



AUGUSTA
BIRD
C L U B

"The groundhog is like most other prophets; it delivers its prediction and then disappears."

~ Bill Vaughn

February Meeting

Date: Monday, February 13th, 7:00 PM

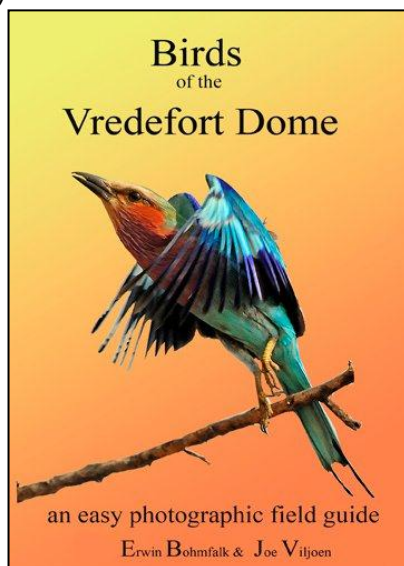
Place: Covenant Presbyterian Church
2001 North Coalter St., Staunton

Program: Birds of the Vredefort Dome

Speaker: Dr. Erwin Bohmfalk

For several decades longtime ABC member (and owner of the Purplefoot) Dr. Erwin Bohmfalk has been photographing African wildlife, and has been hosting photo and viewing safaris to South Africa. These safaris are sponsored by the Wildlife Center of Virginia in Waynesboro, of which Erwin has been serving as Chair of the Board of Directors. For the last ten years he has been specializing in bird photography as a more challenging field of wildlife photography.

About five years ago, that region of South Africa in which the Chazen Nature Reserve is located, was designated a United Nations World Heritage Site named Vredefort Dome. Chazen is the base reserve for the safaris. (The reason for selecting this region as a World Heritage Site is an interesting geological story in itself, which will be discussed.) An obvious application of Erwin's bird photography was to create a

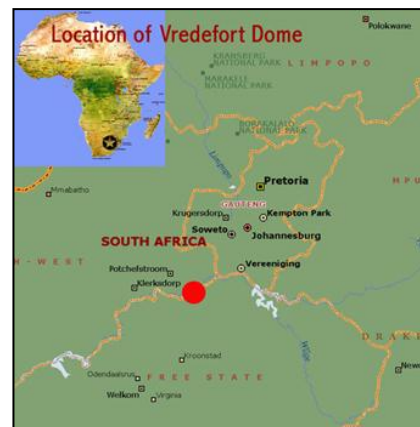


Field Guide of the Birds of the Vredefort Dome. His guide book was published last year in South Africa.

There are more than 700 of his photographs included, representing 217 species. His approach to the content of the field guide is unique. Most guides will show several bird species per page, with only one or two pictures of each species, usually in profile, and possibly in flight. Most guides have been based on hand-colored drawings, with some more recent versions beginning to use photographs. Erwin feels birds look more like their photographs than their drawings. But the most distinguishing feature of his guide book is that he has only one species pictured per page, with a second page having the descriptive text for that species. This one-species-per-page feature allows for multiple photos of a species - different viewing angles, in flight, male vs. female, immature vs. mature, breeding vs. non-breeding, nesting, feeding, etc. All these views will be very helpful in identifying a species, since the observer will not always see a bird simply in profile and at rest. Obviously at this point in time, not many of these views of each species have been photographed,

but it is his intention to continue to add to the variety of views, to improved quality, and to new species.

This program will be discussing these subjects and viewing examples of the book's features.



New Dinner Location

In order to be close to the new bird club meeting place, the pre-meeting dinner will be held at Ma & Pa's Pizza in the Comcast Plaza at 2303 N Augusta St. The dinner is open to all and starts at 5:30. Please email (nebelpk@yahoo.com) or call (540-942-0946) Peter Nebel before noon of the meeting day.

Field Trips

Saturday, February 11th: Zion Crossroads **Meeting Place & Time:** Woodrow Wilson Parkway Holiday Inn (exit 225 off I-81) lower parking lot, 2:30 PM

For **Coordinator:** Allen Lerner ([\(540\) 280-3423](tel:5402803423)) or larnersky@mindspring.com

Join Allen Lerner on this evening field trip to Zions Crossroads for the Short-eared Owl & Nothern Harrier show. We will also look for some waterfowl, American Woodcock, and a Loggerhead Shrike recently seen in the area. Dress warm for the evening and bring snacks. If bad weather cancels we will try for the next evening on the 12th.

The President's Perch

Spring Birding Festivals

Although spring seems to be quite distant at the moment and especially at the beginning of February, it will be here before we know it and several spring birding festivals came to my attention. Finding some of the festivals of interest, it prompted me to do a little bit of searching and I am highlighting a few festivals from Leks to Owls to Aleutian Terns...and more. I included a quote from each website and a few of my own comments.

<http://www.galvestonfeatherfest.com/>

With a great name like FeatherFest, how can you go wrong?!? "One of the largest birding festivals in Texas, and the only one with a dedicated nature photography track."

<http://www.acadiabirdingfestival.com/>

"Explore Mount Desert Island and its birds through numerous events and venues. Greet our warblers on early morning birding walks, visit with

puffins and pelagic birds at sea, and observe Peregrine Falcons at an active breeding site in Acadia National Park. Our combination of lectures, walks, and adventures will connect you to Downeast Maine's many bird species, diverse habitats and local birding experts". Featured speakers are Pete Dunn and Kevin Karlson.

<http://swwings.org/>

"Arizona's Longest Running Nature Festival, Southwest Wings is an educational celebration of the diversity of birds, mammals, reptiles, and insects, in their unique environment; the sky islands in southern Arizona."

<http://www.yakutatfestival.org/>

"The Yakutat Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. Forst Service, and other partners are currently planning for the 2012 Yakutat Tern Festival, May 31-June 3rd. Details will be added to the web-site as they become available. The mission of the festival is to highlight the extraordinary natural and cultural resources of Yakutat and to stimulate local economy by hosting a festival celebrating Aleutian Terns. Participants of the festival will enjoy birding activities, natural history field trips, art exhibits, educational events for kids and adults, Native cultural presentation and more."



Cool Tlingit-inspired logo ...
at least I think it is!

<http://www.festivalofowls.com/>

"Immerse yourself in owls at the only annual, full-weekend, all-owl festival in North America. Highlights include 7 species of live owls (including Snowy!), an outdoor photography session with the owls, and owl prowls to call in wild owls. Attending the banquet, keynote presentation, and World Owl Hall of Fame awards is an experience not to be missed, but there's plenty for kids too."

<http://lektreks.org/>

"Join us in northwest Oklahoma for the 2012 Lesser Prairie-Chicken Festival featuring keynote speaker Jeff Gordon, ABA President. We'll view them from blinds or vans. 100% of festival participants have see the birds! And new for 2012 we're offering a trip to view Greater-Prairie-Chickens at the Tallgrass Prairie from blinds. Get both species of prairie-chickens in trip!"

Virginia Society of Ornithology 2013 Annual Meeting

And at the local level, don't forget about the VSO meeting May 18-20th in Johnson City, Tennessee. The annual meeting will be held as a joint event with the Bristol Bird Club. Throughout the weekend there will be birding field trips along the Appalachian Trail in a cloudland peaking at 6,286 feet. Please see your VSO member newsletter or contact the VSO directly. Anyone interested in car-pooling should email Penny at pen-ny@staunton.com.

I hope many of you get to participate in some wonderful spring birding, near and far!

-Penny Warren, President

Birding Hotspots Enter the Digital Age!

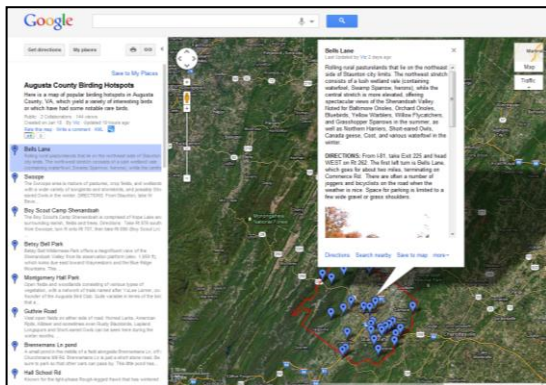
Fellow birders,

I thought it would be useful to map out all the popular birding hotspots around our region to provide detailed descriptions and locations. Thus I have made three Google maps marking hotspots in Augusta, Rockingham, and Albemarle Counties. These maps allow you to zoom in or out depending on the level of detail desired. You can also use all the tools available in Google Maps such as "get directions" and "print" and use various viewing options such as "Satellite", "Road Map", "Terrain" or even "Google Earth". You can find these maps at the following links:

Augusta County: <http://g.co/maps/49rjq>

Rockingham County: <http://g.co/maps/3xutb>

Albemarle County: <http://g.co/maps/7t6f4>



This is a work-in-progress, so I need your help to improve these maps and keep them up-to-date. Thus, please send me (Vic Laubach) new, popular birding hotspots to add to the maps. Be sure to provide me with details for location, description, and driving directions. Also, please let me know of any other ideas you may have to improve these maps, and definitely let me know if you find any errors.

If there is a high demand for additional counties (e.g. Highland, Nelson), these too can be created. If a birding hotspot lies outside but near a given county, I can still add that to a map rather than create a separate map for the new county that may contain only a couple hotspots (e.g. note that I have added "Rockfish Valley Trail" to the Albemarle map, even though it is located in Nelson).

I hope you find these maps helpful. Please use these maps as you wish and feel free to send the links on to other birders. Any comments are welcome.

Thanks,
Vic Laubach
laubach@virginia.edu

Got Snowys??

As most of us have read, there has been an irruption of Snowy Owls this year due to an abundance of the lemming population but now with the extra number of Snowys food is scarce and they are heading further south than normal.



Here are some interesting facts about the Snowy Owl.....

The feathers of Snowy Owls have no pigment, leaving more space for air which helps them to keep warmer because air is such a good insulator. Their legs and toes are heavily feathered to protect them from the harsh weather in cold arctic regions.

They are diurnal.

An individual adult Snowy owl may eat three to five lemmings per day, or up to 1,600 per year.

Length: 20.5-28 inches
Wingspan: 49.6-57.1 inches
Weight: 56.4 – 104.1 ounces

Lifespan: The oldest Snowy Owl living in the wild was recorded to be 9 years and 5 months. A captive lived for about 28 years.

Nest Description: A scrape in the ground, formed into a rounded depression by the female.



Breeds in May. Clutch size 3 to 11 depending upon the availability of food and in particularly lean times a usually monogamous pair of owls may not breed at all. Parents are territorial and defend their nests against all comers.... even wolves. Gestation for eggs is about 32 days, incubated by only the females. The young will leave the nest at about day 25-26 but cannot fly well until about 50 days old.

Young owls, especially males, get whiter as they get older. Females are darker than males with dusky spotting and never become totally white.

A snowy owl has incredibly good sight. They can reputedly see a mouse from the length of two football fields away! Their eyeballs are not actually eyeballs but eye tubes ... almost like having two telescopes in your head! This means there is not much space for a brain which is only the size of a small walnut! It also means that they cannot turn their eyes independently of their head. They must move their head every time they want to look in a different direction. Snowy Owls can turn their heads 270 degrees..not 360 degrees as is popular belief.

Owls have upper and lower eyelids, as well as a third eyelid called a nictitating membrane that cleans and protects their eyes.

Snowy Owls have terrible balance, bad even for an owl and so they do not like perching on branches. They instead like to sit on the ground or perch on flat surfaces.

Legal Status/protection: CITES - Snowy Owls are listed under Appendix II. Snowy Owls are protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. However, Alaska law allows Alaskan residents to shoot unlimited numbers of owls if they are used for food or clothing. No bird or part of a bird may be sold or offered for sale.

The Snowy Owl can be found represented in cave paintings in Europe.

- Penny Warren

Rockbridge Master Naturalists training course starting in February

The Rockbridge Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists is accepting registrations for the organization's 2012 training course, which begins February 14. Classes will take place most Tuesday evenings from 5:30-8:30 at Boxerwood Nature Center in Lexington, with occasional Saturday field trips.

The Virginia Master Naturalist program is a grass-roots effort to train a corps of volunteers who will work in their local communities to improve the environment through education, outreach and service. Virginia Department of Forestry/Western Region is the sponsoring agency for the Rockbridge Chapter, which received its charter in 2010 and has 35 active volunteers.



To become certified as a Virginia Master Naturalist, volunteers must first complete a basic training course that includes a minimum of 40 hours of combined classroom and field experiences. Within a year of graduating, they must also complete an additional 8 hours of Advanced Training and 40 hours of service. To maintain certification, volunteers must complete 40 of service and 8 hours of Advanced Training annually.

The Rockbridge course covers a wide range of topics, including Biogeography of Virginia, Weather, Ecology, Hydrology, Geology, Ichthyology, Herpetology, Botany, Entomology, Mycology, Mammals, Ornithology and Dendrology. Presenters include faculty from the local universities and other area experts. A complete syllabus, class schedule, and an application form can be found on the RMN webpage: www.rockbridgemasternaturalists.org.

Course enrollment will be limited to 20 participants (minimum of 10). A fee of \$125 covers all course materials and field trip transportation. Scholarship assistance is available on request.

For more information and to register, contact one of the following:

Bernadette Bowen (bbowen00@gmail.com)

Keith Maurer (vapapops@gmail.com)

Karen Stanley (karen.stanley@dof.virginia.gov)

The Wide, Wild & Weird World of Birds and Birding

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at University of Virginia is offering the following course that might interest members.

Course # A66: *The Wide, Wild & Weird World of Birds and Birding*

Time: 10 AM - Noon

Dates: Feb 9, 16, 23; Mar 1, 8

Location: R.R. Smith Center
20 S. New Street, Staunton, VA

Instructor: John Spahr

See <http://pages.shanti.virginia.edu/olliuva/> for online catalog and course registration.

My 2011 Junior Big Year

I was inspired to do a Junior Big Year in 2011 by ABC member, John Spahr who did a Big Year in 2010. My Big Year all began in early January in the Florida Everglades, adding 24 life birds. Some common, some not. The color and majesty of the



Roseate Spoonbill and the rareness of the Gray Kingbird. The Alligators that swam, the Short-tailed Hawks that flew high above. And this was only the beginning of a year that would be filled with this kind of magic the whole time.

Next up was Northern California, an adventure west. Finding Burrowing Owl at the Sacramento Airport was awesome. The chase after an ABA code-4 Brown Shrike that had found it's way from Asia to a beach in northern California was one of the most exciting things of the trip. As soon as we landed in Arcata, "the shrike" was the first stop. This mega-vagrant gave great looks. The whole trip was amazing, but that was the highlight. I left with 27 more life birds.

February was more or less a "cleanup" and local chasing (Virginia) month. I ventured to Highland County and got some new birds-siskin, Golden Eagle, etc. I ventured east twice, once to Lake Anna for the Red-necked Grebe and once to Chester for the Allen's Hummingbird. I added Trumpeter Swan in Augusta County.

Early March I was in the air once again, headed for Texas. What a trip that was! We visited the coast in the Corpus Christi area and the legendary Rio Grande Valley. Here I added some 30+ life birds. A few of the most amazing highlights...Whooping Crane, Black-vented Oriole (ABA Code 5), Yellow-faced Grassquit (ABA code 4) Crimson-collared Grosbeak (ABA code 4), Altamira Oriole.

Just the day after my dad and I got back from Texas, my mom and I went down to Roanoke to get the Western Tanager.

The rest of March and April were spent birding locally and adding quite a few migrants and hard to find winter birds.

In May I headed out on my warbler trip to Magee Marsh Ohio. It was an awesome trip, adding not only about fifteen life warblers for me but also Philadelphia Vireo and several others. We came home via Cincinnati Ohio in order to add the Garganey, an ABA-code 4 bird. The rare duck gave great views.

Shortly after my Ohio trip I added bird number 300, a Least Flycatcher at Pocosin Cabin in Shenandoah National Park.

In late June I headed off to Ontario. The main reason for this trip was because my mom is from there. It was also amazing for birds, from the colorful Evening Grosbeak, to the reclusive Clay-colored Sparrow, and the endangered Piping Plover.

August was the Alaska month, spending 3 weeks birding and wildlife watching there. The trip was the most incredible one of the year. We flew out on a float plane to watch the Brown Bears, we

saw Caribou and other wildlife in Denali, we saw a Golden Eagle, a Merlin, a Gyrfalcon, and a Raven in the same binocular view. We went out birding on a boat adding life Horned and Tufted Puffins and 6 other lifers. I added 38 new birds for the year. It was amazing.

The fall was spent more “locally”. I spent hours and hours at the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch but still added a number of year and life birds. I found a Baird’s Sandpiper and a White-rumped Sandpiper at a local pond, near my house in New Hope. I saw a Northern Goshawk fly over my own house. I made trips to North Carolina for Franklin’s Gull, Maryland for Le Conte’s Sparrow and Calliope Hummingbird, and New Jersey for Snowy Owl.

The last “big” trip of the year was to Southeastern Arizona, in early December. In AZ I added a total of 48(!) new birds for me year, all of which but 2 were lifers. An ABA-code 4 Rufous-capped Warbler was the rarest bird. Other amazing birds. Prairie Falcon, Painted Redstart, Costa’s Hummingbird to name just a few. I added my 400th bird in Arizona. Number 400 was Brewer’s Blackbird. Due to a mis-connect in Los Angeles on the way home, I was able to spend a few hours birding adding 2 more lifers, Herrmann’s Gull and Clark’s Grebe.

To end out the year, I returned to Maryland for Black-headed Gull and Black-headed Grosbeak. I spent the very last days of the year at Cape May New Jersey adding 5 new birds including my life King Eider, a majestically wondrous adult male.



My final total on this amazing year was 437 species.

- Gabriel Mapel, age 12

**Don't forget the
Great Backyard Bird Count!**

The 2012 GBBC will take place Friday, February 17, through Monday, February 20. Please join us for the 15th annual count!

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Please consider joining in on this event. Last year, I happened to have a juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk around my feeders and when I reviewed the tally for Staunton, it was the only one noted. I found it to be fun and to review what had been seen in our area.

- Penny Warren

Audubon Camp in Maine Birding Programs Register now!

For over 75 years the National Audubon Society has offered residential birding programs for adults, teens and families at the historic Audubon Camp in Maine on Hog Island. Pete Dunne, Scott Weidensaul, Steve Kress, Lang Elliott, Don Kroodsma, Bill Thompson III and many more expert ornithologists, naturalists, educators and authors will be in residence during the 2012 sessions. Most programs sell out months in advance, so it is worth registering early. Nearly 100 scholarships are offered each year by local Audubon Chapters and birding clubs.

Website: <http://hogisland.audubon.org>

2012 Programs:

Maine Seabird Biology & Conservation - June 3-8 & Sept 9-14

Joy of Birding - June 10-15 & June 24-29

Field Ornithology - June 17—22

Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens - June 17—22 & June 24—29

Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week- July 19—24

Family Camp - August 19—24

Audubon Chapter Leadership Program - August 26—31

Living on the Wind: Fall Migration and Monhegan Island - September 16—21

All 2012 programs are run by the Seabird Restoration Program (Project Puffin) of the National Audubon Society. Summer sessions include a trip to nearby Eastern Egg Rock, where Dr. Steve Kress and his team of biologists have successfully restored an island colony of Atlantic Puffins, and Roseate, Arctic and Common Terns. In addition, you will enjoy trips to fresh and saltwater marshes, blueberry barrens, coastal beaches, islands, and spruce-fir forests. Participants live in restored wooden buildings on 330-acre Hog Island and are treated to fabulous meals by chef extraordinaire Janii Laberge.



The Audubon Camp in Maine is considered by many to be the birthplace of the environmental education movement in the United States. Those who attend join a legacy of naturalists inspired by Hog Island including Roger Tory Peterson, the camp's first birding instructor in 1936, naturalist Rachel Carson, and Mabel Loomis Todd, editor of Emily Dickinson's poetry transcribed on Hog Island.

Recent post by Hog Island instructor, blogger and NPR commentator Julie Zickefoose: <http://juliezickefoose.blogspot.com/2011/01/hog-island-hard-sell.html>

For more information or to enroll, visit <http://hogisland.audubon.org>.

You may also contact Erica Marx, Program Coordinator, at hogisland@audubon.org or call (607) 257-7308 x14.

New Membership Chair

Vic Laubach volunteered to chair the Membership Committee! We are glad to have him on board as a member and thank him for volunteering in this capacity to help the club!

AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB MINUTES

January 9, 2012

The club met at the Covenant Presbyterian church with the meeting being called to order by President Penny Warren. She thanked those who had taken part in the Christmas Bird Counts. She shared information regarding bird counts and announced that Wendy Ray, a local artist is creating a postal bird stamp. She also stated there is a push to approve of Sunday hunting. Last year we made a contribution to a conservation group in Ecuador for which she has received a thank you note. It was reported that the Lark Sparrow that was found on the Christmas Bird Count near Stuarts Draft is still being seen on a regular basis.

Peter Nebel then introduced the speaker for the evening, Jim Nix of the Monticello Bird Club. Jim then took us on a birding tour of Columbia showing slides of some of the 1880 species of birds to be found in Columbia. His presentation showed why it is one of the most desirable birding destinations in Latin America and he encouraged us to consider traveling there as it is now safe to do so.

- Grant Simmons, Secretary

Welcome New Members

Karl Huebner
Karen Warren

Bird Quiz!

Can you identify the bird below?



The answer will be revealed in next month's newsletter. Happy guessing!

Last Month: Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus major*)