



AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB BULLETIN

Vol. 57, No.6
February 2023

"Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."
~ Harper Lee

FEBRUARY MEETING

Date: Monday, February 13th, 7:00 PM

Place: Covenant Presbyterian Church
2001 North Coalter St., Staunton

Program: Environmental Issues for the
Shenandoah Valley

Speaker: Bobby Whitescarver

Pre-meeting dinner: At Little Maria's in Verona (arrive by 5:15 PM). If interested, please contact Vic Laubach (laubach@virginia.edu) before noon that day.

Robert "Bobby" Whitescarver is a farmer, award-winning author, watershed restoration consultant, educator, and environmental activist. He lives and farms with his wife, Jeanne Hoffman, in Churchville along Whiskey Creek. Retired from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service with 31 years of field experience, Bobby teaches natural resources management as well as environmental policy and politics at James Madison University. He is a Soil Health Champion in the National Association of Conservation District's network. Bobby has been involved with over 500 miles of stream bank protection work and helped landowners plant over a half a million native hardwood trees. Wildlife habitat is one of Bobby's specialties, as he has helped landowners establish and maintain over a thousand acres of native prairie. He has also

successfully brought back the Northern Bobwhite to many farms.

Bobby has been published in *USA Today*, *Virginia Wildlife*, *Virginia Cattleman*, *Bay Journal*, and many newspapers throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. He is a contributor at the Bay Journal News Service. His award-winning book, *Swoope Almanac, Stories of Love, Land, and Water in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley* is available through his website: www.gettingmoreontheground.com.

When not working, Bobby loves planting trees, birding, sailing, and helping people understand the natural world.



UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Wednesday, February 15th: McCormick's Mill Farm

Meeting place & time: At the Mill parking lot by 9:00 AM; no car pooling during the pandemic.

Coordinator: Jo King ... 540-430-0186,
kingbird10@yahoo.com

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, woodpeckers, etc. Dress for the weather. In case of rain, the makeup date is February 22.

Saturday February 25th: Trail behind the Murphy Deming College of Health Sciences, in Fishersville

Meeting place & time: Back end of the Murphy Deming parking lot, reached via Rt. 250 to the Shell station west of Fishersville, then turning south on Lifecore Drive / Rt. 636 for about a mile; at 9:00 AM.

Coordinator: Andrew Clem, agclem@comcast.net, 540-849-8234

We will walk past a dense stand of cedar trees and then along Goose Creek for about a mile each way. A nice variety of wintering songbirds is usually present. Wear hiking shoes in case of mud and dress for the weather; if it's rainy, no makeup date.

Sunday March 5th: Lake Anna State Park

Meeting place & time: Park & ride parking lot in Waynesboro off of Rt. 340 at 8:00 AM.

Coordinator: Allen Lerner,
larnersky@mindspring.com

Bring snacks and dress for the weather. This 1.5+ hour ride to the Lake Anna State Park in Louisa County where we will look for gulls, waterfowl, sparrows, and any wintering birds in the wooded and shrubby areas. Cold wintery conditions (32 degrees or lower with rain) will cancel.

Saturday March 18th: Waverly–Wakefield–Piney Grove, in Sussex County

Meeting place & time: Park & ride parking lot in Waynesboro off of Rt. 340 at 6:00 AM.

Coordinator: Allen Lerner,
larnersky@mindspring.com

Planning ahead! This is a 3+ hour drive to Waverly–Wakefield, in hopes of seeing the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Not every trip is successful, but we will keep our fingers crossed. Other birds: Brown-headed Nuthatch, Kinglets, maybe an early warbler or two, and possibly Red-headed Woodpeckers, Blue-headed Vireos, and many more. Dress for the weather and bring snacks. After the field trip we can go down to the Virginia Diner and have a meal. Bad weather will cancel this outing.

NOTE: Check our website for updates on field trips that have been added, cancelled, or postponed:

www.augustabirdclub.org/Field_trips.php

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT! February 17–20

For more information, see the President's Message on page 6.

SENEGAL BIRDING SAFARI January 4–20, 2023

by John Spahr

Senegal is a small country in west Africa where 687 species of birds have been recorded (as of 2018), yet few birders venture there. Fortunately, I just did, along with six other intrepid American birders. Senegal is located mostly in the Sahel region of Africa, a hot semi-arid eco-climatic belt that stretches across the entire continent south of the Sahara. The Sahel consists mostly of savanna and shrubland, with sparse parcels of woodland and wetlands. Our trip was during the dry season, which lasts until April.

The country is a stable republic with a complicated and fascinating history. Demographically, it's a peaceful amalgam of multiple African ethnic groups, with a total population of more than 17 million. The people we encountered and interacted with were all very friendly and helpful. As a former French colony, most speak French, the official language, as well as their native ethnic tongue. The infrastructure for tourists is basic but adequate.

After arriving in the capital Dakar, we birded a nearby wetlands and Atlantic coastal sites. Here we quickly tallied more than 40 species including many water birds (ducks, herons, pelicans, shorebirds, gulls, terns, yada yada), as well as representatives from some intriguing and unique African families like hornbills, mousebirds, weavers, and firefinches. We also did some nocturnal birding and were rewarded with great flight and ground roosting views of Standard-winged Nightjar. The males in breeding season sport extended standards at the end of elongated feather shafts that protrude from the

middle of their wings, which in flight suggest two bats chasing the bird.



Standard-winged Nightjar, male (Photo by participant Ben Loehnen)

Altogether, the group identified 343 species of birds belonging to 85 avian families. There were certainly colorful “marquee” birds like Violet Turaco, Abyssinian Roller, and Bearded Barbet.



Bearded Barbet (Photo by participant Whitney Mortimer)

We also saw less colorful, but impressive and critically-endangered carrion-eaters like Rüppell's Griffon, Lappet-faced Vulture, Hooded Vulture, White-backed Vulture, usually near road-killed donkeys, goats, or cattle. There is extensive overgrazing by domestic stock throughout the country. These old-world vultures, unlike our American vultures, are actually in the same family (Accipitridae) as hawks and eagles, of which we saw a total of 27 different species.

We saw a host of interesting birds that are exclusive to Africa, with such strange names as brubru, batis, tinkerbird, gonolek, eremomela, honeyguide, tchagra, helmetshrike, crombec, camaroptera, and oxpecker. We frequently encountered a number of small attractive finches like Red-billed Firefinch,

Red-cheeked Cordonbleu, Zebra and Orange-cheeked Waxbill, African Silverbill, Cut-throat, Green-winged Pytilia (aka Melba Finch in the pet trade), and Bronze Mannikin. Many are also popular cage birds, yet none are endangered or vulnerable in the wild (yet).



Rüppell's Griffon (Photo by participant Paul Fenwick)

Africa is also the wintering home for many migrants from Europe and Eurasia, of which we saw quite a few. This included several ducks (e.g. Garganey, Northern Pintail), a few raptors, two species of swifts, many shorebirds and waders, Black Stork, three species of swallow, a dozen or so Old World warblers (most are “LBJs” totally unrelated to our colorful warblers), several Old World flycatchers with names like Northern Wheatear and Common Redstart (again, unrelated to our American Redstart). Seeing these birds in tropical Africa, and thinking of our own migrants that winter in the Caribbean, Central and South America, made me appreciate the critical importance of the tropics for birds across the globe.

One special highlight for me was the amazing birding skills of my fellow travelers. All but one of us had been to Africa before, so most were familiar with some or many of the families. The sole newcomer to the continent and the youngest, however, had studied the field guides diligently and was able to instantly identify many birds that he spotted. Speaking of spotting, all the others had younger eyes and I doubt that we missed a single bird within our collective visual range. Four were skilled photographers, and many of their images are uploaded into the eBird checklists. All were dedicated eBirders; we submitted multiple checklists daily. Four of us are eBird reviewers back home. The entire trip report is public and can be viewed at <https://ebird.org/tripreport/98756>.



Back row, left to right: Jeff Marks, Paul Fenwick, Solomon Jallow (local guide), Lincoln Martin, Ron Martin, JS.
Front row, left to right: Whitney Mortimer, Ben Loehnen, Ansu Dunor (local guide in training)

This trip offered too many avian highlights for me to detail here. It including 61 “lifers.” Of these, in addition to the Bearded Barbet above, I was especially intrigued with the following:

Egyptian Plover – An elegant shorebird that is not a true plover. Furthermore, it is now extirpated from Egypt, but is still widely distributed south of the Sahara Desert.



Egyptian Plover (Photo by Lincoln Martin)

Sahel Paradise Whydah – The breeding males are impressive in flight, with flag-like extended tails twice as long as the body. It is one of 20 members of the Indigobird family, all of which are brood parasites (like our cowbirds). This species lays its eggs only in nests of Green-winged Pytilia (aka Melba Finch).



Sahel Paradise Whydah, male (Photo by Peter W. Hills)

Oriole Warbler – A member of the Cisticola family of Old World warblers, with a most distinctive and attractive appearance. We heard the loud musical songs of several males, but our views were typically fleeting and limited. In other parts of Africa this species is sometimes killed and used in traditional medicines.



Oriole Warbler (Photo by Michael Noonan)

This was my seventh trip to Africa, and my third in the last six months. Every visit leaves me with amazing cultural and natural experiences, especially the birdlife. I shall return!

by John Spahr

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

On January 7, Allen Lerner led a very successful field trip to Highland and Bath Counties — the first such winter trip since before the pandemic! We saw Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles in multiple locations. One Bald Eagle pair was at a nest! As usual, there were many interesting ducks at the

pond along Rt. 220 just south of the county line, as well as Horned Grebes, Pied-billed Grebes, a Common Loon, and many Common Mergansers at Lake Moomaw itself. But the biggest highlight of the day came at the very end as we left Lake Moomaw, when Allen spotted a Barred Owl perched on a wire along the road. Many thanks to Allen, as well as Robyn Puffenbarger, Bill Benish, Brenda and Keith Tekin, and Doug Ruby for making it a very productive and enjoyable day!

by Andrew Clem



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Barred Owl, Bald Eagles (adult and juv.), Golden Eagle (juv.), Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, and in center, Common Merganser and Belted Kingfisher. (Highland and Bath Counties, January 7)

On January 28, 13 members of the Augusta Bird Club went hiking for almost a mile along the woodland road at the Boy Scout camp west of Swoope. There were several woodpeckers, including a distant Red-headed one, as well as many White-throated Sparrows, Tufted Titmice, Carolina and/or Black-capped Chickadees, and Red-breasted Nuthatches. Later we all stopped at Cattleman Road, and Bill Benish eventually spotted our main target bird, the Loggerhead Shrike. It was very cooperative as it gradually got closer to us in the course of its hunting routine. Finally, we headed east on Livick Road where, to our utter amazement, we saw a SECOND Loggerhead Shrike! One day later, Bill Benish and Robyn Puffenberger returned and determined beyond a shadow of a doubt that they were in fact two separate birds. Thanks to Josephine King for keeping track of all the species we saw, including several Northern Harriers and American Kestrels, but no Bald Eagles, unfortunately. On the way back to Staunton we saw three or four Red-tailed Hawks, some of which were

being harassed by American Crows. Many thanks to all the participants, including three new members: Jeff and Jeanie Roberts, and Eric Pritchett.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Jeff Roberts, Eric Pritchett, Jeanie Roberts, Warren Faught, Wendy Hill, Jim Hill, Josephine King, Bonnie Hughes, Stephen Pietrowski, Bill Benish, Antonio Martinez, and David Chernoff. (near the Boy Scout camp on January 28)

NATURE CAMP SCHOLARSHIPS

This year the Augusta Bird Club received five Nature Camp Scholarship Applications. One applicant is a first-timer and four are returnees. Each applicant submitted the application form, a short essay, and a teacher recommendation. The five applicants along with the named scholarships are listed below:

- Ingrid Anderson (first time applicant)
- Vera Anderson (Grant Simmons Scholarship)
- Anna Faith Campbell (granddaughter of Jean and Starke Smith)
- Jonah Funk (Dr. John Mehner Scholarship)
- Hayden Terry (YuLee Larner Scholarship)

We can all take pride in the success of our Nature Camp Scholarship program. These scholarships and other club activities are possible because of the success of our Bird Seed Sale. With the support of our hardworking seed sale crew, our members, and other customers, the ABC is helping the next generation of young people to study natural history and environmental science.

by Peter Van Acker

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:
FEBRUARY, 2023**

The 2023 Great Backyard Bird Count

When it comes to a certain famous Groundhog predicting the upcoming weather on February 2nd, birds don't really care if he did or didn't see his shadow! They're just looking to survive each season, and although February's weather started out mild, making it easier for birds to find food, this month's weather can be very challenging for our feathered friends! But no matter what the weather has in store for us, it's a great time for birders to get involved in an important, world-wide, fun event: the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)!

Each February, for four days, the world comes together for the love of birds. Over these four days people are invited to spend time in their favorite places watching and counting as many birds as they can find and reporting them. You can choose to share your sightings in a variety of ways—by using the eBird mobile app, logging on to eBird on your desktop or laptop computer, or even using the free Merlin ID app available for your smartphone! These observations help scientists better understand global bird populations before one of their annual migrations, AND you're contributing to valuable citizen science! This year's GBBC is scheduled for February 17-20.

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society (who established the Christmas Bird Count), the Great Backyard Bird Count was the first online citizen-science project (also referred to as community science) to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real time. Birds Canada joined the project in 2009 to provide an expanded capacity to support participation in Canada. In 2013, it became a global project when we began entering data into eBird, the world's largest biodiversity-related citizen science (community science) project. Each year participation grows as more people of all ages around the world spend their weekend counting, learning about, and celebrating birds.

So, as Philly's "Birds" (the Philadelphia Eagles) get ready to try and set their place in history on February 12th, you can join your birding friends by finding your own birds, in your own special places, from February 17-20, in the 2023 Great Backyard Bird Count! For more information and to find out how you can participate, go to www.birdcount.org. Good Luck and Good Birding!

**Rich Wood,
President, Augusta Bird Club**



ENCORE! Loggerhead Shrike in Swoope, on January 16. (Photo by Vic Laubach.)

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

A huge thank you to all those who renewed their membership for 2023. Our club can only continue its education and conservation efforts with your ongoing support. Including the 11 new members listed below, Augusta Bird Club is now 137 members strong! We look forward to seeing you new folks at meetings, events, and/or on birding field trips!

Barbara Brothers

Michelle & Wallace Edwards

Linda Fly

Joelle Miller

Marcia Mundell

Julie & Stephen Plumbley

Eric Pritchett

Jean and Jeff Roberts

Doris Scott

Ann Walsh

Allen Wolf

**Mona Bearor,
Membership Chair**

HELP WANTED

Editor, Augusta Bird Club Bulletin.
Will train. Desired qualifications: layout design, editing for grammar, etc., and an eye for detail. Duties begin in the fall. Interested persons should contact the club president, Rich Wood, at:

beagleboy831@comcast.net

AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB MINUTES

January 9, 2023
Covenant Presbyterian Church

The meeting was called to order by Vice-President Vic Laubach at 7:00 pm.

Recent Field Trips: A trip to Highland County and Lake Moomaw found Bald Eagles, including an occupied nest, Golden Eagles, Ravens, Ring-necked Ducks, Buffleheads, Common Mergansers, Horned and Pied-billed Grebes, a Loon, Barred Owl, and Lesser Scaup.

Recent Sightings: Red-necked Grebes, Eurasian Wigeons, immature Bald Eagle in Swoope, and the Loggerhead Shrikes on Cattleman Rd. & Livick Rd.

Upcoming Field Trips: McCormick's Mill on 1-18-23.

Waynesboro Christmas Bird Count: Crista reported a good count and will compile results for future reporting.

Membership: We are pleased to welcome 5 new members. (Editor's note: Even more people have joined since then!)

Nature Camp Scholarships: With money raised primarily from the bird seed sale and also private donations, the ABC is able to provide full scholarships to 5 students this year.

Volunteers Needed: With our new and improved display we need volunteers to help with the ABC table at (1) Earth Day in Staunton's Gypsy Hill Park on April 22 and also (2) Riverfest in Waynesboro on April 29. These are 2 fun, easy, interesting events and you are needed to bring the ABC message to the local public. Please put these dates on your calendars and be prepared to help take a shift.

Conservation: Lynne Parks reports that the Native Plant Garden in Montgomery Hall Park has gone well. She is reaching out to Waynesboro City to see if a similar project could be initiated there. She is also exploring a project at the Cowbane Prairie Reserve that would potentially include a day of pulling invasive species and a bird walk.

Program: Ed Clark of The Wildlife Center of Virginia shared the excitement of the 40th anniversary of their founding and some of the extraordinary, broad reaching impacts of their rehabilitation, research, advocacy, and education work with wildlife. They have outgrown their current facility and are embarking on a major expansion at the current

location. For additional information about The Wildlife Center and how you can help, go to : www.wildlifecenter.org.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Marilyn Nash, Secretary

TREASURER'S REPORT

submitted by Mona Bearor
1/1/2023 – 1/31/2023

Opening Balance Jan 1, 2023		\$34,541.40
Revenue		
	Dues	\$310.00
	Nature Camp	\$10.00
	Other	\$160.00
Total Revenue		\$480.00
Expenses		\$142.54
Closing Balance Jan 31, 2023		\$34,878.86

BIRD QUIZ!

OOPS! No more room.

~

Last month: Streaked Saltator. (Photographed in Lima, Peru in February 2017. Actually, we are not 100% sure about this.)

We have a winner — Crista Cabe!

Augusta Bird Club Bulletin
Editor: Andrew Clem, agclem@comcast.net

Club website:
www.augustabirdclub.org

Virginia Society of Ornithology
www.virginiabirds.net