



# 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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Not everyone likes our newsletter.

.....Photo: *Melissa Gross*

## Inside This Issue

President's Message.....Page 2  
Bird Walks.....Page 3  
Bird Lore.....Page 4  
Birding Elsewhere.....Page 5  
Masthead.....Page 6

## UPCOMING

### MEETINGS

Chapter Meeting for October  
Monday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, 3:15 PM  
Lancaster Community Library

Chapter Meeting for November  
Monday, November 4<sup>th</sup>  
Lancaster Community Library  
\*\*\*EVENING MEETING\*\*\*

### BIRD WALKS

(Please contact Joe Cooney  
at (509) 951- 3179)

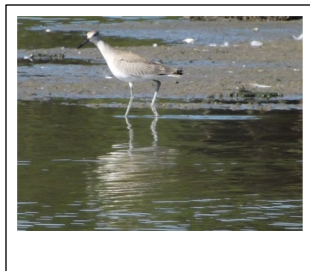
September 21<sup>st</sup>  
September 23<sup>rd</sup>

(for details, see Page 3)

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello, Everyone! I hope you all had a great summer. Welcome to another season of birding with the Northern Neck Audubon Society. We've managed to slog through the tough time of dealing with Hickory Hollow and all it entailed. We lost some members due to the friction it caused, but I think we will come back from those losses; and with the new board members we've gained, we will have a fresh start.

We welcome Ellen Crist as our new Treasurer, Buz Cox as a new Director, and re-welcome some long-time members who have agreed to help out on the Board: Paula Boundy, Maggie Gerdts and Beth Kendrick. Very grateful and heartfelt thanks go out to all of you. We have already had one board meeting, and everyone is excited about the new year. We always kick it off with our annual picnic at Belle Isle State Park, and this we did on September 9<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 p.m. We were met with a beautiful afternoon with a slight breeze, and the evening finished with a "Maxfield Parrish" kind of sunset. Our board meeting was productive and engaging, and tasty food was enjoyed by all. We wished, however, that there could have been more of you there with us, as there were only about 20 attendees. Why not join us for the next bird walk? All free and everyone welcome.



Semi-palmated Plovers and Willet

**....Photos: Melissa Gross**

Joe Cooney has planned some interesting and juicy field trips, including one to Tangier Island, another to Afton Mountain for the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch, along with bird walks to some new tracts of the Rappahannock River Wildlife Refuge; and of course, we'll hit an old standby here and there, like Hughlett Point or Dameron Marsh.

As an organization, we would like to return to our basics: bird walks, programs and local outreach. We understand that these are the things most of you enjoy. We will also be shaking things up a bit. For instance, the November meeting will be scheduled for an evening to allow working folks and students the chance to attend. Such an arrangement might bring in some younger members, or at least get some young folks interested in the magic of birds.

During the last few years, unfortunately, a lot of time and effort have been devoted to property management. In the 1970s and '80s, the organization took on easements and properties for conservation purposes. Because of the oversight demanded by these holdings, we have lately had to neglect our basics. In order to get back to those basics, we will be considering the transfer of easements to another entity. Any such transaction may take a few dollars and a couple of years; but the end result will be a more responsible approach to conservation, as our chapter does not have the manpower to manage these sites in the manner they require.

The last comment I want to make is about membership. (This is not a pity-party story). It is, rather, just a request to please bear with me, as I've been the sole person to take care of membership and treasurer duties throughout the entire past summer. The membership mailing went out, but then our membership chair and treasurer resigned. I was left to pick up mail, not knowing that the box had not been checked for a month. (P.S. I live in Montross, so it's a bit of a haul to get to the Kilmarnock Post Office and the bank).

I tried like crazy to get it all done in a timely manner. I know people get curious when their checks don't clear quickly. Anyway, the memberships are still trickling in; and we are still working to streamline the mail, membership information and treasurer issues. Thanks for your patience.

**....Melissa Gross  
President**

## SUMMERTIME SNIPPETS



Above: Orchard Oriole, just hatching.

Below: White-Eyed Vireo with Big Dinner

*Photos.....Melissa Gross*

**NNAS BIRD WALKS**

September 21<sup>st</sup>, 0700

Leaving White Stone for  
Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch  
in Afton, Va.

September 23<sup>rd</sup>

Tangier Island  
Meet at Tangier Ferry in  
Reedville

Participants are responsible  
for their own ferry tickets.

Joe Cooney  
[jcooney805@gmail.com](mailto:jcooney805@gmail.com)  
or for carpooling:  
509-951-3179

**It is the mission of Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch to collect raptor count data during fall migration in a repetitive and consistent fashion. The site is unique, in that one can literally drive up to the grounds of the Inn at Afton, just east of Waynesboro, and see from the parking lot a 180-degree panoramic view of Rockfish Gap, the Shenandoah Valley to west and the Piedmont to the east. Many of the up to 10,000 hawks/day come close enough for photo opportunities.**

**Peak migration occurs in the final two weeks of September. Normal sightings include 12 common and 2 rare raptor species.**

**This material was taken *verbatim* from the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch website.**

Joe says:

“Bring a chair, binoculars, a jacket, a hat and some lunch.”



## BIRD LORE



On the Northern Neck we are “awash” in waterfowl. If your house is on a creek, there will surely be a Great Blue Heron who shares the shoreline with you, staking out his or her claim with the characteristically hoarse croak. Herons populate every continent except Antarctica (where wading is not an option); and Aesop must have spent a bit of Mediterranean time observing them, because he composed a relevant fable. His heron patrolled its riparian environment in shadow, watching tiny fish but bypassing them in the hope of finding a larger meal. When the sun of that ancient day shifted, all the fish moved into deeper, cooler waters, leaving the heron bereft of any food at all. Aesop, of course, was warning his listeners against passing up a “fish in the beak” while greedily awaiting something better.

A charming little book, *The Hidden Meaning of Birds*, offered up this tidbit, along with the note that the heron bears the folk name “Henshaw.” Accordingly, when Hamlet aimed to prove his sanity by stating that he could “still tell a hawk from a handsaw,” he meant “henshaw,” and that he could tell a hawk from a heron. This assurance, however, unless one is a birder, is certainly no proof of sanity!

We are fortunate to sight an osprey nest from nearly every shoreline as well. Like Aesop, Pliny the Elder, composer of a *Natural History*, infused each bird species with specific character. He wrote that the Osprey forced its young to test their strength by flying as close to the sun as possible. The demanding parent killed any fledgling that failed.

Medieval European folklore found the Osprey to be masterful as well. The belief was that fish would roll over to expose their underbellies and render themselves easy for the hunter to retrieve. It was assumed that the Osprey came equipped with two sets of feet: one fitted with talons for the fish and a second pair webbed for swimming. Since the Osprey cannot swim at all, the source of this myth is surely not direct observation.

Such fantasies are less disturbing than those of Bolivian anglers, who stuck osprey bones beneath their skin in an effort to mimic the birds’ efficient fishing techniques.

Our pesky Double-Crested Cormorants, ornaments of the Rappahannock River Bridge, voracious fishermen and thus the bane of pescaculture, did not go unnoticed in classical times. Inky feathers prompted the Latinate etymology “raven of the sea.” These dark fliers did not go, either, unnoticed by the Norsemen, ever prone to the mystical interpretation of nature. The spirits of Vikings lost at sea were thought to return in cormorant form to visit their loved ones. To see three of the birds in flight formation was in itself a message from the dead.

This bird’s habit of posing with widespread wings, a position advantageous to drying the feathers, brought its image into use in heraldry. That silhouette, sometimes reminiscent of The Crucifixion, lent it attributions of nobility and sacrifice.

....Letha Harris



Arms of Liverpool Hope University

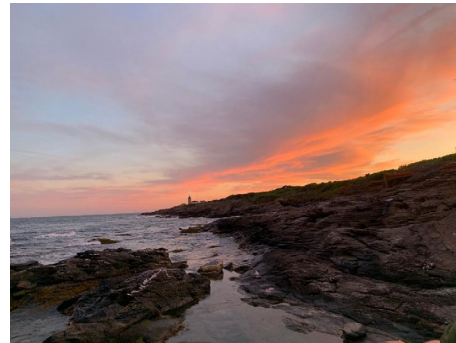
## BIRDING ELSEWHERE

All over New England there are ponds, erratic boulders, meandering eskers and random collections of glacial till.... traces of ice talons that clawed and altered our northern geology. Gouged out deeply was Narragansett Bay, in the center of which lies Conanicut Island. This remnant of crustal rock wears sedimented clays now pressed into numberless sheets of shale. Comprised of upland meadows, craggy promontories and soft marshes, this tear drop of Rhode Island offers a multitude of birding sites.

Where wild rose and blackberry crown the rough shores, Catbirds abound. The thorny tangles, as forbidding as Sleeping Beauty's hedge, keep their nests safe and their stomachs full of viney fruit. Forbidding to humans as well are the low fringes of deadly nightshade. Just off the shore, gulls and Double-Crested Cormorants fish the surf; and where a narrow verge separates rock and thorn, thistle draws in Goldfinches, and cattails attract Red-Winged Blackbirds.

Humps of shale and granite there are, some of them staggeringly old (pre-Cambrian), but these are split almost entirely by a mid-island marsh, along whose margin the local wildlife groups have established a bird sanctuary. Here you can step quickly away from the New York to Cape Cod autobahn into what seems like a primeval forest. Massive maples darken the path, fingering it with treacherous roots, sudden stillness, deep shade.

Somehow these great trees survived "The '38 Hurricane" of whose devastation islanders speak today. Perhaps because they hunkered down under a hillside along the wetlands, the ancient maples remained. When you break from the forest path into the brilliant light over the marsh, the still sharper white of Great Egrets strikes the eye. As the Globe warms, these southerners have moved into New England.



Rhode Island shales...Cormorant habitat

.....*Photo: Caroline Kelley*

There's as osprey nest as well, sky-scraper over the mud flats and populated with the expected and raucous offspring.

When we rested at the viewing platform, we could see several dusky and rather fuzzy waders, the size of egrets with silhouettes reminiscent of bitterns. We could not pin down the species. Were they Sandhill Cranes, the immature morphs of other egrets?

They were too remote and too backlit to identify. As we struggled with the birders' customary frustrations of distance, murky field glasses and moving targets, we were regaled with the caroling of another southerner who has flown north: the Carolina Wren.

Conanicut Island, once a royal residence of Narragansett chieftains and later the barren pastureland where Newport's colonists grazed their sheep, is now lush with green in all stories, from rock mosses, through wavy wetlands up to huge deciduous canopies. This island has grown up through time's dimension as well, from the crusty crystals, half a billion years old, through the siltstone of archaic seas and up to the organic soil laid down by recent agriculture.

Thus has it become a safe and varied harbor for winged things.

....*Letha Harris*

# 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



Northern Neck Audubon Society Resources					
Officers		Committee Chairs			Media
President	Melissa Gross	Outreach	Porter Washington	Membership	Website: <a href="http://www.northernneckaudubon.org">www.northernneckaudubon.org</a> suggestions to: <a href="mailto:nnas1970@gmail.com">nnas1970@gmail.com</a>  Newsletter - five issues annually submit ideas, articles etc. to: <a href="mailto:waterthrush@verizon.net">waterthrush@verizon.net</a>
Vice President	Kevin Howe	Property Mgt	Kevin Howe	Newsletter	
Past President	Nancy Garvy			Website	
Secretary	Paula Boundy	Programs	Betsy Washington & Kevin Howe	Publicity	
Treasurer	Ellen Crist	Field Trips	Joe Cooney	Conservation/ Citizen Science	
		Advocacy	Open	Joe Cooney	

Directors		
Expires 2020	Expires 2021	Expires 2022
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