car! (Fox Lake Park, just west of Titusville, Florida.) ..... Photo by Gerald Fisher

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## UPCOMING

### MEETINGS

Chapter Meetings held Upstairs  
Lancaster Community Library

**Monday, June 5<sup>th</sup>:**

**3:15 PM Program:**

**Patti Reum**

**Kestrel Nesting Box Project**

### REMEMBER!

There will be NO General Meeting in  
either July or August

### BIRD WALKS

**Monday, June 12<sup>th</sup> 9:00 AM**

**Bush Mill Stream**

**Northumberland County**

**with Melissa Gross**

**Saturday, June 24<sup>th</sup> 9:00 AM**

**Voorhees**

**Monday, July 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Windmill Point**

**Lancaster County**

**Monday, August 14<sup>th</sup>**

**Swan Lake/Flag Pond**

**Northumberland County**

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It seems hard to believe that this is my final President's Message. When I took over the presidency in the summer of 2015, it truly was a case of a fool rushing in. I wondered in my first message two years ago at my audacity to take the helm of the NNAS. What I feared at the time was that we were on the brink of collapse. I really did not want that to happen, and I had held out as long as I could hoping that someone more qualified would step up. Although I had served as secretary for a year, and as program chairman for three, I was quite naïve about the scope of our chapter's commitments. As I progressed through my first year, it became clear that there was a small but very dedicated group of individuals working to meet those obligations; but there were things that were being neglected.

In spite of that, we had a very productive 2015-2016 year and saw participation in our walks and programs increase. The chapter owes many thanks to Jeff Wright who, as a new member, stepped up to energize our Conservation/Citizen Science efforts. This impacted our bird walks with the inclusion of hybrid walks, the first NNAS-sponsored Global Big Day and the first NNAS Christmas Bird Count. During our programs he educated us on the use of technical birding tools and on opportunities for citizen science, while he quizzed us in all aspects of birding.

Two other unsung heroes during my tenure have been Paul Servis and Maggie Gerdts. Paul has continued to monitor Hickory Hollow and provide needed trail maintenance. In addition, he has continued active involvement in our bluebird nest box program, particularly overseeing the inventory and distribution of boxes; and he coordinated our outreach table at the Waterfowl Show.

Maggie has been responsible for getting all of our publicity for walks and programs to area walks

newspapers and the hotline, a job that requires considerable organization and close attention to the calendar.

As in all organizations, things change; and in 2016-17 we lost a number of people who had been serving the chapter very effectively for many years. Bonnie Wilson kept our lines of communication open, maintaining our website and publishing our newsletter through the terms of the past four presidents. In addition, she was membership chairman for three years, graciously greeting people at our programs as well as sending out the annual renewal notices and maintaining our member database. Our highly-skilled bird walk teams of Frank and Linda Schaff, assisted by Lance and Maryalyce Johnson, resigned in late 2016 after faithfully organizing and leading our walks for many years.

Nancy Millar did the arduous task of picking up our newsletters from the printer, affixing address labels, sealing the pages, organizing them to meet bulk mailing requirements and toting them to the post office. Our Bluebird Box Chairman of two years, Jon Sultenfuss, moved unexpectedly. All of these events left the chapter in a bit of disarray as the board worked to find replacements. However, there have been many new faces at our walks and programs. I am amazed at the knowledge and skills that these new people have to share. Many of them have stepped forward to take jobs in the chapter. We have worked to define clear, concrete goals, and members are more excited to become involved in accomplishing those goals, as am I, in my new role as immediate past president.

As I said in my very first message, my usual role is that of a support person, frequently providing refreshments, smiling a lot and doing whatever other people tell me to do. As president, this is what I did best to support the hard work of others.

Remember how good the sub sandwiches tasted after the first Global Big Day, and how refreshing the ice cold watermelon was after our very warm hybrid bird walk in Reedville and how tasty the cookies were as we worked to finish the last of the bluebird boxes in February? All were served with a smile. We hope the smile and the goodies helped to make people feel welcome and be inspired to participate.

As the 2016-17 year draws to a close and I reflect on the challenges of the past year, I feel so positive about the future of NNAS. We have several younger, energetic board members who will be leading the chapter in the coming years, as well as many older, energetic members who are committed to serving the chapter as long as they can.

Under this leadership our chapter will continue to thrive and to meet our mission "to educate people of all ages about nature and to preserve wildlife and its habitat to pass on to future generations."

As I have said many times before, this is an amazing, dynamic organization. I am in awe of all we have done and of all we want still to accomplish. It has been an honor to serve as president and to work with so many dedicated members.

I look forward to continue supporting the new leadership and participating in the important work of our chapter.

Happy Birding!  
Nancy

### VIEW FROM ACROSS THE POND

Once more there is the disheartening news that a familiar and once common avian species is suffering a population crash. Europe's tireless flier, the swift, shows a near 50% decline in the UK alone over the last twenty years. The clear culprit, as so often is the case, appears to be loss of habitual nesting sites. Swifts are loyal to original nests; so when old structures undergo remodeling (the closing of cracks, the reparation of crumbling brick, the replacement of rain gutters), these little birds are rendered homeless. Able as they are to employ the smallest fissure for raising a brood, their opportunism does not stretch to using a sealed surface.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) features the swift's plight in the summer issue of its magazine. One remedy reminds us of our similar Bluebird Box Project, offering as it does replacement structures to be attached near traditional colony sites. These efforts are being mounted by individual cities, like Belfast, Bristol and Exeter, as well as by concerned activists who supply several models for on-line purchase.

One building products company, in concert with the RSPB, has contrived a special brick, "ventilated, drained and unobtrusive," which can be set into a new structure as it is raised. News of such a creative partnership can take the "DIS" out of "DIS"heartening and leave us encouraged.

Statistics summed up in the RSPB's article cite the astounding skills of the little swift as it stitches the lilac twilight above old Europe's spires and domes: the bird can cover nearly 500 miles a day with speeds up to 70 miles per hour...surpassed only by those of the peregrine falcon's stoop. Never grounded except for nesting time, the swift even sleeps and mates on the wing, letting the rain provide its bath. Cheers for this endurance champion!

## OUR NEXT HAPPENING

Patti Reum of the Virginia Society of Ornithology will be the June meeting speaker.

Patti is a wildlife biologist who has worked in Canada, Maryland and Virginia as well as teaching math and science for 18 years. She has been involved in many bird projects in Virginia, including the Golden Chase Project (working with biologists at the Center for Conservation Biology) where a Golden Eagle was trapped and fitted with a telemetry device. Many Virginians donated to this project and followed the migration of "Virgil Caine" for four consecutive years.

Patti has also assisted the Golden-winged Warbler research project run by Virginia Commonwealth University. Now "retired," she spends much of her time working on the American Kestrel Nesting Box Project. She is Vice-President of the Bath-Highland Bird Club and a board member of the Virginia Society of Ornithology, where she serves as the Conservation Committee Chair.

She will present a program on the American Kestrel Nesting Box Project. The kestrel has shown population decreases because of loss of grassland habitat, loss of nesting cavities and use of insecticides and pesticides on agricultural fields. The Project's goal is to provide nesting boxes in suitable habitats where kestrels are found throughout Virginia. She will inform us of the habitat and biology of this valuable species and will describe a monitoring program, just started in the Fall of 2016, to track the nesting success of kestrels using the Highland County boxes.

Melissa Gross

## TOM TEEPLES NATURE TRAIL

On the very dreary, damp morning of April 22<sup>nd</sup>, over thirty people gathered to honor Tom Teeples at the dedication of the Tom Teeples Nature Trail. Tom was president of NNAS in 1999 when efforts were formalized to protect Hickory Hollow from industrial development. Over a period of about ten months, he was instrumental in coordinating the efforts that led to NNAS buying the 254 acres known as Hickory Hollow, and to the designation of the area as a Natural Heritage Preserve under the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.



Chapter Members at Hickory Hollow Dedication  
.....Photos: Paula Boundy





## 100 YEARS BEFORE

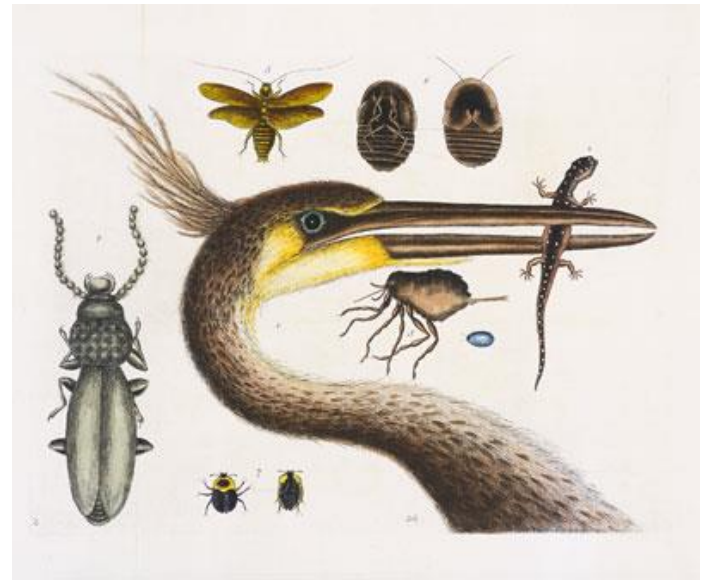
Our NNAS might have been NNMCS, had the British painter and naturalist, Mark Catesby, been discovered at an earlier time. His meticulous renderings of American flora and fauna predate by a century those of John James Audubon. The body of Catesby's work is in the possession of Queen Elizabeth II, but a great number of works have been loaned to the Gibbes Art Gallery of Charleston, South Carolina, where they will remain on view until September 24<sup>th</sup> of 2017.

The Gibbes, sitting just north of Charleston's heart at "The Four Corners of Law," the junction of Meeting and Broad Streets, is small enough to be enjoyed thoroughly. Catesby's prints and watercolors are accessible, and the exhibition rooms completely free of crowds. These factors combine to make possible the examination of the works in an almost microscopic proximity.

As a painter of avian subjects, Catesby showed a fondness for birds of prey, notably the bald eagle, owl and osprey. His impressions are less photographically accurate than are Audubon's, with some subjective morphing of shape and color: his birds stretch out rather attenuated necks topped by sometimes disproportionate heads; but colors seem correct and not badly faded by the intervening centuries.

Another notable differentiation from the work of Audubon is Catesby's more minimal use of context. Landscapes, marshscapes, and forests are rarely present, and the subject often spreads itself in focused isolation upon its background, although an appropriate vine, flower or "companion" insect will as seen here, sometimes have been included. These subjects are not at all restricted to birds but include frogs and turtles, fish and spiders. Even small mammals piqued the artist's exacting curiosity.

The works are labelled with those vernacular names used in 18<sup>th</sup> Century North America. What is clearly a cardinal is a "Redbird," while the summer tanager is titled "The Summer Redbird," the bald eagle is called "The White-Headed Eagle," a direct equivalent of its taxonomic name, "*leucocephalus*." It would have been useful to have had a second, "translation" caption for the familiar and current American nomenclature.



Catesby's Heron

Catesby's first foray into the New World began in 1712, when he escorted his sister, Elizabeth, to join her doctor husband in Williamsburg. The Virginia visit stretched to seven years. Regrettably, there remain from that period very few specimens of his artwork. Regrettably as well, we have no portrait of the naturalist himself.

It is from the second trip, to the Carolinas, the Bahamas and Florida, that the current exhibit is drawn. Catesby's material from the 1712 journey so impressed members of Britain's Royal Society, under the aegis of Sir Issaac Newton, that the Society went on to fund this second exploratory venture.

Letha Harris

## TEACHERS ON THE BAY

On May 1<sup>st</sup> we were happy to welcome the recipients of the Teachers on the Bay Scholarship. Blake, one of the science department heads at Chesapeake Academy in Irvington, led a group of six students in three projects. They attended Sea Camp in Florida, set deep within the mangrove ecosystem. Through their experiences there, and the resulting slides, we learned of the three types of mangrove, each of which is differentially crucial to providing a stable shoreline habitat. The mangrove's special ability to filter salt from seawater allows it to thrive where other flora cannot.

Upon their return, Robin and her students set up interactive projects, some of which were presented to us at the May meeting. We were impressed by the enthusiasm and creativity of these young people. Their first project, by Eden Stander and Adaire Stanley, was called "Conservation Station." The second, by Jack Porter and Elizabeth Stanley, was titled "Symbiotic Relationships." Phillip Haynie and Abbey Souders discussed water pollution in a presentation called "Whatever Floats Your Boat."



Chesapeake Academy Students with their science teacher, Robin Blake.

Article and Photo: Melissa Gross

## BIRD WALK

On Monday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, our chapter's member Melissa Gross will conduct a bird walk starting at 9:00 a.m. at Bushmill Stream Natural Area Preserve in Northumberland County.

This preserve is one of the Northern Neck's many hidden gems. At the mouth of Bush Mill Stream, fresh water meets the salt water of the Great Wicomico River. The preserve offers forested and tidal habitats and an observation platform overlooking fresh to brackish tidal marshes and mudflats. Possible sightings include great blue herons, swallows, belted kingfishers, warblers, bald eagles, osprey, wood ducks and river otters.

Maggie Gerdtz

## Directions are as follows:

From Kilmarnock: Take Route 200 North toward Burgess. At Wicomico Church, turn left onto Browns Stosre Road (Route 609). The that road reaches a T intersection at Light Street (Route 610), where you turn right. At the end of Light Street, take a left on Knights Run Road (Route 642) until you see the Bush Mill sign on the right.

From Route 360 in Heathsville: Take Courthouse Road (Route 201) South. Go 3.4 miles and turn left onto Knight's Run Road (Route 642). The preserve entrance is 0.3 miles further on the left.

For additional information about Northern Neck Audubon Society upcoming events, be sure to check our website at:

[www.northernneckaudubon.org](http://www.northernneckaudubon.org)

## Slate Proposed for 2017-2018

President.....Melissa Gross  
 Vice-President.....Sandy Dodge  
 Secretary.....Paula Boundy  
 Treasurer.....Lise Maring

## 2020 Directors

Les Kilduff  
 Leslie Fellows  
 Kyle Langford

## 2019 Director

Tom Saunders, to replace  
 Melissa Gross

## BIRD LORE

## Amusing Taxonomy:

“Sturnus vulgaris”  
 Starling  
 “Tyrannus tyrannus”  
 Eastern Kingbird  
 “Bubo virginianus”  
 Great Horned Owl  
 “Pluvialis squatarola”  
 Black-Bellied Plover  
 “Mimus polyglottos”  
 Northern Mockingbird  
 “Turdus migratorius”  
 American Robin



## GLOBAL BIG DAY

Though the final counts are not in yet, the Global Big Day on May 13<sup>th</sup> was an extraordinary event. Incomplete but recent reports reflect 6,450 species identified by over 18,000 participants.

Colombia is currently in first place with over 1400 species identified within its borders. The U.S. did quite well identifying 707 species and submitting 29,720 checklists.

In support of the Global Big Day, NNAS hosted bird walks at Belle Isle State Park and Dameron Marsh Natural Area Preserve. In all ten folks participated, braving the rain, mist and cool temperatures to see quite a few birds. In the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> at Belle Isle, 42 species were identified by the group led by Leslie Fellows. In the afternoon, at Dameron Marsh, 24 species (+2 other taxa) were identified from a group led by Jeff Wright.

Most numerous named at Belle Isle were Canada Goose (6) and Prairie Warbler (5). Most numerous at Dameron Marsh were Double-Crested Cormorant (32), Brown Pelican (11) and Laughing Gull (11).

....Jeff Wright



A Couple takes a Break

.....Photo: Paul Servis