



Northern Neck Audubon News

The Northern Neck of Virginia Chapter of the National Audubon Society

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American
Robin
&
Hollyberry Feast

Photo:
....Patty MacCargar

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UPCOMING

**Schedules
for
forthcoming meetings
and
presentations
are not
yet finalized.**

**Watch the Website
for Updates !**



"TREES OF LIFE"

In my view there has never been a better, clearer nor more cogent program presented to our chapter than the Zoom session of April 5th. It was in that evening hour that Dr. Joan Maloof told us "all about forests"...a title which could read as: "a good bit, if not ALL, about birds." Joan has stepped beyond the circle of her considerable education in biology to set up, singlehandedly, an old-growth forest network. I had had only a cloudy sense of the term "old growth," the image of a virgin woodland, one ancient enough to house elves, chanting Druids, or perhaps Rumpelstiltskin. Not so. The "Old Growth" category may be broached, if not completed, in definitive steps, as Joan explained.

There first occurs a "disturbance," a cleaning of the vegetation which creates the *tabula rasa* from which all new growth may arise. Natural destruction from storm, insect infestation or fire provides this fresh ground. We, as constant reworkers of our environments, do the same via logging, opening for development or clearing for agriculture. Natural disasters create patchy openings; ours, however, make enormous swathes of lost habitat and do so with no constraints as to the amount of acreage destroyed. In the East, only 1% of Old Growth remains, the West faring better with some 5%...but 95% of its old redwoods have vanished. With either source of disturbance, a particular sequence of regrowth follows, depending on the location. Here it tends to be:

0-2 Years.....Horsewood & Asters.

2-18 Years....Grasses.

18-20 Years...Pines & Young Hardwoods.

70-100Years..Oak and Hickory and the start of the mature mixed forest..."Old Growth."

This last is just a start..."Old Growth" needs to compound the value of its maturing trees with additional decades, centuries.

Within these chronological designations there are botanical processes: periods called "stem exclusion," the creation of a green desert below the new umbrella of leaf, subsequent appearance of

spontaneous lacunae in that canopy, where fallen giants make room for a clean slate known as "early succession habitat." This last is a key catchphrase often employed by commercial woodland exploiters. Under the aegis of creating this habitat, they barge ahead with clear-cutting of what little "old growth" has regenerated. It is distressing to hear that the very government agencies vested with protecting our forests are those in the vanguard of razing them for the most spurious of reasons.

Massive clearing of older growth destroys far more species than it saves. On a global scale, this practice has reduced forest cover from 46% to 35%. In Virginia, the tabulated history is:

1700s: 80-90% forested

1800s 60-40% forested

1930...Lowest cover ever.

1930-1980....Cover increases.

1980-present..... 62% and declining.

Although the numbers are better than those of 100 years ago, they are again declining. Most improvement is young growth, contrary to biodiversity and a deficit that brings us to the intersection of trees and birds.

Different species flourish in different habitats. Old trunks pocked with holes provide for tree-nesters, parasols of green shelter tanagers from predation (the brown-headed cowbird, e.g.), the extensive bark "acreage" of stout trees yields insects for brown creepers, the shaded understory fruits up for the cedar waxwings, gnarled roots house the infant ovenbirds. As the old tree goes, so goes that welcome mat to biodiversity. Among species she cited, Joan said that only shorebird numbers are increasing. This result may derive from climate changes (rising water levels) as well as from strict wetland protections.

Under the guise of promoting similar protection, there is "The Young Forest Initiative." This is where Joan feels the terminology is misleading.

The alleged rationale for this initiative is the clearing of woods to provide for “early successional habitats.” However, why choose to cut down principally older growth? Plenty of less valuable acreage is available (swathes of open ground flanking high tension power lines or grassy voids surrounding schools, for example). The only logical reason to cut the old hardwoods, rather than to exploit already open lands, is that the older trees can garner a profit. As Joan said, if the money is needed, say so; but do not shelter profiteering under the “canopy” of good works.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife also bows to hunting interests, hoping to provide upticks in populations of birds like woodcock or ruffed grouse; but as Joan noted, a single hunter is allowed to take 108 woodcock in a single season. (Although it is very unlikely he would, or could, find that many). A cheap way to improve woodcock numbers would be to eliminate woodcock hunting altogether.

This public posture may be misdirection. Other positions are just dishonest. The official line that “trees grow more slowly as they age” is a lie. The idea that old trees just die and become fuel is the exact opposite of the case, wherein scrub and underbrush provide the *real* food for forest fires. “Old trees are more susceptible to insect infestation”! This is again a falsehood. In fact, the slower a tree grows, the more resistant it becomes to any destructive invasion.

Joan is leading the charge against all this dissembling by government agencies. She plans for one forest in every U.S. county to fall beneath the protection of her Old-Growth Forest Network. Such a wood will never be cut and will always be open to the public. As things now stand, only eight states ensure that the forests in their State Parks be protected from logging. She is on her way to making that 50.

If you want to join that “charge,” please contact Joan Maloof: joan@oldgrowthforest.org.

Joan Maloof is Professor Emeritus of Biology and Environmental Studies at Maryland’s Salisbury State University. Among her publications are: Teaching the Trees and Nature’s Temples.

...Letha Harris

GLOBAL BIG DAY

The May 8th reprise of Cornell Lab’s Global Big Day marks an intersection of timely motives. Coronavirus constraints optimize outdoor activities, spurring us find outlets for isolation and incarceration. More and more awareness of species in peril and of our need to help them adds birders season by season. May weather stirs the spiri. Quoth Guinevere...“the lovely month when everyone goes blissfully astray”..well, perhaps only everyone’s tennis shoes.

And so Cornell calls us to be out upon the land and water, to submit observations using the free eBird Mobile app

<https://ebird.org/about/ebird-mobile/>

Last year’s Bigd Day was, in Cornell’s words, “staggering.” To cite the Lab’s exact 2020 statistics:

Participants: 50,000
Countries: 175
Checklists: 120,000

These were record-breaking numbers for a single day of birding. Such citizen science informs animated maps of avian populations. It is obvious that as the volume of data of any study increases, the picture drawn grows ever more accurate. Where there are limited resources (and this is always so) to assist bird populations, these can be more effective if applied where most needed. The maps give biologists *target tools*.

The official count period runs from midnight to midnight on the 8th, with the hour set for your specific time zone. One can imagine a wave of watchers circling the Earth like the shadow of an eclipse, or the splendor of New Year ‘s Eve fireworks.

The sightings will flood into the Global Big Day page: <https://ebird.org/globalbigday>

NNAS will be sending its share.

BIRDING BY EAR

Have you ever been out birding, where you can hear several birds but cannot identify one? Yes, some of them sound awfully familiar. You spend time looking for the culprits and cannot find them in the trees. Maybe there are a few you can identify; but if you are like me, most of them go unidentified if you can't see them.

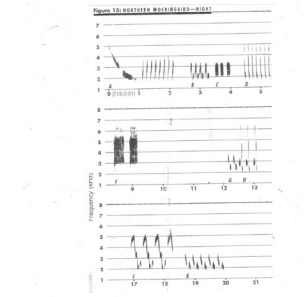
Sometimes you get lucky, and you are birding with an individual who can help you out with most of the bird calls in your area. After all, there is more to birds than just pretty feathers. I recently met a guy, while I was out in the vastness of the Nebraska Panhandle, who could bird by ear better than most of us could manage visually.

How does one acquire those skills? When I was talking to him, I was reminded of a similar individual with whom I'd crossed paths down in Florida. These two guys stand out to me; not only because they have an ear for birds, but also because they have honed their bird identification skills to a level I cannot imagine.

I can listen to a bird in a tree that sounds like a dog toy being chewed and identify it as a Nuthatch. Not any specific species of Nuthatch, but at least I am in the ballpark. The gentleman in Nebraska was describing the differences in sounds among White-Breasted Nuthatch, the Interior West, and the Eastern sub-species. All the while I was having trouble identifying the hawk that we could see sitting on the power pole a few hundred feet away. He looked at me, looking at the , and stated, "Juvenile Ferruginous Hawk." I was glad not to have offered my opinion that it was a Red-Tailed Hawk.

These two men have taken birding to a level I am sure I can learn, with time and patience. A few years ago I decided to set a goal of being able to identify fifty birds by ear. Living in Virginia, I also thought it would be beneficial to learn local bird calls that I hear frequently.

So, how does one start out on a quest to learn bird calls?



SEE what the ear HEARS: A sonogram of the Northern Mockingbird, vertical axis showing cycles/second and horizontal showing time in seconds elapsed.

.....Donald Kroodsmma
The Singing Life of Birds

I started out by making a short list of birds I encountered in Lancaster, Virginia, those birds that I could already identify by their call. There is, of course, the Bald Eagle, a majestic bird of prey with a not-so-majestic voice. I am confident in identifying the Bald Eagle (unless it is the Northern Mockingbird that hangs out by my house. He can fool me several times in a span of thirty minutes). My list contained almost twenty species. I am about halfway to my goal of fifty birds.

As I have progressed in being able to identify birds by their calls, I have added a few species not on the original list. These days I challenge myself to learn new birds by their calls, or new calls for birds I thought I already knew. I have acquired a few CDs of Eastern bird calls. I play them in my car from time to time, and that practice helps me focus on the bird calls. I also play sounds from Merlin, the bird ID app from Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

I may never be quite as good as the two gentlemen I met in Nebraska and Florida; but when I hear, "See me, over here, how 'bout now, see me now," I look up and think: "That is a Red-Eyed Vireo," and smile.

...Joe Cooney

BIRD BOOKS

Vesper Flights ... by Helen MacDonald

This is a book which, like H is for Hawk, is quite a personal narrative by an author who has a deep love for Birds and the Natural World. Vesper Flights, though, has many anecdotes which range from the very touching to the very funny. I read it with great enjoyment and had wished it were longer.

One among the touching stories told by author Helen MacDonald was one which occurred in her youth, at college. She'd been despondent and heartbroken shortly after the end of a romantic relationship and was sitting on stone steps above the river, crying into her hands. She looked down the hill to the river and saw a Swan near the bank. It left the water and came slowly walking uphill toward Helen. Mute Swans can be fiercely protective of territory, and it was not without some fear of attack (which can be dangerous) by this large bird that Helen sat, not daring to move, as it came ever closer.

Eventually, it came and settled on the step next to Helen and just crouched peacefully there for quite some time, during which Helen relaxed and felt a sympathetic presence in the Swan...who, after a considerable time, slowly got up, walking back down to enter the River once again. Helen tells how it was such a comfort to feel that Swan's presence and to know that she was not, after all, totally alone.

There are many stories in this wonderful book, but none so memorable for me as that above. The author travels the world to study Birds, having many adventures in sometimes harsh environments. I most highly recommend this addition to your reading list.

....Katharina Bergdoll

WOODPECKER WORDS

Poetic Observations on a Northern Neck Downy Woodpecker.

The she downy woodpecker visits the stations.
They're abundant with seeds, suet and rations.
For nearly two years on my deck she has flown,
Though when I first saw her, she wasn't alone.
His black and white markings cried out with
contrast....

The red on his head, flagrant flag at full mast.
When he was alive, the two were never apart,
Flying together to feeders, then back to the bark.

Could I sense joy in the wealth of their antics?
Did I imagine significance in their paired
acrobatics?

Then early one spring day she flew here without
him.

Was this an ominous sign, or just a feminine whim?

So each day thereafter I looked for the he,
But each day thereafter I saw only the she.
Her motion seemed to lack the vigor of previous
times,

Flying alone to the feeders, alone back to the pines.

I would then wonder just what had been his fate.
What took the male downy away from his mate?
Was it a cat, an owl, or maybe the cold of the year?
What snatched him away, never again to appear?

With time passed the she downy has not found
another.

I guess there's no replacement for her original lover.

.....by Linda Hamilton

BIRDS HERE AND THERE

HERE

What a short time ago it was when there were scenes like these, of hungry, winter-chilled Brown Thrasher and Cardinal at feeders in Urbanna.



*Photos.....
Maggie
Gerdt*

THERE

On the right, a Carolina Wren and below, an Eastern Bluebird, in the higher, drier Piedmont countryside, as springtime succeeds wintertime in Charlottesville.



*Special Thanks
for photos
from....*

*Jim Greene
Charlottesville*



BIRD LORE

A FEW MORE "COLLECTIVES"

We may be familiar with a MURDER of crows, a MURMURATION of starLings or an UNKINDNESS of Ravens..... but a QUARRELSOME of Sparrows? Therein is an apt description. Sparrows of many sorts (English ones, for certain) are prone to cluster and chatter with a vigor that can be interpreted as quarrelsome.

The OSTENTATION of Peacocks is even more apt, but a DESCENT of woodpeckers might better be laid upon the Nuthatches as they trundle down tree trunks.

When these words were coined, the melancholy nature of the dove's coo must have inspired a "PITYING." Melancholy indeed are those gentle tones and perhaps deserving of some sympathy when the doves suffer at the hands of human and avian predation. PITYING, however, seems a condescension; we should, perhaps, simply honor these birds for their gentle ways, their pair-bonding, their gorgeous twilight colors.

Not so charming...the twenty-three species of vulture, called a KETTLE when circling in the air, but a WAKE when circling a meal upon the ground. Might they be construed, then, to fan in the wake of odors that have drawn them there in the first place?

Solitary as they normally are, how did the owls of the world gather as a PARLIAMENT, by its nature a term of plurality? Owls do, however, form duets, as does the Tawny, where male and female "kewick" and "toohoo" in different syllables, and as with the Fish Owls' and Saw-Whets' gender-specific chatter.

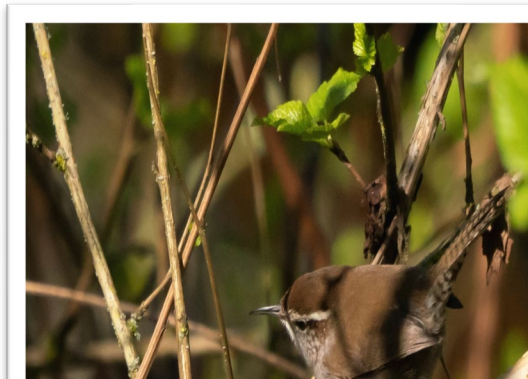
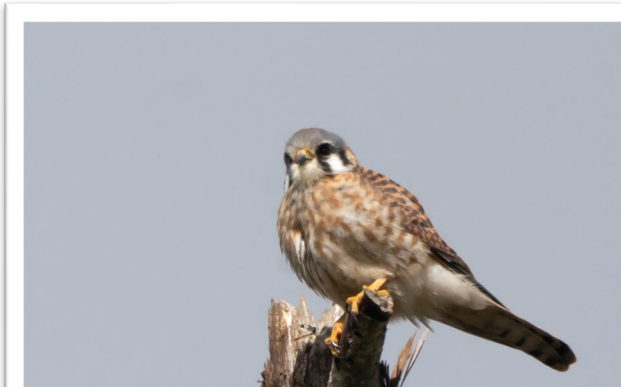
*.....with thanks to Matt Sewell's
A Charm of Goldfinches*

WEST OF THE ROCKIES

These photos were taken by Joe Cooney during his trip West of the Rockies.

Kestrel(on the left), Snowy Plover and Harlequin Duck (below) were taken at the Jetty and Beach in Newport, Oregon.

Song Sparrow (below, bottom) and Bewick's Wren (left, bottom) were taken at Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge. ALL photos from Oregon.



REMEMBER!
2021 GLOBAL BIG DAY
SATURDAY
MAY 8TH!!!

Application for Membership in NNAS - Chapter Code X50, 7XCH

☐ Local Chapter Only Membership - \$15.00 annually, renewable in June; includes chapter on-line newsletter.
Make Checks payable to NNAS.

☐ National & Local Membership - \$20.00 introductory (\$35.00 after), is above, plus glossy National Audubon Magazine.
Make checks payable to "National Audubon Society"

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