



# THE MEADOWLARK

*The monthly newsletter of the Augusta Bird Club*



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## The Importance of Winter Roost Boxes

*by Mona Bearor*

Providing food and water in all seasons is a great way to help your backyard birds. Adding nest boxes to your yard gives the birds a place to raise their young. But many of us forget that although birds aren't nesting in winter, they do need safe, dry places to roost where they can be out of the wind and stay warm. Birds may roost in stands of evergreens, in heavy shrubs, or in vines that are close to buildings. Some cavity nesters will roost together—sometimes several layers deep!—in a previously used nest site. The loss of natural cover is felt intensely by birds in the cold months, and we can help by placing roost boxes on our property.

Roost boxes differ from birdhouses in that they are larger and have perches inside on which birds can sleep. They have the entrance hole at the bottom, allowing the heat from the bird's bodies to rise and be trapped inside. They have no air vents. A good roost box should be about 9–12 inches square and 2–3 feet high. Dowels inserted through holes in the sides of the box will serve as perches. Alternating them will allow several birds to roost without piling up on one another. The opening should be only about 2" above the base of the box, and the box can be mounted 8–10 feet above the ground, with the opening away from the prevailing winds.

Many urban areas have laws requiring the removal of dead trees and limbs, a cleanup process that lessens the number of natural roosting places. The addition of a few roost boxes to these areas would benefit the local bird population greatly.

You can learn more at the following website about winter roosting birds and find plans to build a roost box: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/attract-birds-with-roost-boxes/>.



Views of a winter roost box:  
Outside (above); Inside (below)

# UPCOMING MEETING

**Monday, February 12, 7:00 pm**

**Covenant Presbyterian Church**

**2001 N Coalter St**

**Staunton, VA 24401**

**Guest Speaker: Leslie Sturges**

**Meet Virginia's Bats!**



Founder and President of Bat Conservation & Rescue of Virginia, Leslie has been rehabilitating bats since attending Bat World Sanctuary's Bat Boot Camp in 2001. Over the course of her rehabilitation career, she has handled well over 2,000 bats and has hosted all but one of the mid-Atlantic's native bat species, in addition to brief encounters with several megabat species in captive and rehabilitation settings. She trained with Bat Conservation International in field methods, and is a member of the Northeast Bat Working group. She works with wildlife biologists from USFWS down to local municipal agencies and advises on species behavior and presence to assist regional management decisions.

As a retired park naturalist and former zookeeper, Leslie brings in-depth knowledge of local bat species, ecology, and natural history to her educational programs to further bat conservation in Virginia and beyond. Leslie will tell us all about our Virginia bats and bat rehabilitation in her presentation titled, "**Meet Virginia's Bats.**"

*Don't  
Miss  
This  
One!*



**PLEASE NOTE: We WILL NOT be having a premeeting dinner this month.**



# 2024 Great Backyard Bird Count

## *February 16–19, 2024*

Participating is easy, is fun to do alone or with others, and can be done anywhere you find birds.

How can I participate? It's as easy as 1-2-3!

**Step 1: Decide where you will watch birds.**

**Step 2: Watch birds for 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days, February 16–19, 2024.**

**Step 3: Identify all the birds you see or hear within your planned time/location, and use the best tool for sharing your bird sightings:**

- \* the Merlin ID mobile app
- \* the eBird mobile app
- \* the eBird website (desktop/laptop computer)

For more information, go to <https://www.birdcount.org/about/>





## What Is a Winter Raptor Survey (WRS)?

With the success of nearly 200 volunteer-monitored fall hawkwatches across the US, Canada, and Mexico, scientists wanted to expand their knowledge of raptor populations into the winter. So, in February 2007, the *Hawk Migration Association of North America* (HMANA) started its first Winter Raptor Survey, using participants from several northeastern and midwestern locations.

Each winter, surveyors drive their preplanned route three times: once in December, once in January, and once in February. The participants record every raptor they see, whether perched, flying, or soaring. They also collect each bird's age (adult or immature) and sex if known, habitat (using a code) where observed, and time and location with GPS coordinates. After completing the monthly survey, the collected data is uploaded into HMANA's website.

The survey aims to collect valuable information about wintering, diurnal raptors, utilizing a uniform method, and then to make these data available to researchers, land management and planning agencies, and regional birding organizations. Participants follow a set of guidelines enabling motor vehicle–based observations to be recorded in a standardized format that is scalable to the observer's skill, length of survey route, and detail orientation and capability of the surveying party. The goal of the program is also to foster an enjoyable community science experience.

The WRS was expanded for the first time into Virginia in 2022, when a team from the Augusta Bird Club created, and surveyed, the first route in the state in western Augusta County. Last year, a few more club members established two more WRS routes in Augusta County: one in the central region and one in the northwest area.

For more information, go to <https://www.hmana.org/winter-raptor-survey/>. If you're interested in establishing a new route, drop us an email, and we can suggest several areas in Augusta County that are not being covered!



An adult Red-shouldered Hawk poses for us near Middlebrook, during our December Winter Raptor Survey.

*photo by Vic Laubach*



## Upcoming Field Trips



### **Monday, February 19 (President's Day)—Bell's Lane**

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

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

Let's check out Bell's on President's Day and see if any birds or waterfowl decided to take a holiday break there. I'm still hoping for snow and swans! Rain cancels.

### **Wednesday, February 21—McCormick Farm (bad weather date: February 28—same time/same place)**

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

(McCormick Farm is located 0.5 mi east of I-81 (Raphine exit), just off SR-606.)

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

Join Jo "on the farm" as she searches for a variety of lingering winter birds, as well as a few possible early migrants. Be on the lookout for bluebirds, sparrows, woodpeckers, and waterfowl—maybe the Eurasian Wigeon will still be there! Dress for the weather, wear comfortable walking shoes, and bring water.



### **Members Program Survey**

What kinds of programs would you like to see presented at our monthly meetings? The ABC Program Committee wants to hear from you! Would you prefer all programs to be focused on birds, bird conservation, and birding? Do you want to see more members' birding trips? Do you enjoy learning about other natural history topics? How about current environmental/conservation issues? Please let us know by dropping us an email, to either laubach@virginia.edu, or beagleboy831@comcast.net. Thank you.

## **REMINDER! It's Time To Renew Your 2024 Membership**

**(all memberships expired on 12/31/23)**

by Mona Bearor, Membership Coordinator

Click the Link Below to Download the Membership Form

[http://www.augustabirdclub.org/Docs/ABC\\_2024\\_Membership\\_form.pdf](http://www.augustabirdclub.org/Docs/ABC_2024_Membership_form.pdf)



# Recent Sightings



Wilson's Snipe—Cowbane Preserve  
photo by Vic Laubach



Red-shouldered Hawk—Staunton  
photo by Andrew Clem



Redheads & Ring-necked Ducks—Fishersville Quarry  
photo by Bonnie Hughes



Fox Sparrow—Cowbane Preserve  
photo by Vic Laubach



Yellow-rumped Warbler—Cowbane Preserve  
photo by Vic Laubach



Eastern Screech Owl—Dooms  
photo by Rich Wood



Eurasian Wigeon—McCormick Farm  
photo by Vic Laubach



Northern Harrier—Bell's Lane  
photo by Antonio Martinez

# President's Message

by Rich Wood

## Important Legislation!

*reprinted from the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia*

There are 2.1 million free-roaming cats in Virginia, and 1.2 million of them are unowned. Free-roaming cats kill an estimated 2.4 billion birds and 12.3 billion small mammals in the United States each year and carry diseases and parasites that create public health risks.

House Bill 221 authorizes counties, cities, and towns, if they choose, to adopt a free-roaming cat management plan. It directs the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) to create a model Free-Roaming Cat Management plan and establish minimum standards that will control and reduce the large numbers of free-roaming cats.

HB221 does not prescribe or prohibit any specific cat management strategy, and it provides for public input during the VDACS process. It does not require localities to adopt plans but gives them guidance if they choose to do so. You can read the text of the bill [here](#).

Please ask your delegate to support the bill. If you know of specific problems caused by free-roaming cats, include them in your letter. Be sure to include your name and address in your letter so they know you are a constituent. If you don't know your delegate's name or email address, you can find them [here](#).

Thank you! Your support will help protect birds and our environment.



We are looking for a new editor for our monthly newsletter, *The Meadowlark*. Our newsletter is published and sent out 9 times a year (September–May). Responsibilities include writing articles and soliciting members for articles, gathering recent photos, contacting leaders for upcoming field trips, posting meeting notices, promoting the monthly guest speakers, and more. Creative layout and content is at the discretion of the editor. I will train anyone interested in taking it over, using the free online program, Canva.

If interested, please contact me privately at [beagleboy831@comcast.net](mailto:beagleboy831@comcast.net). Thank you.

—Rich Wood



## Field Trip Reports

Seven intrepid birders gathered on **Wednesday, January 30** to barely above freezing temperatures to conduct a field trip to **McCormick's Farm**. 17 species were recorded. Although the numbers of birds were sparse, the congeniality of the birders was most welcomed! Highlights included: Golden-crowned Kinglet, Gadwall (39), Great blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher and Field Sparrow

- Jo King



**We need your help to staff our exhibit tables at these upcoming spring events:**

- Earth Day Staunton—Saturday, April 20, 2024 (11am–3pm)  
(2 shifts: 11am–1pm & 1pm–3pm)  
Gypsy Hill Park, bandstand area
- Riverfest—Saturday, April 27, 2024 (9am–4pm)  
(2 shifts: 9am–12:30 pm & 12:30 pm–4 pm)  
Constitution Park, Waynesboro

If you can help with any of these shifts, please email Rich Wood:  
([rwood@beagleboy831@comcast.net](mailto:rwood@beagleboy831@comcast.net))

**Check us out on the web**

[www.augustabirdclub.org](http://www.augustabirdclub.org)



*The Meadowlark*  
Editor: Rich Wood