



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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Barn Swallow and Under-dock Nest

Photo.....Melissa Gross

President's Message.....	Page 2
Bird Lore.....	Page 3
Nesting and 2020.....	Page 4
Birds with Spoons.....	Page 5
Birding Elsewhere.....	Page 6
Winter Preparations.....	Page 7
Masthead.....	Page 8

UPCOMING

The following events are also posted on our Chapter Website. For the time-being, our NNAS Chapter will continue the suspension of monthly meetings and of -sponsored bird walks. NNAS does not sponsor those listed here.

November 14th: Project Feeder Watch

Commit to counting feeder birds on two consecutive days weekly, until April 9th, 2021. Sponsored by Cornell Lab.

Walks by Middle Peninsula Bird Club

November 19th:

Birdwatch at Brent and Becky's Bulbs, 7900 Daffodil Lane, Ware Neck, 8:00 AM. Please bring a mask.

December 1st:

Woodville Park, 4007 Woodville Park Road, Gloucester,, off Route 636 in Ordinary, 8:00 AM. Meet at the large parking lot on the left, next to the athletic fields. Please bring a mask.

Christmas Bird Counts:

Tuesday, December 15th Northumberland/Lancaster

Jeff Wright: pec11908@me.com

Sunday, December 20th Washington Birthplace

Bill Portlock: portlock@bealenet.com

Sunday, December 27th: Middle Peninsula

Susan Crockett: scrockett@cox.net

Sunday, January 3rd: Matthews

Joyce McKelvey

matthewsbirdcount@yahoo.com

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The fall migration is in full swing. This morning I heard the sweet call of the first White-Throated Sparrow since they departed last spring. Pine Siskins are abundant at my feeders, and the salt bush is in bloom. As I sit and write, a Carolina Wren is singing as loudly as ever. Occasionally, a female trill can be heard in response. In a small way, the world is all right; and in other ways, things are different.

The calendar pages are turning like the leaves of autumn. This has been a vastly different year. When I took over as President, I was expecting this to be a year full of celebrations. The 20th Anniversary of Hickory Hollow has come and gone; and as we near the 50th Anniversary of the Northern Neck Audubon Society, we cannot even gather to celebrate.

On a brighter note, though, the Christmas Bird Count is also right around the corner. This year of 2020 will mark another year in which the NNAS will sponsor the Northumberland-Lancaster Christmas Count. Strict rules of social distancing and the wearing of masks will be required. Some of the new but relevant restrictions are those disallowing car-pooling, social gatherings and the sharing of optics. Look for further informative details coming forth as we approach the date of the CBC.

We will need a lot of participants if we are to cover our large, two-county area. No experience is required as we will find a way to get everyone involved, even if we follow each other in our own cars from place to place.

So, mark the date on your calendar:

DECEMBER 15TH, 2020

.....and again, remember, more information is to follow.

Today I spent a little time at the table looking out the windows at the birds in the yard. It has been awhile since I just sat around, relaxed and counted birds for an hour. While the resulting list was not impressive, it was swtill time well spent.

I hope you are all getting out there and doing some birding. As for *official* bird walks as conducted by and sponsored by the NNAS, I am not sure we have yet gotten to a point where we can accommodate these. However, if you have any ideas as to how to do so, I am certainly open to hearing from you.

.....Joe Cooney
President, NNAS



*Northern Flicker at Windmill
Pt. Photo.....Joe Cooney*

There is now an opening on the Northern Neck Audubon Society Foundation Board. This group meets quarterly and is currently meeting electronically. For clarification, this is NOT the NNAS Board which runs the Audubon Section here on the Northern Neck.

Please e-mail me separately at jcooney805@gmail.com or call me at 509-951-9170, if you are interested. Joe Cooney, President

BIRD LORE



First Day of Christmas "Partridge":
French partridge is "Perdrix," perhaps
from which came the Partridge in a
Pear Tree.

Second Day of Christmas "Turtle Dove "
symbolized love as long ago as when a
pair pulled Aphrodites' chariot.



Third Day of Christmas "French Hen,"
promising a rich Yuletide Feast.

Fourth Day of Christmas "Calling
Birds," which may have been "Colli Birds,"
an archaic form of "coalie," or black.



Fifth Day of Christmas....Why did it leap from
birds to jewels? Another archaism?

In fact, a little bunting called "Yellowhammer"
has a golden head (does NO hammering) but
his ancient name was "Goldrink.")

Sixth Day of Christmas..."Geese A-Laying"...Another
prediction of bounty for the traditional celebration.



Seventh Day of Christmas.....The Grace of the Swan
and the Grace of the Season.

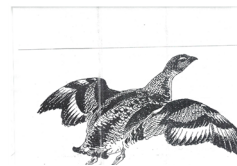


Eighth Day of Christmas: "Maids a'Milking
.. the Whippoorwill, or "goatsucker" group,
as described by Aristotle.



Ninth Day of Christmas "Ladies
Dancing," the balletic Crane.

Tenth Day of Christmas "Lords a'
Leaping," or a tremendously energetic and
displaying "Grouse."

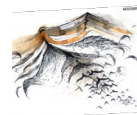


Eleventh Day of Christmas "Pipers Piping":...on the
sand or otherwise.

Twelfth Day of Christmas
"Drummers Drumming," who
but the champion avian
drummer, the Woodpecker?



BIRD BOOKS



*This whimsical take-off on the
traditional carol, "The Twelve
Days of Christmas," was
published, with its somewhat
archaic etchings, in 2019 by*

David Moss

as

The Twelve Birds of Christmas

NESTING BIRDS and 2020

Everyone can probably agree that this has been uncategorically a lousy year, a really strange year. I wonder if any of us really knows what's going on with the NNAS at this juncture? A quick summary: I resigned in March as president, and Joe Cooney took over in my place. I had planned on leaving for a thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail; but COVID struck maybe a week after I resigned, and due to the pandemic, the hike got scrubbed, bird walks got scrubbed, meetings got scrubbed. It feels like everything just got lost.

What in the world does this have to do with nesting birds? I have purple martin houses, bluebird boxes, a dock and osprey sites around our home. I usually keep notes on all the birds nesting around us and participate in NestWatch, a citizen science portal that Cornell University Lab of Ornithology provides. I suppose I was experiencing a certain type of loss with the postponement of a lifetime opportunity, and I just never could recover motivation for a "normal" life...but it wasn't normal anymore. The fact that I had a ton of time to observe and note our nesting birds didn't make me want to do it.

In a normal year, the purple martin boxes remain empty. No martins. That's normal. One year a great-crested flycatcher fledged four babies in a martin house! That was awesome! The four bluebird boxes yield from four to six broods per year. One particular box had three broods in one year. The osprey around here are prolific; and by August, I had counted 25 soaring and circling just in the airspace over our home.

This year, though, strange! The bluebirds.... they didn't do well. One clutch was comprised of five eggs and the parents were doing their jobs; but one day, when they were out shopping, I peeked in to check the eggs and found only two. No evidence of a struggle, no eggshells, just gone. The two remaining did hatch, grow and fledge, thank goodness. One other box had a nest that was never completed, one had a clutch of three.

One morning I found one of those eggs pierced. It was weird.

And what else was weird: I had never seen a house sparrow here before; but this year a pair made a nest in a martin house and laid eggs before I noticed them. I had happened to walk by the martin pole and saw a dead nestling on the ground. When I looked inside the martin house, that's when I saw the house sparrows with only one nestling left. No, I couldn't bring myself to do away with them.

House wrens were around for the first time, nesting in some of the really shrubby areas and being all fussy. Doing a little research, I was troubled to learn that house wrens and house sparrows do not make nice bluebird neighbors. Both species are known to kill other birds' nestlings, pierce and eat the eggs and generally behave in a lousy manner. I think the presence of both these species had something to do with the diminished bluebird breeding this year.

Thanks again, 2020.

Amongst all the miserable predation and damage, low bluebird numbers and not as many ospreys as usual (a structure in our creek where the ospreys always nest was destroyed by a spring storm), we did have a pair of barn swallows build a nest under our dock. It has been a few years since they've built there, and even with our high tides getting higher and higher, the nestlings made it out of their nest about two days before a whacko high tide washed their nest away. I had the privilege of sitting on the dock, fishing, watching the adults fly around, fuss at me a little, and of listening to them chitter-chatter as they sat on the rail of the boat (something my husband also chitter-chattered about, not really appreciating the birds' digested food on his boat). I tried once to observe them from a kayak, but that was way too stressful on the birds and hard on my shoulders. Instead, I could lie on the dock and hang my head over. The swallows allowed that, and I got to watch the parents feed the kids a few times. That didn't last too long, as a headache and dizziness, prompted by the upside-down position, accompanied this activity.

Even amongst the lousy and the strange of this year, there were a few bluebirds brought into the world, some more osprey and barn swallows! Maybe next year purple martins will decide to hang out here. Until then, though, I'm glad to say "buh-bye" to 2020....too bad its departure is still two months away!

.....Melissa Gross

"SPOON" BILLS



Most birds don't cook, but if they did, this bill would make for a useful attribute...and the cake below might appeal:

HUMMINGBIRD CAKE

3 cups all-purpose flour
2 cups white sugar
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1 ½ cups clear vegetable oil
3 large eggs
1 8-oz. can crushed pineapple
drained
2 cups mashed bananas
1 cup chopped black walnuts



STEP 1:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
Grease & flour two 9-inch cake pans

STEP 2:

Sift together flour sugar, baking soda and salt.

STEP 3:

Combine oil, eggs, pineapple, nuts and crushed bananas.
Add flour mixture, and blend by hand.

STEP 4:

Pour batter into prepared pans and bake about one hour, or until an inserted toothpick (or hummingbird beak) comes out clean.

STEP 5:

When cooled, frost with an icing composed of one 8-oz pkg. cream cheese, 1 stick of butter, softened, 1 box of confectioners' sugar and one teasp. vanilla.

FROM: 2020 ALLRECIPES.COM

AT WINDMILL POINT

Least Sandpipers and Killdeer

Photos.....Joe Cooney



BIRDING ELSEWHERE

....The following is a continuation of Sue Alexander's article, first part of which was published in the May/June newsletter, describing bird life in her home county of Hampshire, England.

Finches and tits are keen and busy visitors. The red-headed goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) also has flashes of yellow on its wings and requires niger seed in the feeder during winter months. It finds its paradise at the end of summer when many of the herbaceous plants in the garden have seedheads. They adore thistles and teasels, and a joyous sight in October is to watch a cluster of up to 20 goldfinches



all swaying on the stems of tall asters, gorging themselves on the delicious seed. The male Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*) has a beautiful and distinctive peach-colored breast with flashes of green and yellow in his wings. The female is a very dull beige by comparison!

Blue Tits (*Parus caeruleus*) are the most numerous of this family. Cheery, cheeky and great acrobats, their distinct blue, green and yellow coloring shines out over that of the Great Tit (*Parus major*). Keen nestbox birds, they will often hatch two broods. Particularly fond of peanuts!

But my favorites are the Long-Tailed Tits (*Aegithalos caudatus*). So entertaining, they are always in small groups, flitting from tree to tree and looking as if they are having a party. I once found on my woodland path one of their nests: a creation of such beauty and delicacy that I have kept it in a box ever since.

It had taken 15-20 days to create the nest, using moss, lichen and spider webs. I marvel that no man or machine will ever be able to do the same.

The small wildlife pond in the garden is a bath and drinking vessel for many birds; but the Nuthatch (*Sitta Europa*) particularly needs the mud around it. Nuthatches use crevices in tree trunks, lining them with dead leaves. The female then uses mud pellets to reduce the size of the entrance to the nest, for protection. The distinct bluey-gray feathers of a Nuthatch are always exciting to spot. They have the ability, and the claws, to scramble up and down tree trunks. The other bird that can do this is the Tree Creeper, with his distinctive long, down-turned beak (*Certhia familiaris*), although he can only travel upwards.

Because he is so beautifully camouflaged, I have only ever seen one or two in the garden; and you can imagine my distress last summer when I found a dead one in my drive.

Blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) both male and female are to be seen every morning early, pulling worms and insects from the lawn. Large, plump birds, the male with his distinctive yellow-orange beak, their hearing or sense of vibration must be very super-sensitive. I began by writing about the dawn chorus at 5:00 AM; and as I now write, it is 5:00 PM. Right on cue, a male blackbird begins to sing, either from the roof of the house or from the nearby gleditsia tree. The song is rich,



I am sure you readers have all observed with sadness the decline in numbers of many birds. A much-treasured book, which I highly recommend, is The Charm of Birds, by Viscount Grey of Fallodon. Sir Edward Grey was a Liberal MP in the 1920s and was Foreign Secretary (British) from 1905-1916. His constituency was in Scotland, but he had a small cottage in Hampshire, very near me, where his wife lived and to which he returned as often as possible.

Their knowledge and love of birds was absolutely amazing, and their observations make wonderful reading. Sadly, it does highlight how many birds are no longer seen in our area.

It does, however, reinforce the importance of passion, drive and love and the real affection from us all to protect our birds for future generations.

....Sue Alexander

WINTER PREP

To the right is a Winterberry Holly

Opposing page, Holly and Red Aronia.

Photos taken one day before the birds arrived to consume all that tempting fruit.



Once all the juicy bugs and caterpillars disappear when the temperatures drop, the birds need an alternative food source to get them through the winter. Seeds and nuts become their primary food: so, let's help them out. Leave seed heads on all your flowers and blooming shrubs. Not only will these fuel the birds and small mammals, but also, they will give you new plants in the spring. Zinnias, coneflowers, black-eyed susans, holly and aronia berries, winterberry hollies, sunflowers and tickseed are all good food sources.

It is always a treat to see hundreds of robins mobbing your holly trees. If you watch closely, you are also liable to see lovely cedar waxwings mixed into the flock.

Another way to help out is to make your own suet. It draws many birds, especially all of the woodpecker family, that may not come to your seed feeder. It's cheap and easy, and the recipe can be manipulated to use what you have on hand.

Mix it all together and stuff into wire suet feeders. Hang where you can watch and enjoy. The birds will thank you.

SUET RECIPE

1 CUP Cheap (Walmart) vegetable shortening
½ CUP corn meal
½ CUP old-fashioned oatmeal
1 CUP peanut butter
Raisins, Unsalted shelled nuts, dried fruits, seeds

Mixture can be formed into squares, or whatever shape you need, and frozen. It is guaranteed that this will bring the woodpeckers "out of the woodwork."

Musings and photos....

.....Beth Kendrick

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"

Name _____ Phone _____ - _____

Address _____ E-Mail _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

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



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