



THE MEADOWLARK

The monthly newsletter of the Augusta Bird Club



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Species Profile

Lord Baltimore . . . Oriole

In 1698, "Baltemore Birds" were among the "Beasts of Curiosity" ordered sent from Maryland to grace the royal gardens (*Archives of Maryland* 23: 455-56). Baltimore Orioles got their name from their bold orange-and-black plumage: They sport the same colors as are in the heraldic crest of England's Baltimore family (who also gave their name to Maryland's largest city). The history didn't stop there. In 1953, the St. Louis Browns baseball team moved to Baltimore and became the Baltimore Orioles, wearing uniforms that include a logo of the

famous bird. With their colorful plumage similar to the coat of arms of England's Baltimore family, the Baltimore Oriole was also chosen as the state bird of Maryland.

Every spring, birders look forward to the sweet, rich song of the Baltimore Oriole that echoes from the tops of tall trees. Orioles are in the same family as blackbirds and meadowlarks. Unlike robins and many other fruit-eating birds, Baltimore Orioles seem to prefer only ripe, dark-colored fruit. Orioles seek out the darkest mulberries, the reddest cherries, and the deepest-purple grapes, and will ignore green grapes and yellow cherries even if they are ripe. Fond of fruit and nectar as well as insects, Baltimore Orioles are easily lured to backyard feeders.

The Baltimore Oriole and the more western-ranging Bullock's Oriole hybridize extensively where their ranges meet in the Midwest. Scientists thus considered them as one species, calling them the Northern Oriole. However, subsequent DNA studies showed that they were indeed two separate species (not even closely related), so in 1995, the American Ornithologists' Union split them once again into two separate species, changing the name back to Baltimore Oriole! No matter what you call them, they're master nest builders.



Female orioles select a nest site in the male's territory and begin to build a woven, hanging nest at the end of a branch. Nest construction usually takes about a week and proceeds in three stages, usually all completed by the female. First the female builds an outer support structure of plant material, animal hair (especially horsehair), or human-made fibers such as string. Next she weaves flexible fibers, such as grapevine or Spanish moss, into an inner bowl. To finish, she lines the nest with downy materials, including milkweed seed plumes and feathers. Baltimore Orioles do not reuse their nests from year to year, but females will sometimes pull apart a previous year's nest for materials. Once she lays her clutch of 3 to 7 eggs, the female oriole does all the incubation. Both parents feed the nestlings, which fledge in a few weeks. Baltimore Orioles raise only one clutch per season. They begin to migrate quite early, often leaving their territories as early as July to head south to winter in Central and South America.

With its warm, bubbly song, beautiful orange and black plumage, and skill as a master nest weaver, the Baltimore Oriole is one of our most beloved summer residents. Lord Baltimore would be proud!

Annual Spring Picnic Brunch & Bird Walk!

Saturday, May 11, 2024

McCormick Farm, Raphine

Bird Walk (8:00 am–10:00 am)

Brunch (10:00 am–?)



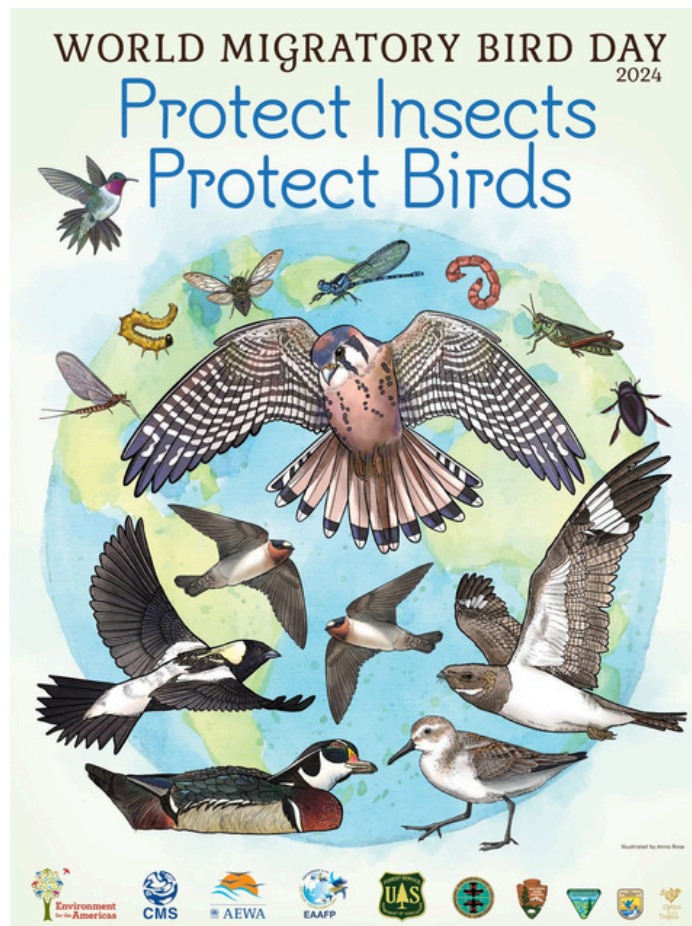
Join us to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day, as we gather for our annual spring brunch at McCormick Farm! This will take place rain or shine, since this year we have a covered building. The bird walk will take place around the farm from 8 am until 10 am, followed by a brunch in the barn. Please bring 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.

Saturday, May 11, 2024
(see above for activity)



Upcoming Field Trips



MAY

Saturday, May 4—Augusta Springs Wetlands

Meeting Time & Place: 8:30 am, the parking area along SR-42, Little Calf Pasture Hwy, 7 mi south of Buffalo Gap
Leader: Lynne Parks (v.lynneparks@gmail.com)

It'll be the height of migration. We could see warblers, tanagers, orioles, grosbeaks, vireos, sparrows ... maybe the green herons will be settled back: all sorts of things! Fingers crossed for a good day. We'll walk the Wetlands Trail (partial boardwalk, dirt, gravel, paved—flat), and take a partial side trip on the Upland Trail. Wear comfortable walking shoes, and bring water.

Friday, May 10—SR-610 and Blue Ridge Parkway

Meeting Time & Place: 8:00 am, Afton Inn (by the Rockfish Gap Hawkwatch)
Leader: Andrew Clem (agclem@comcast.net)

Spring Migration will be in full swing! Join Andrew as he searches for a variety of warblers, vireos, and many other species in some of the most “birdy” spots in our area. There'll be multiple driving stops at the overlooks, etc., and minimal walking along side trails. Please dress for the weather, wear comfortable walking shoes, and bring water.

JUNE (save the dates)

Saturday, June 8—Highland County

Meeting Time & Place: 7:00 am, Food Lion lower parking lot, N Coalter St, Staunton
Leader: Allen Larner (larnersky@mindspring.com)

Join Allen for a search for breeding birds of Highland County. This high-elevation area makes it a great place to seek out species that are otherwise rare or range-restricted in Virginia, such as Golden-winged Warblers, Mourning Warblers, Black-billed Cuckoos, and many more. This is a great time to be in Highland County! Bring lunch, snacks, and water, and wear comfortable walking shoes.

Wednesday, June 12—McCormick Farm

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

Come out to McCormick Farm with Jo King as we seek out early summer breeders in the fields, forests, and ponds of this beautiful, historic site. There may even be a few late migrants hanging around! Wear comfortable walking shoes, and bring water.

Recent Sightings



Palm Warbler—Augusta Springs
photo by Andrew Clem



Great Horned Owl—JMU Arboretum
photo by Matt Diley



Yellow-rumped Warbler—Bell's Lane
photo by Tom Roberts



Red Crossbill—West Augusta
photo by Vic Laubach



Blue-winged Teal—Bell's Lane
photo by Tom Roberts



Trio of Great Blue Herons—Augusta Springs
photo by Vic Laubach



Great Egret—Augusta Springs
photo by Lynne Parks



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher on nest—Eastern Shore
photo by Jim Hill



Indigo Bunting—Waynesboro
photo by Bonnie Hughes



Great Crested Flycatcher—Staunton
photo by Matt Diley

Field Trip Reports

A most enriching field trip to **McCormick Farm** in Raphine on **April 10** was attended by 14 bird enthusiasts. A guest from the Piedmont Virginia Bird Club, Ana Maria Allard, was welcomed to join us. Some 39 species were recorded. We were in awe of the numerous Ruby-crowned Kinglets displaying their "ruby" crowns. American Goldfinches accompanied us as we trod the trail; 2 Wilson's Snipe, 9 Blue-winged Teal, and 5 Gadwall were just a special treat.

Thank you to all the participants. It is always an honor and a joy to spend time with you in this worthy pursuit. Hope to see you next month, May 11, at McCormick's for our annual picnic. Be happy, and have fun.

—Jo King

I was joined by 3 members of the ABC (Eric and Kathy Null, Linda Corwin) on an adventure to **Piney Grove Preserve in Sussex County on Saturday, April 13**, in search of the elusive Red-cockaded Woodpecker. We tallied 30 species of birds during our visit. Before going I let the group know that we had a 50/50 chance of seeing the target bird, and Linda stated that she had tried 3 times to see the bird in Florida, but was unsuccessful. I was thinking we might be jinxed! Well, it turned out that we saw 5 of the endangered birds in total—2 in the morning run, and 3 more that afternoon. The woodpeckers were life birds for the 3 members! We also had a crazy experience at one of our stops, when a Yellow-throated Warbler flew down to check out my vehicle. It first landed on the open window, then hopped into the vehicle for a closer look! Wow!

Our first sighting of the woodpeckers was just a little before 11 am, which was perfect timing, because we had lunch reservations at the *Virginia Diner* for 11:30 am. After a great lunch, we headed back to the Piney Grove area, where we walked the Nature Conservancy's Darden Trail (the whole trail is about 0.3 mile). Here we found Brown-headed Nuthatch and White-eyed Vireo, but the biggest surprise was not a bird but a wildflower, Pink Lady Slipper orchids in various stages of bloom! After finishing the trail, we headed back to Piney Grove and found 3 more woodpeckers! I would say that our 50/50 chance turned out to be 100%!

—Allen Larner



Timothy Motsch
Win Winfree

Check us out on the web

www.augustabirdclub.org



The Meadowlark
Editor: Rich Wood



2024 Raptorthon Summary

(see next page for photos)

On May 3, the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watchers team (Vic Laubach, Rich Wood, Robyn Puffenbarger and Bill Benish) conducted our 12th annual Raptorthon to raise funds for Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) and our local Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch. We spent the day birding in Highland County, Virginia, ending up with 100 species including 18 warblers and 4 raptors. The weather was beautiful: partly cloudy and cool temps early, and warming up in the afternoon with a light breeze. We birded for 12 hours and drove approximately 210 miles!

Our first stop along RT 250 was at the Confederate Breastworks overlook on Shenandoah Mountain, where we heard a Whip-poor-will singing just before sunrise. As we continued down the mountain toward Monterey, we picked up a Wild Turkey, Yellow-breasted Chat and many warblers, including Cerulean, Worm-eating, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Black-and-white, Blackburnian, Redstart, Northern Parula, Black-throated Green, and Pine. After a quick coffee stop at the friendly Sunoco Station in downtown Monterey, we headed south to Paddy Knob (at the West Virginia border). Along RT 220 & RT 84, we added Wood Duck, Solitary Sandpiper, Bald Eagle, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Yellow Warbler. At Paddy Knob (elevation 4477 feet) we were surrounded by birds and bird song! Upon arrival, it seemed as if we were encircled by many tiny, but loud, Least Flycatchers. We also spotted a Veery, Swainson's Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Dark-eyed Junco, Black-capped Chickadee and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. We were fortunate to hear two Ruffed Grouse drumming in the distance, as even more warblers appeared all around us-including Ovenbird, Worm-eating, Black-and-white, Northern Parula, Magnolia, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Greens and Blues, Yellow-rumped, and Canada.

We then headed north to Monterey and Blue Grass. At the Monterey Trout Farm we had a blast while encountering avian, amphibian, and reptilian creatures! An Osprey and Red-tailed Hawk circled overhead, while singing below were Yellow-throated Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Louisiana Waterthrush, Redstart, and Yellow Warbler. In the water were Wood Ducks, a Spotted Sandpiper, and singing American Toads. But probably the best sighting of the day was not a bird. While standing above the stream, we discovered a large Northern Water Snake eating a big Rainbow Trout! The snake had the fish half-way down when we found it, and watched in amazement for a few minutes before it finally swam downstream to finish its meal! It was a very cool "nature moment!" We continued into the Blue Grass Valley and along Wimer Mountain Rd and at Bramble Hill (on West Virginia border), we had a female American Kestrel exit a nest box and added Northern Flicker, Eastern Kingbird, Barn, Tree and Cliff Swallows, House Wren, Orchard Oriole, Common Yellowthroat, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Yellow Warbler, and Belted Kingfisher. Unfortunately, we missed one of our target birds, the Golden-winged Warbler, which had been seen earlier in the morning. Other highlights in the Blue Grass area included Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, Bobolink, Savannah Sparrow, Baltimore Oriole, Red-headed Woodpecker, and Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

We had quite a wonderful day birding together for our Raptorthon! We're thrilled to report that we surpassed our goal of raising \$2,000 in donations! We all give a huge thanks to everyone who supported us!

In case you forgot, there is still time to donate at our Raptorthon page. Go to:

<https://www.hmana.org/product/rockfish-gap-hawk-watchers/>.

2024 Raptorthon Photos



Photo IDs (clockwise from top left): Osprey, the 2024 Raptorthon team at Bramble Hill, a calling American Toad, Least Sandpipers in the mud, Dutchmen's Breeches, Northern Watersnake swallowing a Rainbow Trout, Savannah Sparrow (foreground) being photo-bombed by a Greater Yellowlegs (background), male Rose-breasted Grosbeak singing away, Red Trillium (Wake Robin) and a beautiful family of Canada Geese. Enjoy!

All photos by Vic Laubach and Rich Wood

President's Message

by Rich Wood

(reprinted with permission from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service)

Bird migration is a mysterious and wonderful natural occurrence for humans to witness. Living here in Virginia, we get to enjoy this mass movement twice per year, usually peaking in May in the spring, and October in the fall. But if you're a bird, migration is full of many, uncertain dangers. They need all the energy they can gain just to migrate during good weather, so the combination of habitat loss, light pollution, obstacles and barriers, bad weather, and predators can become too much for many to handle.

Collision hazards for birds come in many forms and can affect many types of birds. In fact, nearly one billion birds collide with glass in the U.S. alone each year. Most of these (preventable) fatalities happen at homes and buildings shorter than four stories tall, though even aircrafts, towers, and smaller structures like glass walkways and bus stop shelters cause bird collisions too. Why is that? Because birds can't see glass as a barrier the way we do, so they don't avoid it. Sometimes, birds collide with windows when our lights from indoors spill through and attract them in. Other times, they collide with glass when they see natural reflections, like clouds and trees, or plants through windows. Even lights used for streets, landscaping, and offshore structures can attract and disorient birds and lead to fatal collisions.

Beyond light pollution and collisions, birds also face growing threats of bad weather events during their migration. Navigating through fog and finding shelter during storms, wind, and other unpredictable types of weather can really affect birds throughout their journey.

And then there is the threat of predators. During migration, many birds will not know what predators they might face at stopover sites or even when they reach their destination. Whether their predators are humans, snakes, racoons, foxes, or even other birds along the way, these travelers must constantly be on high-alert.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

Turn off your lights! It's really easy to turn off or dim your lights at night during peak migration season. If you can't turn off all lights, consider turning off or dimming exterior lights—the flood lights that face up into the sky, roof-top lights that illuminate the surrounding landscape—or set motion-sensored lights to be active only when people are present.

We can also use blinds, shades, awnings, and shutters to reduce the amount of interior light that escapes outside and help birds see the glass as a barrier. By reducing lights, we not only help birds (and other impacted wildlife), but we also help the environment by reducing energy use, and help ourselves by reducing costs and minimizing light pollution to restore starry night skies!

You can also help prevent bird collisions with some improvements to your windows. By applying patterns, decals, screens, or netting, you can make your windows easily seen by birds. Just make sure your window patterns are 2 inches apart and on the outside of glass. Window patterns spaced too far apart don't prevent bird collisions.

Another action we can take is minimizing pollution from reducing, reusing, and recycling to prevent plastics and other materials from deteriorating habitats. Birds (and other wildlife) can become injured or poisoned and can even starve from accidentally eating these materials when they are mistaken for food.

Consider providing or restoring bird-friendly habitat by planting or maintaining native plants. Even simple actions like leaving leaf litter and fallen branches on the ground can create natural foraging opportunities and provide cover from predators. This vegetation can provide essential food sources and can offer shelter and nesting sites for a wide variety of species, including pollinators and other beneficial insects that birds eat! It can also be helpful to minimize use of pesticides and herbicides, which can kill insects and the plants that many types of birds and other wildlife rely on for food.

Augusta Bird Club Monthly Meeting
April 8, 2024
Covenant Presbyterian Church, Staunton, VA

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

Recent Sightings: Brown Thrasher, nesting Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Purple Finches, Blue-headed Vireo, Louisiana Waterthrush, Great Egret at Augusta Springs, Green Heron, Pied-billed Grebe, Red-breasted Merganser, Virginia Rail at Cowbane, Hermit Thrush, Fox Sparrows, 50 Cedar Waxwings facing into the eclipse. The nest with 2 eaglets in New Hope is doing well. Sadly, the 2 Great Horned Owlets at the JMU Arboretum have disappeared. The Sangers Lane heron rookery is very active.

Field Trips: (1) Jo King will lead a trip to McCormick's Mill on 4/10. (2) Allen Lerner will lead a group to Honey Grove looking for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers on April 13.

Volunteer Opportunities: Earth Day Staunton is April 20 at Gypsy Hill Park. Riverfest is in Waynesboro on April 27. Volunteers are really needed to represent the club at our booths. These are important and well-attended events and will be good publicity for our club.

Education/Conservation: The Bluebird Trail boxes at Bessie Weller Elementary have been repaired and relocated for better use and monitoring by the students.

Website: Vic Laubach has spent considerable time and effort updating and revamping our website. We all appreciate this important component of our club. The URL is augustabirdclub.org. Everyone is encouraged to visit the site, which contains a wide variety of information. Vic is looking for pictures of local birds, so everyone is encouraged to send their favorite pictures to him. Please include the location and date taken.

May Meeting: McCormick's Mill will be the site of our May meeting. Jo King will lead a bird walk, followed by a potluck brunch. Meet in the parking area at 8:00 am.

Elections: The annual ABC board elections were held. All current board members were willing to serve another term. There were no nominations from the floor. The club unanimously reelected Rich Wood as President, Vic Laubach as Vice President, Marilyn Nash as Secretary, and Mona Beard as Treasurer.

Program: Dr. Robyn Puffenbarger, Chairman of the Dept. of Biology at Bridgewater College, shared many bird specimens from their collection. Among many interesting facts presented was how we see the colors of bird feathers. Green and blue colors are actually not pigment in the feathers but are, rather, a combination of light and the structure of the feather. The iridescence of hummingbird feathers is also structural, not pigment. Yellows, reds, and oranges come from carotenoids in the diet. Browns and chestnuts come from melanin in the feathers. We thank Robyn for sharing these specimens with us.

The meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Marilyn Nash
Secretary