

OAK LEAF

A NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THE NORTHERN SHENANDOAH VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 42

FALL 2018

NO. 3



Vote to Defend the Migratory Bird Treaty Act

A top priority this year is to defend the MBTA from alarming attempts by Congress and the Administration to undermine the protections it provides. The most important step we can take right now to protect the MBTA is to ensure no bills weakening the act become law.

Please plan to vote on November 6 for officials who will protect the Act. We vote for a United States Senator and all House of Representatives, and many City and Town officers. The Federal election candidates are listed below in the order they appear on the ballot.

The United States Senate candidates are Corey A. Stewart (R), Timothy M. Kaine (D), and Matt J. Waters (Libertarian).

Our Chapter Regions covers 3 Congressional Districts, the 5th, 6th, and 10th. The 5th Congressional District includes Rappahannock County. Candidates are Denver L. Riggelman, III (R), and Leslie C. Cockburn (D). The 6th Congressional District includes Shenandoah and Warren Counties. Candidates are Ben L. Cline (R) and Jennifer Lynn Lewis (D). Most of you are in the 10th Congressional district which covers Frederick and Clarke Counties, and Winchester City in our area. Candidates are Barbara Comstock (R), and Jennifer T. Wexton (D).

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2018 FALL PROGRAMS

Saturday, September 22

Annual "HAWK WATCH HIKE"



Location: Parking lot at Snickers Gap on Route 7 a little east of the Shenandoah River. This is an official Hawk Migration

Association of North America counting site. Bring your binoculars!

12:00 - 1:00 pm - Join us for our annual hawk watch beginning in the parking lot. Check in with the hawk watch counters there.

1:00 pm - Hike to Bear's Den Overlook on the Appalachian Trail. This hike is somewhat strenuous with rocks and inclines and wonderful views at the end. Bring water, binoculars, and camera.

Thursday, October 4 - 7 PM

"FRESH WATER FISHERIES & HABITAT CONSERVATION"



Carol Heiser with Virginia Game & Inland Fisheries will discuss how landscape choices impact habitat health and wildlife diversity. This program is in conjunction with Trout Unlimited & Lord Fairfax Community College STEM club. Science Bldg., Room 145, Lord Fairfax Community College; Middletown VA.

Continued on page 4

HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Many thanks to our new members and those steadfast renewal members who paid their dues with the notice in the March Newsletter. Without you we could not exist. You can renew your 2018 annual membership of \$15.00 online at audubon-nsvas.org with Pay Pal or mail a check made out to NSVAS to:

Shenandoah Audubon Treasurer, c/o Kaycee Lichliter, 1346 Sulphur Springs Rd., Middletown, VA 22645

From the President's Pen



Thank you NSVAS members and partners for your encouragement and support. Our important conservation work could not take place without your continued involvement. See the list below of our scheduled activities and programs for the remainder of 2018. You, your family, and friends are invited to attend any and all of our events free of charge. Please make plans to participate and share your concerns, expertise, interests, and pride in being a NSVAS member.

On **Saturday, September 22** we start our Fall hikes and walks. We meet at 8:30am in the parking lot of Children of America on Jubal Early Drive for an easy stroll at the Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve (ACWP) to see beautiful Fall wild flowers, migrating birds, and to become aware of nature's preparation for Winter. We return to the parking lot about 10:30am. Additional ACWP walks are scheduled for Saturdays at 8:30am on October 6, October 20, and November 3. "Note" on the September 22 walk we also have an afternoon hike planned at Snickers Gap on Route 7 East of Berryville. Meet us at 12:30 pm on top of the mountain to check in with the officials with the North American Hawk Migration Association as they count migrating raptors flying South along the Blue Ridge. It is not uncommon to count 1,000's of hawks in one day at this time of year. Weather and trail conditions will allow us to consider a hike to the Bears Den on the Appalachian Trail. This is a 2 mile circuit and is rated as strenuous with some steep climbs. Please be advised to wear proper attire and bring water. This hike can take from 2 to 3 hours. Call 540-303-3983 if you require additional information.

Mark your calendars for **Thursday, October 4 at 7:00pm**. Our program will have speakers from Trout Unlimited and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. This program will take place at Lord Fairfax Community College. If you ever drink or use water, this program could be of interest to you....

On **Thursday, November 1, at 7:00pm at Shenandoah University**, attend a presentation by Wendy Willis with the American Bird Conservancy. She will discuss critical conservation work taking place in North and South America. Her intrepid experiences in South America are spine tingling and her photographs gorgeous.

Also, don't forget **Audubon's 119th Annual Christmas Bird Count**. That's right. The first Christmas Bird Count took place in the year 1900 in just a few counties in

Massachusetts. It now takes place in almost 2,500 locations in the Western Hemisphere, including the Arctic and the Antarctic with nearly 73,000 people participating. Here in our count area we usually have about 50 counters who spend the day counting birds from sunup until sundown (some groups go out at night to count owls) in designated areas with an experienced leader. About 5:30 PM we all meet at Blandy Farm to share some dinner and compile the count data that will be sent to the Cornell University Ornithological Laboratory. Please join us for all or part of the day on Saturday December 22. This date is subject to change due to weather or other considerations. Call (540) 303-3983 for additional info.

And, congratulations to all Bluebird Trail volunteers who finished another stellar season of caring for and monitoring our 132 Bluebird nesting boxes at Blandy Farm and 64 boxes at Andy Guest Shenandoah River State Park. Your commitment and hard work allow us to marvel at this beautiful bird species as it strives to endure the ravages of invasive species, predators, climate change, etc. Thank you to our dedicated Blandy Trail Manager and NSVAS Treasurer, Kaycee Lichliter; and AGSRSP Trail Manager Roxie Leonard whom consistently provided educational opportunities, excellent leadership, and detailed scientific data.

Remember, all NSVAS activities and programs are free for the general public. They don't occur without lots of logistical coordination, management, planning, etc. Our supportive co-sponsors, many noted in this article, are imperative for our continued success. Thank you co-sponsors.

While we certainly appreciate your membership please consider increasing your participation in NSVAS activities. Your attendance helps, your consideration helps, your encouragement helps, and of course your money helps. But if you can't participate financially, help us in kind by joining our board, speak at one of our programs, take on the role of walk leader, share your knowledge about conservation, or set an example as a caring contributor however you are able.

Thank You!

Jim L. Smith, President,
Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society



Growing a Purple Martin Colony:

The Master Mechanic Behind the Scenes

By Kaycee Lichliter,
PUMA Colony Project Manager



Photo credit Kaycee Lichliter

Hopefully everyone had an opportunity to check out the Purple Martin Colony at Blandy Experimental Farm (BEF) this summer and observe the acrobatic displays and delightful chatter of our visiting Purple Martins (PUMA). At the time of this writing, the PUMA have completed

raising their families for the season and have begun their journey back to South America. Now as we gaze into the sky near the colony, we experience an eerie quietness and wish our PUMA well for the winter.

The first documented history of the PUMA colony I could find was in Sam Patten's NSVAS Blandy Bluebird Trail Summary of Observations for 1998 and 1999 (see side bar). It is thought that Shenandoah Audubon (SA) sponsored installation of two houses in 1998, one in 1999, and one in 2000, totaling 4 units; the next ten years seem to have passed with no known written documentation available. One day in March of 2010, Glennie Comer, Ted Saunders, Kelley Compher, Jeannie Senter and I were in the Lake Arnold area erecting wood duck boxes. That was the day I looked up and thought, "Huh, what's up with those Purple Martin boxes?" Although the 'boxes may belong to SA,' they are on the 'grounds belonging to Blandy,' so a quick conversation with BEF Director, Dr. David Carr, resulted in 'the green light' to care for and maintain the colony.

On taking a closer look at the PUMA colony, Glennie and I found it to be in disrepair. Non-telescoping poles of odd sizes raised the units high into the air; gaining access for clean out and maintenance would be difficult. Each box mount had its own problems requiring different size bolts or screws and methods of operation. As we worked with the existing structures, that year we also installed a new 8-compartment PUMA unit purchased by SA. In 2011, we discovered an abandoned and damaged SA PUMA unit at Abram's Creek that was housing invasive House Sparrows; Glennie refurbished it and we moved it to the colony at Blandy. We were excited to see the colony start to grow, and then sadly, Glennie suffered personal injury and was unable to return to the project.

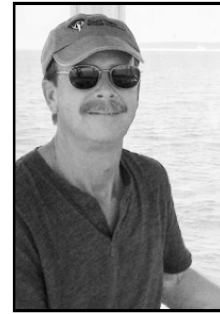


Photo credit Kaycee Lichliter

Ted Saunders, conservationist and naturalist, has recently joined the Shenandoah Audubon Board as Member At Large. Ted resides in Fauquier County and is self-employed (excavator, electrician, plumber, carpenter). Ted enjoys nature photography, in and off shore fishing, boating, kayaking, traveling and fine-dining.

Then one day in 2012....the master mechanic behind the scenes....Ted Saunders, rejoined the project. This is the guy with the big white truck that carries all the tools and gadgets one could want, everything from ladders and saws to duct tape and permanent markers; and, he knows how to use them! To say it lightly, Ted definitely has a natural knack for fixing things. And fortunately, along with his technical skills and abilities, he also has a willingness to do. With Ted's dedication, the PUMA colony has experienced new life. That year, old poles were replaced with telescoping poles, damaged boxes were repaired, and two new rectangular units were installed.

As time passes, we are learning; there's always a curve, or two. We have discovered the rectangular units are very susceptible to the harsh winds that have left us with not only damaged units, but also bent poles, and sadly, loss of nesting birds. As we've frustratingly worked to keep up with repairs, in 2016 we decided to try something new. SA purchased and we installed a new 12-gourd rack. The gourd rack poles are square, which are stronger than round ones, and the curved gourds allow the winds to flow around them, whereas the rectangular boxes take the direct hit. The



Photo credit Kaycee Lichliter

Wind damaged PUMA aluminum housing unit



Photo credit Kaycee Lichliter

gourds are easily accessible with a pulley system whereas if a telescoping pole gets slightly bent, it will not telescope. And, more importantly, the PUMA love the gourds!

Season 2017 saw the PUMA enjoying the gourd system so this spring we installed two more racks. Now, it takes a

few evenings and some perfect weather to prepare for mounting a rack. Holes are hand dug, concrete is poured, ropes and pulleys are assembled, gourd porches are attached and nesting filler is collected; and, timing with spring rain is vital to keep the trucks from sinking in the mud. With all that said, Ted and I accumulated some time at the site with PUMA circling over our heads, chattering and chirping. The final evening as we prepared to mount the two racks on the poles, dusk was approaching. Dozens of PUMA were diving and dipping and starting to perch on the first rack as it went up. We mounted the second rack and quickly drove out of the colony area. Stopping to look back, we were devastated....the PUMA had all disappeared! We had obviously been keeping them up past their bedtime and they dove into the boxes and gourds as soon as we turned our backs. It was phenomenal!

Fall may be approaching and our PUMA have left, but that means for us, it's planning time! We anticipate the first PUMA to begin returning in mid-April, so be sure to plan a visit to the colony and prepare to experience the beauty and grace of God's spectacular Purple Martins!

Excerpts from Sam Patten's NSVAS Blandy Bluebird Trail Summary of Observations for 1998 and 1999

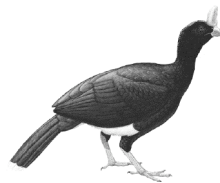
“8 October 1998 House/Purple Martins: No good data. There are two boxes with multiple nests in each box in the Ephemeral Pond Trail. Martins observed on the boxes or flying nearby, ranged from eight on 19/5 to twenty on 20/7, indicating the possibility of 12 fledglings. If the total pair was four, then each pair may have raised three young.” *Sam Patten*

“7 October 1999 House/Purple Martins: No good data. There are three nesting boxes with 12 nesting cubicles in each box on the Ephemeral Pond Trail. Martins observed on the boxes, or flying nearby, remained about 20 until early August when only one was seen. There were none seen in September.” *Sam Patten*

Vote to Defend the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, *continued from page 1*

Information on the candidates can be obtained on their web site and also on ballotpedia.org, Elections, Elections, scroll down to USA map and click on Virginia. Ballotpedia is the online encyclopedia of American politics and elections. Their goal is to inform people about politics by providing accurate and objective information about politics at all levels of government. They are firmly committed to neutrality. While the National Audubon Society does not endorse candidates, both the League of Conservation Voters and Sierra Club endorses candidates based on their environmental record and positions.

2018 Fall Programs, *continued from page 1*



Thursday, November 1 - 7:00 pm **LATIN AMERICAN HABITAT CONSERVATION & FOREST BIRDS**

Location: Shenandoah University; Rm #110 Henkel Hall; Winchester VA

Wendy Willis with the American Bird Conservancy will discuss conservation of South America's most hunted birds, with a specific focus on lesser known and critically endangered species such as the Tolima Dove, Cauca Guan, and Horned Curassow. All of these species of birds are hunted for meat and also facing complex threats from resource extraction and as well, they are integral to forest succession. This program is in conjunction with Shenandoah University Environmental Studies.

THE HAZARDOUS HORSE TAIL HAIR TALE

By Kaycee Lichliter

Shenandoah Audubon Blandy Bluebird Trail Manager

One evening as Glennly Comer and I were monitoring boxes on the Bluebird Trail at Blandy Experimental Farm near the horse paddock, Glennly had exited from the vehicle to look in a box as I waited with the trail book to record his findings. I watched him as he peered into the box. He hesitated, looked intently, and was silent. To me, time just stops while waiting for a verdict, or a surprise, or the go-ahead on something fun; I think I was holding my breath too! Then Glennly yelled for me to hurry, come and look!

As I peered into the box, I heard screaming. Now, I've never heard a bluebird *scream* and didn't know they could, but that's how I describe what I heard. The box held three baby bluebird chicks, one of which was in the back corner, head buried in grass, up-side-down, with its feet sticking up in the air. Well, we'd never seen anything like this before! I told Glennly to hold out his hands and I quickly retrieved the chick in distress. Taking it from the box I found it to be entangled in horse tail hair! Instantly this took me in memory back to bird banding and the challenge of untangling birds from the mist nets. I unwound the hair from the chick's tiny wings, feet, and legs and gently placed it in Glennly's big warm hands. I proceeded to remove the two remaining chicks one at a time from the box, remove the horse tail hair from their little bodies, and place them in Glennly's hands.

As Glennly safely held the chicks, I took a closer inspection of the nest. The parent bluebirds had used horse tail hair to line their nest cup! I removed the hair lining of the cup, leaving a perfectly round soft nest cup of grass and replaced it back in the nest box. Then one by one each chick was replaced safely in the nest. Knowing that when parent birds return to their nest to feed their chicks, they aren't selective in who they feed, giving equal amounts of food in rotating turns, they just shove the food in the first open begging mouth. So, I strategically place our distressed little chick on top of the pile and up front so it would hopefully get the next food delivery. We closed the box, moved from the area and documented our findings and activity.

Being the worrywart that I am, I returned to the box the next day to find all three chicks alive and doing well! All inspections up until the "critical nesting period," the time-frame when the chicks are old enough to jump from the nest but not old enough to fly, found them to be in good condition. After the critical nesting period was over and the birds were predicted to have fledged from the nest, the box was

again monitored. Sadly, one chick was found deceased, however happily, two were presumed to have fledged.

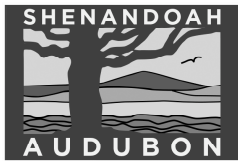
Although the outcome of this nesting attempt was somewhat disappointing, that's the way it happened, so that's the way the story is told. There are several points to glean from this tale. One, with our bluebird chicks, everything doesn't always work out how we hope but we always strive for the best. Two, if you monitor nests, especially near where horses are kept, please note if horse tail hair is added to nests and remove it if possible. I partially attribute the survival of the two chicks in this story to close monitoring and removal of the tail hair. Three, birds will do the craziest things! For example, we've found toxic cigarette butts in Tree Swallow nests, birds that normally add white feathers to their nest cup linings. So, as we have learned that birds will sometimes add odd items to their nests that they find close by in the environment, let's work together for a cleaner environment for the health and safety of our birds and other wildlife.

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Shenandoah Audubon is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Membership dues and donations help defer costs such as website fees, materials for bluebird trail maintenance, Shenandoah Audubon Arboretum maintenance, educational programs and more.

Thank you sponsors and supporters!

Save a stamp and envelope and use the PayPal button on our website! Please indicate if your donation is a new membership, renewal or separate donation.

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MEMBERSHIP (1 YEAR): \$15

Members receive a 1-year subscription (4 issues) of our *Oak Leaf* Newsletter.

ADDITIONAL DONATION: \$

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \$

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Kindly remit payment to **Shenandoah Audubon,**
c/o Kaycee Lichliter, Treasurer
1346 Sulphur Springs Rd, Middletown, VA 22645

HELP WANTED

Interested in helping us on the Board of Directors? We meet 8 times a year for an hour. We need a Newsletter Editor, a Secretary for our Board Meetings (minutes take a page doubled spaced), a coordinator for Blandy Garden Fair in 2019, an Educational Chair, and Field Trip Chair. Contact Jim Smith 540-303-3983.