



The SISKIN

Newsletter of the Northern Virginia Bird Club

Vol. 60, No. 2

April 2015

www.nvabc.org

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To see the newsletter photographs in color, go to www.nvabc.org and click on the *Siskin* icon

Upcoming Weekend Trips

Spring Chincoteague Weekend

The Chincoteague Spring Weekend club trip is scheduled for May 15-17 (Friday-Sunday). Mid-May is an excellent time to visit the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (NWR); spring shorebird migration is in full swing with most birds in breeding plumage. Last year's trip tallied 116 species including such Eastern Shore specialties as Black-necked Stilts, American Oystercatchers, Piping Plovers, Whimbrels, Marbled Godwits, Red Knots, White-rumped Sandpipers, Little Blue, Tricolored and Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Cattle Egrets, Glossy Ibis, Gull-billed, Least, Royal and Common Terns, Black Skimmers, Clapper Rails, Seaside Sparrows, Chuck-will's-widow, Brown-headed Nuthatches and Boat-tailed Grackles.

Plans for the weekend include birding the Chincoteague NWR on Friday afternoon starting at 3:15 p.m. (optional) or on Saturday starting at 7:30 a.m. Activities on Saturday morning include birding along Beach Road, Swan Cove

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NVBC GENERAL MEETING—WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 8 PM

The Project Passenger Pigeon

Speaker David Blockstein

In 1800, billions of Passenger Pigeons crisscrossed the skies of the eastern United States and Canada. On September 1, 1914, Martha, the last of her species died in the Cincinnati Zoo. The centenary of the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon provides a teachable moment to consider how the most abundant bird in the world went extinct and to ponder its implications for today.

David E. Blockstein, Senior Scientist of the National Council for Science and the Environment, is the author of the Birds of North America species account on the Passenger Pigeon and one of the leaders in Project Passenger Pigeon (www.passengerpigeon.org).

Election of NVBC Officers for 2015-2017

Officers and directors will be elected to serve two-year terms beginning July 1, 2015. The following people have agreed to be candidates:

President: Larry Meade

Vice President, Programs: nominee pending

Vice President, Field Activities: Elton Morel

Secretary: Diane Marton

Treasurer: Jean Tatalias

Directors: Emily Caven, Catherine Kubo, Joanna Taylor

Nominations will also be accepted from the floor.

Refreshments start at 7:30 pm. Food and drink contributions are welcome.

There will be a drawing for door prizes.

Meeting place: St. Andrews Episcopal Church, 4000 Lorcom Lane, Arlington, 22207. Directions are on page 5.

Chincoteague scene

photographed by Larry Meade



Presidential Peentings

Charlotte Friend has been an essential part of the Northern Virginia Bird Club for many years. In addition to leading walks for us, she has had the job of managing our membership. She has coordinated new memberships and renewals and performed other nuts and bolts tasks with unfailing competence and diligence. While much of her work has been behind the scenes, we could not have functioned without her. Now she is stepping down from the job and moving on to new adventures in Maryland. We will certainly miss her. We are extremely fortunate that Elizabeth Fenton has agreed to step into Charlotte's shoes and take on the job of membership for us. Thanks Elizabeth! On another note, as I write this, we have just finished the grand finale snowstorm of the winter and spring is in the air. Ospreys have come back and Woodcocks are flying at Huntley Meadows. Warblers will be coming into the area before we know it. In case you are interested, I will be teaching a warbler class on April 30 with a field trip May 2. This class is sponsored by the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia and the Northern Virginia Bird Club. For more information, you can go to www.audubonva.org. Happy warbling!

—Larry Meade



Charlotte Friend
NVBC emeritus member
Best Wishes for
Good Birding in Maryland

Upcoming Weekend Trips: Spring Chincoteague from p.1

and Tom's Cove and a walk along the Woodland Trail looking for land bird migrants. We have reserved the Chincoteague Natural History Association's bus for a 90 minute trip to the Washflats on Saturday at 1 p.m., providing a look at territory otherwise inaccessible by vehicle. Time and tides permitting, we will also visit the Queens Sound Flats and the Chincoteague City mudflats. On Sunday morning, we will visit Saxis Marsh. The trip concludes at noon on Sunday.

NVBC membership is required for this trip. To sign up for this trip, call or email Elton Morel (703-553-4860 or eltonmorel@verizon.net). The trip is limited to 28 people and usually fills up, so please contact Elton Morel first to ensure that space is available before making hotel reservations. When signing up, please indicate whether you are interested in the Washflats bus trip (fee) on Saturday afternoon and a Saturday evening group dinner. If the trip is full, your name can be put on a waiting list.

We have obtained a special rate of \$94 per night on twenty rooms for Friday and Saturday nights at the Best Western Chincoteague Island Hotel on Maddox Boulevard. A two-night stay is usually required. Hotel reservations must be made by April 3 to get this special group rate. Participants should make your own reservations by calling 800-553-6117 and be sure to say you are with the Northern Virginia Bird Club. Check-in time is 3 p.m. on Friday, May 16, and a 72-hour cancellation notice is required. Chincoteague NWR is a U.S. fee area, and Saxis Marsh is a Wildlife Management Area requiring a permit. (See article on this page)

—Elton Morel

Fascinating Birds

On May 13, William Young will give a presentation titled "99 Reasons to be Fascinated by Birds," based on his book, *The Fascination of Birds: from the Albatross to the Yellowthroat* (Dover Publications, 2014). He will explore the connections between birds and subjects such as biology, ecology, literature, music, history, politics, economics, religion, geography, physics, chemistry, linguistics, the visual arts, the performing arts, sports and comedy. This Friends of Dyke Marsh quarterly meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. at the Huntley Meadows Park Visitor Center and is cosponsored by the Northern Virginia Bird Club and Audubon Society of Northern Virginia.

Highland County Weekend

Our summer trip to Highland County in the mountains of western Virginia, led by Marv Rubin, is scheduled for the weekend of June 5-7 (Friday-Sunday). The trip limit is 16 people. Headquarters will be at either the Highland Inn or Montvallee Motel in Monterey depending upon whether the Highland Inn re-opens by the time of our trip.

We will start the trip at 3:15pm on Friday afternoon with a drive around the Blue Grass Valley to look for Bobolinks and Vesper Sparrows. On Saturday morning, we will go to Paddy's Knob to look for Mourning Warblers and Least Flycatchers. On Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, we will bird other areas of the county. We will arrange a group dinner at either Highland Inn's dining room or Hap's High's Restaurant on both evenings. The trip will end in Monterey at about noon on Sunday. Call or email Marv Rubin (703-915-7545 or mbrubin@verizon.net) to sign up and get information to make your reservations as soon as our accommodations are settled upon. NVBC membership is required for this trip.

—Marv Rubin

Access Permit for WMAs

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) continues to require an Access Permit for Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and public fishing lakes under its management. The permit is not required for persons holding a valid hunting, fishing or trapping license or a current certificate of boat registration issued by the Department or for persons 16 years of age or younger. The fee is \$4 for a daily permit or \$23 for an annual permit and may be purchased online or from any license agent. Most, if not all, Walmart stores and many sporting goods stores are DGIF license agents. More information is available at the DGIF website, www.dgif.virginia.gov.

The club has two trips scheduled this spring to a WMA – the walk at Thompson WMA's Trillium Trail on May 9 and the Saxis WMA on May 17 as part of the Spring Chincoteague Weekend.

- Elton Morel

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NVBC is on Facebook. If you are already a Facebook.com member, just log in to your Facebook page and search for "Northern Virginia Bird Club" then "like" us.

Winter Birding in Japan



A chance to see long-standing friends and those Red-crowned Cranes so important in Japanese art and culture—why did I wait so long to sign up for a birding tour! This past January I went on a Field Guides Tour led by the very knowledgeable, easy-going Phil Gregory and the capable Jun Matsui, who drove, spotted birds, and never tired of translating and telling the seven of us our lunch choices at fast-food stops.

Around thence Tobu Narita hotel we picked up Brown-headed Thrush, as well as such attractive species as Japanese Wagtail, Falcated Duck, Bull-headed Shrike, Brown-eared Bulbul, Daurian Redstart and Dusky Thrush that we would continue to see elsewhere.

Soon we were off to the scenic Japan Alps around Karuizawa and Nagano. Walking along snow-covered trails beside creeks and up into the hills—ice grippers really were a necessity—we spotted the endemic Japanese Green Woodpecker, a stunning male Copper Pheasant, an obliging Eurasian Woodcock, a Pygmy Woodpecker, Rustic Buntings and at a feeder a Japanese Accentor, Winter Wren, and Meadow Buntings. Numerous tits (Willow, Varied, Coal and Japanese) flitted about at the feeder or high in the trees.

Snow Country means snow monkeys, and we made the pleasant one-mile hike in to their hot spring, somewhat more developed than I expected, but then Jigokudani Park is a major tourist attraction. Many monkeys were in and around the spring until food arrived, at which time they all bounded out and dug up the grain scattered over the snow.

With snow-dappled peaks in the distance we continued on to the Kanazawa area and the Sea of Japan, picking up Baikal Teal, Smew, Taiga Bean and Greater White-fronted Geese, a Green Pheasant, a bonus Naumann's thrush, Gray-headed Lapwings, and in a field some 400 elegant Bewick's (Tundra) Swans, giving us graceful flight views as well.

Flying to southern Kyushu, at Lake Miike in Kirishima National Park we found such highlights as the head-thrusting Forest Wagtail, the Ryukyu Minivet, a Goldcrest, and a fleeting view of a Japanese Grosbeak.

The stars of this area, however, are the cranes at Arasaki, some 9,000 Hooded and 1,500 White-naped—noisy, flying, parading, eating. Throw in a Sandhill and a couple of Common cranes, too. Individuals feeding them are garbed in biohazard suits, and every time our van left the area the wheels were disinfected, precautions to prevent the spread of any disease.

Also in the area or nearby, a Black-faced and two Eurasian spoonbills, a Temminck's Stint, Daurian Jackdaw, Chestnut-eared Buntings, a Crested Kingfisher, Mandarin Ducks, a Long-billed Plover, Saunders's Gulls, Chinese Penduline-Tits, surprisingly abundant Japanese White-eyes—and my Japanese friend, a citrus grower, who supplied our group with some 15 pounds of Japanese mandarins to snack upon.

But the best was yet to come in the far north, in snowbound eastern Hokkaido! Deplaning just after lunchtime, we headed out immediately to a small field in Tsurui, where some two hundred majestic Red-crowned cranes were dancing and bugling, pair-

bonding, and one sandy-headed youngster learning the proper moves by tossing a dry leaf in the air and dancing with it.

Early the next morning we were at the famous Otowa bridge. We did not see the National Geographic view of mist rising from the river and cranes displaying under a blue sky. Instead it was a stunning sumi-e or ink painting: the blacks, grays and whites of the sky, the birds, the snow-covered banks, the frosty river, the trees with branches limned in white snow. The distant cranes, with heads tucked in, resembled sheep. As they awakened, heads came up, and family groups moved up the river toward us. Did I say I want to return!

However, it was on to see Whooper Swans, a staked-out Ural Owl, and immediately after that, our first view in the trees of the enormous Steller's Sea Eagle with its massive bright orange bill and long white wedge-shaped tail. They were to become commonplace, adorning almost every utility pole on the Notsuke Peninsula, delighting us with every view—especially when one perched near a White-tailed Eagle, giving us a size comparison.

Harlequin Ducks, a Pacific Loon, a boat trip from Habomai harbor with Common Murres, Ancient Murrelets, Spectacled Guillemots—and a close-up look at Russian-occupied Japan, islands taken at the end of World War II and never returned. All just a prelude to...

Superb views of the Blakiston's Fish Owl, not just at one but at two locations! We had barely sat down to dinner at the small family-run Washi no Yado minshuku when the first fish owl came down to a small portion of the creek outside that had been cordoned off and stocked an hour earlier with live fish. Special lighting enabled us to see the owl but did not interfere with its vision. At one point it caught two fish and dropped them beneath the nearby tree, from which its mate came down to share in the catch. A third owl in the tree was probably their offspring.

The next night at our luxurious Yoroushi Dai Ichi onsen, again at dinner the fish owl appeared. At breakfast the next morning, a fish owl was still there, in the daylight, with a Solitary Snipe nearby.

Snowed in at our last stop, we nonetheless saw a White-backed Woodpecker at a feeder.

As others departed for home, I took a four-hour train ride to Sapporo to meet again with Mitsu Yamamoto, an exchange student at my Wauwatosa, WI high school in 1960 and now a prominent translator. My trip fittingly ended with great fellowship, fond reminiscences, fine food—and snow outdoing Boston's accumulations this winter.

—Diane Marton

Photos by Diane Marton of the view from Otowa bridge, White-naped Crane (above) and Red-crowned Cranes (below)



Upcoming Trips and Events

Compiled by Elton Morel

Note:

- Beginning birders are welcome on all trips.
- When reservations are required, please call one of the trip leaders. Phone numbers are below.
- If in doubt about a trip because of weather, please call one of the leaders.
- Check the NVBC website for updated information about trips: <http://www.nvabc.org/trips.htm>.
- To receive email notices, join the NVBC eMail Exchange. For sign-up directions see back page of the newsletter.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday		
<u>April</u>								
Trip Leaders Dave Boltz 703-768-7499 Steve Bruck 703-425-8584 Larry Cartwright 703-941-3142 Elizabeth Fenton 703-533-0851 Catherine Kubo 703-352-1238 Larry Meade 703-206-9030 Elton Morel 703-553-4860 Pete Peters 413-320-8866 Marc Ribauda 703-680-1134 Marv Rubin 703-915-7545 Ruth Schrott 703-860-1643 Dixie Sommers 703-969-7931 Jean Tatalias 571-447-7977 Joanna Taylor 703-243-5989		15 8:30 AM Walker Nature Center Pete Peters			18 7:30 AM Algonkian RP Elton Morel Ruth Schrott			
		8 PM NVBC Meeting			23 8:30 AM Fort C.F. Smith Joanna Taylor	25 7:30 AM Leesylvania SP Steve Bruck Marc Ribauda		
				30 8:30 AM Daniels Run Catherine Kubo Dixie Sommers	<u>May</u>		2 7:30 AM Huntley Meadows- Hike/Bike Trail Dave Boltz Elton Morel	
		3 8 AM Dyke Marsh (FODM)			6 8:30 AM Long Branch Dave Boltz Elizabeth Fenton			9 7:30 AM Trillium Trail David Ledwith Elton Morel
		13 7:30 PM FODM meeting Fascinating Birds	14 8:30 AM Fort C F Smith Joanna Taylor	May 15 - 17 Chincoteague Spring Weekend <i>Members only/reservations required</i> Elton Morel				
				21 8:30 AM Walker Nature Center (with NoVA Audubon Society) Catherine Kubo Jean Tatalias	23 8 AM Blue Ridge Center (with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy) Mary Ann Good Elton Morel			
		27 8:30 AM Huntley Meadows Larry Cartwright Pete Peters			30 7:30 AM Riverbend Park - Nature Center Birds & Trees ID Walk Joanna Hutton Elton Morel			
<u>June</u>								
		3 8:30 AM Long Branch Larry Cartwright Elizabeth Fenton			June 5 - 7 Highland County Spring Weekend <i>Members only/reservations required</i> Marv Rubin			
				6 Occoquan Bay NWR Marc Ribauda				

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
June			10 Remington Sod Farms <i>Call leader for details</i> Elizabeth Fenton Joanna Taylor			13 10 AM Huntley Meadows Butterflies and Dragonflies Larry Meade
			17 8:30 AM Dyke Marsh Larry Cartwright Pete Peters			20 8 AM Bluebird Trail Larry Meade
July						11 9 AM X-trip Limberlost Trail Shenandoah NP <i>Call leader for details</i> Larry Meade Elton Morel

DIRECTIONS

NVBC Meeting (4/15) St. Andrews Episcopal Church, 4000 Lorcom Ln, Arlington 22207, at the intersection of Lorcom Ln and Military Rd. From the intersection of Spout Run Pkwy and Lorcom Ln, go about a half mile on Lorcom to the second traffic light. Turn left onto Military and enter the first driveway on the right. There is some parking near the Church's back entrance and a bigger lot up the driveway. There is on-street parking. Enter at the back door facing Military Rd which leads to the Undercroft where the meeting is held.

Algonkian Regional Park (4/18) 47001 Fairway Dr, Sterling 20165 From I-495, take Rt 7 west 11 miles (mi.) to Cascades Pkwy north and drive 3 mi. to the park entrance. Proceed on Fairway Dr turning left onto Volcano Island Dr, then turn right into parking lot. Meet at the parking lot beside restrooms and Park Shelter 1.

Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (5/23) 11661 Harpers Ferry Road, Purcellville. From Leesburg: Go west on Rt 7, right on Rt 9, then right on Rt 671/Harpers Ferry Rd. Go 6 miles to the Blue Ridge Center entrance on the left, just past the Neersville Fire Station. Meet at Visitor Center.

Bluebird Trail (6/20) From I-495, exit onto Chain Bridge Rd (Rt 123) toward Vienna. Continue on Maple Avenue (still Rt 123) in Vienna, turn onto Beulah Rd. Continue for about 1 mile until left turn onto Clark's Crossing Road. Continue to the end of Clark's Crossing and park at the parking lot overlooking the W&OD Trail.

Daniels Run Park (4/30) 3622 Old Post Rd, Fairfax 22031 From I-495, take US 50 west 2.7 mi. to Fairfax Circle. Exit the circle southwest on Old Lee Hwy. In 1.2 mi. turn left on Old Post Rd (just past Historic Blenheim on the right). Drive 1 1/2 blocks to

the end of the street. We have walk-day permission to park in the Country Club Hills pool parking lot.

Dyke Marsh (6/17) 6401 George Washington Memorial Pkwy, Alexandria 22307 (Belle Haven Park and Marina) From Alexandria, take George Washington Pkwy south. Cross I-495; continue 1.2 mi. to Belle Haven Park entrance on the left. Meet at south parking lot.

Fort C F Smith (4/23, 5/14) 2411 24th St N, Arlington 22207 From I-66 east, take exit 72 (Spout Run Pkwy). At traffic light, turn right on Lee Hwy. At successive traffic lights, turn left onto Spout Run Pkwy, then left onto Lorcom Ln, then right onto Fillmore St. Go one block on Fillmore, turn right onto N. 24th St (watch for speed humps), and continue to park on left. Meet in parking lot at east end of park.

Huntley Meadows Hike and Bike Trail (5/2) From I-495, take Rt 1 south 0.5 mi to Rt 633 (S. King Hwy). Turn right (west), go 2.5 miles to park entrance and lot on left (just before Telegraph Rd).

Huntley Meadows Park (5/27) 3701 Lockheed Blvd, Alexandria 22306 From I-495, take Rt 1 south 3 mi. to Lockheed Blvd. Right on Lockheed; go 0.5 mi. to Harrison Ln, park entrance on left. Meet in parking lot.

Leesylvania State Park (4/25) 2001 Daniel K Ludwig Dr, Woodbridge 22191 From I-495, take I-95 south about 14 mi. to exit 156 (Dale City/Rippon Landing/Rt 784). Following the posted highway signs for Leesylvania State Park, exit east on Rt 784. Proceed eastward 1.1 mi. to Rt 1. Turn right (south) on Rt 1 and go 0.9 mi. to Neabsco Rd. Immediately past the Wawa service station, turn left (east) on Neabsco Rd and proceed 2 mi. to park entrance on right. After passing through the park entrance gate, go 2.2 mi. to end of paved road and park in "Picnic Area" parking lot, immediately before turn-around circle at fishing pier. State fee area.

Long Branch Nature Area (6/3) 625 S Carlin Springs Rd, Arlington 22204 Take Rt 50, east from Fairfax or west from Rosslyn to Carlin Springs exit. Go south on Carlin Springs 0.5 mi. to Nature Center on left, just south of N. Va Community Hospital on left. Meet at Nature Center parking lot.

Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge (6/6) 13950 Dawson Beach Rd, Woodbridge 22192 From I-495, take I-95 south 9 mi. to (left) exit 161 (Woodbridge). Go south on Rt 1 about 2 mi. to left turn onto Dawson Beach Rd. Continue on Dawson Beach 0.7 mi. to entrance gate. Meet in parking lot. US fee area.

Riverbend Park (Nature Center) (5/30) From I-495, take Rt 193 west 5 mi. to Rt 603 (Riverbend Rd). Right onto Rt 603, go 2 mi. to Jeffery Rd. Right onto Jeffery; go 1.5 mi. to Nature Center parking area. (Don't turn right at Main Park entrance sign)

Trillium Trail - G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area (5/9) (Fauquier Co) From I-495, take I-66 west 51 mi. to Linden exit (Rt 79). Go left (south) from exit ramp on Rt 79 approx. 1000 ft. to Rt 55. Turn left (east) onto Rt 55; go 1.2 mi. to Rt 638 (Freezeland Rd). Turn left (north) onto Rt 638. Follow Rt 638, as it bears right, 5.3 mi. to Trillium Trail Parking Area on right—look for sign on kiosk. (Parking Area is just before radio towers.) **Note: Each participant must have an access permit issued by VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.**

Walker Nature Center (5/21) 11450 Glade Dr, Reston 20191. From I-66 west, take exit 60 to Rt 123 toward Vienna, continue 0.7 mi., turn left onto Rt 674, Hunter Mill Rd, go 2.8 mi and turn left onto Rt 673 Lawyers Rd. Turn right onto Twin Branches Rd for 0.3 mi. and turn left onto Glade Dr. Continue 1.1 mi. to Nature Center parking lot on right.

Chincoteague Winter Trip: *Bitterns & Razorbill*

The Northern Virginia Bird Club visited the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and Tunnel (CBBT) Complex on the weekend of February 6 to 8. The trip was led by Marc Ribaud and me. We tallied 102 species for the trip.

On a cold and windy Friday afternoon, the group drove around the mostly frozen Snow Goose Pond noting dabbling ducks and Tundra Swans. On Beach Road, we saw a distant flock of a couple thousand Snow Geese in Tom's Cove. Marc scoped a Ross's Goose, but we were unable to relocate the bird as the geese took flight. We luckily saw a flyby of three Brants in what turned out to be our only Brants of the trip.

Saturday was more productive. We surveyed the Snow Geese at the south parking lot. When they took off, we briefly saw the Ross's Goose again. We also spotted Long-tailed Ducks and Common Goldeneyes in Tom's Cove and a flock of Horned Larks on the sand dunes. The geese re-settled in Swan Cove by the north beach parking lot. A lengthy and tedious scoping of the sleeping geese finally produced the Ross's Goose. It occasionally popped its head up, looked around and preened. On the way back



down Beach Road, we found two immature Black-crowned Night Herons roosting in the low trees on the side of the road.

We timed our afternoon activities with the low tides to visit Queensound Flats and the Chincoteague City mudflats. At the mudflats amongst the many Dunlins, Black-bellied Plovers and Willets, we found two Red Knots. While driving down South Main Street to Mariner's Point, several cars called out

American Bittern at Chincoteague (above) by Larry Meade

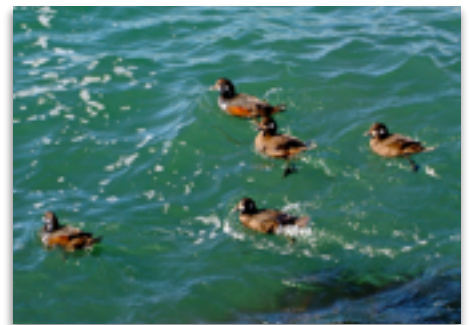
Photographs below (left to right): Ross's Goose raised head among the Snow Geese at Chincoteague by Reid Williamson, a Razorbill by Larry Meade and Harlequin Ducks off the CBBT island by Neal Gause

an American Bittern in a pond bordered by reeds. We all turned the carpool around and got to view a very cooperative bittern hunting in the back of the pond. We later noted a second bittern frozen in the reeds right in front of us. While at Mariner's Point, we had a quick flyover of our only Tricolored Heron of the trip.

Sunday morning began with a visit to Kiptopeke State Park where we scoped a Peregrine Falcon perched on a cement ship and close views of a Red-throated Loon. The highlight of this stop was seeing two Bottlenose Dolphins, one of them just off the pier.

Sunday's escorted visit to the CBBT was the highlight of the trip. Island #4 was remarkably successful: we spotted all three scoter species, many Long-tailed Ducks, Northern Gannets, Great Cormorants, one male Harlequin Duck and six Common Eiders. While we were enjoying the eiders, Larry Meade spotted the bird of the trip – a Razorbill. For a few minutes, it was difficult to view, as we were looking straight into the sun, but eventually everybody got good scope views of the bird. At Island #3, we added Purple Sandpipers and Bonaparte's Gulls to our list, but the highlight there was finding five Harlequin Ducks just off the rocks.

-- Elton Morel



10% Birder Discount to NVBC members at Birdwatchers Seed and Supply Company.

Mention you are in the club at checkout. Address: 396 Maple Avenue East (corner of Beulah Rd) in Vienna

Book Notes

- Derek Lovitch's *How to Be a Better Birder* (2012) emphasizes what he dubs "the whole bird and more approach," rather than "the field mark system." In other words checking out habitats and closely following weather systems is as important for a birdwatcher as recognizing the markings and knowing the behavior of a given species. He also recommends identifying genus before worrying about species. A wealth of on line sources for the most-timely information on shifts in migratory patters and meteorologic data enhances the book's value. Included are valuable tips on what he calls "the tool box of birding," taken from his own experiences in the field.
- Cambridge ornithologist Davis's *Cuckoo: Cheating by Nature* (2014) addresses the fascinating puzzle of how European cuckoos get away with their outrageous behavior. Not only do they sneakily lay their eggs in the nests of other birds, but ruthlessly destroy eggs already in the nest in order to make a place for their own. This is a case study of Darwinian natural selection, the Cuckoo eggs have evolved to mimic those of the different host species, (warblers, pipits and wagtails) in size, color and markings, so as to be less recognizable. The newly hatched cuckoo will mimic the calls of the host's chicks. The host birds attempt to destroy intruders' eggs but are frequently fooled in this battle for survival evolutionary arms race.

—Carol and Chris White

Highland Winter Trip:

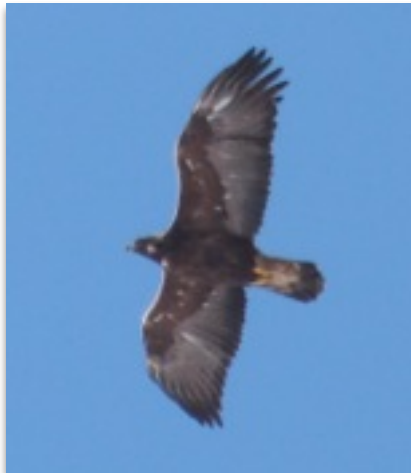
Smith's Longspur

The Northern Virginia Bird Club visited Augusta, Rockingham and Highland counties on the weekend of February 27 to March 1. The trip was led by Beth Moore and me with special assistance from local birders Allen Lerner and Gabriel Mapel. We tallied 65 species for the trip.

By sheer luck, we happened to have timed this trip a few days after a Smith's Longspur was found at Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport southeast of Harrisonburg. This is the first Virginia record of this species. After gathering at the Staunton Best Western in the early afternoon, we went directly to the airport. A short walk up the airport entrance road and after sifting through several Horned Larks, the Smith's Longspur was spotted feeding in the bare grass on the side of the road next a snow bank. Despite multiple cars driving by and flushing the bird, this very cooperative bird kept returning to feed in the grass. Everybody

got excellent looks at this bird, a "Lifer" for everyone on the trip.

Next was Silver Lake near Dayton. Many waterfowl were gathered on this spring-fed, open water lake. Amongst many Gadwalls and Redheads were three sharp-looking male Red-breasted Mergansers and a Trumpeter Swan which was easily compared to two nearby Mute



McDowell feeders. Here we found our target birds – Purple Finches, Pine Siskins and Black-capped Chickadees amongst the many other birds visiting the feeders, mostly juncos and goldfinches.

After lunch, we carpoled for a drive around the Blue Grass Valley. It turned out that raptors were very scarce in the valley this year. We got lucky, though, as we were heading down Route 250 between Hightown and Monterey, when I spotted a bird at a long distance that initially looked like a Turkey Vulture. But something just wasn't quite right for a Turkey Vulture, and as we got closer we realized it was a Golden Eagle. After a quick stop at a safe spot on the side of the road, we scrambled out of our cars and managed to get good looks at and photographs of the eagle being harassed by a Raven.

On Sunday morning, a snow storm began and we judiciously decided to conclude the trip and drive home.

—Elton Morel

*Reid Williamson photographed the Smith's Longspur and Golden Eagle
American Pipit by Larry Meade (below)*

Swans. An extra bonus were American Pipits foraging on the ice and a turtle sunbathing on some clear ice appearing to levitate above the ice.

After a short walk through deep snow at Wildwood Park near Bridgewater, Gabriel Mapel showed us an Eastern Screech-Owl at its roost hole in a tree. A visit to nearby Bridgeview Park resulted in spotting a Common Goldeneye, a Greater Scaup and Common Mergansers.

Our journey on Saturday morning to Highland county included a stop at



A Home With an Escape Hatch

Sometimes you have to think outside of the box. Folks are trying a new design for the bluebird box in order to help bluebirds compete with HOSPs (House Sparrows). HOSPs take over bluebird houses and even kill bluebirds. HOSPs are usually found in more urban areas, and are attracted to birdfeeders filled with "mixed seed" instead of pure sunflower seeds. HOSPs are not native to the USA. They will build nests in boxes intended for bluebirds. They sometimes attack a female bluebird, especially while she is in the nest box, incubating her eggs. The HOSP will actually get on top of the incubating female and peck her head until she's dead.

So let us give the bluebird an "escape hatch" with a re-designed bluebird box that has TWO openings! Simply drilling a second hole in a standard bluebird box, won't work. The box must be enlarged. Linda Violett, who has used it successfully since 1998 with Western Bluebirds in California, has pioneered a "two-holer Mansion" design. As Linda says, "Two-holed boxes are not technically House Sparrow resistant. They are nestboxes that bluebirds can defend against House Sparrows.



The success of the design is based on bluebirds escaping from a box under attack and outcompeting HOSPs by taking the battle outside the box where bluebirds have the advantage." In Southwest Virginia, Christine Boran has run a test with Eastern Bluebirds. Christine is VBS State Coordinator. She put the "two-holer" to the test, installing it in an urban location with a history of HOSPs. The bluebirds have now re-captured that territory. Christine says, "I have been using it 5 years straight where HOSPs are, with 100 percent success." At Mountain Run Lake Park in Culpeper, VA, we also had HOSP nests appearing in some of our boxes, and found dead adult bluebirds in the boxes, with their heads destroyed. Susan Kitts, a trail monitor, read about the "two-holer," and got her husband, Rich, to build one based on Linda's plans at <http://www.nestboxbuilder.com/pdf/Violett2hm.pdf>. In 2014 our "two-holer" had two successful bluebird broods, no HOSP nests, and no murdered bluebirds!

"Two-holer" nestboxes are still being tested and debated. Stay tuned and try it cautiously.

—Brion Patterson

Bluebird box photo by Brion Patterson

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JOIN THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA BIRD CLUB

Northern Virginia Bird Club dues for 2015 are \$8 for Individual and \$12 for Family Membership. Members receive our quarterly newsletter, *The Siskin*. Checks for dues should be sent to Northern Virginia Bird Club, Attn: Membership, P.O. Box 5812, Arlington, VA 22205-0812. Or join or renew online at the club's web site.

If you miss an issue of *The Siskin* or need to report an address or ZIP Code change, please send an email message to nvabc@verizon.net or leave a message for Elizabeth Fenton at 703-533-0851.

Please note: NVBC does not exchange, give away, or sell its membership lists.

NVBC ON THE WEB

Current information and special notices about NVBC meetings, field trips, and other activities, along with a printable membership form, are posted on the club's website, www.nvabc.org.

If you have information or pictures you would like to see on the website, please email the webmaster, Len Alfredson, at nvabc@verizon.net.

NVBC eMail Exchange

By participating in the club's email exchange, you can get email notices of late updates to *The Siskin* and the field trip schedule. To join the exchange, send an email to nvabc@verizon.net. Put "EXCHANGE" in the subject field and

your full name in the message area. You will receive a response from nvbc-exchange@googlegroups.com. The list is for NVBC members' use only.

General Meeting Date: April 15, 2015

Next Board Meeting: Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 7:30 pm, at Diane Marton's home. All club members are welcome at board meetings. For directions or to have items put on the agenda, please call or email Diane Marton.

Thanks to the mailing crew: Many thanks to the February mail out crew: Sally Carson, Elizabeth Fenton, Charlotte Friend, Jane Crawe and Joanna Taylor.

Deadline for next issue of *The Siskin*: The August issue will include activities through October 2015. Please send items for publication by **July 1, 2015** to the editors at siskineditor@verizon.net.



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Photo by Larry Meade of Trumpeter Swan in Silver Lake near Dayton