



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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There may be no meetings, but there are

!!!!COMING EVENTS!!!!



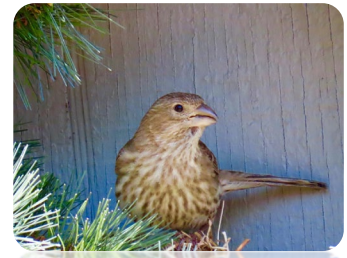
Canada Goose on the banks of Indian Creek,
probably seeking a nest site.

Photo....

.....Paul Servis

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House Finch Photos

.....Candie Newman

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Just one happy thought, as I write this on the 50th anniversary of Earth Day: If you are thinking that the Earth is one "Hot Mess," you may have missed the fact that the Spring migration is in full swing. While we hunker down to avoid the spread of the pandemic, wildlife is willing to step up its game and fill the void. Hummingbirds are humming here and there. Hummingbirds have been seen everywhere. The other night a Bobwhite announced himself to be present on Mosquito Point.

Hummer

Photo.....

Paul Servis



A word about the NNAS. As a chapter, we seem to be in some sort of weird alternate state of suspended animation. While social distancing has become the norm, we need to find ways effectively to continue with business. General membership meetings are suspended for the foreseeable future; the board has not been able to meet. So where do we go from here?

We are behind the curve on our reaction time. We were supposed to have had a slate of officers ready for the May meeting. I am not sure we will be able to accomplish that. Even without the pandemic, finding time in your busy day to volunteer is hard enough. As life gets easier with the advent of technology, it also gets more complicated. There are constant demands for our attention and time. We still need folks to step up and fill vacant positions, though. As an organization, we are large in numbers and scarce in bodies.

We currently have five vacant positions to fill on the board: Treasurer, one (1), Director with term ending 2021, three (3), Directors with terms ending 2023. We can greatly use your help in these areas. If you would like to fill one of these slots, please reach out to the Nominating Committee. All you need are willingness and enthusiasm: experience is something that comes with the job. A wise man once told me, "You cannot do anything if you do not know how, yet much of the learning is in the doing."

To continue on a positive note, though, the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel (HRBT) project has turned a page in the birds' favor. In April I sent out an e-mail asking folks to make official comments to the DGIF website supporting their efforts to mitigate the disruption of available nesting sites at the HRBT. If you have not already done so, please take time to comment. I want them to know that we support the Governor and the actions he directed on Valentine's Day. We have until May 16th to comment. Just go to the Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) homepage at:

<https://www.dgif.virginia.gov>

and, on the bottom of the page, in the "Notes from the Field" section, you will find the link to "Seabird Conservation in Hampton Roads." As an organization, we should stand united on this front and let them know we care about the effects this project will have on birds. We also need to monitor the situation and let our voices be heard at every opportunity as this regulation is drafted.

Do not be afraid that this could be construed as "lobbying." It does not meet that definition at all. First, the matter in question concerns a regulation, not a law; and secondly, the DGIF is not a legislative body. So please, let your voice be heard and have your friends comment as well. The more positive feedback they get, the more likely will the outcome be favorable for birds and wildlife. Commenting can be as simple a statement as:

"I support the Commonwealth's regulation on the incidental take of migratory bird species."

We can effectively, at a state level, mitigate the damage done at the federal level by its gutting of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and thereby set a precedent for other states to follow.

I was five years old when Earth Day was first celebrated. Fifty years later, I can hope that such simple acts of support show that people might just care enough to leave something behind for their grandchildren.

So, let us all stay healthy and sane. Get out and breathe the fresh air and go look for those birds. Coming up on May 9th is Global Big Day. You can participate in this from anywhere on the globe: from some exotic hotspot like your backyard, or at any place else where you love to bird. All you need is an eBird account with which you can log in your sightings.

Finally, if you can offer your services for any of the five open slots previously mentioned, please e-mail me at:

nnas12161970@gmail.com

*....Joe Cooney
President*



MUSINGS AND PLANTINGS

Thank goodness for gardening! Social distancing and all that can get very claustrophobic. Working on the Indian Creek Native Plant Trail provides some therapy for that. Here's an update on how that project has been progressing.

We have recently added some wonderful plants to the trail, thanks to a grant from our own Audubon chapter. You might want to check out some of these beautiful specimens to use in your own gardens.

For bright, sunny and even wet spots, red aronia and fothergilla put on a lovely blooming season as well as a great fall color display. Any of the beauty berries provides all-season interest. Clethra can do shade and sun, producing white flowers in the spring and great fall color as well.

We also purchased Juddii and Burkwoodii viburnums to fill in sunny and semi-shaded spots.

It looks like most of the plants we put in last year are up and running, so we hope to have a great floral show starting in May. If you need to escape for a bit, come walk the 12th hole. Just remember that Indian Creek is an active golf course, so watch out for those wild tee shots!



*Pete Stephens, Ground Superintendant at
Indian Creek, with Beth Kendrick
Photos and article.....*

.....Beth Kendrick

BIRD BOOKS



#63336841

ENLIGHTENMENT in the TIME OF PANDEMIC

During the past several weeks of sheltering in place, I have found myself so grateful that I live in the Northern Neck in a semi-agrarian setting. It has allowed me to spend the beautiful spring days outside, often with neighbors taking long walks, working on my yard, and enjoying the wildlife without feeling like I have to rush off to a meeting, volunteer commitment, errands or a fitness class. This gift of time away from my usual retirement lifestyle has also allowed me to spend more time reading. I have read several books that particularly speak to me as a Master Naturalist and as a member of both the Native Plant Society of Virginia and the Northern Neck Audubon Society.

All of the books address the fragility of our ecosystem and the importance of science as we grapple with human impact.

The first book is Eager, the Surprising Life of Beavers and Why They Matter by Ben Goldfarb. It is an historical account of the relationship of this keystone critter and the ecosystem, and of beavers and humans in the United States and much of Europe. It is an especially timely book as we deal with the subsequent issues of sustainability and climate change.

My second and favorite book is The Invention of Nature—Alexander Von Humboldt's New World, by Andrea Wulf. It is a biography of the extraordinary polymath who predicted climate change in the early 1800s and could easily be credited with being the father of the modern ecology initiative. Wulf is an incredible researcher, who has documented Humboldt's life from his birth in 1769 to his death in 1859. She ties his scientific influence to both European and American history and to all the prominent scientists who were

active during his lifetime. Nothing I write can do justice to this book. You just have to read it to understand why I liked it so much.



Alexander von Humboldt

If you like bees and are interested in pollinators, you will probably enjoy my third book, Buzz—The Nature and Necessity of Bees, by Thor Hanson. It is a charming book, written by a man who loves bees and fills the pages with anecdotes about his research. You will learn the 100+million-year history of bees and will probably learn identifying field marks of many that have been buzzing around our spring blooms.

One of my all-time favorite authors is Barbara Kingsolver, who recently published her new book, Unsheltered. This is a book that can be enjoyed from many perspectives, but I always enjoy Kingsolver as an historical fiction writer and a political commentator. In this book she describes the impact of Darwin's Origin of Species on a family and community in the 1870s and also manages to comment on our current administration.

The book I am currently reading, The Overstory, by Richard Powers, was recommended to me by Master Naturalist friends who described it as one of their recent and favorite reads. It is a collection of stories about several people and their relationships with trees.

Finally, I am anxiously awaiting the arrival of Nature's Best Hope, by Doug Tallamy. I have read excerpts and expect it will become the equivalent of a Biblical New Testament for the at-home conservationists, as he continues to encourage us as he did in Bringing Nature Home, to practice conservation in our own yards; because everything we do makes a difference.

....Nancy Garvey

ACROSS THE POND

Note: Sue Alexander's lovely garden grows in the Hampshire village of New Arlesford, UK).

The dawn chorus begins here in Hampshire at 5:00 AM, full of joy and promise. A silver lining of the lockdown means that the song is undiluted by traffic noise and pollution. A new gift to all our feathered friends.

"Wherever there are birds, there is hope."

....Ildan

Gardening is the great joy of my life, and creating habitats and the right environment for the benefit of birds is a big driver in all that I do. On a practical level, that includes bird feeders, a range of nesting boxes, log piles, leaf litter areas, patches of garden debris and a wildlife pond. On a horticultural level, I select herbaceous perennials and shrubs for seeds, berries and cover with a wide range of trees and hedges planted throughout. A wildflower meadow and other wild seedlings such as teasels are left for the birds to feed upon.

My favourite companion as I work is our national bird, the red-breasted robin (*Ericathus rubecula*), small and so friendly, with bright eyes and cocked head. Robins are unable to feed from firm ground, and they evolved following pigs, finding food in the upturned soil. The delight of hearing the beat of the robin's wing close to my head is magical as I dig and hoe; and they will feed only a few centimetres away from me. Robins nest in strange places, and one delighted me last year by picking a child's fishing net in the back porch. It was wonderful to watch so closely from the kitchen window with my grandchildren; but as every time we went out the door she left the nest, we had to lock up and leave her in peace, coming and going only by the front door of the house. She hatched three eggs.

Recent and unusual visitors have been game birds—a brace of pheasant (*Phasianus cholchicus*) and two red-legged partridge (*alectoris rufa*). They strut proudly and "Korrk-Kok" loudly! Pheasant-shooting is a popular sport around here. Definitely not my choice of activity; and so I am always thrilled to see some escapees here in my garden.

The UK's most common bird is the house sparrow (*passer domesticus*). Gregarious birds, they gather in chattering groups in hedges. They like to nest in a box that is a terraced row and rear two broods each summer. The parents' frenzied feeding time-table is interesting to watch. If the male returns with food before the female, he waits in a nearby tree and allows her to feed her chicks before he takes his turn. Very polite and well-mannered!



(Three-holed, or "terraced," nest box)

The smallest visitor is the goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*), who likes to take up residence in the tall conifers I have planted. In the winter months, the nests, which are round, with a tiny opening to protect against predators, are often blown down. I never lose the thrill of seeing the skill and labour that have gone into this very special little home. The goldcrest markings are stunning. The male has an orange and yellow flat crest on his head, and the female's is yellow. I was watering in the greenhouse last summer when a tiny fledgling hopped out from behind a pot, looking very cute but very bedraggled.

The arrival of swifts (*Apus apus*), swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) and house martins (*Delichon urbica*) is eagerly awaited each year. Their nesting sites have been depleted as old buildings and barns are converted into modern

dwelling; and the issue is being addressed nationally by new schemes that ensure that new builds have special boxes or gaps left for these enchanting birds. Here, I can only offer a home to house martins. There is always a lot of twittering discussion between the prospective nesters. Sometimes a group of 3 will gather, and I am never sure how the third one fits into the scheme! Perhaps he is a passerine estate agent showing off the prime sites he has to offer! The nest is created from mud, mixed with saliva to make small pellets and then pasted together in rows to form a covered nest under the eaves, with a tiny hole right in the top. I make sure there are patches of wet mud in the garden for these birds and happily endure the mess that falls from these nests.

The song thrush (*Turdus philometos*) is the mannequin of migrant birds. Elegant and sophisticated, with a speckled breast and upright stature. Gardeners know not to use the slug pellets, as the snail population is so vital for the thrush's survival. So alternative methods for protecting those lettuce seedlings is important. How I love to hear a thrush smashing a snail shell on the path. The thrush's song is a beautiful flute-like whistling with different phrases repeated several times.



Woodpigeon: British Trust for Ornithology

In total contrast, large and clumsy, the waddling woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*) is the most common visitor here. They hang around the feeders collecting everything that falls! On the very rare occasions when we

have snow, they are one of the few birds to be seen out, and they are so lumbering that they find it difficult to trudge through—quite a comedy act!

Their noisy flapping courtship activities are often carried out on the overhead telephone wires; so having been rather rude about them, I must credit them with some tightrope skills. They nest throughout the year in a very makeshift nest of twigs, just pushed together, laying two eggs. I have watched through binoculars to see the young being fed with “pigeon’s milk,” which is regurgitated from the crop.

One of the smallest, but certainly one of the noisiest birds in the garden, is the wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*). Only 9 cm. in length, it has a distinctive perked-up tail and a sharp pointed beak. It scurries around in the undergrowth beneath small bushes and shrubs looking for insects. The male bird makes several basic nests, and the female then selects her favorite. This one is then upgraded by lining it with feathers and animal hairs. As thanks, the male is then banished to one of the “also rans” for his sleeping quarters. This winter I had to clear away ivy from a summerhouse for repairs, and there found a perfect wren’s nest tucked into the roof jamb.

....Sue Alexander



OTHER WINGS

“Poetic,” “aesthetic,” “balletic”...there is no end to the list of inspiring adjectives with which to describe butterflies, or to caption the collection of butterfly photos that Teta Kain brought to our March chapter meeting. Colors and names alike were breathtaking. To the lovely visuals, Teta added her customary humor. She let us know how butterflies differ from us, needing to take ALL nutrients in liquid form, including bear urine, decaying carcasses and human sweat! Anatomically, they come equipped not just with the expected six legs, but also with a built-in drinking straw and the miniscule, delicate scales that coat the wings and provide color.

Perhaps the commonest big species to be seen in our Virginia gardens is the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail. Identifying its gender requires some attention to detail (always a requisite for learning about these insects), as the female is marked by a bit of blue near the tail. The *Black* and the *Zebra* Swallowtails do live in Virginia but are not as common; and their very similar cousin, the Spicebush Swallowtail, is quite rare indeed.

Of course, the butterfly now functioning as “poster child” for species frailty is the storied Monarch. Teta used it to demonstrate butterfly life cycles, wherein the female (again, differentiated very subtly from the male by the greater heaviness of her stained glass wing veins) lays her eggs on milkweed. These can be seen as little pearls adhering to the leaves’ undersides. After fourteen days, the dragon-like yellow and black caterpillar emerges, feeds voraciously, finds a branch to which it hooks itself, forms a chrysalis and after a miraculous “metamorphosis,” emerges as a wet and weak Monarch, very vulnerable until its body fluid plumps it into flying condition.

The Monarchs manage several broods a year, moving, as they do so, in a northerly wave upwards over our continent. As summer draws to a close, they turn south, flying up to 50 miles per day until reaching their over-wintering grounds outside Mexico City. These very sites are under threat from developers. That danger, combined with the loss of wild milkweed in the U.S., forms a dark cloud on the Monarch horizon.

There are other plentiful and familiar little wings in our Virginia gardens, soft flutters of color like the Azures of mid-summer and spring, Cloudless Sulphur, of summer’s end, and the Cabbage White coming with spring in such plentitude that it is viewed as an agricultural pest.

A butterfly of off-season habits is the Mourning Cloak, hiding as it does in woodpiles and thus not-restricted only to hot weather appearance. Details of ID are again important: this insect wears a white border at some periods and orange tip at another. Its pattern changes are characteristic of the close attention we must pay if we are to learn name, gender and stage accurately so that we know which Skipper, Hairstreak or Admiral is stitching our mid-Atlantic air.



The Red-Spotted Purple

Photo:Teta Kain

Teta recommended Pentax Papilio II, 8.5 x 21. These focus down to 18 inches and are sold on Amazon for around \$120.00. They are a little different from regular binoculars and not quite as sturdy as are more expensive brands. Just the same, according to Teta, they hold up quite well under considerable usage. Such a close focusing capacity allows the viewer to get within a few feet of the target and nail down those very refinements.

Such appealing names belie the technical term for the insect’s order: Lepidoptera...a word that calls to mind a communicable disease. Best to be less technical and say, “BUTTERFLY.”



Spangled Fritillary
(and below, Cloudless Sulphur)

....Photos: Teta Kain

It's interesting that the butterfly nomenclature is as flighty, as unpredictable, as is the creature itself. Teta Kain's noting of its French name, "papillon," recalls the whimsicality exhibited in other languages. The "mariposa" of the Spanish, the "farfalle" of the Italian (sometimes tossed with Marinara sauce in its pasta form), the "schmetterling" of the German, the "fjarilsim" of the Swedish, the "Babochka" of the Russian: each as different from the other as is a Monarch from a Cabbage White. Of course, there is also the charming "Bread-and-Butterfly" of Disney's Alice in Wonderland.

Such appealing names belie the technical term for the insects' order: "Lepidoptera," a word that calls to mind diseases of the skin. Best to be less technical and say, "Butterfly."



EDITOR'S NOTE...This should read, "Editor's Thanks." Contributions to this edition of the newsletter have been more numerous and more varied than ever. An example is the image below, submitted by Joe Cooney, and showing a relatively unusual raptor, the Merlin, "dining on a cardinal." Raptor restaurants have not been put under lockdown, but for humans, this sheltering in place has brought out new and exciting contributors.

...Letha Harris



SIGHTINGS



Above: Towhee.....Lloyd Dodge

Below: Yellow-Crowned Night Heron

.....Nora Kroll



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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