Virginia Beach Field Trip

December 3 – 5, 2010 – Registration Required

The VSO annual field trip to Virginia Beach will be held Friday, December 3 through Sunday, December 5, 2010. An outstanding weekend is planned with a Friday afternoon field trip to the Whitehurst Tract for those arriving early. Field trips include a visit to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT) on Saturday and a half day at Back Bay NWR and False Cape State Park on Sunday.

HEADQUARTERS
The Country Inn and Suites at 1801 Atlantic Avenue, Virginia Beach, will be the host hotel. Oceanfront rooms with private balconies will be available at $65 plus tax. All rooms have refrigerators, microwaves, and coffee makers. The hotel has an indoor pool and a free covered parking garage. Check-in time is 4:00 PM and check-out is 11:00 AM. It will be necessary to check out on Sunday before leaving on the field trip. Those planning to stay at the hotel should make reservations by November 19, 2010, specifying they are with the VSO. The hotel phone numbers are (757) 437-9100 or (800) 456-4000.

DIRECTIONS
To reach the Country Inn and Suites take I-64 to I-264 East to Virginia Beach. Take I-264 to Atlantic Avenue and turn right. The hotel is on the ocean side of Atlantic Avenue. Directions to all field trips will be mailed to participants.

MEALS
There are a wide variety of restaurants in the area. The hotel restaurant will be open at 7:00 AM on Saturday and Sunday for breakfast.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON
As a special enticement to get an early start on the weekend, a field trip will leave the hotel at 12:15 PM for the Whitehurst Tract, one of the many good birding areas in Virginia Beach. The Tract is a patchwork of marshes, weedy and cultivated fields, narrow freshwater impoundments, and pine woodland affording the possibility of a wide variety of bird species. Several sparrows such as LeConte’s are possible as well as numerous waterfowl and raptors. The trip will return to the hotel by 6:00 PM.

FRIDAY EVENING
No organized events are planned.

SATURDAY FIELD TRIPS
Morning on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel
The Saturday field trip to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT) will leave promptly at 8:00 AM from the parking lot of the CBBT visitor center. Participants must check in by 7:45 with the CBBT office. Those staying at the hotel may want to meet near the hotel entrance at 7:00 AM to form carpools. The trip should end about noon. Participants should bring spotting scopes, lunch, snacks, and beverages and be prepared for winter weather. Participation will be limited to the first 45 who sign up since there is a requirement to pay a security guard to accompany each group of 15. The cost is $10 per person for the security guard. A security information form will be mailed to each person who registers for the trip. The completed form must be returned to Clark White no later than November 19, 2010.

Continued on Page 6
President’s Message: Trash Birds

Many use this expression or ‘garbage birds’ to describe those ordinary birds that tend to be everywhere on a count, on a field trip, or at our feeders. Some of my fellow birders don’t even record these birds on their checklists and thus totally ignore their numbers. The blog 10,000 Birds (http://10000birds.com) has this definition for them:

Trash bird is birding lingo for any species that is so ubiquitous in a location that it surpasses unremarkable and becomes truly irritating. Trash birds hog the feeders, crowd the trees, and consistently outcompete other species for habitat and resources. Their belligerent success spells failure for many other kinds of potentially more interesting birds. Although most birders are too polite to use this derogatory term in mixed company, few, if any, can claim to love all birds equally. If some species had to be sacrificed for the greater good, these are the ones that would be tossed on the trash heap. The kingdom of unloved North American avians is ruled by the trash triumvirate: House Sparrow, European Starling, and Rock Pigeon. Invasives all, these three species probably account for 99% of all urban bird sightings.

I admit that I have occasionally referred to a species besides House Sparrow, European Starling, or Rock Pigeon as a trash bird, especially when I’m hoping for something more exciting, e.g., Indigo Buntings singing from every tree when I’m looking for first-of-season warblers. Among my birding friends, we sometimes decide on the trash bird of the trip well before each of us declares our best bird of the day.

In jest, another posting on the 10,000 Birds blog proposed changing the name of the House Sparrow to Black-throated Brown Warbler. This rebranding was intended to elevate the status of House Sparrows in birders’ eyes. The thought being that given this more exciting, new name, birders would seek out the Black-throated Brown Warbler as they do other warblers. I think this idea of a new name to make a bird more exciting has merit. Didn’t you pay more attention to Yellow-rumped Warblers the first time you heard someone refer to them as butter-buts? When they hosted the VSO annual meeting a few years ago, members of the Buchanan Bird Club had us chuckling every time we spotted a Turkey Vulture after they shared its local moniker, Kentucky Condor.

So if we came up with clever names for trash birds, do you think that we would pay more attention to, look for, and count them? If so, help me out as I’m not clever enough to come up with new names for all of them. The only one I’ve thought of so far is Barn Dove for Rock Pigeon. Can you think of more witty names for some of these trash birds? Maybe your regular birding group already has nicknames for some common birds; if so, share them with me. This is just for fun, so let me know your nicknames for birds. Hopefully, a new moniker or two will add some interest to trash bird sightings so we’ll include their sightings and numbers in our citizen science records, e.g., eBird. If nothing else, some funny new names for trash birds will add some humor to our birding. Send your ideas to me at bruno@lynchburg.edu or 1012 Harrods Court, Lynchburg, VA 24503.

Send submissions electronically via e-mail whenever possible. Attach text as Word document or plain text file. Attach images as tifs; scan photos to 300 dpi and line art to 1000 dpi. You may also mail your submission on a PC formatted diskette. Hard copy may be mailed, but must be received two weeks prior to deadline.

Submissions may be edited for style or length.

2010 Submission Schedule

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Birds reported in this newsletter may not have been approved by VARCOM (The Virginia Avian Records Committee).
Conservation Corner

VSO Conservation Alert System Activated

On July 19, Stephen Eccles, VSO Conservation Chair, activated the VSO Conservation Alert System for only the second time since its inception. This was to give VSO members an easy opportunity to show their support for reauthorization of important legislation for bird conservation: the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) which had been introduced in both the Congress and the Senate on a bipartisan basis. NMBCA is the only federal funding program designed specifically for migratory bird species that is available throughout the Americas, and also provides the only dedicated source of funds for migratory birds on their wintering grounds in Latin America and the Caribbean. NMBCA authorizes matching grants to support conservation programs for migratory birds and, when fully implemented, will authorize $20 million per year for projects in the United States, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Reauthorization of NMBCA is supported by the VSO because it has a proven track record of success, with 260 projects in 48 states and territories, as well as in 36 other countries, since its inception in 2002. These have included projects for many species of importance to Virginia including the Cerulean Warbler – a species that the VSO has directly supported in Colombia in recent years. Through membership in the Bird Conservation Alliance – a network of organizations working together, assisted by the American Bird Conservancy – the VSO was able to give its members a very easy means of contacting their Representatives and Senators to ask them to vote for this legislation. To use this tool members just had to enter their zip code and a draft letter was generated addressed specifically to the appropriate representative and senators. The person could then either send that letter exactly as draft, add some personal thoughts, or even rewrite the letter entirely.

Of course, the VSO could only give this tool to members who had provided their e-mail address. Those who missed out on this opportunity are encouraged to provide their e-mail address to the VSO and keep their information current. Every time a constituent makes it known that he or she is interested in a particular piece of legislation, it helps.

Results? At the time of the writing of this article (August 16), the appropriations process had been delayed until Congress returned in September. It seems increasingly likely, however, that, instead of a stand-alone Department of the Interior appropriations bill, which would have included NMBCA funds, there will be an omnibus bill that will fund many programs. So the amount appropriated for NMBCA may not be known for some time. Given the heavy pressure to cut funding this year, a “victory” would be to keep NMBCA funding at the same level as previous years.

~Stephen Eccles,
Chair, VSO Conservation Committee

2010 Foray: Grassland Birds

The 2010 VSO Foray took place in Culpeper and Fauquier Counties on June 12 – 20 with a focus on grassland birds and the recently established Culpeper Basin Important Bird Area (IBA). The 27 participants found 101 species. There were greater than expected numbers of some grassland birds including Field Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, and Dickcissel, supporting the idea that the IBA is important to this group of birds. Other highlights, such as Black-billed Cuckoo were spotted in and around Sky Meadows State Park.

2011 Foray Preview

The 2011 Foray will take place next June in Allegheny County. Those who participate are in for a real treat, as this is a beautiful, albeit underbursed, county. Participants may want to consider taking a mini-vacation while participating in the Foray. Allegheny is mountainous and scenic, with lots of public-access land and beautiful forests, streams, and lakes. In addition to birding, opportunities abound to hike, kayak, fish, and just generally enjoy nature. More details will be included in the next newsletter.

~Clark White
Trip Coordinator

Report of the Piney Grove Field Trip

On May 29, 2010 a group of 14 birders joined Mike Wilson, from the center for Conservation Biology at William and Mary, for a trip to the Nature Conservancy’s Piney Grove Preserve to view the resident Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. In addition to seeing nine Red-cockaded the group observed 50 other bird species including Red-headed Woodpeckers, Northern Bobwhite, and Orchard Oriole.

~Clark White
Trip Coordinator

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New Peggy Opengari Fund

In July, 2009, Virginia birders lost a force of nature, Peggy Opengari. Peggy was many things, an extraordinary teacher, a successful entrepreneur, a committed conservationist, and an excellent trip leader and guide. In her amazing life, she birded on every continent.

In the fall of 2008, Peggy organized a tour to northern Peru. Her chief reason for this trip was a chance to see the Marvelous Spatuletail, the world’s most incredible and improbable hummingbird. Opengari North, as the tour was called, succeeded in seeing this amazing bird on two separate days. Unfortunately, Peggy was unable to share this good fortune. She died while the group was in Peru.

Since her death, many of Peggy’s friends have sought a way to pay tribute to her memory. The New River Valley and Roanoke Valley Bird Clubs established a memorial fund to honor Peggy’s contribution to birding in Virginia.

Bill Akers and Jerry Via are further proposing to make a lasting contribution, in Peggy’s memory, to an international refuge, to help insure the survival of the Marvelous Spatuletail. The reserve, named Huembo (pronounced Wembo), is in the Utcubamba River Valley of northern Peru. It is the only place in the world where the Marvelous Spatuletail exists. The Huembo Reserve is in its infancy and relatively small consisting of 100 acres. An incomplete census of birds lists 100 species, including four that are globally threatened, and three endemics. The reserve is supported by The American Bird Conservancy and ECOAN, the Peruvian partner of ABC. The short-term goal is to expand the reserve to 500 acres. Since its founding in 2006, there have been over 30,000 saplings and shrubs planted in a reforestation project, including the orange-flowered “rosemary” or “romero” shrub which is the primary nectar source for the Marvelous Spatuletail.

Bill and Jerry hope to collect at least $10,000 to help the Huembo Reserve expand and stabilize. They have a commitment to match donations dollar for dollar up to $5,000. To contribute to this project, send your donation (noting on the memo line Peggy O-Peru) to:

Virginia Society of Ornithology
1230 Viewmont Drive
Evington, VA 24550-2006

Jackson Abbott Conservation Award

A Call for Nominations — Deadline February 15, 2011

The Virginia Society of Ornithologists is seeking nominations for the Jackson M. Abbott Conservation Award, given for outstanding work in conserving Virginia’s birds and/or the state’s natural areas.

The Conservation Award was renamed the Jackson M. Abbott Conservation Award in 1989 based on Abbott’s extensive efforts to conserve Virginia’s birds. Abbott founded the Fort Belvoir Christmas Bird Count in 1941 and the 250-acre Jackson Abbott Wetland Refuge on Fort Belvoir is named for him. However, he is best known for his work to protect Bald Eagles in Virginia, especially in the upper reaches of the Chesapeake Bay. Some previous recipients of the award include Henry Bashore for his leadership and conservation efforts on the Northern Neck (1987), James W. Waggener for his efforts to establish the Occoquan Wildlife Refuge (1999), the Non-game Division of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries for their work in promoting conservation and public awareness of birds (2002), the Center for Conservation Biology (2007) and Larry and Thrya Valade in 2010.

Nominations, including at least three letters of recommendation and a list of the nominee’s accomplishments, should be submitted no later than February 15, 2011. The Conservation Committee will make its recommendations to the VSO Board at its March meeting. The award will be presented at the 2011 Annual Meeting.

Send proposals or requests for information to:

Stephen Eccles
Conservation Committee Chair
stephendeccles@aol.com
New Members
May 18, 2010–August 12, 2010

A Warm welcome to the following new members:

Lee L. Adams, Fredericksburg
Jennifer Amarante, Falls Church
Norman & Sara Bell, Monterey
Frederic & Ann Bogar, Bentonville
Robert & Mary Brosnan, Falls Church
Larry E. Cartwright, Annandale
Kathleen L. Gardner, Bridgewater
Bruce Johnson, Lovettsville
Beth Lancaster, Christiansburg
Jean K. Massie, Winchester
Mary McDavit, Sunset Beach NC
Bill McGovern, Alexandria
Diana M. Nishern, Washington DC
Katherine Simenson, Vienna

Hold the Date

The 2011 VSO Annual meeting will be held May 13-15 in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Planning is underway and details will be in the next VSO Newsletter.

Receive Your Newsletter Electronically

VSO members now have the option to receive the VSO Newsletter via email. Electronic delivery will be completely optional, and paper copies will continue to be mailed to those who wish them. If you would like to receive your newsletter by email to help the VSO save paper and money, please send an email message to Andrew Dolby, adolby@umw.edu, and type “VSO email newsletter” in the subject line. Be sure to include your full name in the body of your message.

750,000 Birds!

A remarkable milestone is approaching. If the Kiptopeke Hawk watch records only 188 more birds in fall 2010 than it did in fall 2009, the total will be 750,000. The hawk watch began with volunteers in 1977. Since 1995 the watch has been conducted by full-time staff, paid and supervised by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, but still assisted by dedicated volunteers. More information about the milestone and possible associated events will be sent to the VA List Serve and will also be posted on the Observatory Website at www.cvwo.org. ~ Brian Taber, President, CVWO

Call for Applications –
J. J. Murray Research Award
Deadline January 28, 2011

This annual $1000 student research grant is one of the ways in which the VSO supports the study of Virginia avifauna. The Murray Award was established in 1980 to honor the Reverend J. J. Murray, Sr., a charter member of the VSO and the editor of its journal, The Raven, from its inception until 1969.

Criteria and eligibility: The award is designed to promote graduate and undergraduate research, which must consist of current or projected field studies of Virginia birds. Proposals will be judged for their scientific merit and the likelihood that the work will make a meaningful contribution to the understanding of Virginia avifauna. Upon completion of the research, the recipient will be asked to present the results at a VSO annual meeting, and encouraged to publish the results in an appropriate journal. The recipient will also be awarded a one-year membership in the VSO.

Application procedures: Proposals should be of a reasonable length. If the proposal is longer than 15 pages it must include a summary of no more than two pages. Submissions will be evaluated by the VSO and must be received by January 28, 2011. If the research is part of a degree program, students should include the name of the institution and department they are enrolled in, the degree they are working towards, and the name of their academic or research advisor. Each proposal should include a letter from the student’s academic advisor verifying that the applicant is a student in good standing, and that he or she is receiving the advisor’s support for this project. Both proposals and letters of reference should be submitted electronically as Word files, although they can be submitted separately. Applicants will be notified of the results by April 1, 2011.

Send proposals or requests for information to:
Gene Sattler
gsattler@liberty.edu
Department of Biology & Chemistry
Liberty University
1971 University Blvd.
Lynchburg, VA 24502
Virginia Beach Field Trip

Continued from Page 1

Afternoon at the Eastern Shore
New this year, there will be a Saturday afternoon trip to the Eastern Shore including stops at Kiptopeake State Park, ESNWR, and Oyster. Departure will be from the CBBT at the conclusion of that trip. Those not going on the CBBT trip can meet the group at Kiptopeake State Park at 12:00 PM. The afternoon trip will conclude by about 4:00 PM.

SUNDAY FIELD TRIPS
Back Bay NWR and False Cape State Park
The tram trip at BBNWR will begin at 8:00 AM. Those staying at the hotel may want to meet near the front entrance at 6:45 AM to form carpools. This will be a half day trip. Participants should bring spotting scopes, lunch, snacks, and beverages. After a leisurely tram ride with many stops to view a myriad of shorebirds and waterfowl, a good amount of time will be spent birding and lunching at False Cape State Park. The tram will leave False Cape at 1:00 for a slow return to the Back Bay NWR Visitor Center. Participants may want to stop at the beach in Sandbridge to check out the birds before departing the area. Birds seen on this trip could include both Swans, American Bittern, Common Snipe and numerous waterfowl. Cost for the tram trip will $10. This year the trip will be limited to the first 25 to register.

Alternate Field Trip
For those who do not go on the BBNWR field trip an alternate field trip to First Landing State Park in Virginia Beach will be available. This trip will meet at First Landing State Park at 8:00 AM. Directions will be provided to those who register.

TRIP REGISTRATION
It is important to register for the field trips as participation is limited. Register with the trip coordinator, Clark White, by US mail or e-mail by November 12. Include your name, street or e-mail address and telephone number, the field trips you are requesting and a check for the cost of the trips (if applicable) payable to Clark White.

Send registration to:

Clark White
101 Brookstone Court
Yorktown, Virginia 23693
757-875-7649
or
cwbirds@cox.net

In Memoriam
Dr. Robert James Watson

In July the VSO lost one of its elder statesman, Bob Watson, who died peacefully, surrounded by family at age 89. Bob’s contributions to the VSO spanned 70 years. He joined the organization in 1940 while he was a student at VPI (now Virginia Tech), served on the Executive Committee (the body, that later became the Board of Directors) and was the VSO Secretary for a remarkable 30 years, from 1954 to 1983, the pre-computer age when an organization’s proceedings had to be documented using a typewriter and carbon paper. He was a contributor to the Raven, active in field work, especially during the VSO forays of the 1970s and 80s, and was one of the first members to be recognized with an Eike Award in 1984, when the award was instituted.

Bob enthusiastically participated in VSO Annual Meetings. He and his wife, Laura, were at the 2009 meeting in Fredericksburg and Thelma Dalmas, VSO Membership Secretary, recalled being on the Saturday morning bird walk along the old canal path in the city with Bob and a small group. “He was so interested in every bird. I remember that an Indigo Bunting caught his eye and he talked about the first time that he’d ever noticed one, many years ago. I really feel very lucky to have known him.”

Indeed, birding with Bob was a master class in how to see and appreciate what is around us. We had the pleasure of participating in the DC Christmas Bird Count with him for almost ten years. Our sector consisted of a largely urban landscape, our bird observations were generally unremarkable and the weather was almost always bad. Still, of all the counts we did each winter, it was the one we most enjoyed because, being out there with Bob, the simplest things became interesting and noteworthy. Bob’s face would light up with that wonderful smile if ordinary birds allowed us close observation, or the odd Peregrine or Kestrel would show up unexpectedly. He took nothing for granted but keenly observed whatever presented itself. We too feel very lucky to have known him.

Contributions in Bob’s memory can be made to the VSO Murray Fund, the income from which is used to award scholarships for bird study within Virginia. It was Bob who made the original motion at the March 1979 VSO Board Meeting to establish the Murray Fund and he was the first contributor.

Linda Fields and Alan Schreck
Editors
VSO Newsletter and Virginia Birds

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Highland County Field Trip Report

The first VSO field trip to Highland County, held on June 4-6, 2010, was a great success. More than 45 birders participated, tallying 101 species with the help of Patti Reum and her team of four technicians who guided the Saturday and Sunday trips. Val Kitchen’s excellent recommendation to use two-way radios with the car caravans turned out to be very important for both the Friday and Saturday trips.

On Friday afternoon 25 birders explored the southern part of the county, taking Rt. 220 and then Rt. 607 to where it intersects Rt. 220 again at the border of Highland and Bath Counties. Highlights near that intersection included Orchard and Baltimore Orioles and Northern Rough-winged Swallows. The return trip followed Rt. 220 to Rt. 84 and then to Rt. 637, where the group had a spectacular look at a Baltimore Oriole and a Yellow Warbler sitting out in the open in the same tree. On 640 they saw two Eagle chicks in a nest and an Eastern Kingbird.

The 40 participants on Saturday split into two groups and covered the northern and western parts of the county: Blue Grass, Laurel Forks, Locust Springs and Forks of Water. Highlights of the day were Mourning Warbler just south of Locust Springs; Canada, Magnolia, and Black-throated Green Warblers, as well as Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Scarlet Tanager in the Laurel Forks area; a large group of Bobolinks by the cemetery in Blue Grass; four species of vireos, Yellow Warbler, and Least Flycatcher, nesting Baltimore Orioles and nesting Cedar Waxwings at Forks of Water; and Savannah and Vesper Sparrows on Rt. 601.

Sunday morning featured an unusual non-avian start, on the way to a private property off Rt. 637 (north of Rt. 250), five cows were walking along the road outside a fenced area. It turned out that 100 cows had gotten out and participants who didn’t walk the trail got to watch dozens of cows being herded back inside the gate, while those walking the trail saw Common Yellowthroat, Chestnut-sided Warbler, American Redstart and Worm-eating Warblers. Returning to Rt. 250 via Rt. 640, there were Bobolinks sitting on fence posts, plus Cliff Swallows and Baltimore Orioles.

For several people this was their first VSO trip and first trip to Highland County. Many participants got several life birds. A complete list of species follows.

~ Meredith Bell, Trip Committee Co-chair

Trip Species List

- Black Vulture
- Turkey Vulture
- Canada Goose
- Wood Duck
- Bald Eagle
- Broad-winged Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- American Kestrel
- Ruffed Grouse
- Killdeer
- Rock Pigeon
- Mourning Dove
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo
- Eastern Screech Owl
- Barred Owl
- Chimney Swift
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- Belted Kingfisher
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Pileated Woodpecker
- Eastern Wood-Pewee
- Acadian Flycatcher
- Alder Flycatcher
- Willow Flycatcher
- Least Flycatcher
- Eastern Phoebe
- Great Crested Flycatcher
- Eastern Kingbird
- White-eyed Vireo
- Yellow-throated Vireo
- Blue-headed Vireo
- Warbling Vireo
- Red-eyed Vireo
- Blue Jay
- American Crow
- Common Raven
- Horned Lark
- Purple Martin
- Tree Swallow
- No. Rough-winged Swallow
- Cliff Swallow
- Barn Swallow
- Black-capped Chickadee
- Tufted Titmouse
- White-breasted Nuthatch
- Carolina Wren
- House Wren
- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
- Eastern Bluebird
- Veery
- Hermit Thrush
- Wood Thrush
- American Robin
- Gray Catbird
- Northern Mockingbird
- Brown Thrasher
- European Starling
- Cedar Waxwing
- Golden-winged Warbler
- Northern Parula
- Yellow Warbler
- Chestnut-sided Warbler
- Magnolia Warbler
- Black-throated Blue Warbler
- Yellow-rumped Warbler
- Canada Warbler
- Yellow-breasted Chat
- Scarlet Tanager
- Eastern Towhee
- Chipping Sparrow
- Field Sparrow
- Vesper Sparrow
- Savannah Sparrow
- Song Sparrow
- Dark-eyed Junco
- Northern Cardinal
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak
- Blue Grosbeak
- Indigo Bunting
- Bobolink
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Eastern Meadowlark
- Common Grackle
- Brown-headed Cowbird
- Orchard Oriole
- Baltimore Oriole
- House Finch
- American Goldfinch
- House Sparrow
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Membership Secretary: Thelma Dalmas, Evington

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Price
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Birds of the Virginia Cumberland (2001) $8.00
Birds of Prey in Virginia (1990) $9.00
VSO Field Checklist, 10th ed. $3.00
VSO Arm Patch $4.00
Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas $5.00
VSO Total Merchandise $20.00

Total Merchandise $68.00

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