



VOL. 58, NO. 8 APRIL 2024

THE MEADOWLARK

The monthly newsletter of the Augusta Bird Club



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New Website is Now Live!

www.augustabirdclub.org



Augusta Bird Club

Connecting people with birds since 1966



HOME ▾ ABOUT US ▾ CALENDAR OF EVENTS ▾ RESOURCES ▾ JOIN/RENEW/DONATE CONTACT

Welcome to the AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB

After several months of planning, much input and communications, and overall re-design, the new Augusta Bird Club (ABC) website is now live!

Vice President and Program Chair Vic Laubach worked hard at redesigning the website's overall look—including the layout and how it's organized—for easier navigation. We've added an interactive calendar for upcoming field trips, conservation projects, and special events. Access to all the popular photos, past newsletters, and birding resource links is now right at your fingertips.

In addition, we've listened to many of our members' requests to add the feature that allows them to renew their memberships right online as well as to ease joining for any new members. There are several new resource links that highlight our bird checklist, Birds of Augusta County publication, birding hot spots, eBird sightings, and a cool eBird frequency chart that shows which birds occur in our area and when!

We're superexcited about our new website! We invite you to visit the website to learn about our history and who we are, to discover the many activities you can enjoy and get involved in each month, to explore tools to help make you a better birder, to look through beautiful photos, and to ease in renewing your membership! Most importantly, we feel our new website lays the groundwork for future information and communications with the ABC! We thank Vic for all the time and effort he volunteered to make make this happen! Good Birding!

APRIL MEETING

Monday, April 8, 7:00 pm

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

**Guest Speaker: Dr. Robyn Puffenbarger
“Robins to Raptors”**



Robyn Puffenbarger received her BS in biology from Virginia Tech and a PhD in molecular immunology from the Medical College of Virginia. After a postdoctoral research fellowship at SUNY–Stony Brook, she joined the faculty of Bridgewater College, where she is Professor and Chair of the Department of Biology and Environmental Science. Robyn teaches ornithology, genetics, and intro-biology courses. With her husband Bill, they birdwatch in the yard and all over the world, having seen birds on four continents. Robyn is also a Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener since 2011 and loves learning more about native plants to support wildlife.

For the program, Robyn will bring part of the Bridgewater College bird skin collection to talk about a variety of topics. From woodpeckers to owls to songbirds to raptors, you will have a chance to see some of the beautiful bird species that inhabit Virginia. We will also cover some fun facts and trivia about birds: feather coloration, habitats, migration patterns, diet, identification, as well as how to attract more birds to your backyard.

Upcoming Field Trips



Tuesday, April 2—Bell's Lane

Meeting Time & Place: 8:30 am, ABC kiosk

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

Join Penny for a spring time walk on Bell's, and see what early migrants—as well as “usual suspects”—we might find. Rain cancels.

Wednesday, April 10—McCormick Farm (bad weather date: April 17—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.

Saturday, April 13—Piney Grove, Wakefield, VA

Meeting Time & Place: 6:30 am, the park & ride by Chick-fil-A, 710 Shenandoah Village Dr in Waynesboro. This is about a 2.5 to 3-hour drive to Wakefield.

Leader: Allen Lerner (lanersky@mindspring/com)

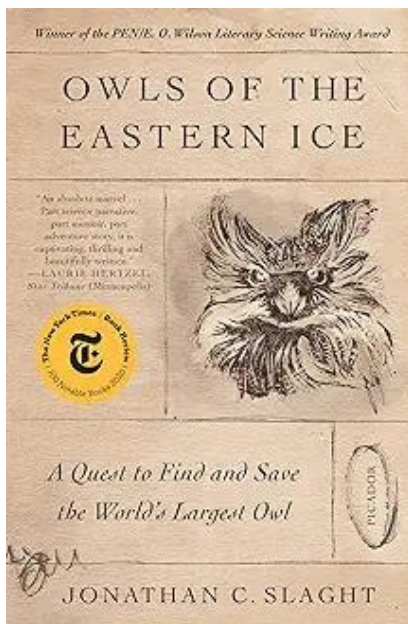
We will be looking for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and any early migrants—like Yellow-throated Warblers, Common Yellowthroats, Blue-headed and White-eyed Vireos, Brown-headed Nuthatches—plus whatever else crosses our path. Trip goes rain or shine, so please dress for the weather. Bring water and snacks, and wear comfortable walking shoes. Afterward we will have lunch at the Virginia Diner.

Field Trip Reports

The powerful winds this month did not deter 10 members of the ABC from conducting a field trip to **McCormick Farm on Wednesday, March 20**. Despite the difficult weather conditions, we persevered to note 27 species. Of note, only 1 Gadwall and 4 Canada Geese were seen on the ponds. We were consoled by the sweet song of the Meadowlark and the relentless calling of the Tufted Titmouse.



The windswept birding crew at McCormick Farm.



Book Review

by Penny Warren

Owls of the Eastern Ice

by Jonathan C. Slaght

This is a tale of the rigors of scientific field work in a very remote part of the world, the southeastern Russian province of Primorye, located between China, North Korea, and the Sea of Japan. It also a tale of adventure retold in riveting fashion.

During Slaght's three years in the Peace Corps in Primorye, he befriended some ornithologists, and that is when he saw his first fish owl and the passion began. The Blakiston Fish Owl, nickname "feathered salmon eater," is massive with a 6' wing span, height over 2', yellow eyes, huge ear tufts, and although somewhat disheveled looking in appearance, it seems quite endearing, I think. The owl couple perform duets, an uncommon trait in less than 4% of bird species globally,

and their duets can last hours into the night during the breeding season. Their pellets are just bones based on their fish diet, so there is no fur to bind a pellet together. They are classified as endangered, and although they have a wide range, theirs is one of those species that require very specific conditions for their habitat.

Slaght returned a number of winters later, winter being the best time to find fish owls, and the story begins in a village named Hell, Agzu . . . and things do not get much better after that! It became known immediately that the social bonding ritual with locals included finishing to the end the bottle(s) of vodka—or sometimes ethano!!!!—that was/were placed on the table for the evening. In another village, they were considered somewhat snooty because their car had real license plates! Many encounters took place with an assorted bunch of characters: a one-armed hunter, recluses, a hermit, etc.

This area of Russia has been subjected to vast logging, forest clearings, mountaintop removal, mining, dam construction, overfishing, and natural disasters such as a typhoon, all leading to loss of, and degraded, habitat. One of Slaght's thoughts was that if the habitat could be protected for the fish owl, it would help preserve the habitat for the other creatures that live there—Amur tiger, various types of deer, Asian black bear, and wild boar, plus all of the bird species.

You are taken right along with Slaght and his team into the forests, along the rivers, as they constantly try to outrun the melting ice and not get caught in the "frazil ice," a slushy mass of dense ice sinks, with no way of knowing how deep they are. Sometimes the paths for the snowmobiles would disappear, necessitating bushwhacking a path in order to continue. Or they would set traps and find the traps foiled by the owls. However, through doggedness, they did accomplish locating and eventually capturing owls, collecting data, and banding and tagging them with a transmitter. After several years of continued work, all of their efforts provided critical information allowing for a conservation plan.

Slaght is now the Russia and Northeast Asia coordinator for the Wildlife Conservation Society, managing research projects on various endangered species throughout an extended area from the Arctic to the tropics. Check out his website, <https://jonathanslaght.com/>, for more information and several brief audio and video clips.

Remembering Grant Simmons

by Crista Cabe



Grant Simmons, a charter member of the ABC since its founding in 1966, passed away at the age of 92 on December 22, 2023. He remained active in the club through the years, participating in the club's activities and serving as both president and seed sale chair at various times. He was invariably kind, generous, and supportive of others, and he had a great sense of humor. These qualities made him a wonderful friend and birding companion on local field trips, weekends away, and international birding travel.

Grant had two lifetime loves: birding and golf. He grew up in Sangerville in northwestern Augusta County and built his career close by. He was an ordained Brethren minister and served several area churches and ministries. His calling was to soothe the pain of others, and in addition to ministry, he was a professionally licensed family counselor and founder of the Family Counseling Service of Waynesboro.

In his last years, Grant moved to Naples, Florida, to live with his daughter, play golf, and watch the ibises and other birds that frequented the golf course beside their home. He stayed in touch with the Bird Club until the end, supporting the Seed Sale and the club's scholarships and conservation initiatives.



UPCOMING Events

Visit our ABC display at these upcoming events.

Earth Day Staunton 2024

STOP the Plastic Tidal Wave!



Sat., April 20, 11AM-3PM
Gypsy Hill Park Bandstand
(Rain Location: Gypsy Hill Park Gym)

Wildlife Center programs, live Beehive, stream critters, electric cars, and more!

Riverfest

Saturday April 27, 2024
Constitution Park, downtown Waynesboro, VA
10 am to 4:30 pm • FREE admission



Annual Spring Picnic Brunch

Saturday, May 11, 2024 (8am–noon)—McCormick Farm



We are excited that our annual spring brunch is being held at McCormick Farm. This will take place rain or shine since this year we have a covered building. Bird walk will take place around the farm from 8 am until 10 am, followed by a brunch in the barn. Please bring a breakfast/brunch item to share with the group. In the past, members have brought breakfast casseroles, muffins, fruit, granola, yogurt, cinnamon rolls, and biscuits, among a variety of other brunch foods. We will supply the beverages.

We'll be in the heart of spring migration, so we are hoping to see waterfowl, shorebirds, sparrows, orioles, warblers, and swallows.

Please come join the group for a morning of birding, food, and fellowship. New members are especially welcome for an opportunity to meet other members of the club.

If you have a question, feel free to contact Linda Matkins at linda.matkins@gmail.com.

Recent Sightings



Red-shouldered Hawk—Staunton (photo by Matt Diley)



Great-horned Owls—JMU Arboretum (photo by Ann Cline)



Fox Sparrow—Augusta Springs Wetland (photo by Lynne Parks)



Purple Finch (female)—Jolivue (photo by Warren Faught)



Brown Creeper—Verona (photo by Antonio Martinez)



Hooded Mergansers—Swoope (photo by Vic Laubach)



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker—West Augusta (photo by Vic Laubach)



Eastern Towhee—Jolivue (photo by Warren Faught)

President's Message

by Rich Wood

All April—All Outdoors

April is a busy month on nature's calendar. It's also a busy month on our calendars as well! As we work hard to prepare our flower beds and gardens, plant a few native trees and shrubs, and once again put out our hummingbird feeders to welcome back these winged wonders, we must pause to enjoy and appreciate all the seasonal changes that are occurring around us!

By now, many of the plants have emerged, and some are already flowering. Our forests and woodlots are decorated with spring ephemerals, that pop-up, flower, then quickly disappear after just a couple weeks. My backyard serviceberry will be in full bloom by early April, and most of the buds of the native trees and shrubs have started to burst with the first new leaves of the year. Many species of amphibians are calling loudly from wetlands and waterways, seeking out mates, and the pollinating insects are buzzing here and there in search of early sources of nectar. In these same forests, fields, and backyards, the birds will also be appearing—a few species individually, as well as waves of mixed flocks. It's a great time to see many of the songbirds, since the trees are not yet fully leafed out and hiding these colorful little birds in their overhead canopies. With nature in full action in April, it's no wonder humans are also out and about!

Here in our area, we celebrate nature and the great outdoors with two popular special events: *Earth Day Staunton* on Saturday, April 20 (celebrating the 54th Anniversary of Earth Day) and Waynesboro's *Riverfest* the following Saturday, on April 27. These events showcase the variety of natural resources we're blessed with having, and there will be a variety of environmental/conservation organizations there offering activities, music, food and opportunities to get involved! And of course, the ABC will be there too, displaying our information, meeting and greeting visitors, and welcoming people to discover the joys of birds and birding! The club also gets more active this coming month, with more exciting field trips and bird walks being added to our calendar of events. Check us out at www.augustabirdclub.org.

Lastly, our state agency, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) is taking advantage of the outdoor opportunities April brings, as they introduce the *Virginia Birding Classic*. This new 24-hour "bird blitz" challenges teams of birders to find as many birds on our public lands as they can, then enter their highest, single tally into eBird. The event runs from April 15 to May 15. **The deadline to register is April 1!**

April is upon us! Nature is calling! Enjoy the great outdoors this month! Good Birding!



photos by Rich Wood

Reminder!

DEADLINE TO REGISTER APRIL 1!

WWW.DWR.VIRGINIA.GOV/VIRGINIA-BIRDING-CLASSIC



The Classic will run from April 15, 2024 to May 15, 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.



Justin Shick
Kimberly Emig
Pedro Salas
Violeta Emig Salas

Check us out on the web

www.augustabirdclub.org



The Meadowlark
Editor: Rich Wood



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:

[\(rwood@beagleboy831@comcast.net\)](mailto:rwood@beagleboy831@comcast.net)

Augusta Bird Club Monthly Meeting
March 11, 2024
Covenant Presbyterian Church, Staunton, VA

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by President Rich Wood.

New members Donna and Matt were welcomed. Rich encourages everyone to bring a friend and help grow our club. Meetings are open to the public.

Recent Sightings: Migrants are just starting to appear. Birds of note are Grackles, Red-winged Blackbirds, Canvasbacks, Phoebes, Goldfinches, Fox Sparrows, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Towhees, Woodcocks, and Tree Swallows.

Field Trips: The February McCormick's Mill field trip led by Jo King found 30 species. Her next trip there is 3/20/24. The Bell's Lane field trip found a Bald Eagle and lots of Bluebirds.

The Cowbane Prairie in Stuarts Draft where members frequently bird has construction going on around it and parking may be an issue. Weekends may be better.

Newsletter: We need a new newsletter editor. The newsletter is a very important way to communicate within our club and the public. It is not difficult to do and Rich will train you. You don't need special knowledge or advanced computer skills. Please consider helping out in this manner—go ahead, just do it! Please let Rich know that you can help. Beagleboy831@comcast.net

Hospitality: The topic of our May brunch was discussed. The decision was made to hold it at McCormick's Mill on May 11. Details will follow.

Education: Recent calculations indicate that since 2005 this club has contributed over \$50,000 in scholarships to Nature Camp for 99 children. That is something to be very proud of.

Virginia Home Grown is a public television program whose mission is "to enrich growers and gardeners of all levels by connecting to new voices and fresh ideas, to highlight the unique richness of gardens and natural ecosystems throughout Virginia, and to serve as a resource for our community." Our own Robyn Puffenbarger was recently featured on a program and is a regular contributor. Check it out on VPM.

Program: We learned how magical and extraordinary hummingbirds are from Bruce Peterjohn through his zoom program, "Everything You Wanted to Know About Hummingbirds but Were Afraid to Ask." He has been banding hummingbirds and doing research on them for many years.

Increasingly more hummingbirds are appearing in Virginia during winter months. If you find such a bird, you can contact Bruce at b.peterjohn@verizon.net.

The program adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Marilyn Nash
Secretary