Northern Shoveler by Pam Scrima

“With beauty before me, May I walk
With beauty behind me, May I walk
With beauty above me, May I walk
With beauty below me, May I walk
With beauty all around me, May I walk
Wandering on a trail of beauty, Lively, I walk.” - Navajo Indians
COVID 19  Our in person monthly meetings, field trips, have been halted for the health of our members until further notice.  The RAS board is looking to sometime this fall for virtual meetings. Field trips are still on hold but encourage everyone to bird on their own with social distancing and masks. Check in our website, Facebook and Listserv for future information.

**President’s Message** by Len Smock

I was recently with a group of fellow birders (appropriately socially distanced), enjoying a beautiful Richmond morning at the peak of fall migration, on the watch for splashes of color in the tree tops or stealthy movement low in the shrubs. During a short break in the action our conversation turned to, what else, birds. One of us started a series of questions for each to answer.

What is your favorite bird?
Your favorite moment while birding?
Your favorite place to bird in Richmond?
Beyond Richmond?
What is the bird you most want to see?
Your most embarrassing moment birding?

You get the idea. Those are questions that I enjoy contemplating and so this was a fun exercise.

What was interesting was not only to hear each of our wide-ranging answers, but also how the answers were wrapped in the passion we all have towards birds, birding and the environment. Given our average age, we had a lot of years and miles traveled to draw from for answers to these questions. I saw and heard our passion and how much birds and the environment were an integral fabric to our lives. Some of us had been birding nearly all of our lives and thus these questions stirred strong emotions and memories that encompassed a lifetime. I am pleased to say that I see this passion often with Richmond Audubon Society (RAS) members. It is one of the reasons that led me to join and be active in RAS. We all enjoy birds, for many different reasons, and we are all in when it comes to bird conservation and protection efforts. That is a strong thread that keeps us together and that Richmond Audubon Society continually carries forth.

By the way, my answers to the above questions are 1) favorite bird is the Black and White Warbler; 2) favorite moment - having a Snowy Owl take flight right in front of me on a cold Illinois winter day; 3) favorite places are Dutch Gap and Arizona; 4) most wanted bird is the Boreal Owl; 5) most embarrassing moment occurred when, as a teaching assistant for an Ornithology class in Illinois, it was pointed out to me by a student that the very distant bobbing ducks I was having a hard time identifying for the class were actually decoys.

What are your answers to these questions?
Legislature Committee by James Shelton

Greenhouse Gas Initiative

We have joined with other states that have lowered their greenhouse gas emissions. These states have also seen benefits for children’s health. A national plan is needed and the Paris Accord must be honored.

Climate Change is becoming more apparent across America. Here in the East, we have hurricanes more frequently of higher severity. Private flood insurance is no longer offered because with more rain, storm surges and sea level rise, claims are too costly for businesses to make a profit. In the West fires make smoke clouds unprecedented in recorded history.

Climate Change has now caused an unusual die off of birds in the Southwest of North America with migrants dying of hunger on their flights. The birds both left early for their winter grounds because an early cold front and faced fires that burned over ever greater areas.

Climate Change is past the tipping point, unfortunately, and will get twice as bad as it is today. But, more than ever we need to act with a national and worldwide plan to address this to prevent it from being more catastrophic. Continuing to deny reality protects no one.

Please consider the birds, ourselves and the future of our children when considering how we can achieve this on a national scale. We need to act intelligently and base our laws and policies on science and compassion for others.

Birds in the Southwest:

Benefits to children’s health
https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/pdf/10.1289/EHP6706

Court Overturns Administration Efforts to Weaken the Migratory Bird Treaty Act

On August 11, 2020, a federal court overturned a reinterpretation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) that had upended decades of enforcement and let industry polluters off the hook for killing birds. Citing the novel To Kill a Mockingbird, U.S. District Court Judge Valerie Caproni wrote that “if the Department of the Interior has its way, many Mockingbirds and other migratory birds that delight people and support ecosystems throughout the country will be killed without legal consequence.” ABC and our partners went to court to challenge the reinterpretation. This ruling is a much-needed win for migratory birds and the millions of Americans who cherish them. The MBTA is one of our nation’s most important environmental laws. Among other things, it has spurred industry innovation to protect birds, such as screening off toxic waste pits and marking power lines to reduce collisions. This key decision to uphold the Act's strength by blocking the
injurious reinterpretation comes at a key time, as we seek to restore our nation’s declining bird populations. “

https://abcbirds.org/article/court-upholds-mbta-2020/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=a3309c50-c893-455b-ba9b-d9eb03bae7c9

Make Your Voice Count

National Audubon, our chapter, and other environmental organizations are making their voices heard to make this world a better place. Don’t be the silent majority, speak up and let your Congress people know what you want for your children, grand children and future generations. You can write your own letter or send a “Take Action” letter. You can add to their letters also. Go to https://www.audubon.org/takeaction

John Dillard

Read more about John at https://richmond.com/news/local/lohmann-pandemic-reminds-avid-birder-it-was-fun-to-see-the-birds-but-also-people/article_5cc027ed-0af5-50a2-87d8-31e4d4dc28c7.html

Bald Eagles Getting Citified

Bald Eagles are getting more comfortable in cities. With the increase of eagles near big cities and being an opportunist more and more eagles are being seen in backyards, city blocks and more.

Read about the released chicks that had fallen out of the nest at Widewater State Park in Stafford. https://wtop.com/animals-pets/2020/07/2-bald-eagle-siblings-released-together-after-rehabbing-in-virginia/

Unfortunately, the citified eagles may lead to collisions with vehicles and breaking through windows. Read about this successful survival of a car accident off Interstate 264 in Portsmouth https://www.pilotonline.com/news/environment/vp-nw-bald-eagle-release-20200903-5rec6delhbljlwtqgzz7rck4-story.html

In 1963 there were 487 nesting pairs and only 30 in Virginia. Now there are over 1500 in the state!

Eastern Screech Owl

Eastern Screech Owls are very elusive. They like suburban areas. They are probably in your backyard right now. They are not usually seen but can be heard. To listen go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogna0Xcqqns

“The Eastern Screech Owl eclectic diet sometimes includes worm-like reptiles called blind snakes, which the adult owl brings to the nest alive. The owl chicks eat some of them, but other blind snakes escape being a meal by burrowing beneath the wood chips, pellets, and other debris on the nest cavity's floor. The surviving blind snakes dine on insect larvae that would otherwise parasitize the owl nestlings. A recent study showed that Screech Owl chicks grew faster and healthier in nests kept vermin-free by "helper" blind snakes.”

Read more about this elusive little owl at https://abcbirds.org/bird/eastern-screech-owl/

Ecoart-Environmentally Inspired Art

RAS had an inquiry from Laura Kirk, a sophomore student at William and Mary College, about artist who do Ecoart. She needed the information for her summer research project. She is majoring in International Relations, and hopes to work in global sustainable development and human rights. After I sent her some information she has sent me her well developed website about Virginia Ecoart, what it is, where you can find some ideas, how you can do it to educate people about the environment and nature. It is a long read but well worth it. At the end there are five artists that show how they did their Ecoart through plays, costumes, sculptures, etc and I hope you get some ideas from it to do on your own Ecoart or with your groups to educate people about nature and how important it is to everyone.

Here is some information from Laura:

“The massive scale of our current ecological crises demands creative solutions from environmental activists. Environmentally inspired art, or "Ecoart," has evolved to respond to this call. Ecoart entails any visual or performing arts that are accessible to the public and are created to achieve an environmental goal, whether it be to educate, create dialogue, heighten awareness, or inspire action. Ecoart projects possess an astounding ability to influence the environmental consciousness of individuals and to mobilize communities in joint
environmental action. Ecoart can be created and integrated within communities by anyone, anywhere, at any time. All that is required is a creative vision, environmental passion, and a sense of community. As an environmental tool, Ecoart holds the potential to transform education, activism, and community engagement as we know it.

https://virginiaecoart.weebly.com/

Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp – Duck Stamp

The Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (formerly the Duck Stamp) has been expanded to cover all birds and increase conservation. So please think about buying one, two or even three stamps ($25 each). 98% of the funds are going towards acquiring more land. You also get free admission to National Wildlife Refuges. More places to bird, hooray! They are also talking about a Bird Stamp so will see if that comes to be.

“Hunters, birders and stamp collectors across the United States join in celebrating with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as the 2020-2021 Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp – commonly known as the Duck Stamp – is now on sale. Beginning 26 June 2020, the new Federal Duck Stamp and its younger sibling, the Junior Duck Stamp became available for purchase online, at many sporting goods and retail stores, and some post offices and national wildlife refuges. Find all buying options at http://www.fws.gov/birds/get-involved/duck-stamp/buy-duck-stamp.php.”

For more information on the refuges go to https://www.fws.gov/refuges/

Go Home, Bird, You’re Drunk from Earth Almanac by Ken Keffer

“Many berries cling to branches well into winter. Frost-thaw cycles can convert starches in the berries to sugars, which can then ferment into alcohol. When fruit-loving birds like Cedar Waxwings and American Robins belly up to the berry bush, it’s possible for them to hit the sauce a bit too hard. Reports of drunk birds are rare, but it does happen. The evidence is mostly anecdotal, but young birds appear to have more trouble holding their booze, or more likely, adults tend to avoid the fermented fruits. Alcohol poisoning is a theoretical possibility. Drunk flying could also be a threat, although plenty of sober birds fall victim to flying into objects each year too.

Birds aren’t the only ones that will imbibe from time to time. Deer can get tipsy from spending too much time at the orchard bar. And beer mixed with mashed banana is well-known bait for attracting moths to a lit-up bed sheet in backyards in the warmer months. Unfermented berries can also cause troubles for the birds. Decorative plantings of nandina, or heavenly bamboo, have been linked to Cedar Waxwing mortality—one more reason to consider native species for your landscaping needs.”
Mistletoe Kisses from *Earth Almanac* by Ken Keffer

“The ancient Greeks and Romans used mistletoe as a cure for a variety of ailments; however, the tradition of kissing under the plant likely dates back to sixteenth-century Celtic Druids. Mistletoe’s ability to bloom in winter may have led to it becoming a symbol of vitality and fertility. The European variety was the original mistletoe, but now the name is applied to many different hemi parasitic plants, meaning the plants can photosynthesize but they also rely on a host plant to survive. Witches’ broom is another name for mistletoe since it grows in thick clumps along the branches of trees or shrubs.

Mistletoe’s growth rarely kills the infested host trees. In fact, forests with high levels of mistletoe host up to three times more cavity-nesting bird species. Wrens, chickadees, and nuthatches all use the tangles for nesting, as do Cooper’s hawks and Spotted Owls. Three species of hairstreak butterflies depend on mistletoe as a host plant. North America is home to more than thirty types of mistletoe. Dwarf mistletoe, a species found mostly on conifers in the West, ejects its seeds from swollen seedpods. Wildlife eat the berries and spread their seeds, but the berries are toxic to humans.”

Wood Duck

“The colorful drake Wood Duck is one of North America's most beautiful waterfowl – an aquatic counterpart of the male **Painted Bunting**. This widespread, fast-flying denizen of swampy woods is also called the Carolina Duck, Swamp Duck, or Squealer.

Today, the Wood Duck is often easy to find in suitable habitat within its range. Some might find it hard to believe that as recently as the early 20th Century, this species seemed to be sliding toward extinction.”

[Photo by Julie Kacmarcik](https://abcbirds.org/bird/wood-duck/?omcampaign=membership&eType=E mailBlastContent&eId=999b2a3e-5a4f-4ad8-a6ce-4eafe9e89280)

Wood Duck Drake and Blue-winged Teal

[Photo by Julie Kacmarcik](https://abcbirds.org/bird/wood-duck/?omcampaign=membership&eType=E mailBlastContent&eId=999b2a3e-5a4f-4ad8-a6ce-4eafe9e89280)
It is Never Too Late to Learn

With the “Stay At Home” safety policy it is a great time to expand our knowledge and learn some fun facts. Check out the following videos.

Have you often wondered how Barn Owls mate and bring up their babies? Here is a delightful video on that  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0Lx7EOJFNE

Here is a wonderful collection of our owls and their calls. “Owls of North America and Their Calls”  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jzbmj6vuMw8

Chimney Swifts always fly

They even take baths while flying, hardly ever land except to nest in chimneys or other vertical surfaces.  
https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chimney_Swift/overview

Hawk Migration

Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) has started its online "lunch and learn" workshops. Join in monthly at 12 pm EDT! Free but you have to register in advance on their web site  https://www.hmana.org/

Or on Facebook LIVE (visit the HMANA Facebook page) at  
https://www.facebook.com/HawkMigration/live_videos/

You can view past sessions on their web site where a recording of the program will be available shortly after airing live.  https://www.hmana.org/lunch-learn-raptor-id-1/

Here are topics:
September 23: Julie Brown, "Celebrating International Hawk Migration Week"
October 15: Josh Haas, "Live from a Hawkwatch"
November 18: Vic Berardi, "Winter Raptor Survey"
December 9: Laurie Goodrich, "Broad-winged Hawk Migration"
25 Things About Birds (continued from last issue)

11. Hummingbirds Can’t Walk

There are some compromises that have to be made when you’re a bird that can fly backwards. To reduce drag, hummingbirds have very tiny and non-locomoting feet. Their legs allow them to perch and shuffle sideways a bit, but they’re not designed for long walks.

12. Not All Beaks are Created Equal

A bird’s beak will vary depending on what nature has instructed it to do. Cone-shaped beaks are perfect for cracking nuts and seeds; a hummingbird’s long bill is ideal for sipping nectar. Birds of prey often have hooked beaks that are perfect for tearing into flesh and causing fatal wounds to the neck of their next meal.

13. Little Blue Herons Have a Built-In Grooming Comb

Whether you consider the heron a backyard bird or not may depend on whether you have a pond, but if you spot one of these fish-chompers, try to take note of their middle toe: it has a serrated edge to it that the heron uses to groom and scratch itself.

14. Crows Can Recognize Faces

If you think your local murder of crows is out to get you, it may not be paranoia. Research conducted at the University of Washington in 2008 demonstrated that the bird is able to recognize faces and hold a grudge when provoked. In the study, scientists donned a caveman mask and then trapped crows (humanely, of course) before banding and setting them free. When the researchers walked the campus in the mask, the crows circled and vocally scolded their suspected captor.

15. Killdeer Fake Injuries to Fool Predators

The Killdeer, which is found across North America, is the avian equivalent of a scam artist in a neck brace. The species will feign being injured or crippled in order to lure predators toward them and away from their nest of offspring. When the predator gets close enough, the killdeer miraculously “recovers” and beats a hasty retreat.

(To be continued in next newsletter)
Some Great Photos from our members

Common Merganser - Larry Tipton

Hooded Merganser – Larry Tipton

Red Breasted Merganser – Larry Tipton

Gadwall – Pam Scrima

Hooded Merganser – Pam Scrima

American Coot – Julie Kacmarcik
**NEWSLETTER**

“The Thrasher” is issued bimonthly (January, March, May, July, September, November.) Article and photos submissions are due by the 10th of the month prior. The newsletter is available for download (PDF) online at [www.RichmondAudubon.org](http://www.RichmondAudubon.org).

Any suggestions, comments, or ideas for the newsletter send to thrasher@richmondaudubon.org.

Thanks and have a great birding day!
Diane Jadlowski & Julie Kacmarcik
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ABOUT THE RICHMOND AUDUBON SOCIETY

RAS MEMBER MEETINGS: Third Thursday of the month except June, July, August and December (virtual are being planned)

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

For information on late breaking news, meetings, and field trips check the RAS Listserv or the RAS website. Join our FACEBOOK page or MEET-UP group.

PHONE (Message Line): 804-601-4917

WEBSITE: www.RichmondAudubon.org

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/RichmondAudubon/

MEETUP 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.
RICHMOND AUDUBON SOCIETY Membership Application

Yes, enroll me (us) as member(s) of both National Audubon and Richmond Audubon Society at the introductory rate of $20.00. Write “X53” as the memo and mail to address below. A subscription to the National Audubon Society “Audubon” magazine is included.

Name ________________________________________________________________

Address ___________________________________________________________________

City ______________________________ State _______ ZIP __________

Phone ____________________________ E-mail ______________________________

Make check payable to: National Audubon Society

Send check and application to:

Richmond Audubon Society
P.O. Box 26648, Richmond, VA 23261
X53