Discovering new things in nature has always been at the heart of my curious personality. Catching tadpoles and crayfish was my afternoon agenda for much of my childhood. That love of nature eventually developed into a fascination with natural history that led me to pursue wildlife biology in college. It wasn’t until that first year of college that I learned there was an activity called “birding”.

Up to that point birds were always distant and untouchable, I couldn’t relate to them. One of my first field biology classes required binoculars and a field guide of birds instead of a traditional textbook. Beginning with the first bird walk for that class, a world of wonder was revealed to me that I have continued to explore to this day.

Birding, and more professionally, ornithology, has woven itself into the fabric of my life. I find it to be a place of refuge and comfort when I’m enjoying familiar favorites spots. At the same time, it provides me with excitement and adventure, when I discover a new bird or set out on a new project. Recently, I have discovered photography as a way to enhance my birding experience and to develop my career.

I don’t think of myself as a highly skilled photographer. Most times I think my camera managed to take such quality photographs despite my presence behind the viewfinder. Still, my skills continue to improve and my camera lens has continued to grow longer. Each time I download a new set of photos, I’m reminded that the birds are the most remarkable part of this camera-photographer-bird relationship. I hope you enjoy a few of my favorite bird photos.

To see what else I’m photographing check out my photostream at

https://www.flickr.com/photos/ellison_orcutt/

Favorite Photos on Page 4

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Richmond Audubon Society

Promotes the enjoyment, understanding, and preservation of birds, other wildlife, and habitat through education, advocacy, and fellowship.

Important Notices

**RAS membership meetings** are on the 3rd Thursday of the month except June, July, August and December. Meetings are at 7:00 PM, and are held at St. Luke Lutheran Church at Custis Road and Chippenham Parkway unless notified.

**RAS Board meetings** are held on the 2nd Thursday on alternate months starting in January (except June and August). In July, the Board has its annual strategic planning retreat. RAS members are welcome to attend board meetings, but let the President or Secretary know due to space considerations. Meeting locations vary; contact the President or Secretary for location details.

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

Richmond Audubon Society
P.O. Box 26648
Richmond, VA 23261
(804) 257-0813
www.RichmondAudubon.org

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Thanks to these Thrasher Volunteers:
Lewis Barnett, Louise Reza: Proofreading.
Caroline Coe: Mailing List.
Ben Griffon: Web Posting.

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**President's Message**

**State of the Organization**

Lewis Barnett

The RAS Board of Directors met for our annual retreat in early July at VCU's beautiful facility on the lower James River, The Inger and Walter Rice Center for Environmental Life Science. There was good news on many fronts. After a period of contraction brought on by our country's economic difficulties over the past six years, we saw a small, but encouraging up tick in revenue this year that we hope will be the beginning of a new trend. It is hard to overstate how that relatively small change tinged the day's discussion with hope and energy.

The board reaffirmed our support for long-standing programs, including continuing support for the Prothonotary Warbler, Northern Saw-whet Owl and MAPS banding projects. We expressed continuing support for the teaching gardens at Swansboro and Southampton Elementary Schools in the City of Richmond. Those programs are continuing their good work through partnerships with local businesses and like-minded civic organizations. You can get news about some of the activities at Swansboro on their blog: http://swansborogarden.org/

We decided that Richmond Audubon will participate as a sponsor in this year's VCN Environmental Assembly, which will be held in Richmond. If you attend, drop by our booth and say hello. Details can be found on the VCN website (http://www.vcnva.org/). We are also excited about the news that the National Audubon Society's 2015 Convention (http://www.audubon.org/2013/convention) will be held in Leesburg, Virginia. We are actively pursuing ways to be involved in that event.

It is an exciting time for Richmond Audubon, and that is due totally to our volunteers and support from our membership. There is always room for more help, especially on work days for the gardens and other similar activities. Contact Education Chair Joyce Caldwell (education@richmondaudubon.org) if you'd like to help out.

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**Publication Schedule**

The Thrasher is issued six times a year. Please submit articles to thrasher@richmondaudubon.org no later than the 10th of the month before each issue. Deadline for the next issue is October 10.
Cuba: A Few of Its Birds

Martha Steger

-- I was on a Hemingway-related magazine assignment to Cuba this past May. I wasn’t thinking about birds or the hot spot of biodiversity the island nation has become. When I received my itinerary for the five-day trip, I discovered time carved out for a quick visit to Havana’s Botanical Gardens and more time for the nature reserve, Las Terrazas. Cubans began the 150-hectares botanical gardens in 1968 and opened the doors in 1984. It was here that I had my most engaging Cuban bird sighting — two baby Bee Hummingbirds nestled darkly in a white, fuzzy nest. (See image on page 5, taken by the owner of the travel agency with which I traveled, the Wilmington, Delaware-based Creative Travel Inc., www.creativetravelinc.com/, which specializes in people-to-people, cultural trips, including examples of Cuba’s nature tourism).

Other images taken by tour operator Bob Older are of birds the five of us traveling with him saw at Las Terrazas. This small community located in the Sierra del Rosario mountains (part of Guaniguanico range) was designated a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1985. Rich in flora and fauna, the site includes lakes, rivers and waterfalls — and only about 1,000 residents.

The nature reserve comprises 5,000 hectares of secondary forest, which was planted on the surrounding, deforested hills by building terraces to avoid erosion (hence, the name, which in Spanish, terrazas, means terraces). Goats graze on mimosa to keep it under control on the terraces; free-range guineas as well as chickens run around any inhabited area; and turkey vultures are among the soaring birds, just as they are here in Virginia.

Local guide Daniel Merino helped our group sight a few birds at Las Terrazas -- such as the Cuban green woodpecker (Xiphodiopicus percussus). Others we saw included the national bird -- the Cuban Trogon (Priotelus temnurus), named in different regions of Cuba as the tocororo; the bee hummingbird (Mellisuga helenae), the smallest living bird in the world and endemic to the dense forests and woodland edges of the main island of Cuba; and the yellow-breasted chat (Icteria virens), a large songbird widely considered the most atypical member of the New World warbler family.

See page 5 for pictures of some these birds

Richmond Audubon Society Meetings September and October 2014

Caroline Coe, Program Chair

Cccoe@verizon.net - 804-276-1397

Thursday, September 18, 2014

The Reza’s Grand Adventure to Iceland

A few pictures and stories about Iceland to start off our RAS fall program meetings. Join Lou and Naseem Reza for a program about their trip out into the Atlantic to a land where the sun never seems to set and birds are ever present. As usual Naseem focused (no pun intended) on the birds while Lou took in the rugged scenery with her trusty Nikon. Seabirds, glaciers and waterfalls are Iceland specialties that you will get to see and hear about.

We meet at St. Luke Lutheran Church, 7757 Chippenham Pkwy, Richmond. Please come and join us at 6:30 pm for pre-meeting coffee, cookies and conversations. The meeting will start at 7:00 pm.

Thursday, October 16, 2014

Hummingbirds of the Mid-Atlantic Region

Bruce Peterjohn, Chief of the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory

Thought you saw a hummingbird during the winter? You may have and it probably wasn’t a Ruby-throated. Gone are the days when the Ruby-throated Hummingbird was the only species of hummingbird found east of the Mississippi River, or when hummingbirds were believed to be only summer residents. The mid-Atlantic region supports a surprisingly diverse hummingbird community, especially during winter when species from western North America regularly appear in the east.

Bruce Peterjohn will summarize our knowledge of the current status and distribution of hummingbirds in the Virginia-Maryland-
Ellison Orcutt’s Favorite Photos

Grasshopper Sparrow on Grassdale Rd in Remington, VA

Sandwich Tern in Virginia Beach, VA

Red Knot on Reeds Beach, NJ

Black-capped Chickadee in Provincetown, MA
Bee Hummingbird nestlings, Cuba
Photo by Bob Older

Cuban Trogon, Cuba
Photo by Bob Older

Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuba
Photo by Bob Older

Laughing Gull enjoying a Brown Pelican ride, Sanibel Island, FL
2nd Place-Audubon of Southwest Florida’s 2014 Photo Contest

Ruby-throated Hummingbird with chicks, Norfolk, VA
Photo by Bob Schamerhorn

Great Horned Owlets at Reedy Creek, Richmond, VA
Photo by Steve Baranoff
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.richmonдаudubon.org/ActivFieldTrip.html).

September 7th, Sunday
Bryan Park with Sue Ridd:
Start time: ½ hour after sunrise.
Meeting location: Shelter 1, Joseph Bryan Park
Join Sue Ridd for early morning birding in Bryan Park. For more information, call Sue at 270-5365.

September 13th, Saturday
Dutch Gap with Lewis Barnett
Meet Lewis at 8:00 am at the entrance to Henricus Historical Park/Dutch Gap Conservation area. Fall migration should be well under way, so you never know what might turn up! For more information, contact blbarnett3@gmail.com, 804-920-4723.

September 13th, Saturday
Craney Island with Ellison Orcutt
Join Ellison for an exciting birding adventure. Known to be one of Virginia’s best and hardest to access birding hot spots, Craney Island is a dredge spoils area with the variety of habitats great for waterfowl and shorebirds. Located in Hampton Roads and projecting miles into the water, this site is also productive for more coastal species like gulls and terns. Participants will meet Ellison at the Craney Island office at 7:45 am. The address is 4599 River Shore Rd. Portsmouth, VA 23703. Participants will carpool from there to Craney. Due to the limited space, interested birders should contact Ellison at mr.ellyo@gmail.com or (804) 339-6976 to reserve a spot and to receive further details. Richmond Audubon Society will ask a $5 donation for this walk.

September 14th, Sunday
42nd Street with Jack Esworthy
Start time: 7:30 am
Join Jack Esworthy to explore one of Richmond’s best locations for enjoying the fall songbird migration. This beautiful section of the James River Park has a tree top pedestrian bridge that can produce eye level views of hard to spot birds. Meet Jack at the 42nd Street lot off of Riverside Dr. Please arrive a few minutes early so the walk can start promptly. For more information contact Jack at chesterfield.birds.va@gmail.com.

September 27th, Saturday
Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens with Tyler Turpin
See the birds of Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens. Meet in the rotunda of the visitor center at 8:00 am. Cost will be $7.00 for non-Ginter members, finish around 9:30 - 9:45 AM. Contact: Tyler Turpin at (804) 317-9478 or email tylerturpin@earthlink.net to sign up. If 4 persons have not signed up by 8:00 pm on Wednesday the week of the trip, the trip will be canceled.

October 5th, Sunday
Bryan Park with Sue Ridd
For details see September 7th trip.

October 8th, Wednesday
Hollywood Cemetery with the Coes.
Start time: To be Determined (TBD)
Join John and Caroline Coe at Hollywood Cemetery in the Oregon Hill neighborhood to explore this Richmond landmark. The cemetery is known for its wealth of history and spectacular views of the James. Join the Coes to see the abundance of birdlife that is property is less known for. Meet them at the entrance, which is located at 4125 Cherry St. Richmond, VA. For the start time and meeting information, contact John at johnwcoe@verizon.net.

October 18th, Saturday
Dutch Gap with Lewis Barnett. Start time: 8:00 am
For details see the September 13th trip with Lewis.

October 18th, Saturday
Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens with Tyler Turpin. Start time: 8:00 am
For details see the September 27th trip.

October 25th Saturday
Lickinghole Creek Craft Brewery with Ellison Orcutt
Start time: 9:00 am
Join RAS for a fall walk on the site of Virginia’s only Farm Brewery. Located at 4100 Knolls Point Dr, Goochland, VA 23063, the property boasts a variety of habitat types and awesome beer. After the walk, enjoy a beer and a view of fall foliage from the hilltop patio. Contact Ellison (mr.ellyo@gmail.com, 804-339-6976) to register. Meet at the Tuckahoe Village Shopping Center on Patterson Avenue near the McDonalds at 8:15 am to carpool to the brewery or meet on site at 9:00 am.
From the Kitchen Window

John Coe

"Do you ne'er think what wondrous beings these?
Do you ne'er think who made them and who taught
The dialect they speak, where melodies
Alone are the interpreters of thought?
Whose household words are songs in many keys,
Sweeter than instrument of man e'er caught!
Whose habitations in the tree-tops even
Are half-way houses on the road to heaven!"

---

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The summer has passed and our birds have sung the songs of courtship and many nests have been conceived.

Last year we were on the road to Alaska and missed summer in our backyard. This year we were able to enjoy our bird families. The titmice did especially well, also lots of chickadees and Carolina Wrens, cardinals and Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers and noisy nuthatches. We enjoyed Mourning Doves and House Finches, Barred Owls down by the creek, and Red-shouldered and Cooper’s Hawks. The young Blue Jays appeared so clueless. The goldfinches ate our flower seeds and hummingbirds buzzed everywhere, front and back, always on the move somewhere.

Robins and blackbirds have started to gather for their forays south. The leaves will be turning – the dogwoods have started a bit now in August – and the beauty and freshness of fall will reward our senses.

September’s full moon, the Harvest Moon, is the 9th. The Autumnal Equinox brings the fall season to the Northern Hemisphere.

October’s full moon, the Hunter’s Moon, occurs on the 8th.

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From the Editor

Our featured RAS photographer for this issue is Ellison Orcutt who has taken an increasingly important role since joining the organization. For the last 2½ years Ellison has served on the RAS Board as the Field Trip Chair and in addition to arranging trips, he personally leads many of the bird walks.

Please join me in congratulating RAS member Martha Steger for her sighting of the Bee Hummingbird, the smallest bird in the world and endemic to Cuba.

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Hummingbirds of the Mid-Atlantic Region

Continued from page 3

providing insights into their identification, life histories, and how these marvelous little birds are adapting to become regular winter residents in this region.

We meet at St. Luke Lutheran Church, 7757 Chippenham Pkwy, Richmond. Please come and join us at 6:30 pm for pre-meeting coffee, cookies and conversations. The meeting will start at 7:00 pm.

Thursday, November 20, 2014: Planning ahead, mark your calendar for our annual pot luck dinner and program of member-shared pictures and stories. Details will be in the Nov/Dec Thrasher and will be posted on the website.
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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Officers / Committee Chairs for 2014-2015

President Lewis Barnett president@richmondaudubon.org 804-320-7898
1st Vice President Eileen Geller vicepresident1@richmondaudubon.org 804-747-5143
2nd Vice President Ben Saunders vicepresident2@richmondaudubon.org 804-272-0605
Bird-A-Thon Lewis Barnett president@richmondaudubon.org 804-320-7898
Conservation Kathryn Rubis conservation@richmondaudubon.org
Cyberspace Ben Griffon Cyberspace@richmondaudubon.org 804-767-0131
Development Jack Esworthy development@richmondaudubon.org 630-940-9698
Education Joyce Caldwell education@richmondaudubon.org 804-560-3444
Field Trips Ellison Orcutt fieldtrips@richmondaudubon.org 804-339-6976
Hospitality Vacant
IBA/VAC Rep Vacant
Legislation Vacant
Membership Michael Dardozzi membership@richmondaudubon.org 267-221-2569
Past President Pam Dummitt pastpresident@richmondaudubon.org 804-929-3899
Programs Caroline Coe programs@richmondaudubon.org 804-276-1397
Publicity Diane Jadlowski publicity@richmondaudubon.org 702-308-1953
Secretary Sue Ridd secretary@richmondaudubon.org 804-270-5365
Thrasher Editor Naseem Reza thrasher@richmondaudubon.org 804-272-1145
Treasurer/Finance Pam Dummitt treasurer@richmondaudubon.org 804-929-3899
Youth Robin Ruth (interim) RASKids@richmondaudubon.org 804-231-5949