



# OAK LEAF

A NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THE NORTHERN SHENANDOAH VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

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NO. 2

## Shenandoah Audubon Purple Martin Colony

*at Blandy Experimental Farm*




Photo by Kaycee Lichliter

Don't let the next couple months pass by without checking out the Purple Martin activity near Lake Arnold. Shenandoah Audubon funds and maintains the colony with permission from Blandy Experimental Farm staff. Ted Saunders and Kaycee Lichliter installed two new 12-gourd

racks recently and work together each spring to clean and maintain the units. Watch for more details about the colony in the fall newsletter. Be sure to catch their acrobatic displays and cheerful chatter before they begin their migration back to their wintering grounds in South America around mid-August.

### FUTURE MEETINGS

- September  - Snickers Gap Hawk watch and hike
- October 4th - Joint program meeting with Trout Unlimiteds at LFCC with a speaker from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
- November 1st - Program Meeting with speaker Wendy Willis from American Bird Conservancy.

## HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Many thanks to our new members and those steadfast renewal members who paid their dues with the notice in the March Newsletter. Without you we could not exist. You can renew your 2018 annual membership of \$15.00 online at [audubon-nsvas.org](http://audubon-nsvas.org) with Pay Pal or mail a check made out to NSVAS to:

Shenandoah Audubon Treasurer,  
c/o Kaycee Lichliter,  
1346 Sulphur Springs Rd.,  
Middletown, VA 22645.

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# Conservation Challenge

By Kaycee Lichliter,

Conservation Chair, Shenandoah Audubon

## Scenario:

Out of the corner of my eye, I catch a glimpse of white in a tree as I'm traveling down the highway. Excitedly, I quickly pull my car to the edge of the road and come to a screeching stop. Having high hopes, I gaze out at the hedge of mulberry trees and see a white flapping figure. Oh, yes! Oh, wait, no. What I thought might be a Snowy Owl, visiting our area during the winter months from up north, turns out to be another one of those darn plastic shopping bags.

## The Problem:

Haven't we all seen those eyesores hanging around in our environment; caught in the tops of magnificent trees, clogging drainage ditches and blowing across our beautiful farmland? As it seems, our management of plastic bags has a lot to be desired. As a result, they are negatively impacting our Earth's waterways, creating havoc for our wildlife, filling up our landfills, and ultimately threatening our health.

When drainage ditches get clogged with plastic bags, it creates flooding problems. The plastic is washed off our lands into rivers and streams and eventually ends up in our oceans and seas. When wildlife comes into contact with plastic bags, whether it be on land or in water, they risk entanglement, suffocating, or ingesting shards and pieces of plastic. Once plastic is here, it never disappears. It breaks down into tiny pieces, but never completely biodegrades. Those microscopic-sized pieces eventually find their way into our water supply and food chain and ultimately our bodies. If you don't think plastic is a problem, I encourage you to read about the oceans' garbage patches: the North Atlantic Gyre, the South Atlantic Gyre, the North Pacific Gyre, the South Pacific Gyre and/or the Indian Ocean Gyre. Whatever are we going to do with all that?

Most of us know to recycle our plastic shopping bags by dropping them in the recycling bins at local stores, or at least by giving them a second use before disposal by using them as trashcan liners, doggie pooh bags, luggage, or many, many other things. Oh, how convenient, but oh, how still bad!

## Here's the Challenge:

Since there is no doubt that plastic shopping bags are a huge environmental problem, I personally challenge you to take a stand to reduce and/or stop your usage of plastic shopping bags and start using **reusable shopping bags**.

## Tip:

Cotton or canvas tote bags are readily available at small cost and they last for years and years (I still have some of the first ones I bought back in the 1980s. My brother used to call me Bag Lady; I'm still not sure if it was a compliment or not.) If you have reusable bags and can't remember to use them, after you unpack your groceries, fold them and lay them by the door. Next trip out to your vehicle, take them and put them in that little side pocket in the door. To help me remember to take the tote bags in the store, for every time I forget and have to use a plastic one, I charge myself a dollar, which I place in a jar. (It doesn't take long to start remembering.) Once the jar is full, the money must be donated to a wildlife conservation project. That's good, but it's also bad. You see, wildlife might benefit either way with the funding, but isn't it always easier to prevent a problem, and it's a lot less painful and economical than trying to fix one? Let's join forces and bag the plastic!



## HELP WANTED

Interested in helping us on the Board of Directors? We meet 8 times a year for an hour. We need a Newsletter Editor, a Secretary for our Board Meetings (minutes take a page doubled spaced), and a coordinator for Blandy Garden Fair in 2019. Contact Jim Smith 540-303-3983.

## Shenandoah Audubon/Blandy Bluebird Trail Season 2017 Summary

*By Kaycee Lichliter, Trail Manager*

The Blandy Bluebird trail includes 132 nestboxes which were monitored for 24 weeks during the 2017 season, March 24 through September 2, by 30 trained trail technicians. There were eight new trainees; Angela Schwarzkopf, Beth Sitton, Cheryl and Ed Ferguson, Deb and Tim Teates, Jeff Woods and Zita Zduoba, who joined our returning technicians, Andy and Margie Miller, Ann Hirschy, Chris Lewis, Dana Crone, Dennis and Mary Carolynn McLoughlin, Diane Sheehey, Glenney Comer, Janet Rigoni, Jill Butler, John Hickerson, Judy and Roger Aaron, Leah DeLong, Marie and Milan Majorov, Mary Keith Ruffner, Pam Luttrell, Richard Hampton, Tanya Godfrey and myself.

Nesting attempts, defined as 'at least one egg laid,' remained stable at 72 for bluebirds (14-yr average 68), with survivorship improved at 87.2% (14-yr average 70.1%), producing 226 fledglings. We had our first reported bluebird nest cup lined with horse tail hair.

Tree Swallows dominated the trail system with 132 nesting attempts, the highest in our 14-yr recorded history, which produced 410 fledglings. Tree Swallows like to add a bit of interest to their nests; one nest was constructed out of corn husk while another added a white fabric clothing tag to its nest in 2016, and this past season we saw our first nest cup lined with white deer fur.

House Wren population continues to decline on the Blandy Trail, which was first noticed in 2012 when the fledgling numbers dropped from 204 in 2011, to 102 in 2012. 2013 had an increase to 149 but has dropped each year since: 2014 produced **84**; 2015 dropped to **66**; 2016 saw **34** and 2017 produced only **22** House Wrens fledged (22 is a huge drop considering our most successful year, 2008, fledged 286 chicks. As the Tree Swallow population has increased, the House Wren population has decreased. It may be that in the competition for suitable nesting sites, Tree Swallows are simply out-competing the House Wren.

We will continue to watch our numbers closely, as both species are native birds and have their importance in our ecosystem.

House Sparrows, on the other hand, are a different story. They are not native to North American and can be quite destructive when competing with our native species. They first presented to our trail system in 2009 when they laid 8 eggs in one nestbox. They were not documented again until 2014 and have been present each year since. They tend to utilize box sites near the field lab (newly constructed in 2012) and the greenhouse (newly constructed in early 2017). Two research cottages were built in early 2017 and house sparrows occupied one box site in that area for the first time. In 2017 we documented a total 43 house sparrow eggs laid in four nestboxes. Nestboxes on average are monitored by technicians six times during their active nesting cycle; however in comparison, techs monitored house sparrow nests an average of 22 times each. By keeping a very close eye on the house sparrows, we were able to replace their viable eggs with wooden eggs, resulting in ZERO house sparrows hatched. The adults continue to incubate the wooden eggs, which keeps them busy while our native birds can continue their nesting activity. Placement of slot boxes may be considered in house sparrow active areas in the future however consideration is being taken into account that that may cause them to spread to other areas of the farm creating an even bigger problem. We are also watching carefully at the Purple Martin Colony near Lake Arnold as house sparrows are known to take over Purple Martin colonies.

As we continue our agenda of creating and preserving suitable habitat, educating folks and contributing to research, we encourage you join us, to get involved with other local conservation organizations, and to work to create your own backyard habitat that invites our beautiful birds and other wildlife species.

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### Andy Guest Shenandoah River State Park Bluebird Trail

The Andy Guest Shenandoah River State Park Bluebird trail had 50 next boxes last year. We had 30 bluebird nests with 128 eggs and 121 fledged chicks. Tree Swallows had 35 nests with 177 eggs and 140 fledged chicks. There were 2 Chickadees nests with 7 eggs and none fledged. There were 5 boxes with no nest attempts.

This year we have 64 boxes with 28 tree swallow nests, 20

blue bird nests, one chickadee, and one Carolina wren, and 14 empty boxes to date.

Monitors for our trail are Linda Bender, Bob Edmonds, Paula Conrow, Diane Eisenman, Jenni Ritenbaugh, Beth Shoemaker, Carl Olson, Kevin Olson, Lorraine Brandon, Michael Whited, Michael Ordower, Wendy Calvert, Andy Miller, Margie Miller, Lee Bowen, and Roxie Leonard.

**SHENANDOAH AUDUBON**  
**c/o Kaycee Lichliter, Treasurer**  
**1346 Sulphur Springs Road**  
**Middletown, VA 22645**

## SUPPORT US

*Together we can promote conservation and appreciation of this beautiful place we call home.*

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Members receive a 1-year subscription (4 issues)  
of our *Oak Leaf* Newsletter.

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Kindly remit payment to **Shenandoah Audubon,**  
**c/o Kaycee Lichliter, Treasurer**  
**1346 Sulphur Springs Rd, Middletown, VA 22645**

Shenandoah Audubon is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Membership dues and donations help defer costs such as website fees, materials for bluebird trail maintenance, Shenandoah Audubon Arboretum maintenance, educational programs and more.

Thank you sponsors and supporters!