



THE AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB BULLETIN

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December 2017

*" Four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves,
and a partridge in a pear tree!" ~ from The Twelve Days of Christmas*

HOLIDAY PARTY!!

DECEMBER 18th, 6:30 PM

(Note the date and time change:
Moved to the third Monday of the month.)



**Augusta Bird Club holiday party,
December 8th, 2014.**

Please join us for our annual holiday meal. The club will provide turkey, ham and beverages. Please bring a favorite side dish, salad, bread or dessert to share. Hope to see you there!



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT(S)

Augusta County Christmas Bird Count

Sunday, December 17th

The routes on this year's CBC have already been assigned, but last-minute volunteers are welcome to help out. The tally of species will be December 18th after the Bird Club's Christmas dinner. Anyone who wants more information, please contact Allen Larner at birdergonewild@yahoo.com or call 540-280-3423.

Waynesboro Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 30th

For more information, please contact Crista Cabe at cristacabe@gmail.com.

(No field trips scheduled for this month.)

ROCKFISH GAP HAWK WATCH 2017 SUMMARY

The 2017 fall hawk migration count at Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch recorded a total of 25,125 raptors, which is slightly more than our 10-year average of 23,163. Our small group of volunteer counters put in 595 hours (avg. = 500) of effort between Aug. 15 and Nov. 30, with a total of 81 days (avg. = 75) that were counted.

Among our common migrants, a new season record was set for BALD EAGLE with 321 (previous record = 304 in 2016, avg. = 174). A single-day high of 32 Bald Eagles occurred on Sep. 3, crushing our

previous record of 19 on 9/14/2010! Our OSPREY count of 227 was a little lower than the 249 average. Our NORTHERN HARRIER count of 53 was lower than the 61 average. In terms of accipiters, our SHARP-SHINNED HAWK count of 994 was much lower than the 1,660 average, and our COOPER'S HAWK count of 251 was slightly lower than the 263 average. In terms of buteos, we had a good RED-SHOULDERED HAWK count of 110 (avg. = 66), which was the third-highest count and only the third time that the count surpassed 100. Our BROAD-WINGED HAWK count of 22,341 was a little higher than the 19,709 average. Keep in mind that the Broad-winged Hawk numbers comprise 85% of our season's total raptor count on average. Our RED-TAILED HAWK count was quite low this year, with only 508 (avg. = 651). In terms of falcons, our AMERICAN KESTREL count of 120 was much lower than the 206 average. However, we set a new season record for MERLIN with 53 counted (avg. = 29, previous record = 51 last year), and our PEREGRINE FALCON count of 34 was higher than the 29 average.



Bald Eagles: adult (left) and first-year (bottom right); Osprey (top right). Photos courtesy of Vic Laubach.

Among our uncommon raptors, we were lucky to have observed not one but two ROUGH-LEGGED HAWKS this season: a light-phase on Oct. 28 and a dark-phase on Nov. 14 (only 11 have ever been recorded, and only one other time have we observed two in one season). Our MISSISSIPPI KITE count of 3 is only the third time that more than one was observed in a season (only 17 have ever been recorded). Our NORTHERN GOSHAWK count of 10 was above the average of 4. Finally, our GOLDEN EAGLE count of 30 was the second-highest ever (highest count was 40 in 2014, avg. = 14).

Other observations this season included a good count of 1,418 Monarch Butterflies (higher than previous two years). We also recorded a total of 111 non-raptor bird species including 332 Ruby-throated Hummingbird, 115 Red-headed Woodpecker, 10 Snow Goose, 2 Greater White-fronted Goose, 4 Tundra Swan, 7 Common Loon, 1 Sandhill Crane, 1 Marsh Wren, 190 Double-crested Cormorant, 245 Common Nighthawk, and 22 warbler species.

by Vic Laubach
Coordinator, Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch



**Kettle of Broad-winged Hawks.
Photo courtesy of Vic Laubach.**

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

On Thursday, November 16, seven members of the Augusta Bird Club went on a field trip to nearby Bell's Lane. It was a beautiful day, with clear skies and gradually warming temperatures. On one of the farm ponds we saw several Ruddy Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, American Coots, and Pied-billed Grebes. While walking along the lane, we had some nice views of Red-tailed Hawks. From the upper vantage point, we could see many birds on a distant pond, identified by Allen Lerner as Greater Yellowlegs, Dunlins, Green-winged Teals, Hooded Mergansers, Gadwalls, and Northern Shovelers. In addition, a Northern Harrier was seen in the distance. Other highlights of the day included Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, N. Flickers, Eastern

Bluebirds, American Robins, and Golden-crowned Kinglets. Altogether, 32 species were identified.

by Andrew Clem



Stan Heatwole, Allen Larnar, Ann Cline, Joe Thompson, Peter Van Acker, and Dan Perkuchin on Bell's Lane, November 16.

On Saturday, December 2nd, Allen Larnar led four ABC members on an unscheduled "impromptu" venture to Bath County. At Lake Moomaw, a Common Loon, two Horned Grebes, and four Bald Eagles were seen. Other highlights included Hermit Thrushes, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Common Mergansers. At Augusta Springs on the way back, a Winter Wren and Swamp Sparrow were seen. Upon returning to Staunton, a quick visit to Bell's Lane paid off handsomely, as four Short-eared Owls were seen and photographed at fairly close range!

by Andrew Clem



Common Mergansers on the Jackson River (Richardson Gorge), December 2.



**Short-eared Owl, on Bell's Lane, December 2.
Photo courtesy of Ann Cline.**

PEREGRINATIONS IN GREECE, PART III

Mid-November found me on the road again heading toward the Albanian and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) borders. First stop was in Nymfaio, which has been singled out by UNESCO as one of the ten most picturesque villages in Europe! It is another beautiful stone village with cobblestone walkways and sidewalks, no cars, quaint tavernas, and coffee shops throughout the small village. At an elevation of 4,400' it commands impressive views but they were few and far between while I was there due to being socked in with rain and fog for most of the three days of my visit.

I had made arrangements to meet up with a local environmentalist, Lazaros, to learn about and to visit some of the area. With the weather, we knew it would not be great birding but we thought we would try to make the best of it. In a nearby large plain area there are four lakes — Vegoritada, Petron, Cheimaditada and Zazari — and we visited all four. There was a decent showing of waterfowl with highlights being the Dalmatian Pelican and Common Pochard. Photos were impossible due to rain and the distance of waterfowl. At one point we ended up in a ditch when Lazaros suddenly stopped because he thought he saw a salamander which we had been trying to locate. Otherwise, we had a fun day.

The next day I headed to Prespa Lakes which is approximately an hour and half away, but I had to cross a mountain top pass which was getting some

heavy wet snow and that slowed me down a bit. The lakes (Mikri and Macro ... small and large) are some of the oldest in Europe and share borders with three countries: Greece, Albania, and FYROM. Much cross-border environmental work is underway mainly through the environmental NGO, Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP). I made arrangements to meet with one of the SPP environmentalists, Sevi, for informational purposes and a very quick tour around the area. Prespa is home to the world's largest breeding colony of Dalmatian Pelicans: 1,100 pairs. Due to the complex mosaic of 49 types of habitat (e.g., alpine meadows, forest, wetland, reed-bed, and farmland), it offers a diverse range of birds with 272 recorded species. Other highlights of the area are a hotspot for butterfly species (172), 60 mammal species (brown bear, wolves, 26 species of bats!), and 1,800 plant species with many of them rare or endemic to the Balkan Peninsula. Greece's only Juniper tree forest (400-year old trees) is located here.

This Greek Macedonian area is very under-explored by Americans, and not many Europeans have been there either. Brits are probably the best represented in the tourist numbers. I do hope my travels bring me back to this area for detailed exploration.

It has been a most interesting journey throughout Greece on many levels and I am savoring my remaining days in Greece which are now in the single digit category. I am looking forward to my return and counting some birds for the CBC!!!

by Penny Warren



**Northern Harrier, on Bell's Lane, December 7.
Photo courtesy of Ann Cline.**

BIRDS OF AUGUSTA COUNTY: NEW EDITION!

Dan Perkuchin recently completed large-scale revisions to the Augusta Bird Club's official book, *Birds of Augusta County*. It includes numerous new records and reclassifications of relative abundance. It will soon become available (as a PDF) on the club's website:

www.augustabirdclub.org

CHIRPS FROM THE CHIEF

December is a traditional time to look back on the past year and forward to the next. So, in that tradition, here are a few 2017 highlights from the Augusta Bird Club (ABC): The ABC celebrated our 50th anniversary which included a fun dinner at Mary Baldwin, 50-for-50 drawings supported by local business partners, and life memberships for Grant Simmons and Jo King. The club worked on collaborative projects with the Parks and Recreation Departments in both Staunton and Waynesboro. In Staunton we sponsored a bench in the Montgomery Hall Park natural playground, and in Waynesboro we helped design a Birds of the South River sign on the Greenway. With leadership from Dan Perkuchin, our Birds of Augusta County records were updated and prepared for electronic publication. Our ABC 2017 bird seed sale was a great success earning funds for Nature Camp scholarships and conservation activities — thanks to Crista, Grant, Lisa, and Linda. And speaking of Nature Camp, the ABC provided almost \$3,000 in scholarships in 2017. We held our first ABC Member Arts and Crafts Sale that was led by Nancy Spahr and supported by our member artists and crafters, and the membership. The event brought in a big crowd, provided a fun evening and additional funding for future conservation and education activities. ABC monthly meetings and programs have been informative, entertaining and well attended; thanks Stan. And thanks to Andrew Clem, we have a Facebook page with more than 100 members! All ABC members can take pride in the Augusta Bird Club.

So, what will 2018 look like? The ABC board will be taking a look at our conservation and education fund. Our Nature Camp Scholarship program supports both conservation and education, and we are committed to continuing that program. But we will consider first if, and then how to expand

conservation initiatives. Are there sustainable initiatives or programs that we can support or implement that will make a difference in our community, region or state? Members are encouraged to consider that issue and to let me know your thoughts on conservation. The ABC Board will continue to look for ways to grow the club. Virtually everyone likes to look at birds, so our potential membership is limited only by our imaginations.

All the best to all of us in 2018, Peter.

Peter Van Acker
President

VOLUNTEER SPOT

Here is a current listing of volunteer opportunities for the first half of our season, along with the contact person(s):

- Christmas Bird Count, Augusta County - Dec 17 - Allan Lerner
- Christmas Bird Count, Waynesboro - Dec 30 - Crista Cabe
- Earth Day, Staunton - April 22 - ABC needs a coordinator to replace Penny Warren
- Bell's Lane Cleanup - Date TBA - Penny Warren
- Riverfest - April 28 - Linda Matkins
- Field Trips - Ongoing - Andrew Clem
- VA Breeding Bird Atlas (2016-2020) - Ongoing - John Spahr

AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB MINUTES

November 13, 2017
Meeting at Covenant Presbyterian Church

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by President Peter Van Acker.

New member Sandy Greene was welcomed.

Recent sightings around the area: Woodcock, Juncos, 440+ Buffleheads, 450+ Tundra Swans, Wigeons, Scaup, a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

December meeting: A reminder that the December meeting is being moved back one week to December 18th beginning at 6:30 pm at Covenant Presbyterian Church. We will meet for a potluck dinner with the club providing drinks.

Bird Seed Sale: Crista Cabe reported the best bird seed sale in several years. Gross income was \$15,000, and net income was \$4,059.40.

Upcoming events: Two Christmas bird counts are coming up. (1) The Augusta County count will be 12/17 and they will tally totals at the meeting on 12/18. Allen Lerner is in charge and if you would like to help contact him at birdergonewild@yahoo.com. (2) The Waynesboro count will be on 12/30. Crista Cabe is leading this one and can be contacted at cristacabe@gmail.com.

Craft Sale: The first ABC craft sale took place before and after the meeting, with proceeds benefitting the Conservation and Education Fund. Many crafters in the club offered a variety of one-of-a-kind items to benefit our work. Thank you to Nancy Spahr for coordinating the sale and to all the crafters and buyers.

Conservation and Education Fund Money: Over the winter the board will be discussing how the money raised for the C & E fund will be distributed. If anyone has suggestions for the board they can contact Peter at pjva540@gmail.com.

Program: Bob Schamerhorn, award winning nature photographer and Nature Camp alumnus, gave a remarkable photo presentation on birds of prey.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Nash
Secretary

TREASURER'S REPORT

submitted by Lisa Hamilton
10/01/2017 – 10/31/2017

OPERATING FUND		
BALANCE - 10/01/2017	\$ 6,123.90	
INCOME	\$ 551.09	
EXPENSES	\$ 87.35	
BALANCE - 10/31/2017		\$ 6,587.64
EDUCATION/CONSERVATION FUND		
BALANCE - 10/01/2017	\$15,198.27	
INCOME	\$15,554.24	
EXPENSES	\$10,636.67	
BALANCE - 10/31/2017		\$20,115.84
TOTAL BALANCE ALL FUNDS - 10/31/2017		\$26,703.48

Virginia Society of Ornithology
www.virginiabirds.net

Augusta Bird Club
www.augustabirdclub.org