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# THE MEADOWLARK

*The quarterly newsletter of the Augusta Bird Club*



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## Fall Migration Magic

*by Rich Wood*

As I sit and write this article, it's early August. The forests and fields have once again grown quiet of many of my favorite bird songs. I know it happens every year at this time, with breeding season now over, but I can't help feeling a little gloomy about the seasonal bird silence. Yet as I drove by a small flock of swallows gathered on a power line last week, I was quickly reminded about what's coming: the magic of fall migration!

For birders, fall migration is an anticipated and exciting time of the year. Birds of every size and color begin their long journeys south, from hummingbirds to eagles, and warblers to shorebirds. The skies, both day and night, along with a variety of landscapes, become superhighways for our many feathered friends. It's truly a mysterious marvel of nature.

Migration is relatively new to our understanding, so there are still many mysteries surrounding it. Development of scientific instruments have just recently allowed researchers to pinpoint exactly where birds go during the migration cycle. This advancement has showed us how complex migration is and has brought forth even more questions. We do, however, now have a basic understanding of how it works. When fall arrives, migratory birds have finished nesting and raising young. There are a number of factors causing birds to fly south for winter: A major one is food availability. By fall, insects that were plentiful in the spring and summer in the northern range are less abundant, but they are still plentiful in the warmer climate of the south. Birds must establish territories in the south to take advantage of this food source and gain strength to prepare to nest again the following spring.

Northern temperatures are getting colder at this time, and though many birds can survive the colder temperatures when food is available, most neotropical migrants can't. The arriving cold signals that it's time for the birds to go to warm climates. Later in the summer, the changing duration of light, called *photoperiod*, is also a deciding factor motivating the birds to search for more welcoming habitats. There is a genetic underpinning that tells many birds that it's time to move on as well.

## Bird Navigation

One question that people often ask is how do birds find their way back to their wintering grounds. Birds navigate in many ways. They can follow the stars and track the sun's movements. Birds are also aware of the earth's magnetism and can recognize features of stopover sites and geographic markers as well. Researchers believe many birds have an imprint of where they need to go encoded within: The Ruby-throated Hummingbird migrates to south of the Mexican border, but it is a solitary bird, so when a juvenile travels over the Gulf of Mexico for the first time to the exact location its ancestors came from, it does so with no assistance from other birds. Scientists think its destination must be genetically programmed.

(Cont'd on page 2)

## Fall Migration Magic

(Cont'd from page 1)

Overall, fall migration is less distinct in nature than that of spring, and the timing of birds' departure is more flexible. The main impetus for migration is less urgent, as birds aren't trying to find a mate or to establish nests. Similarly, because they aren't looking to pair up, male birds display less colorful plumage, and they don't sing in fall, just making instead various calls such as contact and alarm calls. It is very difficult to even tell some species of songbirds such as the warblers apart at this time of year, also partly due to their duller, nonbreeding plumage. To confuse things even more, the less colorful juveniles and females fly south along with the males. Many of the spectacular birds that we look for in the spring, such as warblers and other songbirds, undergo long-distance migration. These are the neotropical migrants, breeding in the US and Canada and then wintering in Central and South America. They are considered true migrants and are preprogrammed to follow this pattern regardless of food availability or weather.

The earliest birds to return south are shorebirds. In Virginia, look for shorebirds migrating beginning in July and peaking in August and early September. It's also in August that birders will begin to see some of the early songbirds migrating, including warblers. However, the majority of warblers will migrate later in the season, mostly in September, October, and as late as November. And let's not forget those majestic raptors!

Late summer (August) also kicks off the fall raptor migration as well. Once again, it's primarily food that drives these beautiful birds of prey to areas further south. Food becomes less abundant. The usual food sources (songbirds) migrate, and small rodents and reptiles burrow underground or hibernate. Raptors leave for places where where this food can easily be found. Raptors will migrate a few hundred to several thousand miles each way to locate better food sources. Some raptors travel to different parts of North America and others to Central and South America. So as autumn approaches, grab your binoculars and get ready for the Magic of Fall Migration!



### 2024 Rockfish Gap Hawkwatch "Opens for Business"!



This year marks the 49th year of the fall hawk migration count at Rockfish Gap Hawkwatch. Although the conditions up at the old Inn at Afton continue to decline, we still plan to conduct the hawkwatch as usual this year. The season begins on August 15 and ends on November 30. Visitors are welcome, and we love having those additional eyes on the sky to help us spot those high-flying raptors! We are also in need of additional counters. If you have some raptor identification skills and wish to learn to be a counter, let us know (we can train). Our small team of volunteer counters use an online calendar to sign up for days, and you can view our calendar on our website here: <https://www.rockfishgaphawkwatch.org/schedule/>. Use this calendar to see if a counter has signed up for a particular day you might decide to visit. You can also follow our daily counts on HawkCount at this link: [https://www.hawkcount.org/month\\_summary.php?rsite=491](https://www.hawkcount.org/month_summary.php?rsite=491). We aim to have the hawkwatch covered every day of the season unless it's raining or there is too much fog. Visit our website for lots more information about our hawkwatch, directions, raptor information, and tips. Counters usually arrive on site by 9:00 am and stay as long as the birds are flying (usually late afternoon). The only amenities we have is a porta-potty, so if you visit, bring a hat, sunscreen, chair or blanket, food, drink, and of course your binoculars. Bring a spotting scope if you have one. Last year we had a total of 32,647 migrating raptors for the season, including 28,462 Broad-winged Hawks, 480 Bald Eagles, and 11 other raptor species!

Thank you, and we look forward to seeing you up there!

Vic Laubach

Coordinator, Rockfish Gap Hawkwatch

# Upcoming Meeting

**Monday, September 9 (7:00 pm)**

**Covenant Presbyterian Church**

**2001 N Coalter St**

**Staunton, VA 24401**

**Guest Speaker: Vic Laubach**

**Using eBird and Merlin**

**to Enhance Your Birding Experience (Part 2)**



**eBird**

The Cornell Lab   
**Merlin**<sup>®</sup>



# Summer Sightings

## Family Time



Tree Swallow Nest w/ Eggs  
Warren Faught (Jolivue)



Begging: Northern Flickers  
Matt Diley (Staunton)



Ready to Go: Killdeer  
Vic Laubach (Swoope)



Hairy Woodpeckers—Jim Hill (Staunton)



Baby House Wrens—Jeff Roberts



Bald Eagles—Ann Cline (Barren Ridge)



Red-bellied Woodpecker Feeding a  
Hellgrammite—Antonio Martinez (Verona)



Mama Ruffed Grouse w/ Fledglings  
Ann Cline (Highland Co.)



Carolina Wren Nest—Jeff Roberts



Young Barn Swallow—Bonnie Hughes



## Summer Sightings (Cont'd)



Canada Warbler—Vic Laubach (Shenandoah Mtn)



Blackburnian Warbler—  
Andrew Clem (Ramsey's Draft)



Mourning Warbler—Vic Laubach (Reddish Knob)



Great-crested Flycatcher—Andrew Clem (Mill Place)



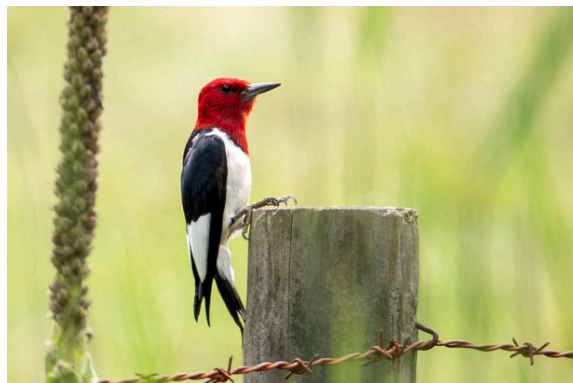
Cedar Waxwing—Rich Wood (Dooms)



Just Passing Through! Canada Geese—Bonnie Hughes



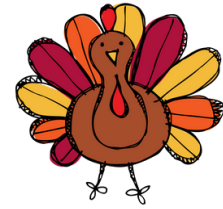
Cooper's Hawk—Sara Johnson (Middlebrook)



Red-headed Woodpecker—Vic Laubach (Quillen's Pond)



## Upcoming Fall Field Trips



### SEPTEMBER

#### **Monday, 9/9—Bell's Lane (rain will cancel)**

Meeting Time & Place: 8:00 am, kiosk on west end of Bell's Lane

Leader: Allen Larner (larnersky@mindspring.com)

First stop will be the private pond, where we will look for any migrating warblers, flycatchers, tanagers, vireos, sparrows, and early waterfowl. Dress for the weather that day.

#### **Wednesday, 9/11—Autumn at McCormick Farm (rain date: Wednesday, 9/18, 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 fall 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.

### OCTOBER

#### **Monday, 10/7—Bells Lane (rain will cancel)**

Meeting Time & Place: 8:00 am, kiosk on west end of Bell's Lane

Leader: Allen Larner (larnersky@mindspring.com)

Once again, we'll make the private pond our first stop, where we'll be looking for any waterfowl that may come in early. In addition sparrows will be starting to migrate in numbers, and we'll search for any late warblers and vireos. Dress for the weather that day.

#### **Wednesday, 10/16—Autumn at McCormick Farm (rain date: Wednesday, 10/23, 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

Fall migration is in full swing, so let's grab our binoculars and see what we can find around the farm! Dress for the weather, wear comfortable walking shoes, and bring water.

### NOVEMBER

#### **Wednesday, 11/6—Autumn at McCormick Farm (rain date: Wednesday, 11/13, 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

Fall migration is wrapping up, but let's see what late migrants we can find, including waterfowl, sparrows, and maybe even a few lingering warblers! Dress for the weather, wear comfortable walking shoes, and bring water.



## Conservation Corner

Our commitment to assisting our communities continues, with conservation and nature projects at Bessie Weller Elementary School in Staunton, as well as Birding Backpack Loaner Kits at our local libraries.



The Augusta Bird Club (ABC) continues to have a wonderful relationship with Bessie Weller Elementary School and their commitment to nature education. The biggest news this spring-into-summer is that the 4 nesting boxes that our handy and dedicated member Jim Hill refurbished and placed were a huge success! Eastern Bluebirds used 3 boxes with a total of 13 nestlings, and Tree Swallows had at least 2 nestlings in another. The students and teachers were able to watch the exciting process of eggs to hatchlings. Many thanks to Jim for his continued monitoring of these nest boxes.

The nature trail project has come along nicely, and we'll be donating native plants to the ephemeral pond area. Future projects include a feeding station. Students will learn to identify birds and observe their behavior. We'll treat the windows with Feather Friendly® white markers to avoid any collisions and make the environment bird-safe. We're excited to contribute to bird education at Bessie Weller!



4 Eastern Bluebird eggs in Box # 1

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## Birding Backpack Kits



The ABC believes birdwatching should be available to everyone and that everyone should have access to the tools they need to get started. We should all have the opportunity to delight in the sights, sounds, and behaviors of birds. Birds are also a pathway to greater knowledge of the natural world. By observing them, we learn about migration, seasons, ecology, habitats, and the threats to the web of life that sustains us all.

The ABC has recently donated 3 **Birding Backpack kits** to our local libraries for checkout-one for Augusta County, one for Staunton, and one for Waynesboro. Each kit includes a pair of Celestron Nature DX binoculars, a *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America*, a local bird checklist, and a laminated pamphlet highlighting popular local birding sites. A kit can be checked out for three weeks at a time by any Valley Library cardholder in good standing, of any age. Happy birding!

# Summer Field Trip Reports

## MAY



**Augusta Springs Wetlands, 5/5:** The weather obliged us this morning. It stopped raining as we started and only started again when we finished. We had 54 species today—not bad. It was definitely a Northern Waterthrush day, with at least 2, and maybe 3. One was singing from under the boardwalk, which created an interesting sound effect. We had good looks at Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore Oriole, Louisiana Waterthrush, Yellow Warbler, and more. A Worm-eating Warbler posed briefly. We all had our FOY Magnolia Warbler. Fun times!

—submitted by Lynne Parks

**Blue Ridge Parkway/SR-610, 5/10:** We had a slow start at the east-side overlooks along the Blue Ridge Parkway this morning, with the usual Indigo Buntings and a nice White-eyed Vireo. We had better luck at the telephone tower, however, where multiple American Redstarts, Cerulean Warblers, Hooded Warblers, and Red-eyed Vireos all made appearances. We also heard a couple Ovenbirds there, but for some reason we didn't actually see an Ovenbird all day! We really hit pay dirt at the Pioneer Village adjacent to the Humpback Rocks visitor center: an Eastern Wood Pewee, more Redstarts and Ceruleans, a Scarlet Tanager, and the twin highlights of the day, a Least Flycatcher only about 15 feet away and a Kentucky Warbler! The latter was identified by Scott Priebe, who had just moved to this area. Jo King tallied 42 species overall. Thanks again to all those who came to share the avian excitement today!

—submitted by Andrew Clem



**Bell's Lane, 5/22:** A group of 9 ABC members gathered for a beautiful summery morning for a bird walk on Bell's Lane and ended with 43 species. We headed to the private pond and found Canada Geese with goslings, Wood Duck, Mallards, Chimney Swifts, Green Herons, Great Blue Heron, Kingbird, Barn Swallows, etc. As we were leaving, the group caught sight of the two Green Herons in a tree and realized they were on a nest! Back on Bell's Lane, we had Red-bellied, Downy, Flicker, Phoebe, Wood Pewee, Great Crested, Red-eyed Vireo, Meadowlarks, Yellow Warbler, Indigo Bunting, Catbirds, Thrashers, etc., all adding up to a very melodious morning! However, before my arrival, Sue saw a Bald Eagle, and Andrew kept birding further up past Carolyn's and had another Yellow Warbler, Baltimore and Orchard Oriole, and a Willow Flycatcher. As always, it was a wonderful morning with a fun group of birders, and I appreciate everyone who attended.



—submitted by Penny Warren



# Summer Field Trip Reports (Cont'd)

## JUNE

**Highland County, 6/8:** The 3 members of the ABC ( Eric, Kathy, and Allen) were joined by 3 nonmembers (Howard, Dan from Charlottesville, and Scott from Stuarts Draft) as we trekked over to Highland County in search of the Golden-winged Warbler, Alder and Least Flycatchers, Veery, and whatever else we could find. When we got to Bramble Hill, it got windy and we missed out on the Golden-winged. Most of the day it stayed windy, so birding was mostly hearing them sing or just catching a second or two look at them. By the afternoon we ran into other birders who had been up at Paddy's Knob, where they reported that they did not see or hear the Mourning Warbler—another target bird missed. All was not lost for the day since we ended up with 68 species of birds (mostly heard when wind gusts died down). We missed out on Black-capped Chickadee, Golden-winged Warbler, and Mourning Warbler. All in all it was a good day, plus making friends with other birders. Target birds seen or heard included Bald Eagle, Alder Flycatcher, Veery, Hermit Thrush, Magnolia Warbler, Canada Warbler, and Bobolink. —submitted by Allen Lerner

**McCormick Farm, 6/12:** Hello everyone. Our field trip this morning was attended by 9 members of the ABC. A total of 41 species were recorded. Highlights were Green Heron, Baltimore Oriole, Warbling Vireo, and the injured Gadwall. Always a delight to see the many brightly colored American Goldfinches, Barn Swallows, and Bluebirds. My thanks to my fellow birders, who always make the trips so enjoyable. Many Painted Turtles and one awesome Bullfrog with those huge eyeballs completed the nature picture. —submitted by Jo King



*The crazy bird crew of McCormick Farm!*

## Lights Out for Birds



**Get Ready.....Here They Come!**

# REMINDERS!



## Annual Birdseed & Feeder Sale!

Pickup Date Is Saturday, November 9

New Location: Augusta Expo–Fishersville

Online orders begin in mid-October

Watch for details on our website and Facebook



## Christmas Bird Counts

**Augusta County: Sunday, December 15**

**Waynesboro: Saturday, January 4, 2025**

For more information, contact:

Allen Larner (Augusta County CBC) - [larnersky@mindspring.com](mailto:larnersky@mindspring.com)

Crista Cabe (Waynesboro CBC) - [cristacabe@gmail.com](mailto:cristacabe@gmail.com)





## **Annual Holiday Party & 1st Annual Wildlife Center Donation Drive Monday, December 9 (6:00 pm)**

**Please join us for our annual holiday celebration, potluck dinner, and friendly fellowship!**

For the first time we'll also be holding a donation drive for the Wildlife Center of Virginia, located right here in Augusta County. A large percentage of the patients at Wildlife Center of Virginia are birds—1,549 in 2023! At the ABC's Holiday Party in December, we will collect items from the Center's wish list, and a member will present them to the Center. We are suggesting that each party attendee bring an item for donation. More information will be available in the Winter issue of the newsletter, on our website, and on our Facebook page.

### **Check us out on the web**

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



*The Meadowlark*  
Editor: Rich Wood

# President's Message

by Rich Wood

Our newsletter is just one of the outreach tools we use to keep our members informed. It's important to let you know what we've been up to, to keep you informed about upcoming field trips and coming events, to give you access to members' photos, and to keep you abreast of much more! It takes a good bit of time collecting all the information, laying it out, editing it, and sending it out to all members each month. Unfortunately, with other things now on my plate, I no longer have the time to continue publishing the newsletter each month. In addition, we could not find any volunteers to take on the Newsletter Editor position and to keep it going on a monthly basis, in its current format (Sept–May). Due to the amount of time this process takes, the board has accepted my recommendation to change the distribution of the newsletter.

I have decided to stick with it, but beginning with this issue, the newsletter will now become a quarterly-only publication, being sent out four times/year. The new seasonal format will align with our "birding seasons." They include:

- **Fall issue (September-October-November)**
- **Winter issue (December-January-February)**
- **Spring issue (March-April-May)**
- **Summer issue (June-July-August)**

This will take a little getting used to. Not only for you, our members, but for everyone who contributes to the newsletter. We will now have to plan several months ahead for all our activities, and report on all our activities for the three months preceding. This may seem like a lot of extra time, but in reality, it actually saves time when it comes to creating the newsletter. I currently receive a few other organizations' newsletters, and they're all quarterly. Of course, for up-to-the-minute information, reminders, and upcoming field trips, we encourage you to visit our new website often, and if you're on Facebook, check us out there too! For bird alerts, we encourage you to use eBird. We hope you understand why we've made this change and that you continue to enjoy all the information and articles that make *The Meadowlark* worthwhile! Good Birding!



## New Members!

- Elizabeth Benbow
- Maureen Gray
- Paige Pettry
- Scott Priebe
- Matt Kretsch
- Carrie Boyd