

THE MEADOWLARK

The quarterly newsletter of the Augusta Bird Club



In This Issue

- From Here to There ...
- Upcoming Monthly Programs
- Fun Facts
- Winter Sightings
- Winter Field Trip Reports
- Spring Field Trips
- Club News
- 2025 Rockfish Gap Hawkwatch Summary
- Spring Bird ID Quiz

From Here to There . . . And Back Again

(Portions of this article have been provided by Kenn Kauffman for Audubon, and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology)

Modern ornithology has identified four major migration flyways in North America: Pacific Flyway, Central Flyway, Mississippi Flyway, and Atlantic Flyway. Birds that nest in the Northern Hemisphere tend to migrate southward when daylight begins to decrease, food becomes scarce, and temperatures start to drop. These same birds travel north in the spring to take advantage of burgeoning insect populations, budding plants, and an abundance of nesting locations. But do birds use the same migration routes in their spring migration as they do in the fall?

Migration can be full of hazards. As birds leave their familiar surroundings and begin to fly through new territory, they may face all kinds of unknown dangers. We might expect them to minimize their risk by seeking out the shortest possible routes between their summer and winter ranges, and then follow the same routes when they head back north again. However, biologists have found that very few species actually travel by the shortest straight-line distances. And for many, their spring migration paths are much different than their fall migration paths. Most North American bird species that migrate south usually end up in one of four main regions. Some may simply fly to the southern US, while others may spend their winter in Mexico or Central America, South America or the Caribbean.



For the first time, scientists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology have documented migratory movements of bird populations spanning the entire year for 118 species throughout the Western Hemisphere. “We used millions of observations from the eBird citizen-science database,” says lead author Frank La Sorte, a research associate at the Cornell Lab. “After tracing the migration routes of all these species and comparing them, we concluded that a combination of geographic features and broad-scale atmospheric conditions influence the choice of routes used during spring and fall migration.”

La Sorte says a key finding of the study is that bird species that head out over the Atlantic Ocean during fall migration to spend winter in the Caribbean and South America follow a clockwise loop and take a path farther inland on their return journey in the spring. Species that follow this broad pattern include Bobolinks, Yellow and Black-billed Cuckoos, Connecticut and Cape May Warblers, Bicknell’s Thrush, and shorebirds such as the American Golden Plover. “These looped pathways help the birds take advantage of conditions in the atmosphere,” explains La Sorte. “Weaker headwinds and a push from the northeast trade winds as they move farther south make the fall journey a bit easier. The birds take this shorter, more direct route despite the dangers of flying over open ocean.” The study finds the spring

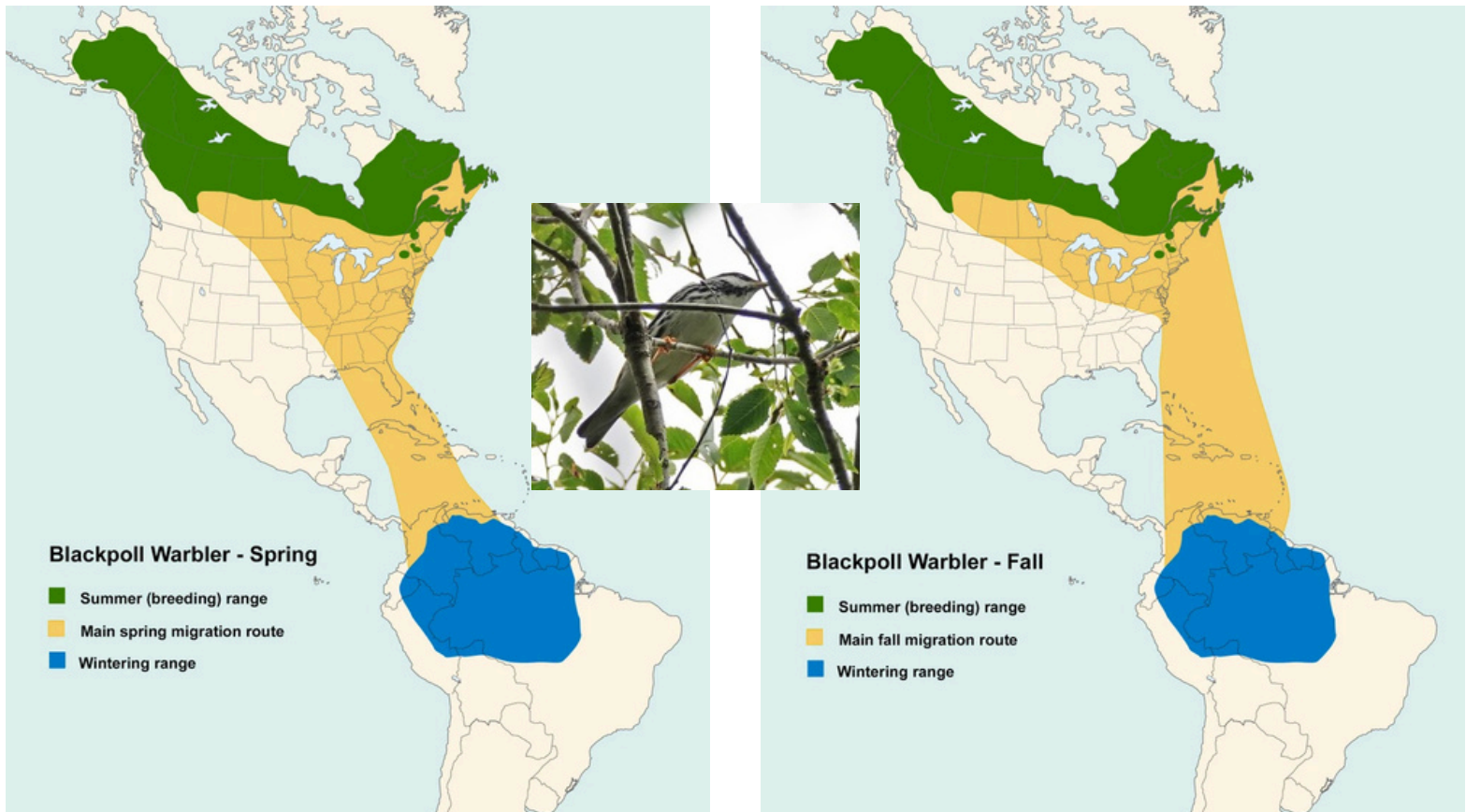
From Here to There . . . And Back Again

(Cont'd from page 1)

migration path follows a more roundabout route, but the birds move faster thanks to the presence of strong tailwinds as they head north to their breeding grounds. For species that do not fly over the open ocean, the study finds that many use the same migration routes in the spring and fall. Geographic features shaping this pattern include mountain chains or peninsulas that funnel migrants along narrow routes. But for some species, these seasonal migration shifts can be pretty spectacular!

LONG JOURNEY-TINY PACKAGE

A good example of this is the Blackpoll Warbler. Blackpoll Warblers do not breed in Virginia, but can be seen regularly during spring and fall migrations here in the Commonwealth. These birds spend their winter in South America, and in spring they come north through the Caribbean then throughout the entire southeast US, before spreading out to their huge breeding range, which extends all across the boreal forest. Every spring before we spot these birds in Virginia, they can easily be seen in many states south of us, as well as in many midwestern states, on their long northward journey. However, in the fall, these birds are rare in the southeast and midwest, even though you might expect to see more of them since their population has swelled by all the young birds fledged during the summer. So why are there so many fewer Blackpoll Warblers in this region in the fall? Because most of them are farther east, out over the waters of the Atlantic. We're fortunate here in Virginia because our state sits right in the path of both their spring migration and their fall migration. In fact, we're one of the last states they fly through during their fall migration, before heading out over open water. An amazing year-round journey for such a small bird!



There are many variations on these patterns, and many exceptions as well. No two migratory species have the same exact ranges or travel routes. Some species we may enjoy seeing each fall may be rare to see in the spring, or vice-versa. For birders, that gives us all the more reason to go out at every season, with the chance to see something new! Good Birding!

(Blackpoll Warbler photo by Vic Laubach)

Upcoming Monthly Programs

March 9, 2026, 7:00 pm

Sea Turtle Nest Monitoring in North Carolina

Linda Matkins

Linda Matkins has been a member of the Augusta Bird Club (ABC) for over 30 years. In the summer, she switches her passion from birds to sea turtles. Each summer for 15 years she has visited friends at Caswell Beach, NC. One summer she was lucky enough to observe her first boil (hatching) of a Loggerhead turtle nest. She was amazed and decided that when she retired, she would like to become a turtle volunteer. After helping that first year, she was hooked. For the past 3 years, Linda has spent 5 to 6 weeks every summer as a volunteer with the Caswell Beach Turtle Watch in North Carolina. The purpose of the turtle watch is to protect the threatened and endangered sea turtles that lay their eggs on Caswell Beach. Linda will share facts about the most common sea turtle that nests on that beach—the Loggerhead—and the least common ones—the Kemp's Ridley and the Green Turtle. Linda will provide answers to an array of commonly asked questions, such as how many eggs are laid in a nest and what determines the sex of the hatchlings.



April 13, 2026, 7:00 pm

Conservation Photography: Riverine and Backyard Biodiversity

Steven Johnson

Steven Johnson is a conservation photographer and Professor of Visual and Communication Arts at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU). His photography of the natural world has appeared in Wildlife Photographer of the Year, National Wildlife Magazine, Nature Conservancy Magazine, Ranger Rick, Virginia Wildlife, Biographic, Orion, National Science Teachers Association Press books, and numerous conservation publications and journals. Steve is an Associate Fellow with the International League of Conservation Photographers. When he's not in the office, he can usually be found crouched next to a vernal pool or kayaking the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. In his multimedia talk, Steven will focus on his work documenting biodiversity close to home: across the street on the Shenandoah River and even closer to home at his backyard pollinator garden and frog pond (an ongoing family project). He will discuss how these long-term photo projects have contributed to the educational and advocacy work of conservation organizations.



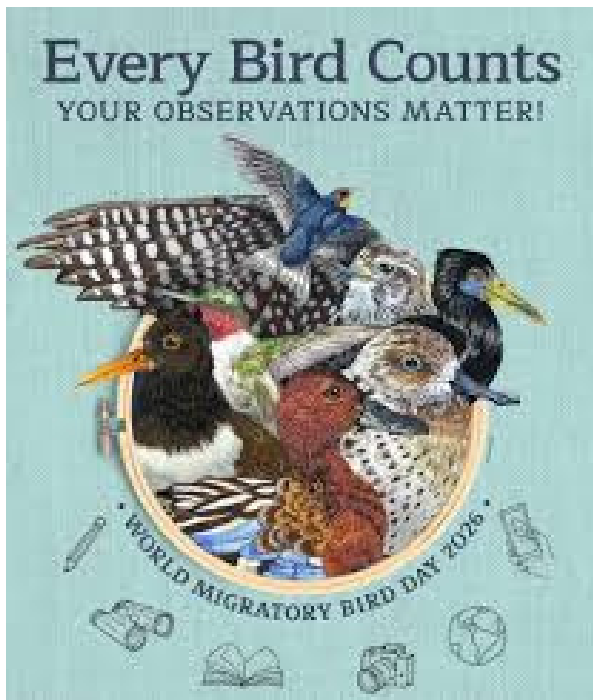
May 16, 2026, 8:00 am–1:00 pm

Annual ABC Members Bird Walk and Spring Brunch

McCormick Farm (rain or shine)



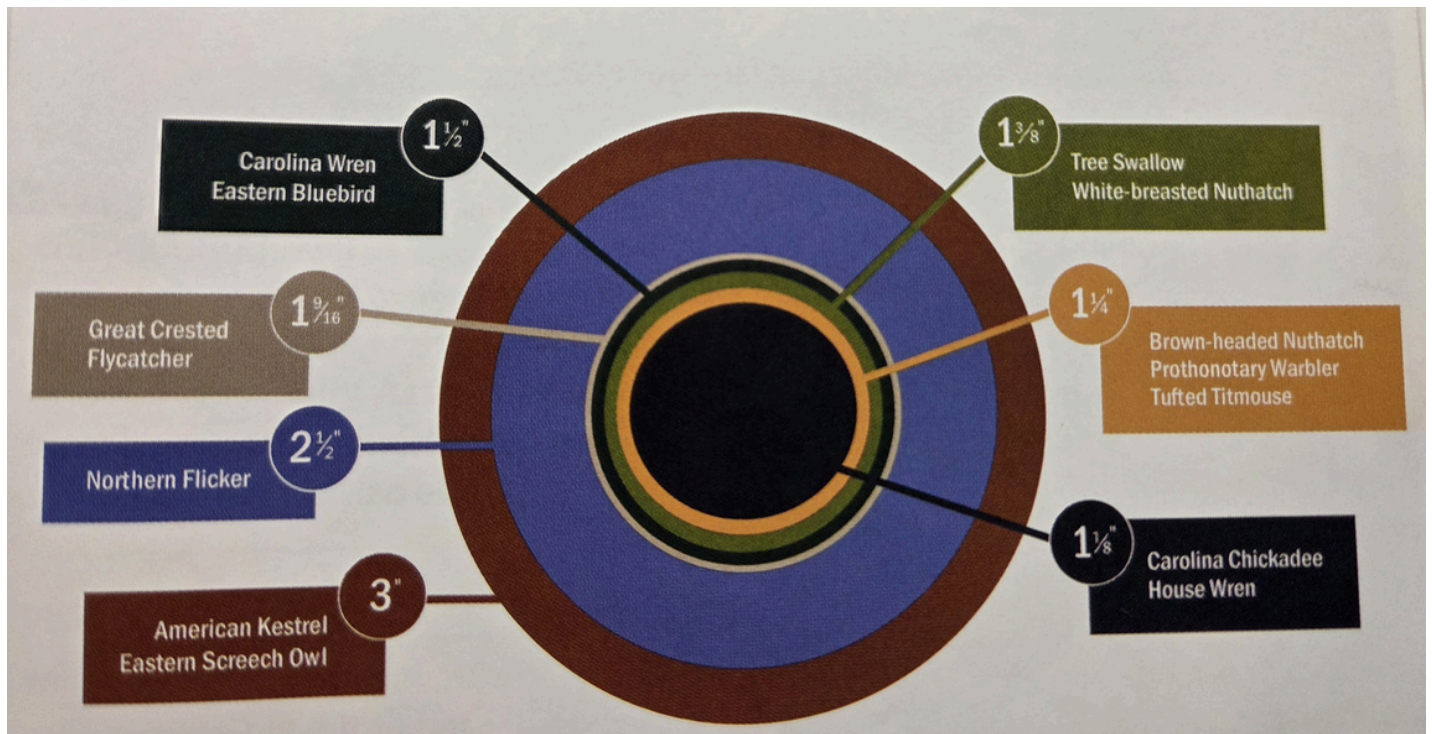
Please plan to join us for the ABC annual brunch and bird walk at McCormick Farm. The bird walk will be from 8:00 am to 10:00 am, followed by a potluck brunch in the barn. Please bring a breakfast/brunch item to share with the group. Past dishes have included fruit, casseroles, quiches, breads, breakfast meats, salads, or anything "brunchy." ABC will provide drinks. We will be in the heart of spring migration, so we hope to see lots of waterfowl, shorebirds, sparrows, orioles, warblers, and swallows. Please come and join the group for a morning of birding, food, and fellowship. New members are especially welcome for an opportunity to meet other ABC members. For any questions, feel free to contact Linda Matkins at linda.matkins@gmail.com.



Celebrate World Migratory Bird Day 2026
Saturday, May 9

Fun Facts!

Nest Box Hole Size: Who Fits Where?



Check us out on the web
www.augustabirdclub.org



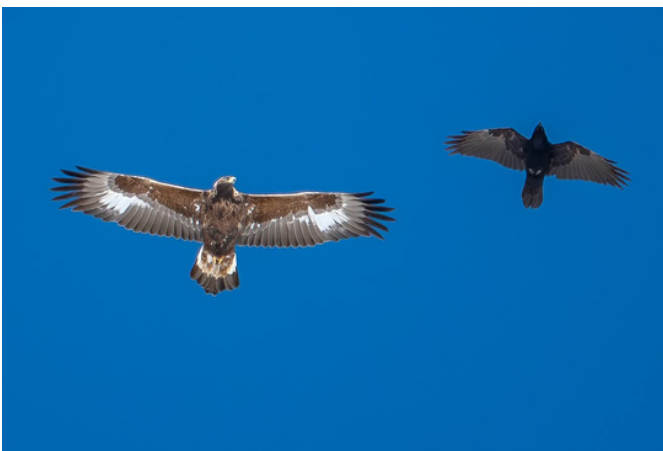
The Meadowlark
Editor: Rich Wood

Winter Sightings

It's been a very cold and snowy season, but terrific for winter birds! Here's a look at just a few that our talented club photographers have caught on camera! Enjoy!



L-R: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker & Red-bellied Woodpecker (photo by Andrew Clem); Rusty Blackbird (photo by Vic Laubach); Eastern Bluebird & Cedar Waxwing (photo by Margaret Johnson)



L-R: An immature Golden Eagle flies alongside a Common Raven (photo by Vic Laubach); and a rare Yellow-headed Blackbird made an appearance at Robyn & Bill's backyard feeders (photo by Robyn Puffenbarger)



L-R: Northern Harrier (photo by Matt Diley); Fox Sparrow (photo by Vic Laubach); adult Bald Eagles (photo by Al Wolfe)



L-R: American Kestrel (photo by Ann Cline); Ross's Goose (L) & Snow Goose (R) (photo by Ana Maria Allard); Short-eared Owl (photo by Scott Priebe)

Winter Sightings

(Cont'd from page 5)



L-R: Immature Cooper's Hawk (*photo by Joel Stauffer*); Tennessee Warbler (top) (*photo by Andrew Clem*); Pine Warbler (bottom) (*photo by Vic Lauba*)



Left: Great-horned Owl
(*photo by Vic Laubach*)

Above: Peregrine Falcon eating lunch
(*photo by Rich Wood*)

Right: Short-eared Owl hunting, with Elliott Knob
in the background (*photo by Vic Laubach*)



Winter Field Trip Reports

On **Saturday, January 3**, 3 members of the ABC traveled west to **Highland and Bath Counties**. It was slim pickings in Highland County, with about 15 species of birds. Highlights included Golden Eagle, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Black-capped Chickadee. Moving on to Bath County, we added about 26 species, including Trumpeter Swan, Long-tailed Duck, Common Merganser, Horned Grebe, and Purple Finch. All in all, we had a total of 34 species of birds from both counties. It was a good day of fun with good friends.

- Allen Lerner

On **Wednesday January 21**, 12 members of the ABC endured a frigid morning on our walk at **McCormick Farm** in Raphine. A total of 10 species were recorded. Due to the freezing temperatures, the ponds were frozen, which limited our adding waterfowl to our list. The appearance of 3 Common Ravens acrobatically performing for us was so cool. Much appreciation to my fellow birders who were so brave and committed to the joy of counting birds. See you in February.

- Jo King



On **Wednesday February 18**, a wonderful bird walk with 19 hearty birders from the ABC conducted a bird walk at **McCormick Farm**. All in all, 27 species were observed and recorded. Of special note was the sighting of a Tundra Swan flying with a group of Canada Geese. Interesting to note that resident birds were singing their spring mating and nesting-site songs before all the snow melts.

I also wanted to share with you that on my arrival home, we spied a Red-shouldered Hawk with nesting materials returning to his old nest. This will be their third year nesting across my street in a tall pine tree on my neighbor's front yard. I'm so excited, especially watching and hearing the fledglings becoming independent raptors.

Many thanks to all the participants. It's wonderful being in your company, sharing our love of nature and especially the love of our feathered friends. Hope to see you on our next outing, March 4. Happy birding to all!

- Jo King

Undaunted by the early morning rains, 12 members/guests of the ABC ventured out to **Bells Lane on Friday, February 20**, for a morning bird walk. Rains left after about an hour, allowing us to tally 40 species, starting with a smattering of waterfowl, including Wood Ducks, Northern Shovelers, Mallards, Green-winged Teal, Redheads, (61) Ring-necked Ducks, Common Mergansers, and one Coot! In the woodpecker realm, we had Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-bellied, Downy, and Northern Flicker. At the top of the hill, we found 3 Northern Harriers and witnessed some fairly dramatic aerial combat between two Ravens giving chase to one of the Harriers!

Other sightings included Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Red-winged Blackbird, and Yellow-rumped Warbler . . . and more (full list on eBird).

As always, I thank and appreciate those who participated with their keen eyes and ears and their enthusiasm for our natural world!

Happy Birding ... spring is coming!

—Penny Warren



Spring Field Trips

Lots of exciting spring bird walk opportunities! For all field trips, dress appropriately for the weather, wear comfortable walking shoes, and bring your water bottle.

McCormick Farm Series—Spring Season, with leader Jo King

(kingbird@yahoo.com); (540) 430-0186

All walks start at 9:00 am and meet at the Mill parking lot.

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

- **Wednesday, March 4** (rain date March 11)
- **Wednesday, April 8** (rain date April 15)
- **Wednesday, May 20** (rain date May 27)



Each month brings exciting, new birds to McCormick Farm, and Jo knows all the secret spots and hiding places! Join us as we search the fields, forests, and ponds for some of these beautiful spring migrants at this historic site.

NEW Field Trip Series: Springdale Water Gardens, with leader Tish Folsom (tishspringdale@gmail.com)

All walks start at 8:00 am; plenty of parking @ 340 Old Quarry Ln, Greenville, VA 24440

- **Friday, March 13** (rain date March 20)
- **Friday, April 10** (rain date April 17)
- **Friday, May 8** (rain date May 15)

Tish introduces everyone to a variety of habitats at Springdale Water Gardens. From wetlands to forests and fields, over 100 species of birds have been recorded here. Join Tish on these easy, monthly walks (about 1 mile) as she searches for spring migrants, including warblers, vireos, sparrows, and many more! This is a beautiful part of Augusta County!

Bath County, with leader Allen Lerner (larnersky@mindspring.com)

Meeting Time & Place: 7:30 am, Meet at the lower parking area of the Staunton Food Lion on North Coalter St.

- **Saturday, March 21**

Join Allen as he returns for an all-day adventure to Bath County! Allen will visit Gathright Dam and Lake Moomaw looking for waterfowl such as Common Goldeneye, Redhead, and Canvasback. The vast forests of Bath County also hold specialties like Black-capped Chickadee, Pine Warbler, and both Kinglets. Don't miss this under-birded area in search of late wintering birds, as well as early spring migrants. Dress appropriately for the weather. Please bring a lunch, water, and snacks.

Augusta Springs Wetlands—Birds & Blooms, with leader Rich Wood (beagleboy831@comcast.net)

Meeting Time & Place: 9:00 am; meet at the parking lot along SR-42 (Little Calf Pasture Hwy), 17 miles west of Staunton

- **Saturday, April 18**

Let's venture to Augusta Springs to see what early migrants have arrived, and which spring wildflowers have popped up! We'll walk the wetlands trail (partial boardwalk/gravel trail), then wander to the upland trail for even more surprises!

Bells Lane, with leader Penny Warren (onthewingnow17@gmail.com)

Meeting Time & Place: 8:30 am; meet at the kiosk at the west end of Bells Lane

- **Monday, May 4** (rain cancels)

Join Penny for a morning walk on Bells welcoming back the summer residents and searching for spring migrants such as orioles, tanagers, vireos, and hopefully many warblers ... and much more!

Club News



Community Special Events: Exhibit Tables: HELP NEEDED!

It's once again community special-event season, and we need your help for the two events we support: *Earth Day Staunton* and *Riverfest* in Waynesboro. Each year the ABC is invited to have an exhibit table to promote who we are and what we do. It takes several people to cover the event, meet & greet visitors, provide information, and promote our bird club. Below are the dates and times, including the shifts anyone can sign-up for.

- **EARTH DAY STAUNTON: Saturday, April 25 (11:00 am–3:00 pm)**—Gypsy Hill Park Bandstand
Two shifts available: 11:00 am–1:00 pm and/or 1:00 pm–3:00 pm; TWO PEOPLE NEEDED EACH SHIFT
- **RIVERFEST–WAYNESBORO: Saturday, May 2 (10:00 am–4:30 pm)**—Constitution Park
Three shifts available: 10:00 am–12:00 pm, and/or 12:00 pm–2:00 pm, and/or 2:00 pm–4:30 pm
THREE PEOPLE NEEDED EACH SHIFT

If you can help us out and would like to sign up for a shift (or two), please contact Rich Wood directly.
email: beagleboy831@comcast.net OR call: (610) 506-7236 ** THANK YOU! **

Copies of *Birds of Augusta County, Virginia* (fifth edition) still available to purchase.

The book is a permanent record of the 324 species seen in Augusta County to date, listed in taxonomic sequence. Each listing includes abundance and habitat information along with extreme dates, peak counts, and breeding status. The listings are current as of August 2025. This will be a great addition to your resource library!

The price is \$14. If you're interested in purchasing a copy, please email Ramona Bearor, treasurer@augustabirdclub.org.

Birds of Augusta County, Virginia



Fifth Edition
Augusta Bird Club 2025
Herbert Allen Larner III, Editor

Membership

We would like to welcome our new members, and very much appreciate your joining and supporting the ABC!



George & Becky Godette * Connie Chandler
Deborah Orchowski * Lois McKim
Joe Glick * Shepherd Waldenberger
Marty Edmonds * Mary Cottone
Leigh Surdukowski * Amanda Carroll * Tyler Demetriou



Monthly Meeting Minutes

PLEASE NOTE: To read the meeting minutes from each monthly meeting, please go to the website (www.augustabirdclub.org), and click on "HOME."

Club News

(Cont'd)

Members Support Annual Seed Sale & 2nd Annual Wildlife Center Donations Drive

Once again, we're proud of the fantastic results of this year's Annual Bird Seed/Feeder Sale, and our Wildlife Center Donations Drive! The success of these programs is all based on our members, and how you continue to support bird conservation and our local community organizations! THANK YOU!

2025 SEED SALE: SUCCESS!

Orders from the seed sale totaled over \$29,000. With seed profit, memberships and donations, the club realized almost \$10,000!

*Thank
You
Everyone*



2ND ANNUAL DONATIONS DRIVE FOR THE WILDLIFE CENTER OF VIRGINIA



PET FOOD

Dog food dry – 22 lbs
Dog food wet – 20 cans
Cat food dry- 23 lbs
Cat food wet – 12 cans



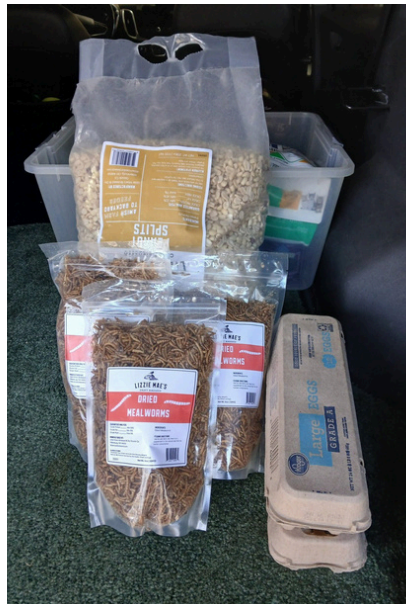
CLEANING SUPPLIES

Trash bags of various sizes –
many boxes totaling 400
Dawn dish soap – many bottles
totaling 364 oz
Paper towels – 2 rolls
Scrubbies – 6



BABY FOOD

7 large rice cereal
34 jars of ready to eat



BIRD FOOD

20 lbs peanut splits
3 bags mealworms

EGGS

2 dozen

2025 Rockfish Gap Hawkwatch—Season Summary



by Vic Laubach, Rockfish Gap Hawkwatch Coordinator

SEASON:	2025	15-yr AVG
Observ. Hours:	528	555
Osprey	218	250
Bald Eagle	635	310
N Harrier	58	66
Sharp-shinned	1,579	1,903
Cooper's Hawk	222	306
Am Goshawk	1	5
Red-shoulder	114	87
Broad-winged	10,550	24,801
Red-tail	982	804
Rough-legged	4	1
Golden Eagle	22	17
Am Kestrel	82	199
Merlin	31	47
Peregrine	25	36
Swainson's	0	1
Mississippi Kite	3	4
Unidentified	19	57
TOTAL	14,545	28,894



Hawkwatch Volunteers



Spring Bird ID Quiz: The Warblers



How well do you know your warblers? As we move into spring, many of these will be seen in our area. Some of these breed here in Virginia, while others are just past passing through on the journey north. All photos are males in breeding plumage. Good Luck! Answers in the summer issue.

Many thanks to the following photographers: Vic Laubach, Joel Stauffer, Antonio Martinez, Sarah Foster, and Tom Roberts.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12

Answers to Bird Faces Quiz from the Winter Issue

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Tufted Titmouse | 9. American Goldfinch |
| 2. Red-breasted Nuthatch | 10. Dark-eyed Junco |
| 3. Red-bellied Woodpecker (male) | 11. Downy Woodpecker |
| 4. Purple Finch (male) | 12. Northern Cardinal (female) |
| 5. Carolina Wren | 13. Mourning Dove |
| 6. House Finch (male) | 14. Golden-crowned Kinglet |
| 7. Hairy Woodpecker (male) | 15. White-throated Sparrow |
| 8. Carolina Chickadee | 16. Fox Sparrow |