



The SISKIN

Newsletter of the Northern Virginia Bird Club

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Virginia Big Day May 6, 2021

(Thursday pm, April 19) The phone rang: it was Greg Fleming. He was interested in doing a Big Day and had questions about strategies and whether I would join him and his colleague, Eric Kershner. We discussed how the Highland County to Chincoteague route should net the most species – he became persuaded and later, Eric was, too. I said I was interested in joining and that we should get Tim Hodge on-board.

Greg and Eric work for US Fish & Wildlife in the migratory bird program – every other year the national program holds a friendly bird-oriented competition for its staff. This year, 2021, the national program is holding a Big Year competition and one of the categories is a Big Day. This was the genesis of our recent Big Day.

I contacted Tim Hodge – he and I did a few Big Days some time ago and our best result was on May 15, 2014 where we tallied 199 species - and I suggested he join the team because of his depth of knowledge. He agreed and soon after we all Skyped and the strategizing started. Tim did extensive scouting in Augusta and Highland Counties and I scouted east of Richmond and on the Eastern Shore. We chose Thursday to avoid weather, Friday traffic and Mother's Day.

We began at midnight at Bridgewater Treatment Plant – the first two species were Canada Goose and Killdeer and were quickly followed by Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, American Coot, Lesser Scaup, Common Merganser, and Ruddy Duck. We missed the Snow Goose and Eared Grebe reported there the day before by Eric and

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NVBC GENERAL MEETING—THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 8 PM

Local Birding Adventures Around the Region Including Northern Virginia Parks

Speaker: Matt Felperin

Matt Felperin is a local naturalist and photographer who has been making the best of the limitations due to Covid-19. His latest newsworthy adventure involved rescuing a Common Loon that landed in a Fairfax pond from which it couldn't take off. Recently he photographed a Wilson's Phalarope in the Reflecting Pool. He is currently the Roving Naturalist for the Northern Virginia Parks. His photographs and tales of birding on foot and by kayak ought to be a light and fun presentation—just the sort to stimulate conversation during our first live in-person meeting since early 2020.

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.



Matt Felperin and Virginia Rail

Inside

- Calendar of NVBC field trips August 14 - November 3, 2021
- Exploring the birds of JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary
- Birding and Photography: Exploring with my camera

Presidential Peentings

For me, an exciting feature of my interests in birding and in nature as a whole, is the opportunity it has afforded me to continue to learn new things throughout my life. Every time I go out to a park or other natural area, I try to add something to my knowledge base. I might see something new, hear a new bird vocalization, or I might learn some interesting fact that inspires me to research a subject further. I especially enjoy exploring areas that I might not have quite as much experience in. A good example is a dragonfly and damselfly count sponsored by the Clifton Institute that I participated in recently. I am fairly confident in my ability to identify the common species, but there are



some confusing species that can look very similar. Spreadwings, a type of damselfly, can be especially challenging. Fortunately, my team had photos of everything and we were able to figure out the identifications of what we saw on the count. I think we all learned a great deal through this experience. There is so much out there and I look forward to many of you joining me on a journey of learning for many years to come.

—Larry Meade

Widow Skimmer at The Farm Brewery seen on the day of the dragonfly count photographed by Larry Meade

Virginia Big Day from p. 1

Greg. After that, we took many dark gravel roads and notched Mute Swan, Barn Owl, Least Bittern, Wilson's Snipe, and Sora plus a few common species like Horned Lark and Yellow-breasted Chat. We were now west bound to Highland Co.

Our first stop was Bramble Hill, which was the O'Brian mountain residence. Pulling up I heard the tooting of a Northern Saw-whet up the slope and Tim also got it but the owl did only one sequence and Greg and Eric missed it. So, we finished up here with American Woodcock and left - the next stop netted Eastern Screech Owl calling close to the car. We started up Laurel Forks Road and the first stop was another tooting Saw-whet but it was distant and hard to hear for all in the group. Fortunately, the third Saw-whet stop was easier - Tim and Greg heard bill clapping as they got out of the car. Playback was initiated and it took about 1.568 seconds for the owl to give the wail call which was easily heard by all as it was less than 50 feet away; so, we all got in the car and sped off. The next stop yielded both male and female Long-eared Owls calling several times (there is a distinctive call for the female, see for example <https://www.xeno-canto.org/638905>). Straight Fork produced Barred Owls and Whip-poor-wills. To round out the owls, we heard a Great Horned Owl near the W. VA border. (This means nearly all the regular Virginia spring

and summer owls are in Highland County. Now, if we only had a breeding Short-eared!)

Dawn chorus started at this border spot - the first bird was an Eastern Towhee, followed by many species such as Hermit Thrush, Veery, Junco, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Black-capped Chickadee. As we began our descent, we passed a singing Winter Wren - no longer easy to find up in this area. The species count soon increased: scads of Black-throated Blue, Magnolia, and Black-throated Green Warblers were heard. We found a Wild Turkey roosting 60 feet up in a tree, Ruffed Grouse drumming near a wet patch and nearby were migrant Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Northern Waterthrush; plus, Greg pulled out a Nashville Warbler! Driving further down slope other highlights were Cooper's Hawk, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, Black-billed Cuckoo, Blackburnian Warbler, more Ruffed Grouse (a real treat to see two males facing off in the middle of the road), Alder Flycatcher, Baltimore Oriole and Raven. At the edge of Blue Grass Valley, we heard a Vesper Sparrow sing, found Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows, and heard many Bobolinks. A second visit to Bramble Hill produced Golden-winged Warbler and nearby we found Blue-winged Warbler, Green Heron, Am. Kestrel and Cliff Swallow. A well anticipated stop at Forks of Water produced Orchard Oriole and Warbling Vireo. As we sped towards Augusta County, we found a pair of Broad-winged Hawks, Cerulean and Worm-eating Warblers and Yellow-throated Vireos. Plus, another Golden-winged Warbler.



Ruffed Grouse facing off on Laurel Forks Road. Photographs: single grouse by Kurt Gaskill and face off taken by Greg Fleming



The drive through Augusta County added Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks, White-throated Sparrow, and Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers. We passed Afton Mtn with 138 species at 11:20 (we were running late from our time target – does a Big Day team ever hit its time targets?). A stop at Observatory Hill in Charlottesville added Bay-breasted, Blackpoll, and Hooded Warblers, Eastern Wood Pewee, and Swainson's Thrush. In addition, we found a Sutton's Warbler (a first for some of us). We then booked, stopping east of Richmond along Rt 60 to notch Summer Tanager, White-eyed Vireo, Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-throated and Prothonotary Warblers plus Chimney Swift. We continued to Blue Bird Farm for the staked-out Snow Goose and then drove across/under Hampton Roads to the start of the CBBT.

For the CBBT our strategy was that everyone - other than the driver (that is, me) - combed the sea and horizon with bins; this resulted in tallies for Northern Gannet, Sandwich Tern, Caspian Tern, Common Tern, Brown Pelican, DC Cormorant and Common Loon. Landfall enabled the driver to glimpse a Caspian Tern. Next stop was Ramp Road for some simple shorebirds, Bald Eagle, Prairie Warbler and an amazing Northern Bobwhite! Driving up to near Magotha Rd and Seaside Rd produced the expected Eurasian Collared Dove. Time was now running late so we skipped several spots and headed straight for Willis Wharf. We arrived at Willis close to 5pm and nearly high tide: we got 2 of the 3 targets (Whimbrel, Gull-billed Tern but missed Marbled Godwit) and spotted a bonus: Bonaparte's Gull!

Next up: Chincoteague causeway. The oyster bar had, naturally, an American Oystercatcher. And the nesting bushes at Wire Narrows Marsh had all the expected birds: Great and Snowy Egret, Little Blue and Tricolored Heron, Glossy and White Ibis, and Black-crowned Night-Heron; yet the site lacked Cattle Egret. Black-necked Stilts were nearby, plus some shorebirds and the ever-present Boat-tailed Grackles. Next stop was in town for a Brown-headed Nuthatch behind a motel.



Black-necked Stilt at Chincoteague photographed by Kurt Gaskill

Arriving at the refuge we went straight for the beach. A quick scan found a small group of Sanderling and Red Knots. I pointed out a Least Tern flying along the beach as well as another gannet. We checked some nearby shorebirds and drove to the wildlife loop. A few more shorebirds to look over but nothing new - then Eric spotted 4 Red-breasted Mergansers swimming behind the

shorebirds. We went to the Marsh Trail platform and waited a few minutes for the Yellow Rail to (finally) make a noise and then we left as the Chuck-will's-widows started up.

Back on the causeway we found one Yellow-crowned Night-Heron through vocalization near the Wire Narrows Marsh nest sites. We stopped for take-away at Sonic and drove to the Saxis area. We had missed Yellow-billed Cuckoo during the day so we tried for it on Marsh Market Road – but no luck (yet, both Night-Herons were heard!). We then drove over to Hammock Rd in the Saxis WMA and pulled out the easy chairs and sat down to listen to the night birds (it's about 10 pm).

We recommend doing a night visit to Hammock Rd – virtually no traffic and on a cool night the bugs are only at half-strength. The dominant bird is Clapper Rail with a dozen or so Virginia Rails close by. Probably 10 Marsh Wrens and a dozen Seaside Sparrows. We were surprised by a Yellow-billed Cuckoo singing behind us – we heard another two later plus a Black-billed Cuckoo overhead. Eventually Tim pointed out Nelson's Sparrows singing that we all got on as well as the Saltmarsh Sparrows singing closer to the bushes where it's a bit drier (only a few of each). We were surprised by the number of Least Bitterns out there – at least 4 and possibly 5. Plus, one American Bittern which “oomp’ed” a few times. A distant Great Horned Owl hooted from a bit south of Saxis town and its juvie also called out. We heard some quacking ducks and Canada Geese from the direction of Saxis. Overhead migrants called out “seet” but no ID could be made. And two Dickcissels overflying called out an hour apart.

The last bird was at 11:45 pm – I was checking email when it sang, perhaps 20 feet from the car. A clear LeConte's Sparrow song. The area is somewhat dry – no Virginia Rails or Marsh Wrens or Nelson's Sparrows were close. All got on the bird, even though it moved 50 feet or more away. We compared vocalizations with Nelson's but LeConte's was a perfect fit. And then the clock struck 12 and we were done.

The final tally was 208 species as a team, with individual totals of 201 to 208. We drove nocturnally 150 miles and in daylight traveled 470 miles. Our big misses on the route were Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, and Kentucky Warbler.

We could not have had this amazing Big Day without the help of many people. On behalf of my teammates, Eric, Greg and Tim, we extend Special Thank You's to John Spahr, Vic Laubach, Allen Lerner, Penny Warren, Bill Hohenstein, and advice given many years ago by Bill Williams and Bob Ake. Also, we must mention the immense value of the amazing reports, and the reporters (such as the work by Carlton Noll), to eBird (which we did not access during the Big Day) that helped nail down various sites. And a thank you to Jan Frye who helped on the Richmond area scouting.

We wish you all the Best in Birds!

**—Kurt Gaskill, Tim Hodge,
Greg Fleming and Eric Kershner**

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 on 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/updated-field-trips/>.
- 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
<u>August</u>						
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Trip Leaders Jeremy Beck 703-517-1816 Dave Boltz 703-599-8305 Kurt Gaskill 703-768-2172 Toby Hardwick 703-201-1517 Gerco Hoogeweg 540-822-5857 Ken Hunt 319-354-1079 Larry Meade 571-275-2523 Elton Morel 703-907-9951 Tom Nardone 703-946-7738 Phil Silas 703-987-0817 Dixie Sommers 703-969-7931 Joanna Taylor 703-243-5989 </div>						14 8 AM Bombay Hook X-Trip Members only/ Registration Required Larry Meade
						21 7:30 AM Huntley Meadows Ken Hunt Larry Meade
						28 8 AM Shenandoah River Campus at Cool Springs Battlefield Elton Morel Dave Boltz
			<u>September</u> 1 8:30 AM Long Branch Tom Nardone			4 7:30 AM Conway-Robinson State Forest Toby Hardwick
						5 7:15 PM Swift/Nighthawk Watch Joanna Taylor <u>Call leader for meeting</u> <u>place and directions</u>
			8 8:30 AM Dyke Marsh Tom Nardone			11 7:30 AM Leesylvania SP Ken Hunt Larry Meade
			15 8:30 AM Algonkian RP Elton Morel Dave Boltz			18 7:30 AM JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary — Reservations only See p. 6 article for instructions Gerco Hoogeweg Elton Morel
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Bird Walks at Local Parks • Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, second Saturdays, 8 am. Meet at the parking lot. Visit the Loudoun Wildlife web site, www.loudounwildlife.org/events/ • Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship, fourth Saturday, 8 am Meet at Education Center. www.loudounwildlife.org/events/ • Dyke Marsh, Sundays, 8 am See directions. Visit the Friends of Dyke Marsh web site, www.fodm.org. <div style="text-align: right;"><i>Continued on p. 5</i></div> </div>			22 8:30 AM Fort C F Smith Jeremy Beck	23 NVBC Meeting 8 PM		25 7:30 AM Occoquan Bay NWR Phil Silas Ken Hunt
			29 8:30 AM Cub Run Stream Valley Park Elton Morel		<u>October</u>	
			6 8:30 AM Long Branch Tom Nardone Jeremy Beck			
						2 7:30 AM Leopold's Preserve Toby Hardwick
						9 8 AM Aquia Landing Beach Park Elton Morel Kurt Gaskill

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<u>October</u>				14 8:30 AM Neabsco Regional Park Boardwalk Phil Silas	16 8 AM Bristoe Station Battlefield Park Toby Hardwick	
<div>Bird Walks at Local Parks<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 (Apr-Oct) 8 am (Nov-Mar) Meet in parking lot. Leader: Harry Glasgow• Merrimac Farm, last Sunday, 8 am Meet at Merrimac Farm Stone House. www.pwconserve.org/eventsindex.html#birds</div>				20 8:30 AM Laurel Hill Equestrian Center Phil Silas	23 8:15 AM Sky Meadows SP Dixie Sommers Elton Morel	
				27 8:30 AM Meadowood Recreation Area Tom Nardone	30 8 AM Silver Lake RP Toby Hardwick Larry Meade	
				<u>November</u>		3 8:30 AM Long Branch Tom Nardone

DIRECTIONS

NVBC Meeting (9/23) 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 (9/15) 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.

Aquia Landing Beach Park (10/9) 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 the parking lot.

Bombay Hook X-trip (8/14) Take Rt 50 across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. Go north 34 mi. on Rt 301. Turn right at Rt 300. Go 15 mi. to Kenton, Delaware. At the traffic light, turn right on Rt 42 to Leipsic. From there go left on Rt 9 for 1.5 mi. to the entrance of the refuge. Meet at the Visitor Center parking lot.

Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park (10/16) 10708 Bristow Rd, Bristow, VA 20136. From I-95: Take Rt 234 north (exit 152B), travel 7.5 mi. and make a left onto Independent Hill Dr. Then make immediate right onto Rt 619 (Bristow Rd). Travel 7 mi. and turn left onto Iron Brigade Unit Ave. The parking lot is located on the left at the traffic circle. From I-66: Take Rt 234 south (Exit 44). Travel 4.5 miles and turn right onto Rt 28 (Nokesville Rd). Travel 1.5 mi. and turn left onto Rt 619 (Bristow Rd). Travel 0.25 mi., turn right onto Iron Brigade Unit Ave and continue to parking lot. Meet in parking lot.

Conway Robinson State Forest (9/4) 12816 Lee Hwy, Gainesville 20155 From I-495, take I-66 west 27.6 mi. to exit 43B, US-29 North in Gainesville. Continue on US-29 for .4 mi, turn left into access road to parking area. There is a small parking area adjacent Route 29-S which can accommodate approximately 10 cars. Additional

parking is permitted along the entrance/exit road unless it restricts through traffic.

Cub Run Stream Valley Park (9/29) From the junction of I-66 and I-495, follow I-66 W to US 29 S in Centreville. Take exit 52 from I-66 W. Turn right onto US 29 S, go 1.5 mi. and turn right onto Pleasant Valley Rd (State Rt 609), go 0.9 mi. and turn right onto Blueridge View Dr, go 0.3 mi. and turn right onto Hidden Canyon Rd, go 0.3 mi. and turn left onto Stillfield Pl, go 0.3 mi to 15077 Stillfield Pl on the left. Park in the neighborhood side streets nearest the front of 15077 Stillfield Pl. Meet at the entrance to the park to the left of the house at 15077. Avoid any parking that blocks driveways. There are several spots along the trail that could be under water. If there have been recent rains, recommend wearing mud boots or waterproof shoes.

Dyke Marsh (9/8) 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 (9/22) 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

Trip Directions *from page 5*

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 Park (8/21) 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.

JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary (9/18) Near Lucketts. Not open to the public. Directions to Lucketts Community Center. From points east and south, take VA Rt 15 north to Lucketts. At the traffic light, turn right onto Rt 662 and immediately right into the community center parking lot.

Laurel Hill Equestrian Center (10/20) 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 (9/11) 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 (10/2) 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.

Long Branch Nature Area (9/1, 10/6, 11/3) 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.

Meadowood Recreation Area (10/27) 10406 Gunston Rd, Lorton, VA 22079 From I-495, take I-95 south 7 mi. to Lorton exit. Left on Rt 642. Immediately after passing under railroad tracks (0.25 mi.) turn right on Lorton Market Rd, which soon becomes Gunston Cove Rd. After crossing Rt 1, road becomes Gunston Rd. Go 1.8 miles to Meadowood on right. (BLM, Lower Potomac Station Office). Park on right next to horse barns just before field station building.

Neabsco Regional Park Boardwalk (10/14) 15125 Blackburn Rd, Woodbridge 22191 From I-495, take I-95 south about 14 mi. to exit 156 (Dale City/Rippon Landing/Rt. 784). Take exit 156A for Rt 784 east toward Rippon Landing. Continue 0.7 mi. cross Rt 1 where Dale Blvd becomes Rippon Blvd and continue down the hill another 0.4 mi. to the traffic light and turn right on Blackburn Rd. The park parking lot is then 0.2 mi. on the left.

Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge (9/25) 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.

Shenandoah River Campus at Cool Springs Battlefield (8/28) From I-495, take VA-267 West (Dulles Toll Road) to Leesburg for 36.8 mi. Take exit 1A and merge onto US-15 South/ VA-7 West/Leesburg Bypass for 3.3 mi. Continue straight to stay on VA7 West for 17.1 mi. After passing Snicker's Gap but just before the Shenandoah River Bridge, turn right at Parker Lane (F709) then go 1.4 mi. to the parking lot. To avoid the toll, from I-495 take VA-7 West (Leesburg Pike) to Leesburg for 47.2 mi. After passing Snicker's Gap but just before the Shenandoah River Bridge, turn right at Parker Lane, then go 1.4 mi. to the parking lot.

Silver Lake Park (10/30) 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 mi. to Rt 55. Turn right onto Rt 55 and go 0.9 miles to Antioch Rd. Turn right onto

Antioch and go 1.3 mi. to Silver Lake Rd. Turn right and proceed to park entrance and continue to parking lot next to the lake. Meet in parking lot.

Sky Meadows State Park (10/23) 11012 Edmonds Ln, Delaplane 20144 From I-495, take I-66 west 42 mi. to exit for Rt 17 north (Delaplane/Paris). Go north on Rt 17 6.5 mi. to Rt 710. Turn left into park and proceed 1 mi. to Visitor Center parking lot. State fee area.

Exploring the Birds of JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary

Located just west of Lucketts, Virginia sits an 87-acre parcel of land with forests and meadows. Working with other individuals and groups, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy (LWC) saved the property from development. It is a nondescript plot of land at first glance, but it has a rich history and an abundance of unique wildlife. A key natural feature of the property is an abundance of vernal pools. JK Black Oak has several distinct habitats such as oak-hickory forest, meadows, and secondary succession forests. It should not be a surprise that it has a decent variety of birds. To date we have documented over 120 bird species and hope to find more in the future. A full overview of all that we have recorded can be found at the eBird hotspot with illustrated checklist at <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L7882388/media?yr=all&m=>.

To protect the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is not open for general public access.

LWC is looking forward to hosting a bird walk for NVBC on September 18, 2021. Birding will take place along mowed grass trails. Space is limited to 24 people. **Registration starts at noon August 18, 2021.** To sign up for this trip, please email Gerco Hoogeweg at ghoogeweg@loudounwildlife.org. We will meet at the Lucketts Community Center at 7:30 am. At 7:45 am sharp we will carpool to JK Black Oak. Parking at the property is limited to 12 cars.

—Gerco Hoogeweg
(Additional information on JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary and the birds are on website-only newsletter addendum)

Birding and Photography: Exploring with my camera

I've been taking photographs longer than I've been birding. A lot longer.

My photography journey began in the early 1980's with a borrowed film SLR, a business trip to California, and my colleague who took pictures of wildflowers. We spent several days in the Bay Area and the Sierras before arriving at our meeting in Reno, taking flower and landscape photos and generally having a great time.

Of course, one thing led to another. Soon I had my own camera with macro lens, a good tripod and my own portfolio of wildflowers. I found out there were classes, workshops and trips with professional nature photographers. I did trips to Denali, Yellowstone, and other spectacular places. I took a darkroom class at the Smithsonian and soon had a darkroom in my basement for black & white developing and printing. After moving to Ohio, I found some wonderful nature photography workshops and kept learning, traveling and shooting.

On returning to Virginia in 2006, I started birding at the encouragement of my good friend Tom Nardone. That led to a whole new type of photography: birds! I bought new equipment for digital and telephoto. And I found out there were trips with "professional birders." Perfect!

So why do I continue to lug around a heavy camera when I'm out birding, especially on one of those trips? There are lots of reasons. First, I love to take pictures and the challenge of getting a good photo of difficult subjects – hummingbirds in flight, birds chasing prey, and more. So satisfying!

And I enjoy sharing photos through my website www.ddpix.smugmug.com. Often, after a trip I will do a short email "report" on where I went, what we saw, and links to the galleries on the website – some of you have been on the receiving end of these messages!

Photography helps me learn the birds. With Adobe Lightroom, I keyword each photo that I keep, showing the species name, location, and other information. So, I must know the species for each photo. This often means poring over checklists from the trip, field guides, and more recently Cornell's eBird pages and

Birds of the World. I then upload selected photos to my eBird checklists.

Posting photos on eBird has led to more learning about birds, and occasionally additional species for my life list and use of my photos by others. Photos posted on checklists become part of Cornell's Macauley Library. If you are lucky, your photo may be selected as a reference photo for one of eBird's species pages. Four of my photos are there: Black-shouldered Nightjar (Rwanda), Black-chested Snake Eagle (Tanzania), Superb Parrot (Australia) and Ruaha Chat (Rwanda).

In 2019, I visited Tanzania with the Audubon Naturalist Society. As usual, back home I edited my pictures and uploaded quite a few to eBird checklists. If you are an eBirder, you know that local eBird reviewers may contact you with questions or corrections on your species ID's based on photos you've uploaded.

A reviewer for Tanzania contacted me about a bird seen on the Serengeti that we had identified as a Sooty Falcon. The reviewer sent the photo

around to various raptor experts in Tanzania and the conclusion came back that the bird was in fact an immature Levant Sparrowhawk. This migrant species breeds in southeastern Europe and southwestern Asia, thus the name "levant." The reviewer said this sighting caused some excitement: "This is one of something like five confirmed records that we have here so awesome sighting!!!"

The icing on the cake is that the Tanzania Bird Atlas curator asked for permission to use my photo in the atlas, as they did not have flight photos for this bird. Permission happily granted! http://tanzaniabirds.net/African_birds/sparrowhawk_levant/lr.htm.

And a new life bird for my list.

—Dixie Sommers



Black-chested Snake Eagle photographed by Dixie Sommers in Tanzania



Levant Sparrowhawk in Tanzania photographed by Dixie Sommers

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JOIN THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA BIRD CLUB

Northern Virginia Bird Club dues for 2021 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 website at <http://www.nvabc.org/join/>.

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: September 23, 2021 and November 18, 2021, February 17 and April 21, 2022.

Next Board Meeting: Thursday, September 2, 2021, 7:30 pm. To join the Zoom board meeting or to have items put on the agenda, please email lgmeade@gmail.com.

Thanks to the mailing crew: Many thanks to the April mail out crew: Elizabeth Fenton, Joanna Taylor

Deadline for next issue of *The Siskin*: The November issue will include activities through January 2022. Please send items for publication by **October 1, 2021** to the editors at nvbciskineditor@gmail.com.

CLUB CONTACTS

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Exploring the Birds of JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary

by Gerco Hoogeweg (continued)

In the winter months when the vernal pools are full of water, Wood Ducks are frequently found, and we see signs of Great Blue Heron along several of the vernal pools. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers can be found in abundance and a few mixed sparrow flocks with the occasional Fox Sparrow. In most years we find Purple Finches

Spring is an exciting time at the property with many migrants stopping and foraging. We found Spotted Sandpipers, Northern Waterthrush and a Green Heron foraging in the vernal pools. Higher up in the tree canopy groups of warblers forage with Scarlets Tanagers and Red-eyed Vireos. The open overgrown areas of some of the meadows are excellent habitat for a variety of birds such as Yellow-breasted Chat and Willow Flycatcher. We have noticed that periodically you better scan the skies for passing migrants such as Great Egret, Osprey and Broad-winged Hawk.

From late August through the middle of October it is often very interesting bird-wise at JK Black Oak. Warblers are returning from their north bound journey and can often be found right at the parking lot. Here we have seen American Redstart, Northern Parula, Blue-winged Warbler, several flycatcher species, and Gray Catbirds. From May through October, it is not uncommon to count over 30 birds along the trails. Most of the birds are easily found in the Autumn Olives, eating the berries.



Photographs at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary by Gerco Hoogeweg:

Above, Eastern Towhee

Below: Wood Ducks in a vernal pool

More information about the JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary can be found at the following links:

1 – LWC website: <https://loudounwildlife.org/black-oak/>

2 – Story map: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5caa1bc0908748f28d30aa7ecddeb21c>

3 - Virtual tour of the vernal pools: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/36305099face41e198a419916ac852dd>

