



Northern Neck Audubon News

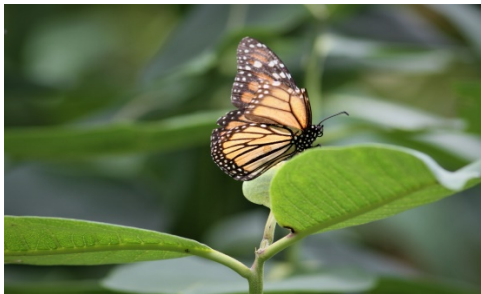
The Northern Neck of Virginia Chapter of the National Audubon Society

P.O. Box 991, Kilmarnock, Virginia 22482

www.northernneckaudubon.org

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Late Summer Scenes.....Paul Servis

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UPCOMING

MEETINGS

Chapter Meetings held Upstairs
Lancaster Community Library
(with the exception of the annual picnic)

Monday, September 10th

5:00 PM Picnic & Bird walk

Shelter #3,

Belle Isle State Park

(Details, Page 5)

Monday, October 1st

3:15 PM Chapter Meeting

Program To Be Announced

BIRD WALKS

(Detailed on Page 5)

September 10th, 20th, & 24th

October 8th & 27th.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

With this president's message, we begin a new season of Audubon in the Northern Neck. I've been 'in charge' for a year now, and it seems I did OK, as I was voted to continue. I must admit, there was no opposition. As I said when I first took this duty on, I've never led an organization of any substance before. I have learned quite a lot this past year, from how to write an agenda to some of the snazzy details of holding land easements. Some of it has been fun and interesting, some of it has been challenging in both positive and negative ways.

This new season brings some major changes to the NNAS board: not only do we have our 'class of '21' consisting of Porter Washington, Joe Cooney and Betsy Washington, we also have a new Vice President – Kevin Howe, a new Treasurer – Sandy Dodge, and a new Secretary – Alice Stieve. I'm excited to have some brand spanking new people who have a lot of energy and ideas.

Kevin Howe, who is also the president of the Northern Neck Native Plant Society, has been motivated enough to step in as our Vice President. He will chair the Property Management committee to assist with inspections of properties we own and hold in easement, and is going to beef up the bluebird nesting box building program.

Sandy Dodge moves from Vice President to Treasurer. He and his wife Edie also manage the membership; and Sandy keeps me straight when I lose my train of thought at our board meetings. So, he's a very busy guy, and good at what he does.

Alice Stieve joins us as our Secretary, replacing Paula Boundy, who is retiring from a long term of loyal service as secretary. Alice brings energy, enthusiasm, attention to detail, and ideas! She's a great "outside-the-box" thinker, and has already come up with some significant suggestions.

Those are just the changes on the Executive Board. Our newest board members will be additional assets. Porter Washington, a retired teacher, has a passion for teaching and is the perfect person to lead our Outreach Committee. She has already begun the process of beginning an "Audubon at Home" program tailored for the Northern Neck, and has spearheaded outreach that will encourage younger children to love and appreciate birds.

Joe Cooney joins us from the west coast, and is an avid birder and photographer. Joe will be replacing Jeff Wright as the chair of the Conservation and



Rappahannock raptors: "Eyes Right!"

Citizen Science Committee, and just might lead a bird walk or 3. He's also knowledgeable about how meetings should be run, so he will join Sandy in keeping me in line when I forget Roberts Rules of Order. He doesn't know this yet. Betsy Washington is also involved in the Northern Neck Native Plant Society, and will be joining Porter administering outreach activities like "Audubon at Home." She brings energy and enthusiasm also. I know that sounds redundant, but it's true.

Now, to get to work! Our true season kickoff is our picnic on Monday, Sept. 10 at Belle Isle State Park. Anyone can join us. Following the 5 pm feasting we will embark on an evening birdwalk. We are working on a boat trip to Smith Island, possibly Tangier Island, and an excursion to the Rockfish Gap Hawkwatch. Member or not, please join us! Check out our website, take our survey (the opening splash page) if you haven't before, and remember....it's about the birds.

FELICITY'S TIPS

Birds of the Air

Have you noticed that you often forget to look up to see what is flying in the sky? I find I have to remind myself consciously to do so.

When I am concentrating on seeing birds in the bushes and trees, carefully placing my feet in order to avoid a fall, I miss seeing some exciting things: Hawks, Great Blue Herons, Crows, Great Egrets, Ospreys, Eagles, airplanes and drones....although the last two usually make enough noise to cause me to look up! Next Time you are out for a bird walk look up. Both the sky and the birds beg for a second look.

Birds flying straight overhead are a *flyover*, while birds flying in loose circles are said to be *kettling*. According to Wikipedia, a kettle is a term that birders use to describe a group of birds wheeling and circling in the air. The origin of the term is unclear. Usually it is used to describe birds of prey, but it is also a behavior characteristic of Sandhill Cranes, Terns and Gulls as they prepare to migrate. Most kettles we see in Virginia are those of Vultures, Hawks and Eagles.

Jason Strickland, one of our finest current Virginia birders, taught me to check each bird in a kettle, particularly if the group appears to consist entirely of Vultures. Sure enough, hawks, and sometimes an immature eagle, will be seen flying with the vultures. It is exciting to see a Red-Tailed Hawk when the sun shines through and illuminates the red tail. Even when no red is visible, this bird is identifiable as the only large hawk with a solid dark tail, all other hawks having banded tails.

Now comes the fun part: How can you recognize the difference between Turkey Vultures and Black Vultures, or, for that matter, from other birds in the sky? Close up it is not too difficult. Black Vultures have a bald, black head and Turkey Vultures have red necks and faces as well as a red proximal half of the heavy beak. At a distance or in flight, these two species may be more difficult to differentiate, as the head colors are hard to distinguish.

The Black Vulture's tail is shorter than the Turkey Vulture's, a "differential diagnosis" that shows up at quite a distance but which requires some experience to denote.

Most of the time, when flying or kettling, a Turkey Vulture will hold its wings in a dihedral. Black Vultures fly with wings flat, but when in a kettle, especially a tight circle, may use the dihedral. Black Vulture wings are wider than those of the Turkey Vulture, a comparison that, again, takes experience to appreciate.

What is most always visible and diagnostic is that the Turkey Vultures has a whitish feather running the entire length of the underwing. As the bird circles there is a point at which this is easy to spot. Black Vultures have whitish feathers only at the tips of their wings. Again, as the bird circles, watch for the point where this is easy to see.

Popular folklore has maligned the Vulture's habit of congregating in trees in a residential area. The birds' silhouettes seem ominous, said to be portentous of a death in the area. I have not found this to be so!

Setting any fears aside, you can identify the bird by the feather colors and then look carefully at the wing width and tail length. If both species are in the same kettle, you will see the difference. Later you can use this skill to identify more easily which species is present, even with no whitish feather visible and with only one species flying.

Black has the thicker or wider wings, not longer, with a shorter tail, while Turkey has the narrower wing and longer tail. Especially easy to see is the Black Vulture's lazy way of flying: flap, flap, glide, flap, flap glide. Be sure and watch while a kettle makes at least three circles.

Turns out that Eagles, Hawks and Ospreys also fly with wings flat, so that configuration alone may not suffice to make an identification. With mature Eagles as they circle, the white head and tail are obvious markers.

Immature Bald Eagles are not so easy. Best clues are the large size and broad wings. Also, whitish feathers may appear in the wings and tail. When you do see these huge birds, pause to experience a moment of beauty and joy as you marvel at the sight of our national bird.

Ospreys have an easily-recognized bend in the wing (at the elbow) and lots of mottled or pure white on the dark gray wings and body. Occasionally this bend is also visible with a vulture; and in that case, you will have to depend on comparative size and visible color to make a correct ID.

As to the Hawks, they are just plain difficult! Perhaps it's best to hold off on those until you are sure of Vultures, Eagles, Ospreys and Crows. Oh yes, I almost forgot the Crows. All black and smaller than Vultures, larger than Red-Winged Blackbirds, they squawk a lot, which is a clue to what is around.

At dusk European Starlings wheel in huge flocks in what is known as a "murmuration." I have never seen this, but I have seen huge numbers of Chimney Swifts circle and swoop down to land where they feed in shrubs on the Eastern Shore. Then off they go, and another big flock takes the feeding station. It is hard to determine how many flocks there are and how many times they feed, or even where they go to eventually roost. Regardless, it will hold you spellbound until dark night closes down the show.

Chimney Swifts are often described as fat cigars with wings, but they are very much larger. The Tree Swallow, a common bird of our fields, has an easily seen white belly. Barn Swallows have rusty breasts and build their mud nests under any roof, porch, barn or dock that offers protection. Best place to see the Larger Purple Martin is near a man-made nesting house. The male has a spectacular black back with a purple sheen. In fact, the best thing about these swallows and martins are their wonderful colors and shapes.

Be sure to turn your binoculars upward, and be patient with yourself. Differentiating one species from another in the sky is not easy. And then there are the flocks, sometimes huge flocks, of Common Grackles and Red-Winged Blackbirds seen in our area. Best sight is that of a flock of Red-Winged Blackbirds wheeling, between you and the sun, so that there is a wonderful flash of red as all the epaulettes catch the rays.

More often Grackles and Blackbirds will be on the ground, allowing for a close-up look. It is always best to have examined a bird at close range before trying to interpret the same species in flight.

Well, having thought that birding was all about enjoying the backyard feeder, it turns out that looking up, down, mid-tree and high-tree are all part of the game, as well as is listening for songs. This last skill is the jewel of birding and the hardest to master.

So, it cannot be said too often that you just have to keep looking up, down and in-between while taking the time to puzzle it all out! But that is one of the joys of birding: a total absorption with, for a brief time, all your stresses behind you.

This article is written in honor of Jeffrey Wright. I have watched him for several years (with considerable astonishment) as he learned and appreciated the beautiful Northern Neck and all that it offers. Without his humor, endless energy, demands and willingness to teach what he knows, I might never have dared lift my fingers to type these tips.

.....Felicity Rask



"Flying Cigars"or "Chimney Swifts"

BIRDING ELSEWHERE

Our family's summer has resembled a voyaging see-saw...fulcrum here at home, and each terminus some 550 miles distant. Late June, with coastal heat already mounting, we drove to Tybee Island outside Savannah for a 50th birthday fete and the plan of seeing lots of Low Country bird life. There was very little reward. Between Savannah and its island dependencies there stretches an enormous marsh, whose verdant blades fade into a velvet shimmer as they extend *ad infinitum*. There, where one would have expected eye-grabbing alabaster indications that egrets were feeding, there was only the green carpet.

On our last drive-by, however, we did discover a large cluster of snowies close by the highway. They normally appear as solitary polka dots across a wetland...but these must have found good foraging in that particular spot. On Tybee's beach, vast and comprised of the sugary sand that laminates to the skin, we also saw a snowy egret running through the wavelets in pursuit of a fish. Close and unusual, this was a slightly different snippet of egret behavior. An enormous cluster of sundry terns and gulls rested on the post-dawn shore, unperturbed that we walked nearby and perhaps, like us, relishing an early and cooler light.

The other half of our summertime see-saw was the annual trip to Narragansett Bay, where the formerly "Northern" bird life seems identical to ours. Carolina Wrens caroled exuberantly, mockingbirds took territorial issue with catbirds (historically very prevalent in this salty, wild-rose environment), a white-breasted nuthatch wheezed, red-bellied woodpecker cackled and more snowy egrets speckled the Rhode Island wetlands than punctuated Georgia's. Down on the rockbound coast, however, experiences were more traditional, with bold herring gulls anxious to snatch an unguarded sandwich, cormorants on the prowl and not yet a pelican to be seen.

.....Letha Harris

SCHEDULED BIRD WALKS

Monday, September 10, Belle Isle State Park, following the picnic, Shelter #3, 5:00-8:00 PM.

Thursday, September 20, Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch. Witness hundreds of hawks migrating daily through Virginia. Carpooling the three hours roundtrip. Leave Kilmarnock 7:00-8:00 AM. www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt/sites/rockfish-gap-hawk-watch.

Monday, September 24, Smith Island. Trip is limited to 20 people. Leave dock 9:00 to 9:30 AM and return between 1:30 and 2:00 PM. Transport cost will be less than \$25.00.

Monday, October 8, Tangier Island. We will use the Tangier Ferry which leaves Reedville at 10:00 AM and returns to Reedville at 4:15 PM. Cost is \$30. We will travel aboard the Chesapeake Breeze. Individuals are responsible for getting their own tickets: Tangier Cruise 804-453-2628. <https://tangiercruise.com>

Saturday, October 27, Laurel Grove Tract of the Rappahannock River Valley NWR. Meet in the Laurel Grove Tract parking lot at 9:00 AM. We will follow the trail around the pond.

Call or Text Joseph Cooney, who is now in charge of the bird walk planning, at:
509-951-3179

NNAS ANNUAL PICNIC SEPTEMBER 10TH

Belle Isle State Park 5:00 to 8:00 PM

Shelter #3

Members and Public Invited Entry Fees Waived

.....Please bring salad, main dish or dessert to share.

.....Chapter will provide picnic ware & beverages.

.....Bird walk to follow, with loaner binoculars available.

.....Specific directions can be found by one of the following means:

Website: www.northernneckaudubon.org

Melissa Gross, President: 301-980-2721

Nancy Garvey: 804-436-8401

BIRD of the MONTH



LOOK!! It's an eagle!!! Oh, drat, it's just a vulture. How many times have you said that? "Just a vulture. I admit it, I have; but let's find out why vultures aren't "just" vultures. They are a seriously important part of the environmental clean-up crew.

First of all, let's identify this big black, wobbly-soaring beast. High in the sky, they have long, two-toned wings with a lighter-shaded trailing edge. In poor light they can appear all black. The wingtips appear "fingered." The tail is typically wedge-shaped and a little longer. They have a black body and a naked red head that is smaller than those of other raptors.

The tell-tale sign of a turkey vulture is its flight: they are "tippy" and seem unstable. This is because the body is light relative to the bird's total size. They hold their wings in a strong dihedral, or a "V" angling up away from their bodies, not flapping very often.



Now that we've figured out we're looking at a turkey vulture, let's also look at why they are so important. They are part of nature's clean-up crew. We see them in the middle of the road on a dead critter or on the shoreline eating a dead fish. Vultures eating dead carcasses helps prevent the spread of disease. Many harmful, disease-causing bacteria can live on carcasses; but vultures have super strong stomach acids that will neutralize bacteria like Anthrax or Botulism. They can eat things that other scavengers cannot.

Vultures prefer fresh kills: they are softer and stinkier. Vultures have an awesome sense of smell, allowing them to find carrion from a mile away.

Here with some other cool (gross) features of vultures:

***To keep cool in hot weather they urinate on their own legs. "Urohydrosis" also serves to kill bacteria and parasites which adhere to the legs as the birds stomp around on dead things.

***Their heads and necks are bare to keep them healthier. No bacteria or parasites from their food can infect the feathers.

***For defense, they vomit. (It's the worst, just ask any wildlife rehabber). It also lightens them for an easier take-off.

***When a large number are soaring together, they are called a "kettle." When a group is feeding, it is called a "wake."

***Hisses, grunts and bill-clacks are about the only noises vultures make, as they have no syrinx.

***Oddly enough, vultures can easily be poisoned by lead. When they eat gut piles left by hunters, they ingest lead shot.

INTERNATIONAL VULTURE AWARENESS DAY

YES, they have their very own commemorative celebration, on the first Saturday of September (which this year will fall on September 1st).

Something we can do to assist our own avian undertakers is to explain, when the occasion arises, the importance of these birds. We can take action as well by dislodging road-kill from the pavement. This needs to be accomplished in a very deliberate manner. It's recommended to carry a "road-kill" kit in your trunk, with heavy gloves, shovel, trash bag and hand sanitizer. If at all possible and safe, we should arm ourselves against microbes and then get the road-kill into the bordering field or onto the verge.

Vultures are a common cause of accidents as they feed in the "dead" center of the road. They themselves are often struck. As yucky as vultures and their menu choices seem to be, they are crucial for the ecology.

.....Melissa Gross

Sources: thespruce.com/fun-facts-about-vultures

Allaboutbirds.org

Crossley, Richard; Liguori, Jerry; Sullivan, Brian
The Crossley ID Guide: Raptors

Richard Crossley, 2018

Handout from "Call of the Wild"

rehab class:

"Keep Calm and Carrion: Vultures in
Rehabilitation and Education"

Sharon Burke and Jackie Kozlowski

BIRD LORE: "VULTURE CULTURE"



Vulture awareness, in the view of the ancient Egyptians, needed no special proclamation. There was reverence, rather than repugnance, for their goddess Nekhbet, whom they set with jewels or limned with timeless pigments in her "vulturous" manifestation.

A sort of "great mother," she it was who, as "provider of all things," was present at the birth of Osiris, to whom she offered life, serenity, stability, LONG life and sovereignty over both the Upper and Lower Kingdoms. Long life was evidently a gift seen as a bonus to just "life."

To the Egyptians, the vulture was a giver of life, whereas for us, it is the consummate taker of life, the very dregs of life at that.

This archetypal creature did, however, turn its face to the end of life as well as its beginning. Some five to six millennia ago Nekhbet's shrine became Egypt's original necropolis, where priestesses garbed themselves in vulture feathers. During one period kings were buried with elaborate headdresses, whereon she stood as a funeral officiant....a little more like the role of several vultures standing on the tarmac.

Nekhbet could spread her wings above the pharaoh (a stretching one occasionally sees a living vulture do), in an iconic shape of eternal protection. Perched atop King Tut's rather familiar gold death mask, the vulture shares space with Lower Egypt's Cobra.

.....Letha Harris

MacKenzie, Donald: Egyptian Myth & Legend, 1978

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	Outreach	Porter Washington	Website: www.northernneckaudubon.org suggestions to: nnas1970@gmail.com Newsletter - five issues annually submit ideas, articles etc. to: waterthrush@verizon.net
Vice President	Kevin Howe	Property Mgt	Kevin Howe	
Past President	Nancy Garvy		Sandy Dodge	
Secretary	Alice Stieve		Melissa Gross	
Treasurer	Sandy Dodge	Programs	Open	
		Field Trips	Harry Colestock	
			Leslie Fellows	
			Melissa Gross	
		Advocacy	Open	
			Membership	Edie & Sandy Dodge
			Newsletter	Letha Harris
			Website	Kyle Langford
			Publicity	Margaret Gerdts
				Leslie Fellows
			Conservation/ Citizen Science	Joe Cooney

Directors

Expires 2019	Expires 2020	Expires 2021
Tom Saunders Katharina Bergdoll Harry Colestock	Les Kilduff Leslie Fellows Kyle Langford	Joe Cooney Porter Washington Betsy Washington