



# 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](http://www.northernneckaudubon.org)

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Great Blue Heron amid Autumn Ambience

*.....Photo: Paul Servis*

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## UPCOMING

### MEETINGS

Chapter Meeting for November

**\*\*\* NOTE \*\*\***

**SCHEDULE CHANGE!**

Monday, November 4<sup>th</sup>: **6:00-8:00 PM**

Lancaster Community Library

"Love is in the Air"

Chapter Meeting for December

Monday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3:15 PM

Lancaster Community Library

### BIRD WALKS

Detailed Schedule on Page 5

### GREAT CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Tuesday, December 17<sup>th</sup>

Details on Page 7

Of special note: Our NNAS Entry to

**TABLESCAPES**

Reedville Fishermen's Museum

December 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Fall is officially here, and with that we get to watch the migrants fly through; and our winter birds arrive. This morning I saw my first Brown Creeper. Yesterday, while the Bluebirds splashed gleefully in the birdbath, a couple of Sapsuckers were snarking at one another in a tree, locked together doing a somersault, chattering and squeaking.. The Kinglets are back, as well as the "butterbutts (Yellow-Rumped Warblers). Even before all the Osprey took off, the Bald Eagles were exerting their authority over territory once dominated by the Osprey. I like to write down when I see "the first of the season." It's interesting to look at that information later on to see the ebb and flow of arrivals. I haven't been doing it long enough to see changes in dates, but I DO see changing numbers of species: for instance, fewer Juncos, Cardinals and Tanagers and more Osprey, Bald Eagles and Tundra Swan.

This morning we had a bird walk at the George Washington Birthplace Memorial. The weather did not bode well, but it turned out to be a great morning. It wasn't hot, it didn't rain, and the only negative thing was that the light was a bit too flat to allow clear identification by sight. But, luckily, my hearing hasn't tanked too badly; and that served me well. At one point Glen joked that even HE could hear the pair of Pileated Woodpeckers making a ruckus. It was a pleasant walk, and I want to thank Betsy, Joyce, Glen and Judy for coming out.

The five of us strolled along the path that edges Pope's Creek. We were few in number, but it was a good opportunity to stop, listen and try to find and then identify a bird. We also talked about migration, what species might be there, how numbers of species were changing, and other birdy stuff. Today we had our usual avian suspects plus a Merlin. That was quite a surprise. We saw some Monarch Butterflies pretty high up and were able to see a good number of baby frogs on the woodsy trail: Yes, baby frogs. (Not being a reptile specialist, I don't know the scientific word offhand, and I'm too lazy at the moment to look up the amphibian life cycle of tree frogs. I'm guessing that the recent rains have allowed the tadpoles to mature).

Before we started the walk, I got there early and was treated to hearing some Bald Eagle loudness; and when I looked across the water, a pair was copulating. As I type this, that sounds a bit in-your-face, but that's what they were doing.

And that's what I love about birding. I relish finding new "lifers," but I really enjoy getting to know better the birds I already know. The Sapsuckers in the tree yesterday....were they defending territory or a food source? The Bluebirds in the bird-bath? A juvenile would plop itself into the middle of the water, then open its mouth toward a mature bird and just sit there...waiting for food perhaps? All the while the mature bird would just splash in the water like there was no tomorrow. Some of the birds, who seemed left out, would find a puddle in the backyard to splash around in (due to the higher tides lately, many puddles are still around).

Watching the hierarchy at the birdbath is also interesting. The Starlings and the Blue Jays chase everyone away, which is probably not surprising. Bluebirds will occasionally splash around with a House Finch, but usually the finches are run off. The older Bluebirds tend to scare off the younger ones. The Yellow-Rumped Warblers appear to be interested in the bath, but will hover nearby if it is in use, then fly away. Carolina Wrens don't seem interested in it at all. For a while I was finding "body parts" of cicadas in the water, possible thanks to the Crows. They seem to enjoy bringing their meals to the edge of the bath and leaving the uneaten parts in the water. That practice has always demanded a clean-up and replacement of the bird-bath water.

Thanks for putting up with my birdy rambling. Anyone is welcome to ramble along with written articles, short stories, your own experiences and impressions of birds. Feel free to share them with us in this Newsletter. We all learn from one another, and maybe we see something different in the "mundane" when viewed through someone else's eyes.

Happy, peaceful birding.

....Melissa Gross  
President, NNAS

## NOVEMBER'S PROGRAM

\*\*\*MEETING WILL BE 6:00 PM\*\*\*

In an effort to accommodate for the attendance of young people and others who might not be free during the daytime, we are trying an evening meeting. This one will feature as speaker Dr. Shawn Dash, Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences at Hampton University, Hampton, VA. Dr. Dash is an entertaining and ecologically enlightening speaker, who brings to his audience a dynamic passion for understanding the natural world.

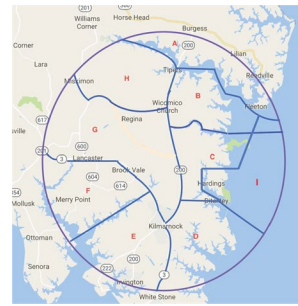
Initially, he had planned to become an ornithologist; but he became fascinated with insects, ant biodiversity and forest fragmentation, interests which led to his obtaining a PhD in Entomology from the University of Texas at El Paso. He retains his expertise in ornithology, however, and has titled his November talk: "Love is in the Air—Avian Reproductive Behavior."

The presentation will cover some of the fundamental principles of bird reproductive behavior: sexual selection, why birds are colorful, mating displays, bird songs, nesting habits and baby birds.

In addition to Dr. Dash's talk, we will have a brief introduction to our fourth annual Northumberland-Lancaster Christmas Bird Count, to be held Tuesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, rain or shine, sleet or heat. Amateur or hardcore birders who have not previously participated in this local count are encouraged to join in this fun outing while contributing to the longest continually-running citizen science project (119 years) in North America.

The details of how to participate and record will be presented at this meeting.

.....Kevin Howe



### HEADS-UP...FOR TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17<sup>th</sup>!

The Fourth Annual Northumberland-Lancaster Christmas Bird Count is on the calendar. We like to make this a fun event, and we welcome bird enthusiasts of all skill levels. YES, novices are very welcome to participate.

As per the title above, this is the fourth consecutive year where the Northern Neck Audubon Society has sponsored this count. As in the past, we have a "social and warming" opportunity in the early afternoon.

We have a record of having good teams and sector leaders, those individuals who are placed in the field to cover each sector. In both 2017 and 2018 we recorded over 100 species of birds and had the participation of 38 observers in the field. Their enthusiasm and expertise, coupled with cooperative birds, pleasant weather, and access to the best habitats, helped us achieve these excellent results.

Of course, we can hope to meet, or exceed the counts of previous years when we sally forth on December 17<sup>th</sup>. This is a valuable exercise in citizen science and one of which NNAS can be justifiably proud.

For more detailed information as to how to sign up for the count, please contact me at:

703- 801 0239.

....Jeff Wright

*Compiler for the Christmas Bird Count.*

## ARMCHAIR BIRDING

Like those “confusing” warblers, we humans can be a migratory species, although most of us wing off no further than Florida, eschewing the grueling trip across the Gulf of Mexico to Central and South America. Like the Bald Eagle, the mobs of American Crows and their persecuted enemy, the Great Horned Owl, some of us sit tight. Unlike them, we remain warm indoors, watching the winged world backdropped by the winter sky or clustered around our feeders. For all of us, the year will soon be “on the turn” and demanding new calendars.

What prompted these thoughts was the arrival of Audubon’s 2020 edition, its series of stunning photos kicking off with January’s very hibernal White Breasted Nuthatch in all its suitable white, black and slate finery. There are an alert Belted Kingfisher, so closely seen that each single fluffed feather is delineated, and Boat-Tailed Grackles, as intensely sapphire as their eponymous gem. Along with traditional and religious events, all the important birding days are marked.

If you want to go weekly rather than monthly, there are the desk diaries. Of these, nothing can surpass David Allen Sibley’s, coil-backed, vinyl-protected publication wherein taxonomic group, like “terns” or “woodpeckers” displays opposite your sequence of tasks (dentist, car inspection, fasting blood draw?) Sibley’s images provide a lighter view; and they are so sharp that the diary can outlive its pertinent year and be kept as a reference.

Weekly books like this, those featuring ONLY birds, seem as rare as the Audubon calendar’s Snail Kite. The planner industry leans heavily toward botanicals (Royal Horticultural), spiritual (Thick Nhat Hanh), and “\_\_\_\_-Lovers”(there is even a Pig-Lovers option). Pro-environment agencies like the World Wildlife Fund, the Sierra Club and the Nature Conservancy portray the customary, and expected

landscapes and creatures, bird images salted among them only here and there.

A particularly pretty calendar, and one with the bonus of being agenda-free, comes from the paintbrush of Marjolein Bastin.

Her art is quite different from Sibley’s. The painter approaches, with a certain aesthetic license, those birds she’s chosen, and she has punctuated the portraits with inked observations. Since the artist is Dutch, hers are often European species, and their pages are shared with flowers, butterflies and mammals; but the art is lovely and provides a visual respite from the opposing pages of dates-times-duties. Each entry is not, like Sibley’s, a scientific study, but rather, a pleasure page.



Comfy birders can be really diligent with their observations using the “Bird-a-Day” calendar, 365 tear-away pages that sit stacked beside the indoor viewer...but with rather little actual spotting available, since tropical, oceanic and Arctic species are all included. This is an Audubon publication as well, sold for \$14.99 on-line and chockful of useful information.

By month, by week or by day, the bird universe can be at your side in 2020.

.....Letha Harris



## HICKORY HOLLOW SNAPSHOT

While I was walking the Blue Ridge and the White Loop Trails to assess the removal of large downed trees from across the trail, the abundance of Beechdrops caused me to stop in my tracks. I was accompanied by Nancy Garvey and Skip Penner. Eventually, we happened upon a spot that amazed me; and, as requested, Skip took the above photo. This spot exemplifies the uniqueness of Hickory Hollow and how, no matter what the date, marvels can be seen there:

- PLANT #1 *Cypripedium acaule*, Pink Lady's Slipper foliage. Typically, there are only two basal leaves; but perhaps this is a very mature plant, or there are two rooted here. This is one of our native orchids. The seed will only germinate and the plant exist if its special mycorrhizal fungus is present in the soil.
- PLANT #2 *Chimaphila maculate*, Striped Wintergreen foliage. This showy, diminutive evergreen plant is in the Ericaceae or Heath family and may also require a mycorrhizal fungus to flourish.
- PLANT #3 *Mitchella Repens*, Partridge-berry foliage. Another showy, diminutive evergreen plant with a trailing habit. Its tubular-shaped blooms occur in pairs and produce one red berry.
- PLANT #4 *Epifagus virginiana*, Beechdrops post-bloom plant. The plant is just past bloom, and the color of the entire plant is beige, with the seed pods evident and eventually turning very dark brown or black. It has a parasitic relationship to , and only grows beneath, *Fagus grandiflora*, the American Beech tree.

- PLANT #5 *Smilax rotundifolia*, Common greenbrier foliage. Most of us associate this plant with one word: THORNS. It is one of the edible native plants IF you munch on new spring growth of stems and leaves or the lovely dark blue berries. I prefer to leave the berries for Northern Cardinals or White-Throated Sparrows.

...Paula Boundy

## NNAS BIRD WALKS

Starting at 9:00 AM  
( unless otherwise indicated)

November 11<sup>th</sup>:

Rappahannock Westminster  
Canterbury

November 23<sup>rd</sup>:

Menokin, Richmond County  
Just outside Warsaw

December 9<sup>th</sup> (Noonish Time Frame)

Hughlett Point, then Dameron  
Marsh....Bring Bag Lunch

Late December:

Four Christmas Bird Counts  
....Details to follow on Website.

February 10<sup>th</sup>:

Regents Point Marina &  
Boatyard

February 22<sup>nd</sup>:

Kendale Farms, Essex County

.....Joe Cooney

jcooney805@gmail.com



## HAWK WATCH

On Saturday September 21<sup>st</sup>, Joe Cooney, Tom Gauthier and I got up before dawn to start the three-hour trek to Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch Open House in Afton, Virginia. When I left my house, I heard the neighborhood Great Horned Owl, a sign that we were in for a good day of birding. By the time I reached Joe's house on Mosquito Point in White Stone, the sun was just coming up over the Rappahannock and the birds were awake. As we ventured down Joe's lane and on over the river, we saw or heard at least ten different species, which included Royal Tern, Greater Black-Backed Gull, Double-Crested Cormorant, Osprey, Pileated Woodpecker, Laughing Gull, Snowy Egret, Mourning Doves, Crow and several LBBs (little brown birds that I still struggle to identify). This was promising to be a really good day.

After picking up Tom, we continued our journey west, arriving in Afton around 10:00 a.m. We found well over a hundred people gathered around the grounds of the Afton Inn, visitors equipped with binoculars, scopes and all manner of cameras, many with telephoto lenses. There were lots of families with young children as well as many very serious, experienced senior birders. I am sure that many people whom I met were drawn over because I had on my NNAS t-shirt. It elicited a lot of comments about how far we had driven as well as questions about our chapter.

It is the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) that sponsors the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch, which is in turn supported by three nearby bird clubs: Augusta, Monticello and Rockingham. HMAMA's mission is to study and conserve raptors. Their goal at Rockfish Gap is to count all the hawks that fly over the site daily from August 15 to November 30. The count is done by volunteers who submit their data to HMAMA to create an international database of all hawk counts and migration routes. The data is used by scientists to study raptor migration and to monitor changes in the species' populations.

Because of its location in the Blue Ridge Mountains, Rockfish Gap is "one of Virginia's premier hawk watch sites." The narrow gap in the mountains' topography provides a natural constricting of the flyway, thus concentrating the raptors and resulting in great numbers of sightings.

Interesting facts about this Hawk Watch:

- 17 different raptor species migrate through Rockfish Gap.
- The most frequently counted raptor is the Broad-Winged Hawk.
- Raptors do not migrate during rain heavy fog.
- The average number of raptors counted each fall is 23,800.
- The migration numbers peak in the last two weeks of September.
- Each day there is one official counter who is supported by several observers.

Out of the official tally on the 21<sup>st</sup> were many non-raptor species, including 230 Monarchs, 46 Chimney Swifts, 1 Hummingbird, 9 Red-headed Woodpeckers, 2 Barn Swallows and 11 Ravens. Only a few days before, on September 17<sup>th</sup>, the total Broad-Winged Hawk count of 10,643 was the second highest single-day count on record, surpassed only by 11,783 on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1986.



Although they are counting every day at Rockfish Gap, Joe had very wisely scheduled our visit for the day of the open house. The bird clubs had set up displays, a volunteer observer spoke on raptor identification, and the Wildlife Center of Virginia did a presentation with a live Kestrel and a Red-Shouldered Hawk. There was a tally board, and the volunteers were documenting the numbers of each species of raptor every hour from sunrise to sunset. Within the first hour of arriving, we saw 15 Broad-Winged Hawks. After that the sightings really diminished, but during the remaining 2 ½ hours we saw Turkey Vultures, Rock Dove, Chimney Swifts, a Red-Tailed Hawk, a Red-Shouldered Hawk and many Monarch butterflies.

It is interesting to note, if you go to [rockfishgaphawkwatch.org](http://rockfishgaphawkwatch.org) and check the counts for September 21<sup>st</sup>, that we missed many birds. This was, in part, because we were only there for four hours. Also, I am not a skilled birder and didn't always know just where to look. Although it was a beautiful sunny day, it was also a bit hazy and very hard to spot any birds that were at great heights.

I stood next to one observer who was using just binoculars, but who never took her eyes off the sky. She would call out to other observers where to look, and they would verify and document what she saw. Even with help from people all around me, I found it hard to see all the action. It was a well-organized effort, and the official observers were clearly experienced and excellent birders, committed to this citizen science effort.

By the end of our stay, my arms were very tired from holding up my binoculars, and all three of us were ready to head home. We all agreed it had been a very good day. The opportunity to be outdoors all day long in the company of like-minded people observing this amazing phenomenon made the long drive well worth it.

Anyone interested in raptors should visit both the HMANA and the Rockfish Gap websites to see pictures and to read the data that have been collected. Definitely think about participating next year.

.....Nancy Garvey

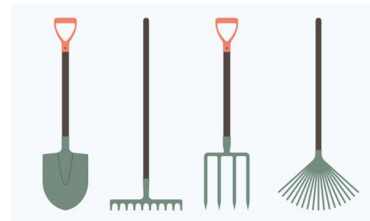
## CALLING ALL DECOYS!!!!

Our chapter will be represented at the Reedville Fisherman's Museum fundraiser, "Tablescapes," on December 10th and 11<sup>th</sup>. Our display will be titled

### "WETLANDS WASSAIL"

To populate our "table" we need to borrow models of those bird species that frequent the marshes (none of "museum quality," please). If you can help us out with this project, one which gives good publicity to Audubon, please contact Letha Harris:

**[waterthrush@verizon.net](mailto:waterthrush@verizon.net) or 804 435 1661**



**Fall  
Clean  
up**

Our Chapter will join with the Virginia Native Plant Society and Virginia Master Naturalists on Saturday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, from 10:00 to Noon for an autumn clean-up at Hickory Hollow Natural Area Preserve (on Regina Road, off Route 3 just south of Lancaster Courthouse).

Snacks and drinks will be provided, but it would be helpful if folks could bring gloves, clippers and rakes. The five miles of trails require some "housekeeping," and this is accomplished on a biennial schedule.

A nature walk will follow the clean-up work, so we hope everyone who participates will come prepared to learn and/or share knowledge. It's a good opportunity to get better acquainted with Hickory Hollow, one of the 63 Natural Area Preserves protected by Virginia because they contain some of the rarest natural communities and unique species habitats in North America.

....Kevin Howe

# 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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