



# 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](http://www.northernneckaudubon.org)

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Baby bird receiving rehabilitation.  
Photo by Maureen Eiger

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## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

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**March 3** - Meeting 7:00 PM

Grace Church, Kilmarnock

Speaker: Maureen Eiger, on Baby Bird Identification

**March 10** - Bird Walk 1:00 PM

Hughlett Point

Led by Frank Schaff. Call for details: 804-462-0084

**March 22** - Bird Walk 8:30 AM

At Maggie Gerdts's property

Led by Frank Schaff. Call for details: 804-462-0084

**April 7** - Meeting 7:00 PM

Grace Church, Kilmarnock

Sandy Spencer (Topic TBA)

## Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz

The following information was sent to our chapter via two email messages by Robert Ake, who spoke to our group on November 2011 about his participation in the ABA Big Year of Birding.

### February 3:

"It's just about time for the Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz. The Virginia Society of Ornithology has been asked to coordinate the Blitz this year and I have volunteered to lead the charge. You're receiving this email because you've indicated a previous interest in the Blitz or you're listed as the contact for your chapter on the current VSO website. If someone else should be your chapter's contact, please forward this information to that person and let me know to whom I should be corresponding."

"The survey period for the Blitz in Virginia will be the entire month of March 2014. It is important to get as much of the state covered as we can. To that end it would be great if your chapter could select a coordinator for your chapter and plan some field trips in March with Rusty Blackbirds in mind. Discuss where chapter members might search for Rusty Blackbirds in your area. It might be a good idea to use a fraction of one of your chapter's meetings to review how to identify Rusty Blackbirds in the field. Your sightings during the Blitz should be submitted to ebird (<http://ebird.org>) where the cumulative sightings will be analyzed at the conclusion of the Blitz."

"To assist you in your efforts the International Rusty Blackbird Working Group has put together a website at [www.http://rustyblackbird.org](http://rustyblackbird.org) where information on the Blitz can be found under the Outreach tab. There you'll find information on identification tips you can use during that chapter meeting as well as information and data sheets that can be used in reporting your results through ebird."

"Let me hear about your chapter's plans. If you have any questions, please let me hear them ([rake@cox.net](mailto:rake@cox.net)). I'll get back to you as rapidly as I can with answers. I'd also be interested in hearing any Rusty Blackbird stories you may have. So get out and start looking for Rusty Blackbirds and honing your identification skills. In March we'll be ready to conduct a thorough census of Rusty Blackbirds in the state."



This photo of a Rusty Blackbird is from the Wikimedia Commons and is used under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

### February 11:

"Only three weeks until the Blitz officially begins in Virginia on March 1. I think it will coincide with that spring warming trend we're all expecting. Until then, spruce up your Rusty Blackbird identification skills so you're ready."

"Participating in the Blitz is straightforward - anyone who feels confident in their Rusty Blackbird ID skills can go out, look for Rusties anywhere in Virginia they like, and report their sightings (or lack thereof) to eBird through their Submit Observations using the special Observation Type listed under Other "Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz" in the drop-down menu."

"However, for birders who'd like a bit more guidance, or for anyone who is willing to collect additional information that will be highly valuable to the effort, an optional Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz protocol document has been developed. This document details how to record and report field observations and indicates the "extras" that birders can do to help our effort (take photos, record information about local habitat, etc). This document along with much other valuable information is available through the Rusty Blackbird website (<http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/>) on the Collecting and Reporting Data page. Take a look and see if you'd like to add some of those extras."

## Stretch Your Bird Food Budget

(This article is by Maureen Eiger, our March 2014 speaker, and is used with permission. It is from her column "The Curious Birder".)

I feed birds all year round but this winter I will need to put out more feeders. Why? Remember the crazy weather we had this year? I don't know about you, but my flower and vegetable gardens were not very productive, and my oak trees did not fare any better. With the lack of acorns and seed heads, birds will be relying more on my feeders and emptying them out sooner. So I have thought of some ideas to keep me from going bankrupt and still enjoy seeing the birds that brighten my winter days. If you have thought about feeding birds but shudder at the expense, maybe you will appreciate these bird feeding tips, too.

We throw egg shells in the garbage almost every day, but they are full of calcium and minerals. Birds need additional calcium, especially after nesting season. When I eat eggs I simply return the empty shells to the cardboard carton. When all my eggs are gone and I am left with just a carton of eggshells, I microwave them in the carton, just until they start to pop. (About 30 to 60 seconds.) That way any possible salmonella germs will be killed. Crunch them up or leave them in halves and toss them out in your flower pots or garden. They will not be there long. It's so much fun watching Blue Jays and other birds carry them off and eat them. You don't have to worry if they miss a couple of pieces; your plants will appreciate the added nutrients.

I often forget about that apple I was meaning to eat and maybe it started to get brown or soft spots. Well, apples left on trees look about the same, and birds do change their diet to more fruits than insects in winter. I am not going to eat a soft, mealy apple, but birds don't care. As long as it is not moldy you would just be helping the birds out. Don't forget about apple cores. Skewer them on branches, or stick them on a shepherd's hook.

Do you cut off the tops of strawberries? I leave a little fruit on the green leaves and place them in a dish. If the squirrels don't get there first the wrens and mockingbirds will make them disappear.



Northern Mockingbird about to dine on an apple.  
Photo by Maureen Eiger

All those pumpkins that we buy and cut up for pies have seeds that birds would love to eat. This also applies to winter squash and cucumber seeds. Instead of throwing out the seeds, toast them in an oven on low heat for a few minutes, just long enough so the shells are easy to crack. Extra bonus — you do not have to rinse the pulp off.

These are safe "people foods" for birds. It is still good to have suet and birdseed available, but adding these few extra items will stretch your bird feeding budget and help our feathered friends. You are in a sense recycling. Just make sure nothing is moldy and your eggshells are toasted. The fun begins when you see which bird is the first to eat your special handout.

*Maureen Eiger is a State and Federally permitted Wild Bird Rehabilitator, Board Member of Wildlife Care Alliance, The Roanoke Valley Bird Club and a very curious birder.*



## Upcoming Events



Maureen Eiger feeding a baby bird  
Used with permission.

The NNAS speaker for March 3, 2014, will be Maureen Eiger whose program will be about baby bird identification and rehabilitation. The meeting will be held at Grace Episcopal Church, 303 South Main Street, Kilmarnock, VA.

Eiger is a State and Federally Permitted Wild Bird Rehabilitator. She is a board member of the Wildlife Care Alliance and the Roanoke Valley Bird Club, and writes a column for *The Roanoke Star*. She has been taking care of various orphaned and injured birds for over 7 years.

Eiger answers well over 100 phone call questions about birds every year. At the Northern Neck Audubon meeting, she will talk about how to identify baby birds in the nest, what to do if you find an orphaned or injured bird (including how to pack a baby bird for transport), and what field marks to look for to identify birds. She will share

her knowledge of interesting characteristics of baby birds.

After the main presentation, attendees can test their knowledge with a friendly bird quiz, and Eiger will answer any questions they may have about birds. Please bring a box of tissues or roll of paper towels to the meeting that she can use to help save baby birds.



Maureen Eiger's photos of a baby Robin (above) and baby Thrasher (below) are used with permission.

The speaker scheduled for the 7:00 PM NNAS meeting on April 7, 2014, at Grace Episcopal Church is Sandy Spencer. At the time this newsletter was sent to the printer, information about Sandy's topic had not been received. Please check the Northern Neck Audubon Society web site (<http://www.northernneckaudubon.org/>) for details as they become available.



## Past Events

*The following report of the NNAS February 3<sup>rd</sup> Speaker is by Letha Harris.*

Many years ago, when my husband began to lose his hearing, his recurrent and melancholy thought was: "I will never again be able to hear the call of the mourning dove." For whatever reason, it was the promise of this particular loss that saddened him. The softness of the bird's voice, combined with its frequency, ensured that the "coo" did, in fact, disappear from his hearing universe. For him, the dove, present primarily by sound, was gone. A void arose in his world, and a similar void has arisen for all of us as the Bobwhite whistle vanishes from our southeastern countryside. How does such an absence touch us? Sometimes its impact is so gradual as to remain unnoticed, a negative space, like the veiling of starlight by light pollution. It will be just another 21<sup>st</sup> century numbing.

Blair Farinholt has made it his passion to reverse the birds' decline. Our little round quail, our Bobwhite, our "*Colinus virginianus*," teeters on the cusp of "threatened". He explained that the fault is the familiar culprit, habitat loss. A once-common species, the native quail no longer replaces itself, as it can find no living space to do so.

The disappearing topography of the Southeast, one of small fields, rough-edged with a melange of tilled ground, brush or bramble, and enclosing forest, was ideal for these little birds. In contrast, the modern, mechanized, monster farms are clean-edged. Their antiseptic borderlands seem marked with a "no" vacancy sign for nesting quail.

Clean agricultural practice may be the major villain here, but there is long list of other problems:

- Overuse of cool-season grasses,
- Lack of wildfires and "succession" grasses,
- Prevalence of high-density plantation pines (with nothing beneath the trees but pine straw),
- Some USDA programs that are hostile to wildlife (though USDA also offers many quail friendly programs),
- Pesticide use that zeroes out the birds' food supply,
- Pen-raised quail, which when released can spread disease (for more about pen-raised birds see <http://bringbackbobwhites.org/blogs/virginia/422-shell-s-covert-on-science-pen-raised-quail-hope>), and
- "Demon" fescue, upon whose tight mat the bumble-bee-sized babies cannot walk.

At first glance this is a defeating compendium of causes; but Blair offered curatives, some of them simple and available to residential landowners. To leave an unprocessed margin to the fields or lawns is the key to recovery. That "gray" area is best produced using a certain seed blend, and Blair provided packets of that for the audience to try. He promoted the black-eyed Susan, coreopsis, switch grass and the supreme rectifier...PARTRIDGE PEA. We were advised to sow the seeds in March or April along what will be an unmoved verge in mid-summer.

Aided by individual efforts, successful quail rebound. Where such rebound has occurred, it can also be chalked up to providing: grounds with southern exposure, bare dirt (for dust baths to remove parasites), shrubbery cover (for protection from predators), thickets and clump grasses.

These are the actions that we can take as individual landowners, but the State must cooperate too, and it has formed a Quail Action Plan, budgeting \$1,995,000 for the effort. The Plan is administered by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. It asks farmers to provide a quail friendly margin next to their fields that is 35 - 50 feet wide and at least 120 feet long — and the longer the better. The Virginia state government has finally realized that money needs to accompany that request. Farmers' sacrifice of production needs to be compensated.

One by one, and collectively, we can spark regeneration of the little quail who, after all, carries "*Virginianus*" in its taxonomy and should, therefore, be special to Virginians.

My husband now profits from one of the really good things to come out of the (previously maligned) 21<sup>st</sup> Century: a stellar hearing aid. He can again hear the voice of the dove. Let us hope that habitat restoration will bring back, with equal efficacy, the whistle of the Bobwhite.



### 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 \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

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