



THE MEADOWLARK

The monthly newsletter of the Augusta Bird Club



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UPCOMING MEETING

Monday, November 13, 2023, 7:00 pm

Covenant Presbyterian Church

2001 N Coalter St

Staunton, VA 24401

Guest Speaker: Bobby Whitescarver

Environmental Issues of the Shenandoah Valley



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, nearby 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 and environmental policy and politics at James Madison University. He is a Soil Health Champion in the National Association of Conservation Districts network. Bobby has been involved with more than 500 miles of stream bank protection work and has helped landowners plant more than half a million native hardwood trees. Wildlife habitat is one of Bobby's specialties, assisting landowners in establishing and maintaining more than a thousand acres of native prairie, and he has 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 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. Bobby will give us a talk entitled "Environmental Issues for the Shenandoah Valley."



ABC Birdseed & Feeder Sale Pickup

This Saturday, November 4, 8:30 am–12:00 pm

Augusta County Government Center, Dick Huff Lane, Verona



Upcoming Field Trips



Monday, November 6—Bell's Lane

Meeting Time & Place: 8:30 am, Bird Club kiosk

Leader: Penny Warren (onthewingnow17@gmail.com); (540) 849-9245

We'll kick off early November with a morning walk on Bell's Lane, starting with a visit to the private pond, with permission, and then back to the lane and continue birding from there. A variety of birds should greet us in the mixed habitats! Rain will cancel.

Sunday, November 12—Augusta Springs Wetlands

Meeting Time & Place: 8:00 am, parking lot along SR-42 (2735 Little Calf Pasture Hwy)

Leader: Allen Lerner (larnersky@mindspring.com)

Join Allen as he searches for late fall migrants and possibly some early winter visitors. There may also be some waterfowl. Easy walking. Please wear comfortable walking shoes and bring water. Rain will cancel.

Wednesday, November 15—McCormick Farm

Meeting Time & Place: 9:00 am, Mill parking lot

Leader: Jo King (kingbird@yahoo.com); (540) 430-0186

Fall songbird migration is almost over, but waterfowl will still be coming south. Join Jo in search of some of the late season migrants around the farm, on this easy walk through mixed woods and adjacent two ponds. You never know what might turn up in November at McCormick Farm! Please bring water, and wear comfortable walking shoes. McCormick Farm is located 0.5 mi east of I-81 (Raphine exit), just off SR-606.

Saturday, November 18—Chimney Hollow Trail

Meeting Time & Place: 9:00 am, meet in front of Food Lion on N Coalter St in Staunton

Leader: Andrew Clem (agclem@comcast.net)

Andrew will lead us on 1.5 mile (RT) hike into the George Washington & Jefferson National Forests as we look for some late fall migrants. Please wear sturdy hiking shoes, bring water, and wear bright-colored clothing. Rain will cancel.

Augusta County Christmas Bird Count

Sunday, December 17

For information on how you can participate, contact Allen Lerner (larnersky@mindspring.com)

Waynesboro Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 30

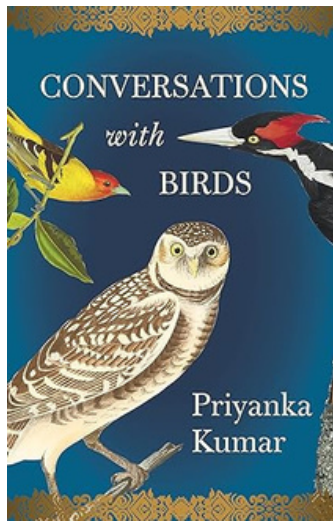
For information on how you can participate, contact Crista Cabe (cristacabe@gmail.com)



Book Review

by Penny Warren

Conversations with Birds by Priyanka Kumar



I once heard an interview with some authors discussing the opening sentence for a book and how critical it is that it grab a person. When I read the first line in this book, “Birds are my almanac. They tune me into the seasons, and into myself[,]” I was sold.... It was a “you had me at hello” moment! I was in love with the book!

Kumar is an award-winning documentarian and author who grew up at the feet of the Himalayas in India. After moving to California, she at first felt disconnected in many ways to society, to nature, but she regains her footing through birds. A near-death experience while hiking in the mountains of California connects her with a bird that catches her soul’s attention, “a mango-colored bird,” a Western Tanager.

From there she begins the process of resetting her inner navigation and delves into the world of birds and animals, full of joy and wonder, while connecting her family, past and present, and the natural world. She ends up in New Mexico, one of my favorite spots on the planet, and I so enjoyed following her to many birding spots I know and love.

Being a staunch defender of the planet, Kumar does reflect on climate change and habitat loss, and this weighs in while she and her family have a five-week residency at Aldo Leopold’s cabin, Mi Casita, in northern New Mexico. She is on the quest for a Goshawk and its nest, and relevant ecological concerns are evident, e.g., trophy hunting, predatory animal control, thinning of forests and timber sales, all at the mercy of “cattle, timber, and mining barons,” all taking their toll on various bird and animal species.

She is a gifted writer and has the ability to pull you gracefully and deeply into her meditations on life and, therein, all of the beauty. It is the most soulful and eloquent book I have read since reading Helen MacDonald’s *H Is for Hawk*.

FUN FACT:

According to National Geographic, scientists have an answer for the age-old dispute over which came first, the chicken or the egg. Reptiles were laying eggs thousands of years before chickens appeared. The first chicken came from an egg laid by a bird that was not quite a chicken. Therefore, the egg came first.

Hawkwatch Update through October

The fall raptor migration at Rockfish Gap is progressing well in many ways, and not as well in some other ways. So far, we've had pretty good coverage, but our coverage usually declines in the final month of November. As of October 28, 2023, we've had a total of 31,716 migrating raptors, which is above the average of 27,521 (see summary below)! Of course, most of these were the Broad-winged Hawks, of which there were 28,462. Bald Eagles, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Red-shouldered Hawks, and Merlin are also above average thus far. We broke the single-day record for Sharp-shinned Hawks on October 21 with 595, beating the previous day's record of 508 in 1986. A few raptors are notably below average thus far, including Osprey, Northern Harrier, Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel, and Peregrine Falcon. For November, we expect increasing numbers of Red-tailed Hawk, Golden Eagle, and American Goshawk, and maybe more Red-shouldered, and possibly a Rough-legged Hawk! We will be counting through the end of November. Visitors welcome!

-Vic Laubach (Coordinator, Rockfish Gap Hawkwatch)

AUG-OCT	2023	AVG
Observ. Hours	398	453
Osprey	145	266
Bald Eagle	309	213
N Harrier	45	58
Sharp-shinned	1934	1774
Cooper's Hawk	208	288
A Goshawk	0	3.1
Red-shoulder	56	43
Broad-winged	28,462	24,239
Red-tail	293	288
Rough-legged	0	0
Golden Eagle	3	7.9
Am Kestrel	134	211
Merlin	53	41
Peregrine	27	37
Unidentified	42	52
Mississippi Kite	5	3.1
TOTAL	31,716	27,521



Juvenile Golden Eagle (above),
Immature Red-tailed Hawk (below)
photos by Vic Laubach



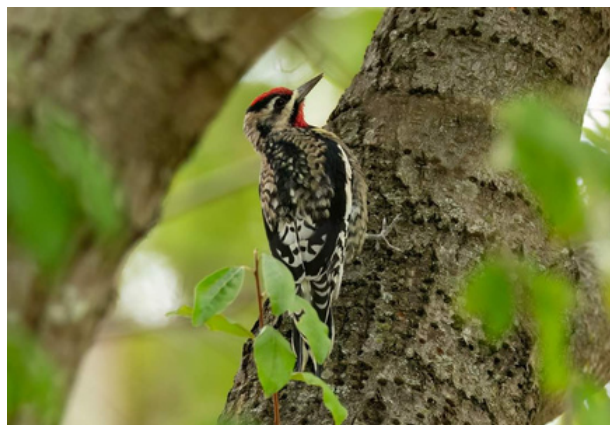
Recent Sightings



Bay-breasted Warbler—SR-610 (photo by Vic Laubach)



Gray-cheeked Thrush—Augusta Springs Wetlands (photo by Vic Laubach)



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker—Bell's Lane (photo by Jim Hill)



Northern Harrier w/ lunch—Bell's Lane (photo by Jim Hill)



A flock of Great Egrets flies over the Rockfish Gap Hawkwatch (photo by Vic Laubach)



Ruby-crowned Kinglet (above) and Blue-headed Vireo (left) Montgomery Hall Park (photos by Andrew Clem)

Field Trip Reports



Thirteen members of the Augusta Bird Club (ABC) conducted a field trip to **McCormick Farm on October 18**. The pleasant weather and congeniality of the birders resulted in 41 species of birds observed and noted. Great numbers of Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Cedar Waxwings, and Robins were present throughout the trip. Several Warblers, including Nashville, Cape May, Palm, and the Yellow-rumped, kept us enthralled. Interesting to mention was a Great Blue Heron perched on top of a power pole. Towhees along with Swamp, Field, Chipping, White-throated, and Song Sparrows rounded out a good species count for the day.

Thanks to unusually warm weather, we had a good turnout for the field trip at the **Boy Scout camp on Saturday, October 28**, with nine people attending. It was very birdy at the end of the road where we parked, and we came upon a few hot spots while hiking up the Trimble Mill hunter access road. Highlights included a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Blue-headed Vireos, Palm Warblers, and a pair of elusive Hermit Thrushes. An immature White-crowned Sparrow made a brief appearance, along with a few other sparrow species. There were a dozen or more Ruby-crowned Kinglets, but they mostly stayed high up in the trees, hard to see. We finally saw some of the expected Eastern Phoebes on our way out but, rather surprisingly, no nuthatches at all. As we were about to leave, Deb Kirtland spotted two Gray Catbirds and some Cedar Waxwings, and Antonio Martinez spotted some Red-tailed Hawks, bringing our total species count up to 33. On the way back to Staunton, some of us drove along Livick Road in Swoope, where we saw some Savannah Sparrows, House Finches, more Palm Warblers, and a few others. Thanks to all the folks who joined in the good, clean outdoor fun!



2024 Nature Camp!



ABC Nature Camp Scholarships Available!

Information about the ABC Nature Camp 2024 scholarship is now on our website! The Nature Camp page includes information about the camp, the scholarship process, this year's essay topic, and a link to the fillable application form. Big thanks to Crista Cabe for redesigning the application and to Andrew Clem for updating the webpage. Please help spread the word to potential Nature Campers. **If you have any questions, contact Sarah Foster (fostercabin@hotmail.com).**



Annual Holiday Party!

Monday, December 11

Pot Luck Dinner

For more information, please email Linda Matkins (linda.matkins@gmail.com)

What's on the Menu?



Quick reference seed and food chart

SPECIES	PREFERRED SEED/FOOD											
	Black-oil Sunflower	Striped Sunflower	Sunflower Hearts	Nyjer (Thistle)	Peanuts	Tree Nuts	Fruit	Millet	Safflower	Milo	Cracked Corn	Suet Cakes
Bluebirds			•				•					•
Buntings			•				•	•				
Cardinals	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Chickadees	•	•	•	•	•	•						•
Doves			•	•				•	•	•	•	
Goldfinches	•		•	•				•				•
Grosbeaks	•	•	•					•	•		•	
House Finches	•		•	•	•			•	•			
Jays	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Juncos			•	•	•			•		•	•	
Mockingbirds							•					•
Nuthatches	•	•	•		•	•	•		•			•
Purple Finches	•		•	•				•				
Quail								•		•	•	
Siskins	•		•	•							•	•
Sparrows	•		•	•				•		•	•	
Tanagers			•				•					
Titmice	•	•	•	•	•	•					•	•
Towhees								•		•		
Woodpeckers	•		•		•	•	•			•		•
Squirrels	•	•	•		•	•	•				•	



Pine Siskins and a Downy Woodpecker feed on black oil sunflower seed (above), while a Red-bellied Woodpecker and Downy Woodpecker enjoy a suet cake (below).
photos by Rich Wood



Source: National Audubon Society



Of Days Gone By

As we head toward the end of the hawk-watching season, we decided to "turn back the clock" 41 years ago to the fall of 1982.

Here, we highlight one of the many articles from one of the founding members of the ABC, YuLee Lerner, as she describes her observations from late September, and a day watching raptors up on Afton Mountain.



The sky is alive

9/19/82

By YuLEE LARNER

Everytime you go outside during September and October, you should make it a habit to look up.

During this season, the sky is alive with hundreds of birds, soaring and swirling around as they prepare for their journey South for the winter.

In town, the species that is most common is the Chimney Swift. After nesting in chimneys of various buildings — houses, schools and churches — they spend their final weeks here flying over the rooftops or high in the air, feeding as they fly, and storing up fat for energy they will need for the long flight ahead.

In town also are Common Nighthawks which appear in ever-increasing numbers in early fall, especially late in the evenings. They, too, are feeding on insects and preparing to head South. Birds that depend on insects for food must set out while the supply is plentiful.

In rural areas, the sky is alive with swallows — Barn, Tree, Rough-winged, Cliff and Bank — all congregating for the migratory flight.

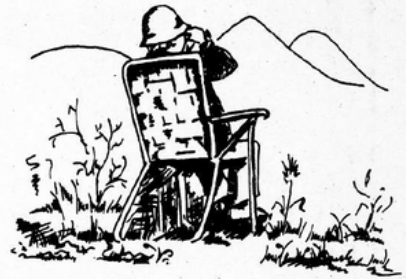
One day recently we observed at least 850 Cliff Swallows that were feeding on insects in a cornfield and skimming over a farm pond near Swoope.

Monarch butterflies are joining in the great migration as they choose wind currents and thermals to reduce the effort of flying. We wonder how their thin, flimsy wings can withstand the battering of wind and rain, and of course many of them never make it all the way to their winter home in South America.

For most of one day we watched for hawks at Afton Mountain, but the sky was not alive.

Until about 3:30 p.m., we had seen less than 25 Broad-winged Hawks. We had made up for the lack of numbers, however, by having superb views of low-flying Osprey, sometimes two at a time.

By the end of the day, we



recorded 20 Osprey, which was an unusually good count for one day. We had enjoyed meeting many visitors who passed by and stopped to check our progress. We believe we encouraged several newcomers to become involved in hawkwatching.

The day was quite hot and still, not the best day for hawk flights. Most of our visitors had left, so that when the real excitement began, there were only about 10 of us left of the 30 or more who had been there earlier.

It was just like we wish for in planning a day of hawkwatching: Silhouetted against a puffy cumulus cloud, streams of Broad-winged Hawks appeared, circled in kettles overhead and sailed off one by one to the Southwest.

Before the hour was over, we had counted more than 800 hawks.

For those of you who missed it, there is still time. Birdwatchers will be looking to the sky at the Afton Mountain overlook near the Holiday Inn for several more weekends and many week days and would welcome you.

There is an excellent publication just made available through the Hawk Migration Association of North America. It is "A Beginner's Guide to Hawkwatching," published by the public information committee of the group.

Compiled by Myriam Moore of Lynchburg, it is a delightful pamphlet filled with helpful information.

If you would like to know more about it, contact me or any other member of Augusta Bird Club. And remember: Look up. the sky is alive.

President's Message

by Rich Wood

As we move into November, we transition into another season of birds and birding. Gone are most of our summer-resident birds, that have migrated south to warmer climates. Our days have grown shorter with the amount of sunlight we receive, and the temperatures have begun to drop. Although our plants now begin their long dormant “sleep” period, several species of birds we may see only for a few short months each year start to appear. In the open fields, flocks of Horned Larks and American Pipits appear, with the possibilities of Longspurs mixed in and maybe even the striking black and white Snow Buntings. Hunting over these same fields we may catch sight of Northern Harriers flying low looking for small rodents and, if we’re lucky, a visiting Rough-legged Hawk that has come south from its Arctic breeding ground.

Our waterways host waterfowl that we may not normally see here in Augusta County, VA, most of the year, including Mergansers, Long-tailed Ducks, and flocks of Ring-necked Ducks, Scaup, Canvasbacks, and Redheads. Throw in some Grebes and Loons, and winter can be an exciting time to keep an eye on our local lakes, rivers, and ponds.

We can’t forget our own backyard visitors!—maybe the most eagerly awaited birds that we can see on a regular basis. Each year we keep alert for winter finches such as Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, and the bold black and gold plumage of Evening Grosbeaks! I love watching the scratching behavior of the ground feeders like White-throated, White-crowned, and Fox Sparrows. Personally, I always look forward to the return of the “snowbirds,” as my dad used to call them—Dark-eyed Juncos. And in the peaceful silence of a cold morning, the soft, nasal calls of Red-breasted Nuthatches is like music to my ears! Yes, winter may bring many outdoor changes, but for me, I look forward to the colder, snowy season with great anticipation each year! Good Birding!

Membership

by Mona Bearor, Membership Coordinator



Sara Battin
Patricia Devitt
Barbara Franklin
Carol & Glen Marshall
Patty Sechi
Sue Woodworth

We are now 189 members strong! Thank You!

Check us out on the web

www.augustabirdclub.org



The Meadowlark
Editor: Rich Wood

Augusta Bird Club Monthly Meeting
October 9, 2023
Covenant Presbyterian Church, Staunton, VA

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by President Rich Wood. He welcomed all and introduced board members and committee chairs.

Recent Sightings: Hummingbirds are still here in good numbers. Also seen are returning Juncos, a Nashville Warbler, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and both Kinglets. The Hawkwatch participants observed Double-crested Cormorants and a group of Great Egrets!

Field Trip Reports: Allen Lerner led a trip to the Blue Ridge Parkway, where he was buzzed by a Screech Owl. The 9/30 hike on Bell's Lane found 45 different species. Upcoming walks are (1) McCormick's Farm with Jo King on 10/18, and (2) Andrew Clem will lead a walk at the Boy Scout Camp on 10/28.

Hawkwatch: Vic Laubach reports approximately 28,000 Broad-winged Hawks so far this year, with 8,600 in one day. Bald Eagles and Merlins are doing well at 100 and 32 respectively. Osprey and Harrier numbers are down so far. One Golden Eagle has been counted. The watch continues through November 30. Counters are needed. If you are interested in learning more about the Hawkwatch or how to become an observer or counter, go to the Rockfish Gap Hawkwatch link found on the Augusta Bird Club website, Augustabirdclub.org.

Birdseed Sale: Crista Cabe reported that the sale is ready for orders. You can order online through our website, pick up a printed order sheet at the meeting, or mail in your order from the form that will be mailed to all members and past participants. We were reminded that the proceeds from this sale go to Nature Camp scholarships, so everyone was encouraged to order a lot! The birds and Nature Campers thank you.

Conservation

Bird Banding: John Spahr requests help next May and June during the banding of Kestrels and Screech Owls in Highland County. Anyone interested should let him know.

Project FeederWatch: The Cornell Lab of Ornithology conducts citizen science research on birds at feeders from November through April. If anyone wants to participate go to FeederWatch.org.

Christmas Bird Counts: Allen Lerner will coordinate the Augusta County count on December 17. Crista Cabe will coordinate the Waynesboro count, with December 30 the probable date. Anyone wanting to participate can contact the coordinators.

Membership: We currently have 189 members.

Program: Megan Thomas from the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources gave an amazing program entitled "Rebound of Virginia's Peregrine Falcons and the History of the Richmond Falcon Cam." The falcon cam follows a Peregrine nest on the Riverfront Plaza Hotel in Richmond from spring through fledging.

Submitted by Marilyn Nash, Secretary