



# THE AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB BULLETIN

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January 2013

*"Silently, like thoughts that come and go, the snowflakes fall, each one a gem."*

~ W. H. Gibson

## JANUARY MEETING

**Date:** Monday, January 14<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 PM  
**Place:** Covenant Presbyterian Church  
2001 North Coalter St., Staunton

**Program:** Two Weeks in Northern Tanzania

**Speaker:** Ed & Nancy Lawler



Ed and Nancy will present pictorial highlights of their 2009 birding adventure to the East African country of Tanzania during the Wildebeest migration. The program will cover their travels between Lake Victoria and Mount Kilimanjaro, while traversing the Serengeti Plain, Ngorongoro Crater and several parks in the Eastern Rift Valley. It will feature birds encountered along the way – from colorful little sunbirds to one of the world's largest flying birds, as well as big game

and other forms of wildlife – from dung beetles to Africa's Big 5. They'll also provide a photographic description of their up-close and personal encounter with a large bull elephant in musk. Of all the birding trips the Lawler's have done, this one is their favorite. And they're anxious to share the experience with you.



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## Field Trips

**Sunday, January 6<sup>th</sup> :** Highland County  
**Meeting Place & Time:** 8:00AM Food Lion, Coalter Street, Snow and rain cancel. Make up date, January 20th.

**Coordinator:** Allen Lerner

Join Allen for this annual all day trip to to this unique part of Virginia with its high mountain valleys, vast woodlands, and sheep and cattle grazing farms in search of winter specialties that include Rough-legged Hawk, Golden and Bald Eagles, finches and crossbills. Plan for cold weather and fill your Thermos with hot coffee!

**Thursday, January 10<sup>th</sup>** : Natural Chimneys  
**Meeting Place & Time:** 8:00am at the Big Lots  
Parking Lot on W. Beverly Street in Staunton

Join Gabriel Mapel on a half-day adventure to Natural Chimneys Regional Park and area near Mount Solon in northwestern Augusta County. We will tour the park's various habitats including stream, woods, campground, and overgrown fields in search of sparrows, kinglets, creepers, Winter Wrens and other winter residents. Afterwards we can tour some other areas nearby such as Badger Road for Red-headed Woodpeckers or Narrow Back Road for waterfowl if we wish and depending on time.

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### Indoor Field Trip

**Tuesday, January 29<sup>th</sup>** : Albert & Shirley Small  
Special Collection Library  
**Meeting Place & Time:** 8:00AM, Inn at Afton  
Mountain parking lot (hawk watch location)

**Limited to six participants.** Please RSVP to  
Penny by January 23rd by phone ([540.849.9245](tel:540.849.9245)) or  
email [penny@staunton.com](mailto:penny@staunton.com)

Join Penny Warren to go UVA's Albert and Shirley  
Small Special Collection Library to view the original  
work of the Jones family's *Illustrations of the Nests  
and Eggs of the Birds of Ohio*, 1879-1886. See  
President's Perch for more details.

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## THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH

### *The Jones Family*

Happy New Year to one and all! I hope your  
holidays were wonderful!

Several months ago, I wrote about the young  
woman, Genevieve Jones, from Ohio who decided  
to illustrate the eggs and nests of Ohio birds in the  
late 1870/1880's. I was so taken with the story of  
the Jones family that I decided to  
contact UVA's Albert and Shirley  
Small Special Collection Library,  
who has a set of the original vol-  
umes by the Jones family, to es-  
tablish a time to view the work. I  
went to the library and three,  
large, oversized, volumes were



brought to me and upon turning to the first litho-  
graph with hand coloring, the intensity of the colors  
leapt off of the page. It was such a pleasure to see  
the original work. I enjoyed a wonderful morning  
pouring through and lingering with the volumes.  
Each illustration, life-sized, comes with information  
on the specific bird (migration and nidification  
dates), the locality of the nest (tree, roadside, or-  
chard, etc. and in some cases the street name was  
actually noted), nest position, materials, egg de-  
scription and then field remarks and often times,  
extensive remarks. Not that I had time to read eve-  
rything in this massive collection of work but I did  
catch a few amusing remarks such as Genevieve's  
father writing the following description of a Wild  
Turkey nest ..."The nest shows but little art, and  
occupies in construction but little time."



All in all, these volumes are a remarkable ac-  
complishment that offer a valuable contribution to  
the field of ornithology and especially so, given the  
era when the work was completed, done by ama-  
teur naturalists, and mostly by women, and all of  
the hurdles the Jones family had to overcome. To  
restate a noteworthy point, only 90 copies were  
completed and of those, 53 were hand-colored and  
to date, only 26 hand-colored copies are known to  
exist. It is a rare item and we are fortunate to have  
these volumes close-by.

If you would like further information, both Cor-  
nell's Adleson Library and the Smithsonian's Jo-  
seph Cullman 3<sup>rd</sup> Library of Natural History, who  
have copies in their collections, have extensive in-  
formation on their websites. Cornell has also  
added the illustrations to their 'All About Birds'  
website.

I hope you will consider joining me for an indoor  
field trip to the library on Tuesday, January 29<sup>th</sup>.  
See 'Field Trip' information for further details.

-Penny Warren, President

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## FREE LECTURE AT MBC

**Program: Environmental Justice**  
**Speaker: Janet Currie**

**January 28<sup>th</sup> , 7 pm — Francis Auditorium,  
Pearce Science Center**



It is often argued that poor and minority persons are more likely than others to be subjected to toxic pollutants that are injurious to their health, and many reasons for this state of affairs have been proposed. This talk by nationally recognized expert and scholar Janet Currie focuses on environmental justice for women

and infants, and asks how maternal responses to environmental policy affect potential exposure to hazardous substances.

Janet Currie is the Henry Putnam Professor of Economics and Public Affairs at Princeton and director of its Center for Health and Wellbeing. Her research focuses on the health and well-being of children, in particular on socioeconomic differences in child health and on environmental threats to children's health. For more information on the speaker go to <http://www.princeton.edu/~jcurrie/>

For more information about this lecture: [www.mbc.edu/events](http://www.mbc.edu/events) or 540-887-7009.

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### A Gathering of Big Year Birders in South Texas

On Tuesday, December 4 I departed Staunton en route to Houston, Texas. Here I joined Bob Ake, who left Norfolk earlier that day, and together we then flew to Valley International Airport in Harlingen, Texas. Harlingen is a small city in the heart of the lower Rio Grande valley of south Texas. It is situated along the Rio Grande across from Mexico and 30 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. The Rio Grande valley is a birding hotspot where over 500 species have been recorded. The region is especially known for its North American rarities and vagrants from Central America. Birds like Tropical Parula, Hook-billed Kite, Red-crowned Parrot, Red-billed Pigeon, Muscovy Duck are only a few of the specialties that occur this side of the Rio Grande with varying regularity and attract hordes of birders annually.

That evening Bob and I were joined at the Santa Fe Restaurant in McAllen by 9 very interesting and distinguished birders depicted in the following image. The photographer was Jeff Gordon, president of the American Birding Association who joined us for the festivities and who entitled this image as "The List Supper." He selected that name because these are 10 of the known birders who have listed over 700 birds in a North American Big Year.



***The List Supper***

*from left to right:*

**Al Levantin** is one of the 3 birders about whom the book *The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession* by Mark Obmascik was written, and upon which the movie by the same name was based. Steve Martin played the character based on Al, who lives in Colorado. Levantin did his Big Year in 1998 and tallied 711 birds.

**Lynn Barber** is the only woman of the group. She recorded an impressive 723 species during her Big Year in 2008. She subsequently wrote an entertaining and informative book about her exploits, *Extreme Birder: One Woman's Big Year*.

**John Vanderpoel** is the most recent member of this "700 Club," completing his year in 2011. His adventures are recorded in a blog <http://www.bigyear2011.com/> John currently holds 2nd place with 744 species. He is also writing a book about his year.

**Chris Hitt** of North Carolina did a "lower 48" Big Year in 2010. He judiciously limited his quest to the 48 states south of Canada, while the rest of the group tackled the entire ABA area that also included Canada and Alaska (but not Hawaii). In spite of this geographic limit, Chris counted an astonishing 704 species. He is the first and, to date, only birder to exceed 700 birds in one year in the lower 48. Chris recorded his travels and travails in <http://slowbirding.blogspot.com/>

**Sandy Komito** holds the all-time Big Year record of 748 species that he tallied in 1998. He is also the only birder to record over 700 twice – only a year earlier he counted 726. He has written two books about his adventures: *Birding's Indiana Jones: A*

Chaser's Diary and I Came, I Saw, I Counted. Owen Wilson played the part based on Sandy in the Big Year movie.

**Dan Sanders**, who regularly does big years in his home state of Ohio, did his ABA Big Year in 2005 and was able to find 715 species. He almost declined to join this group for fear of missing a bird or two in Ohio while away in Texas. He did not regret taking part in this unique gathering and we were all happy that he joined in.

**Greg Miller**, also from Ohio, is the 3rd birder written about in Obmascik's book. In the Big Year movie Jack Black expertly played Greg's character. Greg actually spent considerable time on the movie set and got to hobnob with the actors. In the movie credits his name is listed as "Birding Consultant." Greg finished his 1998 Big Year with 715 species, an impressive accomplishment given that he, unlike all the others in this group, was simultaneously working a full-time job.

**Benton Basham**, the guy with the hat and Santa Clause beard, is the first person to see 700 species in a Big Year. Remarkably, Ben accomplished this feat in 1983 with 711 species. That was before the Internet, list serves, e-mail and North American Rare Bird Alert, communication luxuries that the rest of us could not have done without. Ben also boasts other firsts. He is a founding member of the ABA (member #1) and the first birder to accumulate a lifetime list 800 birds in the ABA area. He currently lives in Estero Llano Grande State Park in Weslaco where he regularly gets Clay-colored Robin, Rose-throated Becard and Tropical Parula in his back yard.

**John Spahr**. I'm seated next to Ben Basham. I did my Big Year in 2010 and barely made it into this distinguished circle with 704 species. I'm in awe of the rest of these individuals all of who are superior birders. I'm the only group member who took advantage of another birder's efforts and planning, and I thank Bob Ake for letting me tag along during his Big Year. Without Bob I would never have undertaken such a quest, let alone achieve this modest accomplishment. My reason for doing this Big Year was to learn more about birds, birders and birding locations. Mission accomplished!

**Bob Ake**, in addition to deserving my personal thanks, also deserved and received collective gratitude from the entire group for planning and orchestrating this get together. Bob said it was like herding cats trying to locate all the members and then

finding a time, place and circumstance where we could all get together and meet. Bob's Big Year recorded an amazing 731 birds and for one year he was number 2 behind Sandy, only to be eclipsed by John Vanderpoel the following year. Bob also wrote an entertaining blog during his year -- <http://bobsbirds.blogspot.com/>. He also has the distinction of finding and publishing an account of North America's first record of Blyth's Reed Warbler, an Asiatic species that he located in the "boneyards" of Gambell, Alaska on September 9, 2010. Congratulations Bob for your dedication and accomplishments.



*Thumb's up celebration after seeing Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl at El Tecolote Ranch with hosts Phil and Karen Hunke.*

This group's activities included much more than a dinner. After all, we were birders and so we birded. The following day we went to Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Mission, TX. Highlights here included Altamira Oriole, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet and the three expected species of kingfisher. That evening John Vanderpoel gave an entertaining PowerPoint presentation of his 2011 Big Year to a local bird club at Quinta Mazatlan estate in McAllan, an event that we all attended. Following his talk he introduced the rest of us to the gathering. We received loud welcoming applause from the group and numerous requests for photos. We felt like rock stars.

The following day was unscheduled so that participants could bird wherever they wanted, either individually or small groups. Al Levantin drove 70 miles west to Falcon Dam searching, in vain, for Muscovy Duck. The rest of us scattered in the McAllen - Harlingen region, visiting famed sites like Santa Ana NWR, Estero Llano Grande State Park and Anzalduas County Park. That evening Jeff, Dan and Gred joined Bob and me for a fine Tex-Mex dinner at restaurant in Alamo.

The next day, Saturday Dec 8, the six of us who remained (Chris, Lynn and Benton had to return home) were all privileged guests at El Tecolote Ranch in Hidalgo County. This interesting property, owned by Karen and Phil Hunke, borders the famed King Ranch. The Hunkes are ranchers and conservationists and were honored with the 2001-2002 Land Steward Award from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Land Steward of the Year from the Texas Wildlife Society in 2004. The Hunkes also have a home in Snowmass, Colorado where they are neighbors of Al Levantin, and it was through Al that we received our invitation. El Tecolote, which means Owl in the classic Nahuatl language, boasts many breeding Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls. We enjoyed a brief visit to one of the owl sites where we saw 3 pygmy-owls as well as one Eastern Screech Owl. Seeing these owls was a bittersweet moment for me. During my 2010 Big Year I was able to tally all of the North American owls, except the Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. Wish I'd have known the Hunkes then. We then piled into a two-decker safari vehicle to tour the ranch that boasts many species of birds as well as the occasional ocelot. We had great looks at several White-tailed Hawks, many Crested Caracaras, a rare lingering Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and several Say's Phoebes, among others.

Our gracious hosts then treated us to a fantastic brunch in their lovely home. This was an elegant and special conclusion to this otherwise informal gathering. It was a gathering of some of the most unique and talented birders I have ever met. I felt honored and humbled to have been among them and to "list" them among my birding friends.



**The 3 birders of the "Big Year" book and movie are in the foreground – Al Levantin, Greg Miller and Sandy Komito. Between Al and Greg are Phil and Karen Hunke our hosts at El Tecolote Ranch. The tall guy in blue is ABA President Jeff Gordon.**

- John Spahr

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## MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!

### Great Backyard Bird Count February 15<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup>

It will be time next month to count your birds in your backyard and report them to the GBCC. You will need to create an account with GBCC this year.

Full details can be found at the following website:

<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/whycount.html>

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### VSO Annual Conference April 26<sup>th</sup> -28th, Leesburg, VA

The VSO Annual Meeting will be held in nearby Loudoun County. Field trips will be offered all three days, Friday evening's event will be a special program on warbler identification and Saturday evening's banquet guest speaker will be Julie Zickefoose. Full schedule is located

at [www.virginiabirds.net](http://www.virginiabirds.net) Registration deadline - April 15th.

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### What Bird?

As I was going through the Illustrations of the Nests and Eggs volumes, I found many names of birds that I did not recognize and I thought I would share some of them with you. Can you guess the current name?.....

*Bay-winged Bunting*  
*Black Throated Bunting*  
*Bee Bird*  
*Rain Crow*  
*Maryland Yellow Throat*  
*Fish Hawk*  
*Pinnated Grouse*  
*Black and White Creeper*  
*Blue Yellow-backed Warbler*  
*Yellow-winged Sparrow*

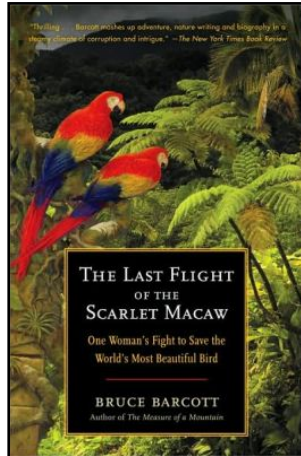
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## Naturalist's Book Nook

### Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw: One Woman's Fight to Save the World's Most Beautiful Bird

by Bruce Barcott

I had this book in my possession for a good six months before picking it up to read, encouraged by a fellow birder who said it was a great story. I thought I was probably the last birder in our area that had not read this book (published in 2009) but over the course of the past several months and mentioning it to various birders, most, in fact, did not know of this book.



Sharon Matola, an unlikely hero, former circus performer, and now an 'expat' zoo keeper in Belize and not one of the best diplomatic skills to say least, decides to try to stop a dam being built in Belize. The dam would flood the habitat where the last 200 macaws are residing in Belize.

Under the skillful writing of Bruce Barcott, the book is a page-turner. He creates a dramatic, suspenseful, quick pace portrayal of the blatant corruption, greed, conspiracy (e.g. a geologist hired by the government erases seismic fault lines on the survey where the dam is to be located) and the backroom politics of this tiny nation. Barcott winds in and out of the regional geopolitics, history of dam building in the world, colonialism, environmental and globalization issues all the while highlighting the personal fervor and passion of one woman trying to save the macaws. Her efforts 'won' her being named an "enemy of the state."

Matola's website states that this book is now part of the required reading for environmental science courses in at least five universities in the US.

A most engaging book!

-Penny Warren

## BIRDOKU

These nine letters fill the grid nine times each:

LADY ROBIN

Each letter must appear once in each row, in each column, and in each 3X3 square.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | D | A |   | N | R |   |   |   |
| R |   | Y |   |   |   | N | B |   |
|   | O |   | A | B | L |   |   | R |
|   | B |   |   |   | O |   |   | Y |
|   |   | R | L |   | Y | B |   |   |
|   |   |   |   |   |   |   | A |   |
| D |   |   | O | L | A |   | Y |   |
|   | I | L |   |   |   | O |   |   |
|   |   |   | B | R |   | A | L |   |

The letters highlighted in green, reading down, will spell out the answer to this riddle:

*What has a beak, two wings, and sees equally well from both ends?*

**A** \_\_\_\_\_

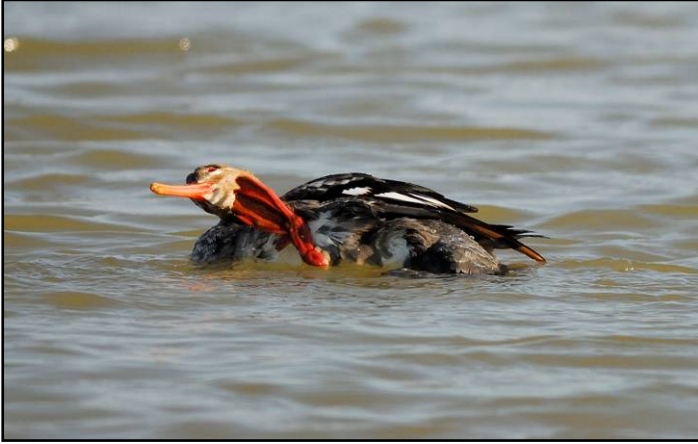
Excerpted from *Bird Brain-Teasers* by Patrick Merrell, © 2008, Patrick Merrell. Used with permission from Storey Publishing, LLC.

## Welcome New Members!

Erika Kancler & Erica Michaels  
Waynesboro, VA

## Bird Quiz!

Can you identify the bird below?



The answer will be revealed next month.  
Happy guessing!

**Last Month: Winter Wren** (*Troglodytes hiemalis*)

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## SW Birding Tour Seeking Participants

Doug Pratt ([dpratt14@nc.rr.com](mailto:dpratt14@nc.rr.com)) is leading a small-group birding tour of South Texas Feb 26-Mar 6, 2013 for Naturalist Journeys ([www.naturalistjourneys.com](http://www.naturalistjourneys.com)) please contact me off list for the brochure and itinerary. Doug describes this tour as an excellent introduction to one of America's top birding destinations at a season when many rarities could be present. It will cover both the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the Aransas-Rockport area (Whooping Cranes, etc.).

He needs a few more sign-ups for the tour to "make". If you are interested please contact him as soon as possible.

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**Virginia Society of Ornithology Website**  
[virginiabirds.net](http://virginiabirds.net)

**Augusta Bird Club Website**  
[www.augustabirdclub.org](http://www.augustabirdclub.org)

### Birding Maps

Augusta County: <http://g.co/maps/49rjq>  
Rockingham County: <http://g.co/maps/3xutb>  
Albemarle County: <http://g.co/maps/7t6f4>

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