



AUGUSTA
BIRD
C L U B

" I have never known birds of different species to flock together. The very concept is unimaginable. Why, if that happened, we wouldn't stand a chance! How could we possibly hope to fight them?"

~ Mrs. Bundy, The Birds

March Meeting

Date: Monday, March 12th, 7:00 PM
Place: Covenant Presbyterian Church
 2001 North Coalter St., Staunton

Program: Wild & Weird Birds Of The World
Speaker: John Spahr

Over the past few decades John has birded most of the world's continents and many islands. In his travels he has encountered many interesting birds, ranging from the plain Small Ground Finch of the Galapagos Islands to the gaudy birds of paradise of New Guinea to the Marabou Stork of Africa, one of the world's largest and ugliest birds. John has recently studied some of these more unusual species in detail. With the use of lots of images, he will share his insights and opinions of a sampling of birds that range from the beautiful to the bizarre....and beyond.



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Save the Date

The Augusta Bird Club will have its annual May birding and breakfast at Ridgeview Park in Waynesboro on Saturday, May 5th at 8:00am. More details to follow!

Dinner with the Speaker?

A 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

Wednesday, March 14th: McCromick's Mill
Meeting Place & Time: 8:30 am, M^cDonalds Parking Lot at the Staunton Mall
Coordinator: Jo King at kingbird10@yahoo.com or 540-886-3022 or 540-430-0186

Enjoy an early spring walk to this beautiful place in the southern corner of Augusta County in hopes of finding returning migrants and resident birds. We will be looking for waterfowl, shorebirds, sparrows and maybe a warbler or two. Come along for the half day. Dress for the weather and bring a snack.

Sunday, April 29th: Riprap Trail
Meeting Place & Time: 8:00 am, Crimora, VA, at the small shopping center along Hwy. 340

across from BP. Look for the parking lot that includes Dollar General and the small Crimora Post Office. From there we will carpool the 10-15 minutes along back roads to the Riprap trailhead at the base of the Blue Ridge (no fee required – the trailhead is not off Skyline Drive). Carpooling is strongly suggested as parking is very limited.

Coordinator: Gabriel Mapel,
redtailbirder@yahoo.com

Join Gabriel Mapel on a woodland walk along the Riprap Trail at the base of Shenandoah National Park. We will walk 1-2 miles along a flat, but in places rocky trail, with sections along a mountain stream. We will be searching for the Louisiana Waterthrushes that frequent the stream and many other migrating and breeding warblers and vireos, as well as resident woodland birds. We may cross the stream, depending on water levels and time requirements. Covered shoes recommended, bring snacks if you wish. We will likely finish up around lunch time.

The President's Perch

A Very Welcome Winter Guest

A lot of you know that I live in downtown Staunton and although we have a number of trees, shrubs, etc. throughout this part of downtown, it is not prime bird habitat. For a city backyard list, I have 36 species including a juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk (2010), Screech Owl (2008 and 2009) and a Fox Sparrow (2010) to name a few. About three years ago I spotted a Brown Creeper one morning and never saw another one until this year. The Brown Creeper arrived on January 3rd early one morning and has been in and around my feeders off and on from that time. He can be absent for as much as four or five days and sometimes I only see him in the morning or in the afternoon. But one consistency has been that almost immediately after a Hairy Woodpecker appeared at the suet cake, there was the Brown Creeper! I laughed to myself that maybe they were roommates sharing the same tree and traveled together!! And, on four occasions there were two Mr. and Mrs. perhaps? Apparently you can tell the male and female apart by the length of the de-curved bill but I think you would almost



need such a small bird in hand to determine this fact.

Doing a bit of reading on the Brown Creeper, I learned that they are monogamous, the male and female choose the nest site together but the female builds the nest. Nests typically are behind a loose slab of tree bark and are composed of twigs, leaves, bark shredding, lined with finer bark shreds, grasses and occasionally feathers and it is crescent shaped. Building can be prolonged and take upwards of 30 days to complete! In Arizona, their nests often have two openings, one serving as an entrance that faces downward and the other as an exit facing upward.

The maximum recorded age for a banded Brown Creeper was 4 years, 7 months. However, it was noted that very little is actually known about the lifespan/longevity of Brown Creepers.

It has been a pleasure watching this little guy for several months and I was happy to include him in my Great Backyard Bird Count. Here's hoping he returns next winter!

-Penny Warren, President

Birding Hotspots Enter the Digital Age!

Google birding maps

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

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

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

Seals, Whales, and Birds, Oh My!

Feb. 4th CBBT/Eastern Shore Report

By 9 am our group of eleven were headed north on the CBBT under Police escort, encouraged by the good weather and hopeful for good birding from the restricted islands 2, 3, and 4. What a spectacular day it turned out to be! Although waterfowl species were low, what we experienced will not soon be forgotten! First stop was on island 2 and as we emerged from our vehicles we were immediately treated to thousands upon thousands of Northern Gannet flying in and feeding, dive-bombing to disappear below the surface. There were massive swarms, circling and nose diving into the channel like swirling clouds of chimney swifts dropping down into a chimney. As the gannets hit the water, we could see the water splashing upwards and with hundreds hitting the water at same time it made for

a truly remarkable sight. On several visits to Virginia Beach in mid-March I have observed thousands of Northern Gannet feeding offshore. However, this was by far the most incredible display of Northern Gannet and to be right there among them, all close and personal like...



Just when we thought we could tear ourselves away, we observed a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier heading out to sea, escorted by military helicopters and US Coastguard. As you might image, our group of 11 standing out there on the island with binoculars, cameras in hand, and spotting scopes drew the attention of the heavily armed helicopters! After a distant pass by one, the second copter came down the bay heading straight toward us and we knew we were being scoped out. The copter swung in low around the end of the island where we were standing and the pilot tilted the copter to acknowledge our presence. A few photographed the close-in copter, some of us waved and went back to observing and photographing the USS George H.W. Bush (CVN-77) as it continued through the channel!

Next stop -- island 3 -- and it is here where we were treated to at least 25 Harbor Seals, many of them stretched out on the rocks basking in the warming sunshine. One behemoth seal emerged out of the water, at least twice the size of the Harbors. Although they have been observed in Virginia waters, the Gray Seal, an adult female, was a first Virginia sighting for the folks in our group. In addition to the seals, we observed several birds including Red-breasted Merganser, Red-throated Loon, White-winged Scoter, flyby female Harlequin Duck, and more gannets.

As we were loading vehicles to head to island 4 someone hollered "whale!" That got folks scrambling and several got to see very distant split se-

cond glimpses. We were hopeful we would have a better observation from island #4.

And, indeed there be whales! This winter there has been an unprecedented showing of Humpback Whales off the coastal waters of Virginia close to Virginia Beach and we were very fortunate to observe at least one as it actively fed close to the surface. It was fun tracking the "whale's spouts" as the whale remained close to the surface, moving toward the channel heading into the Bay. The Humpback surfaced just enough to expose the back extending past the dorsal fin and the fluke (tail) would completely come up and flip before slipping below the surface. Other highlights included Long-tailed Duck, Purple Sandpiper, and Sand-erling.

From the island most of the group continued northward for a brief visit at Eastern Shore NWR where an Orange-crowned Warbler was observed and photographed by one individual. The rest of the group tried but were unsuccessful in relocating this winter visitor. Along SR 600 at the backside of the Oyster dump we were able to locate a nice collection of waterfowl including Black Duck, Gadwall, Redhead, American Wigeon, Hooded Merganser, American Coot, and one Snow Goose. Continuing on to Willis Wharf, exposed mudflats yielded good numbers of Marbled Godwit, Short-billed Dowitcher and Willet. Also noted were Hooded Merganser, Bufflehead, Dunlin and an early (or very late) Spotted Sandpiper.



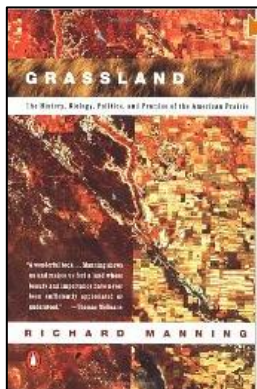
This is where the report ends as the participants parted ways, some turning back to return home and others continuing on to Chincoteague. Thanks to Mike Iwanik and Dave Hogg for their leadership and coordinating a memorable trip.

- Brenda Tekin

The Naturalist's Book Nook

Grassland: The History, Biology, Politics, and Promise of the America Prairie, Richard Manning, Penguin Books, New York 1995.

Richard Manning, an award-winning journalist and author, does a monumental job of presenting the ecological mistakes perpetuated on the American Prairie. But, why should we know this information? It is because our survival as a species may depend on it as we struggle to live successfully on this planet.



Manning explores the ecology of grassland, the biological history of the plants and animals that inhabited the Great Plains, and the politics of how the United States settled this new land following the Louisiana Purchase. Take in all of this information slowly—let it seep into your awareness. The rich depth of this book is great deal to digest, but you will find yourself experiencing several “aha” moments.

An environmental catastrophe was perpetrated on the grassland biome, the American Prairie, by a lack of ecological knowledge, industrialization, and technology. To the mostly European early settlers of North America, grassland was an unknown to be harnessed and molded into their vision of usable land. As Manning points out, the most important thing to know about this great expanse, contained for the most part between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, is its ecology. The major characteristic of grassland is its aridity. Due to its dryness, grassland does not support trees and developed a major root system. One element of destruction was the steel plow brought by the homesteaders to the prairie. This new and improved plow destroyed the prairie root system. The combination of a destroyed root system and overgrazing were the contributing factors to the dust bowl conditions of the 1930s.

To provide us with a way to reverse this situation, Manning's writing path takes us from the idea of early preservationists of only setting land aside to what is now the newly evolving ethic of “remaking ourselves so that we might function as a part of nature.” (p. 5) The idea is to understand the ecology of our habitat and work with it—not against it. Richard Manning gives us the basis for developing an ecological ethic for living on this earth.

- Mary Wiersema Vermeulen

AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB MINUTES

February 13, 2012

The club met at the Covenant Presbyterian church and President Penny Warren began the meeting by welcoming visitors especially several from the Rockingham Club.

Allen was asked to share regarding the Harriers and Short Eared Owls that a number of members had observed in the area of Zion's Crossroads.

Andrew Clem shared about changes he has made to the Club's Website. He noted that he has added to the Site a Google Map created by Vic Laubach that identifies locations for observing birds as well as a copy of the By-Laws. Andrew also stated he is working on revamping the Club Brochure with Dan Perkuchin and invited comments regarding the proposed brochure.

Penny stated that several persons were interested in going to Magee Marsh in May and asked if there was a volunteer to head up the project. She stated she will organize the trip to Fort Lewis over the weekend of October 12-14. She asked those interested to make their reservations now.

There was discussion regarding changing our May outing to Ridgeview Park in Waynesboro rather than our usual location of Montgomery Park in Staunton. It was noted it is a good birding area that we have visited in the past.

It was announced the Ace Hardware in Waynesboro has expanded its birding supplies and seeds. Jo and Penny will team up to make a presentation regarding birds at the store.

Penny shared about a proposed new logo for the club. At present the House Finch is our logo which was chosen according to Allen Larner some years ago when a nest was discovered on the grounds of Mary Baldwin. At the time the Finch was rare in our area.

Several birds were suggested with the Prairie Warbler being one. However, others wanted us to choose a permanent resident such as the Meadowlark. Penny will bring back some designs from a professional designer.

Peter Nebel introduced Erwin Bohmfalk as our presenter. Erwin conducts tours to South Africa in the area of Vredefort Dome. Erwin shared his photos of the colorful birds of that area. His interest in photographing birds began several years ago when members of our club led by John Spahr visited the area. He urged club members to join one of the groups going to Vredefort Dome promising them they would have a memorable trip.

- Grant Simmons, Secretary

Welcome New Members

Glenn & Adam Hanger

Bird Quiz!

Can you identify the bird below?



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

Last Month: White-throated Robin (*Turdus assimilis*)



ODD BIRDS

Twenty birds with somewhat unusual names have been hidden in the grid. Look for them reading left, right, up, down, and diagonally in all directions.

P O M I R Z A K A O P H
A I V A A N G E B U M B
M O O F T E N R T I U O
O A P P T V A E E L H Z
I H M O I B V R B U O I
T H O O P O E U R I A N
I O P E T O L Z A T T H
N R J J N B M O B H Z N
A L A O A O O U P H I I
M H C N P O O U L I N L
O P A K A K J I E Z T O
U H N V O C E B M O R C
J Y A Y Y S G Y N A K N
O G E R Y G O N E V Z A
U A O J P I T O H U I R
M L E P O R A L A H P F

ANTPITTA
BARBET
BOOBOOK
BULBUL
CROMBEC
FRANCOLIN
GERYGONE
HOATZIN
HOOPOE
JACANA
KAKAPO
KERERU
LORY
MAMO
PHALAROPE
PIOPIO
PITOHUI
PO'OUЛИ
TINAMOU
VANGA