



# OAK LEAF

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

Volume 37 • Issue 1

March - April 2013

## Nature Walks

### at Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve Winchester, VA

It's time again for Jim Smith's guided nature walks! Jim has been walking these wetlands for decades and is a wealth of knowledge about the birds and wildlife that frequent the area. Join him and others on a spring Saturday morning and discover hidden treasures in the heart of Winchester!

These guided walks will be held on **March 16th, March 30th, April 13th, April 27th and May 11th.**

Walks begin at 8:00 AM, last approximately 2 hours and are non-strenuous. Bring binoculars, spotting scopes, and/or cameras.

Interested walkers should meet in the Children of America parking lot off of W. Jubal Early Drive, approximately 1/2 mile west of Valley Avenue. Park at the west side of the lot by the woods. If you arrive a few minutes late, simply walk the path until you catch up with the group. These walks are FREE and open to the public.

In the event of inclement weather, walks will be cancelled. For more information, contact Jim Smith at (540) 303-3983.

### at Sky Meadows State Park Delaplane, VA

Join naturalist Margaret Wester for these seasonal walks at Sky Meadows State Park.

#### SPRING:

**Date/Time:** May 11, 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM

**Theme:** Migrating Birds in Spring:

International Migratory Bird Day

**Trail:** Snowden

**Meet:** Visitor's Center

#### SUMMER:

**Date/Time:** June 22, 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM

**Theme:** Birds of Meadowlands

**Trail:** Rolling Meadows/Hayfield

**Meet:** Eastside Parking Lot

#### FALL:

**Date/Time:** October 5, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

**Theme:** Red-Headed Woodpeckers & Bluebirds: Natural and Man-Made Habitats

**Trail:** Woodpecker Lane/Gap Run

**Meet:** Visitor's Center

#### WINTER:

**Date/Time:** December 7, 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM

**Theme:** Resident and Winter Birds

**Trail:** Shearman's Mill

**Meet:** Eastside Parking Lot

Daily parking/State Park fees apply (\$4.00 per vehicle). Please contact Margaret with any questions at [margaretwester@hotmail.com](mailto:margaretwester@hotmail.com) (preferred) or (540) 837-2799.

## Garden Fair

### at The State Arboretum of Virginia/Blandy Experimental Farm Boyce, VA

This year's Garden Fair is May 11 & 12 (Mother's Day weekend) from 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM. The Fair is a huge plant and garden supply sale with dozens of vendors of high-quality plants. Aside from the sales, events include Arboretum tours, mini-workshops, children's nature walks and other activities for kids.

Entry cost is \$10 per vehicle. You can waive this fee by volunteering for a shift at our table. Contact us for more details on how you can help.

*Shenandoah Audubon, your local Chapter of the National Audubon Society, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization. Financial statements are available upon request. Our Audubon Chapter Code is X-54.*

Visit us on the web at  
[AUDUBON-NSVAS.ORG](http://AUDUBON-NSVAS.ORG)

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*We welcome your feedback!*

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#### CALL:

Our friendly Programs/PR chair Rosemary Rogers can field any questions or concerns at (540) 323-7627

*Welcome Spring!*



# WHAT'S A "COUNT CIRCLE" AGAIN?

Christmas Bird Counts are performed in 15-mile diameter "count circles". Each count circle consists of a number of volunteers including a compiler to coordinate and manage data. They break up into small groups and follow assigned routes, counting every bird they see throughout one designated day. The routes that the counters take are consistent from year to year.

The resulting count data is then used by researchers, conservation biologists, and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. It is also a very reliable source to track environmental effects of climate change.

On January 5th, 67 volunteers participated in the Calmes Neck Christmas Bird Count. The center of this 15-mile diameter count circle is the Route 7 bridge over the Shenandoah River. The stats of hours, miles and species below represent totals compiled from all 67 volunteers.

Counting started in the early hours of this cold morning, with 15 hours and 56.5 miles covered by foot "owling" before daylight.

During daylight observation, 71.5 hours were spent covering 55.25 miles of birding on foot. 86.25 hours were spent driving 586.5 miles of road within the count circle.

These hours and miles yielded sightings of 97 different species. 21,484 (!) individual birds were counted.

Blanca Vandervoort and Margaret Wester spotted a Golden Eagle soaring in circles, close enough to get good looks.

Margaret, who is the data compiler for the Calmes Neck circle, noted that this is the third sighting of a Golden Eagle in the Calmes Neck circle.

Mary Bair and Geoff White spotted a male White-Winged Crossbill at a residence near Rippon, WV. Mary noticed that the coloration was similar to a Purple Finch but the bird was slightly larger. She photographed it on the ground (right) and eating seeds from pine cones (below right).

Mary also spotted a Ruffed Grouse on what she called a "luck sighting."

"It flew up near a road above grasses for about 50 feet and then dropped down. I tried to rustle it up but even the bird knew to stay put."

Mary rounded out her exciting count day with 4 Great Horned Owls.

Another count highlight was a tagged Trumpeter Swan spotted by Dave Carr (below). This bird was spotted again in the same

vicinity (Watermelon Park south of Route 7) on January 29th by Jon & BJ Little.

Jo Anna Lutmerding of Bird Banding Laboratory at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center reported of the swan, "This bird was originally marked in Ontario at a place called Franklin Pond near Little Corners. It was a hatch year when it was banded on 11/3/2011, and it is a male. We've received a total of 8 sightings of the bird, most from northwestern Pennsylvania. These recent sightings document the bird's southward movement."



## DID YOU KNOW?

It's obvious that Crossbills are named for their bills with long tips that cross each other. These bills are adapted for retrieving seeds from between the scales of cones of spruce, pine, hemlock, larch and other conifers. But did you know that there are "right-billed" and "left-billed" Crossbills? This allows two Crossbills to position themselves on opposite sides of the same cone and extract seeds from the left and right simultaneously.





## SKY MEADOWS BLUEBIRD TRAIL 2012 SEASON REPORT

The Sky Meadows Bluebird Trail headed by Margaret Wester had a very successful second season.

69 nest boxes were monitored weekly from March 23rd through September 1st with additional Tuesday monitoring of completed bluebird nests to help calculate the date the first egg was laid.

5 boxes on the equestrian trail which had no occupants in 2011 were moved. In their new location on the Hayfield trail, they were all occupied, proving this to be a good decision.

House Sparrows continued to be a nuisance in paired boxes 1-20 along the park entrance road.

"There was a report of one dead adult bluebird on that section and I suspect House Sparrow predation," Margaret said. "Eggs disappeared from another nest and I suspect snake. We also lost 5 bluebird chicks in a blowfly infested nest."

In 2011, the trail fledged 97 Eastern Bluebirds and 36 Tree Swallows. 2012's counts more than doubled, yielding 195 Eastern Bluebirds, 75 Tree Swallows and 1 House Wren. With such great improvement in only 1 year, Margaret is excited to see what 2013 will bring for her trail.



▲ Goldfinches relish the abundant thistle that surrounds the Rolling Meadows section of the Sky Meadows Bluebird Trail.



▲ "Step away from my nest box!" says this Tree Swallow while dive-bombing trail tech Tracey Ramsey on the Blandy Bluebird Trail.

## SHENANDOAH AUDUBON/BLANDY BLUEBIRD TRAIL 2012 SEASON REPORT

by Kaycee Lichliter

Sometimes I wonder why we still refer to this trail as the 'bluebird' trail. We have such an amazing influx of cheerful little Tree Swallows, which make the long trip from southern U.S. and South America each spring, just to come to Blandy. Once they start arriving, the skies over the farm suddenly pop with new entertainment as the swallows dip, dive, circle and dance above the fields. Perched on a sign post or fence wire and appearing somewhat peaceful, the male flaunts his beautiful metallic blue-green summer breeding plumage to impress his mate. On the wing, the swallows look like little fighter jets, swooping and swerving through the air and sometimes even dive-bombing trail technicians (never actually touching techs, of course, but they do give one the sense that his or her hair is tingling, if hair could actually tingle - *it's awesome!*). What appears to be so joyful is actually, as one observes closely, a fierce warfare taking place in the field. Only the strongest and fittest gain entry and take up residency in the 110 available nesting boxes at the Arboretum, competing with other species for not only shelter but for food, water and space.

Housing for cavity-nesting birds is repeatedly proven to be in great need. As a trail tech knows, as soon as one brood of Tree Swallow chicks fledge, a second can start with a new egg laid in the used nest the next morning. This need is why the tech team continues to keep the Shenandoah Audubon/Blandy Bluebird Trail well maintained and monitored.

This March the Shenandoah Audubon/Blandy Bluebird Trail will celebrate monitoring and recording its 10th consecutive year of songbird breeding data, all of which is reported annually to leading ornithology organizations. This project documented the following numbers of birds successfully raised on the trail in the last nine years: 1,514 Eastern Bluebirds; 2,295 Tree Swallows; 1,757 House Wrens; and 23 Carolina Chickadees, for a grand total of 5,589 songbirds!

*To view Data Comparisons for 2004 - 2012, visit [audubon-nsvs.org](http://audubon-nsvs.org) and click on the 'Bluebird Trail' tab on the menu bar.*

## BLUEBIRD TRAIL TRAINING WORKSHOPS

Shenandoah Audubon Training Workshops for bluebird trails at Sky Meadows State Park and Blandy Experimental Farm will be held on Saturday, March 2nd and Saturday, March 9th. **It is mandatory for all new volunteers as well as returning volunteers to attend one of these classes.**

In prior years, beginners and veterans attended separate workshops, but this year both parties can attend either date.

These workshops will focus on native cavity nesting species and the techniques to properly monitor nest boxes including box inspection, critical observations and recording data. At the end of the training session, you can sign up to monitor and state your preference of how often you wish to participate per month. The trails are monitored for the entire nesting season (late March through August) as scheduled by the trail managers. Scheduling will commence after the training sessions.

Reserve your space in one of these workshops by contacting Kaycee Lichliter at [kayceelichliter@hotmail.com](mailto:kayceelichliter@hotmail.com) or Margaret Wester at [margaretwester@hotmail.com](mailto:margaretwester@hotmail.com), or by calling Blandy Experimental Farm at (540) 837-1758. Training is free, but **pre-registration is required.**

# MERIT BADGE WORKSHOPS

Shenandoah Audubon is proud to be a sponsor of the upcoming Bird Study Merit Badge workshops given by Judy and Charlie Hagan of the local environmental group Shenandoah Naturalists.

The events will be held at the Winchester Parks & Recreation Memorial Building Friday, April 12th (7:00 PM - 9:00 PM) and Saturday, April 13th with morning (8:00 AM- 12:00 PM) and afternoon (1:00 PM - 5:00 PM) workshop sessions.

Volunteers are greatly needed, especially on Saturday to help the scouts with birdhouse construction and general birding education. If you wish to help with this noble cause, please email [NatureLover@ShenandoahNaturalists.org](mailto:NatureLover@ShenandoahNaturalists.org) or call the Hagans at (540) 667-6778.

40 scouts received their Bird Study badges in 2011 with this program. Let's help Judy and Charlie have another successful year!



Proud of the Shenandoah Valley and want to help promote local environmental awareness? Become a member, renew your membership, or donate to us online at [audubon-nsvas.org](http://audubon-nsvas.org). OR, give us what we need most: a few hours of your time each month to make a difference! See front page for contact information.



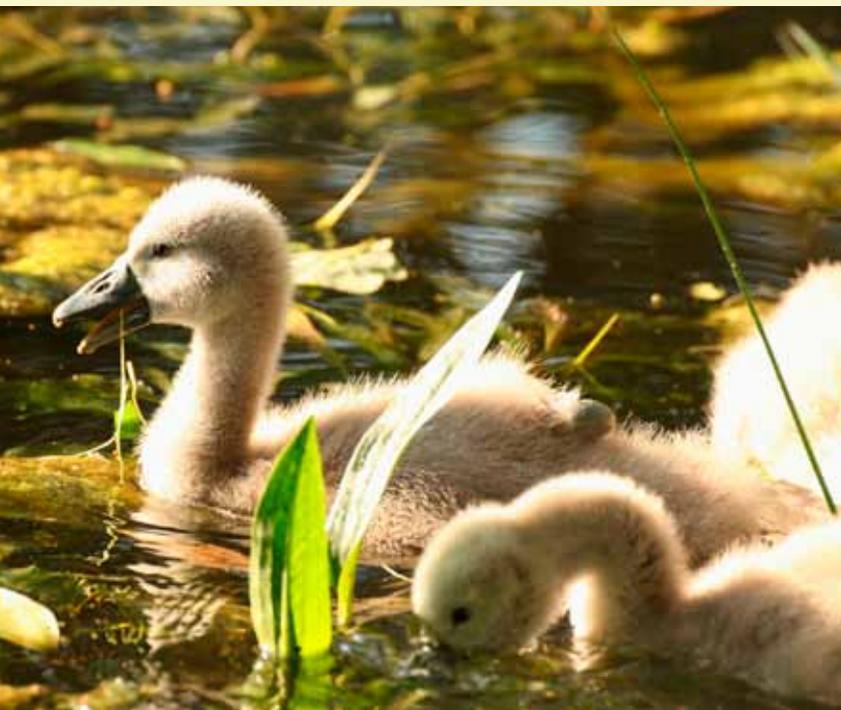
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## QUACK FOR THOUGHT

Acknowledging the good that you already have in your life is the foundation for all abundance.

-Eckhart Tolle

To receive an e-copy of *American Birds 2012-2013, A Summary of the 113th Christmas Bird Count*, join Audubon's online citizen science network at [audubon.org/citizenscience](http://audubon.org/citizenscience).

This will also connect you to citizen science projects, updates on the latest research and reports from Audubon field scientists.



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