



# Northern Neck Audubon News

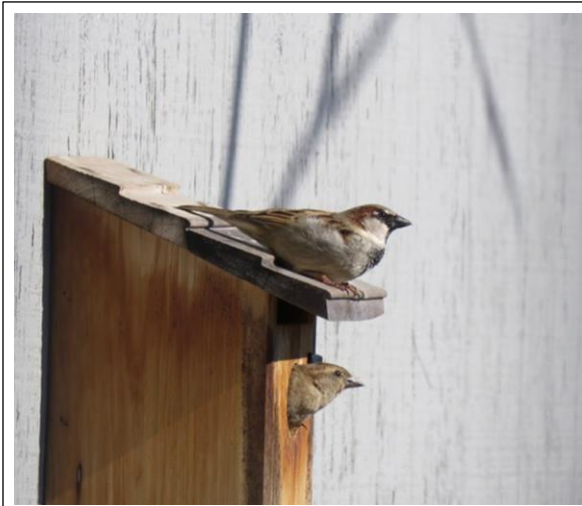
*The Northern Neck of Virginia Chapter of the National Audubon Society*

P.O. Box 991, Kilmarnock, Virginia 22482

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

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“Interlopers.”

.....Photo: *Harriette Fishburne*

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## UPCOMING

### MEETINGS

Chapter Meeting for February  
Monday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 3:15 PM  
Northumberland Public Library  
Virginia Breeding Bird  
Atlas

Chapter Meeting for March  
Monday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 3:15 PM  
Lancaster Community Library  
Jon Bachman: Stratford Hall Bluebirds

### BIRD WALKS

(Please contact Joe Cooney  
at (509) 951- 3179)

February 11<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>  
March 11<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>

(for details, see Page 5)

Of special note: April 13<sup>th</sup> Weekend  
Colonial Beach Osprey Festival

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Happy New Year, everybody out there in birdland! Can you believe that we are almost 20 years into the new century? Maybe in 1986 you used to wonder how old you would be in the year 2000, or what you'd be doing. Personally, I was 36, and I was employed as a firefighter/paramedic in Montgomery County, MD. I may have already told you all this before; I never thought I'd be president of a chapter of Audubon. Or president of ANYthing, for that matter. I have said that before, so I'm sorry for repeating myself.

I have learned a lot this past year and a half. I have had to learn to behave in very different ways from those of my former career. Back in the para-military, male-oriented environment of the fire department, I learned some "different" coping skills that can make me pretty harsh. For good or bad, they hound me now as president. Thank goodness I have a couple of board members who keep reminding me of things I tend to forget, like: to BE NICE!...and to try to explain what we're doing instead of just barking out an order.

Back to the new year. It's already moving right along, and in just two weeks, there will be a program at Stratford Hall that the NNAS has sponsored. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate, and we can all take a day to visit the Lees' historic home and enjoy thinking about spring bluebirds. The event is listed on our website, if you desire details.

February 4<sup>th</sup>, at our membership meeting, we will be hosting Ellison Orcutt. He is from Richmond, went to Virginia Tech, and currently works for the Virginia Natural Heritage Program. He is going to kick off the fourth year of the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas II with us. If you have been wanting to participate in citizen science, here is your chance to get started. Ellison is an amazing birder and a patient teacher. Take advantage of his knowledge!

**\*\*\*\*IMPORTANT NOTICE\*\*\*\***

This February meeting will be taking place at the Northumberland Public Library, 7204 Northumberland Hwy., Heathsville. As always, please check the website for any updates.

Something new is happening in April, and I hope you will all be able to take advantage of it: Colonial Beach will be having an osprey festival the weekend of the 13<sup>th</sup>. The town is revitalizing, and one thing of which it is pretty proud is a successful osprey population. The citizens really want to celebrate "their" bird, and NNAS is in full support of their efforts.

I don't have details at present, but it sounds like a wonderful opportunity to share your love of ospreys and to explore the little town of Colonial Beach. The town really does have a lot to offer. It's quaint and peaceful, has an interesting history, and boasts some pretty unique art galleries. There will be bird walks focusing on the local osprey nests, presentations about ospreys, possible kayak/boat tours of nesting sites, activities for children, and more. Please keep your eye out for further information.

On a completely different subject, a new year also brings new board members. We will need possibly four, this year. The term, which lasts three years, will begin this coming June. It would be helpful to be interested in the organization overall, but more important, just be willing to take the time to attend board meetings and stay engaged. That's not an easy thing to do these days, but it could be worth your while. Maybe it's something you've thought about but haven't committed to....is it time to step up? Do you desire to help people understand more about birds and the environment? Do you'd like to lead bird walks, or just talk birds with the public at our outreach events. We really need you.

If you are interested, please contact me Melissa Gross ([melissagross@outlook.com](mailto:melissagross@outlook.com)), Nancy Garvey ([nangarvey@hotmail.com](mailto:nangarvey@hotmail.com)), or Sandy Dodge ([ldodge2@msn.com](mailto:ldodge2@msn.com)).

Go get your binoculars and go birding!

Melissa Gross, President

## WINTER on the WATER



Top to Bottom:  
Double-Crested Cormorant  
Brown Pelican  
Common Loon eating a crab  
all photographed on Eastern Shore by Joe Cooney.

## FELICITY'S TIPS

## Back Yard Bird Feeders

Learning how to feed birds in your back yard is fun and quite easy. Even better, it is a great way to start bird-watching. It takes place from the comfort of your favorite window, where no rain, snow or wind will bother you. Why, unless you want to, you don't even have to get dressed for the day. Best of all you don't have to get up in the dark to attend an early morning bird walk.

Yes, back yard feeders are easy, but there are a few dos and don'ts. First, invest in a tall enough pole with at least four arms for your feeders. Then add a good quality guard to keep off squirrels, raccoons and anything else that climbs. Duncraft has an excellent Squirrel Stopper System at an eye-popping price. I have two of these; and although I recommend the design, I don't vouch for the quality. Through the years I have spent a lot of money buying poles, feeders and squirrel guards that didn't work. Perhaps starting with a Duncraft pole would have been a better investment.

Placement is very important. Squirrels can jump at least six feet vertically from the ground. A good squirrel guard will prevent a squirrel from getting any purchase. The animal will just fall back to the ground, from whence it will get back up, dust itself off, and try again—and again—and again. From a tree, a squirrel can sail a good 12 feet across to a tempting pole.

These tree-dwellers have no fear of heights or of falling and will keep trying the jump until they have the distance figured out. Finally, if they succeed in arriving, they will eat the bird seed and make large holes in your feeders.

Next: Beware of the hawks! They are after your *birds*, not the *seed*. Place your pole far enough from a bush or a tree to repel marauding squirrels but close enough for your birds to take shelter when there is a hawk in the vicinity.

Birds can be messy eaters and will toss a lot of seed on the ground. Chipping Sparrows and Mourning Doves are ground feeders and will

happily help the squirrels clean up the spilt seed. A wreath feeder with whole peanuts attracts many birds, including woodpeckers; but you may not like the empty-shell litter. Suet blocks work well, but they may not draw in some of the bigger species, like the Pileated Woodpecker.

There are many types of seed feeders. WalMart carries both a variety of feeders and a variety of seeds. At the minimum you should start with a woodpecker feeder, a large black sunflower feeder or a fruit-and-nut feeder, and a nyjer seed tube feeder for the Goldfinches. Once your feeders are in place it will usually take the birds about three weeks before they approach. With a little experience, you will learn which feeders and which foods work best.

Not all birds will eat at a feeder. Surprisingly, Eastern Bluebirds do not, although they may perch on your pole. Most birds will visit a water feature, especially if it is equipped with a drip apparatus. In late summer, whole families of squabbling, pecking juvenile Bluebirds will stop by to bathe. I do not know whether they are the progeny of one pair of parents or the combined young of different pairs. Any bird bath should also have a shelter bush close by. Most birds will land first in the bush to make a quick safety survey before approaching for a drink or a bath.

Bird feeders are there for your entertainment, so allow plenty of time to watch and learn about your visitors! Birds will feed themselves quite well without your help except, perhaps, during a cold and snowy winter. When there is snow on the ground, many, many birds will visit your feeders; and you will have to refill them more often.

Winter birds present an identification challenge, as many birds experience seasonal color changes. The ubiquitous little House Finch gives a good example of plumage variations that, depending on season and diet, can range from yellow to deeply rosy red.

However, there is no rush. Over long periods of observation, you will learn to sort them out. Always note type of beak, absence or presence of



"An Embarrassment of Riches"  
Cardinal with Sunflower Seeds

Photo.....Paul Servis

wing bars, head stripes and the relative size of the bird. If you have a camera at hand and can capture the image of a confusing visitor, there are always plenty of people who can help you to firm up an identification.

From November to April, Cornell University offers a Citizen Science program called "Project Feeder Watch." They encourage participants to enter all birds feeding in a yard. This exercise is particularly rewarding for anyone with a garden planted predominantly with botanicals that are native to Virginia, as this practice attracts the largest variety of birds.

Felicity Rask

This article is written to honor Letha Harris, in recognition of her many hours dedicated to editing and producing our NNAS Newsletter! Remember to thank all the officers, board members and other participants that keep our club viable.



## BIRD LORE

Since his Cub Scout days, my husband has had on his bookshelf a trusty, if now “dusty,” woodland guide: the 1945 edition of Ellsworth Jaeger’s Wildwood Wisdom. Despite its yellowed pages, its World War II publication date, and its unimaginative fonts, its material is in no way obsolete; because wildlife has not had to adapt to text abbreviations nor to touch screens. Forest sound communication remains as it was 70 years ago.

Some of the mnemonics, like the references to “French locomotives” and “old pumps” may not be particularly timely, however.

## Easily Identified Bird Voices

Loon.....	Wild, hysterical laughter
Catbird.....	Mee-You, like a very young kitten
Burrowing Owl.....	Boo-Boo, like imitating French locomotive
Bittern.....	Priming an old pump Unca-la-Plunk.
Greater & Lesser.....	Whew-whew-whew or Yellowlegs whee-yodel, repeated
Saw-Whet Owl.....	Short quick strokes, as with filing a saw
Richardson’s Owl.....	Water dripping.

The author included all the common voices...chickadee, blue jay, killdeer, crow, great horned owl, but the more colorful descriptions are those listed.

## Non-Vocalized Clues

Golden-Eye Duck.....	Wing whistling.
Ruffed Grouse Male.....	Drumming: Bup-Bup-Bup-rrrrr

As birders, we may be less familiar with:

Porcupine.....	Complaining whine
Lynx.....	Amplified tom cat yowl
Cow Moose.....	Eeeeeeeee-ooooo....yuh
Woodchuck.....	Whistle

Letha Harris



Red-Bellied Woodpecker

Photo: Paul Servis

**NNAS BIRD WALKS**

Starting at 9:00 AM  
( unless otherwise indicated)

11 February, Monday  
Hutchinson Unit  
Rappahannock River Valley NWR  
Essex County, Va.

23 February, Saturday  
George Washington’s Birthplace  
Westmoreland County, Va.

11 March, Monday  
New Quarter Park  
to be followed immediately by  
College Creek Hawkwatch  
Williamsburg, Va.

(1.25 hours or 55 miles south of  
Kilmarnock)

<https://hawkcount.org/siteinfo/php?>

23 March, Saturday  
Bethel Beach NAP  
Mathews County, Va.

Joe Cooney  
jcooney805@gmail.com

## TRACKING THE WHIMBREL

The best description of the abovementioned whimbrel project was the metaphor used by the project director himself, our November speaker. Dr. Bryan Watts, Director of William and Mary's Center for Conservation Biology as he described his methods. He and his team treat a targeted site as a statistical blank slate. No one knows what data it will yield; but all know that the site will offer threads that out of the ecosystem, out of the state and probably out of the country. To pull those informational threads is to find unexpected paths, ends and tangles.

That's how things evolved with whimbrels. Dr. Watts and his group knew that the populations were falling, but sought to discover why. They zeroed in on places where the species spent long stretches of time, choosing specifically the Nature Conservancy's Box Creek Preserve along the ocean-side of Delmarva. Here the Whimbrel's favored menu option, the fiddler crab, abounds. During a month's stopover each May, a single bird will put on 200 grams of weight to fuel its upcoming five-day flight to Arctic breeding grounds.

Studies, effected with camouflaged boxes, rocket-propelled nets, low-flying aircraft and all the effort attendant upon placing the equipment and delicately banding the captured creatures, proved that these shores pose no problem. There is plenty of nourishment, and the whimbrels take off in great twilight rafts, well-fattened for their journey. Their speed is astonishing. Radio-tagged birds have been contacted the following morning as they as they overfly Toronto.

Dr. Watts screened maps showing several 5,000 kilometer pathways to reach Alaska's MacKenzie River, or slightly shorter stretches to Hudson's Bay. These are used by the populations nesting on our side of the Brooks Range, while their North Slope cousins migrate the Pacific Coast flyway. "Our" whimbrel groups follow several Atlantic tracks, one of which takes them far out beyond the common paths of hurricanes, and other which brings them along US shores. Fall staging for many of these occurs in the Canadian Maritimes, where they now complete with blueberry farmers, producers counting on a \$9,000 revenue from each mist-berried acre, with the hungry whimbrel counting on easy pickings from densely packed fruit. The two species, farmer and forager, have been in competition, with resulting and expected shootings.

In cooperation with Canadian protectors of wildlife, CCB is slowly convincing producers that swallowing the estimated \$10/acre loss is well worth preserving the bird.

Dr. Watts' reasoning led him to study other sites where the whimbrel stops to rest or bulk up, its "staging areas." Such sites are dense with shorebirds, and numbered among them are the Gulf and Atlantic shores of the American Southeast. There the intrusions of humans, fishing, boating and waterside construction, interrupt the necessary pre-migratory feeds. He did exhibit one marshscape where, due to the concentration of shorebirds, a development had been successfully stopped.

A final "thread" led to the archipelagos of the Caribbean. Often the birds, in mid-migratory flight, are weather-blown onto these islands. There, awaiting them, are great numbers of legal hunters: locals and tourists alike, who may bag hundreds of thousands of birds per year.

These are largely French colonial islands, where such sport is entrenched in a centuries old culture. and as such it requires for change an approach subtler than that applied to blueberry economics. France is well-acclimated to the slaughter of songbirds, so tourists it sends forth may not demur at the similar attack upon shorebirds.

Many of the species so decimated do not reproduce with sufficient speed to maintain stable populations if they are hunted at all. Among these number the red knot, buff-breasted sandpiper, piping plover, and of course, the whimbrel. Efforts are being made to educate children with stories as well as actual visits to the shorebird marshes. Along the wintering grounds of Northern South America and in the Caribbean, this is the approach at work.

Dr. Watts' slides and talk encapsulated the mission of the Center for Conservation Biology. All the data revealed in slides and speech, all the threads pulled in the field, their purpose to "save birds through science." The whimbrel studies, begun in 2007 and sparked by the 4% annual drop in whimbrel numbers, followed their leads and ended, as with a treasure hunt, at non-preconceived answers.

Virginia is not a problem. Southeast Coast human interference is, but is being handled through environmental pressure tools legally addressed. Northeastern blueberry-growers pose a conflict, but one which is being addressed with hard numbers.

It is the Caribbean hunting practice that has punched a huge hole in certain shorebird populations. The worst of the issues seems the most difficult to correct, culturally deep-seated as it is.

Dr. Watts showed graphs to support his contention that whimbrels, along with red knots, buff-breasted sandpipers, and piping plovers, should never be available for licensed hunting. These species cannot replicate themselves with sufficient speed to maintain crucial population numbers.

The CCB has developed a 5-gm. solar-powered transmission pack, and William and Mary a featherweight harness, now used globally, so that birds can be followed with great exactitude. The whimbrel itself shows exactitude when choosing its staging area. A bird will remain in a 500-acre domain, and will return to that same little estuary or creek year after year.

We were treated to delightful pictures of the whimbrel, a courageous and enduring flier producing a charming chick, precocial and underpinned with feet that seem at least as big as its body. As a young bird, it sports a bill notably shorter than the great curving arc with which an adult can so deftly decapitate fiddler crab.

It is with great appreciation not only that we could listen to Dr. Watts, but also that we could learn of his tremendous efforts to save the Whimbrel.

.....*Letha Harris*



The Fall Natural Area Preserve highway pickup was held on Monday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Thanks to the hard work of the pre-Halloween "skeleton" crew, 12 bags of trash and several large items were removed from the sides of NAPS' ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY stretch of Route 200 (from Wicomico Church to the Tipers Bridge).

Many dangerous tree limbs, downed by Tropical Storm Michael, were also removed from the road shoulders, and dozens of cans and bottles were recovered for recycling. Want to join the crew for the next such NAPS event?

Contact Janice Mahoney at 580 3154 or [vervaville@yahoo.com](mailto:vervaville@yahoo.com) or ....start your own!!.



## Application for Membership in NNAS - Chapter Code X50, 7XCH

- ☐ Local Chapter Only Membership - \$15.00 annually, renewable in June; includes chapter on-line newsletter.
- ☐ National & Local Membership - \$20.00 introductory (\$35.00 after), is above, plus glossy National Audubon Magazine.  
 Make checks payable to "National Audubon Society".

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_



### Northern Neck Audubon Society Resources

Officers		Committee Chairs		Media
President	Melissa Gross	Outreach	Porter Washington	Website: <a href="http://www.northernneckaudubon.org">www.northernneckaudubon.org</a> suggestions to: <a href="mailto:nnas1970@gmail.com">nnas1970@gmail.com</a>  Newsletter - five issues annually submit ideas, articles etc. to: <a href="mailto:waterthrush@verizon.net">waterthrush@verizon.net</a>
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Treasurer	Sandy Dodge	Programs	Open	
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			Melissa Gross	
		Advocacy	Open	
			Membership	Edie & Sandy Dodge
			Newsletter	Letha Harris
			Website	Kyle Langford
			Publicity	Margaret Gerdts
				Leslie Fellows
			Conservation/ Citizen Science	Joe Cooney

### Directors

Expires 2019	Expires 2020	Expires 2021
Tom Saunders	Les Kilduff	Joe Cooney
Vacant	Vacant	Porter Washington
Harry Colestock	Kyle Langford	Betsy Washington