



the Thrasher

Newsletter of the Richmond Audubon Society

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009 VOLUME 36, ISSUE 5

Pre-meeting Dinner

Jan Robertson, Hospitality Chair
hospitality@richmondaudubon.org,
or 804-272-6674

The Pre-meeting dinner will start at 5:30 PM. There is a nominal fee of \$5.00. Email or call me by the Monday of the week of the meeting, and no later than the day before the meeting, if you plan to be there for the dinner so that we can arrange to provide plenty of food. Note: if you want to come but are unsure you can make it, get your name on the list. Too much food

continued on page 5

October Program; New Mexico and Southern Colorado & RAS Kids

Sandy Wynne, Program Chair

The program on October 22nd is presented by Al Warfield and is a composite of three separate ProShow Gold presentations, which run on a set time and include sound tracks with pleasant guitar music, and birdcalls. They are only briefly narrated, as they speak for themselves.



Sandhill Cranes at Bosque del Apache NWR, New Mexico.
Photo © Al Warfield.

These shows are based on two trips by Al & Linda Warfield in 2007 and 2009. Excellent pictures of birds of that area are shown, as well as the scenery, architecture, and wildlife. One segment is all about Sandhill Cranes at Bosque del Apache NWR, based on a course in their behavior. Areas covered in New Mexico are Socorro, Bosque del Apache, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Bandelier NM, Taos, and Raton. In Colorado, Amoroso NWR, Great Sand Dunes NP, Canón City, Phantom Canón Road, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo are covered. The total program runtime is about 50 minutes.

continued on page 5

In this Issue



October Program	1
President's Message	2
Field Trips	3
Peregrine Falcons	4
Save the Date.....	4
PUMAs.....	5
<i>the Thrasher</i> by mail or online?..	6
RAS Officers /Committee Chairs and Co-chairs for 2009-2010	7
Gone to the Birds II.....	8

Upcoming RAS member meetings
September 17th, 2009, 7:00 PM at
St. Luke Lutheran Church.
October 15th, 2009, 7:00 PM at
St. Luke Lutheran Church.

Thrasher illustrations
© Carl "Spike" Knuth



Richmond Audubon Society

The Richmond Audubon Society promotes the enjoyment, understanding, and preservation of birds, other wildlife, and habitat through education, advocacy, and fellowship.

Important Notices

Submit articles no later than the 15th of the month before each issue to thrasher@richmondaudubon.org.

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

Thanks to these Thrasher Volunteers:
Ben Griffon, Patrick Hickey:
Labels & Mailing
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RAS membership meetings are on the 3rd Thursday of the month except June, July, Aug and Dec. Meetings are held at St. Luke Lutheran Church at Custis Rd. 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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The Thrasher is printed on recycled paper.

President's Message

Lewis Barnett



Virginia is for Birders

I've been thinking for the past few days about how fortunate we are, as birders, to live in Virginia. I didn't fully appreciate this for many years. Due to family obligations, work obligations and so on, I've developed the habit of being a "bird where I happen to be" sort of birder, rather than a "let's go somewhere great to bird" sort of birder. As a result,

my experience of Virginia's great birding locations has been somewhat spotty. In the last few weeks I've filled a couple of the glaring holes. I made my first visit to the Eastern Shore of Virginia in late July, and had a great birding experience, starting with a calling Chuck-will's-widow just inside the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge at 5:30 AM, continuing with early migrating shorebirds and a single Common Loon over on the Beach Road, great looks at the "black-billed" Great Egret (thought to be of an African subspecies) that has been hanging out there, and ending up with another early migrant, Whimbrel, at Willis Wharf.

A Little Slice of Heaven

Last weekend, I attended the Virginia Audubon Council's quarterly meeting. For those not familiar with the Council, its primary purpose is to promote communication and collaboration among the six Virginia Audubon Society chapters. Over the past few years, this has taken the form of working to support the Virginia Important Bird Area program (<http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/virginia/>). The meeting was held this time in a little slice of heaven, Highland County, Virginia. I have traveled up and down the Appalachians, and spent a significant amount of time along the Skyline Drive and in western North Carolina, but I think this county has some of the most picturesque scenery of any spot I've seen. And the birds are pretty great, too. During our meeting, we enjoyed a constant aerial display put on by a squadron of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, and were surprised by a flight of three Great Blue Herons cruising past on some urgent errand to neighboring West Virginia. As we toured the Blue Grass Valley, Bald Eagles and Common Ravens were ... well, common, as were American Goldfinches and Barn Swallows. A Blackburnian Warbler was a nice early morning find, and Bobolinks were still hanging around a couple of fields where they typically nest.

Those are two spectacular extremes of our beautiful state, all within about four hours of Richmond. Now what about Richmond itself? I've heard the mile and a half stretch of James River Park from 42nd Street to Reedy Creek described as the best place in the state to bird during Spring Migration. That's opinion, of course, but one that you can make a strong case for. Downstream from Richmond, VCU's long-running Prothonotary Warbler nest box project has helped make the lower James River a suc-

continued on page 4



Field Trips

Art Baker, Field Trip Chair

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 additions or impromptu field trips, www.richmondaudubon.org/ActivFieldTrip.html.

September 6, Sunday, 7:15 AM, Bryan Park with Sue Ridd. Meet at Shelter #1. There is a Bryan Park trip on the first Sunday of each month, starting about 1/2 hour after sunrise. For more information, call Sue at (804) 270-5365.

September 11–13, 2009, VSO Chincoteague Field Trip. Full details can be found at http://www.virginiabirds.net/f_trips.html#Chincoteague

September 12 & October 3, Saturday, Bird Banding Demonstration, Dutch Gap Conservation Area. Session 1: 8 – 9 AM; Session 2: 9-10 AM.

Join master bird bander Bob Reilly and several apprentice banders for a close-up and hands-on demonstration of bird banding. See how birds are captured in a mist net, measured, banded, and released. Van transportation will be available to banding site. Cost is free but call 318-8735 to register.

September 17-20, Eastern Shore of Virginia 17th annual Birding & Wildlife Festival. Headquartered in the village of Cape Charles, the festival features a variety of land and boat based trips. Information at <http://www.esvachamber.org/festivals/birding/> or call (757) 787-2460 or contact Stephen Living of the VDGIF at stephen.living@dgif.virginia.gov

September 19, Saturday, Calf Mountain, Shenandoah National Park. Round-trip is 2.1 miles with a climb in elevation of 500 feet. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the most difficult, this is a 2 according to Henry Heatrole. Goal is to look for hawks in migration. For more information, call Sue Ridd at (804) 270-5365.

September 26 & October 31, Saturday, 8:00 AM - 9:45 AM - Bird Walk at Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens. Join Tyler Turpin for walk on the trails at Lewis Ginter. Meet in the rotunda of the visitor center at 8:00 AM. Cost will be \$6.00 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. Four persons need to have signed up by 9:00 PM of the Wednesday before the trip or trip will cancelled.

October 4, Sunday, 7:30 AM, Bryan Park with Sue Ridd. Meet at Shelter #1. There is a Bryan Park trip on the first Sunday of each month, starting about 1/2 hour after sunrise. For more information, call Sue at (804) 270-5365.

October 10, Saturday, 3:30 PM, Harrison Lake Fish Hatchery. Bring your canoe or kayak for an afternoon paddle on Harrison Lake. We meet at the lake parking area at 3:30. Call Art Baker at (804) 730-9127 or email albaker1@earthlink.net for details.

October 31, Saturday, 8:30 AM Fisherman's Island NWR. Meet at the Eastern Shore NWR parking lot promptly at 8:30 AM. We are limited to 15 people so sign up early for a spot. The trip typically lasts till noon. Our trip is led by one of the Eastern Shore naturalists. No facilities. Bring water, snacks and be prepared to walk on loose sand. Dress in layers—the weather can be unpredictable. Shorebirds, migrating raptors and forest birds headline the trip. Dress in layers. Interested folks should call Julie Kacmarcik at (804) 530-3660 evenings after 8:30 PM.

December 20, Sunday, Hopewell Christmas Bird Count. 71st year the Hopewell count has been held. If you wish to participate please contact Arun Bose at arun1bose@gmail.com or (804) 355-8813. From beginner to expert all are welcome; spend all day or a couple hours.

Peregrine Falcons in Shenandoah National Park

Leeanna Pletcher

The best part of our June camping trip to Shenandoah National Park was seeing the Peregrine Falcons at Blackrock only a few feet away from Big Meadows Lodge. The reintroduction program of these birds to Shenandoah gives eco-tourists like us the opportunity to see Peregrines. The Ranger led us to two spotting scopes set up in a clearing underneath Blackrock. We looked up at the ledge with our binoculars and watched as seven juveniles perched on branches near the hack box and flew circles overhead. They vocalized at each other. Two interns; one with the National Park Service (NPS) and one who was an Student Conservation Association had been observing the fledglings since they were released. The interns explained hacking, how they feed the fledglings quail, then gradually reduce the food so the birds will hunt on their own.



Peregrine at Shenandoah National Park.
© Photo by Bob Schamerhorn • www.iPhotoBirds.com

This year, there were adults seen in the area of the older hack site, Stony Man, and the adult birds need space to breed. So, NPS biologists moved the hack site to Blackrock. They were not sure if the adults seen were previously released as juveniles from the area. Time and observation of color bands will tell. Previously released birds over the past 10 years have been tracked to other areas during migration. NPS worked with the College of William and Mary to get these seven birds as nestlings off the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel and move them to Shenandoah. Historically, there was a population that lived in the mountains of Shenandoah National Park. Peregrine populations have made a recovery and were removed from the endangered species list in 1999. More information can be found at <http://www.nps.gov/shen/naturescience/falcon.htm>.

President's Message continued from page 2

a success story for the warbler, which is declining in other parts of its range. As I write this, numbers are building again at the Purple Martin roost at the 17th Street Farmer's Market. Richmond's location on the fall of the James seems to make us a great stop-over for wintering gulls. We had a fantastic show of waterfowl this past winter on the river. The eBird web site's list of observed species for the city of Richmond stands at 210. If you throw in Chesterfield and Henrico counties, the total climbs to 248. We live in a truly rich environment for birds. To make it all better, we have a knowledgeable and active group of birders who are wonderful about sharing their sightings and experiences with our community through the RAS Listserv (instructions on how to sign up can be found on the RAS website at <http://www.richmondaudubon.org/ResourceCommunicat.html>). Fall migration will be picking up soon. It's great to be a birder in Virginia! Get out and take advantage – and be sure to tell us what you see.



Peregrine hacking site.
Photo © Leeanna Pletcher.

Save the Date

Margaret O'Bryan

Coming in the next Thrasher will be details about our traditional November pot luck dinner! Some of the best cooks in the Richmond area will be providing their best dishes for your enjoyment. Mark your calendars now for this returning tradition on **November 19**, and plan on cooking your most delicious recipes to share.

October Program continued from page 1

RAS Kids

Preceding the main program several youngsters and their adult leaders will briefly report on their adventures over the past Spring and Summer. Encounters with owls, kayaking, planting peanuts, and harvesting carrots to name a few. Annual fund-raising efforts have allowed Richmond Audubon Society to assist with school programs at Southampton Elementary and Swansboro Elementary Schools, and after-school programs with Charity Family Life. Richmond Audubon is proud of their achievements and look forward to the presentation.

Pre-meeting Dinner continued from page 1

is better than not enough! (If you can't make it, you will not be responsible for the cost.) Reservations will not be accepted after the evening of the day before the meeting. Entrée items for the pre-meeting dinners are provided by some of the attendees by pre-arrangement. You don't have to bring any food, but you are welcome to share one of your favorite dishes with our group. Keep all your receipts for any food you bring. Those who bring food are reimbursed for their expenses at the meeting if they provide receipts, and all who partake pay the \$5.00 fee whether or not they bring food. (We don't try to make a profit on the dinners.) Call or e-mail by the Sunday before the Thursday meeting to let me know what you plan to provide. This allows time to coordinate the dinner.

Bon Appétit!

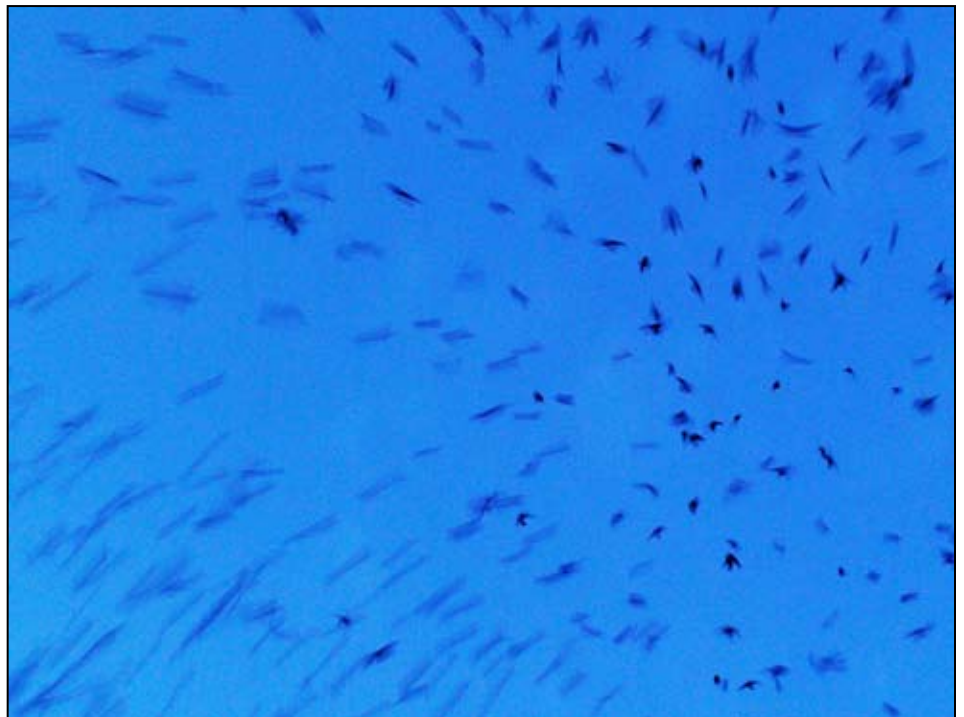
Notes from a PUMA watcher

Jan Frye

I must confess that I never paid much attention to Purple Martins before July, 2008. Even saw PUMAs (such a fierce-sounding banding code for such a mild-mannered bird) at Hog Island during a field trip, but there was no real connection. They were still just part of that plethora of black birds that went whizzing by too darn fast to make an ID. Then Sue Ridd talked me into visiting the roost, I met Jimmy Fitzgerald and so many other wonderful fans of the martins, and I absolutely fell in love with these engaging birds. This year when it looked like they might not show up I was sad and I was not alone. Non-birders who had also fallen for these birds kept showing up and hoping night after night, talking eagerly about what they had seen last summer when the roost was in the 10,000+ range at times. One of my favorite memories of that time is the night about 20 college-age people were standing at the entrance to the TECHEAD parking lot with their cell phone cameras aimed at the sky in a vain attempt to capture the awesome sight of hundreds of birds whizzing by directly above their heads.

This year the numbers are lower for a variety of reasons, but the roost is currently in the 4,000-6,000 range (on 8/17/09) according to the best efforts of 2 people who regularly attempt to estimate their numbers. The flight formations are breathtaking at times and range from the huge flock swirling around a building low overhead to the funnel cloud formation up in the sky or directly over the trees. Sometimes they are so active in response to raptor activity that there is just no way to count them. When they enter the trees from behind me they bring to mind a meteor shower.

continued on page 7



Purple Martins over the 17th Street Farmers Market, Richmond.
Photo © Arun Bose.

***the Thrasher* by mail or online?**

NEW MEMBERS who joined through **National Audubon** and not via a direct application to RAS: If this is your first issue of *The Thrasher*, you need to send a response by one of the methods below in order to keep it coming to your mailbox.

1. Online: (www.richmondaudubon.org/forms/FormEThrasherDelivery.html)
2. Written response to: RAS, PO Box 26648, Richmond, VA 23261 (See Information to Include).
3. Call the RAS phone number (804) 257-0813 and leave a message with your information (see below).

Information to include:

- Your name (from your mailing label)
- Your address (with 9-digit zip)
- Phone number and e-mail address so we can contact you
- The 12-digit account number or other code at the top of your mailing label located on the newsletter that is currently sent to you (e.g., 000123456789, or whatever is listed at the top of your label; you can leave out the leading zeros.)
- Whether you want to receive *the Thrasher* by mail or only read it online.

We want you to get your issue of *the Thrasher* in the mail if you want to receive it that way. Please respond, even if you intend to read it online. We need to know which of our many NAS members are really interested in RAS. We also want to reduce our costs, but not at the expense of your enjoyment.

New members coming to RAS through National Audubon will get at least one issue of *the Thrasher* in the mail so they will have a chance to see it before making their decision. If you come through RAS directly we will send *the Thrasher* automatically if you requested that on your application.

EXISTING MEMBERS: If you got this issue you don't need to send a response. You will continue to receive *the Thrasher* unless you send a response indicating otherwise, or your subscription lapses. Please stay abreast of your expiration date and keep your membership current. This is shown on your *Audubon Magazine* label.

Some of the exhibitors at Gone to the Birds II



Michael Kurze and Rich Moncrief at Carl Zeiss display. Photo © Grace Suttle.



Bradford Pear Trees on 17th Street. Photo © Grace Suttle.



David Spears at VSO display. Photo © Grace Suttle.



Jan Frye Johnson and Lou Verner at Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries display. Photo © Grace Suttle.



Mike and Dawn Wilson at Center for Conservation Biology display. Photo © Grace Suttle.



Heidi Kroffat and Paul Nasca Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory display. Photo © Grace Suttle.



L-R; Grace Suttle, Lori Rutledge, and Pat Blyer at Richmond Audubon Society display. © Photo by Bob Schamerhorn • www.iPhotoBirds.com



Kim Cook and Julie Kacmarcik at MAPS display. Photo © Grace Suttle.



David Bryan and Susan Harmon at National Audubon Society-IBA display. Photo © Grace Suttle.



Carolyn and Dan Pitts at Purple Pals display. Photo © Grace Suttle.

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Auction	Margaret O'Bryan	auction@richmondaudubon.org	804-746-5599
Bird-A-Thon	Vacant		
Development	Anne Dunnburg	development@richmondaudubon.org	804-212-9524
Thrasher Editor	Arun Bose	thrasher@richmondaudubon.org	804-335-8813
Thrasher Co-editor	Naseem Reza	thrasher@richmondaudubon.org	804-272-1145
Education	Kim Harrell	education@richmondaudubon.org	804-282-3419
Hospitality	Jan Robertson	hospitality@richmondaudubon.org	804-272-6674
Conservation	Faye Taylor-Hyder	conservation@richmondaudubon.org	804-691-6339
Legislation	Margaret O'Bryan	legislation@richmondaudubon.org	804-746-5599
Field Trips	Art Baker	fieldtrips@richmondaudubon.org	804-730-9127
Membership	Lori Rutledge	membership@richmondaudubon.org	804-310-9014
Cyberspace	Bob Schamerhorn	cyberspace@richmondaudubon.org	804-929-6568
Programs	Sandy Wynne	programs@richmondaudubon.org	804-276-5520
Publicity	Diane Jadowski	publicity@richmondaudubon.org	702-308-1953
Youth	Robin Ruth	RASkids@richmondaudubon.org	804-231-5949
IBA /VAC Rep	Lewis Barnett	IBA@richmondaudubon.org	804-320-7898

PUMAs continued from page 5

There are plenty of dramatic moments with raptors and each raptor has a different method for capturing a Martin. The Peregrines favor the streaking dive from the Monroe Building on the other side of I-95, especially in the morning at about 6:04 AM. The Martins have a striking reaction when the Peregrines are sighted. Their loud chatter becomes oddly muffled and they have even become almost totally silent a few times in the morning when the Peregrines were especially threatening. In 2008, a woman who worked for the Market saw a Peregrine go in the trees at about 10:00 PM and get a late night snack. Individual Red-tailed Hawks choose to ambush from inside the trees or just go barreling in and grab something (sometimes they end up with a twig....). They get the most attention since they sit there

*When they enter
the trees from
behind me they
bring to mind a
meteor shower*

and pluck their meal right above the crowd. The Kestrel flies around and is heard more often than seen, and there was a Cooper's Hawk on 8/17. Jimmy does not often see this roost on Doppler radar, perhaps due to the Martins' habit of streaming low through the buildings to escape predators when they take off in the morning. Probably not many roosts have a Peregrine nest nearby.

There is still time to visit before they leave around 9/1 to continue their migration. Plan to arrive by 7:45 PM or 5:45 AM and you are unlikely to miss anything. Currently the spectacle is over by about 8:20 PM or 6:20 AM. Whether you enjoy watching Purple Martins, raptors or people, you should find it a worthwhile trip. The people from places like Chesapeake and Arlington never seem to regret the drive!

“Gone to the Birds II” Thanks Richmond Audubon

Sue Ridd Volunteer Coordinator, GTTB Festival

With 18 vendors, 300-500 people, and over 2000

Purple Martins in attendance the Gone to the Birds II Purple Martin Festival was a success. The Organizational Committee for the Gone to the Birds Festival would like to thank the Richmond Audubon Society, its Board of Directors (especially Diane Jadowski) and its members for the support that you gave on July 25, 2009. The photographic display of Richmond Audubon

was very professional thanks to Bob Schamerhorn!

Other displays such as MAPS and Carl Zeiss, Inc. gave

the visitor some wonderful information about their activities!



Purple Martin fans at the 17th Street Farmers Market, Richmond. Photo © Arun Bose.

RAS members included Pat Blyer, Alice Boller, Arun Bose, David Bryan, John and Caroline Coe, Kim Cook, Karin Cundiff, Adrienne Dery, Mary Elfner, Jeff Ellett, Jan Frye Johnson, Denise Hayes, Betsey Heyl, Kait Holzback, Diane Jadowski, Julie Kacmarcik, Janie Van Ostern, Carolyn

and Dan Pitts, Lori Rutledge, Mat Snow, Linda Stoneham, Mary Ellen Strohr, Grace Suttle, Jerry Wells and Barbara Williamson. Thank you all!

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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 _____
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Make check payable to **National Audubon Society** and write “**C9ZX530Z**” on the check. Send your check and application to:
**Richmond Audubon Society c/o
Membership Chair, Lori Rutledge,
P.O. Box 363, Richmond, VA 23218-0363
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