



THE AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB BULLETIN

Vol. 47, No.9
May 2013

*"I meant to do my work today, But a brown bird sang in the apple tree,
And a butterfly flitted across a field, And all the leaves were calling me."*

~ Richard LeGallienne

May Meeting

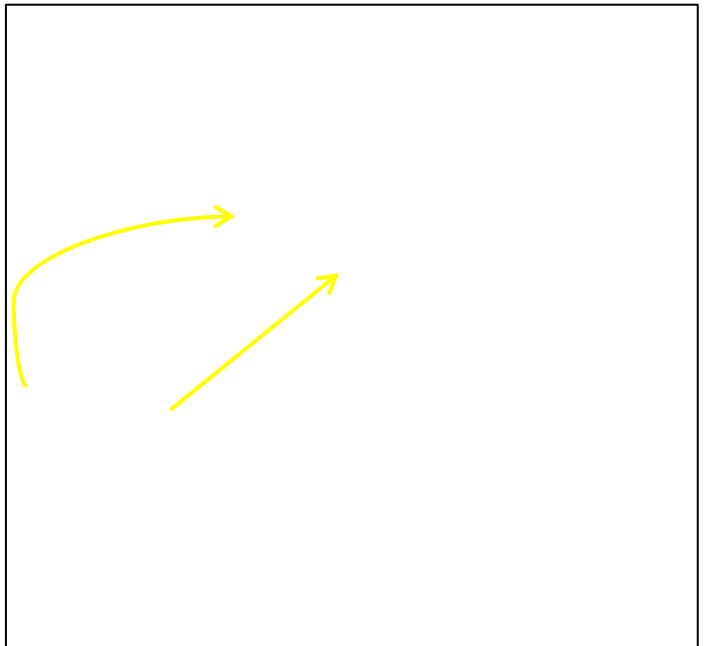
Date: Saturday, May 5th, 8:00 AM
Place: Ridgeview Park, Waynesboro, VA
Program: **Birding & Brunch**

Join the bird club for a morning of birding, food and fellowship at Ridgeview Park on Saturday, May 18th. Please bring a favorite breakfast/brunch item to share with the group. Meet at the pavilion at 8:00 AM to do some birding around the park followed by brunch at 10:00. If you have any questions, call Linda Matkins at [540-383-8229](tel:540-383-8229). To be held rain or shine. Directions to the pavilion:



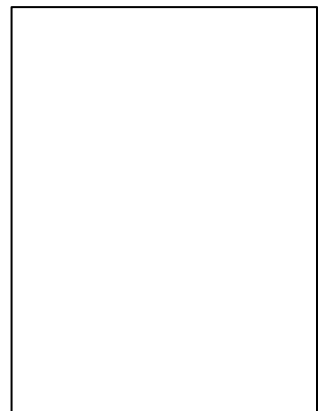
From downtown, take Rosser Avenue. After you pass Westwood Hills Elementary, look for Lover's Lane on your left. Turn left onto Lover's Lane and follow the signs to the Serenity Garden which includes taking another left turn (Serenity Garden sign points to the left) but the road sign is missing. Park in the parking lot on

your left. The pavilion is down in the field to the left of the Serenity Garden.



YuLee Larner (1923-2013)

YuLee Larner died April 9, 2013. She was known to many in the area as the "Bird Lady of Staunton" due in large part to a widely read weekly column in the **Staunton News Leader** that she wrote for over 30 years. These columns dealt mostly with birds and



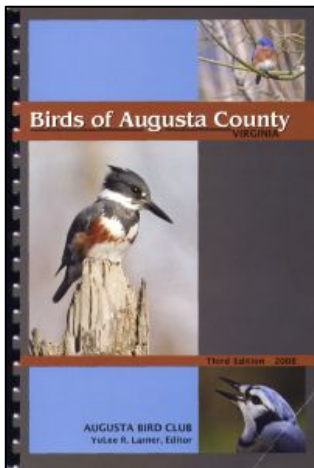
included seasonal topics such as bluebird trails, Christmas Bird Counts, fall hawk watch sightings and, of course, avian records. She always included her phone number (and later her email address) at the bottom of each article, effectively inviting people to inquire and consult her about birds, which they did -- by the hundreds over the years. She loved to anecdotally recount some of the interesting and, at times, humorous inquiries and comments from some of her dedicated readers. One of the more memorable queries was from a woman who asked YuLee about some black and yellow birds at her feeder eating sunflower seeds, to which YuLee offered that they might be goldfinches.

"No, no" the inquirer replied, "I know what goldfinches



look like. These birds have great big lips." I'll never forget YuLee's high-pitched signature laugh as she delivered the punch line, and then explained that the lady must have been seeing Evening Grosbeaks.

YuLee was the maven of avian records for Augusta County for nearly four decades. Initially she kept detailed hand-written ledgers that were later transcribed into computerized spreadsheets of all the special bird sightings in the county. These included not only "first ever" records like "May 10, 1976, first documented nest of House Finch in the state of Virginia, campus of Mary Baldwin College," but also quantitative records like "1,507,707 Common Starlings" tallied during the 1987 Augusta County CBC. Her penchant and passion for accurate record keeping was unmatched. This talent and enthusiasm blossomed in the form of three editions of ***Birds of Augusta County***, an annotated



checklist, for which she was initially the co-editor and later the solo editor. The latest edition was published in 2008.

The Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO) also harnessed her expertise in avian records. She was asked to chair their checklist committee and shepherd the completion of the 2nd edition of ***Virginia's Birdlife: An Annotated Checklist*** in 1979, a monumental task that brought her legendary status within the society and led to subsequent leadership positions of vice president (1979-1982) and president (1982-1984). She also participated in many of the spring VSO forays and contributed over 30 articles, mostly avian records, to the society's quarterly publication ***The Raven***. Her outstanding service to the VSO earned her the esteemed James W. Eike Service Award in 1985.

YuLee was, of course, well known and loved within the Augusta Bird Club, which she helped found in 1966 with Dr. John Mehner. She could be considered the club's matriarch. In addition to her popular newspaper column and the keeping of avian records, she was also well known for leading local field trips, giving countless programs and talks on birds, establishing bluebird trails, counting hawks at Afton, and serving several stints as club president. Her enthusiasm for the club and the birds was inexhaustible, and she expressed genuine joy in almost every task she undertook.

One of her other special talents was music. She taught piano to hundreds of young students and for many years served as organist and music director for Covenant Presbyterian Church. Her musical ear also helped make her an excellent birder, allowing her to learn and remember the vocalizations of so many of our birds. More than once I heard her state which musical notes certain birds were singing, and even in what key. Beginning birdwatchers and expert birders alike appreciated her presence in the field and could learn from her. Her love



of birds and all things outdoors, together with her ebullient personality, made birding with her a real treat.

Many of her readers and friends will appreciated the following quote:

"I'm glad to live in this time and place, where women, even grandmas in tennis shoes, are accepted as having responsible accountability. I can, without hesitation, admit to being a birdwatcher."

- From YuLee's 1991 Staunton News Leader column, *The Average Birdwatcher*

Those who knew YuLee certainly admired her as an "above average" birdwatcher and also as a gentle and grand lady who liberally gave of her talents, wisdom and enthusiasm.

She is fondly remembered by many.

- John Spahr, Staunton, VA.

To All Members of the Augusta Bird Club,

We, the daughters of YuLee Lerner, want to thank you for the beautiful flowers you sent to Covenant Presbyterian Church for her service. The flowers were perfect in reflecting the love our mother had for nature. The little empty bird nest said it all.

She was so proud of the work 'her' club does to send children to Nature Camp. We hope some of the donations will help in that project.

During her years at Baldwin Park - and for the past nine months at Brightview, she has found ways to have her feeders full of the best seeds, birdola cakes, suet cakes, and peanuts available. Other residents have enjoyed the activity at her cluster of feeders and bird bath. It is our hope that these feeders can be maintained for those who follow her in the years to come. Perhaps some of the monetary donations can support that hope.

Sincerely,

Mary Shifflet & Sarah Wilkins

THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH

Grassland Bird Survey

I attended the Virginia Working Landscapes (VWL) Grassland Bird Survey training at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute in Ft. Royal mid-April. This is network of approximately ten different groups such as USDA, American Bird Conservancy, Piedmont Environmental Council and Virginia Outdoors Foundation. The training will allow me to participate in local efforts this May and June in Swoope. VWL has not done a survey in Augusta County and they are pleased to have local participation.



To quote the material given to the trainees, "In recent decades America's grassland birds have experienced a declining trend incomparable to any other assemblage of bird species." The purpose, as with other surveys, is to monitor the bird populations for the long-term trend of relative abundance and diversity of species as it relates the habitat structure and the land management as the majority of the remaining grasslands exist on private land.

This will be a point count method with three predetermined points within the given field and noting every bird that is seen and heard within two distance bands for 10 minutes. Each site will be surveyed three times.

Diane Holsinger and I have been paired to do the surveys in Swoope and in Page County at the White House Farm. Diane and I have done bird, as well as butterfly, counts/surveys at the White House Farm and I will look forward to this new project in Page Co. as well as Augusta Co.

I also look forward to seeing lots of you at the club's May 18th birding and brunch event at Ridge-

view Park. For those that I will not see, have a wonderful summer!!

- Penny Warren, President

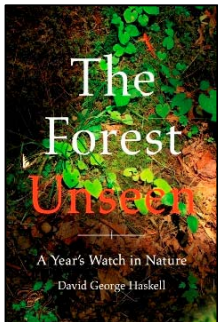
BLUEBIRD NEST BOX UPDATE

As of the writing of this newsletter, we have two active Bluebird nests with two eggs each on Bell's Lane. The Tree Swallows appear to be still battling it out between themselves and harassing the Bluebirds! Let's hope for a successful season for the Bluebirds!

NATURALIST BOOK NOOK

The Forest Unseen by David George Haskell

"When laughing children chase after fireflies, they are not pursuing beetles but catching wonder."



The awe and wonder of nature, whether it is fireflies, birds or a patch of moss, is beautifully captured and described in *The Forest Unseen* by David George Haskell. Haskell is a biologist who teaches at the University of the South and decides to mark off one square meter of forest floor in the Tennessee forest and watch this small space for one year. Each of his 43 entries or essays is dedicated to one observation or a limited number of aspects happening within the square meter which Haskell calls the 'mandala' ... a Sanskrit term for sacred space or circle representing the universe. Haskell eloquently interweaves his observations with threads of historic and scientific facts leading you into an impressive and contemplative journey.



So, if you are interested 'to see a world in a grain of sand' this book will provide a path. I plan to return often to this captivating book.

- Penny Warren

Journal of a Prairie Year

by Paul Gruchow



Paul Gruchow was a lifelong observer of the prairie remnants of southwestern Minnesota and northwestern Iowa. He wrote with great knowledge and insight about the life of the plants and creatures in the grassland biomes of the Midwest—a land often referred to as the “flyover” by people who live on one U. S. coast or the other.

This gem of a book is the result of Gruchow's notes of his observations, thoughts, and experiences throughout the four seasons of a year. As I read this book, I came to respect and admire his detailed knowledge of the prairie biology and his close attention to the nuances in prairie nature. Gruchow knows with the very essence of his being the role of the prairie in our ecosystem. Day by day, footstep by footstep, he roams and sees and listens—and best of all, writes of how the prairie was created, how it lives and survives, and how it influences not only us, but the fauna and flora that live, and ultimately, rest forever within it.

He discovers a dried leaf, examines it and notes that its long outer edges had spiraled in upon themselves. This seemingly nondescript fraction of nature inspires him to discuss spirals, on a grand scale (hurricanes, whirlpools, our galaxy) and on an infinitesimal scale (genetic codes, amino acids, collagen fibers). He muses that the universe itself may take the form of a spiral.

Gruchow's writing demonstrates his depth of knowledge and ability to describe beauty. He leads the reader to see as never before the natural world around us. Such prose is poetry. Read this book on a quiet snowy evening or before falling to sleep. Experience through Gruchow's words our outwardly nondescript but essentially intricate and intriguing Great North American Prairie.

- Mary Wiersema Vermeulen

“Old Timer” Red-cockaded Woodpecker Prepares for his 13th Season

CCB biologists recently finished the spring Red-cockaded Woodpecker population survey at the Nature Conservancy's Piney Grove Preserve with seasonal record high 51 birds. The Red-cockaded Woodpecker population has more than tripled since the Nature Conservancy purchased the land in

2000. The spring survey is intended to obtain a census of all individuals in the population as the breeding season commences. We place a unique combination of color-bands on each woodpecker when they are nestlings that allows for the tracking of individual survivorship and family lineages through time.



Among this year's spring cohort of woodpeckers is a breeding male that is entering his 13th season since hatching. Thirteen year old birds are rare for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers although a few 15 year old birds and one 18 year old have been documented elsewhere in the woodpecker's range. On average, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers at the Preserve only reach an age of 2.5 years before they are lost from the population. Breeding birds persist for an average 6 years. The next oldest bird at the Preserve is 5 years younger than this 13 year old male.

We banded this "old timer" woodpecker as a nestling in 2000 (nestling on left in photo) and he has stayed within the same breeding territory ever since. Red-cockaded Woodpeckers are cooperative breeders so a group of birds are typically composed of a breeding male and female along with helper birds that assist in caring for young and cavity excavation. Helper males often act as assis-



tants for several years waiting for an open breeding slot in their natal territory or another nearby location. After fledging in 2000, this "old timer" remained as a helper until 2005 when the disappearance of both his parents provided an opening.

Since 2005, this male has successfully fledged 19 young birds. He is also a grandparent, with 3 of his young moving to other sites on the Preserve and fledging 18 woodpeckers of their own from 2010-2012. In fact, it was 3 of the old timer's direct progeny that paired with other birds to pioneer 3 new breeding sites on the Preserve. This included last year's new breeding territory that pushed the Preserve total to 10 breeding pairs.

Like the other breeding males in the population, this old timer is currently engaged in season activities such as mating, maintenance of the nesting cavity, and chasing off competitor males vying for his breeding status.

NINETEENTH ANNUAL PURPLE MARTIN FIELD DAY Saturday, June 22rd, 10:00 AM

The Nineteenth Annual Purple Martin Field Day <http://www.purplemartinfieldday.org/> will be held in Central Virginia, about 20 miles east of Charlottesville, at the farm of Merle and Lance Wood in Louisa County, Virginia.



Enjoy watching hundreds of these beautiful birds soaring and feeding their young while an expert tells you all about them.

No registration is necessary. The event is free, but donations are appreciated to help cover expenses.

Bring lawn chairs, binoculars, notepad, camera, and a picnic lunch to enjoy on the grounds. Drinks

and snacks are provided. The hosts request that guests do not bring pets. A nestbox trail tour to view bluebirds, tree swallows, kestrels, and barn owls follows the lecture at approximately 12:00 p.m.

For information and directions, visit the Purple Martin Field Day website at: <http://www.purplemartinfieldday.org/>.

Or Contact: Ron & Priscilla Kingston email: kingston@cstone.net or telephone: 434-962-8232.

AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB MINUTES

April 8th, 2013

The meeting was called to order by President Penny Warren at 7:00pm in the Covenant Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall. She reported that 9 people have signed up to go to Fort Lewis Lodge on the last weekend of September. The Inn manager reported there is plenty of space still available.

Reported sightings of birds were Purple Finch, Red Breasted Nuthatch, Black and white Warbler, Fox Sparrow and American Egret. Penny suggested members check the Newsletter for planned bird walks. She also reported that the News-Virginian is planning an article on the Bird Club.

Gabriel Mapel reported on the Young Bird Club sharing that they are monitoring a Bluebird trail. Mary Mapel added that if you order a pair of binoculars from Eagle Optics through their Website (blueridgeyoungbirders.org) their club will get a 5% donation. Also going through their Website ordering anything from Amazon will yield them a 5% donation.

Vic Laubach announced that he has applied for a grant for the Hawk watch in the amount of \$750. He further reported that the team of Penny, Gabriel, Brenda Tekin and himself will participate in a Raptorthon to record as many raptors as possible on April 28. They would like donations to support them which will be shared with the Hawk Watch and HMANA (Hawk Migration Association).

Vic shared that Big Spring Day would be May 5th and he encouraged members to volunteer to help survey an area as he would like to cover the entire county. He also offered to share a DVD to anyone interested in obtaining Yulee's articles that she has written for the

News Leader over the past 33 years as he has scanned them into PDF files.

Penny shared there is now a sign on Bells Lane giving tribute to John Moore for his efforts in developing the area and that the Raptor program at the library was well received with 50 persons attending.

Linda Matkins shared regarding River Fest on April 28th with the information that Buddy the Bald Eagle will visit at 3:30. Also the club will conduct several bird walks and she would welcome volunteers.

Peter Nebel then introduced Dick and Sharon Kiefer who presented a program on their birding tour of Brazil and the Pantanal in August of 2011. Dick is Professor Emeritus of William and Mary.

The program concluded with Dick answering questions about his trip and receiving thanks for the presentation.

- Grant Simmons, Secretary

Bird Quiz!

Last Month: Chestnut-collared Longspur
(*Calcarius ornatus*)

The bird quiz will be taking its annual summer vacation. If you would like to "nominate" a photo for Volume 48 of the newsletter, please contact the editor, Paul Callo at pcallo@mbc.edu

Virginia Society of Ornithology Website
virginiabirds.net

Augusta Bird Club Website
www.augustabirdclub.org

Birding Maps

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