



THE MEADOWLARK



The monthly newsletter of the Augusta Bird Club

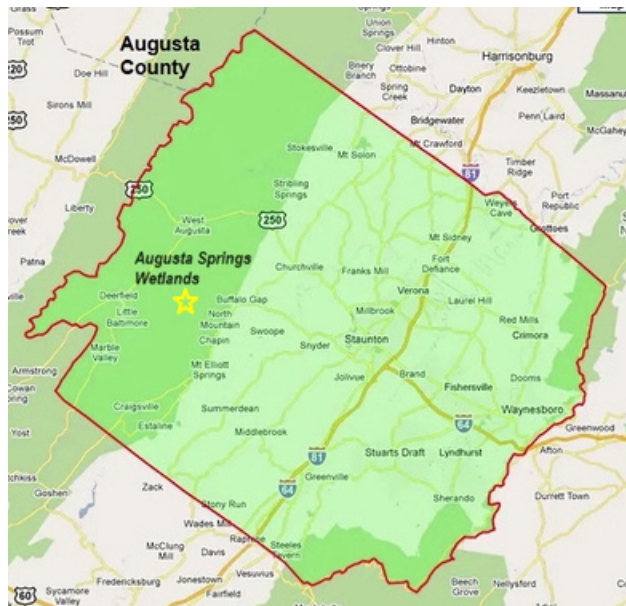
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Spotlight on Augusta County Birding Hotspots: Where Can I Go?

Augusta Springs Wetlands

eBird Hotspot name: "Augusta Springs Wetland Trail"



Female Hooded Mergansers hunting for fish

With a 2/3-mile, level, handicap-accessible nature trail and boardwalk, Augusta Springs Wetlands is one of the most user-friendly birding locations in Augusta County, with some excellent birding! Located along busy US-250, about 17 miles west of Staunton, the wetlands are part of the George Washington National Forest. But just because this marsh sits along a busy road doesn't mean it's not good birding! On the contrary, the small open-water pond attracts a good variety of waterbirds, including Canada Geese, Wood Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, and Great-blue and Green Herons. Virginia Rails have been seen/heard in spring and summer. It's thick alder shrubs, birches, and sycamores are frequently used as perches for resting swallows, flycatchers, Cedar Waxwings, Red-winged Blackbirds, and orioles. In the spring and fall, the wetlands and surrounding shrublands are a great place for migrating warblers and vireos. As one walks along the trail, it's not uncommon to get eye-level looks at some of these small songbirds! Barred Owls and the tiny Winter Wren have also been spotted here. In the surrounding thickets and uplands, Brown Thrashers, thrushes, warblers, woodpeckers, and an occasional Ruffed Grouse can be found. Don't forget to scan the sky above for soaring raptors and eagles.

A bonus of this site is the many amphibians that breed here. On a warm spring evening, the wetlands come alive with the sounds of Spring Peepers and Green Frogs. Later in the summer, listen for the calls of Pickerel Frogs, Gray Tree Frogs, and the deep "jug-of-rum" calls of the Bullfrog! The pond is also home to a large population of Red-spotted Newts.

(Cont'd on page 2)

Augusta Springs Wetlands

(Cont'd)

As its name implies, the wetlands are fed by a large spring, located off the trail, just about 100 yards northeast. The history of the wetlands dates back to the 1800s, when a resort hotel was built on the site. In 1900, millionaire E. G. Pendleton bought the land and converted the Augusta Springs Resort into his home. In addition, a cement slab is all that remains of a once-active mineral-water bottling plant.

If you're looking for an easy stroll that's great for seeing birds and all kinds of nature, you must add the Augusta Springs Wetlands to your places to visit this year!



Yellow-rumped Warbler
photo by Kristen Fuoco



The main spring of Augusta Springs



UPCOMING MEETING

Monday, March 11, 7:00 pm

**Covenant Presbyterian Church
2001 N Coalter St
Staunton, VA 24401**

Guest Speaker: Bruce Peterjohn

**“Everything You Wanted to Know about Hummingbirds
but Were Afraid to Ask!”**



As a longtime birder, Bruce has always been fascinated by hummingbirds. After he visited various tropical birding destinations, his fascination only expanded. Bruce has been banding hummingbirds across the mid-Atlantic region since 2006. While his main interest is in the late fall and winter hummingbirds, he has also explored the fall migration of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds from the Coastal Plain to the mountains of western Virginia. Bruce was the Chief of the US Bird Banding Program between 2008 and 2019, but he is now happily retired and spending his days birding and banding hummingbirds when the opportunity arises.

Bruce's presentation is titled "Everything You Wanted to Know about Hummingbirds but Were Afraid to Ask." He will talk about hummingbirds in general, his banding experiences, as well as some western vagrants that appear during winter.



Bruce measures the wing length of a Calliope Hummingbird.

This tiny, rare visitor spent the fall and winter of 2020–21 in our backyard. In January 2021, Bruce visited us and carefully captured the hummer. After banding it and taking its measurements, he released the bird—all in about 15 minutes.

—Rich Wood

Upcoming Field Trips



Sunday, March 3—Highland County

Meeting Time & Place: 7:45 am to carpool, lower parking lot of Food Lion, North Coalter St, Staunton
Leader: Allen Lerner (larnersky@mindspring.com); (540) 280-3423

Join Allen on this spring adventure to Highland County in search of Golden & Bald Eagles, Black-capped Chickadees, Winter Wrens, Pine Siskins, plus many more. Dress for the weather & bring snacks. Due to driving conditions, the trip will be canceled if there is freezing rain or snow. However, as long as the temperature is above freezing (35 degrees or higher, even with rain), we will go. If time permits, we will trek over to Bath County (Lake Moomaw) in search of waterfowl.

Wednesday, March 20—McCormick Farm (bad weather date: March 27—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

Early spring migrants will be arriving on the farm! Join Jo as she searches for a variety of “in-coming” birds, including sparrows, warblers, active bluebirds, woodpeckers, and waterfowl. Dress for the weather, wear comfortable walking shoes, and bring water.

Field Trip Reports

Eight members of the Augusta Bird Club (ABC) participated in the bird walk on **Bell's Lane on Monday, February 19**. It was a beautiful, sunny day, albeit cool temps to begin with, but overall a most pleasant day for a bird walk with a great group of birders. We tallied 36 species plus a couple of unknown duck species due to distance.

Some highlights were an assortment of waterfowl ... Gadwall, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Ruddy ... one Bald Eagle, Sapsucker, Red-bellied, Downy, Hairy and Flicker, some beautiful Bluebirds in their “spring blues,” etc. Our day ended with great views of two Ravens and two Red-tails together soaring against the blue sky!

Thanks to all that were able to join!

— Penny Warren

Eleven members of the Augusta Bird Club (ABC) met on **Wednesday, February 21**, to conduct a bird walk on the **McCormick's Farm**. The frigid temperatures did not deter the cheerful birders. Some 34 species were observed. Great views of the Golden-crowned Kinglet, a chorus of Carolina Wrens, “creeping” Brown Creeper, Woodpeckers, and numerous Gadwall and a Belted Kingfisher with fish in beak did not disappoint.

Many thanks to all the participants. I look forward to our next outing on March 20, when many migrants will be coming through. Stay well, and keep looking and listening to our feathered friends.

— Jo King



Bird Count Survey Volunteers Needed This Spring

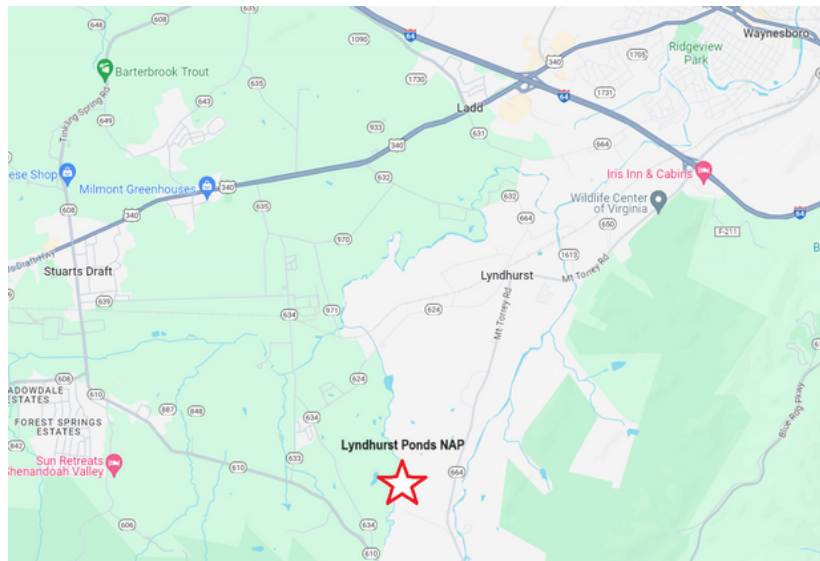
Virginia Greene of the VA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is looking for birding volunteers for a new project at the Lyndhurst Ponds Natural Area Preserve (NAP). DCR is at the beginning stages of management there and is planning to lay the groundwork for grasslands similar to those at Cowbane Prairie NAP. DCR is very interested to know what birds are currently using the landscape at Lyndhurst, so it can observe any shifts in species over time as it carries out forestry mulching, invasive removal, and fire to promote those native grasslands.

To that end, it is looking to get some help collecting point count data. Volunteers would do point counts on designated days this spring, and follow up next year (and years following if at all possible!) so it can start to get a picture of shifting avian usage that relates to its management efforts.

WHAT ARE POINT COUNTS?

A point count is a survey method used to count birds, where an observer stands at a single location and records all of the birds seen and heard in a given amount of time. The time can vary from 3 to 20 minutes. The observer then moves on to the next point. Each observer usually walks a predetermined grid, or circular, pattern.

If you would like more information, or are interested in volunteering to help with this citizen science project, please contact our Conservation Chair, Lynne Parks (v.lynneparks@gmail.com), who is coordinating ABC's involvement with DCR. 😊



Recent Sightings



A very rare, 1st time in Virginia Gray-crowned Rosy Finch
—Amherst Co (photo by Mark Kosiewski)



Tundra Swans—Swoope (photo by Vic Laubach)



Harlequin Duck—Kiptopeke fishing pier (photo by Jim Hill)



Eastern Screech Owl—Verona
(photo by Antonio Martinez)



Yellow-rumped Warbler—Jolivue (photo by Warren Faught)



Black Ducks—Swoope (photo by Vic Laubach)



Mr. Gadwall takes a bow!—McCormick Farm
(photo by Ann Cline)



Pileated Woodpecker (photo by Matt Diley)

President's Message

by Rich Wood

We are birders. We enjoy watching birds, learning about birds, photographing birds, writing about birds, drawing/painting birds, and doing what we can for bird conservation. Birds bring joy to our lives and connect us to our natural world. This is why the report that came out a few years ago from Cornell Lab and American Bird Conservancy was so alarming ... and if it wasn't a wake-up call before, it should be now!

According to research published online by the journal *Science*, wild bird populations in the continental US and Canada have declined by almost 30% since 1970. "We were astounded by this net loss across all birds on our continent, the loss of billions of birds," said Cornell Lab of Ornithology conservation scientist Ken Rosenberg, who led an international team of scientists from seven institutions in the analysis of population trends for 529 bird species. The study quantifies for the first time the total decline in bird populations in the continental US and Canada, a loss of 2.9 billion breeding adult birds—with devastating losses among birds in every biome. Rosenberg, who leads joint research initiatives by the Cornell Lab and American Bird Conservancy, says these study results transcend the world of birds. "These bird losses are a strong signal that our human-altered landscapes are losing their ability to support birdlife," he said. "And that is an indicator of a coming collapse of the overall environment." So, how can we help?

Cornell Lab recommends a few simple things we can do to help our feathered friends.

- **Make Windows Safer, Day and Night**
- **Keep Cats Indoors**
- **Reduce Lawns, Plant Natives**
- **Avoid Pesticides**
- **Drink Coffee That's Good For Birds**
- **Protect Our Planet From Plastic**
- **Watch Birds, Share What You See**

As Rachel Carson wrote in her famous book, *Silent Spring* (1962), "Over increasingly large areas of the United States, spring now comes unheralded by the return of the birds, and the early mornings are strangely silent where once they were filled with the beauty of bird song."

Let's celebrate birds, every day! Let's try to do what we can to protect them and their critical habitats! Personally, I don't want to leave a world of "silent springs" for my children, or for future generations! Good Birding!



Canada Warbler
photo by Antonio Martinez



VA Department of Wildlife Resources announces a new program! ***VIRGINIA BIRDING CLASSIC***

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources invites you to participate in the kickoff of our inaugural statewide birding competition — The **Virginia Birding Classic**! The Classic will run from April 15th, 2024-May 15th, 2024, during which time teams of birders are asked to search the public lands of Virginia for as many species as they can find in 24 hours. Teams may bird as many 24-hour periods as they like, but can **only submit one day (with the most species they've found)** to eBird.

All registration proceeds will benefit the Virginia Wildlife Grant Program which connects youth to the outdoors. Registration opens on March 1, 2024 and closes April 1, 2024.

Learn more about this new challenge at www.dwr.virginia.gov/virginia-birding-classic.



Welcome New Members!

Donna & Matt Diley!



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. Thank you.

—Rich Wood

We Still Need Volunteers For Riverfest!

Please consider helping us cover our exhibit table for a few hours



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)

Check us out on the web

www.augustabirdclub.org



The Meadowlark
Editor: Rich Wood

Augusta Bird Club Monthly Meeting
February 12, 2024
Covenant Presbyterian Church, Staunton, VA

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 pm by President Rich Wood.

Upcoming Field Trips: (1) 2/19 Bell's Ln, Staunton, 8:00 am, (2) 2/21 McCormick's Farm, 9 am, (3) Highland County. Check website for details.

Recent Sightings: The heron rookery on Sangers Lane is starting to see arrivals. Approximately 200 American Pipits were seen on White Bridge Rd, and Eagles on Barren Ridge Rd. Woodcocks are dancing at Beagle Gap in Shenandoah National Park and Cowbane Prairie Preserve. Purple Finches and Shrike are on Livick Rd. The Gray-crowned Rosy Finch is still in Amherst. Pine Siskins, Fox Sparrows are also about.

Membership: Time to pay dues if you haven't already.

General News: The Great Backyard Bird Count is scheduled for 2/16 to 2/19. This is a collaboration between the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Audubon, and Birds Canada.

Rich has created a survey asking members what programs they would like to see. Please fill one out. You can also make suggestions to Vic Laubach (laubach@virginia.edu).

Volunteers are needed for the Earth Day exhibit on 4/20 in Staunton and Riverfest on 4/27 in Waynesboro. Let Rich Wood know (beagleboy831@comcast.net).

The club is seeking a new newsletter editor. Newsletters are sent out by email from September through May. Training is available. Let Rich Wood know if you can help (beagleboy831@comcast.net).

Conservation/Education: Lynne Parks reports DCR needs volunteers to conduct a bird survey in the spring on approximately 40 acres near Quillen's Pond. They will be doing some restoration work there and want to know what birds are there prior to their work. Let Lynne know if you can help (v.lynneparks@gmail.com).

The Staunton Library is conducting 2 birding workshops, one on birding basics and one 2/17 on bird illustration.

Program: Leslie Sturges, founder of Bat Conservation and Rescue of Virginia, gave a program entitled "Bats: The Animals, the Myths, and Reality." We learned about the beauty, magic, and critical importance of bats in Virginia and everywhere. We met Birch, a non-releasable Big Brown Bat and watched him gobble down mealworms. Leslie can be contacted at lsturges@virginiabats.org if you have questions or concerns about bats.

The meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Marilyn Nash