



# The Thrasher

Richmond Audubon Society

The next *Thrasher* will be the September/October issue

## The 2008 RAS Auction

As we rush into summer, don't forget to mark your calendar. Save the date & volunteer for "It's For the Birds", Richmond Audubon's 2008 Auction on November 20, 2008. The auction committee is meeting and planning to make this year's event bigger and better than last year. We're looking forward to an evening of good food, fellowship and the opportunity to help support Audubon's programs. There will be live and silent auctions, with auctioneer Doug Sinclair once again at the helm. And this year we're providing the food and drinks along with a drawing for door prizes and a goody bag all for the price of a single ticket. Tickets will go on sale in August. New this year, we're looking for some corporate sponsorship for the auction and could use your help to

identity sponsors who might be interested in our mission. Contact RAS Auction Co-chairs: Bob Coles (804-883-7570) and/or Caroline Coe (804-276-1397) if you know a sponsor or have information about possible sponsors. The sponsorship pamphlet is available online: <http://www.richmond-audubon.org/AuctionSponsorship.html>  
A reminder: it's not too early to plan for something special to *donate to the auction*. You can contact us by e-mail at: [auction@richmond-audubon.org](mailto:auction@richmond-audubon.org)

*Here's how RAS will spend auction proceeds:*

RAS Kids (Primary Project - 75% of funds raised): Introducing children in underserved Richmond communities to nature and educating them through nature study and field trips. RAS Kids is currently working with two

organizations: Swansboro Elementary School and Charity Family Life. (See the article on P. 5 for recent activities.)

Hands-on habitat restoration projects (Secondary projects):

- James River Park System in the City of Richmond. Working with JRPS, RAS was pivotal in the creation of the Wetlands section of the park in 1981. As active advocates, RAS provides interpretative nature signs, and bird walks in the park.
- Presquile National Wildlife Refuge in Chesterfield County. RAS has adopted the Lower James River Important Bird Area that includes Presquile NWR. Support has included construction of an observation platform, a ramp for the dock, funding and volunteers for the large tree-planting project in 2006, and leadership for public walks.

## Richmond Audubon welcomes new IBA Coordinator

Richmond Audubon Society is pleased to welcome Mary Elfner as the new Coordinator of the Virginia Important Bird Areas program. Mary comes to us from a stint as the Coordinator of the Georgia IBA program. Her MS degree is in Environmental Policy and Wildlife Biology from the University of Georgia. She brings a superb mix of skills and experience to her new position. Her experience includes two years as a fish and wildlife biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. As Executive Director of the Coastal Georgia Land Trust 1999 to 2002 she gained experience working with landowners, raising funds for the protection

of coastal lands. She has also worked for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, is past president of the Ogeechee Audubon Society and has served on the boards of several conservation and water policy organizations. The Virginia Important Bird Area program is part of a global effort to identify and conserve areas that are vital to birds and biodiversity. Working with Audubon chapters, landowners, public agencies, community groups, and other non-profits, the program endeavors to interest and activate a broad network of supporters to ensure that IBAs are properly identified, managed and conserved. Mary's experience in field biology, private land conservation work, and natural resource management give her a very strong background for addressing all of the goals of the IBA program. RAS has adopted the Lower James River IBA, which encompasses Dutch Gap Conservation Area, Presquile NWR, and James River NWR, all on the James River below Richmond. Mary has already secured a grant from the National Audubon/Toyota Together Green program to support volunteer activities on Virginia's IBAs, so stay tuned for more information on how you can join in to support the goals of the program and help protect Virginia's birds and their habitat.

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Lewis Barnette

## President's Message: July / August 2008

My first year as President has come and gone. It went by so fast! RAS has continued its fantastic growth trajectory. Our annual fundraising auction was bigger and better than ever. The RAS Kids program partnered with more organizations to reach more kids than the year before. We celebrated more recognition than in any previous year I can remember. We collected more collaborative funding grant money from National Audubon than ever before. The IBA program received major funding solidly anchoring its future. We generated more new members than ever before. We made major strides in streamlining key organizational features like revising our By-laws, re-designing our web site, and generating major cost savings by making *The Thrasher* available online. We invested in our key programs like Education and membership meetings by upgrading several pieces of equipment.

I could go on, but the main thing I would like to point out is that a huge number of members and volunteers made all these accomplishments possible. I would like to personally thank the entire Board, all the committee chairs and co-chairs, and especially all you energetic volunteers who made this possible.

If our goal as an organization is to enable enjoyment, conservation, education, and awareness of habitat for birds and other wildlife in our community, then the past year was a raging success. If we look at the future with the intention of continuing to make a difference there, then we have to realize that continuing on this path of growth and increasing outreach means we can't let up. If you agree with that, then you are in company.

RAS, you are making it happen in a big way. Pat yourselves on the back and keep it coming!

*Pam Dummitt*

## RAS Field Trips and Workdays: July - August, 2008

Sunday, July 6. Bryan Park with Sue Ridd. Meet at Picnic Shelter #1 at 6:30 a.m.

Future Bryan Park Field Trips with Sue Ridd (always on the 1st Sunday of the month):

Aug.3            6:45 a.m.

Sept.7           7:15 a.m.



Come see Bryan Park from a different point of view. Each season has its own cast for your birding interests! For more information, call 270-5365.

Summertime is our lightest period for organized birding trips. Shown here are all the RAS trips that have been submitted as of the publication date. Check the RAS listserv [[va-richmond-general@freelists.org](mailto:va-richmond-general@freelists.org)] or the RAS website for any late breaking additions or impromptu field trips, <http://www.richmondaudubon.org/ActivFieldTrip.html>.

*Penny Reynolds*

## Luncheon to Honor USFWS Recovery Award 2007 Recipients

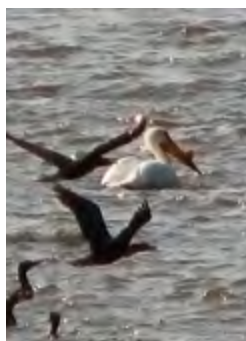
The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Richmond Audubon Society and the Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries honored Drs. Mitchell Byrd and Bryan Watts and the Center for Conservation Biology, College of William and Mary, at a June luncheon held at the DGIF offices in Charles City, Virginia. Dr. Byrd, Dr. Watts and the Center for Conservation Biology were recipients of the USFWS's Recovery Award for 2007. Dr. Byrd and Dr. Watts were recognized for their science and leadership in Bald Eagle Recovery efforts. When the state of Virginia first tapped Dr. Byrd and the College of William and Mary to conduct research on eagles, Byrd noted, "At that time, in 1977, there were about 33 breeding pairs in the state of Virginia, and they produced a total of 18 offspring. Pretty pathetic." In 1991, Byrd and one of his former students, Bryan Watts, co-founded the Center for Conservation Biology (CCB), a nonprofit organization within the College's biology department. Watts now serves as the center's director. And through their continuing research and monitoring as well as ongoing work fighting to protect habitats and raising the awareness of landowners, the once endangered Bald Eagle has recovered in Virginia. Now in large part through the efforts of Byrd, Watts and CCB there are about 428 active bald-eagle nests in the Tidewater region alone. As Joe McCauley, Eastern Virginia Rivers National Wildlife Refuge Complex Refuge Manager, noted at the luncheon, when it came time to select nominees for the Recovery Award, the task was a no-brainer for any one knowing the work of Byrd and Watts, and, "The nomination form almost wrote itself." Mitchell Byrd, Bryan Watts and the Center for Conservation Biology are clear winners and through their efforts there is hope now and in the years to come for continued successful rebound of avian species.

*Caroline Coe*

## American White Pelican near Richmond?

On the first day of May, a report with a couple of questions was received through the RAS website. "We saw an American White Pelican swimming near our shore this morning about 10 a.m. We live on the James near the Benjamin Harrison Bridge. Did you have any other sightings? What is the growth on the top of the bill?"

In *Virginia's Birdlife, an Annotated Checklist*, S.C. Rottenborn and Ed Brinkley, ed., only two previous records of the American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) in the Piedmont of Virginia were reported, although there have been numerous reports on the Coastal Plain. Nevertheless, a sighting was reported, *via* the VA-Bird listserve, near the Benjamin Harrison Bridge in March 2008. A perfectly adequate picture of the bird, sent by the folks who sent the e-mail, verified the sighting.



White Pelicans spend their winters in Mexico, along the Gulf Coast, and in California. Their summers are spent in the northern Great Lakes and in lakes and rivers in places like Rocky Mountain National Park, Yellowstone, the

Grand Tetons, and other locations in the Rocky Mountains. Linda & I saw several of them on a float trip we took on the Snake River in June (see higher resolution picture below). Populations decreased drastically in the 1960s, but have now increased considerably. Probably this one was migrating north in March and decided to take a break on the James River.

This photo was taken while on a float trip on the Snake River in Grand Teton National Park, early in June, 2008. Four American White Pelicans are seen on a gravel bar. All have the bill horn as part of their alternate plumage. If you look closely you can see differences in shape, size and color among the structures on individual birds. There are also other differences in plumage, such as location and intensity of black markings around the face and head. The differences are even more striking when the image is enlarged more than shown here, and best in color.



The "growth" on the top of the bill is actually part of the alternate molt, otherwise known as breeding plumage, of the white pelican. It's also referred to the "bill horn", "keel", or "carbuncle", and is most likely a feature that serves some function during and/or after breeding, because it is formed pre-breeding and lost sometime after the young are raised.

More specific answers were gleaned from an Internet search, which uncovered a 1974 article by P. L. Knopf of the Utah Dept. of Wildlife Science. Once paired, birds aggressively defend potential nest sites within an establishing colony. Agonistic behavior is intense and involves frequent physical contact. Aggressive jabs are oriented at the distal portion of the maxilla near the bill horn. Thus, in Dr. Knopf's study, the horn appeared to function as a "target" structure at which jabs were directed. Without this orientation, jabs could inflict serious injury to the fleshy pouch essential to successful foraging. Also, when adults return to the nesting colony to feed young, individual recognition between parent and chick appears to be dependent upon visual cues. Variable breeding plumage features that include the bill horn facilitate this process. Brown Pelicans and even other species of white pelicans don't develop such a structure, but some other species such as turkeys and ring-necked pheasants apparently have some kind of target structure that serves a similar purpose.

Dr. Knopf's article can be found at <http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/Condor/files/issues/v077n03/p0356-p0359.pdf>

*Al Warfield*

## RAS Kids Report: Do NOT Eat the Loblollies – Outdoor Education and Kids

When Richmond Audubon Society Members and Riverine Master Naturalists team up to present outdoor activities to kids, the outcome is fun for all ages. Several recent volunteer activities involved students at one of the Richmond City Schools.

For Arbor Day, volunteers helped 53 Swansboro Elementary School third graders plant Blue Spruce seedlings. Nanette Sweet, Mary Arginteanu, Robin Ruth, Francis Woodruff, Bob Williams and Donna Cottingham were all on hand for the educational project. They divided the students into small groups to better facilitate learning opportunities. While the tree-planting group learned about planting, proper care of the seedlings and what trees need in order to thrive, the other group of students enjoyed a short walk to identify some of the mature trees on campus.

The volunteers heard some very interesting observations throughout the day. Volunteer Donna Cottingham asked the observant students lots of questions about leaves, bark and the benefits of trees to people. Most third

graders knew that trees “make oxygen of us to breathe.” One child pointed out that trees “can be used to make pencils.” One enthusiastic child even suggested, “Pine trees make food for us to eat!” When one child asked how you could tell the age of a tree, another student told him “you cut down the tree and count the rings.” The young man looked puzzled and then asked, “How did they put the tree back together?” A female robin sitting on a nest in a Magnolia tree was the perfect visual illustration that trees provide shelter for birds and mammals. Upon seeing the nesting bird one girl exclaimed, “Oh my gosh! That is the sweetest thing I have ever seen!” All of the students received a certificate commending them for their tree planting and conservation efforts.

To reward the top readers at Swansboro, RAS treated twenty students, from grades kindergarten through six, and their librarian to a field trip to Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens. Last year’s readers were rewarded with a tea party at school. Richmond Audubon Society volunteers

wanted to reward this year’s students with a field trip and outdoor experience. Children’s Garden educators at Lewis Ginter provided hands-on lessons about insects, plant propagation, cotton and natural dyes, how some foods grow and much more. Volunteers Lori Rutledge, Bob Schamerhorn, Sally McCrea, Nanette Sweet and Donna Cottingham led groups of students on a multi-sensory walk through the gardens to look for wildlife, smell the herbs and flowers, listen for bird sounds, feel the various textures throughout the garden and to experience the unique environment inside the conservatory. Despite forecasts for heavy rain, the weather was perfect for a picnic in the Children’s Garden before the children returned to school. Lori Rutledge, who planned and coordinated the event, even provided treat bags of tea and cookies for the kids to take home.

*Donna Cottingham*



Top Left: “Donna Cottingham and Kids”  
Photo by Larry Robinson

Right: “Group at Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens” Photo by Bob Schamerhorn

On Page 5 are other images from the LGBG trip, courtesy of Bob Schamerhorn, including a larger version of this one.





"Look at That!"



"Girl with Flower"



"Sniffing Flower"



"Group at the Conservatory"

### RAS Picnic, June 21, 2008

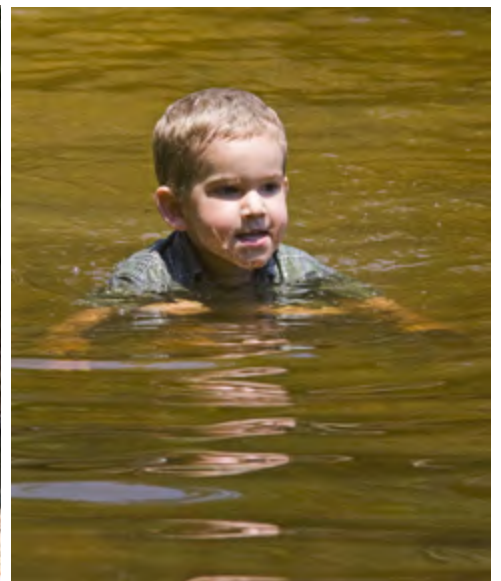
About thirty folks came to Buz and Nelda Snyder's Varina home for the RAS picnic, including seven early risers who went on the bird walk. They were rewarded with great views of a Scarlet Tanager, a mother Black Duck swimming across the lake with her brood close behind, and about twenty other species seen or heard. There was plenty to do: fly fishing, canoeing, fishing from the dock, paddleboating, and swimming. (Those of you not there missed seeing Jim Blowers in his Speedo. Woo-hoo!) And we ate – a lot! No two dishes were alike and everything was delicious. There was plenty of socializing too, of course, as everyone enjoyed the great weather and getting together. Thanks Buz and Nelda for being such great hosts.



Prothonotary Warbler

American Black Ducks

Look what I caught!



Photos by Joan Mazza (upper left) and Al Warfield



Officers / Committee Chairs and Co-chairs for 2008-9

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**Important Notices**

Richmond Audubon Society is a registered non-profit organization

*The Thrasher* is issued in Jan/Feb., Mar/Apr., May/June, Jul/Aug, Sept/Oct, Nov/Dec. pending circumstances.

Submit articles no later than the 15th of the month before each issue.  
E-mail: [thrasher@richmondaudubon.org](mailto:thrasher@richmondaudubon.org)

RAS membership meetings are on the 3rd Thursday of the month except June, July, Aug and Dec. Meetings held at St. Luke Lutheran Church at Custis Rd. and Chippenham Parkway unless notified.

RAS Board Meetings held on the 2nd Thursday on alternate months starting in Jan; RAS members welcome to attend, but let a Board member know due to space considerations. Most meetings are St. Luke.

**Thanks to these Thrasher Volunteers:**  
**Linda Warfield:** Labels & proofreading  
**Patrick Hickey & Jean Adams:** Mailing

Richmond Audubon Society is also a chapter of the Virginia Society of Ornithology and the Virginia Conservation Network.

*The Thrasher* is printed on recycled paper

**From The Kitchen Window: July - August, 2008**

"Every human being looks to the birds, they suit the fancy of us all, what we feel they can voice, as we try to; they court and nest, they battle with the elements, they are torn by two opposing impulses, a love of home and a passion for far places. Only with birds do we share so much emotion."  
D. C. Peattie

Summertime and the living is easy. Not necessarily so if you are bird parents with young on the wing, or trying to be on the wing. It's really early out the kitchen window. The sun is barely peaking above the horizon trying to shine its way through summer haze. The cardinals and Carolina Wrens are singing away. Then they remember the "kids" and singing becomes "fussing". Baby birds are everywhere and pretty much out of control. They can't fly straight, they fall off of things, and they surely don't know how to sing. They mostly know how to flutter their wings with mouths open to get food. We do feed the birds in our yard a lot less in summer than we do in the winter or during migration time, but we do have a feeder that hangs at the kitchen window - out of squirrels harm - with sunflower hearts. And on the deck each morning we scatter our peanut butter/lard/cornmeal/oats mix for the bluebirds (and ALL the other birds). This morning there were seven young bluebirds perched on the wire waiting for their breakfast. It's such a thrill to watch all the new birds "you" have raised in your yard, and to watch the parents helping them along.

We have had a very good year for courting, nesting and raising young in our yard this spring. Lots of new bluebirds, titmice and chickadees, and cardinals, nuthatches and Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers. I think no House Wrens this year; and we've seen only one cowbird fledgling raised by a Song Sparrow (the other parent Song Sparrow was feeding one of its own). Chipping Sparrows keep showing up out front, and the catbirds are skulking in the underbrush; the sound of gnatcatchers is high in the trees and the Red-eyed Vireos sing all day in the trees. The goldfinches bide their time and will nest later. A sad note out back: no lightning bugs have flashed here as of June 15.

The full moon in July occurs on the 18th, named the thunder moon or buck moon, and Jupiter shines brightly all month. The full moon in August occurs on the 16th, and is called the sturgeon moon or grain moon. The Perseid meteor shower peaks on August 11th.

*John Coe*

