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

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

As we begin another year of RAS meetings, field trips, programs and camaraderie, I would like to say what an honor it is for me to begin my term as your president. Many thanks to past-president Eileen Geller for her outstanding leadership over the last four years, which I can only hope to emulate. RAS is a vibrant organization with much to give to its members and the greater Richmond community. Those who know me know that I am passionate about birds, natural history and conservation. My professional life, mainly as a faculty member at VCU, has been focused on understanding the complex workings of our environment and educating others to better appreciate and understand the world around them.

How does a person get bitten with the bug, either early or later in life, to immerse themselves in the beauty of the natural world or in the never ending need to preserve that world that we so very much care for? Where did my passion come from? When did it develop? What was it that fascinated me, as a young boy growing up in Chicago, which led to a passion for birds, natural history and environmental activism that continued through my life both at home and at work? Exactly what was it that hooked me? Was it when, as a four year old, I asked my grandparents to buy me Chester Reid’s little known “Field Guide to the Birds of North America” instead of the usual ‘Dick, Jane and Spot’ Golden Books sitting on the book rack? I still remember being fascinated by the beauty and variety of birds as I turned the pages of that book and my mother read to me about Blue Jays, Cardinals and other species. Or was it when, at about nine years old and sitting along a pond with my fishing pole, that I was held motionless watching a Black and White Warbler foraging along a crab apple tree six feet from me? From then on the Black and White has been my favorite species. Maybe it was, at about that same age, when I watched and listened as a pair of Ovenbirds nested in my backyard one summer. Or was it that cold Chicago winter when, walking along Lake Michigan in the gloam of sunset, a Snowy Owl lifted off from the dunes just ahead of me? Was it because my parents loved traveling and being outdoors, exposing me to the diversity of birds and landscapes as we traveled the country? And thanks mom for rafting down the Snake River with me.

Each of you have reasons that you are a member of RAS and life experiences that took you down this path. For me it was a book at a young age, encounters with birds now special to me, traveling and getting outdoors, my parents and grandparents. They hooked me and I want to be sure to help hook the younger generation, such as by watching a Red-bellied Woodpecker with my three year old granddaughter Bethany. I challenge each of you to do the same – find a way to bring the beauty and wonder of nature to someone else, young or older. It could change their life forever.

Len Smock - RAS President
RAS MEMBER’S MEETINGS

WHEN: RAS membership meetings are on the 3rd Thursday of the month at 7:00 PM (except June, July, August and December). Come early for coffee, cookies and conversation beforehand starting at 6:30 PM.

WHERE: Held at St. Luke Lutheran Church • 7757 Chippenham Pkwy., Richmond, VA at the corner of Custis Road and Chippenham Parkway unless noted.

VISIT: www.RichmondAudubon.org for actual dates, times and for additional information.

SEPTEMBER 19TH

“GARDENING FOR BIRDS” PRESENTED BY JESSICA SHAHAN

“Birders travel all over the world to get a sight of exciting and exotic species, but how much time do we dedicate to enjoying the birds around our own homes? In this talk, we will explore the ways that yards and gardens can be managed to attract a variety of bird species and improve backyard birding opportunities. Discussion will include habitat structure, avian food webs, seasonality, and bird-approved plant species for a variety of conditions.”

Jessica is a biologist and environmental educator with the Nicholas Newlin Foundation in Glen Mills, PA. She received her MS in Biology from the University of North Dakota in 2014, focusing on landscape ecology and grassland bird communities. In her spare time, she can be found exploring the birding hotspots of DE, volunteering as a bird bander at Rushton Farm Preserve in southeastern PA, and gardening for native pollinators.

OCTOBER 17TH

“ATLANTIC COASTAL BIRDS” PRESENTED BY BOB SCHAMERHORN

The Atlantic Coastline contains a great diversity of both habitats and bird species: Gulls, Terns, Skimmers, Sandpipers, Plovers, Herons, Egrets, Swans, Ducks, Geese, Mergansers, Grebes, Rails and more. This wide variety of species, typical to the coast, are displayed with award winning photography. Includes entertaining stories with information about our favorite shorebirds, discussion of habitats, migration and their challenges. This program covers the shoreline gamut from Maine to Florida.

Bob is a Virginia native with nearly fifty years of photography experience. Just over a decade ago, advancements in digital camera technologies, inspired a re-connection with photography. He has worked as a professional nature photographer since 2012. His images have appeared in numerous publications and won national awards including: the 2018 National Audubon’s Top 100 (#11 of 8,000 entries) and the North American Nature Photography Association’s 2019 Showcase “Best In Show - Mammals”. His wildlife photography is now exhibited at about thirty art shows annually. His hope is to educate and inspire the conservation of nature, by capturing and sharing its beauty. He considers himself, “An enthusiast, not an expert!”
KIDS, BIRDS AND ART…

This spring, with the support of Richmond Audubon Society, five Riverine Chapter Master Naturalists, led a weekly After School Program “Birds and Art” 2ndGrade Club at E. S. H. Greene Elementary School in Richmond Public Schools. On any given week, the students enjoyed a short lesson and then eagerly tackled hands-on projects that they took home to share with their families. The six-week program covered topics such as bird anatomy, flight, and feathers; birds as modern day dinosaurs; common local birds including owls; food sources and bird feeders; bird vocalizations; and bird nests and habitats. This was a fun learning experience for the students and volunteers alike! Thanks go out to members June Bohrer, Jan Robertson, Lynn Faugot, Kathy Warnkey, and Pam Bernardo.

Please consider volunteering on the RAS Education Committee. Contact Anne Wright and Kathy Louthan: education@richmondaudubon.org

FROM THE EDITORS

For the photo gallery in this issue, we are recognizing the bird species that stay with us throughout the year. These resident birds do not migrate and are easily seen in our backyards, parks and nature preserves. All the woodpeckers we see in Virginia are residents with one exception and that is the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker which is winter guest for us.

Our second in the series article on Richmond Parks/James River, is by Lewis Barnett who regularly leads field trips for Richmond Audubon Society to the Dutch Gap Conservation Area in Chesterfield County. Dutch Gap is a well known birding hotspot and based on eBird data, leads the Central Virginia birding sites with 214 species recorded. If you want to add to your life list of birds, join Lewis on one of his field trips.

With the onset of cooler weather, our summer guests such as Wood Thrush, Summer Tanager, Common Yellowthroat and many others will head South for warmer climes but they will be replaced by familiar winter guests such as White-throated Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Hermit Thrush and many more.

Fall migration is around the corner, so keep an eye out for the warblers that break their journey to Central and South America with an all too short a stop in Central Virginia.

If you have ideas to improve the content of this publication, please share it with us at: thrasher@richmondaudubon.org.

Bob Schamerhorn & Naseem Reza - Co-Editors
DUTCH GAP CONSERVATION AREA

BY LEWIS BARNETT

Richmond Audubon holds nearly monthly walks at the Dutch Gap Conservation Area in Chesterfield County. The park consists of 796 acres, including a substantial chunk of Aikens Swamp, the marshy area along the entrance road to the park, as well as riparian shoreline along the James, and several lagoons including a large oxbow lake that forms the resting place for a number of wooden barges formerly used to service the nearby Chesterfield Power Plant. There are approximately five miles of trails, including a 3.5 mile loop, all of which are flat and well maintained. The combination of location and habitat variety make this a great place to see a wide variety of birds. The eBird summary for the Dutch Gap/Henricus hotspot shows 214 species recorded at this location. The ongoing Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas 2 project has confirmed 48 species of birds breeding in the block that contains the bulk of the conservation area, and documents another 16 probable breeders.

This area is one of the better year-round birding spots in our region. A long-running nest box program aimed at Prothonotary Warblers makes it a real hot spot for that charismatic species during the nesting season. During Spring migration it also hosts a wide variety of warblers and other neotropical migrant songbirds. The park has a currently active heronry, best viewed from the loop trail just past the channel bridge. Great Blue Herons and Double-crested Cormorants have nested in this area for a number of years. It is also likely that Least Bitterns nest in the swamp along the entrance road – they have been photographed carrying nesting material in that area. American Kestrels are often seen on the power lines along Coxendale Road leading to the park entrance and on the entrance road within the park.

The river overlook just past the Citie of Henricus historical area is a great place to find Bald Eagles, which nest along this stretch of the river and often perch in the trees just above your head at this spot. Osprey are common here as well during breeding season, and one or two have wintered here for the past several years. This is also a good vantage for gulls and terns.

Because hunting is not allowed in the conservation area, the swamp along the entrance road is a wintertime magnet for waterfowl. From November through March, you are likely to see Wood Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Bufflehead, and Northern Shovelers in Aikens Swamp. Somewhat harder to find but still often seen are Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Greater and Lesser Scaup, Redhead, Canvasback, and Common Goldeneye. There are two conveniently sited observation platforms and a boardwalk over the swamp to give good views of these winter visitors. (Cont. Page 5)

The James is tidal in this area, and exposed mud at low tide attracts shorebirds during the winter and in migration. Wilson’s Snipe are fairly regularly found during the winter, and Yellowlegs and various peep
sandpipers are observed during migration. The mudflats are also popular with gulls and terns.

Dominion still uses some land adjacent to the conservation area for disposal of fly ash from the power plant, and is currently in the process of remediating this area under the terms of a recent agreement with the Virginia General Assembly. The older portions of this area provide habitat for a number of grassland species, including Eastern Meadowlark and Grasshopper Sparrow. The chain-link fence line between the loop trail and the fly ash area is usually lively with a seasonally appropriate mix of Eastern Phoebes, Eastern Bluebirds, Savannah Sparrows, Tree Swallows and Yellow-rumped Warblers.

The park has been host to several rarities over the years, most notably a female Painted Bunting and a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher within a few days of each other in May of 2012. Lark Sparrow was another recent notable sighting.

Coxendale Road, the Dutch Gap Boat Ramp and the entrance road to the park are Richmond Audubon’s Adopt-a-Highway patch. We do clean-ups combined with bird walks three or four times a year. If you are interested in helping, watch the Thrasher for announcements of the dates for these events.

**NEXT CLEAN-UP: October 19, 7:30 AM - Saturday - Adopt-a-Highway at Dutch Gap**
(See page 6 for more details)

**COME ENJOY LARRY’S BENCH!**

Thanks to donations from Mary and Larry’s Hathaway Tower neighbors, Mary Arginteanu arranged for a bench in memory of Larry Robinson at Landria landing in the Wetlands section of the James River Park. The plaque says “Larry never sat here, but he would be glad you are”.

**BIRDIES FOR CHARITY - RAS IS #30 IN THE STANDINGS!**

The Dominion Energy Charity Classic is focused on making a positive impact within the Richmond community. Birdies for Charity presented by TowneBank is designed to give area charities an opportunity to generate contributions through flat donations or based on the number of “birdies” made by PGA TOUR Champions players during the Dominion Energy Charity Classic. Participating charities will receive all of the donations collected on their behalf, minus credit card fees. Additionally, donations will be bonused by an additional 10%!

More details on this worthwhile event can be found at


**PLEASE DONATE BY OCTOBER 30TH • MATCHING FUNDS!**
RAS FIELD TRIPS

Check the RAS Listserv or the RAS website for information and any late breaking news about field trips or join our MEET-UP GROUP: www.meetup.com/RAS-Meetup/

SEPTEMBER

September 1, 7:10 AM - Sunday - Bryan Park. Meet Bob Beard at Shelter #1 at about a half-hour after sunrise. Socialize with the group at Stir Crazy Cafe afterwards. Contact Bob at rbeard22205@hotmail.com for more information.

September 7, 8:30 AM - Saturday - Fenwick Mines Recreation Area. Meet Wes Teets at the small parking area on Fenwick Mines Rd (Rt 685) northeast of New Castle in Craig County. This fall birding hotspot in the mountains is a stopover site for plenty of songbirds--vireos, thrushes, warblers, etc.. It’s three hours from the Richmond area but the entire site is easily traversed by foot. Carpool from the Parham Rd Park & Ride at Fordson Rd at 5:00 AM. Contact Wes at wesrtx@gmail.com for more information.

September 15, 7:30 AM - Sunday - Harrison Lake Fish Hatchery. Meet Paul Bedell at the parking area. Stop by Shirley Plantation afterwards for more birding. Contact Paul at pbedell@verizon.net for more information.

September 21, 8:15 AM - Saturday - Dutch Gap. Meet Lewis Barnett at the Henricus Historical Park parking lot. Contact Lewis at lbarnett3@gmail.com or (804) 920-4723 for more information.

September 28, 8:05 AM - Saturday - Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Meet Tyler Turpin in the rotunda of the visitor center. Trip will end by 9:45 AM. Free for members; otherwise, admission is $13, $11 for seniors (55+), and $8 for children (12 and under). Contact Tyler at (804) 317-9478 or tylerturpin@earthlink.net.

OCTOBER

October 6, 7:40 AM - Sunday - Bryan Park. Meet Bob Beard at Shelter #1 at about a half-hour after sunrise. Socialize with the group at Stir Crazy Cafe afterwards. Contact Bob at rbeard22205@hotmail.com for more information.

October 12, 8:00 AM - Saturday - Powhatan State Park. Meet Lewis Barnett at the playground, past the first parking lot. This is about a 45-minute drive from Richmond. Park fee is $5 cash at the gate. Contact Lewis at lbarnett3@gmail.com or (804) 920-4723 for more information.

October 12, 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM - Saturday The Big Sit! Join Richmond Audubon as we attempt to tally as many species as possible from one stationary location while we SIT! The Big Sit! will see teams across the country “competing” in the same manner. This is RAS’ 3rd year, in 2017 we found 44 species and in 2018 we saw 50. Can we top 50 this year? The count will be stationed on the bluff at Chimborazo Park in Church Hill. We’ll be overlooking the dog park. Everyone is welcome, just bring a chair and your optics (including scopes) and hang out for a while. For more information contact Ellison Orcutt at Mr.Ellyo@gmail.com. Public restrooms available during business hours.

For more on The Big Sit visit: https://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/bigsit/about.php.

October 19, 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM - Saturday - Youth Birding at Bryan Park. Richmond Audubon will host a morning of birding dedicated to young birders and youth who are curious about birding. Join Ellison Orcutt at 9am to explore the ponds of Bryan Park in Richmond’s Northside. The park offers a variety of habitats that support many species of birds. All skill levels are encouraged and parents should plan to join their children or at least remain at the park. Extra binoculars will be available to share. Meet Ellison at Shelter 1, best accessed by driving in through main entrance. For more information and to RSVP contact Ellison at Mr.Ellyo@gmail.com. Please share the walk info with others whom may be interested. Membership in Richmond Audubon is not necessary to attend.

October 19, 7:30 AM - Saturday - Adopt-a-Highway clean-up at Dutch Gap. Meet at the boat landing at the end of Coxendale Rd. Participants should bring sun/bug protection, water, and a snack. VDOT provides safety vests, trash bags, and gear for safely picking up trash. Contact Lewis at lbarnett3@gmail.com or (804) 920-4723 for more information.

October 26, 7:00 AM - Saturday - Huguenot Flatwater. Meet Tyler Turpin and bird until about 10:00 AM. Contact Tyler at (804) 317-9478 or tylerturpin@earthlink.net for more information.
MEMBER PHOTOS: RESIDENT BIRDS

Pileated Woodpecker (female) by Pam Scrima

Eastern Towhee (male) by Charles Woodrich

Red-bellied Woodpecker by Lori Schamerhorn

Eastern Towhee (female) by Charles Woodrich

Great Horned Owl by Pam Scrima

Killdeer by James Shelton
ABOUT THE RICHMOND AUDUBON SOCIETY

Richmond Audubon Society (RAS) is a chapter of The National Audubon Society (NAS). Becoming a member of either Society enrolls your membership in both (NAS and RAS by zip code). Renewals are processed through The National Audubon Society.

AFFILIATES: Chapter of the Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO) and the Virginia Conservation Network (VCN).

MAILING ADDRESS: Richmond Audubon Society
P.O. Box 26648 • Richmond, VA 23261

PHONE (Message Line): 804-601-4917

WEBSITE: www.RichmondAudubon.org

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/RichmondAudubon/

MEET-UP GROUP: www.meetup.com/RAS-Meetup/

TWITTER: www.twitter.com/@RichmondAudubon

LISTSERV: www.freelists.org/list/va-richmond-general

NONPROFIT: RAS is a registered nonprofit 501 (C) (3) charitable organization. Donations are tax deductible.

NEWSLETTER: “The Thrasher” is issued bimonthly (January, March, May, July, September, November.) Submissions due by the 10th of the month prior. The newsletter is available for download (PDF) online at www.RichmondAudubon.org.

RAS BOARD MEETINGS: Second Thursdays of January, March, May, July (annual strategic planning session), September, and November. Board Meeting start times and locations vary, members are welcome to attend, contact the President or Secretary in advance.

OFFICERS & COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS OF THE RICHMOND AUDUBON SOCIETY

President Len Smock president@richmondaudubon.org
First Vice President Mary Elfner vicepresident1@richmondaudubon.org
Second Vice President Wes Teets vicepresident2@richmondaudubon.org
Secretary Lori Schamerhorn secretary@richmondaudubon.org
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Thrasher Co-Editors Naseem Reza & Bob Schamerhorn
Youth Chair Ellison Orcutt

Audubon

AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Yes, enroll me (us) as member(s) of both National Audubon and Richmond Audubon Societies at the address below, at the introductory rate of $20.00.

A subscription to the NAS “Audubon” magazine is included.

Name_________________________________
Address ______________________________
City __________________________________
State_________ ZIP _____________________
Phone ________________________________
E-mail ________________________________

Make check payable to: National Audubon Society for Individual/Family Membership write “X53” as the memo.

Send check and application to: Richmond Audubon Society
P.O. Box 26648, Richmond, VA 23261

X53