

OAK LEAF

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

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NO. 2

2021 NSVAS Annual Report

I am happy to say that, although things have not returned to complete pre-pandemic normalcy, many of the activities this chapter has performed in the past have returned, at least in part. Activities, projects, programs and online media continue to grow and expand, with help from the dedicated members, as well as non-members, who work hard to contribute to these successes. I thank the board members for their tireless efforts to continue moving the organization toward our collective goals.

The four Bluebird trails sponsored by this chapter were able to return to some semblance of normal monitoring this past season.

- The Shenandoah Audubon Bluebird Trail at Andy Guest State Park in Warren County, where there is a total of 77 nest boxes, 213 Eastern Bluebirds (EABL) fledged, 193 Tree Swallows (TRES) fledged and 30 House Wrens (HOWR) fledged. Thanks to Lee Bowen and the monitors at the park for keeping this trail going.
- The Shenandoah Audubon Bluebird Trail at Blandy Experimental Farm in Clarke County, has a total of 132 nest boxes. Monitoring there gathered data that showed 436 EABL, 385 TRES and 27 HOWR fledglings. A unique phenomenon also occurred at this Bluebird trail. In July, a Red-headed Woodpecker (RHWO) breeding pair enlarged the entrance hole on one of the nest boxes and laid 2 eggs on the nearly bare floor within the box. The box was observed from a distance until early August, by which time the RHWO activity at or around the box had ceased. Upon box inspection after activity had ceased, it appeared the nest had been predated by House Sparrows (HOSP) and the adult RHWO had evacuated the box. An unfortunate end to a very unique situation. Perhaps the RHWO will return next season. Thanks to Kaycee Lichliter and the monitors and other volunteers for a great season. To read the complete story about this nest event, please visit our website.
- This was the first season for the newly formed Shenandoah Audubon Bluebird Trail at Chet Hobert Park in Berryville, which has 10 nest boxes. This trail had 32 EABL and 21 TRES fledge. This was a great first year for a new Bluebird trail. Thanks to Margaret Wester as well as our partner, Chet Hobert Park, for making this first year a success.
- The Shenandoah Audubon Bluebird Trail at Belle Grove Plantation, in Frederick county, has 6 nest boxes. Unfortunately, an ongoing HOSP problem resulted in no EABL, TRES or HOWR fledglings occurring this season. Thanks to Kaycee Lichliter and Tammy Batcha for their continued efforts to help EABL and other cavity nesters gain a foothold here.

The NSVAS Purple Martin (PUMA) colony at Blandy Experimental Farm and State Arboretum currently consists of 4 rectangular and one octagonal PUMA houses as well as 4 gourd racks, which each hold 12 Purple Martin gourds. In total, there are 112 cavity nesting sites for these summer visitors. This past summer, as in previous years, visiting PUMA took up residence here. During this time, these birds could be observed

feeding on flying insects fairly high above the ground as well as perching on the poles of the colony. The colony is easily viewed from Blandy Farm Lane, just north of Lake Arnold at the arboretum. Plans for next year include erecting two more gourd racks with 12 gourds each, bringing the total nesting sites to 136. Thanks to Kaycee Lichliter and Ted Saunders for the regular upkeep of the colony.

The Audubon Arboretum, at Jim Barnett Park in Winchester, continued to have additional trees planted this past year. Recently, 8 trees were planted within the arboretum, including Dogwood, Red Maple, Service Berry, Swamp White Oak, Bur Oak and Overcup Oak. Additionally, a Virginia Pine and another Service Berry were planted this past year. The Sensory Trail, part of this arboretum, was dedicated this past fall. NSVAS partnered with the Lions Club of Winchester to plant over 30 trees with signs written in braille and regular text, sharing information with visitors of the 14 species represented there. The Winchester Parks and Recreation Department helped with the planting and regular maintenance of the arboretum, including the spreading of 10 cubic yards of mulch and 3.5 tons of planting mix. Plans for the spring include the addition of a Pollinator's Garden, with help from the Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardeners. This addition will include persimmon, viburnum and summersweet shrubs surrounding a perennial and annual garden to attract seasonal pollinators. Thanks to Jim Smith and the Winchester Parks and Recreation Department for the perpetuation of this arboretum. If you are interested in having a memorial tree planted within the arboretum call Jim Smith at (540) 303-3983.

The NSVAS was happy to help bring back two in-person programs this past fall. Mike Neese, from the City of Winchester, presented a timely and important program on recycling in October, in partnership with Trout Unlimited. In November, Jennifer Burghoffer from the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center in Boyce, presented an entertainingly informative program on the work they do at their local wildlife rehabilitation center. Thanks to both Mike and Jennifer for their time and energy in these crucial endeavors. Also, thanks to Mark Bruns for organizing these programs.

Our website, nsवादubon.org, continues to grow and offer event updates, articles, and past newsletters as well as information about local birding resources. Our Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society Facebook page offers event updates, photos and other relevant information. Thanks to Sharon Fisher for providing this information electronically.

As in years past, Jim Smith provided spring and fall bird walks at Abrams Creek. The Heron rookery walk at Shenandoah University River Campus at Cool Springs, in Clarke County, took place last March. It is our hope that these, and other bird walks, will continue in the upcoming year. Thanks to Jim Smith and Mark Bruns for coordinating these walks.

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President's Letter continued –

Although some of Audubon's 121st Christmas Bird Counts were canceled last year, the local Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society and Calmes Neck Christmas Bird Counts did successfully occur. Both of these bird counts will take place again this year. Thank you to Charlie Hagan, Larry Frey and Professor Rob Simpson for all of their work with last year's NSVAS Christmas Bird Count and to Margaret Wester for her work with Calmes Neck Christmas Bird Count.

Dates for the 2021-22 Christmas Bird Count have been scheduled. The local circles' dates are:

- *December 18 – NSVAS Christmas Bird Count*
- *January 2 – Calmes Neck Christmas Bird Count*

We at NSVAS remain committed to our mission, "to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats, for the benefit of humanity and Earth's biological diversity". We will continue to make every effort to bring programs, events and information to you so we may all work toward such a worthwhile end.

Please stay safe and well.

Sincerely,

Dave Borger, *President*
Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society

Rare Bird Report 2021

by Gabriel Ricketts

This is a compilation of all of the rare or unusual birds seen in our chapters region during the spring of 2021. This region includes Frederick, Clarke, Warren, Shenandoah, and Fauquier counties. A combination of highly varied habitats, bad weather and wind movements during spring migration can cause a lot of birds, particularly unusual ones, to show up in our area. All data here was gathered using the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird website. This report will be in taxonomic order and will list the date and location of all the sightings of a species.

WATERFOWL: Not too many rare species of waterfowl were seen this spring. Most of these are late birds that, for whatever reason, did not go north to the breeding grounds. This tends to happen with injured birds that cannot fly. But, a rather significant record is of a single Ross's Goose that showed up following some rain at Lake Frederick (Frederick co.) on the 7th of May. At this same date and location, an extremely late Cackling Goose was sighted flying over. Another late occurring Cackling Goose was seen at Seven Fountains Pond (Shenandoah co.) on April 19th. Other late waterfowl includes two Ring-necked Ducks and a Lesser Scaup all at Lake Holiday (Frederick) from the 9th of May to the 3rd of July. All of these birds were males. A male Redhead has been hanging out at Belvoir pond (Fauquier) seemingly since April 5th. Even as I write, this bird is still there. The last species of rare or late waterfowl this spring is a Red-breasted Merganser at Lake Frederick (Frederick). This bird is an injured female that probably was passing through the county with other Mergansers and then was injured while at Lake Frederick. This bird started being seen by itself on the 16th of May and was last reported on June 25th.

RAILS, GALLINULES, COOTS, CRANES: While not all that rare in Fauquier, Virginia Rails are listed as rare for the Valley counties. There were a couple reports from the area. One bird was at Abrams Creek Wetlands preserve (Frederick) on the 19th April. There was another one on the Whites Mill Trail (Fauquier) from on the 4th and 6th of April. Another slightly regular Rallid reported a good number of times

in our region this spring is the Sora. One bird was at Abrams Creek Wetlands preserve on the same day as the Virginia Rail. Another at Blandy Experimental farm/State arboretum (Clarke) on the 5th of May, another at Oxbow Farm (Warren) on the 11th of May, and one more at the Clifton Institute (Fauquier) on the 24th of April. A Sandhill Crane was found on Crest Hill rd on the 7th of May. The bird left the next day. The final bird in this segment is the Common Gallinule. One was recorded calling (confirmed by NFC experts) during a Nocturnal Flight Call count in Lake Holiday (Frederick) on the 23rd of April. Another was found at the Round Hill rd marsh on the 4th of May. One more was found in Fauquier on Hume rd. This bird was present from the 15th to the 24th of May.

GULLS AND TERNS: Not many rare gulls or Terns were seen this spring. The rarest probably being a Herring Gull present at Lake Holiday (Frederick) from the 7-8th of March. A few Caspian Terns were sighted throughout the area however. The first being a single bird at Warrenton reservoir (Fauquier) on the 19th of April. Another bird was at Lake Frederick (Frederick) on the 21st of April and then another bird on the 5th of May. Forster's Terns were seen in Frederick county. A high count of 4 birds were present at Lake Holiday on the 28th of March, a rather early occurrence, and the 3rd of May. Lake Frederick had one bird on the 24th of May.

LOONS: Only one rare loon was seen in our area this spring and that was the mega Pacific Loon found at Lake Holiday (Frederick) on the 24th of May. This was the first Frederick county and the first Shenandoah valley record. The bird was last seen on the 4th of June. Herons, Egrets, Bitterns, Ibis: Not many rare wading birds were seen in our area this spring. One that was found in our chapter area this spring was a flyover Glossy Ibis at Andy Guest Jr. Shenandoah River State park on the 19th of April. Unfortunately this bird was just a flyover. a Snowy Egret was found on Janes Ln. in Fauquier co. on the 16th of May. It was not seen the next day. Less significant was the slightly heightened occurrence of American Bittern at Blandy Experimental Farm/State Arboretum (Clarke). This species was seen (unclear as to if it was the same individual) on the 16th of April, 9th and 10th May.

HAWKS, KITES, OWLS: There were a couple sightings of Mississippi Kites in the area. The most prominent being the up to three near Dumfries Rd. (Fauquier) reported from the 21st to the 23rd of May. An immature bird was found on Back Rd in Shenandoah county on the 16th of June. A Long-eared Owl was present at Blandy Experimental Farm/State Arboretum from the beginning of March until March 25th. This bird spent the winter at Blandy and has come back for several years now.

FLYCATCHERS: Two rare but annual flycatchers were seen in our region. There was one report of an Olive-sided Flycatcher seen from the Woods at Warrenton trail (Fauquier) on the 19th of May. Not relocated afterwards. There were two Alder Flycatchers reported in the area. One on the Woods at Warrenton Trail on the 15th of May, and one seen at Mudhole Gap in Shenandoah co. also on May 15th. Vireos to Cardinals and Buntings: Red-breasted Nuthatches stuck around ever so slightly later than normal. At least 1 was seen at Lake Holiday (Frederick) until May 28th. This past winter was a big irruption year for the species. There were two reports of Marsh Wren from Fauquier. One was at "Little Milan" on the 29th of April and another at Locust Hill Farm on May 1st. This species shows up with some regularity east of the blue ridge. Evening Grosbeaks were seen in very high numbers for our region this spring and winter. This is due to a massive irruption. Two birds were seen in Frederick, both at private residences. One on the 20th of April near Gore and another in Winchester on May 3rd. A small flock of up to 8 were seen in Clarke county near Tilthammer Rd until April 2nd. Another was seen on May 3rd on

Black Twig Rd. in Warren county. Up to 7 were seen near and in Seven Bends State Park in Shenandoah from March 13th until they were last reported on April 11th, and 1 more was seen on March 2nd at Davis-Mills farm in Shenandoah as well. On the 1st of May, a single bird was seen at a feeder near Bristersburg Rd. in Fauquier county, and then a flock of 3 and 9 were seen at Asterfield Farm from the 3rd to 4th of May. It is unlikely that there will be any irruption years such as this for a long time. The last rare bird species occurrence to be included in this report was a flock of 14 Red Crossbills was recorded and photographed flying over Lake Holiday (Frederick) on the 18th of May. These Crossbills were later confirmed using audio to be the "type 10" or "Sitka Spruce" subspecies of Red Crossbill. This "type" is different from the much more expected "type 1" Red Crossbill. This was the first county record of Red Crossbill.

I hope that you enjoyed this report of rare birds seen in the spring of 2021. Fall can be just as good, or even better than Spring for finding rare birds. NSVAS often schedules Spring and Fall walks at Abrams Creek Wetlands preserve. A place where a couple of the rare birds in this report were seen. Consider joining us one morning and who knows, maybe we will see something truly amazing.



Visit our web site:
www.nsvaudubon.org

2021 Fund Drive

The Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society has continued to maintain existing projects, and will continue to explore new avenues for public outreach, education, and community involvement. With membership at over 400, with National and Chapter members combined, our mission will continue to guide our decisions. We will always give great consideration as to how your monetary donations are directed in order to get the best use out of each and every dollar.

Your chapter continues to look toward future growth, new ideas and opportunities for participation and learning, for our current members and our region's youth. We are completely open to new ideas on how to conserve our natural resources and protect our wildlife. Please feel free to offer any suggestions you may have through our FaceBook page, our website (nsvaudubon.org) or email (shenandoahaudubon@gmail.com).

Please look for your membership expiration date on your address on the label of this newsletter/annual report. We thank you in advance for your continued support. All donations are tax-deductible and we will continue to use your dollars wisely. Thank you.

MEMBERSHIP AND DONATION FORM

SUPPORT US

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

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Please check an option below:

Mail a printed Newsletter to me

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A copy of our financial statement is available through Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Office of Charitable and Regulatory Programs P.O. Box 1163, Richmond, VA 23218, (804) 786-1343

New Memberships, Renewals and Donation payments may be made with PayPal at our website: www.nsvaudubon.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.)

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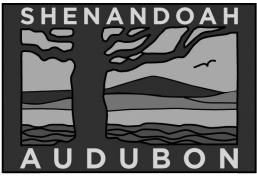
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Kindly remit payment to:

**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.**



P.O. Box 2693
Winchester, VA 22604

A Chapter of the
National Audubon Society

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For information about NSVAS, please visit our Facebook page or website: www.nsvaudubon.org

January Meeting to Vote on Proposed Bylaw Updates

All members are invited to join our January 24, 2022 Zoom meeting to vote on our proposed updated bylaws. The proposed bylaws are available for viewing on our website at nsvaudubon.org. Interested members may sign up to attend the meeting via the events page by clicking the RSVP button.

Bluebird Nest Boxes Available Help support Shenandoah Audubon

Bluebird boxes, complete with pole, hardware and predator guards are available for a donation of \$75. If you would like a set, you may obtain one at the True Value Hardware in Berryville or Front Royal, or email us at shenandoahaudubon@gmail.com to order a set.



Donate a Tree to The NSVAS Arboretum

Trees continue to be planted at the Audubon Arboretum within Jim Barnett Park in Winchester. The arboretum currently has more than 100 trees containing over 40 species. To donate a tree, please contact Jim Smith at 540-303-3983

Upcoming Christmas Bird Count

Dates for the 2021-22 Christmas Bird Count have been scheduled. The local circles' dates are:

December 18 NSVAS Christmas Bird Count
Contact Mark Bruns if interested in participating at markbruns3@gmail.com

January 2 Calmes Neck Christmas Bird Count
Contact Margaret Wester if interested in participating at margaretwester@hotmail.com

Have You Considered An IRA Donation?

If you would like to donate via a Qualified Charitable Distribution from your IRA to satisfy your required minimum distribution, please consult your tax/financial advisor to ensure suitability.

Shenandoah Audubon

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