



Northern Neck Audubon News

The Northern Neck of Virginia Chapter of the National Audubon Society

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www.northernneckaudubon.org

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"Mother Goose": More than a book of
nursery rhymes.

.....*Photo: Paul Servis*

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UPCOMING

MEETINGS

Chapter Meeting for May
Monday, May 6th, 3:15 PM
Lancaster Community Library
The Uncelebrated Insect

Chapter Meeting for June
Monday, June 3rd, 3:15 PM
Lancaster Community Library
The Eastern High Arctic

BIRD WALKS

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

May 13th

May 25th

June 10th

(DETAILS ON PAGE 5)

BIRD(S) OF THE MONTH

Two sturdy buteos populate our area, and a glance at the distribution map of each shows that the larger, the Red-Tailed Hawk, frequents pretty much all of North America, while its Red-Shoulder cousin has a range filling almost exactly the Eastern half of the U.S., with the addition of the Pacific Coast. Bird species' range often breaks along the Mississippi River corridor, but the Red-Shoulder's territory stretches on into some prairie states. It has limits, but is fortunately listed as "of least concern" in terms of conservation.

The Red-Tailed, however, seems nearly limitless. Year-round presence is noted throughout much of Mexico and the continental U.S. (with the exception of Canadian border areas). Summer breeding options stretch nearly to Hudson's Bay and Alaska's Brooks Range. This marvelous adaptability renders the Red-Tailed, also, as of "least concern."

The Northern Neck offers habitats that draw both hawks. Tall trees, riparian fringes and marsh, abundantly present, appeal to the Red-Shouldered, also abundantly present. A slightly drier, slightly more-elevated field architecture favors the Red-Tailed; and as we move inland from the creek sides, we find in our local topography plenty of this landscape.

Habitat helps, therefore, in differentiating between the two raptors; but the most salient difference is in the tails: eponymously rusty red for the Red-Tailed, and strikingly banded in charcoal and white for the Red-Shouldered, although its Western morphology can embrace body colors from overall black to near all-white.

Breast markings of the two are also sharply different, with the Red-Tailed sporting its "necklace" of chocolate freckles and the Red-Shouldered its lovely persimmon flush. Bird nomenclature can seem ill-considered; one cannot easily see, or even identify, the shoulders of a hawk as it perches on wires or soars overhead. The chest, however, is usually visible and this bteo might better be called the "Peach-Breasted Hawk!"

To help in identification, bird guides may use comparative size (the Red-Tailed is much larger than the Red-Shouldered); but the ineffectual word is "comparative." Without the two birds set side by side, of what use is it to know which is the larger? Wingspan of the larger averages 48 inches, and of the smaller, 40." It IS practical to be able to differentiate calls:

Red-Tailed.....High-Pitched
hoarse, descending scream.
Red-Shouldered...."Kee-yeear"
with downward inflection.



Red-shouldered Hawk



Red-Tailed Hawk

Both enjoy a wide spectrum menu suitable to flexible carnivores: small mammals like voles and squirrels, snakes, frogs and lizards are all "grist for the mill." Despite the inclusion of birds on the options list, these buteos do not tend to frequent bird feeders nor prey regularly on songbirds. The particular Red-Tail cited in this issue seems to present an exception.

....Data obtained from:

Allaboutbirds.com

(Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

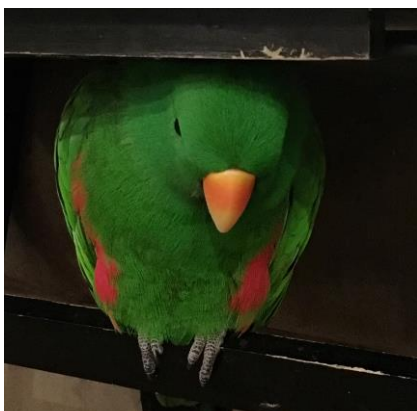
Audubon Field Guide (on-line)

BIRDING ELSEWHERE



At our grandchildren's home in Canton, Massachusetts, a Red-Tailed Hawk arrives periodically to perch on the roof of an atrium window. He exhibits no fear whatsoever of humans and will fly over one's head at a hair-ruffling level. His object of interest, often sitting just behind the kitchen glass, is the bright green Eclectus Parrot pictured below. Fortunately for the wild birds, the hawk prefers to focus on "parrot TV" rather than on the nearby birdfeeder.

Letha Harris



Photos:Caroline Kelley



BIRD BOOKS

I know I've dwelt before on the prodigious talents of Bernd Heinrich, an author who seems to have morphed his life into one, long bird walk. Mr. Heinrich is graced with at least three gifts valuable to bird-watching:

Astute observation
Meticulous note-taking
Superb sketching skills.

He has them all, each enhanced by a deep well of patience and an apparently prodigious ability to churn out charming and contemplative books. One Wild Bird at a Time, Portraits of Individual Lives, is such a one. The author takes whatever hours he needs to examine the behavior of a particular species, or, more often, a single bird.

He becomes curious, for example, as to just why blue jays scream; what we anthropomorphize as "raucous," or "scolding" may not be so. After long hikes into the woods to track one jay, or even a small mob, he determines that most of the cries, all differently inflected, are probably meant to pass information...about owls? food availability? nest presence? or simply to chat "over the back fence."

His local broad-winged hawks have revealed themselves as fine interior designers. Over the weeks of nesting, the pair lined its nest daily with fresh fern fronds. The intrepid Mr. Heinrich, who is also a marathoner, discovered this by climbing an old sugar maple for regular nest monitoring; and as time passed, he noted the "tablecloths" changed to large maple leaves, succeeded by cedar sprigs.

Bird bios with attendant charcoal sketches include Red-Breasted Nuthatch, Starling, Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker, and Great Crested Flycatcher. This is not a page-turner, but a restful anthology: something to read at the comfortable pace Mr. Heinrich uses to study his birds.Letha Harris

FIXING UP AT HICKORY HOLLOW

Last week I had the pleasure of helping Brent Marshall do some repairs down at Hickory Hollow along the boardwalk toward Cabin Swamp. Brent had noticed that the boardwalk had come apart at a joint between two sections. It was also de-stabilized along one side, due to inadequate support.

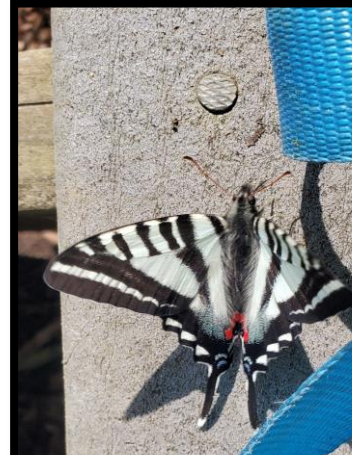


Brent was able to visualize and fix the problem. The swamp side was at least 8 to 10 inches lower than the other side. He was able to fabricate some repair panels and also to cut a few supports from a cedar 4 x 4 post that he had lying around.

On Wednesday, April 17th, we went out to Hickory Hollow to start the repairs. All the work was made easier by Brent's meticulous process of eliminating unnecessary tools and supplies. After a short walk we arrived; and within two hours, we were wrapping up the completed project.

I am not sure about the rest of the boardwalk, but that particular section is now sturdy and secure. Thanks for letting me be of service.

Above is a photo of the broken joint that demanded repair, to the right you see Brent addressing the problem. The completed work met with approval from both dogs and the zebra swallowtail.



Zebra Swallowtail



..Photos and Article
..... Joe Cooney

TAIL FEATHERS



JAPAN AIRLINES



Lufthansa

Vintage Image
American Airlines

These airline insignia remind us that we have always aspired to fly, and that the main inspiration for this derives from birds.

We may have succeeded in reaching the sky, but not without blasts of fuel exudate and aluminum shells. flexible feathers and light armature of the birds remain elusive.

NNAS BIRD WALKS

Starting at 9:00 AM
(unless otherwise indicated)

Joe Cooney
jcooney805@gmail.com

Monday, May 13th
Chilton Woods

Saturday, May 25th
Belle Isle State Park
This is Memorial Day Weekend

Monday, June 10th
Beaverdam State Park

Since summer walks, in the past, have not produced easy viewing and have, also, not been well-attended, this will be all until September.

There will, however, be a few organized outings centered around the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas. Advisories to the details will go out via e-mail...open to anyone on the e-mail list.

.....Joe Cooney

UNCELEBRATED!

The featured speaker at our May 6th meeting will be Dr. Shawn T. Dash, Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences at Hampton University in Hampton, Va. An expert in myrmecology, the study of ants, he also includes in his research the domains of biodiversity and the faunistics of insects and invertebrates.

Some 10,000 species of birds inhabit our planet today, with about 950 of these occurring within U.S. borders. From the regal Whooping Crane to the tiny, yet feisty Calliope Hummingbird, birds are renowned and idealized in songs, poems, paintings, cartoons. Their images even adorn our clothing. They have become a multi-million dollar industry, providing a major source of income to some rural communities. Studies have found that spending time in nature and watching birds both relaxes us and recharges our spirits.

Frequently, however, even the nature enthusiast fails to consider the community which the birds occupy. The warblers are a delight to see, sought-after phantoms of color high in the canopy; but few of us are just as excited about the insects that feed these birds. We do not see birds as part of a bigger system, one whose players are mostly invertebrates, and particularly, insects.

On a global scale, biologists have noted that insectivorous birds consume 500 million tons of arthropods annually! More than 70% of North American birds are insectivores; but, to most, “icky” bugs are not worthy of our attention, beyond our understanding that they provide tidbits for hungry birds. Interestingly, we do not hold this dismissive attitude toward the interplay of birds and *plants*. Whole texts have been written about gardening for the birds. Very little is published as to how to establish an ecosystem focused on promoting insects.

However, insects drive bird survival and even promote species evolution. Dr. Dash’s presentation will explore the importance of regarding the bird world in the light of the insect world: both inextricably connected in the web of life.

Dr. Dash is continuing his work on ants and soil invertebrates in the context of evolution and ecology. With his students, he is surveying the soil invertebrates of the Nolan Trail and Sandy Bottom Nature Park.*** He is work-

ing with researchers at the Virginia Museum of Natural History to complete a contemporary review of the ants of Virginia and collaborating across multiple institutions to produce a guide to the ants of the Delmarva Peninsula. As well as documenting biodiversity in ants, he is studying invertebrates in urban communities.

May’s talk to our chapter is titled: “Insects: The Uncelebrated Partners of the Bird World” and should inspire to us to view invertebrates less “dismissively.”

NOTE

Sandy Bottom Nature Park in Hampton is an environmental “turn-around” story: a successful ecosystem born from a waste disposal area.

The Nolan Trail in Newport News circles Lake Maury and is attached to the Mariners’ Museum.



Eastern Towhee hunting sunflower seeds

Photo.....Paul Servis

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: www.northernneckaudubon.org suggestions to: nnas1970@gmail.com Newsletter - five issues annually submit ideas, articles etc. to: waterthrush@verizon.net |
| Vice President | Kevin Howe | Property Mgt | Kevin Howe | |
| Past President | Nancy Garvy | | Sandy Dodge | |
| Secretary | Alice Stieve | | Melissa Gross | |
| Treasurer | Sandy Dodge | Programs | Open | |
| | | Field Trips | Harry Colestock | |
| | | | 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 |
|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Vacant | Les Kilduff | Joe Cooney |
| Vacant | Vacant | Porter Washington |
| Harry Colestock | Kyle Langford | Betsy Washington |