



# 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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Tundra Swans at Belle Isle  
.....Photo: Paul Servis

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## UPCOMING

### MEETINGS

Chapter Meetings held Upstairs  
Lancaster Community Library

Monday, November 5th

3:15 PM Program:

Brian Watts

Tracking the Whimbrel

Monday, December 3rd

3:15 PM

Christmas Party

### BIRD WALKS

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

Saturday, October 27<sup>th</sup>

Wilna Unit

Monday, November 12<sup>th</sup>

Kendale Farm

Essex County

Saturday, November 24<sup>th</sup>

Hughlett Point NAP

Monday, December 10<sup>th</sup>

George Washington Birthplace

Tuesday, December 18th

Christmas Bird Count

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I would like to say "Thank You" to the people who have been able to come along on the recent bird walks and outings. It has been encouraging seeing new faces, meeting new people and continuing friendships with those already known. We've been to Tangier Island, Belle Isle State Park, and Rockfish Gap Hawkwatch. The trip to Smith Island had to be cancelled due to a small craft warning, but the roster had been full!

In addition to those trips, we had a sort of spontaneous work event at Hickory Hollow a couple of weeks ago. The main purpose was to clean up a bunch of old broken glass that had been erupting from the trail about 100 meters from the trail head. I had noticed this glass before, but didn't pay much mind. I wear sturdy shoes; but there is a website (can't remember which one) that posts public comments about trails. Somehow I found a comment that mentioned that glass, and how a hiker who had dogs was reticent to bring them, because she didn't want their paws cut up. I had never thought about that. People who want to hike with their pups will not want to go where paws will be sliced and diced. Fall is coming, and we all know that people love to walk in the woods and admire the changing leaves.

That was an important and easy fix. Since we own that property and are responsible for it, it seemed appropriate to go clean up that glass ASAP. About 10 of us showed up with rakes, shovels and plastic containers. It turned out that what we mostly needed were small hand tools to dig out the partially buried glass. Some of it was pane glass, thin and sharp, some had corners poking straight out of the ground, some was old stoneware; but most of it was broken bottles.

I found a small radio tube, Brent found the claw to a tub and an intact old bottle, Joe found a bracket for a shelf. There was also evidence of burned trash.

I had often wondered why that glass was there; and someone mentioned having heard that the area was used as a dump. Finding all that junk supports the "dump" theory.

At one point the area was slated to become an industrial park, until Henry Bashore, Ann Messick and Tom Teeples worked to save it.

I can imagine that, as time goes by, more glass fragments and other miscellaneous trash will make themselves known.

As I mentioned, NNAS is responsible for the upkeep of Hickory Hollow. We should take pride in the knowledge that it was our organization that worked so hard to save the 250 acres. However, these preserved acres and trails do not take care of themselves. That stewardship is up to us.

We are trying to start a regular trail monitoring program for the natural area, with the hope that each individual trail will be adopted by someone. Each of these trails is labelled with a color, and we invite you to choose one that you would be willing to monitor. Making such a commitment does not mean that you, alone, are responsible for upkeep. You can do light trail maintenance, or you can notify a board member about specific issues. If you are interested in taking such trail care, please contact:

....me ([melissagross@outlook.com](mailto:melissagross@outlook.com))

.... or Nancy Garvey ([nangarvey@hotmail.com](mailto:nangarvey@hotmail.com))

In the meantime, when you are out walking the Hickory Hollow trails, it's always a good thing to take along a bag for trash, along with gloves to protect yourself. A small bucket might even be useful if and when the glass problem reemerges. You could probably leave the bucket by the side of the trail, and no one would bother it. Pick it up on your way out and BOOM! You've done some trail maintenance.

Again, thanks to all who have been hanging with the bird-nerds lately. It has been fun!

....Melissa Gross  
President

## WHY DO WE BIRD?

I was intrigued in late July to read a post in the VA-bird list from David Gibson, asking for input on why people bird watch. So, instead of writing about the joy of birdfeeders, I decided to share some of what I wrote to him.

I, too, have wondered about why some of us enjoy bird watching. For myself, the answers I have come up with are rather simple. When I know what something is “called,” I am more likely to remember it and recognize it from something that is different.

In my retirement years, my increased interest has a lot to do with eBird’s making it so easy. Although I have been watching birds for about 70 years, my records are incomplete. If, in my childhood and working years, eBird had been around, when I lived in South America, Europe and the USA, my life list might have been impressive. As it is, I sometimes wrote a daily record on a piece of paper that promptly got lost. It didn’t include numbers, because I didn’t understand the importance of that data. I’m not much good at keeping records! But, an easily entered and accessed life list is satisfying and helps to keep one interested.

My first e Bird entry was in 2009. My count is currently at 312 but includes only Virginia, Florida and a non-birding trip to Costa Rica.

I tend to be lazy about getting out on my own (in spite of the rewards) and like to go with a friend or a birding group. This helps lessen my awareness of extreme cold, heat, or any annoying aches and pains.

Today I find that any time spent birding allows me to focus exclusively on the search for birds and to forget anything else that might be on my mind. I do enjoy the leading of local bird groups, even though this function somewhat distracts from my concentration.

In Florida in the winter, my husband and I have a weekly birding date. He likes the shorebirds, and I prefer the tweety birds. Am happy to say that he is gradually becoming more interested in the LBJs (little brown jobs), and I am getting better at the shorebirds.

There is no doubt that being able to quickly identify most birds is very satisfying and keeps one interested. My early years of attempting this identification were frustrating. Often I just gave up rather than face the disappointment of not knowing the names of so many of the birds I was seeing. So, another question comes to mind: How does one go from the frustration of recognizing very few birds to the point where most birds are recognized? In other words, how does one move beyond the early struggle?

I think for me, having someone there to tell me just what I am looking at has always been the best way. Happily, now that I have finally learnt what identifiers to look for and have made sure to jot down a quick description of the “mystery” bird, I can usually figure it all out on my own, once I am back home, with bird books spread all around. As I realized that I was slowly sorting out the different species, the struggle transformed into a exciting challenge.



Not too hard to identify!

Pileated Woodpecker

Photo: Paul Servis

I have no interest in chasing around the country after rare birds, or in adding to my life list---well, perhaps yes to the life list! I just want to name what is in my local habitats.

I have entered some birds in the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas but find that identifying nesting behaviors is difficult. Reading the articles about how to watch for nesting birds has increased my appreciation of this behavior.

Learning to identify birds by ear is hard, but very useful. I do enjoy working on that, as well as watching birds at my backyard feeders; and our yearly dock-nesting ospreys are a source of wonder.

I am secretly pleased to be recognized locally as a bird resource. I do enjoy the people I meet through the birding community.

But, why birds, instead of boats or cards, or even mathematics? I cannot answer that. In spite of offering bribes, I have not succeeded in getting any of my five grandchildren interested in birds!

....Felicity Rask

*This article is written in honor of my 58-year-old nephew, Charles Swift, who has been birding since he was 10 years old. He is both a treasured mentor and an occasional birding companion. He lives in Idaho but quickly recognized Brent and Becky's VA as a great birding location, and he helped get it identified as a Hot Spot.*

## NOT TO BE MISSED



At the November 5<sup>th</sup> chapter meeting, Dr. Brian Watts will present: "Tracking the Whimbrel: Moving toward full life-cycle conservation in a migratory shorebird." He will concentrate on the whimbrel satellite tracking and conservation efforts of the Center for Conservation Biology over the past decade. In addition, he will comment on recent research concerning bald eagles, peregrine falcons and osprey.

Dr. Watts is Mitchell A. Byrd Professor of Conservation Biology at The College of William and Mary/VCU Center for Conservation Biology. The author of more than 250 publications on avian ecology and conservation, Watts has studied birds since early childhood. He has conducted more than 500 research projects focused on solving conservation problems, primarily within the mid-Atlantic region of North America.

His research attempts to explore general ecological principles that have broad applications. Current interests include population estimation, habitat modelling, policy, migration ecology, ecological-economic tradeoffs, demography, spatial ecology and conservation limits.

.....Nancy Garvey



## OCTOBER'S PROGRAM

The frost was most certainly not on the pumpkin, nor the burnish on the leaves; but the red frost was on the ribbons and the craft stores were alight, so it may not have been too early to contemplate the Christmas Bird Count at the October 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter meeting.

Thanks to member Kevin Howe, we heard a comprehensive overview of this, the oldest continuously active citizen science effort in the U.S. (There had been the Bird Phenology Program established in 1846, but interruptions in service have left the Christmas Bird Count as the senior, by virtue of continuity).

This annual procedure to take a census of our bird biota began, under National Audubon sponsorship, in 1900. The framework was set to comprise all species counted from midnight to midnight on a day chosen between December 14<sup>th</sup> and January 5<sup>th</sup>, with boundaries laid as a 15-mile-diameter circle. Filtering out of the mass of data so collected have been long-term winter trends: composition, distribution and abundance.

Tracking the roots of the Christmas Bird Count led Kevin Howe to the roots of Audubon itself, when George Grinnell first set about to protect birds in 1886. The editor of *Forest and Stream* magazine, he founded the society under the name of his New York neighbor, John James Audubon. This somewhat solo effort faded in 1889, but several years later, two Bostonian socialites dipped down to pick up the Audubon thread. Harriett Hemenway and Mina Hall formed Massachusetts Audubon which spread on to fifteen more states.

The counting at Christmastime stems from a separate, less salubrious 1880's tradition of holiday side-hunts, wherein participants shot birds with an aim to competitive numbers. Frank Chapman, an ornithologist from the American Museum of Natural History and publisher of a periodical called *Bird Lore*, initiated a new approach to this seasonal count: one of naming and monitoring, rather than killing. As *Bird Lore* evolved into the new iteration of National Audubon, the winter count of 1900 (29 participants) began its evolution into today's enormous tabulation (58,882 participants in 2016-2017).

This last census posted some toppers: most participants came out of Edmonton, Alberta, and most species (229) out of Matagorda, Texas. Our own Northern Neck Christmas Count originated in 2016. As "the Eastern End" of the Northern Neck, we are comprised of eight sections, each with a dedicated leader, and all reporting at the end of the day to one compiler. Abundance and scarcity have been remarked, from the plenitude of Canada Geese to the solitude of Winter Wren, Clapper Rail, American Pipit.

The fallout of this citizen science is that we are losing birds in great numbers: one billion by count over the continental United States since 1970 (a 9% drop in the total). Specifically decimated are the Snowy Owl, the Chimney Swift, the Bobolink, Sprague's Pipit and the Oak Titmouse.

As these uncomfortable, really painful numbers plummet, the importance of citizen science like the Christmas Bird Count rises in counterpoint. The finger of blame has been pointed squarely at habitat loss and climate change, and there will be other and subtler causes at work. With the 1970 quota of eleven billion birds now standing at ten, it is crucial to stop and even reverse known trends while finding causes not yet understood.

To reprise your part in last year's event, or to join for the first time, please contact:

Jeffrey Wright: [pec11908@mac.com](mailto:pec11908@mac.com)

**CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT  
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18TH**

For organizing purposes, Jeff requests that participants register as soon as possible, with the absolute deadline being December 5<sup>th</sup>.

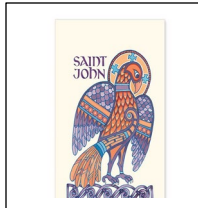
## BIRD LORE



Double-Headed Eagles, L to R:  
The first known (Hittite),  
The Standard of The Holy  
Roman Empire



Native Petroglyph Eagle



Medieval Religious



Great Seal of the United States



The  
Senate  
and the  
People  
of  
Rome



Sporty Eagle



U S Military Eagles



Photos from Chincoteague:  
Tri-Colored Heron, above  
Glossy Ibis, below

.....Melissa Gross

## BIRD OF THE MONTH

### Bald Eagle (Immature...First Year)



Photo: Cornell "All About Birds"

Now that the ospreys have pretty much flown south, our large birds for the current season are the bald eagles, the vultures, and the ones we can't confuse with those, like red-tailed hawks or northern harriers. Around where I live, there are already more bald eagles making themselves seen, appearing with full adult plumage in comparison to the babies in their mostly brown. The more I watch the youngsters, the more comfortable I am in picking them out amongst a large kettle of "big, black birds" soaring up high. It takes practice, patience, and the making of mistakes. Now, again, I am not the expert. I use multiple resources to help me out, from the Cornell University's [All About Birds](#) website to the [Crossley ID Guide to Raptors](#), (my fave).

Last month I wrote a few words about identifying turkey vultures and why they're important and, well, cool. That was an attempt to lessen disappointment when we finally figure out that what we saw was NOT the bald eagle we had thought it was.

This month I offer some words about immature/juvenile bald eagles. They can be tricky when they are soaring and circling with other big, dark birds high above our heads. The white heads and tails of older birds, those markers which make them easy to spot, are absent from the juveniles, rendering that group harder to pick out. So many times we see them at an odd angle, or in poor light conditions, that make it hard to be sure what we are seeing.

The more reliable keys to ID-ing the young eagles are shape and flight style or pattern. All eagles fly steadily, not "tippily," like turkey vultures. If you ever think to look for it, you will note that bald eagles have stiff, powerful wingbeats ending on a downstroke. When they soar in wide circles, their wings appear straight and "planklike," as in the picture to the left. When you see them head-on, their wings are flat, not in a dihedral like those of the turkey vulture.

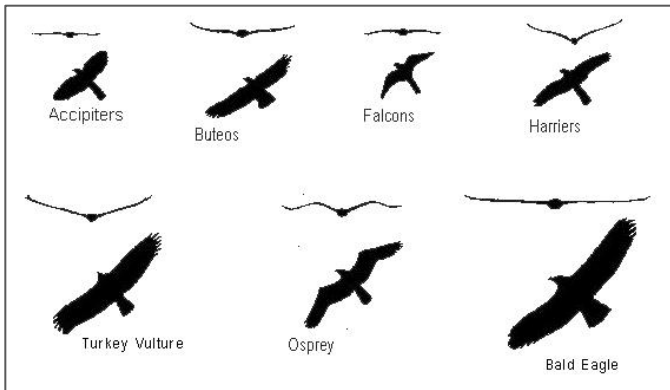
Next up: shape. Bald Eagle has long wings which are fairly broad, but with juveniles' wings being a little broader still than those of the adults. This is due to the greater length of primary and secondary flight feathers. As they molt, the newer feathers are shorter, making the adults' wings a little bit narrower. As with the adult bald eagle, the juvenile will have a head that is larger and more protuberant than that of other "big, black, soaring birds."

This doesn't sound like a lot of information, but it does provide a few crucial tips and a couple of keys used to ID most birds. Of these keys, shape and pattern of flight are unique to Bald Eagle when it is seen in a kettle of circling raptors.

.....Melissa Gross



## RAPTOR SILHOUETTES



.....Diagram courtesy of [journeynorth.com](http://journeynorth.com)  
and Melissa Gross

### Seven chapter members and what they found!

On September 27<sup>th</sup>, seven NNAS members met at Hickory Hollow to clear glass from the white trail. In addition to a lot of broken glass, several large pieces of metal were also removed.

Pictured below, from left to right: Joe Cooney, Nancy Garvey, Glenn Marine, Judy Marine, Porter Washington, Melissa Gross and new member, Brent Marshall.

Photo: Nancy Garvey



## BIRDING ELSEWHERE

A 60<sup>th</sup> high school reunion brought my husband, Dave, and me to the spectacular Coulee Region of western Wisconsin in mid-September. The search for Fall air was abortive: temperatures remained in the 80's. Leaves remained as green as the corn was high; but, the scenery did not disappoint.

In its upper reaches, the Mississippi fattens out to resemble a long lake, rather than a river, with spectacular cliffs to mark its flood wall, islands of varying habitat, and an absence of any dense population or industry. The long view north recalls that which must have greeted European exploratory eyes.

We had hoped to drive into the inland marsh preserve of Trempeleau, but tremendous late summer floods had closed it to traffic; and so we settled upon the visitor center of the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, which proved serendipitous. This is a beautiful museum, where a heavy glass floor allows one to walk on the water, so to speak, to see the rich under-river life, the great bass and the storied Walleye with the otter cavorting between.

Film and lecture described the impressive stats for the refuge, its 261-mile length and its nearly century-deep age. Because the central stream functions as a trunk line for the nation's grain supply, it must be kept widely navigable by federal edict; but of balancing force are the laws that provide three types of habitat for nature: the open water zone, the braided stream zone and the backwater marsh zone. When crucial island habitat is destroyed by current or by the dam and lock system, these land masses are being recreated by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Thus the flyway that welcomes 50% of our Canvasbacks, 20 % of our Tundra Swan, and hosts 200 nests of Bald Eagles (in 1969 there was only one such nest) remains flexible and free.

....and what did we see? One pelican and a seagull raft of indeterminate speciation.

.....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 \_\_\_\_\_



### Northern Neck Audubon Society Resources

Officers		Committee Chairs		Media
President	Melissa Gross	Outreach	Porter Washington	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>
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			Publicity	Margaret Gerdts
				Leslie Fellows
			Conservation/ Citizen Science	Joe Cooney

### Directors

Expires 2019	Expires 2020	Expires 2021
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