



VSO Newsletter

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Spring 2023



White Ibis at VSO OBX Field Trip. Photo by Alan Mitchnick

What's Inside

Tracking Virginia's American Kestrels	1
2023 Annual Meeting	3
President's Message	4
Remembering Vickie Fuquay	5
Outer Banks and Virginia Beach/ Eastern Shore Trip Reports	6
Summer Field Trip	7
VSO Membership Reminder	8
VSO Grants, Awards, and Scholarship	9
New VSO Members	9
Conservation and the Atlas	10
Blast From the Past	10
Birding Algonkian Park	11
Membership Renewal Form	12

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Send submissions by email. Attach MS Word document or plain text, with high resolution photos. Submissions may be edited for style and/or length.

Contact VSO President Bill Williams at:
info@viriniabirds.org

Tracking Virginia's American Kestrels

Advancements in Technology Shed Light on Movement Strategies and Habitat Use

Caylen Wolfer, The Clifton Institute

Across Northern Virginia's scenic agricultural landscape, one of the most frequently seen raptors is the colorful, pint-sized American Kestrel. Although relatively common in Virginia, they and many other grassland bird species have seen population declines over the last 50+ years. The northeast United States in particular is noted as the region of most persistent kestrel decline, leading many researchers to explore what may be causing these downward trends. Potential causes include loss of agricultural land to urbanization and intensive farming practices, exposure to pesticides, predation by Cooper's Hawks, competition with European Starlings for nest sites, and low fledgling survival.

Although it is a relatively well-studied species, there are still gaps in our understanding of kestrel ecology, such as home range sizes, movements, and habitat preferences. All of these are critical to understand before land management recommendations can be developed to better support the species.

Beginning in 2020, the Clifton Institute and the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute teamed up to begin an unprecedented study on American Kestrels, now known as the Northern Virginia Piedmont Kestrel Project. Using lightweight solar-powered GPS transmitters that can accurately take locations up to every 20 minutes, the team deployed units on 19 breeding female kestrels captured at nest boxes throughout Fauquier and Rappahannock counties in 2021. From the movement data alone, it was discovered that these kestrels had smaller breeding home range sizes than previously reported, at 78 acres with notably little to no territory overlap (Figure 1 on next page).

Small home ranges in many species, including raptors, are often associated with high quality habitat. Home range size itself was fairly stable across the nestling, fledgling, and post-breeding (fledglings no longer reliant on parents) stages of the season, but some females packed up and abandoned their nesting territories for what was likely better foraging habitat, setting up completely new territories to close out the summer season.

The tracking backpacks also detected long-distance excursions from nesting territories (some as far as Pennsylvania, but most between 1 and 10km), another first for this species. These birds may be prospecting for future nesting locations, but some were

certainly planning for where they would spend the end of their summer and, in some cases, winter. Overwintering locations and migration routes were also discovered, with 2 females traveling south to stay in South Carolina and Georgia in Winter 2021-22. These females ended up leaving on the same day to return to Virginia, taking only 2 days to come back to nearly the same boxes where they bred the year before.

To better understand habitat preferences, the team combined movement data with data on the available habitat around each tagged kestrel box. Each distinct field was categorized by habitat type (pasture, hay, meadow, row crop, forest, lawn) and vegetation height and density were measured throughout the breeding season. Preliminary analysis indicates kestrels' strong preference for pastures, both during and after nesting. Kestrels used less disturbed grasslands and meadows earlier in the season during nesting, but then avoided these areas later in the season, potentially due to the increasing vegetation height as the season progresses. The team is analyzing vegetation height and density data now to see how tall is too tall for kestrel foraging.

The GPS tagging continued in 2022 with 8 more females and 4 male kestrels receiving transmitters.



Female American Kestrel with a solar-powered GPS transmitter backpack. Photo by Sarah Cain.

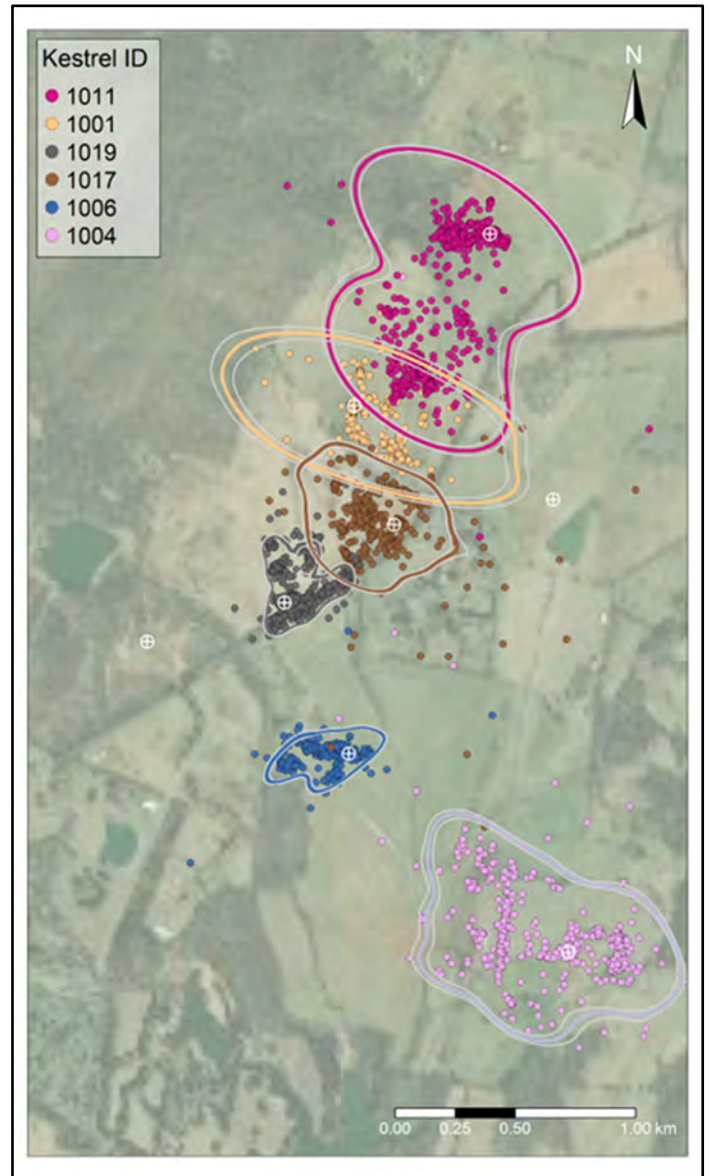


Figure 1. Estimated home range boundaries and tracking locations during the nestling stage of 6 breeding female kestrels in 2021. All available nest boxes depicted by white targets. Figure by Joe Kolowski.

The data for males in particular surprised the researchers: the males seem to range much more widely than females, with huge variation from one male to the next. One male in particular was found traveling a 7-mile route one way each day to provide food for his family.

The team also assisted in a regional study conducted by Hawk Mountain Sanctuary to help investigate fledgling mortality as a potential cause of kestrel decline in the northeast. Nestlings from 10 nest boxes were weighed and measured weekly, and at the final check blood was drawn to test for various pesticides. VHF transmitters were attached to 2 nestlings at each box. Once fledged, the

kestrels were tracked weekly to determine how far they traveled and how they survived the summer. In Northern Virginia, there was no evidence of death after fledging, with 8 fledglings being tracked all the way into October when they all disappeared, presumably to migrate. Although more comprehensive blood analyses still need to be done, preliminary testing has shown no nestling exposure to rodenticides. Virginia data on fledgling survival and nestling toxin exposure is being pooled with data from other study sites to make conclusions about the potential role of fledgling survival in kestrel declines.

After two groundbreaking research seasons, the Northern Virginia Piedmont Kestrel Project is planning for its biggest season yet in 2023. To further explore the dynamics of male and female pairs and their movement strategies, 40 GPS units will be deployed on 20 female and 20 male adult breeding kestrels. The project also installed cameras in over 30 boxes this winter, creating a large network that will record the entire nesting period. Cameras will help answer questions about causes of nestling mortality, and the relationship between foraging distance, prey deliveries and nest attendance. Finally, prey abundance surveys will

be done in different field types to quantify the amount of prey available to kestrels.

This comprehensive approach to combining high-resolution GPS tracking data with nest success, reproductive output, and prey selection will yield a much more complete understanding of what kestrels need to be successful and maintain healthy populations in not just Virginia, but the northeast United States.

For updates including field photos, publication news, and videos from camera boxes, follow Northern Virginia Piedmont Kestrel Project on Facebook and Instagram. Follow the locations of the tagged kestrels by visiting scbi-cec.shinyapps.io/AmericanKestrelTracking/

Want to support kestrels? Visit cliftoninstitute.org/restoration/resources/, with information on how to build, install, and maintain a kestrel box, and best practices to maintain your land with native grassland species in mind. If you live around Fauquier County, you can also sign up for a free property visit and receive advice on how to best steward your land for kestrels and beyond.

Editor's Note: The VSO has supported the Clifton Institute's kestrel research through our conservation grants program. Your VSO dollars at work!

VSO Annual Meeting – May 5, 2023

This spring the VSO Annual Meeting will be a virtual gathering on the evening of **May 5, 2023**.

Dr. Bryan Watts of the Center for Conservation Biology, College of William and Mary, will be our keynote speaker.

The brief business meeting will include the election of officers and directors, recognition of the 2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Regional Coordinators, and presentation of awards, grants, and scholarships. The evening will begin with several student research grant honorees presenting overviews of their respective field studies.

Watch you email for further details and registration information.

VSO OFFICERS		VSO Editors
President: Bill Williams Vice President: Diane Lepkowski Secretary: Phil Kenny	Treasurer: Dixie Sommers Membership Secretary: Shirley Devan	<i>The Raven:</i> John & Jennifer Styrsky <i>Virginia Birds:</i> Matt Anthony <i>VSO Newsletter:</i> Dixie Sommers
VSO BOARD OF DIRECTORS		
Terms Expire 2023 Faye Cooper, Staunton Ellison Orcutt, Richmond Alan Williams, Luray Patti Reum, Blue Grass	Terms Expire 2024 Guy Babineau, Earlysville Chris Bolgiano, Fulks Run William Leighty, Richmond Lisa Perry, Broadway	Terms Expire 2025 Jason Bulluck, North Chesterfield Todd Michael Day, Jeffersonton Jessica Ruthenberg, Norfolk

President's Message

Bill Williams, VSO President

Annual Meetings - Then and Now

The genesis of an organization devoted to Virginia birds was in October 1929 through letters sent by Dr. Ruskin Freer of Lynchburg College. The letters were mostly met with positive support, although concerns were expressed “that due to the small number of Virginia bird students and distances separating them, a statewide organization would be impractical.” The organizers, however, felt those objections would be remedied through the publication of a monthly bulletin, to which corresponding members from across the state would contribute, and the organization of local groups in communities such as Lynchburg, Richmond, Norfolk, and Alexandria. A third element, annual meetings and field trips, was subsequently endorsed.

Dr. Freer's invitational letters resulted in an organizational gathering of eighteen people on December 7, 1929, at Lynchburg College. The group decided to organize as the Virginia Society of Ornithologists whose primary purpose was the “study of birds in the field” to be accomplished by “bringing ‘students’ together where they may know and help each other” and to “gather and assemble data on the birds of Virginia.”

Throughout 1930 and into early 1931, thirteen hand-typed, mimeographed, snail-mailed, monthly issues of *The Raven* were sent to members as a precursor to the VSO's first Annual Meeting headquartered at the Hotel Richmond during Valentine's weekend in 1931. The highlight of the

gathering was holding the main program in the Hall of the House of Delegates in the Virginia State Capital Building! The Saturday field trip was to Curles Neck Farm.

In just a little over one year, *The Raven*, then as much a newsletter as an ornithological publication, combined with the annual meeting and field trip to establish two of the society's foundational pillars -- correspondence among members and an annual convocation where folks could meet and share a common passion for birds.

Annual meetings anchored by compelling speakers and superb field outings with their enthusiastic camaraderie were hosted at venues across Virginia over the next ten years. Those much-anticipated events were curtailed from 1942 through 1945 due to World War II. Once the meetings resumed in 1946, they became everything the VSO founding members anticipated them to be as a component of sustaining the state's society of bird enthusiasts.

As local bird groups evolved in the 1950's, host chapters assumed the responsibilities for planning and coordinating these spring weekends geared to locations where high volumes of birds and birders seemed most likely to interface. As we know, that ended abruptly in 2020 because of Covid-19 restrictions, and much to our collective disappointment has yet to be resurrected.

When the VSO formally incorporated in 1968, stipulations in its By-Laws and Articles of Incorporation as governed by Virginia state code obligated the organization to elect its directors in the spring of each year by a vote of the members. Thus, it is, that the VSO must convene a meeting of the membership annually.

I look forward to seeing you at this spring's VSO Annual Meeting, on-line the evening of **May 5, 2023** (Cinco de Mayo!!).

Kudos and Thanks!

After two very successful field trips – Outer Banks and Virginia Beach/Eastern Shore – what goodies are coming up: Piney Grove on May 28 and Machicomoco State Park in Gloucester County on June 2-4! You will find reports for the recent trips and information on upcoming trips in this *VSO Newsletter*.



Virginia State Capitol, scene of the first VSO annual meeting in 1931. Wikimedia Commons

Our board of directors is exploring an initiative to host regionalized birding experiences. By collaborating with local bird clubs, we can offer outings providing small group exposure to bird-rich sites with less effort and expense than our usual field trips.

A nod of appreciation goes to Patrick Lewis of Northern Virginia who reached out to the VSO for thoughts on how best to promote bird study at Algonkian Park in Loudoun County. His request to get involved with expanding opportunities for young birders led to his becoming a member of our Community Engagement Committee chaired by Board of Directors member Jessica Ruthenberg.

Look for Patrick's Algonkian Park profile elsewhere in this Newsletter.

The VSO Board of Directors expresses its sincere gratitude to the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory for its donation of a solar panel that will be used to power a Motus Wildlife Tracking System at Bramble Hill.

A flurry of huzzahs to the editorial staff of our *Virginia Birds* journal for its thorough and engaging revitalization of the publication now caught up through fall 2021 season. Thanks to Matt Nootbaar for taking on the responsibilities of being the journal's photo editor.

Remembering Vickie Fuquay

Vickie Fuquay, president of the Southside Bird Club and Vice President, Education, of the Virginia Bluebird Society, passed away on February 21.

Valerie Kenyon Gaffney, President, Virginia Bluebird Society:

Back in the 80s, Vickie was driving one day when her car hit an unknown bird, a blue bird. She had never seen one before and took this as a sign to learn all she could about Bluebirds. And learn she did! And Vickie's passion never wavered.

Vickie joined VBS in 2007, promptly volunteering to be County Coordinator and bringing along 27 bluebird enthusiasts from Pittsylvania County.

In the Fall 2008 VBS newsletter *The Bird Box*, Vickie wrote, *'I finally got reports from all my monitors. Our five cemeteries have 27 boxes with 230 bluebirds, up from 106 last year! Can you believe the increase in the cemeteries in just one year? On the walking trail, we had 70 boxes with 250 bluebirds, four chickadees and 95 Tree Swallows fledged. We have 14 boxes at three schools and six more going up this coming week. So far 1,855 baby blues have been reported as fledged for our city and county! We now have just over 150 boxes on public land since March 2007! That does not count the 15 in my garage waiting to go!'*

From those prophetic beginnings, Vickie went on to develop the "Adopt-a-Box" bluebird nest box program along the Riverwalk Trail in Danville and increased the number of monitored boxes in Pittsylvania County to more than 675. Under

Vickie's leadership the county has the most productive VBS trails, fledging over 40,000 bluebirds since 2007.

No surprise then that Vickie was recognized as 2008 County Coordinator of the Year. In 2009 Vickie was elected a director of VBS and in 2011 vice president, and later Vice President, Education. In 2013 she was honored as the Barbara Chambers Memorial County Coordinator of the Year.

But Vickie was much more than the positions she held. As administrator of the VBS Nest Box Camera Grant, Vickie was instrumental in placing nest box trails on more than 75 schools throughout Virginia.



Vickie Fuquay. Courtesy of Fuquay family.

Imagine the many students who may have known as little about bluebirds as Vickie did in the 1980s, but through her efforts learned to love bluebirds as much as she did. She generously gave of her time to recruit and train volunteers to monitor trails, to speak to community and civic organizations about bluebirds, to pick up the phone or send an email in response to an inquiry from a bluebird landlord. It has been said that if you have a bluebird in your backyard, chances are Vickie Fuquay had something to do with it.

Vickie was all that and so very much more. Her energy, enthusiasm and knowledge were limitless. She was a good friend, a confidante, an advisor. Her kindness, compassion and generosity were without equal. It's no surprise that Vickie could get hummingbirds to feed from her hand and bluebirds to come to her call.

Mary Foster, Southside Bird Club:

Vickie and I had known each other for years when we started the ball rolling on creating Southside Bird Club. She was a founding member.

No one...and no ONE person will ever be able to replace her in all the projects she had going. She was the glue that held us all together. We have taken turns being president over the years and getting speakers, etc., for the bird club.

She also worked at Raywood Landscape Center, where she created their bird department and was the star attraction. Everyone went to her for help and info on bird feeders and bird feeding. She visited the nursing homes weekly with her Golden Retriever therapy dogs. She was incredible with everything she put her hand to and will be forever missed.

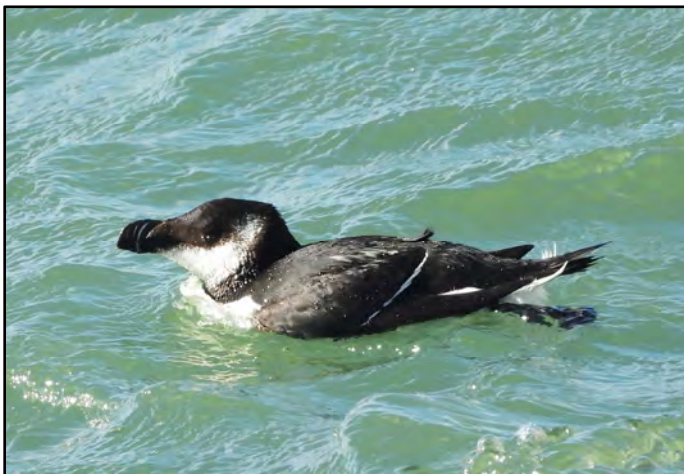
VSO Outer Banks Field Trip Report

February 3-5, 2023

Meredith Bell, VSO Field Trips Co-chair

Despite weather challenges on Friday (windy) and Saturday (cold), the VSO field trip to the Outer Banks February 3-5, 2023, was a great success. We found a total of 143 species over the weekend.

Bill Akers and Jerry Via couldn't join us due to testing positive for Covid. They were missed by all! Many thanks to those who led their trips Saturday morning: Bob Ake, Shirley Devan, Mary Foster, Doug & Sally Pfeiffer, and Mike Schultz. Thanks also to Lee Adams and Pete Peterman, who served as excellent leaders for the two groups at Lake Mattamuskeet.



A trip highlight! Razorbill at Jennette's Pier. Photo by Doug Pfeiffer

All participants expressed appreciation for Jerry Via, who spent many hours preparing a fabulous presentation for our pre-trip Zoom call. All the tips he gave us for identifying species when perched and in flight were valuable references over the weekend.

Outer Banks highlights included:

- ❖ Manx Shearwater (seen and photographed by one participant) on Jennette's Pier
- ❖ Short-eared Owl and Barred Owl at Alligator River NWR and Great-horned Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl at Bodie Lighthouse
- ❖ Anhinga, Black & White Warbler, and Fox Sparrow at Lake Mattamuskeet
- ❖ Red-breasted Nuthatch, Virginia Rail, Marsh Wren, and Sedge Wren at Bodie Lighthouse
- ❖ Ash-throated Flycatcher (in 3 locations) at Alligator River NWR
- ❖ Common Gallinule at Pea Island Visitor Center
- ❖ Razorbills up close at Jennette's Pier

We've already booked the Comfort Inn South Nags Head for **February 2-4, 2024**. Mark your calendar now, and plan to join us.

Complete list of 143 species from the Outer Banks weekend is here: <https://www.viriniabirds.org/vso-news/field-trip-report-obx-2023>

VSO Summer Field Trip to Gloucester County

June 2-4, 2023

Plan to join us June 2-4, 2023, for the first-ever VSO field trip to southeast Virginia's Gloucester County, featuring the new Machicomoco State Park! Field trips will be offered Friday afternoon, all day Saturday, and Sunday morning.

VERY Important! All VSO field trips are open to members at no charge. If you have not renewed your dues for 2023 or have not joined yet, you can **RENEW** or **JOIN** here:

<https://www.virginiabirds.org/join-renew>

Species we usually have in one or more of our destinations include both Summer and Scarlet Tanager, Northern Bobwhite, Grasshopper Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, Orchard Oriole, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Red-headed Woodpecker, and a nice variety of warblers, vireos, and flycatchers. Bald Eagles nest at Machicomoco, and we may even get to observe (from a safe distance) the young testing their wings before fledging.

Thanks in advance to members of the Hampton Roads, Middle Peninsula, and Williamsburg Bird Clubs for assistance with the field trips!

TRIP REGISTRATION

Please register online **HERE**:

<https://secure.lglforms.com/form/engine/s/V2hHmHYlase1QNergR5zEg> **Provide the names of**

participants in your party with each person's telephone number and email address so we can contact you as needed.

HEADQUARTERS

Holiday Inn Express Gloucester is the host hotel (6639 Forest Hill Ave, Gloucester, VA 23061). Room rate for the VSO block of rooms on Friday and Saturday nights is \$114/night (plus tax, King)

Hold the Date ***VSO Piney Grove Preserve Trip!***

WHAT: Trip for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers!
WHEN: May 28, 2023, 5:30 A.M.
WHERE: Meet at Virginia Diner Wakefield, VA
Limit: 15 participants in 6 or fewer vehicles

Registration will be announced in early May. Watch for your email for a message from VSO!



Entrance sign at Machicomoco State Park. Courtesy Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation.

or \$119/night (plus tax, 2 Queens). For those arriving early or staying an extra day, the rate for Thursday and Sunday nights is the same. There are microwaves, mini-refrigerators, and Keurig coffeemakers in all rooms. **Register by Monday, MAY 1**, to get the special rate and state you're with VSO when you call: (804) 695-1900

There are a few other hotels/motels in Gloucester County and lots of lodging options in nearby Williamsburg or Newport News.

And if you're up for camping, Machicomoco SP has overnight facilities for RVs, tent camping, and 3 yurts. You can call 1-800-933-PARK or make reservations online:

<https://reservevaparks.com/Web/>

MEALS

A complimentary hot breakfast buffet is included for those staying at the host hotel. You'll need to bring lunch for Saturday. Dinners are on your own. There are a variety of restaurants in the area, and we'll provide you with a list closer to the date.

SCHEDULE

TUESDAY, MAY 30

We'll hold a Zoom video call at 7:30pm to overview the weekend. We'll record the call and send a link for the recording to all registrants afterwards.



Beaverdam Park, Gloucester County. Courtesy Gloucester County Parks and Recreation.

FRIDAY PM, JUNE 2 – Beaverdam Park, Main Entrance (10-min drive)

This local park has great birding around the parking lots in addition to more than 9 miles of hiking trails that follow along the edge of Beaverdam. There are easy-to-walk slopes along with flat areas. Info about the park: <https://www.gloucesterva.info/497/Beaverdam-Park>

SATURDAY, JUNE 3 – Machicomoco State Park (15-min drive)

This is one of the newest State Parks in Virginia, and we're going to devote the entire day to exploring all the great birding spots it holds! Be sure to bring lunch, snacks, and beverages. It's

mostly flat, easy walking. The staff takes pride in keeping the grounds immaculate while maintaining wildlife-friendly habitats. We've reserved one of the picnic shelters for the entire day, so we'll have lunch there and also hold the tally at the end of the day. Info about the park: <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/machicomoco>

SUNDAY AM, JUNE 4 – Woodville Park (15-min drive)

This local park has easy walking trails. One of them is a boardwalk that takes you through a wooded area where you'll hear (and maybe see) Ovenbird and White-eyed Vireo singing. Info about the park: <https://www.gloucesterva.info/1297/Woodville-Park>

If you have any questions, contact field trip coordinator Meredith Bell at (804) 824-4958 or merandlee@gmail.com.

Virginia Beach/Eastern Shore Weekend

Thirty-five people signed up for the VSO Virginia Beach and Eastern Shore weekend, held December 2-4, 2022, and led by Lee Adams. They birded Pleasure House Point, Kiptopeke, Chincoteague and other spots, counting 66 species. See the report from their trip on the VSO website: <https://www.virginiabirds.org/field-trips-events>

VSO Membership Reminder!

While the VSO's Board is all volunteer, your annual dues keep the organization running AND support the Murray Scholarship Awards, Conservation Grants, Field Ornithology and Youth Scholarships, VSO's publications, the VaBird listserv, and Virginia's Second Breeding Bird Atlas.

Your 2023 dues will help VSO continue these efforts and support the VSO's conservation, research and education mission.

And with your membership, you join VSO Field Trips for free!

You can renew quickly and safely on our web site [here](#). Or mail a check using the membership form on the back of this Newsletter.

The VSO is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, so your membership dues and any donations are tax deductible. A financial statement is available upon written request from the Virginia Office of Charitable and Regulatory Programs. Our federal tax identification number is: 54-1081406.

If you have questions about your VSO membership status, feel free to contact Shirley Devan, Membership Secretary, at vsomembership@cox.net

Many thanks for your continuing support!

Conservation Grants, Murray Awards, and a Scholarship

Each year, the VSO provides **Conservation Grants**, generally university undergraduates conducting research in bird conservation with potential benefits to Virginia species and habitats.

Conservation Grants are also occasionally given to fund community conservation projects with a direct benefit to birds in Virginia.

The VSO Conservation Committee, with the approval of the VSO Board, has awarded four Conservation Grants for 2023, totaling \$3,415:

- ❖ **Barbara Slatcher** through Bryan Watts at the Center for Conservation Biology, College of William and Mary, for purchase of 10 kestrel boxes to be placed at Shirley Plantation, Fort Lee, town of Surry, and Powhatan County, \$797.
- ❖ **Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary**, Shipman, VA, for purchase of mealworms for injured birds, \$200.
- ❖ **Clifton Institute**, Fauquier County, for purchase of five camera units for kestrel boxes, \$1,420.
- ❖ **White House Farm Foundation**, Prince William County, for building a Purple Martin box at Leopold's Preserve at Haymarket, VA, \$998.

All conservation grant recipients are asked to give a report to either the VSO Board or preferably at the annual meeting the following year to inform members as to the success of their project.

The VSO has selected two **J.J. Murray Award** winners, each receiving \$1,000. The Murray Award was established in 1980 to honor the Rev. J. J. Murray, Sr., a charter member of the VSO and the editor of *The Raven* from its inception until 1969.

The Murray Award promotes graduate and undergraduate research consisting of current or projected field studies on Virginia birds. The 2023 recipients are:

- ❖ **Lyn Brown**, Trent University, Ontario, Canada, for her proposal entitled "Linking foraging habitat quality to American Oystercatcher breeding productivity and population viability on two Virginia barrier islands."
- ❖ **Ella DiPetto**, Old Dominion University, for her proposal entitled "Quantifying the Effect of Oyster-based Living Shoreline Projects On Avifaunal Diversity, Frequency, and Habitat Use."

Through the **Field Ornithology Scholarship**, the VSO annually supports a student participating in a formal training or workshop to gain field ornithology skills to benefit Virginia birds.

For 2023, the VSO has awarded the \$500 scholarship to **Paige Pettry**, James Madison University, who will be attending a week-long bird banding training in September at Braddock Bay Bird Observatory, Rochester, NY.



Wetland viewing platform at Leopold's Preserve. Courtesy White House Farm Foundation.

New VSO members December 10, 2022 - February 22, 2023

Ric Anderson, Midlothian, VA Karen Anderson, Charlottesville, VA Linda Anthony, Bel Air, MD Jeremy Beck, Arlington, VA Paul and Lorilee Bultinck, Grandville, MI Nancy Cohen, Palmyra, VA Samuel Colston, Reston, VA Jan Cook, Fredericksburg, VA Maryanna Fisher, Deltaville, VA Jeanne Hartzell, Fredericksburg, VA	Kathy Hixson, Arlington, VA Margo Isabel, Fairfax, VA Karen Jiannine, Glen Allen, VA Carol Kauffman, Radford, VA Jessica Leslie, Arlington, VA Ashley Lohr, Lynchburg, VA Sissy McEntee, Montpelier, VA Tatiana Morales, Henrico, VA Thomas Nardone, Alexandria, VA Kimberly Osmonson, Richmond, VA Michelle Zoby Payne, Virginia Beach, VA	Taryn Payne, Richmond, VA Katie Ratcliffe, Richmond, VA Emily Reifenstein, Lovingson, VA Eric Rodic, Alexandria, VA Lindsay Schneider, Ruther Glen, VA Andreas Seiter, Alexandria, VA Allan Sharrett, Emporia, VA Eudora Thorpe, Luray, VA Joshua Ward, Blacksburg, VA Caylen Wolfer, Warrenton, VA
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Conservation and the 2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas

Our colleague Sergio Harding of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) recently published [The Atlas: A Bird Conservation Tool for the 21st Century](#) highlighting ways the 2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas is already being used in conservation and how publication of the Atlas website will expand this use much further.

DWR's applications of the Atlas include, among others, revising the list of Species of Greatest



*This Virginia Breeding Bird needs a Sponsor!
Hooded Warbler, photo by Dixie Sommers*

Blasts from the Past!

Shirley Devan, VSO Membership Secretary

Learning about the early years of the VSO is one of the benefits of scanning the old VSO newsletters. Here's an excerpt from the April 1957 newsletter about the Annual Meeting.

May 3 - 4, 1957 VSO Annual Meeting at Wachapreague on the Eastern Shore

Before the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, visitors to the Eastern Shore had to take the ferry from Little Creek in Norfolk to the ferry landing at Kiptopeke. Weekend planners advised participants *"that ferry service is often inadequate after 8 am on Fridays, frequently necessitating a wait of two hours or more. Hence, if you cannot come to Wachapreague on Thursday night, arrange to reach the ferry as early as possible Friday morning."* Rates at the Hotel Wachapreague were \$7.00 to \$10.00 per day, American Plan.

Fast forward to the **VSO's Eastern Shore Field Trip August 7 - 9, 1964** when visitors could

purchase a "combination ticket" which included the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel and *"the new Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel."* The CBBT opened April 15, 1964, with a toll of \$4.00 for car and driver and \$0.85 for each additional passenger. The rate for the ferry had been \$3.85.

Sergio also discusses actions on private lands where the Atlas will be important, such as conservation easements, acquisition of land for preservation, and encouraging habitat management. Both public and private organizations will find the Atlas invaluable for addressing the impacts of climate change on Virginia's bird communities.

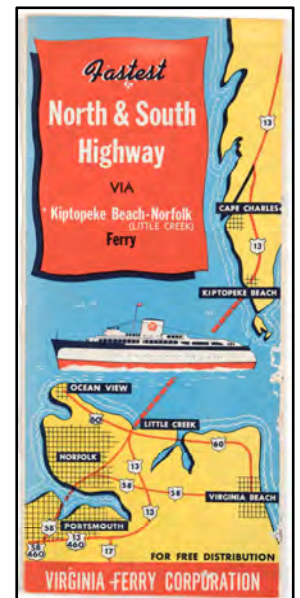
VSO members and friends are moving the VSO closer to fully funding the publication of the Atlas!

As of March 10, the Atlas fund held \$148,500, including nearly \$100,000 in cash and the remainder in pledges. Because of your help, we are about halfway to our goal! *Thank you!*

But we have much further to go. You can help by [Sponsoring a Species](#) - there are about 100 Virginia breeding bird species still waiting for a sponsor! Or [make a donation](#) to the Atlas fund.

purchase a "combination ticket" which included the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel and *"the new Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel."* The CBBT opened April 15, 1964, with a toll of \$4.00 for car and driver and \$0.85 for each additional passenger. The rate for the ferry had been \$3.85.

Many thanks to those who responded to my request for back issues of the VSO newsletter. Many gaps are filled, but big gaps still exist from 1968 - 1974 and 1994 - 1996. Do you happen to have these tucked away in a box or drawer? Please contact me at vsomembership@cox.net or call 757-813-1322 and leave a message. I'll return your call promptly.



*Virginia Ferry Corp.
Brochure, c. 1955.
Courtesy Library of
Virginia.*

Birding Algonkian Park

Patrick Lewis pdlewis514@gmail.com

Algonkian Regional Park is Loudoun County's prime birding location, with over 220 species reported on eBird at the main [hotspot](#) alone. In Sterling, VA, this [Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority](#) property encompasses 838 acres of varied habitats that attract an impressive variety of bird species year-round.

The most-often birded portion of Algonkian is the half-mile Woodlands Trail, running along the Potomac River from the boat ramp to "The Point," or the confluence of Sugarland Run and the Potomac. It is bordered by a golf course driving range and a natural field. The field is small but very productive for sparrows, especially in fall and winter, when all sparrow species present in the area are possibilities. Even a Nelson's Sparrow was once observed here. Swallows also frequent the field and use its nest boxes.

The Woodlands Trail is home to most woodland species common to the area and, in season, is excellent for finding migrants. The portions of the Woodlands Trail branching off to the south are well-known for Red-headed Woodpeckers and migrants as well. The Woodlands Trail and its branches are about 1.5 miles round-trip. An athletic field, just south of the natural field, has a wooded perimeter that can also produce a variety of woodland species.

The area west of the boat ramp can also be productive. The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail runs along the Potomac here as well through a more open woodland habitat. A surprisingly productive area is a small spot located south of this trail, where vernal pools attract migrants and other passerines in season. A natural field east of the maintenance facility is also productive for sparrows.

Continuing west, one will find the [Volcano Island Waterpark](#), surrounded by woodland and very productive, especially in spring and fall. The trees on the north side of the Waterpark's parking lot are one of the county's best warbler spots. Birders will often sit in one place and watch flocks move through the trees, sometimes observing over 15 warbler species in an hour or less. The White Trail, a 0.6 mile loop from the Waterpark, is also

excellent for birding, with most of the woodland and passerine species that occur in the area.

The northern edge of the park is, of course, the Potomac River. Here, the Potomac is generally its widest above Great Falls, half a mile in some places, and attracts a variety of waterfowl. Shorebirds can be seen in small numbers in season, as can wintering ducks. Wading birds and raptors, including Ospreys and Bald Eagles, nest on the islands in the Potomac.

The eastern edge of Algonkian contains the Sanctuary Trail, the only portion of the park specifically maintained as a nature sanctuary. The trail is about a mile long with various branch trails adding a half-mile and borders Sugarland Run much of its course. It is mainly woods but passes a collection of man-made ponds, home to in-season waterfowl and, for several years now, a celebrated pair of wintering Sandhill Cranes. Migrant sparrows and woodland birds are all expected in season.



Sandhill Crane at Algonkian. Photo by Jim Emery

Birders planning to spend two hours or less at Algonkian may find it best to bird only one of the sections outlined above. Taking a slow walk through the habitats will, in peak season, often yield more than 60 species in a couple of hours. Multiple parts of the park can be birded if you spend a whole morning there and folks have been known to tally nearly 90 species over the course of four hours on a May morning!



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