

OAK LEAF

A Newsletter for Members and Friends of the Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society

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NO. 1

Hello to NSVAS Members!

It is with great anticipation that I have assumed the role of president of the Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society. I want to thank the officers and other board members for assisting me with this transition. I especially want to thank Jim Smith, our former president, for offering much needed guidance and helpful advice. His shoes will be challenging to fill, but I will work hard to maintain the successes the chapter has experienced while helping to build upon them as we move forward. I would also like to congratulate Gabriel Ricketts on becoming our new secretary. This talented young man has already shown to be quite adept in his new role. Another hard working young board member, Corey Seymour, has moved into the role of membership chairperson. He brings with him both a fresh interpretation of what we do and how to proceed forward, as well as knowledge of social media and how to incorporate various forms of electronic communication. If you have not yet done so, please take a minute to view our Facebook page that Corey developed for our chapter.

This past December 14 saw the 120th Annual Christmas Bird Count. Here in the northern Shenandoah Valley, 46 volunteers observed 89 bird species, totaling 26,642 individual birds, according to the preliminary data. This was the 44th consecutive year for this local bird count. Thank you to all the volunteers for making the count successful again this year.

The Shenandoah Valley/Blandy Bluebird Trail had a successful 2019 season. As was reported in the Winter 2019 newsletter, the Bluebird Trail at Blandy had the greatest number of Eastern Bluebird and Tree Swallow fledglings recorded in the past 16 years. The data collected from the Bluebird Trail, including the 260 Eastern Bluebird and 570 Tree Swallow fledglings, are submitted to the Virginia Bluebird Society, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "Nest Watch", UVA's Blandy Experimental Farm and to members of Shenandoah Audubon via our newsletter. Thanks to all of the volunteers that continue to make the Bluebird Trail at Blandy possible. We should all be especially appreciative of Kaycee Lichliter who continues to work tirelessly at coordinating the Bluebird Trail and has done so for 17 years.

In addition to the 132 Bluebird nest boxes that comprise Blandy's Bluebird Trail is the Purple Martin Colony at the State Arboretum as well. Last spring two additional gourd racks were erected, each holding 12 Purple Martin nest gourds. The colony now has five racks for a total of 60 nest gourds. Besides the gourds, there are 6 aluminum Purple Martin houses. This collective group of nesting sites, once cleaned and ready to be occupied, are located near Lake Arnold. Particular thanks to Kaycee Lichliter for overseeing the Purple Martin Colony and to Ted Saunders for his assistance in erecting and maintaining the structures.

Trees continue to be planted at the Audubon Arboretum within Jim Barnett Park in Winchester. This arboretum, located along Pleasant Valley Road and started in 1999, currently has more than 100 trees containing over 40 species. This green area was made possible through an agreement between Winchester Parks and Recreation Department and the Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society, both of which provide care and management of the arboretum. These two entities are currently working with the Winchester Host Lions Club to create a sensory trail, for which trees have already been planted. Plans for establishing a pollination garden are also in the works. Jim Smith, our former president, was instrumental in the creation of this arboretum and continues to be involved in much that occurs within this valuable green space. I am grateful for his work in this regard.

Looking ahead, the NSVAS has been or will be involved with the following developments:

- Finalizing and launching the new Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society website
- Assisting with the Calmes Neck Christmas Bird Count
- Working with the Chet Hobert Park in Berryville, VA, to create a new Bluebird Trail
- Providing info and training for the Belle Grove Bluebird Trail
- Providing assistance with the development of a Bluebird Trail at the future Seven Bends State Park near Woodstock, VA
- Bird walks at Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve in Winchester with Jim Smith
- Fall programs (TBA)

The mission statement of the the Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society and the National Audubon Society, "to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats, for the benefit of humanity and Earth's biological diversity". The work that this chapter has done in the past has been clearly consistent with this mission, as well it should have. The work we have planned for the future will continue to support efforts toward achieving these same goals. I am very proud to be part of an organization that shares and works toward doing so.

If you would like to have more information about what we have accomplished, what we have plans to achieve or want to take a more active role in supporting us in our efforts, you may contact me at shenandoahaudubonpresident@gmail.com or by phone at (540) 955-1243.

Dave Borger, President
Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society

What Are “Seagulls” Doing Away From the Ocean?

By Gabriel Ricketts

Have you ever seen a “seagull” in a grocery store or restaurant parking lot and wondered, why is this “seagull” away from its ocean home? First, there is no such thing as a “seagull” hence the quotation marks, and this article will tell you about a few different oceangoing, or seaside dwelling birds that are found regularly in our area, and why they are here.

One familiar group of seaside birds you may see regularly in our region are the Gulls (family *Laridae*). This is the group of birds that people refer to as “seagulls”. There are three species of Gull that can be found in our region regularly, the Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*, RBGU*), the Bonaparte’s Gull (*Croicocephalus philadelphia*, BOGU), and less commonly, Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*, HEGU). Ring-billed Gulls are smaller gulls that are mostly white, gray backs, black wingtips, and if you can get a good enough look, a dark ring on the bill close to the tip. From a distance this looks like a dark tip to the bill. The Bonaparte’s Gull is a small gull (smaller than RBGU) and can be distinguished from RBGU plumage-wise by the much smaller amount of black on the wingtips, and during the breeding season a completely black head. Winter BOGU have a mostly white head and a dark spot behind the eye. Herring Gulls are like large versions of RBGU but with a red spot behind the tip of the bill on the lower mandible.

Why are Gulls here? They are here because there is food available. Gulls are opportunistic feeders meaning that they can eat pretty much whatever you may think is healthy (or not, e.g. French fries, bread) for a bird. But isn’t there enough food/garbage at the seashore? If every Gull lived by the sea, then all the food would disappear, and we would have a lot fewer gulls. So why not take advantage of the plentiful food further inland? Exactly. Why not. Gulls can be found throughout the whole continent. Gulls are typically found near water, so to find them, consider taking a trip to a nearby river or lake. Lake Frederick can host large flocks of gulls during the main migration seasons. If you cannot make it to a waterbody, then a restaurant or grocery store parking lot can be just as successful.

If you have ever been to the beach, then you have probably seen small birds skittering around on the water’s edge occasionally pecking at the wet sand. These birds are Sandpipers (*Scolopaciidae*), and Plovers (*Charadriidae*). There are a few of these kinds of birds (grouped together under shorebirds) that regularly make their way to our area. A couple of them are listed in this article. One of these birds is the Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*, SPSA) and this bird can be differentiated from other similar species by the spotted undersides and regular pumping of the tail. Another shorebird found regularly in the area is the Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*, SOSA). It can be distinguished from other similar shorebirds by the bold white eye-ring and greenish legs. Solitary Sandpipers can be found during migration season in flooded fields, muddy ponds and pond edges, and muddy river/creek banks. A rather uncommon shorebird found in our region is the Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*, SEPL). You can distinguish this bird from other similar plovers by the single breast band. SEPLs can be found in muddy ponds, flooded fields,

and occasionally along muddy riverbanks. These are three of the over twenty species of shorebird that have been found in our area.

But why are shorebirds here? Pretty much the same reason as Gulls. They are here because of food. Shorebirds have evolved to eat many small invertebrates found in muddy/wet areas or in water. If a harvested cornfield becomes flooded, it may create a small (or large, depending on the field topography and rainfall) pond or mud flat which soon becomes swarming with all kinds of tiny life forms. If a migrating shorebird flying by day (or by night) happens to come across this smorgasbord on the ground below, odds are that this shorebird will land and refuel for the next leg of its journey, and when one comes, it is likely that more will follow. Some lists submitted to eBird.org have reported over one hundred shorebirds consisting of 8+ species in one flooded field! In the same case as Gulls, if every shorebird lived and fed along the coast, there would be far less shorebirds than there are today. To look for shorebirds, consider going to a muddy pond or, after rainfall, a flooded field. The best time of year to look for shorebirds is late June through early October, but you can also have good luck during mid to late May.

Every so often, in a large Gull or shorebird flock, a rare Gull or shorebird will be with them. Always approach rarity identification in shorebirds and Gulls (and any rarity) with caution, as many shorebirds and Gulls are hard to confidently identify from a more common species. For resources on Gull and shorebird identification, consider browsing through the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s birds of North America website or download Merlin Bird ID free from the app store. If you are more into books, some fine works on this subject would be Kevin T. Karlson and Pete Dunne’s Gulls Simplified, and Michael O’Brien, Kevin T. Karlson, and Richard Crossley’s The Shorebird Guide.

I encourage all of you to look for Gulls and shorebirds more often (without trespassing) and hope that this article has answered the question “what are seagulls, shorebirds, doing away from the ocean”. If Gulls and shorebirds are not the kinds of birds you’re into, consider joining the Audubon Society for one of our birding and nature walks at Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve. Walks start on March 28th and will be every other Saturday until late spring.

*The four-letter acronyms are the codes that bird banders use to quickly write things down and such. E.g. instead of three Ring-billed gulls, 3 RBGU. Resources: eBird.org, Allaboutbirds.org, my brain.



Visit our web site:
www.audubon-nsvs.org

Bluebird Trail Monitors Needed

Bluebird trail monitors are needed at Andy Guest Shenandoah River State Park in Bentonville, VA. Please contact Lee Bowen at lbowen@ramseytruevalue.com or leave a message on his cell phone 540-671-1906. Training will be provided at your convenience.

Install a Bluebird Box

Your donation supports Shenandoah Audubon

Are you interested in adding housing for the native, cavity nesting birds in your backyard or garden? Shenandoah Audubon currently has available cedar Bluebird nest boxes beautifully handcrafted by our member, Mr. Chris Lewis. These boxes are the same design as the boxes used on our bluebird trails. Constructed using the safest, most preferred specifications, these boxes will happily accommodate many of our native cavity nesters. The perfect gift for a fellow nature lover!

Suggested Donation:

- Bluebird House \$35
- Predator guard, pole and hardware \$30
- Bluebird house, predator guard, pole and hardware (entire setup) \$55



For more information or to obtain a birdhouse, please contact Kaycee Lichliter at: kayceelichliter@hotmail.com

New Bluebird Trail at Belle Grove

Greetings from Middletown, VA. I'm Tammy Batcha, a fairly recent graduate of the Virginia Master Naturalist training, active member of the Shenandoah Master Naturalist group and now along with my husband Tom, members of Shenandoah Audubon. I was introduced to your chapter last year through Kaycee Lichliter when I signed on as a monitor of the Blandy Bluebird Trail. After that season wrapped up I reached out to Kaycee to see if she'd be willing to speak with me about a potential bluebird trail here in Middletown. Happily, she agreed and during our meeting, Kaycee walked me through the process of what would be involved as a trail manager. After working through a list of possible locations we soon met up with Kristen Laise, Executive Director at Belle Grove Plantation. After some consideration, Kristen agreed to allow us to set up a small trail of 6 nesting boxes on their property. I'm so grateful that Shenandoah Audubon has agreed to sponsor and fund this trail. We have our monitor training next week and currently have at least 5 volunteers signed on to help with this new trail throughout the season. As the trail manager, I am truly looking forward to continuing and expanding the bluebird conservation movement in our area. Thank you.

MEMBERSHIP AND DONATION FORM

SUPPORT US

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

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP: _____

EMAIL: _____

PHONE: _____

Please check an option below:

I will view the Newsletter on the website

Mail my Newsletter to me

New Memberships, Renewals and Donation payments may be made with PayPal at our website: www.audubon-nsvas.org

Is your payment a RENEWAL or a NEW MEMBERSHIP?
(Please circle one.)

MEMBERSHIP (1 YEAR) \$15.00
(Membership is good for one year beginning the date payment is received.)

ADDITIONAL DONATION _____

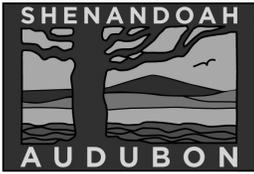
TOTAL ENCLOSED _____

CHECK NUMBER _____

Kindly remit payment to:

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

Shenandoah Audubon is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Membership dues and donations help support local Bluebird trails at Blandy Experimental Farm and Shenandoah River State Park, the Purple Martin Colony at the Virginia State Arboretum, the annual Christmas Bird Count, as well as educational programs and student scholarships. **Thank you for your support.**



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Winchester, VA 22604

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 For information about NSVAS, please visit our Facebook page or website: www.audubon-nsvas.org

2020 SPRING NATURE WALKS

Abrams Creek Wetland Preserve
Saturdays at 8:30am – rain or shine
APRIL 11 • APRIL 25 • MAY 9

FREE • Guided • Family Friendly • Paved • About 2 Hours
Learn about birds, wildlife and plants living in the wetland

Meet your guide in the parking lot at 620-630 W. Jubal Early Drive, 22601.
(Abrams Crossing Shopping Center near Children Of America)
Text or call 540-303-3983 for more information.

Shenandoah Audubon At Garden Fair

May 8-9-10, 2020 – Rain or Shine
at Virginia State Arboretum – Blandy Farm

Turn your backyard into a bird and wildlife paradise. This huge plant and garden supply sale includes native plants, annuals, perennials, berry bushes, boxwood, small trees, and more. Enjoy a free guided tour, free nature-themed activities for kids and lots of expertise from our knowledgeable staff and vendors.

400 Blandy Farm Lane, Boyce, VA 22620. Located about 10 miles east of Winchester on Rt 50. Entrance \$15 per vehicle

Donate a Tree to The NSVAS Arboretum

Trees continue to be planted at the Audubon Arboretum within Jim Barnett Park in Winchester. The arboretum currently has more than 100 trees containing over 40 species. To donate a tree, please contact Jim Smith at 540-303-3983

Have You Considered An IRA Donation?

If you would like to donate via a Qualified Charitable Distribution from your IRA to satisfy your required minimum distribution, please consult your tax/financial advisor to ensure suitability.

Membership News

by Corey Seymour

We would like to welcome the following new members:

Karen A Baughan	Mildred Hathaway	Margaret McKee
Katherine Bryant	Michael Head	Susan Moose
Jennifer Burgess	Candy Jackson	Lisa Murphy
Brenda Chapin	Sondra Littlejohn	Zeeshan Sheikh
Karen Follett	Mary Lynch	Frank Reuling
Kathleen Greene	Susan Macnelly	

All memberships (new and renewed) will be valid for one year beginning on the date that membership payments are received. Individual membership time-frames will be specified in thank you letters sent to new and renewed members upon receipt of membership payments. The membership form is included in this newsletter. It is also available on our website at www.audubon-nsvas.org. Thank you for your contributions and efforts.

Shenandoah Audubon

2020 BOARD OF DIRECTORS OFFICERS

President.....	Dave Borger
Vice President.....	Jeannie Senter
Secretary.....	Gabriel Ricketts
Treasurer.....	Kaycee Lichliter
At-Large.....	Ted Saunders
At-Large.....	Glenny Comer
At-Large.....	Sharon Fisher
At-Large.....	Margaret Wester
Newsletter Editors.....	Lee Bowen and Angela Schwarzkopf

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Arboretum.....	Jim Smith
Conservation.....	Kaycee Lichliter
Education.....	Open
Field Trips.....	Open
Finance.....	Kaycee Lichliter
Membership.....	Corey Seymour
Webmaster.....	Jeannie Senter
Programs/Public Relations	Mark Bruns