



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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Downy and Diagonals

Photo:Paul Servis

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UPCOMING

MEETINGS

Board Meeting, Feb. 3rd.

1:30 PM

There will be

NO

Membership Meeting

February 3rd

Next Chapter Meeting

Monday, March 3rd, 3:15 PM

Library

Program to be Announced

BIRD WALKS

(Please contact Joe Cooney

at (509) 951- 3179)

!Texts Preferred Please!

Monday, February 10th

Regent's Point

Saturday, February 22nd

Kendale Farms

Essex County

Monday, March 9th

Deltaville Maritime

Museum + Holly Point

Nature Reserve

(for details, see Page 5)

BIRDING IN REAL TIME

Fones Cliffs

The January bird walk at Fones Cliffs Unit of the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge was great. There were 21 people in attendance. The only downside for this impressive number was that it made for more *spotters* than *spotted*. Oh well, that was okay. The weather forecast had been dismal at best. Rain was expected for the period of the walk; surprisingly, however, it held off for the entire day. Thankfully, the threat of rain had not stopped people from coming out.

A couple of “miscues” arose with reports of a Great Blue Heron, one of which turned out to be an old tire, and the other to be a piece of wood, illuminated in just the right way to resemble a tall, slender and grayish bird with a lighter colored neck and head.

The list that follows is remarkable for the huge Canada Goose count, at 3500. All in all it was a good day for a walk in the woods. Even though there were not that many types recorded, no one complained; and birders were amazed by glimpses of Bald Eagles, Cedar Waxwings, and the Northern Harrier. Thanks for coming out!

....Joe Cooney

The Count (19 species):

Canada Goose (3500), Mallard (18), Red-Breasted Merganser (3), Double-Crested Cormorant (1), Northern Harrier (1), Bald Eagle (11), Red-Shouldered Hawk (1), Belted Kingfisher (1), Red-Bellied Woodpecker (1), Northern, or Yellow-Shafted, Flicker (1), Blue Jay (4), Carolina Chickadee (5), Tufted Titmouse (3), Carolina Wren (1), American Robin (4), Cedar Waxwing (13), Dark-Eyed, or Slate-Colored, Junco (12), Red-Winged Blackbird (1), Northern Cardinal (1).

Christmas Count

Preliminary, or “raw,” data is in from the 2019 annual Northumberland/Lancaster Christmas Bird Count, an event that took place December 18th,

having been delayed by a day due to poor weather conditions on the 17th. The number of species was 101, with a total of 10,701 birds counted over the nine sectors included, almost exactly the same as the 2017 census of 10,823. Last year’s had dipped at 8,354 total birds noted.

This is the fourth year that NNAS has sponsored the event, and the third in which we have broken the “Century” mark. A 102nd species, Helmeted Guinea Fowl, qualifies only as “domestic,” but the 101 stands, for wild birds documented.

We also had our highest number of participants this time, at 43, with positive meteorology to boost us up. There were mostly sunny conditions and light winds, with waves on the bay no higher than 2 feet.

This year was remarkable for increased use of electronic tools, including eBird, digital field guides, cameras, audio recordings, geographic information systems, and GPS. Maeve Charlesworth and Joey Coker provided an example of this technique, identifying a White-Eyed Vireo at Dameron Marsh by submitting to Ebird an audio recording of the bird in question.

Owling before dawn was a success as well. Three species were identified: Eastern Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl and Barred Owl. There were two instances in which the Barred was actually seen, just before sunset.

All these diligent citizen scientists kept their motors running in good form due to Porter and Mason Washington’s world class hospitality. Their providing of refreshments and an oasis of warmth was greatly appreciated.

I’ll be happy to entertain ideas for improving the count planned for December, 2020, and thank all participants of 2019 for a job well done.

...Jeffrey Wright
Compiler

Northumberland-Lancaster
Christmas Bird Count

BERRIES FOR BIRDS

Last October the Northern Neck Audubon Society gave grant monies to Indian Creek Yacht and Country Club to purchase plants for the native plant trail and surrounding property. The plants chosen are ones that will provide cover, food, nesting places and nesting materials for birds; and many of these will also support pollinators, as moth and butterfly habitat.

The Northern Neck Native Plant Society has also been extremely generous with donations of native botanicals, signage for identification and shovel power when that was needed for digging in and placing the plants.

A number of Audubon members have been involved in the choosing, as well as positioning and planting of these specimens. Betsy Washington, Porter Washington, Ellie Davis, Nancy Garvey, Jeff Wainscott, Bryna Brennan, Paula Boundy and Mick and Beth Kendrick.

Below are listed just some of the plants that were added to the garden, as was a new small pollinator meadow:

Wild Strawberry	Beardtongue
Joe Pye Weed	Black-Eyed Susan
Rudbeckia	Goldenrods
Aster	Ironweed
Spiderwort	Violets
Coneflower	Elderberry
Bergamot	Trumpet
Lobelia	Honeysuckle

For several years, the Christmas Bird Count has been held on the property; and this past summer, its first ever butterfly count. We are expanding every more quickly due to the grant.

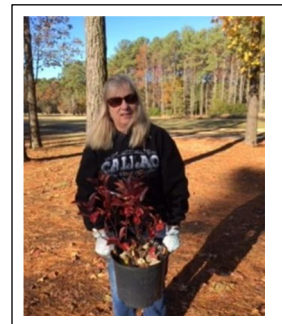
In November, we were able to add winterberry holly, black chokeberry and osier dogwood shrubs.



Nancy Garvey, Mick Kendrick, Betsy Washington



Beth Kendrick, Ellie Davis, Brenda Mayer



*Porter Washington at
November Planting
Session*

Photos:Beth Kendrick

I will be keeping the NNAS membership updated on these gardens as they expand and mature.

Anyone interested in helping, please contact me. If you are also a master naturalist, hours used working in and for this garden will count.

*....Beth Kendrick
bethannkendrick@gmail.com*

BIRD BOOKS



#63336841

Three new books have flown into our library over December. One, "The Twelve Birds of Christmas," pertains quite obviously only to the season, but the other two are notable for presenting diametrically opposite approaches to birding.

Tristan Gooley, author of Wild Signs and Star Paths, takes aim at the speed and superficiality of current life. (By "superficiality," he is not making an assessment of modern character, but rather, of modern attention to natural surroundings.) It is his mission to reawaken in us the dormant skills of observation, those forms of concentration used by humans in an earlier, less hurried time. Take off your watch and watch, take *out* your earbuds and take *on* your instinctive earset, to hear the crack of a branch or an owl colloquy. Above all, slow down. Many of his pages cover a single long walk, meticulously described with the sights and sounds he very sensitively absorbs. It takes some patience just to read about a leisurely hill climb that lasts a whole afternoon, broken by extended repose upon granite. Disciplining oneself to Walk such a Walk, is still more demanding.

Mr. Gooley is a well-reputed birding guide, and so his pointers are useful to us. For example, he describes "the jink," which is the sudden change in direction of a bird's flight pattern. Assuming the crow flies "as the crow flies," he always perks up when a mob, or an individual, makes a sharp turn. He calls this "a jink" If it occurs just above you, you have been spotted. Over another spot, it will have indicated a different object, perhaps a lawnmower, or a predator. He notes that, if you are well camouflaged, a solitary bird of prey will not spot you until the last minute. When it does, you'll know it, by its jink, "an inelegant maneuver, as when fighter jets strain their engines in a risky turn." You will then, of course, be rewarded with the wonderful underwing colors.

He includes similar analyses of bird calls and songs. Many songbirds share the "tktktk" alarm that is quick to learn, quick to utter and quick to comprehend. The glorious caroling used for attracting a mate or establishing territory is complex...slow to learn, hard to do and labor-intensive to identify....thus not used for emergencies. Some songbirds opt for the "seeet" sound as specific to the presence of an aerial threat. The author has learned to look up, reflexively, when he hears this; and when he hears the Chickadee add some syllables to its "Chickadee-dee-dee," he knows the bird is varying its warning to create a greater sense of urgency. All this knowledge takes time to acquire. That sense of time spent learning and time spent using the ensuing knowledge is the crux of Wild Signs and Star Paths.

This book falls surely into the field guide slot, as it is substantially and entirely out in the field itself. If it is used, either for its solid information or for an approach...one in which the senses become heightened, it will teach a great deal.

Simon Barnes' The Meaning of Birds is, on the contrary, is about US, the watchers, and our philosophical, not our outdoorsy, approach to birds. This is definitely birding for a rainy day: nestled in cushions with toasty toes, the armchair birder will find pleasure beyond the sensory from Simon Barnes' encyclopedic knowledge and readable chapters.

As one expects from his title, Barnes spends a good amount of time ruminating on humanity's fascination with birds...and as one would also expect, it's the "flight thing." Myth, religion, poetry and painting have taken figurative wing for thousands of years. Until the recent "blink of an eye" event at Kittyhawk, getting up in the air has been in the domain of magic. Doing it as the birds do, without benefit of a metal envelope, is magic

However, the author does his best to concretize this magic by listing all sorts of wondrous "lightening" tricks birds have at their disposal. We're familiar with the hollow bones...but there are now bones at all in the tail, and a boneish-seeming beak consists, like our fingernails, of light, pliable keratin. NO bladder? Every bit of liquid waste is discharged at the moment it's generated. As for air, if it's stale, it gets expunged with equal immediacy from air sacs. Physiologic efficiency is the name of the game for flight.

BIRD WALKS

The “why” of birding touches on “accessibility.” This concept is counterintuitive, until Barnes explains that we don’t go “mammal watching” because foxes, raccoons, rabbits ...bear and moose are good at hiding from us. Birds make be shy on a branch but are in our sights when they fly. He reminds us that tracking mammal trails means tracking droppings; tracking a sky silhouette is far more salubrious.

And beyond silhouette, you have color, displayed by birds with two completely different mechanisms. Pigment, the Crayola stuff, is the more familiar; but the other, refraction, is harder to understand. The feathers can have a prismatic skill: light hits them at a certain angle and our eyes see colors that weren’t visible in the shade. Of course, he cites the poor, lowly and maligned starling, waddling blackly across the grass. Give him a shaft of sun and “he explodes into a heavenly creature of glowing purple, lit with deep blues and greens, all of it spangled with gold.” ...and there’s a sample of writing that is a sensory, as pleasurable, as the starling’s iridescence.

As for the pigments, one of them, melanin, gives us a suntan, but gives feathers strength. A fishing seabird (gull, gannet, albatross) wears its white underneath as a “cloak of invisibility” to its water-borne prey; but the wingtips, the strength of which is crucial for flight, are often black. Amino acids and carotenoids in untold forms and combinations, paint the gorgeous feather rainbow that we know.

Notwithstanding the color chapter, the book’s illustrations are reminiscent of Victoriana: black and white etchings of very refined nature, with some poetic license taken. They reflect the author’s intent not to write a scientific guide, or a field manual, but rather long pondering on what birds give to humans.

....Letha Harris

Monday, February 10th

We will meet in the parking lot, at Regents Point Marina and Boatyard at 9:00 AM. Your GPS may take you down a gated road, so please use the physical address of 316 Regent Point Drive when setting your destination.

Saturday, February 22nd

We will meet at the main house of Kendale Farms, Essex County, at 9:00 AM and start the walk shortly thereafter.

Monday, March 9th

We will meet in the parking lot of Deltaville Marine Museum and Holly Point Nature Reserve at 9:00 AM.

For further details on all of these walks, check with:

Joe Cooney
jcooney805@gmail.com
 OR text 509-951-3179

*Photo below:Paul Servis
 Tundra Swans*



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** _____

Mail to P.O. Box 991, Kilmarnock, Virginia 22482



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