



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

Volume 45 No.1

January/February 2018



“Two Beauties”

Photo: Paul Servis

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UPCOMING

MEETINGS

Chapter Meetings held Upstairs
Lancaster Community Library

Monday, February 5th

3:15 PM Program:
Jeffrey Wright

Monday, March 5th

3:15 PM Program:
To Be Announced

BIRD WALKS

Saturday, January 27th

9:00 AM Hughlett Point

Monday, February 12th

Bethel Beach NAP
Mathews County

Saturday, February 24th

George Washington Birthplace
Westmoreland County

Monday, March 12th

Rappa. River Valley NWP
Wilna Unit, Richmond County

Saturday, March 24th

Hickory Hollow

A CHRISTMAS QUEST

Back in June I went on a bird walk with a group of highly experienced birders. It was a walk led by Ellison Orcutt, with the goal of familiarizing people with the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas and how to use the eBird app for it. Much was learned about the VABBA2 and how to record the information experienced; but this story isn't about that.

There was a guy on this walk who had a smart phone, and during the entire walk he kept moving aside from the group and looking at his phone and making phone calls. You could say it was curious...maybe even annoying. I heard him later telling our leader, "Hey, there's a willet in Virginia Beach. You wanna see if we can go see it?" I wondered why you would drive three hours to go see a willet; but this story isn't about that, either.

I did, however, learn that this young man was alerted to this rare bird by an app called "eBird," developed by Cornell University. You can sign up for alerts of when rare birds are sighted in your state, or county, or what have you. I was skeptical at first and thought, "Oh, rother, I'll never e that nerdy over birds! Drop everything and drive three hours to see a 'whatever.'?" Never say never.

I signed up to get these alerts myself a couple of months ago, when I found the time to figure out the eBird system, and then came the quest. Something rare and wonderful had been confirmed close by—a snowy owl in West Point. A SNOWY OWL! These are the owls that live in the Canadian tundra, are cute and cuddly as a button but terrifyingly successful as a top tier predator. In West Point! That isn't too far. Way closer than Waynesboro, that's for sure (see my earlier story on the hawk watch). A SNOWY OWL IN WEST POINT! But it might not be there. But it's in West Point. It's a rare bird! Christmas is almost here and I have stuff to do. But it's a snowy owl. A bird I've never seen, an hour away, on a Saturday. I caved. LET'S DO IT!!!!!!

It was a nice drive down 17 without any traffic of police. It didn't take too long, especially because I was occupied with wondering if the bird

would be there, with where exactly I was going, that the light that day was bad for pictures, that I didn't have a jacket!

Not to worry, it's warmish (but it's windy) EW, I smell the paper plant. I'm getting close. Fifty minutes and I make it to West Point. I turn left on the designated street and slowly drive through a very eclectic neighborhood: some nice Victorian homes, a small apartment building, a ramshackle bungalow...and then I see the water. The owl is supposed to be about a block away. I park, grab my camera and bins and start walking toward the water. I see another person driving slowly, looking around...you know how you can just "tell" a birder? Of course, the Audubon sticker helps. I catch up with him and ask if he is also looking for the owl, and he says, "Yes." We look around where it was reported the day before. No owl. We take a few steps, then both of us look around with binoculars.

A resident appeared from her front door and asked, "Are you looking for the owl?" When we said "Yes," she very kindly told us that it was on her neighbor's dock and that we might walk through her yard to see it.

Gratefully walked around to her backyard, turned, and THERE IT WAS!!!!!! THE SNOWY OWL!!!!....Just casually hanging out on the dock, the wind ruffling its gorgeous white feathers. It was a breathtaking creature.



THE POLLINATORS' PARTY

I stared at the magical owl. It stared back. It was hard to tell how big it was, but it was just so pretty and majestic at the same time. There was some faint blood on its floofy furry feet from eating a fish. (Unintentional consonance, there). Through a scope you could see its yellow, jewel-like eyes. Its bill, covered with feathers, looked tiny and gave it a little smile.



A few more people came up with scopes, and the owl started looking around more and taking more steps. It seemed nervous. I was content with my time watching the owl, so I took my leave and created more space for others. I had taken my first road trip to see a rare bird. It's possible that I've reached the level of true "bird-nerd," but that's okay, because I saw a snowy owl. In Virginia. On December 23rd, 2017.



Quest and Photos: Melissa Gross

Over the past several Christmas seasons, our chapter has contributed to the Tablescapes display at the Reedville Fishermen's Museum fundraiser. The "Pollinator" theme was our third such, set up at Festival Halle the second weekend in December. As always, the entry entertained the attendees; but, more crucially, aired the issue of threatened pollinators and lent exposure to NNAS.

Restricted as we were to four invitees, we chose to highlight the bat, the hummingbird, the bee and the butterfly, each of whom had its own suitable seating, with chairs donated by our trusty members. Dave Harris painted the chairs in colors apropos to each little creature...black, of course, for the bat, emerald/"cochineal" for the hummer, yellow/black stripey for the bee and tangerine for the butterfly.

Thanks to Nancy Garvey, suitable menus were on display for each honored pollinator, letting visitors know just what we, the Earth's gardeners, could provide to help out:

**BALTHASAR BAT'S
SELECTED NATIVE MENU**

STARTERS
FLEABANE MOONFLOWER
(OR FLEAS STRAIGHT UP)
PEAFISH
BUFFALO-WINGED ANTS

ENTREES
EVENING PRIMROSE
NIGHT-BLOOMING PHLOX
NIGHT-BLOOMING JESSAMINE
FOUR-O'CLOCK (OR LATER) DATURA

DESSERT
MOSQUITOES A LA MODE

Special thanks to helpers Nancy Garvey, Dave Harris, Jessica Servis and Diane Wruck.

Letha Harris

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season. It was very wintry, so those of you who enjoy sub-zero temperatures, howling winds and snow...you had your socks blessed off...or frozen off...or blown off. Our creek (Nomini), which is about 600 yards across, froze solidly over, what with the high winds and low tides. This kept all the usual waterfowl out on the Potomac.

I did watch a fox trot around in the middle of the creek; and on January 1st, an interesting thing happened. A couple of hunting dogs were making a heck of a ruckus by the cove near our house, so I went out to see what was going on. A doe was standing stock still and belly-deep in a small opening in the ice. The dogs had chased her there. She didn't move a muscle or bat an eye for about an hour. I wanted to try to save her, pull her out, whatever I could do; but then I thought she was frozen to death.

A few hours later I snuck outside to see if she was still there, but she was gone. Had she sunk into the water? Maybe the tide forced her under the ice? I was kind of bummed. I found out later that a neighbor watched her get out of the water somehow, lie on the bank "warming up," and then run off. Pretty amazing.

So, we embark upon a new year, and it's going to be a good one. I can tell. We climb out of the frozen cove, warm up and run off. The Northern Neck Audubon Society has a lot of exciting things going on.

First of all, I direct your attention to our website, which has been transformed by Kyle Langford. Kyle took a new domain and soared. He has created a sleek, usable and up-to-date page that is easy to navigate and looks great! Any chapter member is welcome to contribute to the page (AND the newsletter) with pictures, stories, book reviews, travelogues or whatever else might be interesting to share.

We invite you to take the survey that is found on the "Welcome Page." We would like to hear how you think we're doing, and what, if any improvements you would like to see made. Thank you, Kyle, for your work.

The Chapter has been working on updating Hickory Hollow NAP. The area is close to its 20-year anniversary, and there is a lot of work being done on new signage, better trail-blazing that corresponds to a more accurate map, and (most exciting of all) a short trail that will focus on kids. A trail that is about ½ mile long will be transformed into an outdoor classroom.

Activities relating to birds, mammals, trees and nature will be featured. We are really excited about this and hope it will be fun for the young and (pardon the cliché) for the young-at-heart.

Once the new map is finished and the new trail-blazing goes up, we'll start work on the fun trail. Again, any member is welcome to help with these endeavors. We'll certainly need assistance with posting the blazing, creating the activities, and cleaning up the trails.

We are excited as well about some of our upcoming programs. We will begin in February with Jeff Wright's brushing us up on the songbirds that will, soon after that time, be returning to the Northern Neck. We hope to invite Dominion Power to educate us about reducing avian collisions with electrical lines.

At some point there will be a program on avian rehab, elucidating those steps to take if an injured bird is found.

Whether or not you are a member, we invite you to our programs and our bird walks. Check the events calendar for upcoming happenings and attendant details. We would be glad to share our passion for and enjoyment of birds with you.

.....Melissa Gross
President



"I can see you"!

Photo: Paul Servis

NOT TO BE MISSED



Yes, eventually the snow and ice will be gone, Songbirds will fill the air and charm our ears, and there will be Spring! This program will provide “virtual springtime” (and warmth) by having an interactive presentation on how to identify and attract songbirds.

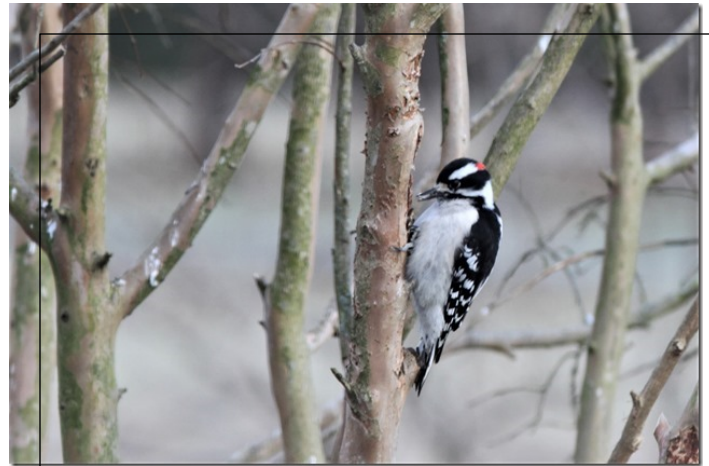
The session is timely, as it will focus on birds that we might see during the Great Backyard Bird Count from February 14th through 19th this year). The aptly-named songbirds provide the chirps, songs and occasional “racket” that fill our yards and forests, particularly in the Spring.

Various tools, techniques and diabolical quizzes will be included in the session to help identify these birds, both by hearing them as well as by seeing them. The presentation will include High Definition photos and videos of songbirds.

Wrestling with learning to identify selected thrushes, wrens, finches, orioles, sparrows, grosbeaks and mimic thrushes on a February day will hopefully speed up the arrival of Spring.

Within this group of soulful songsters are hundreds of songbird repertoires to listen to, learn to love, and to use to hone bird identification skills.

Jeffrey Wright
NNAS Chair
Citizen Science



MAKE TRACKS, TRACE TRACKS

National Audubon's on-line newsletter has published a very timely article on how to ID birds through their tracks in the snow. Its author, Rosemary Mosco, has done an excellent job triaging how to analyze patterns.

She starts out sensibly with recommending that the "detective" get a sense of the landscape; i.e., "in a city, ambling three-toed prints are probably those of an urban turkey, rather than of a White-tailed Ptarmigan."

She next classifies the arrangements of the imprints as they reflect how the bird has moved. Two parallel foot marks indicate hopping and thus, according to Ms. Mosco, birds that spend much of their time perching, like Goldfinches, Chickadees, Cardinals, Titmice and Nuthatches [all familiar to our Northern Neck feeders]. Staggered pairs of imprints indicate skipping, common in ground foragers like Song Sparrows and Robins.

In contrast, single tracks, regularly spaced out, are clues of a walking bird, like European Starlings, Mourning Doves, raptors, gulls and ducks.

Having clearly categorized these three patterns, the author goes on to describe the shape of the footstep as well.

She says that there are normally three toes in the front and one in the rear, indicative of species that need that format to perch, with slender, long toes, on slim branches (sparrows, jays and finches are included in this group). Doves and pigeons, prone to rambling over the ground, present a wider configuration, and the marsh birds are, as expected, equipped with the broad feet needed to stand in their oozy habitat.

Even though birds of prey have the three front toes and the one in the rear, as do the passerines, their tracks are easily differentiated from those of smaller birds by the bulk required for them to seize and hold prey.

In the Northern Neck it's useful to be on alert for webbed tracks. An outline stretching between the front three toes implies waterfowl: ducks, geese, swans, gulls. Interestingly, Ms. Mosco notes that cormorants (common to our area, but according to her, not likely present in winter) have webbing among all four of their toes.

She has supplied us with a new "bird word," and that is: "ZYGODACTYL," which she recommends saying slowly, "and with relish." Zygodactyl species have feet entirely different from those just described: two toes in front at two in back, allowing them to climb trees and grip branches with greater stability.

She cites owls and woodpeckers as the salient species for our habitat. The parrots and roadrunners that she also mentions, will not be making tracks in our snow!



....Bald Eagle making tracks in the air, not in the snow!

Photo: Melissa Gross

PH BIRD WIRDS

The words for common objects in related languages, or even familiar languages, often share a root, a letter clue or a tonal hint as to what the meaning might be.

For BIRD, as goes the current parlance, “not so much”!

There is the French “oiseau,” notable for embracing as it does not only all avian species but also all vowels!

There is the Spanish “pajaro,” fingerprint of the 700 years that Arabic sounds rang on the Iberian Peninsula.

There is the Italian “uccello,” which lent its euphonic triplet to a great Renaissance painter of horses and wars.

There is the Germanic “vogel” which so clearly evokes the miracle of flying.

Welsh, as it hangs on determinedly as one of the rare residual pockets of the ancient Celts, contributes “aderyn.”

Lithuanian, the oldest living language in the vast Indo-European family tree gives us “paukstis.”

Splitting from that most prevalent group to the less familiar “Finno-Ugric” we find the Hungarian “madar” and the Finnish “lintu.”

Still farther afield, off the European grid, and onto the African Continent there is the Swahili “ndege.”

And there are all those ornitho(Greek, of course)logical terms limned in Arabic, Hebrew, Mandarin, Coptic...all those sounds to which no friendly Roman alphabet has been assigned.

Here on our home continent, the Cherokee were out spotting the “tsi s qua” eons before we Audubon members were out watching “birds,”

Our “bird” hatched in Middle English, but among so many squawking and muddying nestlings (“bridd, bride, young bird, young of any animal”) that its parentage remains unclear.

Letha Harris

IMAGES OF THE SEASON

Photos: Alice Stieve



Photo: Melissa Gross



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	Birdhouse	Open	Website www.northernneckaudubon.org suggestions to: nnas1970@gmail.com Newsletter - five issues annually submit ideas, articles etc. to: waterthrush@verizon.net
Vice President	Sandy Dodge	C. Easement	Jeff Wright	
Past President	Nancy Garvy		Sandy Dodge	
Secretary	Paula Boundy	Programs	Open	
Treasurer	Lloyd Dodge	Bird Walks	Jeff Wright	
			Melissa Gross	
			Leslie Fellows	
		Grant Review	Paula Boundy	
			Open	
			Membership	Edie & Sandy Dodge
			Newsletter	Letha Harris
			Website	Kyle Langford
			Publicity	Margaret Gerdtz
				Leslie Fellows
			Hospitality	Jan Tyndal
			Conservation/	
			Citizen Science	Jeff Wright

Directors

Expires 2018	Expires 2019	Expires 2020
Jan Tyndall Jeff Wright Beth Kendrick	Tom Saunders Katharina Bergdoll Diane Wrack	Les Kilduff Leslie Fellows Kyle Langford