

THE MEADOWLARK

The monthly newsletter of the Augusta Bird Club



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The Goatsuckers

by Rich Wood

As early as 300 BC, Aristotle wrote, "Mysterious flying creatures. Blind by day, milk thieves by night." These bizarre-looking birds were feared for centuries for their reputation of bringing harm to unsuspecting herds of goats! But as we have come to learn, their nickname was far more alarming than the actual habits of the birds.

Also called nightjars, this group of birds belongs to the family *Caprimulgidae*, literally meaning "goatsuckers." These birds are nocturnal insect catchers with small bills, very wide mouths and large, flat heads. They were first called goatsuckers because of the ancient superstition that they used their wide mouths to suck milk from goats. While it is unclear if anyone ever really believed in goat-milking birds, the name stuck.

There are three species of nightjars that can be found in Virginia: Eastern Whip-poor-will, Chuck-will's-widow, and Common Nighthawk. Since these birds are primarily nocturnal, they're more often heard than seen. Eastern Whip-poor-wills and Chuck-will's-widows were named for their songs or calls. The Whip-poor-will's call has three syllables that are sung rapidly. The Chuck-will's-widow's call has four syllables sung with a slight pause between each one. Both species are more common in rural areas and prefer open woods and wooded areas along fields.

The Common Nighthawk differs in appearance from the other two species. It has a more tapered body and rounder head than its cousins; a slightly forked tail; long, pointed wings with white blazes underneath; and a white, V-shaped throat patch visible when it is in flight. Nighthawks can be seen over neighborhoods and downtown areas, flying in big looping patterns as they catch insects in the evening sky. They often use flat-topped roofs of buildings downtown as roosting and nesting sites. Their call is distinctive; it's best described as a nasally *peent*. Because they resemble large bats darting after insects, some folks refer to them as bullbats.

Whether you call them goatsuckers, nightjars, or by their common names, you can rest assured that these unique, beneficial birds will not swoop down under the cloak of darkness to steal any milk from your goats! Enjoy!



Common Nighthawk
photo courtesy of Garland Kitts

Parts of this article were printed with permission from Bill Hamrick, Mississippi State University Extension.



Upcoming Field Trips and Events

Saturday, June 10: Field Trip—Highland County

Meeting Time & Place: 7:00 am, Food Lion on N. Coalter St. (lower parking lot), Staunton

Leader: Allen Larner (larnersky@mindspring.com)

Join Allen Larner as he takes his annual spring field trip, west, to the mountains of Highland County! We'll search for Golden-winged and Canada Warblers, Alder and Least Flycatchers, Veery, Hermit Thrush, and whatever else we can find!

Wednesday, June 14: Field Trip—McCormick's Mill Farm

Meeting Time & Place: 9:00 am, Mill Parking Lot (From I-81, Raphine Exit No. 205; 0.5 mi east on Rt. 606)

Leader: Josephine King (kingbird10@yahoo.com; (540) 430-0186)

Join Jo King at this historic site at the southern edge of Augusta County. On this easy walk through open fields and mixed woods and along two ponds, we may see waterfowl and newly arriving summer migrants. Nesting Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, Green Herons, Catbirds, Warbling Vireos, and Wood Pewees have nested on the farm for many seasons. Wear comfortable walking shoes and bring water. Rain will cancel the trip; makeup date is June 21.

Spring Events a Big Success!

by Rich Wood, President

The Augusta Bird Club (ABC) was well represented at two large, special events this spring—**Earth Day Staunton** and **Riverfest**. Hundreds of visitors stopped by our exhibit to ask questions and learn about birds, birding, and the ABC! A special THANKS to Barbara Holt and Lynne Parks for making up the wildly popular seed bombs and kids' coloring pages at Earth Day: they were a big hit! Our outreach program is an important part of the club's mission each year, and we couldn't do it without our dedicated group of volunteers to help staff our display at these popular events! If you would like to get involved in our exhibit for events, please email me at beagleboy831@comcast.net. THANK YOU to everyone who helped us this year! It was very much appreciated!



Although the Earth Day Staunton event was moved indoors due to rain, it didn't stop hundreds of visitors from coming out to enjoy this year's theme: "Plant Local, Think Global."



ABC volunteers Martha Gibbons and Nature Camper Vera Anderson pause for a quick photo at our display table at this year's Riverfest.

Field-Trip Reports

On **April 29**, 4 members (Jim and Wendy Hill, Elaine Carwile, and I) embarked on an adventure to **Chincoteague Island** for a fun weekend of birding. On Friday, my travel day consisted of rain, rain, and more rain for the entire trip to the Eastern Shore. Fortunately, by the time I arrived at my hotel, the rain had stopped. I met up there with Elaine and her husband, Tim (Jim and Wendy would join us on Saturday), and the three of us went out to the refuge to scout for Saturday's birding, where we found several birds that we would not find the next day, including Red-necked Phalarope, Lesser Black-backed Gull, and Common Tern.

Saturday, we started at 8:00 am in the McDonald's parking lot, which overlooks a marsh full of Clapper Rails, and saw a flyby Laughing Gull. We headed to a local nature trail on the island, where we found several warblers, including Yellow-throated, Black-throated Blue, Ovenbird, Worm-eating, Northern Waterthrush, and Black-and-white. In addition, we added both Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Red-headed Woodpecker, Great-crested Flycatcher, and White-throated Sparrow. We then went out on the Causeway, where we had Great and Snowy Egrets; Tri-colored Heron; and Herring, Laughing, and Great Black-backed Gulls. We also added Forster's, Caspian, and Royal Terns; Black-necked Stilt; and White Ibis. Our next stop was Saxis Marsh, where we had more Clapper Rail, Seaside Sparrow, and Marsh Wren, the latter two, target birds. We also added Boat-tailed Grackle, Orchard Oriole, Yellow Warbler, Gray Catbird (they were everywhere we went), and Barn Swallow.

We finally entered Chincoteague NWR at 3:30 pm, where our first stop was Tom's Cove area. Our highlights here were Willet, Least Tern, Whimbrel, Short-billed Dowitcher, Dunlin, Black-bellied Plover, and 5 Piping Plovers. We also watched large flocks of Double-crested Cormorants flying north (estimate of 300–400). We then hit the Wildlife Loop around 4:30 pm, where we spotted several waterfowl: Mallard, Black Duck, Bufflehead, Green-winged Teal, and Canada Goose. We also saw more Gulls, Terns, Egrets, and Herons. But the big highlight was seeing more than 258 Glossy Ibis! After Wendy and Jim headed out for the day, Elaine and I stayed and looked through the Glossy Ibises to see whether we could pick out a White-faced Ibis. I saw a bird that looked different from the rest, but I blew it off as a subadult Glossy. Anyway, the weather was great, the birding was great, and, most of all, the fellowship was great—and new friendships were formed! Our species total for the trip was 105.

by Allen Lerner

****Note**** On May 3, a White-faced Ibis was found, and a photo of the bird's plumage looked like what I had seen on that Saturday. This bird was a subadult!



(L) Snowy Egret showing its breeding-color red lores (C) Seaside Sparrow (R) Marsh Wren

All photos by Jim Hill

Field-Trip Reports (Cont'd)

On **May 6**, 22 ABC members showed up at **Cowbane Prairie Natural Area Preserve**. Ryan Lepsch from the VA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) was there to open the gate, so we had plenty of parking. I think a lot of us have been curious about Cowbane but didn't know how to access it. For future reference, individuals can park at the white gate just past Ply Gem Siding and walk in. It's good to check in with Ryan in case there are any ecological managements scheduled for the day.

We walked for 3 hours covering 1.5 miles. We had 56 species—we had a lot of good eyes and ears! There were at least 5 Orchard Orioles, and they put on quite a show, especially a first-year and an adult male chasing each other. Baltimore Orioles were in the same trees, so it was colorful. Grasshopper and Field Sparrows buzzed and trilled. Some attendees saw both Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers. A Black-billed Cuckoo chortled.

We repaid the nicety by coming out and pulling Garlic Mustard 2 weeks later.

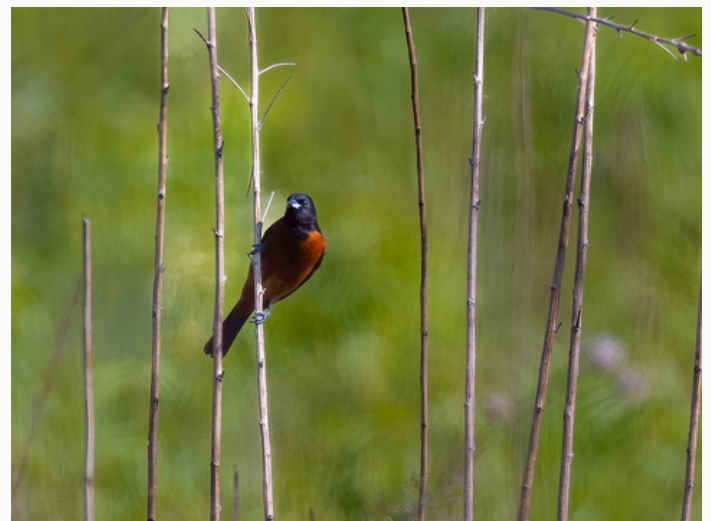
by Lynne Parks



ABC members plan their strategy



First year Orchard Oriole (top), Adult male Orchard Oriole (bottom) and a Spotted Sandpiper (L)



*Bird photos by Tom Roberts
Group photo by Andrew Clem*

Field-Trip Reports (Cont'd)

On **May 17**, 12 members of the ABC enjoyed a field trip to **McCormick's Farm**. A total of **64 species** were recorded. The weather was so pleasant. Everyone enjoyed each other's company and spotted some good birds and wildflowers. Bill Benish spotted 4 Cliff Swallows and Blue Grosbeak, to my delight.

by Josephine King



(L) A Red-headed Woodpecker poses for the camera, while (R) a Painted Turtle photobombs a Spotted Sandpiper

*photos by
Bonnie Hughes*



The weather was absolutely perfect as 12 members of the ABC leisurely paddled a short section of the **Middle River on May 17**. An adult Bald Eagle welcomed us just after we put in, and we saw/heard many birds, including lots of Warbling Vireos and Baltimore Orioles singing from the tall Sycamores, and Louisiana Waterthrushes near the water's edge. We ended with an awesome riverside picnic lunch with delicious grilled hot dogs (thanks, Mike!). Great People ~ Great Birds ~ Great Paddling ~ oh, and a Great Lunch! A big THANKS to *Ann Cline* for coordinating this!!



*photos by
Rich Wood*



Recent Sightings

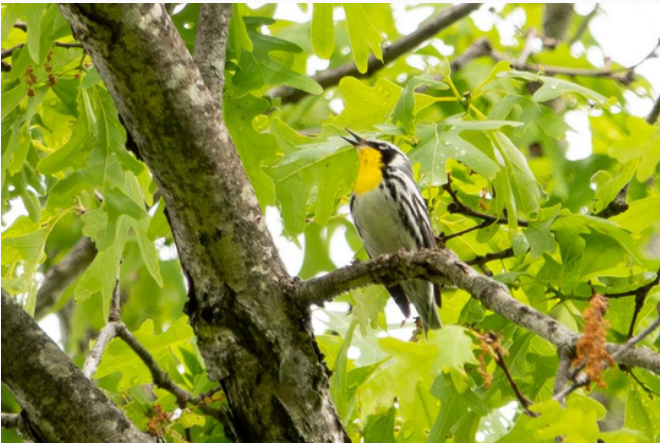
Enjoy some beautiful photos from our club members!



Common Raven—Blackwater Creek Trl., Lynchburg
photo by Ann Cline



Rose-breasted Grosbeak—Big Meadows, Shenandoah NP
photo by Donna Stokes



Yellow-throated Warbler—Quillen Pond
photo by Vic Laubach



Swainson's Thrush—Rt. 610
photo by Vic Laubach



Barred Owls—Rt. 610
photo by Antonio Martinez



Red-necked Phalarope—Mt. Horeb Pond
photo by Vic Laubach

Conservation Corner: Doing Our Part

by Lynne Parks and Rich Wood



Non-native Invasive Plants. We've all heard so much about them in the past few years when it comes to nature and birds. But why are they so much of a problem in our native landscapes?

Nonnative plants are usually more aggressive, are capable of growing in a variety of conditions, and have little competition. They reduce biodiversity, competing with native plants for limited resources, and they alter habitats. Our local birds depend on native plants for food, nesting, and shelter, and native plants attract the insects that most of our birds feed their young on. Scientists have found that nonnative plant species produce fruit that are lower in nutritional value to our native birds. In some cases, these invasives can result in huge negative economic impacts and fundamental disruptions of ecosystems. One of these nasty plants is Garlic Mustard.

Introduced from Europe originally as a food plant, Garlic Mustard is now a serious concern in forests across North America. This species is an invasive nonnative biennial herb that spreads by seed. Although edible for people, it is not eaten by local wildlife or insects. Garlic mustard roots produce a chemical that inhibits the growth of other plants nearby. This suppression of native competitors contributes to its fast spread.

On Saturday, May 20, 12 hardy ABC volunteers teamed up to do our part toward reducing this invasive plant! We met at Cowbane Prairie Natural Area Preserve, one of our local birding hotspots near Stuarts Draft, to hold a "pull party"! Hooray! We're making better habitat for birds and other wildlife.



Ryan (VA DCR) shows ABC volunteers the invasive Garlic Mustard



ABC volunteers removing Garlic Mustard at Cowbane Preserve



Bonnie Hughes shows off her "haul" of the invasive plant



Flowering Garlic Mustard

2023 Raptorthon: A Summary

by Vic Laubach

Although challenging, our Raptorthon this year on May 1 was another success; ending with 81 species, including 10 raptor species (Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, American Kestrel, Bald Eagle, Osprey, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Turkey Vulture, Black Vulture, and Eastern Screech Owl)! Our team (Vic Laubach, Lynne Parks, Rich Wood, and Robyn Puffenbarger) made it to Paddy Knob (on the Virginia–West Virginia border at 4,478 ft elevation) at 7:20 am only to find cloudy, windy, freezing conditions! These conditions remained with us throughout the day, with a high of 48F, 15–20 mph winds, and intermittent rain/snow/sleet! Nonetheless, we found a few good birds at Paddy Knob including Broad-winged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Least Flycatcher, Veery, plenty of Dark-eyed Juncos, and 4 warbler species (Ovenbird, Black-and-white, Redstart, Black-throated Green). On our drive north to Blue Grass we found an Osprey, Hermit Thrush, Wood Duck, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Killdeer. At the Trout Hatchery north of Monterey, we found lots of swallows (Northern Rough-winged, Tree, and Barn), a Bald Eagle, Louisiana Waterthrush, Yellow Warbler, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. At Forks of Water we found a big highlight of the day: a singing Yellow-throated Warbler in a Sycamore above the river! Nearby we also found a Red-shouldered Hawk, American Kestrel, Common Merganser, and House Wren. Along Wimer Mountain Rd. to the West Virginia border, we found a Solitary Sandpiper, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, a flock of 24 Double-crested Cormorants flying over, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Eastern Kingbird, 2 Black Vultures, and another Osprey. In Blue Grass we met up with John Spahr, who took us to a nearby Eastern Screech-Owl nesting box containing a Gray-phase Owl sitting on eggs (or perhaps hatchlings). Nearby we also found a Downy Woodpecker, Veery, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, and a singing Bobolink. At a pond along Laurel Fork Rd., we found a Least Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Killdeer, and Savannah Sparrows.

By this time (2:00 pm), the cold rain became persistent, so we headed back to Augusta County, where the weather was a bit more comfortable. At Ramsey's Draft, we found White-throated Sparrows, a Blue-headed Vireo, and 6 warbler species (Louisiana Waterthrush, Blackburnian, Black-and-white, Redstart, Pine, and Black-throated Green). Along West Augusta Rd. we found another Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Red-tailed Hawk, Kestrel, Orchard Oriole, and Blue-winged Teal. We reached our final destination, Bells Lane in Staunton, at 4:00 pm, where we found some White-crowned Sparrows, Brown Thrasher, and a Kestrel. Robyn had been reminding us all day that we hadn't seen a chickadee, and we feared we'd end up chickadee-less! However, as we were walking to our vehicle to head home, a lone Carolina Chickadee called out from a nearby tree as if to say "Wait, don't forget about me, your 81st species of the day!"

The weather certainly made things interesting, but it was mostly just a conversation topic, among many other topics of great conversation while driving around all day in our warm vehicle! Thanks for driving, Rich! Fun times, great memories, and good birds made for another successful Raptorthon!



The 2023 Raptorthon Team
from L to R : Vic Laubach,
Lynne Parks, Robyn
Puffenbarger, Rich Wood



Ovenbird
photo by Vic Laubach

President's Message—June 2023

by Rich Wood

June is **National Rivers Month**, a time to recognize and celebrate our life-giving waterways. Healthy, clean streams and rivers are important not only for humans but also for many species of wildlife, including birds, which depend on good water quality to survive. Here in Augusta County we are blessed to have so many waterways that birds use throughout the year. These include the North, South and Middle Rivers. We also enjoy others, such as Christian's Creek, Lewis Creek, the Calfpasture River, St. Mary's River, Little River, Hamilton Branch, Mossy Creek, Back Creek, and dozens of other smaller streams and tributaries.

Several species of waterfowl use these flowing waters for feeding, along with herons, egrets, kingfishers, Osprey, Bald Eagles, Spotted Sandpipers, and waterthrushes. Some of these species also nest along the banks or close by. In addition, dozens of species of songbirds forage, migrate and/or nest in the riparian areas along these waterways, including Yellow-throated Warblers, Cedar Waxwings, Warbling Vireos, and Baltimore Orioles. Let's not forget those winged wonders, the swallows, who can be found feeding on emerging aquatic insects along many of these streams, creeks, and rivers. As birders, it pays for us to always serve as advocates of good water quality and for the protection (and enhancement) of our riparian buffers! Let's Celebrate National River Month ... for the birds! Enjoy, and good birding!



A pair of Common Mergansers enjoying a rest on one of our local streams

photo by Vic Laubach

“Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it.”

—Norman McLean, *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*

Welcome New Members!

Let's all welcome our new members! ABC thanks you for your support, and we look forward to seeing you at monthly programs and events.



Marilyn and Pat Lockhart
Kelsey Stoneberg-Loch
Alex Loch

ABC's membership is now 168 strong!

Treasurer's Report

Opening Balance May 1, 2023	\$33,812.83
Revenue	
Dues	\$50.00
Donations	\$10.00
Total Revenue	\$60.00
Expenses	
Nature Camp Scholarships	\$4,975.00
Donations to Outside Organizations	\$1,150.00
Total Expenses	\$6,125.00
Closing Balance May 28, 2023	\$27,747.83

Remember to check us out at

www.augustabirdclub.org



Virginia Society of Ornithology: www.virginiabirds.org

The Meadowlark

Editor: Rich Wood

beagleboy831@comcast.net

A big THANK YOU to Lucy Ivey for her time and patience in reviewing and editing this issue of *The Meadowlark*!