As a native of Hawai‘i, enjoying the beauty of nature came easy for me. Growing up on the island of O‘ahu, my playground included sandy beaches, oceans of all shades of blue and green, lush mountains, tall waterfalls, dancing palm trees, and a variety of land and ocean wildlife.

Surprisingly, my interest in photography was sparked during my college years on the mainland. Through an uncle, who decided to share his passion of photography with me, I received as a gift a Canon A-1 and several lenses. I continued to take photos throughout my college years, which were mostly comprised of people and events. As a student with limited financial resources, my priorities were to finish college and get a job in my field of study. A hobby such as photography was a luxury. The cost of film and developing photos were both expensive. Eventually, the camera and lenses were stored away for several years until I sent them to my younger sister who was in college majoring in Art.

As life went on, my interest in nature was re ignited with the purchase of a “ten-dollar” pair of binoculars. I became an avid back-yard birder. I would sit in my folding chair and bird watch for hours. I eventually purchased a good pair of binoculars as my fascination with birds continued to grow. When I joined the Richmond Audubon Society, I met numerous photographers on birding trips and events. There were so many benefits in having a camera in hand, especially a digital camera! If one could not readily identify a bird, just snap a photo or two or three or a gazillion, and identify the bird later. In addition to keeping a bird list, digital photos could serve as a bird photo journal.

In 2008, I purchased used camera equipment. Like my first set of binoculars, my camera equipment continues to improve over time. With binoculars and camera gear in hand, my hobby as a nature photographer took off. Most of my photography has been in Virginia and other states along the East Coast. I have had several opportunities to visit my home state of Hawaii. Each trip home is a new adventure. It is as though I am discovering my home state through a new set of eyes. In addition to the beautiful landscape, there are birds! Standing on the edge of black lava rocks just a footstep away from pounding waves while waiting in anticipation for marine birds to glide across the water is worlds away from sitting in a folding chair in my backyard.

Nature photography is a wonderful hobby. It is my hope that by sharing my photos that they will help encourage the connection between people and nature, and more importantly, increase efforts to preserve the earth and wildlife for generations to come.

See more photos by Lori on page 7
President's Message
Lewis Barnett

I hope everyone has survived the holiday season in good shape. As Richmond Audubon looks forward to the new year, it’s a good time to look back on our accomplishments of the year just past.

In 2012, thanks to the generous support of our members and friends, and to the hard work of member volunteers, we have continued our work with the children of Southampton and Swansboro elementary schools, introducing them to the wonders of the natural world though classroom gardens and other events.

We have partnered with the Chesterfield County Library system on a series of “build your own bluebird house” educational events. The Library folks described this as their most successful program ever, and we will be repeating those events this year.

Our intrepid banders have had a record year for Northern Saw-whet Owls, and have continued the important data gathering activities at our MAPS station and with Prothonotary Warblers. Citizen science continues to be a strong emphasis with participation in the Christmas Bird Count, the James River Winter Count, and the Great Backyard Bird Count.

We have run nearly fifty well attended field trips to locations around central Virginia.

Many of our members are deeply involved with planning and running the "Gone to the Birds" Purple Martin Festival at the 17th Street Farmer's market each summer.

We would like to continue all of these activities, and are on the lookout for additional opportunities to advance our mission of appreciation and conservation of birds.

There are two things that make all of this possible: the help of our member volunteers, and your continued financial support. If you are interested in volunteering for one of these activities contact either the president, or the appropriate committee chair (the list is in each issue of the Thrasher). If you would like to support the mission of Richmond Audubon with a donation, there are a couple of ways to do it. You can mail a check made out to Richmond Audubon Society to P.O. Box 26648, Richmond, VA 23261. You can also check out our web site (www.richmondaudubon.org) and click on the “Donate” button on the main page to make your donation by credit card. Any way you do it, we appreciate your support - we couldn't continue these wonderful programs without it!
RAS Programs Celebrate the JOY of BIRDING

Caroline Coe, Program Chair

January Program
Conservation in Legislation, and Conservation at Home

Our January program will be a two part program aimed at increasing conservation awareness in the political arena as well as at home. The first part of the program will highlight the conservation issues expected to come up in the 2013 General Assembly session. Legislation chair Eileen Geller will provide a short update on the many bills and issues expected to make the rounds in 2013.

Then representatives from the Richmond Region Energy Alliance will be on hand to discuss their energy saving program and answer questions about how to improve energy efficiency in your home. RREA is a non-profit organization that helps homeowners assess the energy efficiency in their homes, and then helps connect homeowners to available rebates and financing to help cover the costs of upgrades and green energy improvements. The January program will be on Thursday, January 17th at St. Luke Lutheran Church on Custis Road. The program begins at 7 p.m. with coffee and dessert starting at 6:30.

February Program
Prothonotary Warbler Nest Box Study

Join us for the chance to learn about the Prothonotary Warbler Nest Study AND have the chance to assemble some Prothonotary nest boxes. Master Bander Dr. Bob Reilly will give us some of the latest data about the studies he is conducting and add much needed brightness to mid-February with pictures of these “Golden Swamp Warblers”.

After a short talk, we will have a chance to assemble some boxes to be used in the study – replacements boxes for damaged or lost over the winter. RAS will have box parts pre-cut and have tools and appropriate hardware on hand. We’ll ask each of us to help defray the costs of materials by making a small donation ($10 will build a box and for $15 we can supply the conduit to position the box). And we’ll be donating our time and talents to assemble the boxes.

The February program will be on Thursday, February 21st at St. Luke Lutheran Church on Custis Road. The program begins at 7 p.m. with coffee and dessert starting at 6:30.

2012 Christmas Bird Count

Arun Bose

Each Hopewell Christmas Bird Count is a little different, and this year was no exception. Pre-dawn rain did not deter some from searching for night birds. It seemed the rain put a damper on owls as they were few and far between. Only 3 Great Horned and 1 Barred were tallied for the count, although a King Rail was a nice bonus, as was an American Woodcock (the only bird on the count). The rain thankfully ceased shortly after daybreak, and calm conditions with relatively mild temperatures prevailed for most of the day.

The highlights were undoubtedly the addition of three new species to the count circle. A Rufous Hummingbird

Continued on page 7
Clapper Rail

Naseem Reza

The Clapper Rail is a chicken-like bird that is abundant along the Atlantic coast from Massachusetts to Brazil and also on the Gulf coast. Elusive and secretive, it inhabits saltwater marshes and mangrove swamps where it is easily heard but seldom seen. It hides behind shrubs and sedges along tidal creeks and seldom emerges from this cover. I suspect a fair number of birders have the Clapper Rail on their life list without actually spotting one (heard only).

The Clapper Rail is mostly a resident species and breeds throughout its range but migration from North Atlantic States to South Atlantic States also occurs.

The King Rail is a similar species, about the same size but with a brighter plumage and a preference for fresh water marshes. John James Audubon named the King Rail, Freshwater Marsh Hen and called the Clapper Rail, Salt-water Marsh Hen. Most coastal states, including Virginia, have open Rail hunting season in the Fall and the daily bag limits suggest that hunters behave like some RAS bird photographers, that is they shoot first and identify later. Of course the RAS folks do their shooting with a digital camera. Shown below is an excerpt from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries website concerning the bag limits for the 4 species of Rail hunted in Virginia:

Clapper/King: 15 - counted together daily, 30 in possession

Sora/Virginia: 25 - counted together daily, 25 in possession

There are many sub-species of the Clapper Rail and only those on the West coast are listed as endangered.

In Virginia, a good place to spot a Clapper Rail is the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (CNWR) on the Eastern Shore. High tide with a setting sun offers the best chance of seeing one. To hear the call of the Clapper Rail and learn more about this shy bird, you can go to:

www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Clapper_Rail/sounds
Richmond’s Winter Ducks
Sue Ridd

Alice Boller lives in Beaverdam and during the winter, she is always looking for ducks through her binoculars. She loves ducks! Growing up outside of Boston and spending summers at Cape Cod probably had some influence on her birding interests.

“Where do you like to go in the Richmond area to search for ducks? And why?” was an email question posed to eight birders – Lewis Barnett, Arun Bose, Wendy Ealding, Julie Kacmarcik, Bob and Lori Schamerhorn, Tyler Turpin and Jerry Uhlman. Here are their answers beginning with -

1) The James River: (6 votes)
   “JRP (James River Park) - Huguenot bridge to Rockets landing is always good for winter ducks,” wrote Arun. “The river upstream from Pony Pasture is another easily accessible place, though the variety of ducks on that stretch is more limited in most winters – you’ll mostly find Bufflehead and Ring-necked Ducks, with the occasional Hooded Merensar,” stated Lewis. Tyler agreed.

2) Dutch Gap (Henricus) Conservation Area: (5 votes)
   Henricus for sheer variety (was the best) according to Wendy. Lewis pointed out, ”the easiest place is the marsh at Henricus - it has drive up access and good views from the observation platforms. There is usually a good variety of wintering ducks there.” Tyler liked it because there were “coot and often many Wood Ducks.” Regulars include Northern Shovelers and Gadwalls.

3) Byrd Park: (4 votes)
   “Byrd Park boat lake for Ringed-necks and stragglers” was a favorite of Arun’s. Bob and

Lori Schamerhorn stated that this was their first choice for ducks. Jerry Uhlman was focused also on the small lakes of Byrd Park. Perhaps the open aspect of the park makes it a desirable place for bird photographers. Recent stragglers include Canvasbacks, Redheads and Lesser Scaups.

4) Stony Point Office Park Pond (near Huguenot & Forest Hill Ave) : (4 votes)
   “The pond in the office park behind Stony Point Shopping Center (is good) because of the many Buffleheads, Ring-necked and Ruddy Ducks seen. It’s the best place to have a chance to see the Hooded Mergansers in central Virginia” Tyler wrote. “Stony Point for Hoodies” was Arun’s shorter email version.

Lewis also added, “I’d also encourage folks to regularly check the ponds in their residential areas - you just don’t ever know what will show up.”

Thanks to everyone for their assistance on this article - Sue Ridd

©Naseem Reza  Leslie Scaup pair at Byrd Park
Field Trips
Ellison Orcutt

These are all the RAS trips that have been submitted as of the publication date. Check the RAS listserv (if you don't subscribe the archives are at www.freelists.org/archive/va-richmond-general/) or the RAS website for any late breaking news about field trips (www.richmondaudubon.org/ActivFieldTrip.html.)

January 5th, Saturday
Floodwall with Richmond Audubon
Start time: 8:00 am.
Meeting Location: Meet at the Floodwall parking lot on Hull St. between 1st and 2nd Street (Just south of the Mayo Bridge).
For more information, contact Ellison Orcutt at fieldtrips@richmondaudubon.org

January 6th, Sunday
Bryan Park with Sue Ridd
Start time: ½ hour after sunrise
Meeting location: Shelter 1, Joseph Bryan Park
Brief description: Join Sue Ridd for early morning birding in Bryan Park to see what birds have made Richmond their home for the winter.
Preferred contact information: For more information, call Sue at 270-5365.

January 12th, Saturday 7:00-10:00 am
James River Winter Count with Richmond Audubon

Help Richmond Audubon Society inventory the bird species of the James River Parks system. It will be followed by a count compilation and light brunch at an RAS member’s home. All skill levels are welcome. For more information about participating in this long running count contact Julie Kacmarcik at juliekazz@comcast.net

January 20th, Sunday
Dutch Gap with Betsy and Ben Saunders
Meet Betsy and Ben at 8:00 AM at the entrance to Henricus Historical Park/Dutch Gap Conservation area. Explore this great birding spot to see what winter birds are around. For more information, contact betsyben@juno.com

February 3rd, Sunday
Bryan Park with Sue Ridd
Start time: ½ hour after sunrise
Meeting location: Shelter 1, Joseph Bryan Park
Description: See January 6th walk.

February 16th, Saturday
Great Backyard Bird Count with Tyler Turpin
8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. as part of the Great Backyard Bird Count (Feb. 15-18, 2013). Join in for one or several of the following sites:

Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens: Meet at 8:00 am in the rotunda of the visitor center. Cost will be $6 for non garden members, finish around 9:30 – 9:45 a.m.

Brown’s Island: Then the count will continue on to the James River Park (free), meeting at the parking lot next to the Tredegar Ironworks (500 Tredegar Street) at 10:10 a.m. to count birds at Brown’s Island.

Huguenot Flatwater: Parking lot on Riverside Drive around 11:30 a.m. access from Cherokee Road then down Southampton Drive On-foot and count from car assignments are available for the Pony Pasture and Huguenot flatwater areas..

Counters should return to the parking lot at Pony Pasture at 12:45 p.m. to tally their sightings. Trip will finish at 1:30 p.m. with a look at the lake at the office park behind Stony Point Shopping Center.

CONTACT: Tyler Turpin at (804) 317-9478 or email: tylerturpin@earthlink.net to sign up.

February 16th, Saturday
Dutch Gap with Betsy and Ben Saunders
Description: See January 20th walk.

February 17th, Sunday
Great Backyard Bird Count Survey at James River National Wildlife Refuge.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Richmond Audubon join forces for this annual survey of wintering birds in a remarkable habitat bordered by Powell’s Creek and the James River. Meet at the refuge information kiosk, 4550 Flowerdew Hundred Road, Hopewell, VA, at 7:30 am. Contact Lewis Barnett (lbarnett3@gmail.com, 804-920-4723) for details.
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From the Editor

Lori Schamerhorn is our featured nature photographer in this issue. Since 2002 Lori has been an active RAS member who has also served on the Board in various capacities.

The Clapper Rail article on page 4 is part of our series on commonly heard but not easily seen birds.

John Coe and his From the Kitchen Window column is off for this issue.

Christmas Bird Count

(aka Little Sarge) that has taken up winter residence at a local feeder showed up on cue for its dawn feeding. A Rufous was present at the same location in 2011, but was not seen on the day of the count. Next was a Tennessee Warbler at City Point in Hopewell. It was encountered earlier in the week, and seems to be staying in the area. Also frequenting City Point was an Ash-throated Flycatcher. First found on December 8th it has been somewhat elusive, but was kind enough to show itself for the count. 175 species have now been recorded on the Hopewell CBC. The preliminary total for 2012 is 107.

At the time of writing not all checklists have been received so it is difficult to say accurately if the total number of birds are below average or not. However comments from most groups suggest birds were hard to find this year.

Other highlights included; 17 species of wildfowl including 2 Cackling Geese, 2 Common Loon, 1 Great Egret, 1 Osprey, 1 Marsh Wren, good numbers of both kinglets (over 100 of each), and 3 Orange-crowned Warblers.

In this "finch" year there was a moderate showing, though nothing compared to the flight that has occurred on the coast. However a single female type Evening Grosbeak was noteworthy. A single Purple Finch, a smattering of Pine Siskins, with good numbers of House Finch and American Goldfinch made for a decent finch count. Red-breasted Nuthatches also made a good showing.

My thanks go to the volunteers who were out in the field counting, to the property owners in the count circle who allowed access to their land. I am also thankful to Cyrus Brame of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Mark Batista of Chesterfield County Parks and Rec, for assisting us at Presquile NWR and Dutch Gap.

Until next time ...
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY
Chapter Membership Application

Yes, please enroll me (us) as a new member(s) of both National and Richmond Audubon Societies at the address below, at the introductory rate. A subscription to the NAS magazine, Audubon is included.

☐ Individual/Family Member(s) $20 enclosed
☐ Student/Senior Member $15 enclosed

Name ________________________________
Address ______________________________
City ________________________________
State_ ZIP ____________________________
Phone ________________________________
E-mail ________________________________

Make check payable to National Audubon Society and write “C0ZX530Z” on the check. Send your check and application to: Richmond Audubon Society, P.O. Box 26648, Richmond, VA 23261 C0ZX530Z

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