



VSO Newsletter

A Publication of the Virginia Society of Ornithology

Website: www.virginiabirds.org eBird: ebird.org/content/va/ Facebook: [Virginia Society of Ornithology](https://www.facebook.com/VirginiaSocietyofOrnithology)
Listserve: mailman.listserve.com/listmanager/listinfo/va-bird

New VSO International Programs: *Following the Birds Down South*

As every Virginia birder knows, the species we spend so much of the year chasing have a double life as tropical visitors. The migration routes of Virginia birds make conservation an international effort, as birders throughout the Americas work to preserve and enhance the habitats that neo-tropical migrants need.

It is in this spirit that the VSO is announcing two new international endeavors in birding for conservation, with trips to Guatemala and the Dominican Republic.

Former VSO President Andrew Dolby has spent years building relationships with researchers and conservationists in Guatemala. One such partner is Community Cloud Forest Conservation (CCFC <http://www.cloudforestconservation.org/>) an organization with a growing ecotourism business that also engages in sustainable agriculture training and environmental education programs with the area's children.

Andrew is working with CCFC to recruit VSO members for a field trip to the area, including the Guaytan Archeological Site, Posada del Quetzal, Escondido Pine-Oak Reserve, CCFC's Agroecology Center, Tikal, and Rio Dulce. Many other shorter stops will be included along the way.

The trip will take place from April 1-11 2017 with resident guide Rob Cahill. Rob is the son of John Cahill, Guatemala's leading bird expert. Andrew has seen from personal experience that this family knows every birding nook and cranny in Guatemala.

The timing of the trip also makes for a fascinating confluence of Guatemala's permanent residents and North America's summer residents at this time of year. The price is \$1,960 for double occupancy and \$2,660 for single occupancy, which covers all in-country transportation, lodging, meals, guide services, and entrance fees.

Airfare to and from Guatemala City, alcoholic beverages or personal incidentals are not included.

The price is based on a minimum of eight travelers, but the trip will be capped at 10. Deposit due date is January 15, 2017 and final payment will be due February 25. Contact Andrew Dolby for more details (adolby@umw.edu).

In the Caribbean, the VSO is planning its first foray in the Dominican Republic. The VSO is partnering with the Virginia-based organization Earth Sangha (<http://www.earthsangha.org/#!tree-bank/c1jq1>) to collect avian biodiversity to support Earth Sangha's conservation planning.

For the last 10 years, Earth Sangha has been working in Dajabón province, along the DR-Haiti border, using native plants to fight the spread of deforestation and encouraging sustainable agriculture, including shade-grown coffee farming.

For the first trip, the goal is to gather useful baseline data, with the hope of expanding in future years. To achieve this goal, the trip will include a small group of six birders with previous experience in collecting bird data. Participants will depart in mid-December of 2016 and spend 3-4 days collecting data.

VSO's volunteers will visit a total of three sites/habitats, as determined by Earth Sangha. The habitat types are 1) an open-ground/young forest planting, 2) a coffee grove from Earth Sangha's project area, and 3) a lowland/riparian area.

Open-ground observations create a

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Vol. 62 • No. 3

Fall 2016

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Jerry Thornhill



In Memoriam - See page 7

President's Message:

I'd like to start this article by just saying it's too hot to even write, but I guess that isn't very presidential. This weather is much better for amphibians than birds or birders!!

I continue to be impressed by our first year efforts on the 2nd Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA2). Already nearly 50% of the priority blocks are assigned and we have data from 44% of the priority blocks. This is a great first year for a five year project. I realize that some of the remote blocks will require special effort, but I am continually impressed by the army of volunteers who have stepped forward to help in this project. Thank you!

Geography lesson.....Did you know that Virginia is over 42,000 square miles with elevations from sea level to over a mile high? The Commonwealth contains every habitat from north Florida to southern Maine somewhere within its boundaries. From southwest Virginia (down near Kentucky for you folks who may think Virginia ends at Bristol and Blacksburg), there are seven other state capitals closer than Richmond and if you travel US 58 from Virginia Beach to Cumberland Gap it will take you over 13 hours. You could almost drive from New York City to Jacksonville, Florida in that amount of time. As the summer winds down, I hope each of you will consider the part you play in conservation efforts. Every organization, like the VSO, requires hands to make things happen. This is particularly true when we take on a project as large as the Breeding Bird Atlas in a state as large as Virginia. We will need your time and your donations to make the BBA2 a success. I hope all of you will step forward to assist with this project.

I'll leave you with something cool to think about; at Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area, Virginia, the average snowfall is approximately 32 inches per year and there are only three months out of the year when snow has NOT been recorded. Just think, only five more weeks of summer left!!



Good birding everyone!
- Jeff Trollinger - President, VSO

UPCOMING EVENTS - SAVE THE DATES

Virginia Beach, December 2-4 - Coordinator and Leader: Lee Adams. See trip details on page 6.

Outer Banks, February 3-5 - Coordinator: Meredith Bell. Leaders: Bill Akers, Jerry Via, Lee Adams and Meredith and Lee Bell. Watch website (<http://www.virginiabirds.org>) for more details as they become available.

Annual Meeting, May 5- 7 - Richmond Audubon Society will host the 2017 Annual Meeting of the VSO and planning has begun. Watch the website and future newsletters for details as they are developed.

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Send submissions electronically via e-mail whenever possible. Attach text as Word document or plain text file. Attach images as separate files; please do not imbed in email body. Send the largest file possible. The images will not print well if formatted smaller as for the web.

Submissions may be edited for style or length.

2016 Submission Schedule

Issue	Copy Due
Winter 2016	Oct 21, 2016
Spring 2017	Jan 27, 2017
Summer 2017	May 19, 2017
Fall 2017	Aug 11, 2017

Bird reports in this newsletter may not have been approved by VARCOM (The Virginia Avian Records Committee).

Up and Coming

Every four years there is an event so huge, so influential that it is talked about for months, even years after its closing ceremonies. The North American Ornithological Conference (NAOC) is that and so much more. NAOC is the catalyst for the work of everyone interested in birds from bird watchers to ornithologists to leaders at multinational NGOs. The amazing results from NAOCs past have a history of going widely unnoticed in the birding community for really no good reason. I hope you enjoy this column and feel empowered to help the scientists in bridging the science-public gap.



There are six major ornithological societies in Central and North America (Cooper Ornithological Society, American Ornithologists' Union, Wilson Ornithological Society, Association of Field Ornithologists, the Society of Canadian Ornithologists and *Sociedad de Ornitología Neotropical*) and each holds annual meetings across the continent. While each meeting typically attracts 2-300 ornithologists, this subgroup of bird scientists represents a tiny portion of the robust ornithological and birding communities. In stark contrast, however, are the 2,000 attendees of the 2016 NAOC including such recognizable names to the birding community as Ken Kaufmann and David Sibley. Top representatives from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, the American Bird Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy, and hundreds of research labs across the country were also in attendance.

This conference was a big deal all the way up to the international level, but what does this mean to the future of ornithology and conservation in Virginia? Potentially quite a bit. Students, professors and researchers from Virginia's own Center for Conservation Biology, Virginia Commonwealth University, The College of William and Mary, Northern Virginia Community College, Virginia Tech, the Virginia Society of Ornithology and the Virginia Zoo were all present. Research on James River Prothonotary Warblers, the relationship between birders and conservation, Chincoteague Piping Plovers, the interaction of birds with the Williamsburg housing market, Blacksburg Wood Ducks, the history of birders' changing attitudes towards science, and too many other projects to list here. We are lucky to live and bird in a state with such a vibrant research community.

NAOC *continued on page 5*

Kestrel Box Project Update

There have been 250 nest boxes built so far, 235 of which have been installed in twenty-nine counties and nine State Parks.

Dan Bieker and I continue to present programs about the project, most recently for the Roanoke Bird Club. Landowners continue to volunteer to participate as they hear about the project and are willing to host boxes.

Having put installation on hold during the March through August nesting season, we began erecting boxes in September and will continue through February. Primary focus during this season will be in Highland, Bath, Augusta, Louisa, Madison, Albemarle, and Goochland counties.

A video camera was used to monitor 35 boxes in Highland County. Of those, 22 (or 64%) were occupied by kestrels, 11 (31%) were occupied by starlings, two boxes were inhabited by bluebirds (1%) and only one was unoccupied (less than 1%) One box was abandoned that had been occupied by kestrels, probably due to predation.

This is an incredibly successful rate of occupancy and even more amazing, only one occupied box was located outside of the Blue Grass Valley! It's possible that some boxes may have been used twice. I discovered that there were two nesting periods, one that started prior to May 18 and one that started after May 18. This may have been caused by the late snow, freezing temperatures and freezing rain that occurred much of April. I believe some kestrels just waited until the weather improved to initiate egg-laying. The 2016 monitoring season revealed that the Blue Grass Valley region of Highland County is extremely important for the success of this species. In some cases, kestrels nested much closer together than I had previously expected.

- Patti Reum

Jackson M. Abbott Conservation Award

A Call for Nominations

The Virginia Society of Ornithology 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. While Abbott began the Fort Belvoir Christmas Bird Count in 1941 and the 250-acre Jackson Abbott Wetland Refuge on Fort Belvoir is named after him, 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 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), and the Center for Conservation Biology (2007).

Nominations, including at least three letters of recommendation and a list of the nominee's accomplishments, should be submitted to the VSO's Conservation Committee (chair: Patti Reum pareum@gmail.com) no later than **January 15, 2017**. The Conservation Committee will make its recommendations to the VSO Board at the February board meeting. The award will be presented at the 2017 Annual Meeting.

VSO Bids Warm Welcome to Our New Members

Eileen Rowan, Vinton, VA

Paul Ladan, McLean, VA

Lisa Nickel, Williamsburg, VA

Helen and Tracy Wheelock, Lynchburg, VA

Mary Harshfield, Roanoke, VA

Justin Ausura, Newport News, VA

J. J. Murray Research Award

- Call for Applications

Deadline 29 January 2017

This annual \$1,000 student research grant is one of the ways in which the VSO supports the study of Virginia avifauna.

Criteria and eligibility: The Murray Award was established in 1980 to honor the Rev. J. J. Murray, Sr., a charter member of the VSO and the editor of its journal, *The Raven*, from its inception until 1969. The award is designed to promote graduate and undergraduate research, and the research must consist of current or projected field studies on Virginia birds. Proposals will be judged for their scientific merit and the likelihood that the work will make a meaningful contribution to our understanding of Virginia avifauna. Upon completion of the research, the recipient will be asked to present the results at a VSO annual meeting, and are 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 no more than five pages in length (including citations) and provide the following information: background, objectives/hypotheses, methods, expected results and benefits to VA birds, and a budget. Submissions will be evaluated by the VSO and **must be received by 29 January 2017**. 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/she is receiving the advisor's support for this project. Both proposals and letters of reference should be submitted electronically as Word documents or PDFs, although they can be submitted separately. Applicants will be notified of the results by early April 2017.

Please send proposals or requests for information to:

Lesley Bulluck

lpbulluck@vcu.edu

804-828-0072

Department of Biology & Center for
Environmental Studies

Virginia Commonwealth University
Trani Life Sciences Building

1000 West Cary Street

Richmond, VA 23284

Trip Report, Craney Island, Portsmouth, August 19

Twenty-seven members of the Virginia Society of Ornithology met at Craney Island Disposal Area in Portsmouth on August 19, 2016 to observe shorebird migration and the breeding birds that use the habitat created there.

Guided by members of CVWO, Bill Williams, Brian Taber and Dave Youker, and accompanied by Kristen Scheler and several others from the Army Corps of Engineers which manages the site, the trip lasted four hours. Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory supports the on-going survey which continues Ruth Beck's long-standing conservation and education efforts at Craney Island and several other coastal Virginia sites. www.cvwo.org.

At the first stop on the high perimeter road, overlooking an impoundment along the south side, Black-necked Stilts, some in family groups, American Avocets, Stilt Sandpipers and both Yellowlegs were seen.

Wilson's Phalaropes swam circles. Two Green Herons flew by while Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, & Snowy Egrets stalked the shallows. A Clapper Rail hugged the shoreline. An immature Bald Eagle sat barely concealed in the top of a tall pine. A Red-shouldered Hawk streaked directly over. En route to the next stop four Red-tailed Hawks were spotted perched on the power line poles.

Brown Pelicans, Great Black-backed, Herring and Laughing Gulls, with several Lesser Black-backed and Ring-billed Gulls, sat on a sandbar on the east side. Caspian, Royal, and Common Terns were mixed in with Least Terns. The tide was too high to reveal flats for shorebirds but one Willet walked the shore. At a northwest impoundment shorebirds were feeding. Semipalmated Sandpipers predominated with some Least and Western among them.

A Black Swan that has been seen at Craney for a month was preening along

the shore of an impoundment in the company of a Mallard. Ruddy Ducks, Northern Shovelers, a Green-winged Teal and many Mallards swam in the distance. Black Terns flew over. Two Yellow Warblers moved in the tops of the reeds.

Chimney Swifts, Purple Martins, Barn and Bank Swallows cruised over. A Sharp-shinned Hawk and several Cooper's Hawks were seen. As the end of the trip drew close seven Glossy Ibis were spotted flying high over the I-664 bridge/tunnel.

Many thanks go to the Army Corps of Engineers for allowing the field trip, and to Bill Williams, Brian Taber and Dave Youker for their expert birding skills and extreme patience.

For pictures and complete species list go to <http://www.virginiabirds.org/events/field-trip-reports/2016-craney-island>

- Lee Adams

NAOC *continued from page 3*

Of the above-mentioned projects, both the relationships between birders and conservation as well as the history of birders' changing attitudes towards science push traditional ornithology into the oft-visited middle ground between birders and bird science. In the past this bird science has been stuck in bound journal copies hidden in the stacks at university libraries and therefore not available to the general public. This barrier has been significantly chipped away at in the past few years towards a much more digital and open system. The second major barrier in the way of bridging the gap between science and birders is the perceived notion that you need a biology degree to understand raw ornithology articles. While this may hold true for most genetic studies, a large swath of migration, breeding biology and other articles require only the will to try in order to understand them. Don't believe it? Use this formula to quench your thirst for bird science. First, pull up Google Scholar on your web browser. Next, search any topic relating to birds (ex. Suburban birds, American Avocet or Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge). With the results of this search you will see a whole list of articles, some of which will have a link on the right side of the page to a totally free PDF. If the article you are searching for lacks such a link you may often have luck googling the title or emailing the author who are typically happy to hand out copies of their work. Additional places to search for article titles are at the respective websites of the ornithological societies listed above.

The biggest mistake you can make while watching the Olympics is to believe that you cannot succeed in a certain sport because watching people who do those sports for a living is prohibitive. These sports can be fun when taken bit by bit. The same may be said in the realm of bird study, except anyone can make the jump into ornithology, after all its only a long word, not a marathon.

- Nick Newberry

2-4 December 2016 - Virginia Beach Field Trip

The VSO annual field trip to Virginia Beach will be held Friday, December 2 through Sunday, December 4, 2016. On Saturday a visit to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT) is planned. The last trip of the weekend will be a tram ride at Back Bay NWR and False Cape State Park on Sunday morning.

LODGING

There will be a blocks of rooms available at Comfort Suites Beachfront (VA563) Renovations have been completed. To register for the group rate you must mention the Virginia Society of Ornithology. Reserve rooms by Nov. 10 to receive the group rate.

Comfort Suites Beachfront
2321 Atlantic Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA 23451.
Phone (757) 491-2400
FAX (757) 491-8204
Special Rate \$74 + tax.
Reserve by November 10.

<https://www.choicehotels.com/virginia/virginia-beach/comfort-suites-hotels/va563>

FRIDAY MORNING/FRIDAY AFTERNOON

To be announced. Waiting on confirmation with the site.

FRIDAY EVENING

A tally/meet & greet will be held at 7 PM Friday at the hospitality room of the hotel. Please bring a beverage of your choice and a nibble to share.

SATURDAY MORNING

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 meet & check in at the CBBT office at 7:15 AM. This is a half day trip. Participants should bring binoculars, spotting scopes, snacks, and beverages and be prepared for winter weather. Participation will be limited to the first 45 to sign up since there is a requirement to pay a security guard to accompany each group of 15. The fee is \$10 per person for the cost of the security guard; please bring cash so that the fee can be paid to CBBT Friday morning. The security information form, available at: <http://www.cbdt.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2011RevisedRESEARCHERBirdingApp.pdf> is needed by Nov. 14 for each person who registers for the trip. Please fill out ONLY page 2 which is headed: "Each individual in this Group must provide the following information" & fax (540-834-0767), email, or mail to me, Lee Adams Box 1671 Fredericksburg, VA 22402. I will fill out the group information that is requested. I must take the forms to the CBBT office on Friday, November 25.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Some folks may want to head north across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel to explore and bird. Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge is a great winter birding area. Flocks of Snow Geese should be there. Kiptopeke State Park 3540 Kiptopeke Dr, Cape Charles, VA 23310 is another great place to bird.

If you wish to explore on your own, the address for Pleasure House Point Natural Area is 3957 Marlin Bay Drive, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23455. Directions from hotel area would be: north on

Atlantic Ave which becomes Shore Dr, continue about six miles on Shore Dr and cross Lesner Bridge, after you cross the bridge go about 3/4 mile and turn left onto Marlin Bay Dr, park along the street and explore the trails on your own.

At 8:00 PM there will be a tally in the hospitality/meeting room. Folks can gather to chat. BYOB.

SUNDAY MORNING

Back Bay NWR and False Cape State Park 4005 Sandpiper Rd, Virginia Beach, VA 23456

The tram trip at BBNWR will begin at 8:00 AM. This will be a half day trip. Participants should bring spotting scopes, lunch, snacks, and beverages and more warm clothes than you think you will need. After a leisurely tram ride with stops to view a myriad of shorebirds and waterfowl, some time will be spent birding and lunching at False Cape State Park. This trip is limited to the first 27 to register. Please bring \$15 checks made out to VSO.

TRIP REGISTRATION

It is important to register for the field trips as participation is limited. Register with the trip coordinator, Lee Adams, by email by November 15 at leeloudenslageradams@gmail.com. Please put VSO VIRGINIA BEACH TRIP in the subject line of the email, and include your name, e-mail address & cell phone number, and the field trips you are requesting.

- Meredith Bell

INTERNATIONAL *from page 1 -*

baseline of little-to-no forest species, the coffee grove will provide data to evaluate the impact of the coffee program, and data from the riparian area indicates some of the biodiversity potential of the area's remnant forests. After establishing the foray

fundamentals with this trip, the VSO hopes to recruit 10 participants in 2017. The foray is being organized by VSO Vice President Lenny Bankester (lennybankester@yahoo.com), in conjunction with the Earth Sangha staff and local community members.

We are excited about these first steps in expanding our work to encourage quality habitat along the entire migratory route. Stay tuned for future stories from the field!

- Lenny Bankester

Jerry Thornhill – In Memory

Jerry Thornhill of southwestern Virginia passed away on July 4. Jerry, who was an avid birdwatcher and served on the VSO Board of Directors from 2011 through 2014, was a member of both the Russell County Bird Club and the Buchanan County Bird Club, and Past President of the former. His love of birds led him to do programs on birds for schools and Boy Scout groups. He worked with the scouts to give birding programs for younger scouts to earn merit badges, and with the older scouts by teaching them to make bluebird houses. In 2012 he did a class for the summer school program at Elk Garden School.

Regardless of where the VSO held its Board of Director meetings, many of which were a day's journey for him, Jerry was always there, driving further than anyone else on the Board. He also frequently attended VSO's field trips, and contributed extensively at both VSO's meetings and the many field trips he attended.

The birding community has lost a valued friend.



BREEDING BIRD ATLAS UPDATE

As the first breeding season of VABBA2 concluded, atlas volunteers shifted their birding checklists back into the 'regular' eBird portal as breeding observations dwindled and migrants arrived to muddy the waters. For the 436 volunteers who contributed data to the Atlas project in 2016, this may have been a strange transition after immersing in the world of breeding codes and behavioral observations for months. These dedicated folks contributed nearly 14,000 eBird checklists and 10,000+ hours of field observation to this project from late March through August. Nearly 50% of Atlas Priority blocks received data and 174 species were confirmed breeding statewide. Citizen science efforts like the VABBA2 offer a chance for birders to take an active role in bird conservation. These numbers show that many of Virginia's birders embraced this role, despite learning curves and project growing pains, to help make this first year a resounding success.

Thanks so much to the many birders who contributed their valuable time and energy to this project. We can't wait to see what we can accomplish next year! Please stay tuned via the Atlas Facebook page (facebook.com/vabba2), eBird portal (ebird.org/atlasva) and website (vabba2.org) for important announcements about workshops, events, and project updates.

- Ashley Peele

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- Contributing Membership \$60
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I would like to make an additional donation to:

- \$ _____ VSO Conservation Fund
- \$ _____ American Kestrel Nest Box Project
- \$ _____ Breeding Bird Atlas 2 Project
- \$ _____ VSO General Fund
- \$ _____ Endowment Fund
- \$ _____ Murray Award Fund

If you have been an "Active" or "Family" member in the past, please consider renewing at the "Sustaining" level" or the "Contributing" level - or becoming a Life Member!

VSO Sales Items

- _____ Virginia's Birdlife: An Annotated Checklist \$20
- _____ VSO Arm Patch \$4
- _____ VSO Cloisonne Pin \$5

Please return this form with your check, payable to the VSO, to:

VSO
PO Box 5994
Williamsburg, VA 23188-5994

You may also join, renew, and purchase items online at [www. Virginiabirds.org](http://www.Virginiabirds.org)