



# THE AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB BULLETIN

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September 2020

*"O-o-oh whippoorwill, you make my heart stand still,  
when I hear your evening sound."*

~ *"Whippoorwill" by Randle Chowning (O.M.D.)*

**Because of the continuing restrictions on public gatherings during the Covid-19/ Coronavirus pandemic, the Augusta Bird Club in-person monthly meetings scheduled for September 2020 through February 2021 are cancelled.**

For more information, including the possibility of holding some programs via the Zoom virtual meeting platform, see Jack Holt's President's Column on page 5.

We are resuming field trips on a limited basis, subject to scrupulous observance of "social distancing" rules. We want to avoid groups larger than eight, so if more than that number of people show up at one of the following field trips, the participants will split up into two groups. **Everyone should drive to the destinations in their own cars, should wear masks, and should keep a six foot distance from other people.**

## 2020 BIRD SEED SALE

The 2020 Augusta Bird Club's seed sale will get underway soon, and once again, Crista Cabe is coordinating the big fund-raising event. Our seed sale provides the vast majority of the funds for our scholarships to Nature Camp and other conservation-related causes.

The tentative pick up date will be October 17. An online order form will soon appear on our website:

<http://www.augustabirdclub.org>

## UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

**Saturday, September 5th:** Augusta Springs Wetlands

**Meeting place and time:** Wetlands parking lot, 8:00 AM (Rt. 254 15 miles southwest of Staunton)

**Coordinator:** Allen Lerner,  
[birdergonewild@yahoo.com](mailto:birdergonewild@yahoo.com)

Dress for the weather, bring snacks and masks. If weather is real bad we can meet on the 6th. If 8 or more show up we will divide the group and go in different directions. Hand sanitizer will be provided. Afterwards we can all have a little get-together on the benches to tally up the species, safely of course.

**Thursday, September 10th:** McCormick's Mill

**Meeting place and time:** at the Mill parking lot, 9:00 AM (Raphine exit on I-81 south; one mile east)

**Coordinator:** Jo King, [kingbird10@yahoo.com](mailto:kingbird10@yahoo.com) or 540-430-0186

Join Jo King at this historic site at the southern edge of Augusta County. On this easy walk through open fields, mixed woods, and two ponds we may see waterfowl, early wintering sparrows, a late summer migrant, or a confusing fall warbler. Dress for the weather. Rain will cancel this outing. Due to the Covid-19, there will be no car sharing at McDonald's parking area.

**Saturday, September 19th:** Braley Pond — *and beyond!*

**Meeting place and time:** Braley Pond picnic area (1 mile north of Rt. 250, 15 miles west of Staunton), 8:00 AM.

**Coordinator:** Andrew Clem, [agclem@comcast.net](mailto:agclem@comcast.net), 540-849-8234

Most local birders are familiar with Braley Pond, but did you know that it is linked to a whole network of mountain trails? This three-mile hike upstream from the pond is timed to coincide with the peak of fall migration. The enchanting woodland trail is not difficult, but wear boots or sturdy shoes in case of mud. Two small stream crossings, no rain date.

**Monday, September 21st:** Chimney Swifts at Riverheads High School

**Meeting place and time:** Riverheads High School back parking lot, near the power plant chimney stack, 7:00 p.m. (Greenville exit on I-81 south)

**Coordinator:** Penny Warren, 540.849.9245, [onthewingnow17@gmail.com](mailto:onthewingnow17@gmail.com)

Join Penny to witness numerous Chimney Swifts coming in to roost for the night. In past years, we have seen upwards of 3,000 in one evening. It's a special phenomenon to watch! Rain date: Tuesday, September 22nd.



## 2020 HAWK WATCH HAS BEGUN!

The Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch has started its 44th continuous year of monitoring fall migrating raptors. We can observe up to 16 raptor species in a season but usually get 13 or 14 species, which add up to an average of 26,612 total migrating raptors between Aug 15 and Nov 30! Despite the coronavirus pandemic, we expect to be able to conduct a full season of counting, and we have taken precautions to protect our counters. We have canceled our annual Open House. We even have a port-a-john on site for visitors this year (with disinfectant spray inside).

We have started off this season with a real bang! So far (as of Aug 29), we've had very good raptor numbers overall (432 total migrants) including two big-name species: a very rare Swainson's Hawk on Aug 19 and an uncommon Mississippi Kite on Aug 20! Osprey numbers are good (63 so far) as well as Bald Eagles (60), Broad-wings (221) and Northern Harriers (6). We did break the early Merlin migrant record this year with our first Merlin passing through on Aug 14.

Our small volunteer group of counters are ready for another terrific season! We welcome visitors, and we aim to have at least one counter present each day of the season (except for rainy days). We are always in need of new counters. If you have some bird identification skills and would like to learn to be a counter, please contact us; we will train! Visit our web page (link below) to find out more. You can also find us on Facebook, where we often share photos and stories of our days. The accompanying photo shows Rose Thomas, one of our senior counters, viewing our first Bald Eagle of the season!

We hope to see you up there soon!  
Keep looking up!

**Victor Laubach**  
Coordinator, Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch  
[www.rockfishgaphawkwatch.org](http://www.rockfishgaphawkwatch.org)

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## CONCLUDING THE SECOND VIRGINIA BREEDING BIRD ATLAS (VABBA2), 2016–2020

The field work for the 5-year VABBA2 is essentially done. The breeding season has now passed for all species and migration is well under way. It has been a highly successful project here in Augusta County, Staunton, and Waynesboro, thanks to the dedicated participation of nearly two dozen of our club members, with well-appreciated contributions by an equal number of visiting birders. Together these volunteers logged nearly 1,800 survey hours within the borders of our county, contributing records in 100 of the 105 blocks that comprise this area. All 19 of our priority blocks are recorded as "complete." Augusta County tallied 114 breeding species, the second highest in Virginia. First-time breeding records included Virginia Rail, Sora, Least Bittern, and Common Merganser. 15 species of warblers were documented as confirmed breeders and

another four listed as probable breeders. These are only some of the highlights that this citizen science effort has yielded. The overall scientific data tabulation and review will take another few years before the statewide results are published. Stay tuned.

In the meantime, all eBird users are requested to switch their portal (in Settings) from *Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas* to either *eBird* or *Virginia eBird*. This is important so as not to skew the effort times with “unproductive” Atlas hours now that the breeding season is past. Finally, I wish to extend a big “thank you” to all who participated in this important and educational project.

by **John Spahr**  
**Region 3 Coordinator, VABBA2**  
<https://ebird.org/atlasva/home>



One of two juvenile Killdeers (along with a parent) seen at Leonard's Pond on August 16.

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## SUMMER BIRD SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

Since we have had no official field trips\* since late March, there are no field trip reports. Instead, here are some noteworthy photographs from near and far taken by some of our members.

\*During one of the small informal outings on May 31, four Augusta Bird Club members heard a Whippoorwill calling very close by at Madison Run! It was quite a surprise, as this species is hardly ever active during the day. We never did see it, however.



This juvenile Eastern Screech Owl was part of a family of four (?) seen in northern Staunton, June 20.



Wood Stork in Florida, courtesy of Tom Roberts. (A life bird for him!)



Summer Tanager (male) in Northumberland County, mid-August; courtesy of Ann Cline.

## FIELD NOTES SUMMARY

### FieldNotes99 — Spring 2020

The following are abridged highlights of seasonal records, peak counts, and early or late dates, from March through May, 2020. The corresponding records for June and July follow after the spring summary. The full reports will be incorporated into the book *Birds of Augusta County*.

Trumpeter Swan (1) – March 1 - 17, 2020, Waynesboro: fifth spring record

Common Merganser (31) – March 17, 2020, Bells Lane: spring peak count; also (9; adult female with 8 juveniles) – April 12 2020, Franks Mill area: early breeding record

American Bittern (1) – March 25 2020, Shenandoah Wetlands: early date

Least Bittern (1) – May 16 2020, Shenandoah Wetlands: fifth spring record

Great Blue Heron (24, with 2 on nest) – March 4 2020, Sangers Lane rookery: new early breeding date; also (92) – April 5 2020, throughout Augusta County: new spring peak count

Yellow-crowned Night Heron (1) – March 25 2020, Shenandoah Wetlands Bank: early date

Glossy Ibis (1) – May 22 2020, Guthrie Rd: fourth spring record

Golden Eagle (2; one adult & 1 imm.) – March 22 2020, Reddish Knob & Badger Rd.: sixth & seventh spring records

Virginia Rail (1) – March 19 2020, Shenandoah Wetlands: new early date

Sora (1) – April 9 2020, Shenandoah Wetlands: new early date

Sandhill Crane (1) – April 6 2020, McCune's pond, Fisherville: sixth spring record, new early date

Spotted Sandpiper (1) – March 8 2020, Crimora: new early date

Long-billed Dowitcher (2) – April 24 2020, Mount Solon Pond: first spring record

White-winged Dove (1) – April 20 2020, Swoope area: new species for Augusta County

Long-eared Owl (1) – April 11 2020, Benson Run area: second spring record

Bank Swallow (1) – April 6 2020, Waynesboro area: new early date

Cave Swallow (2) – April 23 2020, McCune's Pond: first spring record

Orange-crowned Warbler (1) – April 21 2020, West Augusta area: first – fifth spring records; also (1) – May 11 2020, Ramsey's Draft area: sixth spring record

Black-throated Blue Warbler (20) – May 12 2020, Ramsey's Draft area: new peak count

Palm Warbler (1) – March 24 2020, Cowbane Prairie: early date

Summer Tanager (2) – May 14 2020, Staunton: matches peak count

Western Tanager (1) – March 1 thru May 7 2020, Stingy Hollow Rd: third spring record

Scott's Oriole (1) – March 1 thru 23 2020, Swoope area (same bird that was seen in Feb.): first spring record

### FieldNotes100 — Summer 2020

Wood Duck (48) – July 23 2020, throughout Augusta County: summer peak count

Least Bittern (3; adult w/ fledged young) – July 21 2020, Shenandoah Wetlands: first breeding record

Virginia Rail (4; adult w/ young) – June 21 2020, Cowbane Prairie: new area for breeding

Black-bellied Plover (1) – June 19 2020, Estaline Valley Rd.: second summer record

Eurasian Collared Dove (1) – June 5 & 6 2020, Cattleman Rd.: third summer record

Chuck-wills-widow (3; carrying food) – June 21 2020, Big Levels: breeding record

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (1) – June 9 2020, Waynesboro: third summer record

Winter Wren (1; carrying food to nest site) – July 31 2020, Reddish Knob: new breeding record

Yellow-rumped Warbler (2; fledged young) – July 4 2020, Palo Alto: new area for breeding record

Summer Tanager (2) – June 10 2020, Blue Ridge Parkway: summer peak count

**H. A. Larner**  
**Staunton**  
**Augusta Bird Club Records Chair**

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Greetings to all. We are living in a very weird time. I hope this message finds you well. The ABC Board met on August 23 and we discussed some items that I'd like to share with you.

Last spring we granted six Nature Camp scholarships. Because the camp was cancelled, these nature campers have been invited back next year. Five have responded that they would like to attend. Any students who were Seniors will not be "aged out" of the program.

A lively discussion revolved around the subject of resuming monthly meetings. While we all (Board members and Newsletter readers alike) are eager to resume our normal routine, it just doesn't seem safe at this time. At this point it looks like meetings will be cancelled through February, when the Board will reevaluate the question. At that time there should be lot more data on which to base our course of action. If there are any miraculous breakthroughs, we can always reconsider.

We are looking into the possibility of holding some programs via the Zoom virtual meeting platform. I know this option, if it comes to pass, may not be suitable for all members, but it will at least offer a little bit of what we have been missing. Stay tuned.

Both Jo King and Andrew Clem will be resuming bird walks in September (details elsewhere in this newsletter). Groups will be limited to eight people or be divided into groups of eight or less. Masks and physical distancing are mandatory, and with no car pooling from town to bird walk locations. Don't forget the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch. Their annual open house has been cancelled but they welcome visitors. If you are a qualified raptor counter they need your help! Visit their website ([rockfishgaphawkwatch.org](http://rockfishgaphawkwatch.org)) for more information or to put your name on the watch calendar.

Last but not least, the annual bird seed sale is a go! The usual way we operate the bird sale is ready-made for the precautions we are taking during the pandemic. The date will probably be Oct. 17, but could be moved to Oct 24, if required. Stay tuned for more info, and watch for the upcoming order form. Please remember the sale is by far our club's largest source of revenue. Also note you can update your membership on the order form as well. Since this year hasn't gone as planned, paid members in 2020 will have their dues waived when they renew for 2021.

I will miss our monthly gatherings. I'm guessing you will too. We'll get through this. Go outside. Bring your bins. Buy more feeders (available at seed sale) and watch the birds from the comfort of your home. Watch for newsletters, Zoom programs, and don't forget the seed sale. Stay in touch. We welcome your suggestions.

Wishing you all well until next time...

**Jack**

**(NOTE: Jack Holt became ABC president as of May this year, and club members are very grateful for his willingness to lead the club.)**

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## TREASURER'S REPORT

submitted by Lisa Hamilton  
7/01/2020 – 7/31/2020

OPERATING FUND		
BALANCE - 07/01/2020	\$ 8,439.06	
INCOME	\$ 2.21	
EXPENSES	\$ 115.57	
<b>BALANCE - 07/31/2020</b>		<b>\$ 8,325.70</b>
EDUCATION/CONSERVATION FUND		
BALANCE - 07/01/2020	\$ 17,674.68	
INCOME	\$ 0	
EXPENSES	\$ 0	
<b>BALANCE - 07/31/2020</b>		<b>\$ 17,674.68</b>
<b>TOTAL BALANCE ALL FUNDS - 07/31/20</b>		<b>\$ 26,000.38</b>

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## BIRD QUIZ? Not enough room!

Mystery bird feather shown in the May issue:  
Great Horned Owl

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Augusta Bird Club Bulletin  
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Augusta Bird Club website:  
[www.augustabirdclub.org](http://www.augustabirdclub.org)

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