MARCH MEETING

Date: Monday, March 9th, 7:00 PM

Place: Covenant Presbyterian Church
2001 North Coalter St., Staunton

Program: Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird

Speaker: Katie Fallon

Pre-meeting dinner: 5:15 PM at Little Maria’s, located on Route 11 (Commerce Road) between Staunton and Verona. If interested, please contact Stanley Heatwole (540-886-7450 or sheatwole@usa.net) before noon that day.

Vultures are often overlooked, under-appreciated, and unloved, despite the vital role they play in healthy ecosystems. Worldwide, vultures are more likely to be threatened or endangered than any other group of raptor, but in the United States Turkey and Black Vultures may be increasing in number. Based on Katie Fallon’s recent book, this fun presentation will discuss the life and times of the noble Turkey Vulture, including its feeding, nesting, and roosting habits, migratory behaviors, and common misconceptions.

Katie Fallon is the author of the nonfiction books Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird (2017) and Cerulean Blues: A Personal Search for a Vanishing Songbird (2011), which was a Finalist for the Reed Award for Outstanding Writing on the Southern Environment. Katie is also the author of two books for children. Her essays and articles have appeared in a variety of journals and magazines, and she has taught writing at Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, Chatham University, and West Virginia Wesleyan College. She is a founder of the nonprofit Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia and has served as President of the Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society. Her first word was “bird.” For more: www.katiefallon.com.
UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Wednesday, March 18th: McCormick's Mill Farm
Meeting place & time: Parking Lot at McDonald's on Greenville Ave. at 8:30 to car pool, or at the Mill by 9:00 AM
Coordinator: Jo King ... 540-430-0186, kingbird10@yahoo.com

We will be getting ready for Spring by looking for newly-arriving early migrants. If the weather is bad on the 18th, the makeup date will be March 25th.

Saturday, March 28th: Braley Pond and vicinity
Meeting place & time: Food Lion parking lot on N. Coalter St. Staunton, 8:30 AM
Coordinator: Andrew Clem, agclem@comcast.net, 540-849-8234

We will take a short hike around the pond, and perhaps venture further upstream depending on what we see and hear. This wooded area is known for a variety of birds throughout the year; last fall there were many Fox Sparrows and Golden-crowned Kinglets. We may also get some early spring arrivals. Rain date: April 5th.

EXPANSION OF THE COWBANE PRAIRIE NATURAL AREA PRESERVE

Many of our club members have visited Cowbane Prairie Natural Area Preserve in Stuarts Draft for the variety of birds and plants. Cowbane is a 63-acre Natural Area Preserve (NAP) owned and maintained by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). This preserve is representative of wet prairies, mesic prairies, and calcareous spring marshes which were once common in the Shenandoah Valley. Cowbane holds 11 rare plant species such as queen-of-the-prairie, blueflag iris, and marsh-speedwell. According to eBird, 101 bird species have been recorded here, including Wood Duck, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Virginia Rail, Northern Harrier, Northern Goshawk, Warbling Vireo, American Pipit, Grasshopper Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat, Northern Waterthrush, Yellow Warbler, Palm Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, and Magnolia Warbler.

Recently I learned that a new 84-acre section of Cowbane has opened on the south side of the South River, expanding Cowbane to 147 acres total. This expansion was made possible using funds from the settlement with DuPont over mercury discharged into the South River. Both sections of Cowbane provide a variety of habitats, including grassland, brushland, river, marsh, and forest. Both sections are open to birders from the Augusta Bird Club, who are permitted to roam through the property provided that plant species are respected and left unharmed. The north section is accessible by parking at the end of Johnson Dr. and walking around the metal gate. The new, south section is accessible by parking at the end of Bowmans Run Dr. and walking through the wooden gate. The photo below depicts the general boundaries of the north (blue) and south (yellow) sections. The red stars indicate parking and trailheads. The pink area is the Nature Conservancy's 14-acre South River Preserve.
FIELD TRIP REPORT

Twelve members of the Augusta Bird Club conducted a bird walk to McCormick's Farm on February 19, 2020. The weather was cold and sunny with no wind. We noted 33 species, including the following highlights: Gadwalls, Hooded Merganser, Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, Pileated, Red-bellied, and Downy Woodpeckers, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebirds, American Robins, Eastern Towhee, Red-winged Blackbirds, House Finches, and American Goldfinch.

by Jo King

CONSERVATION CORNER:
SAVING A 25,000-BIRD NESTING AREA

In April of 2018, the Interior Department changed the interpretation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) stating it will not punish companies for killing birds “when the underlying purpose of that activity is not to take (kill) birds.” In Virginia, due to this change in interpretation, a 25,000-bird nesting colony was destroyed by contractors involved in the construction of the new span of the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel (HRBT). The colony included Gull-Billed Tern, Royal Tern, Sandwich Tern, Common Tern, Black Skimmer and a variety of gull species and was located on the South Island of the (HRBT). Apparently, as the purpose of the project is to build a bridge-tunnel, destroying the nesting area was collateral damage.

Conservationists and birders didn’t take destruction of a nesting area sitting down. With leadership from the Virginia Society of Ornithology and other conservation groups, a campaign of letters, e-mail, phone calls, and face-to-face conversations with elected officials and the heads of state agencies bore fruit. In mid-February Governor Northam announced a migratory bird plan that, among other things, includes the following:

~ New policy to address the federal rollbacks of longstanding migratory bird protections and limit future harm to migratory birds.

~ New habitat for nesting. DGIF will provide habitat for nesting waterbirds by preparing an artificial island, and will procure and position barges to provide additional nesting habitat adjacent to the HRBT in advance of the upcoming nesting season.

~ Bird management plan. The HRBT design builder, with VDOT and DGIF, will develop a plan to deter nesting and ensure proper treatment of nests, eggs, and young that may become established on the HRBT’s South Island.

“This plan demonstrates that infrastructure and development can and must be compatible with wildlife conservation,” said Governor Northam. “It also shows that Virginia is stepping up when federal policies change environmental protections.”

Our collective voices made a difference.

by Peter Van Acker
Past President

Sandwich Tern, one of the species that nests near the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel.
2020 VSO ANNUAL MEETING: MAY 1–3 IN WILLIAMSBURG

Plan to attend the VSO Annual Meeting in Williamsburg, May 1 - 3, 2020. Headquarters will be the Fort Magruder Inn and Conference Center, 6945 Pocahontas Trail, Williamsburg, VA. Room rates are $119 plus tax for single or double.

Annual Meeting Fee/Registration fee: $45 and Banquet ticket: $35. Online registration will be available March 1, 2020 at a link on the VSO web site. You'll be able to pay by credit card/debit card/ Paypal. Of course, we'll also accept paper registrations and checks. You don't have to be a VSO member to attend the annual meeting.

Attendees will be able to register in advance for field trips when they register online for the meeting. For early arrivals, Friday afternoon will feature three guided trips. Three “self-guided do-it-yourself” hotspots are available all weekend.

Field trip destinations include: Great Dismal Swamp, Piney Grove Preserve, Hog Island Wildlife Management Area, Cheatham Annex, Grandview Natural Area Preserve, Sandy Bottom Nature Park, Jamestown Island, Chippokes Plantation State Park, York River State Park, Newport News Park, Discover the James Boat Trip (extra fee) and several local Williamsburg birding hot spots. Seven trips are scheduled for both Saturday and Sunday. Of course, destinations are subject to change.

Our banquet speaker will be Dr. Bryan Watts, Director of the Center for Conservation Biology at W&M/VCU/Mitchell A. Byrd Professor of Conservation Biology. We look forward to seeing you in Williamsburg in May. Questions? Contact Rexanne Bruno: rexannebruno@gmail.com

AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB MINUTES
February 10, 2020

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 by board member Darrell Schwalm.

Recent Sightings:
Bluebirds, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Black-capped Chickadee, Short-eared Owls (including a deceased one at Bell’s Lane), N. Harriers, E. Phoebe, and large flocks of Robins. A non-avian surprise is that Spring Peepers have been heard.

Announcements:

1. An ABC Board meeting was held 2/2/20.
2. Ann Cline has received 7 Nature Camp applications, from which 6 will be selected for scholarships.
3. Andrew Clem requests pictures of birds for the newsletter.
4. Field trips to Mill Place Trail and Bell’s Lane were relatively quiet. Jo King will lead a trip to McCormick’s Mill on 2/19/20.
5. The Nominating Committee (Peter Van Acker, Andrew Clem, & Penny Warren) has nominated Jack Holt to serve as ABC president for the next year, pending the election of board members at the April meeting.

Conservation and Education:

1. All are encouraged to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count the weekend of 2/14-2/17. Decide your own place, time, duration.
2. Earth Day festivities in Staunton are 4/18 from 10:00 to 2:00 pm with this year’s theme, “911 Emergency - Climate Change”. Barbara Holt will staff a booth and needs volunteers.
3. Project Grows in Verona is a non-profit farming operation focusing on education for children. They would like to expand their educational offerings to include birding. Darrell has placed Bluebird boxes on the property. ABC volunteers are needed to provide educational opportunities such as bird walks, etc.
4. Riverfest is 4/25/20 at Constitution Park in Waynesboro. ABC volunteers are needed at our booth where owl pellets will be dissected by the children.
5. Kites and Critters will be held 2/26 from 1-5 pm at the Bell’s Lane farm of Carolyn Ford. The Valley Conservation Council and Friends of the Middle River are current sponsors and they would like the ABC to become a sponsor. Volunteers are needed.

Program:

Max Nootbaar presented a program of his experiences at the Cornell Young Birder’s event in Ithaca, New York from July 11-14, 2019. Max received a scholarship from the ABC to attend the event. Max described how this experience had a profound effect on his life, helping him to decide to pursue a career in ornithology. He will attend Virginia Tech in the fall. Max is a founder of the local Young Birders Club and was named Young Birder of the
Year by the American Birding Association. The ABC is thrilled to have played a small part in this extraordinary young man’s future.

Next month the program will be about vultures.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Marilyn Nash, Secretary

TREASURER’S REPORT
submitted by Lisa Hamilton
1/01/2020 – 1/31/2020

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TOTAL BALANCE ALL FUNDS - 01/31/2020 $25,747.00

ERRATA, ET CETERA

The January 11 field trip report in the printed edition of the February ABC Bulletin mistakenly identified Doug Ruby. The Editor regrets the mistake. Also, our address list somehow got Marietta Beverage’s mailing address wrong. It is now fixed. Please bring any such errors to the attention of the Editor, Andrew Clem: agclem@comcast.net.

BIRD QUIZ!

Can you identify this bird?
(Photographed in Thailand by J.J. Harrison.)

The answer will be revealed at the next meeting.
Happy guessing!

~

Mystery bird from the February issue: Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher

We have a winner: Betty Gatewood

Virginia Society of Ornithology
www.virginiabirds.net

Augusta Bird Club Bulletin
Editor: Andrew Clem, agclem@comcast.net

Augusta Bird Club website:
www.augustabirdclub.org

(After updates on field trips that have been added, cancelled, or postponed.)

A young Yellow-crowned Night Heron attempts a head-stand by Cubitt Creek in Heathsville, VA. Photo taken in 2016, courtesy of Ann Cline.