

# OAK LEAF

A Newsletter for Members and Friends of the Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society

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## MIGRATORY BIRDS IN YOUR BACKYARD

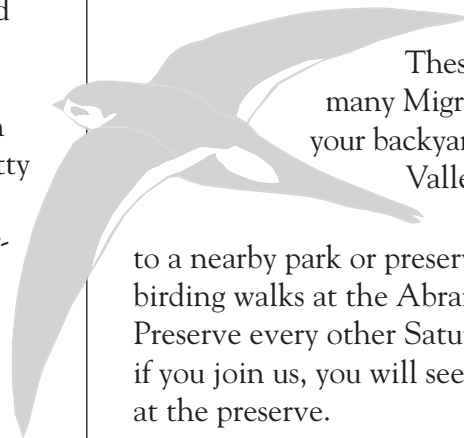
By Gabriel Ricketts

*Each year millions of birds fly thousands of miles back and forth from Central and South America to the United States and Canada, and back again. Did you know, that some of these birds, can be seen in your own backyard? This article, will tell you about some of the Migratory Birds you may see in your backyard here in the Shenandoah Valley.*

The Shenandoah Valley is rich in avian biodiversity, and from mid-April until October a common bird you may see zipping around above the rooftops, is the Chimney Swift. The Chimney Swift is a small bird, not very colorful, and looks like a flying cigar with long, thin, pointy wings. They usually are found in flocks, and in the evening, you can sometimes see large swirling, twittering flocks of these birds, circling an open chimney. The flock will get larger and larger, and after about an hour (or more), they will all funnel down into the chimney, and vanish for the night. The Chimney Swift winters throughout most of Northern South America. Sadly, the Chimney Swift is declining throughout most of its range, most likely due to changes in the abundance of their prey.

Another Migratory Bird you may see in your backyard is the colorful Indigo Bunting. The breeding plumage of a male Indigo Bunting, a sparrow sized bird, is deep blue all over, and in the right light, can be startlingly beautiful. The Female Indigo Bunting is light brown, with a little bit of blue on the wings. The Indigo Bunting, can be found pretty commonly in woodland edges, power line cuts, and most open, grassy areas, with a few trees nearby. They can also be seen at your bird feeder, and can add a pretty splash of color to your backyard. The Indigo Bunting has a cheery song, that can be heard, even in the hottest part of the day. The Indigo Bunting winters in Central America, the Caribbean, and some in South Florida.

Another colorful, widely known, Migratory Bird you can see in your own backyard, is the Baltimore Oriole. This beautiful bird, with the males rich, orange, and black plumage, can be found in a variety of habitats, including suburban parks, forest edges, scrubby fields, and, anywhere, that has enough trees, a suitable food supply, and a good place to nest. The female Baltimore Oriole, is less colorful than the male, and is normally a pale orange to deep yellow color, with a little bit of gray and black around the head and wings. The Baltimore Oriole is attracted to orange slices and grape jelly, and with these two ingredients you may very well attract them to your backyard, out of the tree tops for a closer look. The Baltimore Oriole winters mostly in Central, and Northern South America, and some individuals winter in the southeastern states. The Baltimore Oriole has a rich, melodious song, and can generally be heard in the spring and summer.



These are just a couple of the many Migratory Birds you can see in your backyard here in the Shenandoah Valley. To see even more birds, consider taking a field trip

to a nearby park or preserve. The NSVAS leads birding walks at the Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve every other Saturday and I can tell you, if you join us, you will see some pretty cool birds at the preserve.



# Coyotes in Virginia

By Margaret Wester

I recently attended a VDGIF lecture on coyotes in Virginia. The main theme was that coyotes are here to stay, and we need to learn ways to co-exist with them to reduce human conflicts. They are designated as a nuisance animal with an open season on private lands by the VDGIF. This is mostly due to reported predation on livestock and pets, sightings, presumed impacts on other wildlife and fear. There is much we can do to prevent these conflicts if we learn more about these animals and their ways.

Their historical range in pre-settlement times was the center of our continent in the prairies. By 1900 they had expanded their range North to Alaska and to the South and West. After 1900, they started moving East around the Great Lakes area and South across the Mississippi River heading East and North. This was due to the elimination of wolves by settlers and the habitat changes from woodland to open and brushy areas due to logging and agricultural development that also increased the food supply of domestic animals and deer. Wolves are highly competitive with coyotes and will prey upon them, so with their elimination by humans, it opened the way for coyotes.

Coyotes entered Virginia to the South and West in the late 1970's. By the 1980's they came in from the North and as their population increased, they are now found in every county in Virginia, even the coastal areas. They are very adaptable and are found in cities and suburbs as well as rural areas. They are very prolific and have a short gestation period typically giving birth to 5 – 6 pups. They control their own population by reducing reproduction when food supplies are low or other conditions are not favorable. However, 150 plus years of intense hunting and bounties to eliminate them has failed to reduce their numbers as they have density dependent reproduction. If they lose large numbers, they replace them with increased litter sizes, earlier mating and a high survival rate of the young. Thus, the saying, "coyotes are here to stay".

Their actual impact on livestock loss is little compared to their population. Their preferred food is small mammals such as mice, voles, rabbits, squirrels

or groundhogs. In times of stress they may also eat some insects such as grasshoppers and fruit. They may take an occasional fawn, but they rarely hunt in packs for big game like deer, so the impact on the deer population in most areas of the state is minimal. A negative effect on red foxes is also rare as foxes avoid coyotes as they are territorial competitors.

There are some positive aspects of the effects of coyotes. They are a benefit to ground nesting birds because they prey upon the predators of these birds, such as raccoons, possums and skunks. Urban coyotes' prey upon rats and squirrels and not garbage cans as popularly thought. A suburban property owner may be pleased that a coyote has taken the groundhog that was making tunnels all over their yard and rabbits eating their flowers. They reduce the population of free roaming feral cats thereby increasing songbird nesting success. They help control Canada geese that make a mess in our parks.

Coyotes are largely nocturnal and prefer to avoid human contact, like most wildlife. However, they may sometimes be seen during the day, but that does not indicate it has rabies.

If you do encounter a coyote, do not run, but make noise, yell, wave your arms or throw something like a stick or rock and they should leave. If you encounter a fearless or aggressive coyote, it should be reported to VDGIF or USDA Wildlife Services.

However, you can avoid encounters by following a few simple rules:

- **Do not feed or put food sources outdoors**
- **Keep trash indoors**
- **Don't feed pets outside**
- **Keep cats indoors**
- **Don't feed feral cats**
- **Keep dogs leashed**
- **Remove fallen fruit around trees**
- **Stop wildlife feeding**

## **Coyotes continued**

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I know we all love to watch our birds as they come to our feeders, but any food source in your yard may attract coyotes. Fallen seeds attracts small mammals that in turn attracts coyotes. So, if you feel at risk, you may want to limit or eliminate bird feeding. Some tips for farmers with livestock recommended by VDGIF:

- **Improve fencing**
- **Confinement of livestock at night**
- **Disposal of dead stock**
- **Human presence and novelties, as in moving things around**
- **Guard animals (large dogs, llamas, donkeys)**
- **Strobe lights, sirens or propane canons**

If you have problems with coyotes, you can call the Virginia Wildlife Conflict Helpline at: 1-855-571-9003

To wrap it up I will quote from the VDGIF brochure: "Developing a better understanding of coyote ecology and behavior helps reduce coyote conflicts and increases chances of a successful coexistence."

These intelligent animals deserve our respect and hopefully, in time, they will be removed from the "nuisance animal" category.



# **Membership News**

*by Dave Berger*

*We would like to welcome the following new members:*

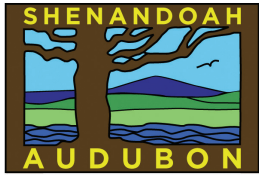
Lovell Allen and Mary Lou Witt  
Sara and David Bicking  
Robert Burke  
Susan Burke  
John Cannon and Sharon Fisher  
Steven Carroll  
June and Roy Cooper  
Ryan David Cress  
Richard and Jan Christoph  
Richard Kortum and Theresa Markiw  
Jim and Sue Lawrence  
William Rice Matthews  
Eric and Nancy B. Melkerson  
Vicki Meyers-Wallen  
Judith Roop  
Erik and Kathy Rosa  
William Stevenson  
Timothy and Deborah Teates  
Jeanette Winget

All memberships (new and renewed memberships) will be valid for one year beginning on the date that membership payments are received. Individual membership time-frames will be specified in thank you letters sent to new and renewed members upon receipt of membership payments. The membership form is included in this and all newsletters. The membership form is also available on our website at [www.audubon-nsvas.org](http://www.audubon-nsvas.org).

We welcome all new and renewed members to our chapter. It is our hope and desire to continue the efforts of our chapter and further our goal to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats, for the benefit of humanity and the Earth's biological diversity.

***Thank you for your contributions and efforts toward achieving our goal.***





P.O. Box 2693  
Winchester, VA 22604

 For upcoming programs, visit our Facebook page or our website: [www.audubon-nsvs.org](http://www.audubon-nsvs.org)

## TEAMING UP ONCE AGAIN

*by Kaycee Lichliter*



In anticipation of the arrival of spring and the upcoming Bluebird trail monitoring activity, once again Shenandoah Audubon's Blandy Experimental Farm Trail Manager Ms. Kaycee Lichliter and Sky Meadows State Park Bluebird Trail Manager Ms. Margaret Wester teamed up to teach their annual trail technician workshops. Meeting on Wednesday evening, March 6, and Saturday morning, March 9, the Blandy Library was buzzing with excitement as 57 volunteers, both new and returning to the project, met to learn and review species, nests, and egg identification, safe monitoring protocol, and systematic data collection and documentation practices.

### ***Trained Trail Technicians for Year 2019:***

Judy Aaron	Carol Dennis	Marie Majorov	Steven Rooker
Roger Aaron	Robert Edmonds	Milan Majorov	Keith Ruffner
Tammy Batcha	Karen Fall	Dennis McLoughlin	Angela Schwarzkopf
Linda Bender	Cheryl Ferguson	Mary Carolynn	Diane Sheehey
Judi Booker	Ed Ferguson	McLoughlin	Kathy Simmons
David Borger	Susan Galbraith	Andy Miller	Jenny Swaner
Juli Bowers	Bob Hearn	Margie Miller	Deb Teates
Rose Breece	John Hickerson	Doug Morris	Tim Teates
Jill Butler	Mary Ann Kirkpatrick	Ramona Morris	Edwin Tobias
Kasey Clark	Diane Krumme	Alex Newhart	Madeleine Tobias
Luciana Codella	Lucinda Lentz	Jessica Oplak	Laure Wallace
Glenny Comer	Chris Lewis	Shayla Ortell	Margaret Wester
Dana Crone	Kaycee Lichliter	Phyllis Partain	Jim Wilcox
Leah DeLong	Pam Luttrell	Joanne Ridings	Jim Windmiller
		Janet Rigoni	Zita Zduoba

***Shenandoah Audubon wishes all trail participants  
a safe and enjoyable monitoring season!***



# Cool Springs Bird Walk

By Dave Borger

On Saturday, March 23, Jim Smith lead a morning bird walk at Cool Springs, along Virginia's northernmost stretch of the Shenandoah River. As the participating group of nine assembled in the parking area, the wind made the early spring temperature feel more like winter. Eagerly bundled against the wind, we set out for our morning observations, heading northward along the riverside leg of that loop. That path would provide the most adventitious view of the Great Blue Heron rookery (nesting sight) on an island across the river.

Over the course of the next two and a half hours, the following species were observed:

- Song Sparrow
- Bald Eagle (*juvenile perched and adult on a nest*)
- Field Sparrow
- American Goldfinch
- Golden Crowned Kinglet
- Carolina Chickadee
- Wood Duck
- Common Merganser
- Great Blue Heron (*15+ building nests within the rookery across the river, most of which were occupied by nest-building adults*)
- Eastern Bluebird
- Tufted Titmouse
- Double-crested Cormorant
- Hawk (Buteo)
- Eastern Phoebe
- Carolina Wren
- Winter Wren
- Northern Flicker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Mallard
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Tree Swallow
- American Robin
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- White-throated Sparrow
- Mourning Dove

Join us throughout the year for fun and informative nature walks at Abrams Creek and Cool Springs.



©Photo credit Kaycee Lichliter

The group felt this outing was a more than worthwhile excursion. Observations were made by many, and all welcomed the input shared by those participating. Especially enlightening was Jim Smith's interpretation of various species along the way.

The NSVAS would like to recommend Cool Springs as a place for birders to explore, as it provides safe, varied habitat for a number of bird species. Our thanks to Shenandoah University for providing the conservation of and access to this diverse habitat free of charge. Conservation efforts by such institutions should be appreciated, encouraged and supported. It is and will likely continue to be part of a greater multi-pronged approach to conservation in the future.



# Buy a Bluebird Box

Your purchase supports Shenandoah Audubon

Are you interested in adding housing for the native, cavity-nesting birds in your backyard or garden? Shenandoah Audubon currently has available cedar Bluebird nest boxes beautifully handcrafted by our member, Mr. Chris Lewis. These boxes are the same design as the boxes used on our bluebird trails. Constructed using the safest, most preferred specifications, these boxes will happily accommodate many of our native cavity nesters. The perfect gift for a fellow nature lover!



### Suggested Donation:

- Bluebird House \$35
- Predator guard, pole and hardware \$30
- Bluebird house, predator guard, pole and hardware (entire setup) \$55

For more information or to make a purchase, please contact Kaycee Lichliter at: [kayceelichliter@hotmail.com](mailto:kayceelichliter@hotmail.com)

# Thank You!

Shenandoah Audubon would like to thank Mr. Chuck Atkinson of Advanced Graphics, Winchester, Virginia for creating and donating the plaque which has been affixed to the Purple Martin Colony crossing sign post at Blandy Experimental Farm.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS OFFICERS

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 markbruns3@gmail.com



# SUPPORT US

*Together we can promote conservation and appreciation of this beautiful place we call home.*

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

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New Memberships, Renewals and Donation payments may be made with PayPal at our website: [www.audubon-nsvas.org](http://www.audubon-nsvas.org)

Is your payment a RENEWAL or a NEW MEMBERSHIP? (Please circle one.)

MEMBERSHIP ( 1 YEAR) \$15.00  
(Membership is good for one year beginning the date payment is received.)

ADDITIONAL DONATION \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL ENCLOSED \_\_\_\_\_

CHECK NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

Kindly remit payment to:

**Shenandoah Audubon**  
**c/o Kaycee Lichliter, Treasurer**  
**1346 Sulphur Springs Road**  
**Middletown, VA 22645**

Shenandoah Audubon is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Membership dues and donations help support local Bluebird trails at Blandy Experimental Farm and Shenandoah River State Park, the Purple Martin Colony at the Virginia State Arboretum, the annual Christmas Bird Count, as well as educational programs and student scholarships. **Thank you for your support.**