



Northern Neck Audubon News

The Northern Neck of Virginia Chapter of the National Audubon Society

P.O. Box 991, Kilmarnock, Virginia 22482

www.northernneckaudubon.org

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR

No Meeting on February 2

February 9 - Bird Walk

VirMar Beach

Led by Frank Schaff 804-462-0084

February 13 - 16 - Great Backyard Bird Count

February 28 - Bird Walk

Belle Isle State Park

Led by Frank Schaff 804-462-0084

March 2 - 7:00 PM

Meeting & Program

Grace Episcopal Church,
Kilmarnock, VA

March 9 - Bird Walk

Time and Place to be announced on
NNAS Website

Led by Frank Schaff 804-462-0084

Great Backyard Bird Count 2015

The following information is from the eBird web site at Cornell University.

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is for everyone, from beginner birdwatchers to experts, and anyone can participate from anywhere in the world. Counting birds provides scientists and conservationists with a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Bird Studies Canada, and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. Please participate in the GBBC, Friday, February 13 through Monday, February 16, 2015.

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count was the first online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real-time.

Since then, more than 100,000 people of all ages and walks of life have joined the four-day count each February to create an annual snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds.

Participation is easy. Simply tally the numbers and kinds of birds you see for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count, February 13-16, 2015. You can count from any location, anywhere in the world!

If you're new to the count, first register online (<http://gbbc.birdcount.org/spread-the-word/>) then enter your checklist. If you have already participated in another Cornell Lab citizen-science project, you can use your existing login.

Everything you need to participate can be found at the eBird web site: <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>.

Audubon Photography Contest

Annual Audubon Photography Contest Now Open

"You love birds, and you love taking photos of them. Now enter the Audubon Photography Awards! There are spectacular prizes up for grabs, including fabulous trips and high-end photo gear. Winning photos will run in both Audubon and Nature's Best Photography magazines."

"The 2015 Audubon Photography Awards, in association with Nature's Best Photography, Contest is open to all legal residents of the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, and Canada (excluding Quebec) who are 13 years of age or older as of January 5, 2015."

For complete information about the contest, which ends on February 23, please see the contest web site at <http://audubonphotoawards.org/>.



Female. Northern Cardinal Having an Icy Breakfast
Photograph by Paul Servis

Past Events

November NNAS Meeting on Team Warbler

It was one of those cold and damp November nights when Cathy Viverette, Student Advisor and Research Associate at Virginia Commonwealth University's Center for Environmental Studies and Rice Rivers Center, came to speak at the Northern Neck Audubon Chapter's meeting, held at the Lancaster Public Library. The topic of her talk brightened the evening, as it focused on one of our brightest-colored small birds: the Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*).

Faculty and students from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), along with a number of conservation partners, have been studying the breeding biology of Prothonotary Warblers occupying the James River since 1988, but the project became global five years ago, with research being conducted in Panama as well as here in Virginia.

The preferred habitat of Prothonotary Warblers here is wooded wetlands with hardwoods and cypress swamps. They are thick in Dragon Run where professors, students and volunteers have erected bird boxes on poles in the water to protect the birds from predators. The boxes are of the project's own design, and over 600 have been put up for the warblers in Virginia over the course of the project. As Viverette quipped, "If you build them, they (the warblers) will come."

The project, named "Team Warbler" is centered at the VCU Rice Center where studies and conservation of large rivers is concentrated. Its importance is due to the fact that Prothonotary Warblers are iconic birds and good bio-indicators of the effects of global warming and development of wild lands into residential and industrial use. Thirty-seven per cent of migratory birds are in decline, and it is hoped that study of the Prothonotary Warblers may provide information that will so they can prove the importance of



Prothonotary Warbler.
Photo by Paul Servis

conservation and will be useful in planning future development to avoid endangering the habitats upon which these beautiful birds depend for survival.

Studying the warblers is a challenging task. Team Warbler has banded over 30,000 birds, but only two have been captured outside Virginia. Where are they going? Unlike larger species of birds being studied, the Prothonotaries are so small that the Team cannot use satellite tags to track them. However, the Team has been able to deploy 25 geo-locators to try to answer the question of where the birds go. The problem is that the birds have to be caught to get the data from those geo-locators.

In Panama, the warblers spend their winters in mangrove wetlands, a tropical environment of salt marshes, which are one of the three most endangered habitats in the world. Team Warbler does field work in those wetlands that surround Panama Bay. The field work is conducted in December with 16 students and team leaders along with researchers and volunteers from Panama joining together. Viverette describes the work as "life altering".

Past Events (continued)

As many as 100 birds are caught in mist nets and banded each day. They are banded on a first caught, first banded and released basis in order to be sure that no individual bird is stressed by the banding more than is necessary. Data is recorded regarding weight and color of brightness. The brighter the bird, the better quality of food it has been able to consume. Three sites are chosen for the banding and data gathering: young, intermediate, and mature woods. The data has determined that mature sites have more species and more individual birds, and those from mature sites are in better body condition and are brighter in color.

Panama Bay and Chesapeake Bay face the same challenges and are under great pressure due to development, so the research partnership with Panama Audubon is especially helpful.

For more about Team Warbler here and in Panama, visit the VCU website at <http://www.vcu.edu/rice/research/research-warbler.html>. Once there you can view a short Laura Chessin film: From Bay to Bay: a field study of the Prothonotary Warbler, as well as learn how you may be able to help support the work of saving this beautiful little songbird.

December NNAS Meeting - Rebekah Martin
on the Rappahannock River Valley National
Wildlife Refuge
(Report by Letha Harris)

The coastal waterways of Virginia seem configured like a left hand, its fingers forming our succession of rivers, with the under-curving thumb shaping the base of Hampton Roads. In a very "mixed" metaphor, our Rappahannock digit wears not a ring, but a necklace of wildlife refuges, its top clasped at Port Royal, its chain coursing down the top bank to loop around just near the Lancaster/Richmond County division before running up the opposite shore. This is the Rappahannock River Valley

National Wildlife Refuge, whose links, under the aegis of US Fish and Wildlife, provide shelter for indigenous flora and fauna. Rebekah Martin, its deputy manager, was our December speaker. Hers is the job of guarding and surveying the protected habitats.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (part of the Department of the Interior) oversees the National Wildlife Refuge System, a network of connected lands with the mission of conserving fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continued benefit of the American people. There are more than 560 national wildlife refuges across the country.

Rebekah Martin, a native of the Northern Neck, has served in the US Fish and Wildlife Service for more than 13 years. As the deputy refuge manager, she enjoys protecting the very lands and species that inspired her to work in the conservation field.

The patterns of zoologic and botanic populations, topography and geology are ancient; the methods of safeguarding them are technologically cutting-edge. Motion-activated cameras, snapping three successive photos at a time, can give up the mysteries of secretive or nocturnal behavior. Rebekah treated us to images of a curious barn owl (ostensibly aware of the camera) in the act of dining on a vole.



Past Events (*continued*)

The Barn Owl photos above were taken by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in May 2015. The game camera is also very effective in identifying the population concentrations of the Black Duck.

Maps of osprey migration were also visualized in color, using computerized tracing devices. The Refuge partners with William and Mary to band the birds, one of whose trips popped up on the screen showing a 25-hour flight from Cuba to Columbia. Occasionally the track-line vanishes, as the bird has tragically “fallen off the map” and just didn’t survive this grueling migratory feat.

Work on the Refuge can be low tech, rather than high. Much active management involves prescribed burns alternating with mowing, where agricultural fields have

converted to native, and necessary, grasslands. Left to their own aggressive devices, such habitats will welcome the return of woody vegetation. It takes only a couple of years of inattention for this growth to dominate. The Refuge is trying to aid the grasshopper sparrow, an indicator species for successful revitalization of native grasses.

Other management of woodland involves selective clearing: leaving trees strong enough for bald eagle nests and encouraging pine savannah, now only covering 3% of its original, natural range and a supporting environment for the brown-headed nuthatch.

Rebekah ended with an overview of educational programs, primarily the Junior Duck Stamp Camp, which includes along with its artistic competition, days of canoe and habitat schooling; a “Learn While you Earn” Youth Conservation Corps, wherein young people participate in some of the physically challenging maintenance work, and “Go Wild,” the annual May outdoor festival held at the Hutchinson Tract of the refuge in Tappahannock.

Upcoming Events

General meetings of NNAS will take place the first Mondays of the months of March, April, May, and June. Please check the NNAS web site for details as they become available. The URL for the web site is <http://www.northernneckaudubon.org/>. Programs are also announced in regional newspapers.

Bird walks are scheduled for the second Mondays and fourth Saturdays of each month and are also announced in regional papers and on the web site.

INJURED BIRDS

Diana O’ Conner - 804-313-2240

INJURED ANIMALS

Nancy Johnston - 804-435-3040



Application for Membership in NNAS - Chapter Code X50, 7XCH

- Local Chapter Only Membership - \$15.00 annually, renewable in June; includes local newsletter and directory.
- National & Local Membership - \$20.00 introductory (\$35.00 after), is above, plus glossy National Audubon Magazine.
 Make checks payable to "National Audubon Society".

Name _____ Phone _____ - _____

Address _____ E-Mail _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____



Northern Neck Audubon Society Resources

Officers	Committee Chairs		Media
President Mike Andrews	Birdhouse Fred Witschey & Ron Feldman	Gifts & Mem. Open	Website www.northernneckaudubon.org suggestions to: bbwilson@kaballero.com Directory - publ. every 18 mths Newsletter - five issues annually submit ideas, articles etc. to: bbwilson@kaballero.com
V President Russell Buxton	C. Easement Open	Hickory H'w Glyn Surdam	
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Northern Neck of Virginia Chapter
Of the National Audubon Society
P.O. Box 991
Kilmarnock, VA 22482-0991