



# VSO Newsletter

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[www.virginiabirds.org](http://www.virginiabirds.org)

Winter 2023-24

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Project Achieves New Milestones

**Dixie Sommers, VSO Board**

We have achieved two new milestones for publication of the Atlas: we have hired the species account authors, and VSO's Atlas fundraising has passed the \$200,000 mark!

### Species Account Authors

In late January, two authors will start a six-month part-time stint on staff of the Conservation Management Institute (CMI) at Virginia Tech, with each responsible for preparing about 100 species accounts. They will work under the supervision of Atlas managing editor Austin Kane. (See the Fall 2023 VSO Newsletter to read about Austin.)

The Atlas Final Products Committee, a group representing the VSO, CMI, and the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), conducted the hiring process, with 75 applicants in response to the job posting and 8 candidates interviewed. The authors are:

**Ron Rohrbaugh.** Ron has many years of experience in bird conservation and interpretation of science to the public, including as Assistant Director of Conservation Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Director of Conservation and Forest Programs at Audubon Mid-Atlantic. At Cornell, he was involved in development of eBird, All About Birds, and Project Feederwatch. His writing includes many articles for the Cornell products mentioned, and natural history summaries and species accounts for field guides, such as Audubon Mid-Atlantic's *Forest Bird Pocket Guide*. He has also published four books for young people on nature. Ron holds bachelor's and master's degrees in wildlife science and ecology from Penn State.

**Megan Massa.** Megan is currently at Georgetown University serving as project coordinator on the Southern Wings Online Guide and has recent research experience on grassland birds in Virginia and Maryland. She has worked on numerous field research projects and has significant data analysis experience. Megan received a bachelor's degree in biology from William and Mary, and a master's degree in applied ecology and conservation biology from Frostburg State University in Maryland. Virginia birders will recognize Megan from her many years as a birder, walk leader, and her involvement in birding projects. She is also an accomplished artist and was the American Birding Association



*Peregrine Falcon seen on the 2023 Chincoteague trip. Photo by Jim Elder.*

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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](mailto: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 Diane Lepkowski at:  
[info@virginiabirds.org](mailto:info@virginiabirds.org)

artist for the 2019 Bird of the Year. She designed the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory's logo.

### Atlas Fundraising

The VSO is responsible for funding the publication of the Atlas, following the major support from DWR for the earlier field work and data clean-up and analysis. Our goal is to raise \$300,000 by mid-2025. As of December 31, generous VSO supporters have provided \$207,100, or 69 percent of the goal! Thank you!

The largest source of Atlas donations is the Sponsor-a-Species campaign. As of December 31, 113 species have been sponsored, raising \$126,350 in pledges and donations.

There is still time to [sponsor a species!](#) Snowy Egret, Yellow-throated Vireo, Summer Tanager, and many others await a sponsor.

In December, the VSO Atlas fund received a \$13,000 grant from the Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation. We have submitted grant requests to additional organizations and are planning for more proposals for 2024.

Other donations have come in response to direct mail appeals and along with memberships and



Species account authors Ron Rohrbaugh and Megan Massa.

field trip registrations. The Royal Raffle, made possible by DWR, has benefited both the Atlas and the winning birders who have visited the Hampton Roads tern colony (See the Summer 2023 VSO Newsletter).

The VSO Atlas fund is paying for the Atlas managing editor and species account authors, design and development of the web site, and other related expenses. Your continued support is critical to accomplishing the publication of the Atlas!

Again, thank you!

### President's Message

With the joy of the holidays and Christmas Bird Count season behind us, we look forward to feeder watches, winter birding, and eventually the excitement of spring migration.

I am grateful to those of you who have been serving the VSO both on the front lines and behind the scenes, along with those of you who support the VSO with donations and those of you who attend our always-popular field trips. Your engagement and support are key to our continuing success!

This leads to a few questions for your consideration:

*Would you like to become more involved in the VSO? Are you interested in volunteering, but not sure where to start? Or what the opportunities might be?*

Much of the VSO's work is accomplished in committees. Committees can (and do) include members who are not on the VSO Board. If you have an interest, skill, energy, and enthusiasm, we

would love to hear from you. Volunteering with the VSO is of course an opportunity to contribute. It is also a wonderful way to connect with like-minded people and make new friends. Current committees include fundraising, finance, and field trips, just to name a few.

Are you interested in leading or organizing field trips in your local area? The VSO aims to add REGIONAL field trips, including one-day events around the Commonwealth. This is just one example of where you might want to participate.

Please let us know if you would like to explore possibilities or learn more about volunteering. Consider asking questions of Board members you may know, or contact us directly via email at: [info@virginiabirds.org](mailto:info@virginiabirds.org). We look forward to hearing from you!

With warm wishes for a wonderful and birdy New Year,

Diane Lepkowski, VSO President

## VSO Summer Field Trip to Southwest Virginia June 7-9, 2024

Plan to join us June 7-9, 2024, for the VSO field trip to southwest Virginia, where we'll explore two very special state parks, Grayson-Highlands and Hungry Mother, along with other hot spots in this beautiful part of the Commonwealth. Field trips will be offered all day Friday, 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 2024 or have not joined yet, you'll need to do that before participating in the trip. You can do that [HERE](#).

We expect to find many species that nest only in higher elevations, such as Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Veery, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Dark-eyed Junco, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Blue-headed Vireo. Warblers we're likely to encounter include Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Canada, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, and Hooded.

Huge thanks to local residents Rebecca Currin and Bob Riggs for their assistance with scouting out locations and organizing and leading the field trips!

### TRIP REGISTRATION

Please register online [HERE](#).

**Provide the names of participants in your party with each person's telephone number and email address** so we can contact you as needed. If you have any questions, contact Meredith Bell, trip coordinator, at [merandlee@gmail.com](mailto:merandlee@gmail.com) or 804-824-4958.

### HEADQUARTERS

The Comfort Inn Atkins-Marion is the host hotel (5558 Lee Hwy, Atkins, VA 24311). Room rate for the VSO block of rooms on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights is \$137.45/night (plus tax, King) or \$128.95/night (plus tax, 2 Doubles). Your stay includes a free hot breakfast. There are microwaves, mini-refrigerators, and coffeemakers in all rooms. The Comfort Inn also has electric vehicle charging stations on site. **Register by Monday, MAY 6**, to get the special rate. Be sure to say you're with VSO when you call: 276-783-9715



*View at Grayson Highlands State Park. Photo by Lee Bell.*

There are a few other hotels/motels in Marion, and if you're up for camping or staying in a cabin at nearby Hungry Mother State Park, you can call 1-800-933-PARK or make reservations [online](#).

### MEALS

A complimentary hot breakfast buffet is included for those staying at the host hotel. You'll need to bring lunch for Friday's trip. 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, JUNE 4

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.

#### FRIDAY all day, JUNE 7 - Grayson Highlands State Park (50-minute drive)

This scenic park offers views of Mount Rogers and Whitetop Mountain, Virginia's two highest mountains. There are several trails, and we'll cover a number of them during the day. Bring snacks, lunch and beverages since we'll spend all day here.

Info about the park is [HERE](#).



*Canada Warbler. Photo by Dave Boltz*

**SATURDAY AM, JUNE 8 – Saltville (30-minute drive)**

The Saltville Well Fields offer a unique habitat for the mountain region of Virginia. The waters of these wetlands are brackish, providing the only inland saline marshes in Virginia. The trails are

paved and easy to walk. Info about the Wellfields of Saltville is [HERE](#).

Lunch is on your own. There are several restaurants in Saltville. You can also return to Marion for lunch.

**SATURDAY PM, JUNE 8 – Hungry Mother State Park (15-minute drive from Marion or 30 minutes from Saltville)**

Hungry Mother is one of the original six Virginia State Parks, with beautiful woodlands and a large lake. We'll explore various trails during the afternoon and tentatively plan to have a tally of species seen for the weekend at one of the picnic shelters in the park. Info about the park is [HERE](#).

**SUNDAY AM, JUNE 9 – Grindstone Campground (30-minute drive)**

This large campsite is in the Mount Rogers National Recreational Area. While it's currently closed to campers, it's open for enthusiastic birders to explore! It has easy walking trails and an abundance of singing woodland birds in early June. Elevation is 3,702 feet. Info about Grindstone is [HERE](#).

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

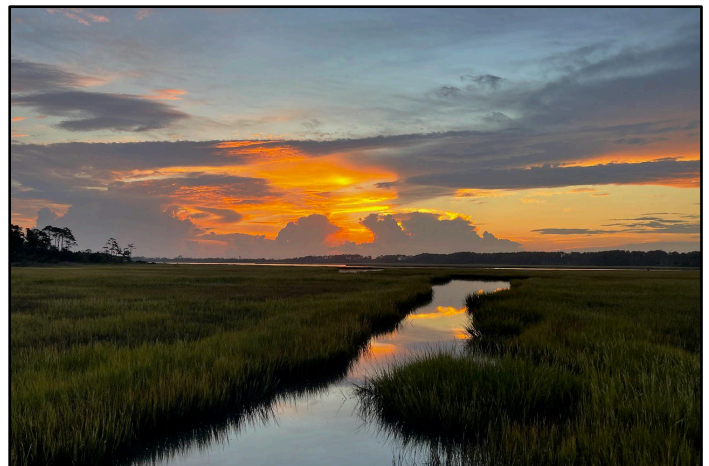
**VSO Chincoteague Field Trip Report  
September 8-10, 2023**

The weather was hot and humid for the VSO annual Chincoteague weekend field trip September 8-10, but that did not deter the record 114 enthusiastic participants from having a fabulous time! Between the beaches, trails, and boat trips we tallied 131 species. Many participants have already marked their calendar for next year's trip, September 6-8, 2024!

We kicked things off the Tuesday evening before the weekend with a Zoom call, where Jerry Via gave an excellent presentation on identifying the various species we might see, and Meredith Bell previewed the field trip locations.

The Meet-and-Greet Happy Hour late Friday afternoon on the back lawn of the Refuge Inn has become a favorite event, welcoming first-timers and renewing friendships from past field trips.

The two boat trips continue to grow in popularity, with participants able to get up-close views of a



*Sunrise over Chincoteague NWR Marsh at Boardwalk Bridge. Photo by Seth Honig*

great variety of shorebirds, wading birds, terns, and raptors. Several people signed up for both trips because this has become their favorite part of the weekend. Andrew Rapp led these trips and did a superb job of spotting and identifying birds.

And speaking of Andrew, he was a rockstar in another way by spotting a Roseate Tern early Saturday afternoon at Swan Cove, and he guided lots of participants to see it. A lifer for many!

Much has changed with the Wildlife Loop over the years. It was totally dry this year, so there were no shorebirds or ducks to be seen. The Loop was closed Thursday and Friday due to aerial spraying to kill the invasive phragmites that has taken over much of the area. Several species of woodland

birds were seen by those who explored the fields and wooded areas around the Loop.

We appreciate so much the dedication of ALL the field trip leaders—Jerry Via, Bill Akers, Lee Adams, Andrew Rapp, and Meredith and Lee Bell—who worked hard to ensure everyone had a great experience.

Complete list of 131 species for the weekend is [HERE](#).

### VSO Supports Diverse Birders

The VSO seeks to increase access to the joy of connecting with nature through birds by engaging historically underserved communities, including but not limited to Minorities, Tribes, LGBTQ, disability, and youth groups, in birding activities. Grants of up to \$1,000 for this purpose are available!

Examples of grant projects are organizing a birding walk(s) during Black Birders Week (May), Pride Month (June), or any other time; organizing a class(es) on birding accessible to people of all ages and skill levels; presentations on traditional Tribal relationships with birds; organizing a local bird club; organizing a group(s) of K-12 students to identify local birds and their habitats; organizing a class (any age) to study local bird habitats and recommend improvements; and transportation, purchase of binoculars, information handouts, or other expenses to support proposed activities.

For deadline, where to send a proposal, a link to a flier with this announcement, and more



*A very young birder! Photo U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

information, please go to the Outreach Grants section of the [VSO Scholarships and Grants](#) webpage.

#### New VSO members – September 5 – December 18, 2023

Gigi Amateau, Richmond Elena Bersani, Virginia Beach Steve Bielamowicz, McLean Diane Bowden, Richmond Doren Burrell, Charleston, WV Jane Diven, Paris Scott Flinchum, Roanoke Thomas Frazier, Vienna Gary Harvey, Reston	Sharon Hirschland, Charlottesville Gregory Irving, Waverly William Jefferson, Hopkins Barbara Kreuter, Midlothian Kathleen Kreutzer, Chesterfield Brenda Lucy, Quinton Lisa Mattson, Palmyra Connor McGinnis, McLean Tonia Moxley, Christiansburg	Jill Partlow, Shawboro Patricia Price, Marshall Marie Putnam, Vienna Sharon Ritchey, Centreville Catherine Roseberry, Richmond Paige Saufley, Martinsville Peter Schmidt, New Market Robert Steele, Roanoke Barry Truitt, Machipongo
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## VSO 2023 Awards, Grants and Scholarships Call for Nominations and Applications

The VSO is seeking nominations for awards to recognize individuals or organizations who have made significant contributions to the conservation and study of Virginia's birds. Nominations should be submitted to Patti Reum [pareum@gmail.com](mailto:pareum@gmail.com) and are due by **February 20, 2024**.

The awards will be presented at the 2024 VSO Annual Meeting. The VSO website lists the [previous award recipients](#).

We are also seeking applications for VSO Conservation Grants and Scholarships.

### **Jackson M. Abbott Conservation Award**

In 1973 the VSO established a conservation award to be given to individuals or organizations who have demonstrated outstanding conservation work in Virginia. In 1989, the award was named in honor of Jackson M. Abbott for his lifelong devotion to conservation and his effective work on its behalf.

Nomination letters for the Jackson M. Abbott Conservation Award must include a description of the outstanding conservation work of the individual or organization and reasons the conservation work will have a lasting effect on birds in Virginia. Two additional letters of support must be submitted for each nominee.

Nomination materials should be sent to Patti Reum at [pareum@gmail.com](mailto:pareum@gmail.com) by **February 20, 2024**. The committee will review all nomination packets and make its recommendation to the VSO Board.

### **Mitchell A. Byrd Award**

The Mitchell A. Byrd Award, established in 2011, recognizes outstanding scientific achievement in the field of ornithology. Recipients shall demonstrate an exceptional record of contribution

to the scientific knowledge of Virginia's birds through evidence including, but not limited to, publications such as papers in peer-reviewed scientific journals and books or book chapters derived from the candidate's original scientific research, conference presentations, recommendation letters from scientific peers, and other forms of peer recognition (e.g., an award from a national scholarly society).

*Any member of the Virginia Society of Ornithology may nominate a candidate for the Byrd Award.*

Please contact Patti Reum at [pareum@gmail.com](mailto:pareum@gmail.com) to submit the name of your nominee. Deadline is **February 20, 2024**.

### **James Eike Service Award**

In 1983, the VSO Board approved the James Eike Service Award, named in honor of James Eike, a member of the VSO from 1933 until his death in 1983. Eike's long and faithful service, his dedication, and his enthusiasm in promoting the work of the VSO gave him a unique status in the organization. The recipient is recognized by the presentation of a silver Raven pin. The first pin was given to Claire Eike, in honor of her late husband for whom the award was named.

The James Eike Service Award is given to recognize a VSO member for outstanding service to the VSO. Eligibility for consideration would include service as an officer, Board member, foray director, field trip leader, or other contributions to the organization.

Nominators should send a letter of nomination giving the rationale behind the nomination. In addition, two letters of support are required. These materials should be sent to Patti Reum at

## **VSO Annual Meeting – Save the Date!**

This spring the VSO Annual Meeting will be a virtual gathering on the evening of **May 2, 2024**.

Dr. Ashley Peele, now with the American Bird Conservancy, will be our keynote speaker, presenting early findings from the 2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas data. Ashley is well known to VSO members through her leadership on the Atlas at the Center for Conservation Management, Virginia Tech.

The brief business meeting will include the election of officers and directors and presentation of awards, grants, and scholarships. Watch you email for further details and registration information.

[pareum@gmail.com](mailto:pareum@gmail.com) by **February 20, 2024**. The committee will review all nomination packets and make its recommendation to the VSO Board.

### **Myriam P. Moore Award**

This is the highest service award, instituted in 1983. It recognizes a very high level of achievement in service areas and long continuous service and a demonstrated devotion to the principles and objectives of the VSO.

Please send your nomination and 3 letters of support to Patti Reum at [pareum@gmail.com](mailto:pareum@gmail.com) by **February 20, 2024**.

### **VSO Conservation Grant, \$500-\$1000**

Each year, the VSO provides Conservation Grants to worthy candidates, generally university undergraduates, conducting research in the field of bird conservation with potential benefits to Virginia species and habitats. Conservation Grants are also occasionally given to candidates needing funds for community conservation projects with a direct benefit to birds in Virginia. The VSO has budgeted \$2,500 annually. Awards are usually \$500, \$1,000, or occasionally more, with the amount determined by the Conservation Committee.

Applicants are encouraged to submit a request in writing to the Conservation Committee Chair. Each application should include:

1. A 1-to-2-page proposal describing how the proposed work will lead to improved conservation of Virginia's avifauna and/or its habitat
2. Requested funding level
3. Detailed budget for requested funding

Applications will be evaluated based on clarity of content, purpose, and how the proposed work will provide a benefit to birds.

Grant recipients will report their findings to the VSO at the completion of their project with a paper or publication (with preference for publishing in *The Raven*). Progress reports may be requested.

We also request that your results or progress be presented at a forum to be determined by the VSO. We will share your presentation on the VSO website and on social media. Recipients will be awarded a one-year VSO membership.

Please submit your application to Dan Albrecht-Mallinger (Conservation Chair) at [dan.albrechtmallinger@gmail.com](mailto:dan.albrechtmallinger@gmail.com) no later than **January 31, 2024**. We ask that applicants apply for either the Conservation Grant *or* the Murray Award (please do not apply for both in the same funding cycle). Applicants will be notified of results in mid-February.

### **J. J. Murray Research Award, \$1000**

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 award promotes graduate and undergraduate research consisting of current or projected field studies on Virginia birds. The VSO has budgeted \$2,000 annually to support two proposals. Proposals will be judged for their scientific merit and the likelihood that the work will make a meaningful contribution to our understanding of Virginia avifauna.

The recipient will be asked to present their results at a forum to be determined by the VSO, and they are encouraged to publish the results in an appropriate journal. The recipient will be awarded a one-year VSO membership.

Applicants must submit the following materials by **January 31, 2024**, as a PDF file:

1. Proposal of no more than 5 pages including background, objectives/hypotheses, methods, expected results, and benefits to VA birds. Citations should be included in the 5 pages.
2. Budget describing how the VSO funds will be used along with any other funding already acquired to carry out the project.
3. Name of the institution and department where they are enrolled, the degree they are working towards, and the name of their research advisor.

Applicants should also have their advisor send a letter of recommendation separately that, at a minimum, verifies the applicant is a student in good standing and is receiving the advisor's support for the proposed project. Inclusion of additional information about the applicant is also helpful and will be considered by the reviewers.

Applicants will be notified of the results by mid-March. Please send proposals or requests for information to Lesley Bulluck, Center for Environmental Studies, VCU, [lpbulluck@vcu.edu](mailto:lpbulluck@vcu.edu)

We ask that applicants apply for either the Conservation Grant *or* the Murray Award (please do not apply for both in the same funding cycle).

### **VSO Field Ornithology Scholarship, \$500**

The VSO annually supports one student or recent graduate to participate in a formal training or workshop to gain field ornithology skills (i.e., mist-netting, banding, etc.). Applicants must submit the following materials: (a) description of the workshop they hope to attend, including a web link to the opportunity if one exists, (b) description of why the student needs to gain these skills, and (c) a brief budget of expected expenses. Students working with a faculty member to carry out a specific project to benefit Virginia birds will be given priority.

Applicants will be notified of the results by early March. Please send proposals or requests for information by **January 31, 2024**, to Lesley Bulluck, Center for Environmental Studies, VCU, [lpbulluck@vcu.edu](mailto:lpbulluck@vcu.edu). Applicants will be notified of the results by mid-March.

### **Youth Conservation Scholarship, \$500**

The VSO annually supports one early-stage student (high school or undergraduate) to participate in an avian research experience. The funds will enable a student with interests in avian research to participate in field research with a mentor. Such opportunities can provide much needed and sometimes difficult to acquire experience that propels them to future opportunities, especially for under-represented minority students.

Applications can come directly from early-stage students with an agreed upon mentor OR from a graduate student/faculty member interested in mentoring a student (who may not yet be identified). Applicants should submit a brief description of the research to be conducted, including the role the student will have and the length of the mentoring experience. Applications should be no more than 2 pages. Please send proposals or requests for information by **January 31, 2024**, to Lesley Bulluck, Center for Environmental Studies, VCU, [lpbulluck@vcu.edu](mailto:lpbulluck@vcu.edu).

## **Teta Kain Nature Preserve Dedication**

**By Bill Williams**

Teta Kain is one of four individuals who has been awarded VSO's highest recognition, the Myriam P. Moore Award. Teta's ebullient, high energy, get-things-done approach to all things nature extended far beyond her remarkable service to the VSO. She was recently presented a Lifetime Achievement Award by the York River and Small Coastal Basin Roundtable, a forum for information sharing and

collaboration among water quality and conservation-minded stakeholders within the York River, Mobjack Bay and Piankatank River as well as the Dragon Run, Mattaponi River and Pamunkey River.

On June 22, 2023, the Friends of Dragon Run honored her by dedicating the Teta Kain Nature Preserve, an 18-acre parcel on Farley Park Road (Route 603) at the New Dragon Bridge in Middlesex County.

Four former VSO presidents and Membership Secretary Shirley Devan joined Teta for the ceremony (see photo).

The following was excerpted from the May 28, 2023, edition of the *Fredericksburg Freelance Star*:

*A force of nature, Kain's enthusiasm and leadership have made key and measurable contributions to the natural world. She always has both a sense of purpose and a sense of humor. Legions of Virginians know more about nature and became nature enthusiasts based on her charismatic skill and magic. She has gifted environmental literacy to countless individuals and groups.*



*Teta Kain (front center) and (from left) Shirley Devan, Rexanne Bruno, Jeff Trollinger, Thelma Dalmas, Bill Williams*



*For 35 years Kain has been a key leader within Friends of Dragon Run, as a former president of the organization but most famously as the kayak paddle guide who led more than a thousand individuals on tours of the Dragon and the Dragon Run watershed. She is known to many far and wide as the Doyenne of the Dragon, later as the Queen of the Dragon, and now as the Empress of the Dragon.*

Words of praise for Teta's extraordinary work over many decades were given by representatives from

local government, The Nature Conservancy, and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

When Teta was notified of the event and asked what she wanted, she said "Bagpipes." Sure enough, those were on hand. The sound of the pipes mingled with Teta's infectious smile and Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireo voices to make the somewhat rainy event attended by 40 to 50 of Teta's admirers a joyous occasion.

## **VSO Board Explores the Future**

**By Bill Williams**

A frequent topic at VSO Board meetings is how we can improve our social media presence and opportunities. This discussion is often intermingled with how to better engage and support young birders and increase our presence within more diverse communities.

Board member Bill Leighty suggested we explore these topics through the Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs Capstone Project, a program of VCU's Master of Public Administration (MPA) curriculum.

Our Capstone Project was conducted in the fall 2023 semester. We engaged with graduate student expertise, under faculty guidance, to both undertake an otherwise costly research project and contribute to the development of future public and nonprofit leaders.

Four MPA students, none with life sciences backgrounds, enthusiastically formed the VSO/VCU Capstone Team. Their research design was shaped by the following guiding questions:

- How does VSO engage members?
- What is the theory behind membership engagement/youth engagement?
- What strategies are applicable to membership engagement for non-profit organizations?
- What are the social media best practices for non-profit organizations?
- What opportunities and hurdles are there for membership engagement?

Their research tasks were to:

- complete a SWOT (strengths weaknesses, opportunities and threats) exercise via

interviews with the VSO Board, editors and committee chairs,

- analyze the SWOT results to develop a membership survey to gauge its understanding of how VSO fulfills its mission and to solicit feedback on ideas and potential initiatives, especially regarding communications, and
- review and assess the VSO's use of social media and make recommendations to increase its effectiveness for creating a wider understanding of VSO's role in bird conservation and education, especially among younger and future birders.

The Capstone Team's analysis of the SWOT interviews revealed that its:

- strengths encompassed the Board's confidence in initiatives, financial stability and management, and our online membership renewal system,
- weaknesses included youth engagement and underutilization of websites and apps,
- opportunities centered on regional field trips and increased youth involvement, and
- threats comprised challenges to reach diverse audiences and a limited social media presence.

The team's 33-page final report provided the Board with an engaging suite of insights into where the VSO is currently, and, in the effective practice of science, an array of challenging questions for further research. The report's recommendations offered a range of implementation options based on resources and priorities. Following the team recommendation, we have applied for a Spring 2024 Capstone partnership to help us make progress.

The time spent with the four VCU Capstone Team students stretched the boundaries of reward and motivation. Each exemplified everything we hope

to see from aspiring entrepreneurs and leaders. They were an honor to work with.

## Bramble Hill Update

Dan Bieker

In 1967, when the VSO Board established the VSO as a corporation, an argument in favor was that corporate status would allow us to take title to real estate. Fast forward 50 plus years and that foresight paid off with the acquisition of a rustic farmhouse and 30 acres in the remote countryside of the Allegheny Highlands.

In the two years since VSO took ownership of Bramble Hill, we've made great strides in preserving the legacy of Maggie O'Bryan for her home as a place of solitude for the peaceful enjoyment of nature with its abundant wildlife.

The VSO Bramble Hill Committee, responsible for managing the property, has focused on habitat improvement and preservation and on making necessary repairs to the farmhouse. We recently received donation of a farm tractor and contracted for new siding and deck repair on the house. The tractor will enable us to manage the early successional habitat more effectively and economically for Golden-winged Warblers and the myriad other species that will benefit. New house siding, just completed, was done by superb local Amish craftsmen, whom we hope to employ for further repairs in the house and the barn exterior.

Other developments include establishing an ornithological library in the old upstairs game room, and installation of a solar-powered Motus Tower by a team from Virginia Commonwealth University (see details in the Fall 2023 VSO Newsletter). Researchers under the guidance of VCU professor Lesley Bulluck continue to use the property for research activities.

Stunning scenery, dark night skies, and wildlife not found in other parts of the state can all be experienced at Bramble Hill. We maintain mowed trails for access, and this winter we are marking boundaries to ensure that visitors don't wander off onto neighboring properties.

While the grounds are open to birders and all respectful nature enthusiasts, a VSO membership offers exclusive access to overnight stays in the three bedroom/two bath house. Fees are quite reasonable and birding opportunities abound. To book reservations (April thru November) contact Faye Cooper: [fcooper2@verizon.net](mailto:fcooper2@verizon.net)

Ruffed Grouse live on the hillside, Golden-winged Warblers breed behind the house, and Golden Eagles are winter visitors. Kestrels have bred at Bramble Hill since installation of a nest box eight years ago, and recently a Barn Owl was discovered using the barn. Spring and early summer birding can yield a host of breeding warblers, thrushes, and raptors, especially westward into the neighboring Monongahela National Forest where Merlin and Northern Goshawk now breed.

See the [VSO website](#) for more info for visiting Bramble Hill, birding the region, and other area places to stay.

Many volunteers contribute to efforts at Bramble Hill. We offer special thanks to VSO members Rich Booth and Allen Hale for donating time and resources to several projects mentioned here.



*Bramble Hill house with new siding! Painting will be completed when warmer weather arrives. Photo by Dan Bieker.*

## Make sure your VSO membership is current for 2024

With a current membership, you can continue to participate in VSO field trips – like the OBX trip in early February 2024 – and continue to receive VSO publications and announcements of special events, updates on the funding and progress of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Breeding Bird Atlas, Bramble Hill, and the 2024 Annual Meeting. The VSO has lots going on and many long-term commitments.

You can renew using the form on the back of this newsletter – clip it out and mail it with your check. Even easier, you can renew quickly and easily on

the [VSO web site](#). If you are able, please make tax deductible donation to one of the VSO’s special funds: 2<sup>nd</sup> Breeding Bird Atlas, Bramble Hill Conservation Fund, Scholarships and Student Grants, and the VSO Conservation Fund.

VSO General Fund Membership dues alone do not allow the VSO to accomplish all we need to do. We hope you will renew soon and perhaps donate a bit more.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the VSO!

VSO OFFICERS		VSO Editors
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### Remembering J. J. Murray, Jr. By Dan Bieker

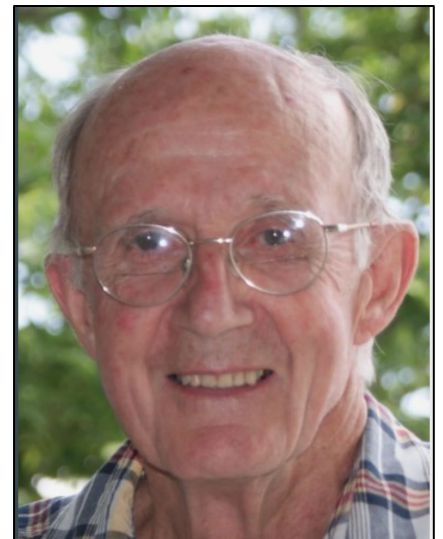
J. J. (Jim) Murray, Jr. died peacefully on Sept. 5, at 93 years of age. A passionate and accomplished conservationist, Jim leaves a legacy that touches all of us who value native species and wild habitats.

Jim was the son of legendary VSO co-founder and, for 40 years, *The Raven* editor J. J. Murray, Sr. Jim inherited his father’s passion for the natural world, which led him to high achievements in academia and globe-trotting research. He chaired the Biology Department at the University of Virginia and was director of Mountain Lake Biological Station for 13 years. He served on VSO’s Board for many years, and as president in the late 1970’s.

Perhaps Jim’s most lasting legacy was his tireless dedication to wilderness protection. He was a founding member of the Virginia Wilderness Committee, and through his gentle but steadfast perseverance helped spearhead passage of six wilderness bills through the US Congress. Anyone who has marveled at the remote, lush mountain environs of Jefferson and George Washington National Forests, and the unique wild animals and

plants found there, has much for which to thank Jim and Bess, his late wife.

Jim’s varied passions included herpetology. It was a joy to experience his enthusiasm as he played frog calls on his tape recorder to students. On many a rainy night in March he could be found helping Spotted Salamanders navigate a treacherous road crossing on their nuptial stampede. Jim was a gentleman in the truest sense, kind, humble, immensely knowledgeable - a true friend and mentor to those fortunate to know him.



*VSO former president  
J. J. "Jim" Murray, Jr.*



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## 2024 VSO Membership Renewal

Name & Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Check here to receive VSO emails about upcoming events such as field trips, annual meetings, and organization news.** Print your email address clearly. By checking this line, you give the VSO permission to communicate with you by email.

**Check here to receive VSO publications in soft copy electronically by email.** By checking this line, you give the VSO permission to send publications you have requested by email.

**Check here to receive VSO publications in hard copy by US Postal Service.** You can check this line and still receive emails about upcoming events and organization news by checking the first line above.

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:**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ 2<sup>nd</sup> Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_ VSO Conservation Fund

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Bramble Hill Conservation Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_ VSO General Fund

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Scholarships and Student Grants

**VSO Merchandise**

**Virginia's Birdlife "Gold Book"** (Rottenborn, Brinkley 2007) \$25.00

**VSO Arm Patch \$4.00**      **VSO Cloisonné Pin \$5.00**

VSO Field Checklist FREE! Download 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 23188-5216**

You may 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](mailto:vsomembership@cox.net)

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

*The Virginia Society of Ornithology is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. All membership fees, donations, and contributions are tax deductible to the extent of the law.*