

The SISKIN

Newsletter of the Northern Virginia Bird Club

Vol. 64, No. 1

February 2019

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

A reminder to pay your 2019 dues

If not paid, this will be the last issue you receive. *The Siskin* mailing label shows the year through which your dues are current or "CO" for complimentary. **Thanks!**

Chincoteague Spring Weekend Trip

The Chincoteague Spring Weekend club trip is scheduled for May 17-19 (Friday-Sunday). The trip is limited to 28 people and usually fills up very fast. NVBC membership is required. **Registration will open on Wednesday, March 27, 2018 at 6 am.** To sign up for this trip, email Elton Morel at eltonlmorel@verizon.net on that date. When signing up, please indicate whether you are interested in the boat trip (fee) on Sunday morning and a Saturday evening group dinner. If the trip is full, your name can be put on a waiting list.

continued on p. 2

A pair of endemic Collared Nightjars at Andasibe National Park: "Those pine cones have eyes" Photograph by Libby Lyons

NVBC GENERAL MEETING—WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 8 PM

Madagascar's Biodiversity: Vangas and Couas and Lemurs, Oh My!

Speaker: Libby Lyons

Join Libby Lyons as she describes how she joined her daughter, a lemur researcher, for two and a half weeks exploring the biodiversity of Madagascar in July 2018. Libby will share her photos to illustrate how the biodiversity differs across the island's dry western tropical deciduous forests, mid- and low-altitude eastern rainforests, and the southern spiny bush forests, with attention not only to birds, but also to plants, lemurs, tenrecs, chameleons, and those masters of camouflage, the leaf-tailed geckos. She will describe endemic groups of birds – couas, asities, mesites, tetrakas, and ground rollers – and her favorite, the vangas, a diverse family that challenges Darwin's finches in the spectacular diversity of their body size, bill shape and food preferences. She will also touch on the ecology of various lemurs as well as on current efforts to conserve Malagasy biodiversity.

Libby Lyons is a long-time Arlington resident who works on international science cooperation for the National Science Foundation. She takes her binoculars wherever she travels for work. Although her training was in plant science, she now considers herself a bird enthusiast and a lapsed botanist.

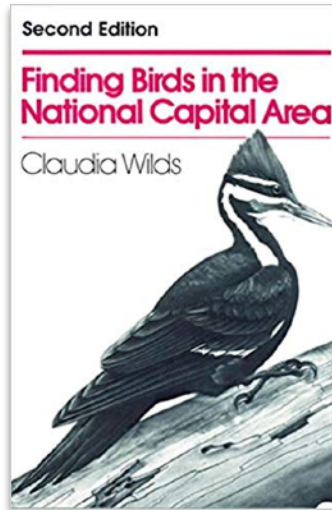


Early bird refreshments start at 7:30 pm. Any contributions of food or beverage will be most gratefully received. There will be a drawing for door prizes. Northern Virginia Bird Club pins will be available for members who would like to buy them (\$5 each).

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

Presidential Peenting

Books and birding seem to go together. I know many birders, including myself, who have extensive book collections related to birds and birding. I always see plenty of browsers at our book exchange table during NVBC meetings. People who are avid readers are generally knowledge seekers who like to learn new things about the world around them. I think that is also usually true of birders. For active birders, field guides are the most immediately useful books to own. In order to understand birds, you need to know what you are looking at. In addition to providing pictures of bird species and pointing out their various field marks, most field guides also provide useful information on range, habitat and behavior. There are many field guides to choose from including National Geographic, Stokes, and Sibley. There are also books that provide information about the birds and birding



locations of specific areas. When I first started birding, I was constantly referring to Claudia Wilds book, *Finding Birds in the National Capitol Area*. If I am planning a trip, I usually buy a guide to the area that I am traveling to such as one of the ABA guides for individual states. Other books related to birds are not as utilitarian. There are books with a scientific bent such as *Where Song Began* by Tim Low. There are books about birding adventures such as Mark Obmascik's famous book, *The Big Year*. There are also books that can inspire us such as *The Bluebird Effect* by Julie Zickefoose or entertain us like *Tales of a Low-Rent Birder* by Pete Dunne. If you choose to be an avid birder, you might want to get ready to expand your library!

—Larry Meade

Chincoteague Spring Trip from p. 1

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. Most trips tally about 100 species, including such Eastern Shore specialties as Black-necked Stilts, American Oystercatchers, Piping Plovers, Whimbrels, Marbled Godwits, Little Blue Herons, Tricolored Herons, Cattle Egrets, Glossy Ibis, Least, Royal, Gull-billed and Common Terns, Black Skimmers, Clapper Rails, Seaside Sparrows, Chuck-will's-widows, Brown-headed Nuthatches and Boat-tailed Grackles. Last year's highlight bird was the Nelson's Sparrows found along the board walk near the hotel. Other good finds were Red Knots, a lone Western Sandpiper and surprisingly large numbers of White Ibis.

Plans for the weekend include birding the Chincoteague NWR on Friday afternoon starting at 3:15 pm (optional) or on Saturday starting at 7:30 am. Activities on Saturday morning include birding along Beach Road, Swan Cove and Tom's Cove. We will also visit Chincoteague Island Park Trail, looking for land bird migrants, and Queens Sound Flats, the Chincoteague City mudflats and Mariner's Point. On Sunday morning, we will board a boat and travel along Chincoteague Inlet then visit Fishing Point at the end of Tom's Cove and finally Black Point Landing, all the while looking mostly for shorebirds along the mudflats. The cost of the boat trip will be about \$35 per person. The trip concludes at noon on Sunday.

We have obtained a special rate of \$92.00 per night, including tax, 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 18 to get this special group rate. Participants should make their 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 pm on Friday, May 17, and a 48-hour cancellation notice is required. Chincoteague NWR is a U.S. fee area.

—Elton Morel

April NVBC Meeting Election of Officers

Mark April 20 on your calendar for the Northern Virginia Bird Club's spring meeting. The program will appear in the next issue of The Siskin.

Also on the agenda is the election of club officers and directors for two-year terms that begin July 1. If you are interested in serving on the NVBC Board or have suggestions to make to the Nominating Committee, please send an email to lgmeade@gmail.com. The Nominating Committee will present a slate of candidates and there will be an opportunity for club members to make nominations from the floor.



Eastern Bluebird with worms photographed by Larry Meade

Common Atlas Coding Boo-boos

The third year of Virginia's Breeding Bird Atlas 2 has ended and year four has just started – as of December 15 Great Horned Owls became fair game. And the third year was a great year for the Atlas in the Northern Region of the state as many priority blocks are now completed (37 out of 59), some difficult-to-find species have been confirmed (e.g., Common Merganser in Fairfax County, American Woodcock in Loudoun County, Horned Lark in Prince William County, and Ruffed Grouse in Fauquier County) and we had 4 fantastic block-busting trips. Now, perhaps like you, I am developing plans for next year. So, I look over Atlas data to develop my species strategy and...wait... I put down Blue Jay as singing? Rookie mistake!!! *Arghhh!#*@!**

Yep, all of us do it on occasion. Those little Atlas coding mistakes slip by. It wasn't intentional. I was probably a bit busy when I entered the data into the Atlas portal. Or maybe just tired. I can always go back and change the obvious mistakes – once I find the time! So, to help me (and maybe you) save time in the future, here is a list of Common Atlas Boo-boos.

The Boo-Boos

1) *All the species observed are not coded on a trip list.* This happens more often than you may think; you visit a block but neglect to code some or all the species you see. For example, you may think 'these are common species and someone else has done it.' But occasionally, the species remains uncoded for the block - and so these are listed as "observed" and never upgraded to a possible breeder. Since you, the observer, are the only person who can add a code, this means all your effort is lost to the Atlas!

2) *Coding a species that is migrating.* This happens often. To avoid this mistake, you should consult the Breeding Guidelines Bar Chart to determine the "safe" data range for coding a potential breeding species. Of course, sometimes species exhibit breeding behaviors that confirm breeding has occurred, before the safe date range starts or ends – examples of such behaviors are nest building (B or NB codes) and obviously fledged birds (FL). If you observe these types of situations outside the safe date range, you should add a statement in the notes section to clarify why you are justified in coding the species outside of the safe dates.

3) *Incorrect use of the T code.* This code is for a breeding species that exhibits physical behaviors defending its breeding area. It can be directed toward another of its own species (e.g., chasing it) or going after a predatory bird (chasing or harassing hawks, Blue Jays, Ravens, Crows, vultures). For example, a bird singing from perch to perch should not be assigned a T code, but instead consider the S, S7, C, A, or N codes. However, a bird that is actively chasing another can be coded as T.

4) *Recording the "Pair" code for species where the sexes look alike without explanation.* Upon review, these will nearly all be "reinterpreted", and the coding will be downgraded. That's because it is very difficult to explain why two identical birds are male and female. Consider using a more appropriate code such as S, S7, C, A, T or N.

5) *Coding Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, larids, Double-crested Cormorants and other colonial nesting species as possible or probable breeders.* At this time,

colonial nesters must be in a known breeding block (i.e. one with a known nesting colony) to support a probable or possible code, otherwise the sighting should be listed as a flyover or just observed.

6) *Coding woodpeckers, nuthatches, and corvids as S for singing or even S7.* The vocalizations of these birds are not considered song and so the S or S7 designation cannot be used; instead the appropriate habitat code, H should be used. The loophole is for woodpecker drumming: drumming of woodpeckers is considered advertisement in the same way that song is, and that behavior can be coded as S and, in principle, S7 a week or more later if the same bird is drumming.

7) *Coding a Raptor carrying food as CF.* Since raptors can fly long distances, into adjacent blocks (or further if still migrating) you cannot use the CF code unless there are special circumstances. If you believe the circumstances warrant the CF coding, then you should provide the details on the checklist.

8) *Coding raptors and herons nest building as NB.* Since many representatives of these species can carry sticks and other nesting material long distances, you should ensure that the target bird lands and is nest building in the target block.

9) *Using the M code.* The Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas 2 does not use the M code – through a glitch by E-bird, this code shows up on the E-bird portal and, when you convert the sighting to the Atlas portal, it persists. If you enter directly through the Atlas portal, you will not see M as an option. During the review process, the M code gets downgraded to Singing Male (S), which may be to a code that is less than your observation merits.

10) *Reporting observations in the Atlas with no breeding information.* This often happens after the breeding season effectively ends in September. Using the Atlas portal, the observer reports a list of species, but no breeding information is present. This skews the Atlas data for the block and the state on effort hours and miles. If you have no breeding information, i.e., you are not adding a code, then you should not use the Atlas portal and instead use the regular E-bird portal (found at ebird.org).

But, even knowing the Boo-boos, I (and maybe you) still make a few. So, when I have some time, especially on these rainy, winter days, I go into my lists through the Atlas portal and correct mistakes. It's not that hard... and it sometimes evokes pleasant thoughts of a fun birding day several months ago!

Lastly, let me suggest that since vultures are a somewhat special case for recording as potential breeders, you should provide a short statement as to why you are reporting a breeding code. In general, a flying vulture cannot be assigned a code except for F (and even then, don't feel compelled to code every vulture you see as F. Once per block is sufficient.)

Virginia's Breeding Bird Atlas 2 portal can be found at: <http://ebird.org/atlasva/home>

Thank You and Wishing You Successful Atlas Adventures!

—Kurt Gaskill

P.S. Kurt Gaskill is coordinating the Northern Region for VA Breeding Bird Atlas 2 and if you have any questions, please drop him a note at kurtcapt87@verizon.net.

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/field-trips-this-month>.
- To receive email notices, join the NVBC eMail Exchange. For sign-up directions see back page of *The Siskin*.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																												
February			6 8:30 AM Long Branch Tom Nardone			9 8 AM Riverbend - Visitor Center Larry Meade																												
<table><tr><th colspan="2">Trip Leaders</th></tr><tr><td>Jeremy Beck</td><td>703-517-1816</td></tr><tr><td>Dave Boltz</td><td>703-599-8305</td></tr><tr><td>Larry Cartwright</td><td>703-941-3142</td></tr><tr><td>Toby Hardwick</td><td>703-201-1517</td></tr><tr><td>Bert Harris</td><td>615-440-0666</td></tr><tr><td>Ken Hunt</td><td>319-354-1079</td></tr><tr><td>David Ledwith</td><td>703-933-9477</td></tr><tr><td>Larry Meade</td><td>703-206-9030</td></tr><tr><td>Elton Morel</td><td>703-907-9951</td></tr><tr><td>Tom Nardone</td><td>703-946-7738</td></tr><tr><td>Phil Silas</td><td>703-987-0817</td></tr><tr><td>Dixie Sommers</td><td>703-969-7931</td></tr><tr><td>Jean Tatalias</td><td>571-447-7977</td></tr></table>			Trip Leaders		Jeremy Beck	703-517-1816	Dave Boltz	703-599-8305	Larry Cartwright	703-941-3142	Toby Hardwick	703-201-1517	Bert Harris	615-440-0666	Ken Hunt	319-354-1079	David Ledwith	703-933-9477	Larry Meade	703-206-9030	Elton Morel	703-907-9951	Tom Nardone	703-946-7738	Phil Silas	703-987-0817	Dixie Sommers	703-969-7931	Jean Tatalias	571-447-7977	13 8:30 AM Burke Lake Jean Tatalias			16 8 AM Aquia Landing Beach Park Elton Morel David Ledwith
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			20 8:30 AM Dyke Marsh Dixie Sommers NVBC Meeting 8 PM			23 8 AM Mason Neck SP Phil Silas																												
			27 8:30 AM Huntley Meadows Dixie Sommers		March	2 8:30 AM Blandy Farm Elton Morel Dave Boltz																												
3 5:00 PM Woodcock Display at Dusk - Huntley Meadows Hike/BikeTrail Elton Morel			6 8:30 AM Long Branch Tom Nardone			9 8 AM Occoquan Bay NWR Larry Meade Ken Hunt																												
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<u>April 1</u>			3 8:30 AM Long Branch Tom Nardone			6 7:30 AM Leopold's Preserve Elton Morel Toby Hardwick
Bird Walks at Local Parks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dyke Marsh, Sundays, 8 am See directions. Visit the Friends of Dyke Marsh web site, www.fodm.org • Eakin Park, Mondays, 7:30 am Meet at Prosperity Ave parking lot. Leader: Carolyn Williams • Great Falls National Park, Sundays, 8 am Meet in front of snack/concession stand at the Park Visitor Center • Huntley Meadows Park, Mondays, 7 am (Mar-Oct) 8 am (Nov-Feb) Meet in parking lot. Leader: Harry Glasgow 			10 8:30 AM Claude Moore Park, Vestal's Gap Visitor Center Jean Tatalias			13 7:30 AM Silver Lake RP Toby Hardwick Larry Meade
			17 8:30 AM Fort C. F. Smith Jeremy Beck NVBC Meeting 8 PM			20 8 AM Aquia Landing BP Elton Morel David Ledwith
				25 8:30 AM Laurel Hill Equestrian Center Phil Silas		27 7:30 AM Huntley Meadows Hike/Bike Trail Larry Cartwright
			<u>May 1</u> 8:30 AM Long Branch Elton Morel			4 7:30 AM Leesylvania SP Phil Silas Elton Morel

DIRECTIONS

NVBC Meeting (2/20, 4/17) 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.

Aquia Landing Beach Park (2/16, 4/20) 2846 Brooke Rd, Stafford 22554 From southbound I-95 towards Stafford, take exit 140 to Stafford, then left (east) on Courthouse Rd (Rt 630), go 3.5 mi. and turn right on Andrew Chapel Rd (Rt 629), go 0.9 mi. and under the railroad bridge to a slight left onto Brooke Rd (Rt 608), go 4.4 mi. to the park entrance, continue past park entrance gate to the parking lot at the end of the road. Meet in parking lot.

Blandy Experimental Farm (3/2) 400 Blandy Farm Rd, Boyce 22620 Take I-66 west 42 miles to exit for Rt 17 north (Delaplane/Paris). Continue on Rte. 17 one mile and turn left (west) onto Rte. 50. Go about 8 mi., and turn left at sign for VA State Arboretum. (If you reach Rte. 340, you have gone too far.) Meet in parking lot.

Burke Lake Park (2/13) 7315 Ox Rd, Fairfax Station 22039 From I-495, take exit 54 west (Braddock Rd). Stay in right lane of exit if you are coming from the north. On Braddock Rd, go 1.5 mi. and turn left onto Burke Lake Rd. Go 4.7 mi. and turn left onto Rt 123 (Ox Rd). Turn left at second traffic light (big park signs), and turn left immediately after the entrance booth. Park in the first lot on the right (by the mini-golf course).

Claude Moore Park, Vestal's Gap Visitor Center (4/10) 21544 Old Vestal's Gap Rd, Sterling 20164 From I-495, take VA-7 Leesburg Pike west for about 12.3 mi. Use the left 2 lanes to turn left onto Va-637, Potomac View Rd and continue 1 mi. Turn left onto VA-1794, Cascades Parkway, go 0.2 mi. and turn left onto Old Vestal's

Gap Rd. Drive to the Visitor Center parking on the left. Wear mud boots if there have been recent rains. (Do not enter the park via Loudoun Park Lane. That entrance leads to the ball fields and community center and will require a walk to the Vestal's Gap Visitor Center.)

Clifton Institute (3/30) 6712 Blantyre Rd, Warrenton 20187 Take 1-66 West to exit 40, to merge onto US-15 south towards Haymarket (0.4 mi), then turn right onto VA-55 West. Drive 5 mi. and turn left onto Blantyre Rd. Proceed 5.6 mi. and then turn right on to a dirt road. Drive northwest for about 0.5 mi. between two lakes and park in the parking lot below the main house. Meet outside the house.

Dyke Marsh (2/20, 3/13) 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.

Eakin Park (3/27) 3401 Prosperity Ave, Fairfax 22031 From I-495, take

Directions.

Rt 50 west one mile to Prosperity Ave; turn left onto Prosperity and go one mile to parking lot on left.

Fort C.F. Smith (4/17) 2411 24th St N, Arlington 22207 From I-66 east, take exit 72 (Spout Run Pkwy). At traffic light, turn right on ee 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. From Alexandria: take GW Pkwy north, take left exit onto Spout Run, then right exit onto Lorcom Ln, and follow remaining directions above.

Huntley Meadows Hike and Bike Trail (3/3, 4/27) 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 (2/27, 3/23) 3701 Lockheed Blvd, Alexandria 22306 From I-495, take Rt 1 south 3 mi. to Lockheed Blvd. Turn right on Lockheed and go 0.5 mi. to Harrison Ln to park entrance on left. Meet in parking lot.

Laurel Hill Equestrian Center (4/25) Lorton From I-495, take I-95 south about 13 mi. to exit 163 (Lorton Rd). Continue 1.4 mi. west on Rt 642/ Lorton Rd, then turn left on Rt 611/ Furnace Rd then an immediate right onto Dairy Rd. Proceed to and meet in the parking lot.

Leesylvania State Park (5/4) 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.

Leopold's Preserve (4/6) 16283 Thoroughfare Rd, Haymarket 20169 From I-66 west, take exit 40 to Rt 15 toward Haymarket/Leesburg. Turn left onto Rt 15 south. Turn right onto Rt 55

and go 1.7 mi. to Thoroughfare Rd. Turn left onto Thoroughfare and go 0.3 mi. There are parking lots on both sides of the road. Meet in the right hand (west) parking lot. The left hand (east) parking lot can be used for overflow parking.



Merlin in Lucketts photographed during Sugarloaf Mountain Christmas Bird Count by Larry Meade

Long Branch Nature Area (2/6, 3/6, 4/3, 5/1) 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.

Mason Neck State Park (2/23) 7301 High Point Rd, Lorton 22079 From I-495, take I-95 south 7 mi. to Lorton exit. Left on Rt 642 to Rt 1. Right on Rt 1 to Rt 242 (Gunston Rd). Left on Rt 242, go 4 mi. to Mason Neck Management Area. Turn right, follow paved road to end at Visitor Center. State fee area.

Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge (3/9) 13950 Dawson Beach Rd, Woodbridge 22191 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 (Visitor Center) (2/9) 8700 Potomac Hills St, Great Falls 22066 From I-495, take Rt 193 west 5 mi. to Rt 603 (Riverbend Rd). Turn right onto Rt 603, go 2 mi. to Jeffery Rd. Turn right onto Jeffery and

go 0.8 mi. to main park entrance sign on right. Turn right and continue 0.5 mi to Visitor Center parking lot. Meet in front of Visitor Center.

Royal Lake - Lakeside Park (3/20) 5216 Pommeroy Dr, Fairfax 22032 From I-495, take exit to VA-620 (Braddock Rd) and continue on Braddock Rd for 2.36 mi. Turn left onto Rt 651, Guinea Rd continue 0.64 mi. and stay straight at intersection onto Commonwealth Blvd (do not turn left to follow Guinea Rd) for 0.4 mi. Turn left on Pommeroy Dr and then turn right at the intersection with Bronte Dr to the entrance leading to the parking lot.

Silver Lake Park (4/13) 16198 Silver Lake Rd, Haymarket 20169 From I-495, take I-66 west 24 miles to exit 40 (Rt 15). Turn south onto Rt 15 (toward Haymarket) and go 0.3 miles to Rt 55. Turn right onto Rt 55 and go 0.9 miles to Antioch Rd. Turn right onto Antioch and go 1.3 miles to Silver Lake Rd. Turn right and proceed to park entrance and continue to parking lot next to the lake. Meet in parking lot.

Widewater State Park (3/16) 101 Widewater State Park Rd, Stafford 22554 From I-95, take exit 148 to Quantico Marine Corps Base and follow signs to Widewater State Park. Left on Russell Road. Right on Route 1 South, go 1 mi. Left turn on Telegraph Road, go 0.5 mi. and turn left on Widewater Road. Widewater Rd. (Route 611) turns into Arkendale Rd. (Route 633) after about four miles. Follow this road for about 2 mi. and cross railroad tracks. Entrance to park Visitor Center entrance is about 2.5 mi. on right. Meet at the Visitor Center. State fee area.



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
703-242-4565

Birding in Romania and Hungary, April 2018

Diane Marton and I took a beautiful birding trip to Romania and Hungary in April of 2018 organized by Field Guides. Not only were there a wonderful number of birds, but also castles, mountains, quaint villages, sweeping plains, myriads of blooming fruit trees and the very interesting Danube delta. We were also very lucky with the weather - mostly sunny and warm, which is not always the case, especially on the Delta and in the mountains. Altogether we had 209 bird taxa and 7 mammal taxa.

Our trip started in Romania where a small group of us took a three-day pre-trip to the northeastern province of Bucovina (which translates as beech forest) to visit the beautiful painted monasteries which are unique to this area. The monasteries date from the 15th to 16th centuries and are painted inside and outside with bible scenes, stories of saints and other images and are amazingly well preserved. Well worth the trip.

Our serious birding started in Bucharest where we did a quick tour of the city. Fortunately a great deal of the city remains pretty much untouched by Ceausescu's Stalinist "improvements" and is very reminiscent of Paris. The next day we drove up to Tulcea and boarded our floating hotel for the trip into the Danube delta. We spent three days cruising around the Delta and racked up 15 different species of ducks and geese including one of the best birds of the trip, a lingering Red-breasted Goose. Also present were Black, White-winged and Whiskered Terns, Little, Caspian and Pallas's Gulls and a bunch of raptors including 20 White-tailed Eagles. I especially enjoyed the Common Kingfishers who were busy scrapping over breeding territories and perched in the open giving us great looks. Other outstanding birds included Eurasian Hoopoe, Black Woodpecker and Bearded Reedling, a lovely bird.

Next we drove south through Badadag Hills ending up in Constantia on the Black Sea. On this leg of the journey we picked up a goodly number of birds ranging from Little Owl to Ortolan Bunting. The next day we birded the nearby beaches and lagoons and picked up 19 species of migrating shore birds. The afternoon was mostly spent driving to the medieval city of Brazov. The next day we visited nearby Bran (Dracula's) castle. The name Dracula comes from a famous Romanian prince, Vlad the Impaler, who fought valiantly against the Ottoman Empire, but had an unpleasant way of disposing of his enemies. His family name was Dracul, i.e. the dragon. We had lunch at a charming Saxon village, which also possessed a fortified church. These are common in this area of Romania and were used as refuges from

invaders. Most of these churches are World Heritage sites. We picked up a fair number of new birds on the road including Little Bittern, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Northern Goshawk, and Eurasian Green Woodpecker.

The next three nights we were based at Desag, which is in the Carpathian Mountains. The mountains are a pretty good height, and a lot of peaks still had snow. We visited the Bicaz Gorge, Liben Forest and Mr. Hargita. The best birds here were probably three Western Capercaillie easily seen as they walked on the road. We also had a Eurasian Pygmy-owl, and great looks at a Wallcreeper. My favorite birds included White-throated Dipper, Eurasian Bullfinch and European Siskin. There was a bear hide near our lodge, and those who visited it saw two Brown Bears.

After our stay at Desag, we continued on through Transylvania, where the many traditional villages still retain their different ethnic character. Most interesting are the Szekler villages with their elaborately carved gates. The Szeklers are descended from Hungarians, who arrived 200 years before the main group of Hungarians settled in what is now Hungary. Best bird of the day was a European Scops owl hiding out in a city park. We also saw European Bee-eaters, Peregrine Falcon, Red-backed Shrike and Woodlark, and many other birds.

The last four days of the trip were spent in Hungary. The contrast between the two countries was remarkable. From the hills and mountains of Romania we emerged onto the Great Hungarian Plain which is totally and completely flat. It is a mixture of farmland, wetlands and woods, and we were able to add many new birds to our list. Outstanding were Imperial Eagles, displaying Great Bustards, Bee-eaters, Rollers, assorted warblers and finches. I was especially pleased to finally see a pair of Common Quail, a bird which is a world-class skulker and is usually heard rather than seen. One of my favorite moments was watching a nesting colony of 100+ Bee-eaters.

The trip ended in Budapest where some of the group stayed on an extra day to tour the city. Altogether it was a delightful trip. If you are interested you can find the entire trip list posted on the Field Guides web-site. If you do, you will be treated to a sight of yours truly looking at the Scops-owl.

—Joanna Taylor

*Common Kingfisher (top) and Brown Bear (bottom) photographed by Diane Marton on trip
White-throated Dipper (middle) photographed by Neal Gause in Czech Republic*



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Northern Virginia Bird Club dues for 2019 are \$10 for Individual and \$15 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 lgmeade@gmail.com 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, Jeremy Beck at jghyll+nvabc@gmail.com.

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 lgmeade@gmail.com. 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 Dates: February 20, April 17, September (tbd), and November (tbd), 2019.

Next Board Meeting: Thursday, February 28, 2019, 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 at dsdm42@gmail.com.

Thanks to the mailing crew: Many thanks to the November mail out crew: Elizabeth Fenton, Jane Grawe, Diane Marton and Joanna Taylor.

Deadline for next issue of *The Siskin*: The April issue will include activities through June 2019. Please send items for publication by **March 15, 2019** to the editors at siskineditor@verizon.net.

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