VIRGINIA SOCIETY OF ORNITHOLOGY ANNUAL MEETING
and
DISMAL SWAMP BIRDING FESTIVAL
April 29-May 1, 2022

Bob Ake, Cape Henry Audubon Society

For the first time in three years the VSO is sponsoring an Annual Meeting. The Cape Henry Audubon Society and the Great Dismal Swamp NWR are planning a modified VSO Annual Meeting and Dismal Swamp Birding Festival the weekend of April 29-May 1, 2022. Events such as the banquet, vendor sales, and local chapter displays will have to wait until the shadow of covid has passed. The business meeting, research paper presentations, and a program speaker will be held virtually a few days ahead of the weekend field trips.

Headquarters for the weekend: Hilton Garden Inn Suffolk Riverfront, 100 E. Constance Road, Suffolk VA23434. Room reservations can be made by phone at 757-925-1300. Please specify that you are a part of Virginia Society of Ornithology – Great Dismal Swamp group when making reservations to guarantee the discounted rate of $89 per room, which will be available until March 29, 2022.

Field trips: Offered Friday, Saturday, and Sunday morning to Jericho Ditch, Washington Ditch, and Railroad Ditch, all prime areas of the Great Dismal Swamp NWR. The birds expected to be seen are essentially the same on these three routes. Jericho and Washington Ditches are bird walks of up to three miles total. The Railroad Ditch route is by car with frequent birding stops along the way. Reservations are required since space is limited.

Information for afternoon birding will be available to guide birders to sites such as Back Bay NWR, First Landing State Park, and Pleasure House Point Natural Area in Virginia Beach. Information about birding sites in Chesapeake like the Dismal Swamp Canal Trail and the Northwest River Park will also be available. The Dismal Swamp Birding Festival will schedule additional trips and activities on Saturday which will be available for registration.
Social session: On Saturday afternoon weather permitting a Meet and Greet session with a cash bar will be held on the patio of the hotel. Participants will have the opportunity to share birding experiences from the weekend.

Meals: There will not be a banquet or any group meals during the meeting. Meals will be on your own. The hotel has a restaurant whose status for meals during the meeting is not currently confirmed, but it will not be open early enough for a served breakfast prior to departures to the field trip sites.

Virtual events: To participate via ZOOM in the VSO virtual events listed below, you will need to register on the VSO website. Just one registration is all that’s needed to receive the links for any of the three virtual events.

Annual Meeting and Great Dismal Swamp Festival
Calendar of Events - April 26 – May 1, 2022

Tuesday, April 26
7:00pm (Virtual) Speaker – Dr. Jerry Via, a favorite presenter and field trip leader, will give a presentation that includes an introduction to the birds of the Dismal Swamp.

Wednesday, April 27
3:00-4:00pm (Virtual) Business Meeting
4:00-6:00pm (Virtual) Research paper presentations

Friday, April 29, continued
2:00-6:00pm Afternoon field trips – on your own – web information available

Saturday, April 30 - Dismal Swamp Birding Festival (official day)
7:00am-noon Morning field trips – GDS NWR
7:00am-5:00pm Festival activities – GDS NWR
2:00-5:00pm Afternoon field trips – on your own – web information available
5:00-6:00pm Meet and Greet – Hilton Inn, north patio

Sunday, May 1
7:00am-noon Morning field trips – GDS NWR

Registration

Register for the VSO Annual Meeting here:
https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/HwRyO4yCFliBKNXFwUtzxQ

NOTE: Each individual should register separately. One individual cannot reserve multiple spaces for field trips!

Register for Great Dismal Swamp Festival events here:
https://www.fws.gov/event/great-dismal-swamp-birding-festival
President’s message

Terri Cuthriell, VSO President

In the last newsletter I shared with you my hope that VSO can strengthen our organization by increasing membership and volunteerism to support avian conservation efforts across the state. And the 2022 Annual Meeting will be a great opportunity for the Covid-weary among us to do some person-to-person networking!

Board member Guy Babineau and I have been sending via email our good wishes and requests for input from the VSO affiliated clubs. We’re hoping you’ll join us on a virtual “VSO Network Gathering” of club representatives before the annual meeting so we can hear your thoughts about what’s going well with VSO and what we can do to support our affiliates more effectively. (More information on our virtual “VSO Network Gathering” will be coming in a few weeks via email to club presidents.)

We also want to meet club representatives and everyone else who’s eager to support the VSO mission in person at the annual meeting (see front page). VSO board members are looking forward to sharing fellowship time with you and the joys of spring birds!

Thank you! Terri

VSO Announces Conservation Awards

Patti Reum, Conservation Committee Chair

I am happy to say that this year we received four applications for conservation grants. Conservation grants are very important to our mission and essential for avian researchers in Virginia. The VSO Board decided at its February meeting to increase our budget so that we could fully fund all four of these applications.

Here is a summary of the research projects and the budget requested:

Joe DiLiberto, William and Mary. “Full” Metal Sparrow: Examining the effects of sublethal lead on ecologically-important behaviors in a commensal songbird.” $1,000

Using a human-commensal species, the House Sparrow, as a model, the study will assess how Pb contamination may affect Virginia’s avifauna in terms of behavior, such as conspecific aggression, and escape flight behaviors. The budget will be spent on assay kits, and other lab materials. William and Mary has all the necessary permits to use House Sparrows for research and capture and house the birds.

Sami Livingston and Ashley Dayer, Virginia Tech. “Developing Evidence-based Messages to Strategically Reduce Human Disturbance of Shorebirds.” $1,000

These researchers plan to use message framing (process of designing a message with the goal of shaping, changing or reinforcing the response of the message recipients) to encourage dog walkers to leash their dogs on beaches in Virginia where birds rest, forage, nest and roost.

Ella DiPetto, Old Dominion University. “The effect of saltmarsh oyster restoration structures on avian diversity and behavior.” $1,000

Using three structures to simulate natural oyster beds, applicant will see if avian diversity and density are affected by structure type. Data will be collected by 5 cameras that cost $1,000, which is the full amount she requested from VSO.

Bert Harris, Clifton Institute. “The influence of land use and habitat structure on foraging decisions by American Kestrels.” $1,752

VSO funded this project last year to help purchase solar-powered GPS backpack transmitters to fit on female kestrels in Fauquier and Rappahannock counties. They successfully tracked 18 birds. They are currently analyzing home ranges to determine size, territorial interactions, and vegetation They are asking to fund a base station to download data from GPS transmitters.
The Heart of the Atlas: Species Accounts

Dixie Sommers, VSO Newsletter Editor

When the 2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas website is published, you will undoubtedly notice that most of the content is devoted to the species accounts for the state’s 200 or so breeding species. So, what is a “species account”?

The North American Ornithological Atlas Committee Handbook gives us a concise answer:

“...breeding evidence and other maps and species accounts are the mainstays of the atlas publication. The maps and species accounts summarize concisely each species’ breeding distribution and abundance, as well as information on changes over time, in the case of repeat atlases.”

The VABBA2 Final Products Committee has outlined the species accounts. Each account will have a set of graphic items - maps, tables, charts and photos – and a narrative providing expert and clear interpretation of Atlas results, using a writing style accessible to the general reader.

Maps, tables, charts and photos

Maps are perhaps the most important part of any species account. We will present maps showing the geographic distribution of the breeding species across Virginia documented in the 1st and 2nd Atlases, and the change in geographic distribution between the 1st and 2nd Atlases, i.e., between 1985-1989 and 2016-2020. We also will show a population density map for species where the data are sufficient. The website format will allow the user to zoom in on each map to see the details.

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources describes the importance of the geographic distribution maps:

“Comparing the two Atlases will shed light on changes in distribution for individual species over the past 30 years. Although programs such as the North American Breeding Bird Survey already tell us how bird populations have changed over time, maps produced through the Atlas will indicate where these population changes have unfolded on the landscape. By documenting where particular species are losing or gaining ground in the Commonwealth, we will be better positioned to identify where these species may benefit from conservation action.”


The map below from the Minnesota breeding bird atlas is an example of a geographic distribution map – in this case for Red-tailed Hawk. Virginia maps are not yet available.

The population density maps will visually show where in Virginia the species populations are more or less abundant. See example from Ohio on the next page – Virginia maps are not yet available.

Population trend information will be shown in a timeline chart for species where the data are available. The species’ status in the Virginia Species of Greatest Conservation Concern will be listed, as will “breeding phenology” information - the typical dates for breeding, migration, and non-
breeding seasons for each of Virginia’s major eco-regions.

Each account will have a table showing the number of Atlas survey blocks by breeding status, i.e., the number of blocks where breeding was possible, probable or confirmed. Survey blocks are the basic geographic unit of the Atlas, with the state organized into a grid comprised of blocks of about 9 square miles each. Breeding status is based on observations of breeding activity recorded by the Atlas field surveyors, such as nest building, carrying nesting material or adult birds feeding young.

Each species account will include a high-quality photo of the species. We expect to use photos taken by Virginia birders! If you are a photographer, watch for our photo request sometime in 2023.

**Species Account Narrative**

The species account narrative will present basic information about the species in Virginia, and interpret the results shown in the maps, tables and charts: breeding distribution and how the distribution has changed (or not) between the 1st and 2nd Atlases, population trends and abundance in the state, Virginia-specific information on the type of habitat associated with the species, and more.

This narrative will focus on and interpret Atlas results rather than be a general reference about the species. General discussions can readily be found in other sources, such as Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology’s *All About Birds*.

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**How You Can Help the VABBA2!**

- Help the VSO fund our part of the final Atlas by donating on-line at [www.virginiabirds.org](http://www.virginiabirds.org) or by mail to VSO, P.O. Box 5994, Williamsburg, VA 23188-5994. Thank you!
- Volunteer to help us raise funds for the Atlas! Email to [VSOAtlas@gmail.com](mailto:VSOAtlas@gmail.com)
- Let us know your questions and comments by email to [VSOAtlas@gmail.com](mailto:VSOAtlas@gmail.com)
- Receive e-mail atlas updates from DWR by subscribing at [https://dwr.virginia.gov/atlas-updates/](https://dwr.virginia.gov/atlas-updates/)

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VSO Summer Field Trip to Blacksburg

June 17-19, 2022

Meredith Bell, VSO Field Trips Co-chair

The New River Valley Bird Club will host the VSO summer field trip June 17-19, 2022, featuring some of the best birding areas in the New River Valley and Southern Appalachians. The varied topography and the river valley offer a wide variety of habitats and bird species.

Field trips will be offered Friday afternoon, all day Saturday, and Sunday morning. Bill Akers and Jerry Via will be our trip leaders, and they are organizing some terrific activities for us!

COVID GUIDELINES

VSO is committed to ensuring the health and safety of all participants. We encourage every participant to be vaccinated, if at all possible. By registering for this event, you agree to abide by all guidance provided by the CDC, individual field trip leaders and local businesses.

VERY Important! All VSO field trips are open to members at no charge. If you have not renewed your dues for 2022 or have not joined yet, you can RENEW or JOIN here!
https://www.virginiabirds.org/join-renew

TRIP REGISTRATION

Please register online HERE.
https://bit.ly/3CkpCQ7 Provide the names of participants in your party with each person's

telephone number and email address so we can contact you as needed. If you have any questions, contact Meredith Bell, trip coordinator, at merandlee@gmail.com or 804-824-4958.

HEADQUARTERS

Holiday Inn Express and Suites Blacksburg is the host hotel (1020 Plantation Road, Blacksburg, VA 24060). Room rate for the VSO block of rooms on Friday and Saturday nights is $129/night (plus tax) for single or double. Double and King beds are available, and some suites have pull-out beds. For those arriving a day early or staying an extra day, the rate for Thursday and Sunday nights is $99/night (plus tax). There are microwaves and refrigerators in all rooms. Register by Friday, MAY 16, to get the special rate and state you’re with VSO when you call: (540) 552-0900.

MEALS

A complimentary hot breakfast buffet is included with your stay. You’ll need to bring lunch for Saturday. (There’s a convenience store next to the hotel.) Dinners are on your own. There are many excellent restaurants in Blacksburg.
SCHEDULE

MONDAY, JUNE 13

We’ll hold a Zoom video call to overview the weekend and have a presentation by Jerry Via. We’ll record the call and send a link for the recording to all registrants afterwards.

FRIDAY PM, JUNE 17 - UVA Biological Station and Mountain Lake Lodge area (approximately 35-minute drive)

We’ll start at the UVA Biological Station at Mountain Lake, where target birds include Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Blackburnian Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, and Black-capped Chickadee. From there we’ll go to an area of rhododendrons near Mountain Lake Lodge, where we’ll look for Canada and Black-throated Blue Warblers.

SATURDAY, JUNE 18

AM - Glen Alton and Kelly Flats (approximately 45-minute drive)

This is a full day trip, so be sure to bring lunch, snacks and beverages. Once at our destination, we will divide into smaller groups and alternate visits to both areas.

Glen Alton is an estate now owned by the Jefferson National Forest. It is unusual because the elevation is 2,600 feet, but some of the birds there are normally found at much higher elevations. There are many beautiful trails along a stream, fish ponds and beaver pond. The walking is level and easy. Specialties include Blackburnian Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Northern Parula, Blue-headed Vireo and Brown Creeper.

Kelly Flats includes a small bog and a walk along a fire road. This trail requires walking up a hill, but we’ll cover it at a slow pace. Highlights will be Red-breasted Nuthatch, Scarlet Tanager, Acadian Flycatcher and singing Hermit Thrush.

PM - We’ll visit other areas in the New River Valley in search of species like Golden-winged, Hooded and Kentucky Warblers.

6:00 PM - Tally of species, 1st floor hotel conference room

Dinner on your own

SUNDAY AM, JUNE 19

Plans are still being finalized for the specific destinations Sunday morning.

If you have any questions, contact field trip coordinator Meredith Bell at (804) 824-4958 or merandlee@gmail.com.
The VSO field trip to the Outer Banks February 4-6, 2022, was a huge success for a number of reasons. We had a record number of registrants (115!), and we were able to have safe, fun field trips in spite of COVID-19. And we had no rain, which is always a plus! We found a total of 145 species over the weekend.

Thanks to our field trip leaders who made sure everyone got to see as many species as possible: Bill Akers, Jerry Via, Lee Adams, Sally Knight, Brenda Chase, and Meredith and Lee Bell.

A very special thanks goes to Jerry Via who spent many hours preparing an excellent presentation for our pre-trip Zoom call. All the tips he gave us for identifying species when perched and in flight were valuable references over the weekend.

As always, we had surprises in addition to the “regulars.” Highlights included:

- Blue-headed Vireo, Black & White Warbler and Fox Sparrow at Lake Mattamuskeet
- Vesper Sparrow, Virginia Rail and Sora at Bodie Lighthouse
- Sandhill Crane, Golden Eagle, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Orange-crowned Warbler, Rough-legged Hawk and American Woodcock at Alligator River NWR
- Common Gallinule and Ross’s Goose at Pea Island Visitor Center
- American Pipit at Oregon Inlet Fishing Center
- White-crowned Sparrow at Oregon Inlet Campground

With the strong NE winds on Saturday, Jennette’s Pier was a challenge! Ocean birds were in short supply compared to other years, but we did have excellent views of Northern Gannet, some Black and Surf Scoters, Common and Red-throated Loons, and Forster and Common Terns. A few lucky participants spotted Razorbills in flight as they viewed birds from the warmth of their hotel rooms.

Most abundant duck of the weekend by far was Northern Pintail. We saw 100s at Pea Island Visitor Center and Alligator River NWR (when scoping ARNWR on Thursday, Meredith estimated more than 1,200 in the impoundments on Sawyer Lake Rd).

We’ve already booked the Comfort Inn South Nags Head for February 3-5, 2023. Mark your calendar now, and plan to join us.

The complete list of 145 species from the Outer Banks weekend starts on the next page.
Snow Goose
Ross’s Goose
Canada Goose
Tundra Swan
Wood Duck
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Gadwall
American Wigeon
Mallard
American Black Duck
Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal
Eurasian/Common Teal
Redhead

Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
Surf Scoter
White-winged Scoter
Black Scoter
Bufflehead
Hooded Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Wild Turkey
Pied-billed Grebe
Horned Grebe
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Clapper Rail

Virginia Rail
Sora
Common Gallinule
American Coot
Sandhill Crane
American Avocet
American Oystercatcher
Black-bellied Plover
Killdeer
Semipalmated Plover
Marbled Godwit
Ruddy Turnstone
Sanderling
Dunlin
Western Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher
American Woodcock
Wilson's Snipe
Lesser Yellowlegs
Willet
Greater Yellowlegs
Razorbill
Bonaparte's Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Common Tern
Forster’s Tern
Royal Tern
Red-throated Loon
Common Loon
Northern Gannet
Double-crested Cormorant
American White Pelican
Brown Pelican
American Bittern
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Blue Heron
Tricolored Heron
Black-crowned Night-Heron
White Ibis
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Golden Eagle
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk

VSO members viewing Ash-throated Flycatcher at Alligator River NWR.
Photo by-Cathy Williamson
Cooper’s Hawk
Bald Eagle
Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Rough-legged Hawk
Short-eared Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
American Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Ash-throated Flycatcher
Eastern Phoebe
Blue-headed Vireo
Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow
Tree Swallow
Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Brown-headed Nuthatch

Brown Creeper
Winter Wren
Marsh Wren
Carolina Wren
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird

Hermit Thrush
American Robin
Gray Catbird
Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
Cedar Waxwing
House Sparrow
American Pipit
House Finch
American Goldfinch
Fox Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
Eastern Towhee
Eastern Meadowlark
Red-winged Blackbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Common Grackle
Boat-tailed Grackle
Black-and-white Warbler
Orange-crowned Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
Palm Warbler
Pine Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Northern Cardinal

Ash-throated Flycatcher. Photo by Seth Honig

Snow Geese in flight. Photo by Don Alexander
The “Gold Book” is getting an update

Many Virginia birders and ornithologists use Virginia’s Birdlife, an Annotated Checklist, fondly known as the “gold book” for the bright yellow cover of the fourth edition. This most recent edition, published by the VSO in 2007, is showing its age.

The team of Bill Williams, Bob Ake, John Spahr, Todd Day, and Matt Anthony is working on the update, expected to be completed in spring 2023. At its February meeting, the VSO Board gave its support to the update project.

The first comprehensive annotated checklist of Virginia birds was compiled in 1952 by Joseph J. Murray and published by the Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO). The second edition, edited by YuLee Larner and published in 1979, updated Murray’s 1952 checklist, describing the occurrence of 400 species in the state and giving contemporary birders a standard by which the significance of their sightings could be measured.

Birders began to take note of records that “beat the book,” and soon thereafter, the state’s ornithological record had been augmented to the extent that another update was necessary. Under Teta Kain’s editorship, the third edition of the annotated checklist, covering 411 species, was published in 1987.

The fourth edition, edited by Stephen C. Rottenborn and the late Edward Brinkley, updated the summary of Virginia’s avifauna, addressing the occurrence of 466 species in the state.

NEW VSO MEMBERS – DECEMBER 2021-FEBRUARY 2022

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| Joette Borzik, Jamesville, VA      | Lynne Parks, Staunton, VA               |
| Arun Bose, Richmond, VA            | Theresa B. Proenza, Mollusk, VA         |
| Moira B. Croghan, Richmond, VA     | Samuel R. Sellard, Melfa, VA            |
| Carla DeMasters, Centennial, CO    | Kimberly Smart, Durham, NC              |
| Thomas Detmer, Henrico, VA         | Julie Smith, Charlottesville, VA        |
| Rebecca Fales, Gordonsville, VA    | Maggie Steinhilper, Leesburg, VA        |
| Grayson Harlow, Scottsville, VA    | Katie Tiedge, King George, VA           |
| Madaline Harrison, Charlottesville, VA | Laura Viancour, Williamsburg, VA    |
| Lucy Hartley, Charlottesville, VA  | Elizabeth W. Wade, Richmond, VA         |
| Katherine Hoffman, Roanoke, VA     | Annette Whitlow, Moseley, VA            |
| Elizabeth E. Lyons, Arlington, VA  | Andrew Wilson, Scottsville, VA          |

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| Secretary: Phil Kenny      | Newsletter Editor: Dixie Sommers      |
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|                           | Raven Co-editors: John & Jennifer Styrsky |

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Your support means so much to the success of the VSO. Thank you!

vsonmembershipline.com

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2022 VSO Membership Renewal