



VSO Newsletter

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Summer 2023



*Tricolored Heron at Chincoteague.
Photo Larry Meade.*

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Editor: Dixie Sommers

Change of Address (USPS or email)

Virginia Society of Ornithology
PO Box 5994, Williamsburg, VA 23188
vsomembership@cox.net

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@virginiabirds.org

VSO Honors and Remembers Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus

Patti Reum, VSO Awards Committee Chair

The VSO honored Charles Ziegenfus (affectionately known as Zig) of Harrisonburg, Virginia, with the Mitchell A. Byrd Award. This award was established in 2011 to recognize outstanding scientific achievement in the field of ornithology.

Zig's work in ornithology and bird conservation has spanned more than 50 years and has run the gamut. Dan Cristol, Chancellor Professor of Biology at William and Mary, nominated Zig and has known him since 1987. Dan praised him as a mentor and as a "major contributor to the seminal research on reproductive biology and evolution of Dark-eyed Juncos that was carried out at Mountain Lake Biological Station." I met Zig then when I was spending the summer at Mt. Lake. Supporting this nomination were letters from Elizabeth Ihle, long-time VSO and Rockingham Bird Club member; Diane Lepkowski, long-time friend, Rockingham Bird Club Vice President, and current VSO Vice President; and Clair Mellinger, Professor Emeritus of Eastern Mennonite University, and bander of Saw-whet Owls at Highland Retreat Camp.

From Zig's field research with juncos at Mountain Lake, to teaching a popular ornithology class at James Madison University, and as a founding member of the Rockingham Bird Club in 1974, Zig was tireless in those efforts. A true educator, he promoted bird conservation, helping anyone who was interested in doing the same. He installed and maintained countless nest boxes benefiting bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and kestrels. Zig assisted Dr. John Spahr and Patti Reum with the VSO's American Kestrel conservation project in Highland county. Volunteering at banding stations including Dolly Sods in West Virginia and Highland Retreat Camp in Rockingham County for Saw-whet Owls, Zig also operated a banding station on a Rockingham County farm and banded wintering sparrows on several other private properties. He was always on hand for local bird counts, including the Rockingham Christmas Bird Count since the 1970's, and he ran several breeding bird survey routes over the years.

Zig's encouragement, his effort, and his generosity in sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm has been a gift beyond words to

birders in the Shenandoah Valley and across the Commonwealth. He inspired many of his JMU students to pursue ornithological or conservation-related careers or to embrace birding as an avocation. A long-time VSO Life member, Zig often took students to the VSO's February Outer Banks field trips.

As Dan Cristol wrote, after detailing personal recollections and Zig's many achievements: "And the amazing thing is that he was a math professor and an electrician first, and all of these contributions to science, bird conservation, and ornithological education were not even his 'day job.'"

Sadly, Zig died shortly after receiving this award. We are happy that the award was presented by VSO Vice President Diane Lepkowski to Zig and his family shortly before his passing.



*Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus with Red-tailed Hawk.
Photo by Bob Dean*

President's Message **Bill Williams, VSO President**

The positive response of 143 people registering for our 2023 Annual Meeting, conducted via Zoom the evening of May 5, was highly encouraging, a true testament to how much VSO members enjoy time together to celebrate our interests in birds and birding.

The final tally of attendees was 55. Those present participated in the organization's first-ever online polling to elect Board of Directors Class of 2026



Dr. Bryan Watts with a third-year Bald Eagle. Photo courtesy Center for Conservation Biology, William & Mary.

members Monica Hoel of Emory, Dan Albrect-Mallinger of Richmond, and Nick Newberry of Oakton and our officers for the 2023-2024 term- Diane Lepkowski of Harrisonburg, President; Bill Williams of Williamsburg, Vice President; Dixie Sommers of Alexandria, Treasurer; Phil Kenny of Vienna, Secretary; and Shirley Devan of Williamsburg, Membership Secretary.

Without question, the true draw for the program's events was to become immersed in Dr. Bryan Watt's thorough and engaging discussion of "Eagles of the Chesapeake". His presentation on the morphology, reproductive biology and population dynamics of Virginia's Bald Eagles was exceptional in its scope, science, and erudition.

Bryan meticulously detailed the significant role the VSO played in establishing Chesapeake Bay Bald Eagle reproductive success and population level benchmarks through on-the-ground field work begun in 1957 by some of our members. Those initial explorations set the stage for aerial surveys pioneered by VSO members Jackson Abbott and Fred Scott, then subsequently by Mitchell Byrd, Bryan and Captain Fuzzo Schermer; a model of

Bald Eagle research adopted by other states that continues to the present.

Bryan's analysis of the Chesapeake Bay's Bald Eagle population changes during the 1960s outlines a sobering decline that reached a nadir of zero young being produced on the James River in the early 1970s. Indeed, the possibility of seeing this species back then prompted more than a few birders to venture to fall hawk watch sites on the slim hope one migrating from some distant location might pass.

The chronicle of this species extraordinary resilience over the ensuing 5 decades made the program's concluding segment a message of hope and proactive progress. It was a "must" experience to hear Bryan skillfully detail how and why the Virginia Bald Eagle population plummeted below maintenance levels due to human negligence, but then exceeded all expectations above recovery

goals to achieve totals that now appear to be self-regulating and sustainable.

That recovery story is deeply affixed to this top predator's biology and demonstrates how the science of population biology brings meaning over the long term. The VSO is proud that it played an integral role in the successful Eagles of the Chesapeake saga.

One of the evening's most powerful messages came early on, when Dr. Watts extolled the value of bird clubs for aspiring naturalists. Bryan described bird club folks as "passionate and knowledgeable. Always willing to share what they know." And he encouraged younger people in Virginia to take advantage of the VSO.

Video of the Annual Meeting, including Dr. Watts "Eagles of the Chesapeake" presentation, is on <https://youtu.be/juTPjZ850vI>

Jenny Gaden Receives Eike Service Award

By Guy Babineau, VSO Board

Congratulations to Jennifer (Jenny) Gaden for winning the VSO Eike Service Award. Jenny's past roles for the VSO include Board Member and Secretary. She is a past president of the Piedmont



Jennifer Gaden, photo by Stauffer Miller.

Virginia Bird Club, a VSO chapter. And she keeps on volunteering!

The Eike Service Award is given for service, dedication and enthusiasm in promoting the work of the VSO. Recognition is in the form of a silver raven pin.

The compiler of the Charlottesville Christmas Bird Count since 2006, Jenny has welcomed many into participation in the CBC. She ensures coverage of the circle and figures out ways to pair new participants with experienced teams.

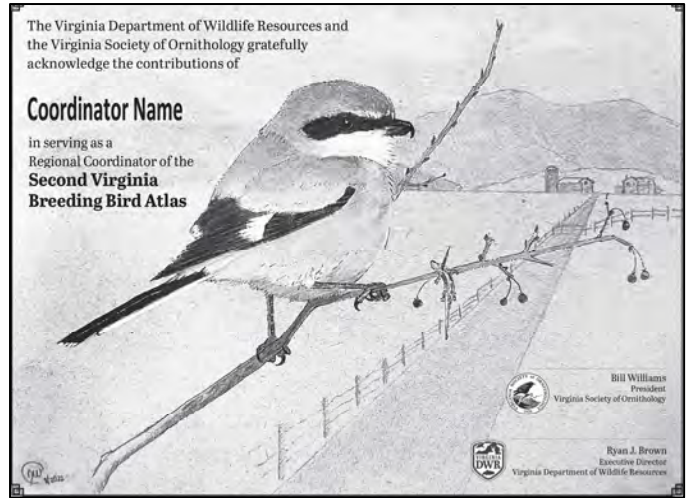
She has provided enrichment to many, teaching Osher Lifelong Learning Institute classes in ornithology at the University of Virginia and actively supporting area young birders. The Rivanna Master Naturalists rely on Jenny for classes and field trips about birds. Jenny has contributed to local bird conservation, including raising awareness about keeping cats indoors and reducing the number of birds killed by windows.

Jenny is an author and editor of *The Birds of Albemarle County and Charlottesville Virginia, an Annotated Checklist 2010*, an excellent local resource.

These contributions, along with many others, to birding and birds in the state of Virginia, are worthy of this important award. We congratulate Jenny!

Thanking Atlas Regional Coordinators

During the 2023 Annual Meeting, VSO President Bill Williams formally recognized and thanked the Atlas regional coordinators. These volunteers performed invaluable work during the Atlas field data collection, providing guidance to volunteers who collected data and ensuring that blocks in their region were covered. They delved into fine details such as which breeding code should be used in particular situations and monitoring eBird data.



Each regional coordinator received a certificate of appreciation signed by Bill Williams and Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources Director Ryan J. Brown. The certificates feature original artwork by Virginia Tech Student Joshua Ward.

The VSO and VDWR thank these individuals:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p><i>Robert Ake</i>
 <i>Lewis Barnett</i>
 <i>Dave Carr</i>
 <i>Bob Epperson</i>
 <i>Kurt Gaskill</i>
 <i>Paul Glass</i>
 <i>Steven Hopp</i>
 <i>Michael Lott</i>
 <i>Ellison Orcutt</i></p> | <p><i>Lisa Koerner Perry</i>
 <i>Zak Poulton</i>
 <i>John Spahr</i>
 <i>David Spears</i>
 <i>Evan Spears</i>
 <i>Mike Stinson</i>
 <i>Jerry Via</i>
 <i>Dave Youker</i></p> |
|---|---|

Photo: VSO President Bill Williams (left) presented certificates of appreciation to Atlas regional coordinators Bob Ake (center) and Dave Youker (right). Photo by Lee Schuster with Bill's cell phone!.



VSO OFFICERS		VSO Editors	
President: Bill Williams Vice President: Diane Lepkowski Secretary: Phil Kenny	Treasurer: Dixie Sommers Membership Secretary: Shirley Devan	<p><i>The Raven:</i> John & Jennifer Styrsky <i>Virginia Birds:</i> Matt Anthony <i>VSO Newsletter:</i> Dixie Sommers</p>	
VSO BOARD OF DIRECTORS			
<p>Terms Expire June 30, 2023 Faye Cooper, Staunton Ellison Orcutt, Richmond Alan Williams, Luray Patti Reum, Blue Grass</p>	<p>Terms Expire 2024 Guy Babineau, Earlysville Chris Bolgiano, Fulks Run William Leighty, Richmond Lisa Koerner Perry, Broadway</p>	<p>Terms Expire 2025 Jason Bulluck, North Chesterfield Todd Michael Day, Jeffersonston Jessica Ruthenberg, Norfolk</p>	<p>Terms Expire 2026, Terms start July 1, 2023 Monica Hoel, Emory Dan Albrecht-Mallinger Nick Newberry, Oakton</p>

VSO Fall Field Trip to Chincoteague

September 8-10, 2023

Join us September 8-10 in Chincoteague for one of VSO's most popular field trips!

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.viriniabirds.org/join-renew>

TRIP REGISTRATION

Please register online **HERE**. The form gives you the option of signing up for one of the two boat trips, offered at 8:30am Saturday and Sunday (details below). If you have any questions, contact Meredith Bell, trip coordinator, at merandlee@gmail.com or 804-824-4958.

www.viriniabirds.org/vso-events/fall23-chincoteague

HEADQUARTERS

The Refuge Inn on Beach Road in Chincoteague will be the host hotel (800-544-8469 or 757-336-5511). Room rates for Friday and Saturday nights are \$132 (plus tax) per night for a single or a double room, minimum two-night stay. For those arriving a day early or staying an extra day, the rate for Thursday and Sunday nights is \$124 (plus tax). The Refuge Inn is non-smoking and no pets are allowed. Check-in time is 4:00pm, and check-out time is 11:00am. To assure the VSO rate, **make reservations by August 11** and state you are with the VSO when you call.



American Oystercatcher bathing. Photo by Cindy Hamilton.



VSO Birders on the Woodland Trail. Photo by Rebecca Currin.

NOTE: There is a **one-week** cancellation notice if you decide to cancel your reservation.

MEALS

The Refuge Inn offers a complimentary continental breakfast for guests. The night before, you'll fill out a form with your order. For Saturday and Sunday, they will deliver all bags to the conference room by 6:30am for you to pick up. Lunch and dinner are on your own.

SCHEDULE

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

We'll hold a Zoom call at 7:30pm to overview the weekend and have a special presentation by Jerry Via. We'll record the call and send the link afterwards for those who can't attend the live call.

BOAT TRIPS SATURDAY and SUNDAY (SEP 9 and 10) – ADVANCE REGISTRATION REQUIRED

There will be two birding by boat trips on Saturday and Sunday at **8:30am**. This is a two-hour trip with a local boat captain and his crew. You have a chance to check out the marshes and tidal flats up-close during the outgoing tide for interesting water birds and raptors. The fee per person is \$35, and you will pay in cash after you board the boat (exact change please). Bring additional cash for tip (to crew) on the boat. Departure is from the Curtis Merritt Marina at the Sound end of Chincoteague



Birders on the boat! Photo by Laura Mae.

Island, 2246 Curtis Merritt Lane. Arrive by 8:15am, 15 minutes before departure.

NOTE: You can sign up for both boat trips if you'd like. For some folks, this is their favorite part of the weekend!

FRIDAY, SEPT 8, 5-6PM MEET-AND-GREET

We will have a Meet-and-Greet Happy Hour from 5-6pm outside at the far end of the Refuge Inn lawn (on the pool side). Bring your own beverage and folding chair if you prefer to sit.

FIELD TRIPS SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

Field trips for the weekend will be offered on Saturday morning and afternoon as well as Sunday morning. Advance registration for these trips is not required. Offerings will include the Island Nature Trail in Chincoteague, Woodland Trail, Marsh Trail on the Wildlife Loop, and the beach area. Details will be provided closer to the weekend.

SATURDAY EVENING

Weather permitting, we'll have a tally of the day's species outdoors at 6:00pm, around the picnic tables at the far end of the Refuge Inn (on the pool side). You can bring a chair if you prefer not to sit at one of the tables.

OTHER LODGING IN THE AREA

If you're unable to get a room at the Refuge Motor Inn, you may want to try these motels close by: Best Western (757-336-6557), Days Inn by Wyndham (757-336-1900) and Comfort Suites (757-336-3700).

For additional information about lodging and restaurant options, check out the Chincoteague town website: www.chincoteaguechamber.com



*Brown-headed Nuthatch – listen for the squeaky toy!
Photo by Seth Honig.*

Margaret O'Bryan's Bramble Hill

Julie Kacmarcik, Conservation Chair, Richmond Audubon

There is a treasure atop Wimer Mountain Road in Blue Grass, VA named Bramble Hill. It is now owned by the VSO after the generous donation of this entire property by Wayne O'Bryan in memory of his late wife Margaret O'Bryan.

VSO may own Bramble Hill, but it will always be overseen by Margaret. Her spirit and humor are palpable to me anytime I am there. People often go there to tick off life-list birds on their life lists or get that award winning photo. Personally, I feel

you are missing the aura of Bramble Hill if this is what drives you.

I was privileged to know Margaret very well. I will never meet anyone like her again. Her kindness, playfulness and commitment to the natural world was unparalleled. Occasionally she picked up a pair of binoculars. I never saw her take a photo while at Bramble Hill. She did not keep lists of birds but moreover embodied a dedication to sharing her mountain-top world with all that love nature.



Margaret O'Bryan

'Come on up' she would yell from her driveway in the early morning hours while birders would patrol the roadside at the bottom of her farm. In her pre-dawn attire and a coffee in hand she welcomed all. Her rules were few; "no playback tapes and don't kill any snakes'. When you were invited in the 'hostess with the most-ess' left you to your own devices to make your coffee and help yourself to anything in the fridge or on the counter.

Then there were the stories, the laughs and endless mornings on the back porch. We solved all the world's woes while being serenaded by warblers, vireos and cuckoos from high in the canopy. There was always the yellow-billed/black-billed cuckoo debate. In the end, it didn't matter-we were content knowing the birds were there.

Hummingbird swarms would create a constant bustle while visiting the spectacular gardens of pollinator flowers and then changing course to the buffet of porch feeders. The sun was moving and the coffee pot was empty; time to change clothes and move on to a cold drink and the front porch.

Monarchs were plentiful and provide a caterpillar nursery among endless stands of milkweed

throughout the property. Unique to Bramble Hill is the fact that you can straddle the driveway and have one foot in Virginia and the other in West Virginia. This has always added to the magic of Bramble Hill.

Awards, she had many. Positions of authority in defending the environment were boundless and impact-making. Margaret would say her greatest achievement in defending habitat was Bramble Hill. This was her retreat to the real world that she shared with so many. There were never too many flowers or hummingbird feeders. Her efforts to maintain a bountiful habitat were awe-inspiring.



Bramble Hill is in good hands with the VSO. Efforts continue to protect the Golden-winged Warbler, a species at risk. The local community is embracing conservation efforts. Ornithology students are reaping the benefits of Bramble Hill. A plaque in honor of Margaret (above) was recently placed on the porch. When you go put down the binoculars, take it all in, look all around, really breathe in the mountain-air and thank Margaret for having the awareness of everything Bramble Hill is and will continue to hold for our future.

VSO Members Can Stay at Bramble Hill! The farmhouse is available on a limited basis for overnight stays. We ask that all overnight visitors be VSO members. There is a small per night fee to assist with maintenance expenses. To learn more or to make a reservation, please email or call

Faye Cooper, fcooper2@verizon.net, 540.294.1665

VSO Treasurer's Report for 2022

Dixie Sommers, VSO Treasurer

The VSO ended 2022 in sound financial condition, thanks to the support of members and friends. Thank you!

The year was dominated by fundraising for the 2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas and building a reserve in the Bramble Hill Fund to support maintenance of the habitat and property. For the Atlas, we raised \$77,577 for a new total of \$87,341. Fundraising continues (see the Atlas update article in this issue for more recent status). In 2023 we will begin spending from the fund for Atlas publication work. The Bramble Hill fund grew by \$10,622, ending the year with \$53,209.

Our General Fund supports VSO's day-to-day work: board and officer expenses, our publications and

web site, grants and awards, program activities such as VARCOM, and insurance and other services. This report shows that your membership dues are the most important source of General Fund support.

The remaining funds continue to have reserves sufficient for the planned uses, including grants and scholarships from the Endowment Fund, and the Kestrel Fund for project expenses.

The VSO had total assets of \$697,603 at the end of 2022, including cash and the Bramble Hill property, and no liabilities. Our full financial report for 2022 is available on request and from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. <https://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/>

Fund Balances				
Fund	December 31, 2021	December 31, 2022	Change over year	
General Fund	\$131,131	\$131,209	\$2,078	
Endowment Fund	\$55,180	\$48,473	(\$6,707)	
Conservation Fund, Total	\$51,660	\$62,072	\$10,412	
General Conservation Fund	(\$1,853)	-\$1,083	\$770	
Kestrel Fund	\$10,925	\$9,945	(\$980)	
Bramble Hill Fund	\$42,587	\$53,209	\$10,622	
2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Fund	\$9,784	\$87,341	\$74,557	
Total, All Funds	\$247,755	\$329,095	\$83,340	
Receipts and Disbursements by Fund				
Fund	Receipts	Disbursements	Net	
General Fund	\$29,788	\$27,710	\$2,078	
Memberships	\$25,077	---	---	
Other General Fund Receipts	\$4,711	---	---	
Endowment Fund	\$545	\$7,252	(\$6,707)	
Conservation Fund	\$29,405	\$18,993	\$10,412	
General Conservation Fund	\$770	\$0	\$770	
Kestrel Fund	\$0	980	(\$980)	
Bramble Hill Fund	\$28,635	\$18,993	\$10,622	
2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Fund	\$77,557	\$0	\$77,557	
Total, All Funds	\$137,295	\$53,955	\$83,340	
Assets and Liabilities				
Type	Cash	Real Property	Liabilities	Total
Amount	\$331,095	\$366,508	\$0	\$697,603

New VSO members - February 23 - May 23, 2023

Daniel Albrecht-Mallinger, Richmond Ric Anderson, Midlothian George Bailey, Chesapeake Justin, Blake and Theodore Barnes, Shipman Anne Beckley, Williamsburg Jim Bentley, Winchester Caroline Bertrand, Charlottesville Robert Biersack, Lexington Patty Campbell, Locust Hill Natalie Cavalieri, Beaverdam Jean Chamberlain, Tobaccoville, NC Christine Conley, Hayes Evelyn Cooper, Williamsburg Dan & Mary Dellatorre, Rockville, MD James Drummond, Mathews	Daniel Earnhardt, Williamsburg Tom Faison, Marshall Jensen Farinash, Alexandria Pamela Faulkner, Henrico Alice Findler, Edinburg Lucille Fischer, Williamsburg MaryJane Hall, NORFOLK Kerry Harlan, North Bruce Harper, Norfolk Diane Herron, Chesapeake Kim Jovanelly, Spotsylvania Andrew Kaizer, Arlington Keith Kennedy, New Kent Jeffrey Kilian, Honolulu, Hawaii Patty Maloney, Williamsburg Lisa Markowicz Benoit, Partlow	Antonio Martinez, Verona Linda Matkins, Mt. Crawford Andrew McCoy, Purcellville J Joel Merriman, Washington, DC Kathy Miller, Edenton, NC Martha Moss, Williamsburg Janis Paushter, Staunton Pat Price, Evanston, IL Cal Salant, Henrico Nicole Shaye, Surry Sally Shoemaker, Chesapeake Christopher Siwy, Fairfax Evan Spencer, Fairfax Barbara Stewart, North Chesterfield Joel Thompson, Staunton
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Update on the 2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas

Dixie Sommers, VSO Board

Here's an update on two activities leading to the publication of the 2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas: progress of the project and paying for it!

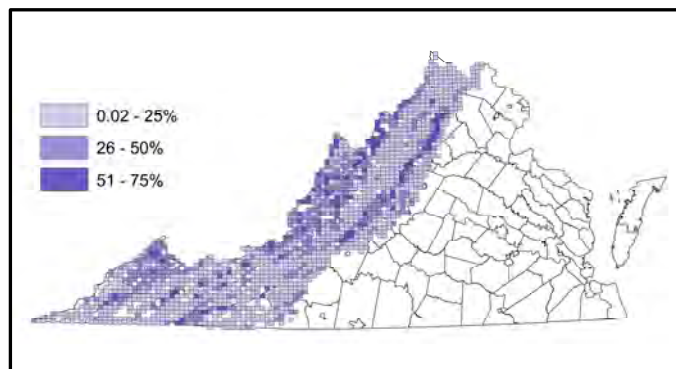
First, the project. The Atlas Final Products Committee completed a job description for the “managing editor” – the individual who will lead the actual work, including planning, hiring species account writers, writing and editing, coordinating with a future web developer, and much more. The managing editor will work for the Conservation Management Institute (CMI) at Virginia Tech and will coordinate their work through the Committee.

As of this writing, the job opening has been posted and a team from the Committee and CMI is reviewing applicants. We expect the managing editor will be on-board at CMI by July. Then the Atlas publication work will ramp up, culminating in release of the Atlas website in late 2025.

The Atlas Final Products Committee, with members from Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), the VSO and CMI, has also worked on project planning and refining the content and presentation of the of species accounts.

At the same time, CMI is continuing the analysis phase of their work, with funding from DWR. They expect to complete this in the Fall.

Among the results of the analysis will be modeled population density maps for both the 2nd and 1st Atlases for species with sufficient data. These maps will be based on models developed by CMI estimating the probability of the species occurring in each survey block.



*Probability of Occurrence- Second Atlas,
Black-throated Blue Warbler.*

Paying for the Atlas publication. The VSO has been busy raising funds and many of you have generously donated! Thank you! As of June 3, we have raised 54 percent of the \$300,000 goal, with \$161,078 received in donations and pledges.

The **Sponsor-a-Species** campaign has resulted in 99 of the 195 species being sponsored so far, with \$111,500 in donations and pledges. Sponsors will

be named on the published species accounts, along with any dedication they have specified.

There are still 96 species available for sponsorship. You can pick your species at <https://www.virginiabirds.org/sponsor-a-species-home>

Thanks to the DWR, the **Royal Raffle** returned in 2023! This fun effort sold 564 raffle tickets raising nearly \$4,000. Sales closed on June 3 and the winner is to be announced. This lucky person and his or her guest will accompany DWR staff to Fort Wool in June to see Royal and Sandwich Tern adults and chicks, along with Common and Gull-billed Terns and Black Skimmers. Most of the Royal Tern chicks should be hatched and moving about and there will likely be a lot of Laughing Gull activity too!



You can sponsor Yellow-breasted Chat in the 2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas! Photo by Dave Boltz.

American Kestrel Study, Highland County

Patti Reum & John Spahr

Status report by John Spahr, May 2023

Fifty kestrel boxes were checked this April, of which 38 (76 percent) had egg clutches with incubating adults. Seven boxes had no evidence of nesting. Three had starling eggs that were removed in hopes of attracting later nesting kestrels. One box was filled with honeybee combs, which were removed. Another was occupied by a red morph female Eastern Screech-Owl with four fluffy white chicks. On the flip side, we also had kestrels nesting in two boxes initially placed for screech-owls.



Most boxes had a “full” clutch of 4-5 eggs, which the females typically lay over 8-10 days. We have another dozen or so additional boxes to check in early May, and we will also

Left: Opened nest box from which male kestrel was trapped, banded and released.

recheck any earlier inactive boxes.

We were able to trap and capture 37 adult birds of which 35 were females and two were males. This is expected, since females do the lion’s share of incubation. In one box we captured both male and female on separate visits. All the captured birds we examined appeared healthy and vigorous. We follow recommended capture and handling techniques to minimize stress and avoid injury to the birds.



Typical completed clutch of 5 eggs in box.

In one box the female occupant had a small headless red-bellied snake in her talons. This she released as she was gently extracted. After we examined and banded her, she was returned her to her clutch along with the snake, which no doubt offered caloric/survival value so early in April.



Female kestrel about to be released.

Eighteen of the captured birds we had banded in prior years, so called “recaps.” Three of these were banded in 2020, nine in 2021, six in 2022; 10 as nestlings, eight as adults. Adding the three “recaps” that we had last year gave us a total of 21 to date. Of these, four were from the very box where they nested successfully the prior year. Ten were from locations less than five miles, and three from less than 10 miles away. Only four came from locations more than 10 miles distant, but still within our study area in western Highland County. We encountered no banded birds from outside our survey area.

To us, this limited data suggests that all our breeders are locally hatched birds and that we have a non-migratory population. Testing this supposition will entail multiple additional years of banding research.

Want to help Ospreys?

Michael Academia, Center for Conservation Biology at William and Mary, is recruiting Osprey nest watchers. There are three simple steps detailed at <https://www.osprey-watch.org/pages/how-to-participate>: (1) register on the website, (2) find an osprey nest to monitor, and (3) observe and submit activity reports. Contact Michael at macademia@email.wm.edu

Michael said, “We need people to report the fledglings per active nest.” This is the productivity rate, an essential metric for gauging the osprey population. See this YouTube video about the productivity rate:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUhko2hGNQw>

Note: The VSO supported Michael’s master’s degree research with a Murray Award in 2021. His research was published in *Frontiers in Marine Science*, April 10, 2023.

Come mid-May we will start banding nestlings, ideally at the age of 14-16 days when sex can be determined by plumage. This will be a time-intensive effort that will extend well into June and may involve over 150 nestlings. In 2020, our “apprenticeship” year with Charles “Zig” Ziegenfus, we banded 89 nestlings. In 2021 John became sub-permitted under Dr. Jill Morrow’s banding permit, and we independently banded 157 nestlings, and then 154 in 2022.

Where do all these young birds go? We suspect many remain in the area over winter since we see kestrels year-round and have winter-trapped a few in 2020. Some may well wander out of the area. However, without placing tracking devices on the birds or recovering bands from outside our region, we cannot confirm or refute distant movements.

Many nestlings die in their first year. Other researchers have reported up to 69 percent mortality in the birds’ first year, with 45 percent annual mortality in subsequent years (*Smallwood and Bird*). Causes of mortality include starvation, predation, disease, and human causes, such as collisions with cars, buildings, utility towers; shootings; attacks by pets.

References: *Smallwood, J. A. and D. M. Bird (2020). American Kestrel (Falco sparverius), version 1.0. In Birds of the World*
<https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.amekes.01>

We thank Steven Rannels for assistance with banding April 21-24 and for the photos shown here.

Also, thanks to Marcia Lyons and Faye Cooper for help with monitoring and winter surveys.



Osprey juveniles. Photo by Bryan Watts



The Virginia Society of
ORNITHOLOGY
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WILLIAMSBURG, VA
23188

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Lynchburg, VA
Permit No 161

2023 VSO Membership Renewal

Name & Address: _____

Email address: _____

Check here if you wish to receive VSO publications electronically by email via Constant Contact. Please print your email address clearly. (Note that we do not share members' email addresses with any other organizations. The VSO may contact you by email to notify you of upcoming events, field trips, annual meetings, and organization news. You may opt out of these email notices at any time.)

New _____ Renewing _____ Gift _____

_____ Contributing Membership \$75 _____ Active Membership \$20
_____ Sustaining Membership \$50 _____ Student Membership \$10
_____ Family Membership \$35 _____ Life Membership (individual) \$500

I would like to make a donation to:

\$ _____ 2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Fund \$ _____ VSO Conservation Fund
\$ _____ Bramble Hill Conservation Fund \$ _____ VSO Endowment Fund
\$ _____ Scholarships and Student Grants

VSO Merchandise

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VSO Field Checklist FREE! Download the latest 2020 list at:
<https://www.virginiabirds.org/resources-education>

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM WITH YOUR CHECK, PAYABLE TO THE
VSO, TO: VSO, PO BOX 5994, WILLIAMSBURG, VA 23188-5994

You may also join, renew and purchase items online at:
<https://www.virginiabirds.org/join-renew>

If you have questions about your membership, contact Membership Secretary Shirley
Devan at: vsomembership@cox.net

Your support means so much to the success of the VSO. Thank you!

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