AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB CLUB
BULLETIN
Vol. 56, No.8
April 2022

“Spring is come home with her world-wandering feet, and all things are made young with young desires.”
~ Francis Thompson

APRIL MEETING

Date: Monday, April 11th, 7:00 PM

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

Program: Treeswifts and Temples: Birding (and Rice Pests!) in Cambodia

Speaker: Doug Pfeiffer

Pre-meeting dinner: 5:00 to 5:30 at Little Maria’s in Verona. If interested, please contact Stanley Heatwole (540-886-7450 or sheatwole@usa.net) before noon that day.

In this month’s presentation, Doug Pfeiffer will draw from experience birding in Cambodia, in Southeast Asia. There are several critically endangered birds in this region, and some of these are included. Cambodia has a fascinating history, and Doug will include views of some temples, and of course, some insects!

Black-naped Monarch, on the Kbal Spean trail.

Doug Pfeiffer is a Professor of Entomology at Virginia Tech, with a lifelong interest in birding. Originally from eastern Massachusetts, he and his wife Sally have lived in western Virginia for the past 40 years! Though now active in the New River Valley Bird Club, Doug and Sally attended the Augusta Bird Club from 1982-1987, while he was stationed at Shenandoah Valley Research Station (now AREC - the McCormick Farm), until his transfer to the main campus in Blacksburg. At our meeting last November Doug gave an excellent presentation on birds in Sub-Saharan Africa.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Wednesday, April 13th: McCormick's Mill Farm
Meeting place & time: At the Mill parking lot by 9:00 AM; no car pooling during the pandemic.
Join Jo King at this historic site at the southern edge of Augusta County. On this easy walk through open fields, mixed woods, and two ponds we may see any number of waterfowl, migrating sparrows, warblers, woodpeckers, etc. Dress for the weather.

**Tuesday, April 26th:** Bell’s Lane

**Meeting place & time:** by the bird club kiosk at 8:30 AM

**Coordinator:** Penny Warren, 549.849.8245 onthewingnow17@gmail.com

Join Penny for a spring walk on Bell’s Lane looking for warblers, other spring migrants and arriving residents. With owner permission, a visit to the private pond will be included. Walk should finish by 11:30. Rain cancels.

**Saturday-Sunday, June 11-12th:** Highland County (overnight!) field trip

**Coordinator:** Linda Matkins, linda.matkins@gmail.com

Lisa Hamilton has graciously offered the use of her property in Blue Grass as a home base for a weekend of birding. You can join us Saturday or Sunday, or both days. If you want to stay overnight, you can camp on Lisa's barn porch by the river or check out other lodging options in the area. Two things to note about camping on the barn porch: there is no bathroom but a mighty fine outhouse built by our own John Spahr; also there is no cell service. After a day of birding on Saturday, there will be a cookout on the barn porch in the late afternoon (early enough for those who aren't spending the night to get back to Augusta County before dark). We hope to see Red-headed Woodpeckers, Hermit Thrushes, Golden-winged and Mourning Warblers, and other Highland County specialties. In order to further plan the weekend, please email Linda Matkins by April 15th if you are interested at linda.matkins@gmail.com.

You can call Linda at 540-383-8229 if you have questions.

**NOTE:** We plan to hold our annual picnic brunch at Humpback Rocks on May 21. Further details will appear in the May issue. And don't forget Earth Day and Riverfest on April 23, as well as Big Spring Day on April 30! (See the President's Letter on page 7.)

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**MIDDLE RIVER CANOE TRIP!**

The Friends of the Middle River have generously offered to host/facilitate a trip down the Middle River on May 7th. (Rain date May 8th.) We will do our best to provide kayaks or canoes to all interested parties. The trip will take approximately 3 hours. Put-in and take-out will both be in the Verona area. Meeting time will be 8:00 a.m. and we will end at approximately 11:30. Anyone who is interested may contact Ann Cline at anncline1443@yahoo.com.

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**TO BAKU AND BEYOND IN AZERBAIJAN**

The name alone — Azerbaijan — is so exotic, so foreign, so unfamiliar, conjuring up so many adventurous fantasies, and when you add to that its location along the Caspian Sea, even more uncharted adventures must await you, no?

Baku is the lowest-elevation capital city in the world, sitting at 92 feet below sea level. Being part of an extremely oil-rich country, Baku is a beautiful mix of the uber-modern, exemplified by the famous Flame Towers (a trio of glass skyscrapers symbolizing fire) along with the ancient Maiden Tower within the walled city and the magnificent turn-of-the-20th-Century buildings along wide boulevards. One often hears that “Baku is where Dubai meets Paris!”

The Flame Towers in the capital city of Baku.

(All scenic photos in this article are courtesy of Penny Warren.)
There are 10 national parks which were established between 2003 and 2018. We visited four of them, as well as several nature preserves. Azerbaijan features a remarkable range of habitats, including coastal areas, semi-desert, dry steppes, marshy wetlands, rivers, forests, craggy mountains and snow-covered mountains: Greater Caucasus to the north, Lesser Caucasus to the west, and Talysh Mountains to the south. In the center of the country are extensive flatlands, and nearly half of all of the mud volcanoes on earth are found here.

Our trip consisted of many long and somewhat arduous hikes. One of the most challenging was slogging through thick mud up an entire mountain side into the Talysh Mountains in search of the Caspian Tit. When we reached the top of the mountain, light snow was falling and it was beautiful and ... it was absolutely silent save for a few bird calls ... no man made noise ... it was heavenly. We never saw the Caspian Tit, but we did hear it.

Our “shortcut” trip down the mountain proved to be even more of a challenge due to areas of deeper mud and very wet, muddy areas. We had to stop at a local village shoe shop for several of us to buy new shoes!!! One person lost a sole on his shoe as soon as the hike started, and my hiking shoes were soaked and required a good wash and several days to dry. A few broken-down cars, damaged muffler, and sliding off the road into the ditches only added to the day’s events!
As an aside, our birding route south took us along the Iranian border and I had to laugh to myself: With 12 foreigners looking through scopes and binoculars at the Iranian border, what could go wrong?!?!?

BirdLife International notes 348 species (with 18 globally threatened species) in Azerbaijan. Our tally was 148 species, seeing 10 of the threatened species, and I picked up 37 life birds. Also of note were our mammal sightings: Jungle cat (a rarely-seen endangered species), Wild boar, Goitered gazelle, European hare, Red fox, and Nutria.

by Penny Warren

COLOMBIA: CHOCK FULL O’ BIRDS

I went on the Colombia MEGA tour with Rockjumper Worldwide Birding Adventures last November and December—a whole month! Our guide, Dušan, a six-foot, four-inch Dutchman, was fond of impersonating Arnold Schwarzenegger. He was more like a magician, predicting exactly where we would find each bird, right down to the branch! Indigenous local guides could spot the impossible.

It felt like birthing boot camp, ha. It was fun and not fun, mind-blowing, beautiful, grueling, and exasperating. We averaged five and a half miles of walking a day, but there were a few eighters and niners. Being Colombia, it's mostly slope. We started at 5 a.m. and went to 8 p.m. Roads could be like washboards for hours, and we were lucky if there was hot water at the lodges. We were warned not to extend our hands when walking along the Venomous Snake or Pit Viper Trails. We saw poison dart frogs. We crossed landslides by shuttle and foot. I didn't die, ha.

Colombia is the most biodiverse country in the world when it comes to birds. I saw 928 species, and 829 of them were lifers. We visited the sweltering Amazonian lowlands and the chilly high-altitude...
paramos of the Andes. We were damp in cloud forests and comfortable in the lowland jungle and dry deciduous forest of the Magdelena and Cauca valleys. We found many endemics in the Santa Marta Mountains, and ended at the Caribbean estuaries of the Guajira Peninsula. I fell in love with every landscape.

Some highlights were the wonderful wacky antpittas, which are called “oranges on stilts.” The Antioquia Brushfinch was thought to be extinct but re-found by a local farmer who is now a conservationist. The hummingbird feeders were a dazzling frenzy — fiesty beasts, Aztecs named their war god after them with good reason, Huitzilopochtli. A Black-and-chestnut Eagle eyed me as a possible snack.

I missed one day of birding from food poisoning. Don’t eat cream sauces in the Amazon. A fun fact is that Inca Jay vocalizations were used in the movie Predator.

It was an astounding trip.

by Lynne Parks

RAPTORTHON! 2022

Dear Friends of Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch,

On May 11, the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watchers team will conduct our 10th annual RAPTORTHON! to have fun while raising funds to support our Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch and HMANA’s work for raptor conservation, migration, and hawk watching.

Our team this year (Vic Laubach, Penny Warren, Rich Wood, Ezra Staengl) will be covering Highland and Augusta Counties, Virginia. Each of us
are volunteers at Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch, which operates from mid-August through November where we typically count over 26,000 raptors each season. This year we’re aiming to outdo our Raptorthon from last spring where we ended with 111 species including 8 raptor species! We plan to be out before sunrise looking for Whip-poor-wills and owls before arriving at Paddy Knob (on the border with West Virginia) just after sunrise. We’ll spend the first half of the day birding in Highland County and then finish the day in Augusta County.

We hope you can sponsor our team this year with a donation of any size. This is our only fund-raising drive of the year. Half of the funds we raise will support HMANA programs such as Hawk Watch Fund grants, and half will support our Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch. We depend on donations like yours to help keep our hawk watch up and running year after year.

Please consider supporting our efforts. We’re very grateful to those of you that have supported us in past years and hope you can do so again this year. It’s easy to donate! Simply visit our Raptorthon page (https://www.hmana.org/product/rockfish-gap-hawk-watchers/) and enter your amount at the bottom of the page. If you prefer to donate by mail, send a check (made out to ‘HMANA’) to: Vic Laubach, 104 Lanchester Ct, Waynesboro, VA 22980. We’d greatly appreciate your support!

Wish us luck!

by Vic Laubach,
Coordinator, Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch

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FIELD NOTES

FieldNotes106—December, 2021–February, 2022

The following are abridged highlights of winter records, peak counts, and early or late dates, from December, 2021 through February, 2022. The full reports will be incorporated into the book *Birds of Augusta County.*

**Augusta County Christmas Bird Count, December 18, 2021.** The following records are new winter peak counts:
- Common Merganser (64)
- Common Loon (2)
- Red-shouldered Hawk (23)
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (35)
- Carolina Wren (159)
- American Robin (6,780)
- Northern Mockingbird (315)
- Yellow-rumped Warbler (326)
- Song Sparrow (205)

**Other Records**
- Golden Eagle (2) -- Feb. 28, 2022, Swoope Area: new winter late date
- Selasphorus Hummingbird (1) – Dec. 1 & 2, 2022, Middlebrook Area: third winter record
- House Wren (1) – Jan. 2, 2022, Waynesboro: third winter record

**Other Notable Sightings**
- Lapland Longspur (1) – January 31, 2022, Fishersville

Allen Larner
Records Chair, Augusta Bird Club

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2022 ELECTIONS!

The ABC will hold its annual election at the April 11 meeting. The slate of nominated officers is:
- President: Rich Wood (Jack Holt outgoing)
- Vice-President: Vic Laubach (Stan Heatwole outgoing)
- Secretary: Marilyn Nash
- Treasurer: Mona Bearor (Lisa Hamilton outgoing)
- Editor: Andrew Clem

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AUGUSTA BIRD CLUB MINUTES

March 14, 2022, Covenant Presbyterian Church

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 by President Jack Holt.
Recent Observations: 2 Trumpeter Swans remain in Waynesboro, a leucistic Red-tailed Hawk has been mistaken for a Snowy Owl, Cooper’s Hawks, Bald Eagles with 2 eaglets, Fox Sparrow, Wood Ducks, Grouse near Braley Pond, and Woodcocks at Humpback Rocks.

Membership: Martha will send individual emails to those that haven’t sent in their membership dues. She also reports that the hard copy version of the newsletter is now being sent to only four members, with the rest receiving it through e-mail.

Birding hikes: Jo King will lead a hike at McCormick’s Mill this month.

Kayak/canoe trip: The Friends of the Middle River have invited the club for a float trip in appreciation for our donations to their organization. The tentative date is May 7th. Ann Cline is coordinating.

Events and Volunteer Opportunities: (1) Earth Day, April 23; (2) Big Spring Day, April 30th (Allen Larner is coordinating); (3) Riverfest in Waynesboro is also April 30th. (See the President’s Letter.)

May meeting: The club decided to meet on May 21 at the Humpback Rocks picnic area. Bird walks will be followed by a brunch potluck.

Board Nominations: The nominating committee presented the following slate of nominees for officers of the 2022–2023 club year, to be elected at the April meeting. (See announcement on page 6.)

Program: Rich Wood gave a very informative program, “If You Plant Them, They Will Come.” He identified many trees, shrubs, and plants that will benefit and attract wildlife to our properties.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Marilyn Nash, Secretary

PRESIDENT’S LETTER:
APRIL, 2022

Hello again, fellow birders! I hope you are enjoying this change of seasons. Here at the Holt house Barbara and I have been watching a pair of Cooper’s Hawks working on their nest from our back deck. We hope there will be nestlings soon!

Earth Day 2022 is just a few weeks away. This year we will be celebrating on Carolyn Moore’s farm at 272 Bells Lane on Saturday, April 23, (rain date is Sunday 4/24). The theme of this years celebration is Soil: Mother Earth from the Ground Up! You can read about all the exhibitors and the schedule at the website earthdaystaunton.org. It looks like it will be an exceptional program and celebration this year with presentations, food trucks, musicians, booths, and more! Also note that on Monday of that week, April 18th, Penny Warren will lead the Bells Lane Earth Day cleanup. Meet by the beaver pond location 9:00 a.m. Trash bags and grabbers will be provided; bring your own gloves.

The Bird Club will have an Earth Day booth and we need volunteers to help man our station. We will have a sign-up sheet at our April meeting. In addition to promoting ecology in general, and birding in particular (as well as club membership), one activity at our booth this year will be a book giveaway. Do you have any old field guides, nature books, kids’ books, etc. that you no longer need? If you have any books to donate, please bring them to our April meeting.

Meanwhile, keep looking up! I look forward to seeing you at our April meeting. Bring your old birding books, sign-up to volunteer for the Earth Day fun and the Middle River float trip on May 7. And remember our May bird walk and “brunch” at Humpback Rocks picnic area on the Blue Ridge Parkway on May 21. Happy Spring! - Jack

Jack Holt,
President, Augusta Bird Club

TREASURER’S REPORT
submitted by Lisa Hamilton
02/01/2022 – 02/28/2022

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| TOTAL BALANCE ALL FUNDS - 02/28/2022 | $32,539.35 |

Augusta Bird Club Bulletin
Editor: Andrew Clem, agclem@comcast.net
Editorial Assistant: Bonnie Hughes

Club website:
www.augustabirdclub.org

Virginia Society of Ornithology
www.virginiabirds.net