



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

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Bumble Bee Heaven
Photo....Caroline Kelley

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UPCOMING

MEETINGS

Chapter meetings are suspended
for the time-being, due to Covid-19.

BIRD WALKS

Audubon is refraining from the
sponsorship of walks during
the pandemic

Some activities have been
arranged by the
Middlesex Bird Club
(for further details, see Page 5)

DO REMEMBER: October 17th
Global Birding Day

GLOBAL BIG DAYCOUNT

Saturday, October 17th, will mark this world-wide count day. In order to participate, you must get an eBird account, the app which allows you to post your sightings and also keep an eye on sightings throughout the world.

Of course, the presence of Coronavirus makes it imperative that you bird safely, with proper distancing from others. There will be no formally organized groups, therefore; but the individual birder can report from his home territory OR from the trail loops established by Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, for example. The reporting time for the BIG DAY stretches from midnight to midnight on the 17th.



*Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher and
Mississippi Kite.....*

Photo Credit.....Joe Cooney



BIRD WALK OPTIONS

(The following are NOT sponsored by NNAS, but we have been furnished some details and the offer participate):

Tuesday, October 6th

Middle Peninsula Bird Club

King William County

Assemble at 6:4 AM at

Gloucester Courthouse Food Lion

Includes Acquinton and Dawson Creeks

Golf cart available for those with
limited mobility.

Thursday, October 22nd:

Middle Peninsula Bird Club

Adner area of Gloucester

Walk begins at 8:00 AM and includes
trail access to the Poropotank River

To join in either walk, you must register with

Susan Crockett

scrocket@cox.net

804 693 6381

*** Masks are mandatory

and

Insect Repellent advisable.

These walks usually last about two hours, but participants need not stay for the entire time.

Detailed directions will be made available upon registration.

MUSINGS FROM THE FIELD

Indian Creek Yacht and Country Club was lucky this year to have two pair of Red-Headed Woodpeckers nesting on its property. One couple played a mating game of "hide and seek" before settling down in the snags between the fourth and ninth holes. The parents could be seen coming to feed their young through the small hole in a dead portion of tree. Their beautiful colors looked as if someone had used a T-square to paint those clean lines in the red, black and white patterns.

They are aerial insect-eaters, adeptly catching their food in midair and including the dreaded cicada and cicada wasp that are burrowing into our greens. Being omnivorous, they also eat nuts, seeds and fruits (including the berries of poison ivy), storing surplus by jamming it into tree bark for a later use. For the nest placement, they are partial to smooth-surfaced tree snags, as snakes can't get a purchase on that wood to climb up and raid the nest.

This woodpecker lays 3-10 eggs and sometimes has two nestings per season. Its fledglings do not immediately develop the characteristic red head but remain gray in their early weeks.

It has been especially rewarding to have the two families at the golf course, in that the bird's numbers are down some 70% over the past 30 years. As cool weather moves in and as feeders move out, think of putting out some peanuts to attract the beautiful, but somewhat threatened, red-Headed Woodpecker.



Photo Credit.....Allaboutbirds.org



Photo Credit.....National Geographic.org

As the woodpeckers go to sleep, this lovely creature fellow takes up her turn at nocturnal patrol. The familiar Virginia Opossum, whose name comes from the Algonquian for "white face," roams nightly about the property. Unfortunately, most of these are seen on the roadways due to the fact that stress makes them comatose...not a good thing if you are in the middle of the street.

The opossum is the only marsupial native to the U.S. Like the Australian kangaroo, the female raises her young in a pouch. The opossum can hang by its tail from a tree branch.

The species is millions of years old and may have snacked upon dinosaur eggs. It is a true omnivore, eating as it does anything in its path. It functions as nature's garbage can, consuming trash and roadkill. The great age of the species may be partially due to its immunities to copperhead or rattlesnake venom, rabies and most poisons.

Especially fortunate for us, the opossum is partial to ticks and can consume about 4000 per week! So, the next time one decides to lie down in the road before you, you might try to avoid flattening it.

Even though Mother Nature did not make this creature cute or cuddly, he is a wonderful cog in our ecosystem.

Summertime observations by:

.....Beth Kendrick

BIRD LORE



For the professional ornithologist, birds come well-labelled to reflect an organized taxonomy, with multisyllabic names, their initial letters appropriate to Genus and species: like *Cyanocitta cristata*, “blue parrotlike crested bird,” our familiar Blue Jay. He always appears pleased as punch with his gloriously Graeco-Roman handle.

The vernacular names, however, are not only more familiar, but often more charming. Diana Wells’ title volume, 100 Birds and How They Got Their Names is replete with, of course, exactly 100 of these.

A peregrination (without the eponymous falcon) through any chapter flies off in all direction. With the starling, for example, we are taken to its Anglo-Saxon name, “staer” and attendant diminutive, “ing,” and given an explanation of starry plumage, or of a star-shaped silhouette from the four even projections of head, tail and two wings. Did the bird give something back? It may be that the coinage of Edward the Confessor, stamped with four birds, coined something itself: “sterling silver.”

.....AND, as for the falcons as a group, their name has come almost undisturbed into English from the Latin “falx, falcis,” for sickle, reflecting the sharp curves of beak and talon. Either Romans were assiduous birders, or the species classifications began with scientists committed to Latin usage. Thus it is that the osprey has a classical root as well, “ossifragus,” or bone-breaker. This is a misnomer, of course, as the bird swallows its meals in whole chunks without bothering with the niceties of fragmentation.

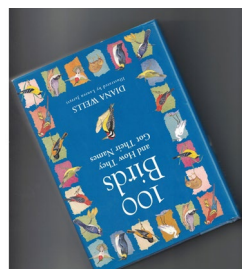
Far more pleasant indeed to rummage in the syllables of the “bunting,” purported to originate in the Scots “buntline” or Old English “buntyle,” for plump shape. We are thus reminded of the cuddly infant of “Bye, bye Baby Bunting,” although his/her Papa had “gone a-hunting,” perhaps with one of those aforementioned predators.

Not to be outdone by the Romantics, the Germans have given us “haigron,” for “heron,” which moved on to the French for a little such, or “aigrette,” now our egret. Not to be outdone by the egret’s beauty, the limpkin must bear a less graceful name, due to its lopsided walk. Apparently the bird favors one leg. Adding to its melancholy character, the limpkin wails with expressive sadness, for which the natives of Florida called it “the crying bird.”

There is no mystery as to why the catbird is who he is, meower that he is, nor to the crow, as he croaks or caws raspingly, nor to the cuckoo, who sang “cucucu” in the oldest ballad of the English language... “Cuckoo” is a lot easier to say than “Coccyzus erythrophthalmus.” There is no mystery to woodpecker, mockingbird or kingfisher; but there is a clerical aura about the cardinal and the prothonotary warbler. The brilliant red of a church cardinal’s robe is well-known...less so, the intense yellow worn by Byzantine ecclesiastical court clerks.

For Americans, and secularly hallowed, if such is possible, is “*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*,” sounding like a microbe but more commonly known as the bald eagle.

.....Letha Harris



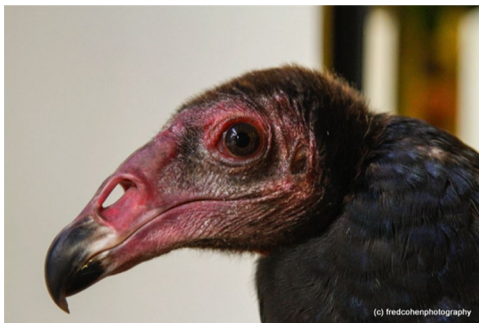
HERE IN OUR SKIES.....

Black Vultures and Turkey Vultures are prominent fixtures in our skies or perched on water towers, roofs and trees. These incredibly interesting birds are a vital part of our ecosystem. They are nature's garbage men, cleaning up roadkill and other dead and decaying fauna. Easily identified in the air, vultures ride the high thermals doing lazy circles with their wings in a V-shape.

The "Turkey" species has a red, naked head, resembling that of turkey: hence the name. They run to 3.3 pounds in weight and 3 ½ feet in length. They can smell a potential meal from an amazing 8 miles away and 1000 feet in the air.

The heads are naked because the birds thrust them into the carcasses of dead animals where feathers would gather the microbes attendant upon rotting meat. The bare head is surely more hygienic than would be a feathered one. Their efficient noses are open from one side to the other providing a "thruway" for air and thus better cleaning.

Everything about these creatures borders on the disgusting. To cool themselves off on hot days they spread their wings and pee on their feet. As that moisture evaporates, the feet cool. They can also project vomit up to 10 feet...a skill which prompts any observer to keep his distance. They use the projectile vomiting as a defense or to lighten the gastric load, if they have been too gluttonous to be able to fly. They have super acidic stomach juices designed to kill virtually all bacteria they ingest from rotting food.



The face
that
"only a
mother
could
love!"

*Photo Credit: Wild Bird Fund
....Fred Cohen Photography*

The Black Vulture is similar and can be identified in flight by the white "stars" on the undertips of the wings: the only white on an otherwise totally black bird. They soar above the Turkey Vultures and watch where they go to feed, because the black vulture is not equipped with as exceptional a sense of smell.

Although they are the smaller of the two species, they are far more aggressive. They have no voice box and so will hiss menacingly at you if you get too close for comfort.



Photo Credit....National Audubon

This bird can eat up to two pounds of spoiled flesh at one sitting...or perching...and so keeps our world a little sweeter.

The next time you see one, look beyond its homely visage and appreciate its contribution to the carrion clean-up, an otherwise unwanted job.

.....Beth Kendrick



Photo Credit....Massachusetts Audubon

BIRD BOOKS



In the long, seemingly endless stretches of 2020, our own "Plague Year," the seeking of comfort and communication have been commonalities. In the Spring I encountered a magazine article all about that very comfort as provided by the literature of childhood: books like *Wind in the Willows*, *The Secret Garden*, *Little House on the Prairie*, and (not especially "comforting") *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. The article prompted me to set up a phone story hours with the Boston grandchildren and to read them Mother Nature Stories by Thornton Burgess.

These tales, set in southeastern New England, were written down in the 20th Century's early years; yet their environmental sensitivity rings timely. All the "little people" of the Green Meadows and the Green Forest have their proper places, and with the vector of "Farmer Brown's Boy," the author gently reminds each listener, to love and respect his natural neighbors.

Mr. Burgess puts several birds into all his stories: Hooty and Mrs. Hooty, the great horned owls, Jenny, the little busybody wren, Blacky the Crow and Sammy Jay. He does a masterful job describing that blue jay, who is always nattily dressed and pleased with himself accordingly. He's given Sammy the job of nature's journalist, flying throughout the forest to report whatever's going on and relishing his own vocal "Thief, thief, thief," an accurate self-assessment if ever there was one.

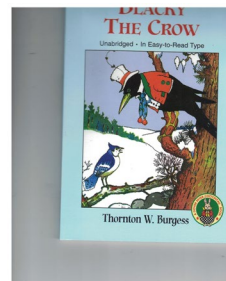
His corvid cousin, Blacky the Crow, is also cleverly characterized as a "scamp," ever

in search of mischief. In that pursuit he spends a good bit of time inciting his friends and relatives to screech at poor Mrs. Hooty, brooding upon her nest. How true this is. Here in the Virginia countryside we often pick up the racket of a mob of crows...or a "murder of them," perched in pine and harassing someone...possible an unoffending owl.

The author is careful with his truths: crow and jay lay plans to steal the eggs of the little songbirds, as well as of the owls; but they are fortunately always thwarted. These are the patterns that depart from the tooth-and-claw approach, rendering these stories less than realistic but more than comforting (which is what lets all of us, young and old, fall asleep at night!)

If there is a dated, 1922, flavor to the tales, it is there in the anthropomorphizing: Sammy is proud of his fashionable blue jacket, white vest and black tie; and while he and Blacky conjure wily schemes they do occasionally do something good, reflecting the unpredictable nature of the human personality. Young listeners seem to need the linkage between the birds' behavior and theirs....that's how they are so happily gripped by Thornton Burgess' plots and reliable "morals of the story."

.....Letha Harris



Illustrations by Harrison Cody
for Dover editions of
Thornton W. Burgess, 1922

Thornton Burgess dedicated his crow tales as follows:
"To an American citizen who, despite persecution and changed conditions, has by his adaptability and intelligence maintained his place in the land of his forefathers---the American Crow."

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

☐ Local Chapter Only Membership - \$15.00 annually, renewable in June; includes chapter on-line newsletter.
Make Checks payable to NNAS.

☐ National & Local Membership - \$20.00 introductory (\$35.00 after), is above, plus glossy National Audubon Magazine.
Make checks payable to "National Audubon Society"

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