

OAK LEAF

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

Volume 36 • Issue 1

March - April 2012

*A New Vision
for our future*

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to the new Shenandoah Audubon. While this group has had several years of struggle, our new leadership team is confident we can renew our organization's sense of excitement and productivity.

We have four main goals to serve our members and the community in the coming year:

- **Program Meetings:** Six to eight educational programs will be presented.
- **Newsletters:** Four newsletters will be mailed with updates on our progress and events.
- **Community Activity:** We will continue to support the bluebird trails at Blandy Experimental Farm, Shenandoah River State Park, and Sky Meadows State Park.
- **Education Outreach:** We will present programs at local schools and at events at Blandy Experimental Farm.

If you are a member of Shenandoah Audubon, thank you! If you are not a member or a member of National Audubon only, we encourage you to join us. By becoming a dues-paying member of Shenandoah Audubon you lend financial support to the bluebird trails we monitor, our community outreach at local schools, and the events at Blandy Experimental Farm.

Another way you can support us is by volunteering to help with NSVAS events. We also seek more activists on our Board to help with publicity, education and membership.

One of the most important things we need from you is support at our program meetings. We have excellent speakers scheduled for our spring meetings and a new convenient meeting location (see the next page of this newsletter). These speakers are volunteering a significant block of time to present their programs, and we need to have a good turnout to welcome them.

I look forward to meeting you at our next program meeting!

Lee Bowen
President

2012 - 2014 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

President: Lee Bowen
Vice President: Eric Williams
Secretary: Jeannie Senter
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Conservation: Kaycee Lichliter
Education: Open
Field Trips: Margaret Wester
Finance: John Hachtel
Membership: Lee Bowen
Programs: Rosemary Rogers
Public Relations: John Hachtel/Rosemary Rogers

NEWSLETTER

Tracey Ramsey

WEBMASTER

Jeannie Senter

At the December 9, 2011 meeting, the Nominating Committee presented the Board a slate of candidates for election to the 2012 - 2014 term.

These candidates were approved by the Board and also approved by the members who attended December's meeting.

However, due to the low attendance of this meeting, we would like to request that members affirm the slate of candidates by voice vote at the beginning of the March 19th program meeting.

These officers have already begun performing their new roles and we thank them for taking on their new responsibilities.

We would also like to gratefully acknowledge two outgoing members of the Board, Diane Greco and Cynthia Fenton, for all of their dedication, hard work and efforts to guide our Chapter during their tenure.

THANK YOU!

PROGRAM MEETINGS

All of our program meetings are **FREE** and open to the public. Take advantage of these terrific educational opportunities!

Monday, March 19, 2012 – 7:00 PM

Human Impact on Wildlife and How We Can Help

by Heather Sparks of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, located in Millwood, Virginia, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit wildlife hospital and rehabilitation center. They specialize in caring for injured, orphaned, and ill wildlife with the goal of giving them a second chance at life in the wild.

A truly inspiring event to witness is a bird release—the return of a bird that has been nursed to health at the Center—back to the location where it was found. However, sometimes the injured birds cannot be returned to the wild because their injuries are too serious. These birds can serve as wildlife ambassadors to tell their powerful stories of how humans can help them. Live birds, including owls and hawks, will be a part of this program.

The Wildlife Center has had several hawks come in recently with lead poisoning. They always see more lead toxicity cases in the winter because these wild raptors consume lead-shot deer carcasses. Currently they have a Cooper's Hawk with the highest level of lead in its blood than they have seen all winter. This hawk probably became poisoned by eating doves that had lead shots in them. Wild animals are good sentinels of the toxins in our environment, and lead is one of the worst.

This program will provide information on what to do if we find a baby bird on the ground, if we find an injured animal by the road, or if we find injured animals in our fields or yards. Most important, this program can help us understand the impact humans have on our Virginia environment and wildlife and what we can do to protect and prevent harm in the future.

Check out the Center's website, blueridgewildlife.org, or their Facebook page to learn more.

Monday, May 21, 2012 – 7:00 PM

Owls: Birds of Mystery and Majesty

By John Spahr

John Spahr combines his long-term interest in birds and conservation with his knowledge of these nocturnal birds in a digital presentation with stunning images. This program covers some of the unique and special adaptations, behaviors and "lifestyles" of owls. It continues with an elaboration on some of our more common eastern owls. John's programs intend to inform and entertain.



▲ A Cooper's Hawk rests on a branch. Live birds will be a part of our March 19th program meeting.

Monday, April 9, 2012 – 7:00 PM
Birds of the Northern Shenandoah Valley: Their Status and Future

by Bruce Ingram

Bruce Ingram is nationally known for his in-depth knowledge of fishing, birds and their calls, and Virginia's rivers. He is the author of over 2,100 magazine articles on the outdoors and has sold over 2,500 photos to magazines since he began writing in 1983. Ingram writes for a number of outdoor magazines such as *Virginia Wildlife*, *Wildlife in North Carolina*, *Bassmaster*, *Virginia Game and Fish*, *Turkey Call* and many others.

Ingram has become a proponent of creating conservation easements throughout Virginia as a method of protecting wildlife. Our own local Christmas bird count shows decreasing numbers of birds native to this area, including the Northern Bobwhite. We can see farming practices, development, and land misuse are having an impact on wildlife. Is it possible for each of us to make slight changes to the way we mow our grass, plow our fields, or what we put in our trash to make a big difference for wildlife?

All of our program meetings will be held in Room 102 of Shenandoah University's Bowman Building.

The Bowman Building is located in downtown Winchester at 30 S. Cameron Street, between Cork and Boscawen. There is ample free parking in the lot behind the building which is accessible from either Cameron or Kent Streets.



◀ A Great Horned Owl in flight.

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Hello, friends! It is with great pleasure that I introduce myself as your newly elected newsletter editor for 2012 - 2014! I am excited to be the messenger of the wonderful upcoming events and happenings of NSVAS.

First, a little background on me to tell you how I arrived at this position. I grew up in Pittsburgh and have always had a strong love for nature and birds in particular. In my youth, I would take scrap wood from shop class and make as many birdhouses as I could, putting them up at a nearby park. I had my first taste of "He-Man" adrenaline at a young age when I saw a Killdeer chick fall through a storm drain grate. Without any hesitation, I lifted off the grate, jumped in the sewer and lifted the chick to safety. As a 10-year-old, this was my equivalent of lifting a car to save a baby! Needless to say I was very passionate about my interests. During high school and college, I always would love to "escape" to the park. It was there where I felt inner peace and connectedness.

I graduated college with a degree in Graphic Communications, and my husband Mike and I moved to Front Royal in 2004. Our densely wooded property closely resembled the park that was my childhood paradise. I was in heaven! As a new homeowner, one of my first priorities was putting up birdhouses. Surprisingly, I had no occupants the first 3 years except for flying squirrels. In spring of 2007, I finally had a titmouse claim one of them.

I'll never forget my first bluebird sighting. It was May 2007. I was in my shed and saw some activity at one of my houses. A bright flash of blue widened my eyes and sent a surge of excitement through my body. "Is that...a bluebird?!" The mystical bird that I had always heard was so rare and was struggling to recover from population decline? That all my bird books said only inhabited farmland and open areas? My house was in the middle of the woods with the only real stretch of "open area" being the road and the driveway. What were they doing here? Since I had never seen a bluebird before, I got out my binoculars and double-checked my field guide. Eastern Bluebird confirmed. Wow!!! I was overcome with gratitude and joy to have such a special guest on my property.

Over the next few days Mrs. Bluebird began stuffing the box with nesting material. I was so excited and watched the activity every day. Imagine my horror when I found blue eggshells all over the ground a week later. What had happened? I hoped Mrs. Bluebird was okay! A quick Google search for local advice led me to the Virginia Bluebird Society. I called Barbara Chambers and told her my story. She explained the list of possible predators, which was numerous because the house was improperly mounted on a tree instead of on a baffle protected pole. She explained the process of monitoring a box and stressed the importance of doing so, which sounded very disruptive and invasive to me at the time. She said, "If you're not going to monitor the boxes, you shouldn't even put them up!" Wow. Monitoring must be important!

A few days later I noticed Mrs. Bluebird was rebuilding in another box. YES! A shot at redemption! I started monitoring the box as instructed and installed a wire Noel predator guard after the first egg was laid. I felt confident that the nest was safe. Sadly, I was wrong. I opened the box one morning to find mutilated, dead nestlings. I was convinced that flying squirrels were the assassins since they had occupied my boxes in the past and could easily glide to them and fit past the guard. It wasn't until a year later that I realized the true culprit were House Wrens. They never filled any of my boxes with sticks, so I wasn't even aware of their presence until I learned of their destructive habits and recognized their call. I have since applied cardboard "wren guards" to the boxes after the first egg is laid and haven't had a predation problem since. I am proud to report that my boxes have fledged 12 chickadees, 14 titmice and 26 bluebirds to date!

My interest in birding eventually led to monitoring bluebird trails at Blandy Experimental Farm and Sky Meadows State Park. It was Blandy trail manager Kaycee Lichliter who informed me of this newsletter editor position last fall. Realizing the state of the Chapter and its lack of active members, I agreed to take on the challenge. The board and I decided that a printed newsletter produced in an environmentally responsible way could be a powerful tool to communicate our activities to members and friends and help keep upcoming events fresh in their minds.



▲ Taking a break from monitoring at Blandy. This is one of their 9 Willow Oaks.

I met with the three owners of ColorCraft of Virginia, a printing company in the Dulles area and also my employer. I explained the Chapter's position and need for a printed "hook" to reach a greater audience. All three were extremely excited about helping our organization. They understood the importance of conservation awareness and saw their involvement as a way they could make a real difference in local efforts. They offered to donate the paper and printing (!) of our newsletter and enthusiastically offered suggestions on how to make the production as smooth as possible.

I then met with the owners of WeKnowMail, also located in the Dulles area. They too shared a concern for our cause and generously agreed to donate mail list processing, inkjetting and mailing. WOW! Can you feel my excitement?

And my gratitude continues. I would also like to sincerely thank the previous board for all of their hard work and long hours they spent to keep the Chapter going. I hope that myself and our current board can take the passed torch and keep the Chapter moving forward.

Last and most importantly, I would like to thank Charlie Clevenger and the late Sam Patten for their dedication to nature. Among other contributions, they started the bluebird trails at Blandy. This has given the Shenandoah Valley the distinction of having more bluebirds than almost anywhere else on the east coast, which is no doubt the reason I have them on my property. It was the inspiration of the bluebirds that ultimately led me here, so thank you.

My role as newsletter editor is to inform and educate you of our activities and opportunities where you can make a difference. I sincerely hope that you will join us in our efforts of preserving the natural wonders of the Shenandoah Valley. We have several committee chair positions open and are seeking new active members to grow our board and keep our organization strong.

Our first program meeting coincidentally falls on my birthday, March 19th. I can't think of a better birthday present than a room full of members and friends gathered to hear what the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center and their feathered ambassadors have to say!

See you then!

With gratitude,

Tracey Ramsey
Editor



Mr. & Mrs. Bluebird on one of my boxes.

Think globally,

DISCOVER LOCALLY!

Nature Walks

at Abram's Creek Wetlands Preserve

Winchester, VA

Did you know that this unique habitat hosts 3 species of plants that are found nowhere else in Virginia? Find out which ones and more with naturalist Jim Smith as he walks and talks the beauty of the Preserve.

From mid-March to mid-May, Jim will lead walks every other Saturday and discuss the changes in the environment from week to week.

Walks begin at 8:00 AM, last approximately 2 hours and are non-strenuous. Bring binoculars, spotting scopes, and/or cameras. Participants are also encouraged to bring water and dress for the weather.

The walk dates are **March 17th, March 31st, April 14th, April 28th and May 12th.**

Interested walkers should meet in the Children of America parking lot off of W. Jubal Early Drive, approximately 1/2 mile west of Valley Avenue. Park at the west side of the lot by the woods. Walks are FREE and open to the public.

In the event of inclement weather, walks will be cancelled. For more information, contact Jim Smith at (540) 667-0504 or (540) 303-3983.

Spring Events at the State Arboretum

Boyce, VA

Below are a few of the Spring public programs hosted by The Foundation of the State Arboretum.

Tuesday, April 17, 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM Wildflowers of Shenandoah National Park

by Ann and Rob Simpson, Simpson's Nature Photography



An illustrated program on the wildflowers of Shenandoah National Park and other natural areas. Ann and Rob are photographers, teachers, and the authors of field guides and children's books, which will be available for purchase and signing.

Wednesday, May 9, 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM Salamanders: Hidden Jewels of Appalachia

by Kim Terrell, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute

The Appalachian region includes the greatest diversity of salamanders in the world, but populations are declining at an alarming rate. Learn about the work being done to protect these animals from extinction.

Wednesday, May 16, 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM America's Old-Growth Forests

by Joan Maloof, Salisbury University

Learn about old-growth forests and efforts to identify and protect one such forest in each appropriate U.S. county. Joan Maloof is an ecologist, author, and founder of the Old Growth Forest Network.

All of these programs will be held in the Blandly Library. The cost for each program is \$8 for Foundation of the State Arboretum members and \$10 for non-members. Pre-registration is required.

For more details and a complete schedule of programs, visit blandly.virginia.edu or call (540) 837-1758 x 0.

A Red-headed Woodpecker at Sky Meadows State Park. ▶
This near threatened species thrives amongst the park's groves of dead trees.



TRACEY RAMSEY

Bird Walks

at Sky Meadows State Park

Delaplane, VA

Mark your calendars now for these educational walks through Sky Meadows State Park with naturalist Margaret Wester!

SPRING:

Date/Time: May 12, 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Theme: Migrating Birds in Spring:
International Migratory Bird Day

Trail: Boston Mill Road & Gap Run

Meet: Visitor's Center

SUMMER:

Date/Time: June 23, 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Theme: Birds of Meadowlands

Trail: Rolling Meadows

Meet: Eastside Parking Lot

FALL:

Date/Time: October 6, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Theme: Wildlife & Habitat: The Red-Headed Woodpecker

Trail: Woodpecker Lane

Meet: Visitor's Center

WINTER:

Date/Time: December 8, 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Theme: Resident Woodland Birds

Trail: Shearman's Mill

Meet: Eastside Parking Lot

For all walks, bring binoculars, field guides, water and food (if desired). Wear clothing appropriate for the weather, sturdy walking shoes or hiking boots, protection from the sun (hat/sunscreen) and insect repellent according to personal preference. Daily parking/State Park fees apply (\$4.00 per vehicle).

In the event of inclement weather, there will be a lecture on the same subject as the walk at the Carriage House.

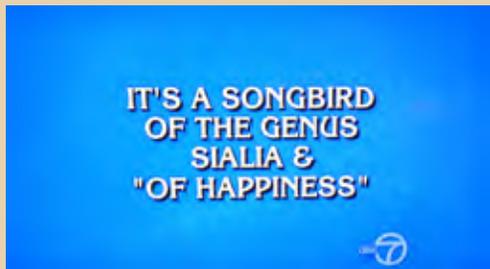
Please contact Margaret with any questions at margaretwester@hotmail.com (preferred) or (540) 837-2799.

BLUEBIRDS EVERYWHERE!

By Tracey Ramsey

The North American Bluebird Society has a feature in their newsletter called "Bluebirds Everywhere" in which readers share their sightings of non-feathered "bluebirds".

Here are some of my sightings which I plan to submit.



▲ On Jeopardy!



▲ A motel I spotted while vacationing in Grand Lake, CO.



▲ Fancy a Bluebird Bitter English Ale? Cheers!

SHENANDOAH AUDUBON MEMBERS:

If you haven't already renewed your membership for 2012, please do so in April.

NON-MEMBERS:

Our membership year begins in April. Now is the perfect time to join!



BLUEBIRD TRAIL TRAINING WORKSHOPS

Shenandoah Audubon Training Workshops for bluebird trails at Sky Meadows State Park, Blandy Experimental Farm and Andy Guest/Shenandoah River State Park are as follows:

- **Training Workshop for Beginners:** Wednesday, March 7, 2012 at 7:00 PM in the Blandy Library. This workshop is designed for those who do not have any previous bluebird trail monitoring experience. It is mandatory to take this class before one can volunteer and operate as a monitoring technician on any of the above bluebird trails.
- **Refresher Workshop for Veterans:** Saturday, March 10, 2012 at 9:00 AM in the Blandy Library. This workshop is designed for those who have had previous experience as a bluebird trail technician at any of the above bluebird trails. It is also mandatory to attend this class before returning as a trail monitor volunteer.

At these workshops you will learn about bluebirds and other native cavity nesting species and the techniques to properly monitor nest boxes including box inspection, critical observations and recording data. At the end of the training session, you can sign up to monitor at any of the above trails and state your preference of how often you wish to participate per month. The trails are monitored for the entire nesting season (late March through August) as scheduled by the trail managers. This is a great opportunity to participate in citizen science for conservation of bluebirds and other native cavity nesting species.

Scheduling will commence after the training sessions.

SHENANDOAH AUDUBON/BLANDY BLUEBIRD TRAIL 2011 SEASON REPORT

by Kaycee Lichliter

44 dedicated trail technicians completed the 8th consecutive year of recording consistent breeding data on the 110 nest box Shenandoah Audubon/Blandy Bluebird Trail (SA/BBT) during 2011. Approximately 400 volunteer hours were donated in order to submit a Citizen Science contribution to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Virginia Bluebird Society, the North American Bluebird Society and the USGS Bird Banding Lab.

Shenandoah Audubon/Blandy Bluebird Trail technicians earned special recognition from The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Nest Watch Program for placing 9th in the Top 20 Nest Watch All-Stars in the United States. Data was submitted for 197 nesting attempts in the 2011 season.

Trail data indicates our bluebirds are recovering from the heavy 2010 snows which produced prolonged ground cover, one of the suspected variables for the local population crash. In 2009 we celebrated 205 new bluebirds, whereas the population fell to just 97 fledglings after the snowstorms. The 2011 season showed a partial recovery with 154 fledglings; almost back up to our eight-season average of 165 fledglings per year. Tree Swallows had an impressive year increasing from 309 fledglings in 2010 to 384 fledglings. It is interesting to note that Tree Swallows did not experience a population decrease after the 2010 snows. Tree Swallow numbers have increased each year since 2007. House Wrens decreased slightly from 216 fledglings in 2010 to 204 new birds this past season. House Wrens also did not show a decline due to the 2010 heavy snows and actually increased from 196 to 216. Since 2004, the SA/BBT has provided nesting habitat and recorded detailed breeding information for the following number of fledglings: bluebirds 1,318; Tree Swallows 1,925; House Wrens 1,459 and Carolina Chickadees 23 for a total 4,725 new sets of wings to take to the air. To view Data Comparisons for Years 2004 - 2011, please visit audubon-nsvas.org and click on the 'Bluebird Trail' tab on the menu bar.

Thank you to all trail technicians and those who support us! If you are interested in participating with the Shenandoah Audubon/Blandy Bluebird Trail, reserve your space in the upcoming trail technician workshop by contacting Ms. Kaycee Lichliter, Trail Manager, at kayceelichliter@hotmail.com or by calling Blandy Experimental Farm at (540) 837-1758. Training is free, but pre-registration is required.

QUESTIONS?

CONTACT US AT

SHENANDOHAUDUBON@YAHOO.COM

Garden Fair 2012

May 12 & 13, 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM
MOTHER'S DAY WEEKEND

The Garden Fair is a huge plant and garden supply sale with dozens of vendors of high-quality plants including annuals, perennials, small trees, shrubs, boxwood, bonsai, and more. The Foundation of the State Arboretum also usually offers for sale a selection of plants divided or propagated from the Arboretum collection. In addition to the plant sale, free events include Arboretum tours, mini-workshops, children's nature walks and other activities for kids.

Entry cost is \$10 per vehicle. Come by our tent and say hello! Or better yet, waive the \$10 fee by volunteering for a shift at our table! Contact us for more details on how you can help.



TODD HAKALA PHOTOGRAPHY

**SHENANDOAH AUDUBON
PO BOX 2693
WINCHESTER, VA 22604**



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TODD HAKALA PHOTOGRAPHY

QUACK FOR THOUGHT

Each time we bring to routine activities an awareness of "now," we raise our vibratory frequency and cause the freshness of the moment to fall upon us.

-Dr. Michael Beckwith

Be sure to check audubon-nsvas.org frequently for updates! We will be redesigning our site over the next few months but will always have up-to-date information available.



Please recycle.

