



VSO Newsletter

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Lenny Bankester. President, VSO

We Have a Plan

By Lenny Bankester

Having worked in budgeting and planning for a number of years now, I understand that these are not the most riveting topics for a general audience. At the same time, we can all see how organizations increase their effectiveness when they plan out what they need to do and write it down as a commitment. That is just what the VSO board did at its November meeting in Henrico, VA. I consider this kind of work our demonstration to you that we take the VSO's work, and your support, seriously. The VSO is fortunate in already having a solid mission statement that you may have seen on the History section of our website: "The Virginia Society of Ornithology exists to encourage the systematic study of birds in Virginia, to stimulate interest in birds, and to assist the conservation of wildlife and other natural resources." Having surveyed the VSO members in the past, I know that y'all generally agree with this. It's broad enough to cover the things an organization like the VSO must do, while allowing discretion for future VSO

leaders to adapt to changing times. We couldn't come up with any improvements ourselves, so it became the backbone of our strategic plan. In our plan, the purpose statement is divided into three strategic goals: 1) encourage systematic study, 2) stimulate interest in birds, and 3) assist in the conservation of birds and natural resources.

The plan itself is concise at one page and you can read it here: www.virginiabirds.org/about/strategic-plan. I doubt you'll find many surprises in our objectives and that would be a good thing. We want to be transparent and we want you to know what you get when you join the VSO. The plan will be in effect until the next president has been in office for one year. By offsetting a two-year plan with the term of the president, we avoid giving a new president the job of immediately writing a new plan, while retaining the ability for future officers and board members to adapt the VSO to new efforts. So, please take a look and let me know what you think at lennybankester@yahoo.com.

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We're Looking for Webmaster!

Our webmaster is a crucial part of the VSO and we are looking for good candidates. Duties include making regular updates with VSO news and appeals. You will have plenty of opportunity to explore your online creativity and support Virginia's birds through our online presence. Interested in learning more? Contact VSO President Lenny Bankester at [lennybankester\[at\]yahoo.com](mailto:lennybankester[at]yahoo.com) and current webmaster Rob Bielawski at robbielawski@gmail.com.

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Send submissions electronically via email whenever possible. Attach text as Word document or plain text file. Attach images as separate files: please do not embed in email body. Send the largest file possible. Images will not print well if formatted as for the web. Submissions may be edited for style or length.

Submit copy for:

Spring 2019 Feb. 15
Bird reports in this newsletter may not have been approved by VARCOM.

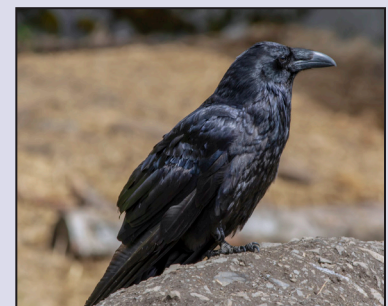


Photo by Judy Jones, VSO Member

A Response to the Fall President Message

By Dave Davis

I am writing this in response to President Lenny Bankester's article in the Fall 2018 Newsletter. I found Lenny's suggestions all very helpful, and I applaud his emphasis on bird conservation.

Following, I'm suggesting some additional personal actions that I consider important complements to his list.

Many people, for many reasons, can't (or don't) do much in the way of volunteering of the sort Lenny outlined. However, many of them are capable of writing checks to provide the critical funds to support the many conservation efforts underway or needed. There are many great organizations to choose from such as the flagship bird conservation organizations like the American Bird Conservancy, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Ducks Unlimited. There are also many smaller or more narrowly focused ones too, obviously including VSO. Similarly, one can give to organizations that have a broad land conservation mission that benefits birds, along with other organisms and ecosystems, such

as The Nature Conservancy and various land trusts.

I recognize that not everyone has the ability to write big checks, but many do, and there should be no stigma attached to doing so. At times I've noted some bias within the birding community (against wealth), but we don't have the luxury to exclude anyone who is willing and able to support bird conservation by whatever means they can.

Second, there are lots of opportunities for volunteer contributions beyond leading bird walks, outreach to children/schools, and similar interactive social approaches. Some of us prefer to make our contributions alone or with friends or family, pursuing our hobby of birding in a way that it makes a direct contribution to bird conservation. These efforts include eBird, Project Feeder Watch, breeding bird atlases, special surveys, and the like. Frankly, I see no excuse for any serious birder not submitting his/her field data into eBird, though I know that there are still birders who resist it.

Third, there are small, everyday ways to help such as buying shade-grown,

bird-friendly coffee, chocolate, and other products when available. Yes, they often cost a bit more, but they can make a big difference.

Finally, there is the area of habitat improvement on our own property, or on property over which we have some control or stewardship. My family is fortunate in having a second home with some nice habitat which we have enhanced and struggle to maintain against a constant barrage of invasive plants and changing environmental conditions. My wife leads efforts in our condo association (at our primary residence) to do the same. I hope that any VSO member who has such property (or access to it) will take similar actions.

I recognize that VSO members encompass a wide spectrum, ranging from hard-core birders/listers to people who just like to watch and feed birds in their own backyards. Like many of you, I am a bit of both, but we should all stand united in doing whatever we can to protect birds and their habitats.

MAKE PLANS NOW FOR THE 2019 VSO ANNUAL MEETING

You won't want to miss this VSO Annual Meeting from May 3 to 5, 2019. It will be at Mountain Lake Lodge in Pembroke, Virginia. This hotel was named 2018 Hotel of the Year by the Virginia Restaurant, Lodging and Travel Association. For more information about the hotel see www.mtnlakelodge.com.

Not only will you enjoy your stay and the meals at the hotel, but the birding will be fantastic. There will be plenty of interesting field trips to choose from so that you can look for some of those high-elevation species you don't see in other parts of Virginia. Would you like to see a Ruffed Grouse, Black-billed Cuckoo, Least Flycatcher, Golden-winged Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, or Rose-breasted Grosbeak?

Then plan to join us for the 2019 VSO Annual Meeting. All the information about making hotel reservations and registering for the spring meeting will be in the Spring VSO Newsletter.

Birding Guatemala, April 2019

Once again, a group of Virginians will be heading to Guatemala for the 4th VSO annual birding trip there, April 3 -14, 2019 with an optional extension to April 17. The trip will be guided by John and Rob Cahill, Guatemala's leading birding experts, leaders of the past 3 VSO Guatemala trips and eBird regional editors for Guatemala. Participants on past trips have found close to 350 species. Target birds include Pink-Headed Warbler, Resplendent Quetzal, Highland Guan, Spotted Rail, Ocellated Quail, Ocellated Turkey. Some of the birding will be at Mayan archeological sites at Tikal and Guaytan. The optional extension (\$875) into the Sierra de las Minas mountain

range will provide the opportunity for highland specialties such as Horned Guan and Wine-Throated Hummingbird. This trip along with the previous three VSO trips supports Community Cloud Forest Conservation www.CloudForest-Conservation.org which works to protect the cloud forests in the highlands of Guatemala through focus on environmental education of Q'eqchi' Maya youth as well as agroecology and reforestation. Each trip provides the funding to replant ½ acre of cloud forest. This year Kathy Burger, who was on the 2017 VSO trip, created and installed plaques recognizing the 3 plots reforested as a result of VSO tours. (See photos)

Cost is \$2,700 per person for double room occupancy, and \$3,100 for singles. Price includes lodging, meals, ground transportation, guide services, and entrance fees to parks and reserves. For inquiries, contact David Farner by email: guatzal18@gmail.com or phone: 443-643-6141.

If 2019 doesn't work for your schedule but you are interested in visiting Guatemala in the future, please let David know. He'll add you to the list for information about future trips.



VSO Winter Field Trip North Carolina Outer Banks February 1-3, 2019

Make plans to join us for the VSO's Winter field trip at the Outer Banks of North Carolina February 1-3, 2019! The weekend's leaders include Bill Akers and Jerry Via, as well as VSO field trip co-chairs Lee Adams and Meredith Bell. We always have great waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors, along with a wide assortment of land birds.

TRIP REGISTRATION

To help us plan for the weekend, please register in advance. Provide the names of participants in your party with a telephone number and email address so we can contact you if needed. Register with Meredith Bell, trip coordinator, at merandlee@gmail.com or 804-824-4958.

The weekend itinerary will be sent via email to all registrants a few days before the trip, and it will also be available at the front desk of the hotel Thursday evening.

Important! Please bring FRS (two-way) radios if you have them because this helps us stay in contact in our caravans when calling out bird sightings.

HEADQUARTERS

The Comfort Inn South Oceanfront in Nags Head is again the trip headquarters. There's a huge deck off the second floor, which offers great beach-viewing opportunities. The special VSO room rate is \$75 for oceanfront and \$62 for bay-view plus tax. Ocean front rooms are available on a first come, first served basis. The 7th floor bayside rooms offer a panoramic view of the bay but do not have balconies. The hotel is just two blocks from Jennette's Pier, a 1,000-foot long, 24-foot wide pier that will allow you to get really close to the ocean birds! Contact information for the hotel is: 8031 Old Oregon Inlet Road, Nags Head, NC 27959; Phone: 252-441-6315. Reservations must be made by January 14, 2019 to get the special VSO rate.

MEALS

A complimentary breakfast buffet breakfast is included with your stay, beginning each morning at 6:00 AM. For dinner there are many fine restaurants in the area.

FRIDAY

This year we are offering two options for Friday. You do NOT need to register in advance for your preference.

Option 1 - Lee Adams will lead the all-day trip to Lake Mattamuskeet. Meet in the hotel lobby at 7:15 AM for 7:30 departure. Expected driving time is 90 minutes. Bring snacks, beverage, and lunch. Optional: camp or lawn chair for greater comfort while eating lunch. Those interested will stop at Alligator River on the return trip to listen and watch for Short-eared Owls at dusk.

Option 2 - New this year - for those who prefer less driving. Meredith, Bill and Jerry will lead the trips. We're finalizing the day - this is the current plan:

AM - Jennette's Pier

Lunch - on your own

PM - Alligator River. We'll explore areas that won't be covered on Sunday's AM trip. Those interested can stay until dusk to listen for Short-eared Owls.

Friday evening at 8:00 PM we'll have a slide presentation and weekend overview in the Neptune Room on the 2nd floor at the end of the hall. Complimentary coffee and tea will be available.

SATURDAY

Our morning field trips will include visits to the impoundments of Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, the beaches of Cape Hatteras National Seashore, and the Oregon Inlet marina/Coast Guard Station. We'll divide into smaller groups for a safer caravan experience, and every group will visit all areas.

We'll return to the hotel for lunch (on your own), giving you time to visit

Jennette's Pier, the beach and other nearby areas. Last year at the pier, species of note were Dovekie, Razorbill, Long-tailed Duck, Eared and Horned Grebe, and Northern Gannet. At 3:00 PM we'll gather at Bodie Lighthouse to view waterfowl from the platform. Those interested can stay after dusk to listen for owls and American Woodcocks.

At 6:30 PM there will be a tally in the Neptune Room on the 2nd floor at the end of the hall. Complimentary coffee and tea will be available.

SUNDAY

We'll explore Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. Drive on your own and meet at 8:30am at the main entrance on Milltail Road. We'll caravan down the road so you can easily catch up with us if we've already started.

Come prepared for variable weather, lots of birds and a great time! If you have any questions, contact field trip coordinator Meredith Bell at 804-824-4958 or merandlee@gmail.com.

VERY Important! All VSO field trips have a registration fee of \$20 for NON-members only. This fee will be applied to an individual membership that will be active until the end of 2019. If 2 or more people from the same family register, the registration fee will be \$25, which covers a family membership. Groups of students accompanied by their instructor are exempt from this fee. Non-members can join in advance at virginiabirds.net/VSO-Store.html or pay the registration fee on the first evening of the event.

Call for Applications, 2019 Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO) Grants

VSO Conservation Grant, \$500-\$1000

Every year, the Virginia Society of Ornithology awards conservation grants to worthy candidates conducting research in the field of bird conservation with potential benefits to Virginia species and habitats. The VSO Board of Directors has budgeted \$2,500 annually. Awards are usually \$500.00, \$1,000.00 or occasionally more if the project is deemed especially worthy.

Applicants must submit an application to the Conservation Committee Chair, and should include:

1. A 1-2 page research 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

The Conservation Committee will consider each application and confer with the Board of the VSO. There are 2 separate calls for these awards; this is not a two-step process. Recipients are asked to report their findings to the VSO board and members at the Annual VSO Meeting in May.

Applications are due July 31 and January 31; applicants will be notified of the results by April 1 and October 1, respectively. Please submit your

application via email to Patti Reum (Conservation Chair of the VSO): pareum@gmail.com.

VSO Murray 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 its journal, *The Raven*, from its inception until 1969. The award is designed to promote graduate and undergraduate research consisting of current or projected field studies on Virginia birds. The VSO Board of Directors has budgeted \$3,000 annually to support three 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. Upon completion of the research, the recipient will be asked to present the results at a VSO annual meeting held in May, and are encouraged to publish the results in an appropriate journal. The recipient will also be awarded a one-year membership in the VSO.

Applicants must submit the following materials by January 31, 2019 as a PDF file:

1. Proposal of ≤ 5 pages (including citations) including background, objectives/hypotheses, methods, expected results and benefits to VA birds, and a budget.

2. Name of the institution and department they are enrolled in, the degree they are working towards, and the name of their research advisor.
3. Letter from the student's research advisor verifying that the applicant is a student in good standing, and that he/she is receiving the advisor's support for this project.

Applicants will be notified of the results by mid-April 2018. Please send proposals or requests for information to: Lesley Bulluck, Center for Environmental Studies, VCU, lpbulluck@vcu.edu

VSO Field Ornithology Scholarship, \$500-\$1000

The VSO would like to annually support one student to participate in a formal training/workshop to gain field ornithology skills (i.e., mist-netting, banding, etc.). Applicants need to submit the following materials by January 31, 2019 (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 will be given priority. Applicants will be notified of the results by mid-April 2018. Please send proposals or requests for information by

NOW is the time to renew your VSO membership for 2019!

Use the form on the back page of the newsletter or renew online (safely and easily with your debit or credit card) at the VSO website: www.virginiabirds.org/membership-and-donate/

Your VSO membership runs from January to December each calendar year. First notices of renewals were sent in November, and we are grateful for those who have renewed so far! THANK YOU! Your dues and donations are so important to VSO's ongoing conservation, research, and education efforts.

We'll be sending follow up notices early in 2019 to those who have delayed renewing. Save wear and tear on your "volunteer" Membership Secretary by renewing soon.

The VSO is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, so your 2019 membership dues and any donations to the Second Breeding Bird Atlas or the VSO Conservation Fund are tax deductible in 2019.

Keep in mind that non-members have to pay a \$20 fee (individual) or \$25 fee (family of 2 or more) to participate in VSO field trips. Please make sure your membership is up to date to avoid the hassle of paying at the last minute.

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

Virginia Beach Field Trip—2018



Photos by Lee Adams

Lee Adams led the field trip to Virginia Beach and posted a great many photos on the VSO Facebook page at Virginiabirds.org. Twenty-five birders attended and according to Russ Taylor and Phil Kenny 135 bird species were spotted during the week. I emphasize BIRD because apparently the group saw a number of rather large Cottonmouths in the water, on a gravel road and in the grass while birding in Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge.



One highlight of the trip was the Friday night Meet and Greet—it was so much fun Lee says she forgot to make photos. Another highlight was the tram ride through Back Bay

Said Lee, “The tram trip ending the VSO VA Beach weekend was awesome. The weather started gray and foggy, but was mild. The sweet sounds of Tundra Swans and Snow Geese mingled with the harmonics of Great Blue Herons, Canada



Geese and Mallards! At False Cape State Park Brown-headed and Red-breasted Nuthatches squeaked and tooted. A Great Horned Owl was heard from the west road. A pair of adult Bald Eagles sitting close together in the top of a tree warned off an encroaching immature eagle by calling loudly. Many thanks to Erica Ryder from USFWS for making the arrangements for, and driving the tram.”

Key Season for Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas

The past breeding season marked a key milestone for the second VA Breeding Bird Atlas project. Completing year three of five means that we waved hello to the halfway mark and are now blazing ahead toward the completion of this project. The VABBA2's recently published 2018 Summary details many of the cool results from our third field season, so please download this from our homepage (vabba2.org) or Atlas eBird portal (ebird.org/atlasva). For now, we wanted to share a few key highlights...

First, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology recently shared an exciting statistic on the pre- and post-VABBA2 reporting of breeding bird data in Virginia. Here are the numbers:

2015 - only 4,597 breeding observations were reported in Virginia

2016 (1st VABBA2 season) - 89,148 breeding observations, a **2000% increase!**

2018 - 136,428 breeding observations, a **3000% increase** on pre-VABBA2 numbers!

We hope that you too find these numbers jaw-dropping. Virginia birders have done a tremendous job of supporting this project, simply by taking the time to log breeding codes on their spring/summer checklists through the VABBA2 eBird portal (ebird.org/atlasva)

The second significant benchmark achieved in 2018 were the **120+ completed Priority blocks** (PBs), as well as

the **20%** increase in statewide priority block survey time. Much of this increase was thanks to local birders and clubs who organized trips to ‘blockbust’ under-surveyed PBs.

While we don't have room to thank all here, we want to make special mention of Meredith Bell, the VSO Field Trip Coordinator, and all the VSO members who attended the summer field trip in South Boston this summer. Meredith worked with VABBA2 Coordinator, Dr. Ashley Peele, to focus the summer trip on a part of VA in need of Atlas survey effort. All the folks who attended this trip helped to log valuable breeding data for the southern Piedmont, so a big thanks to all who both helped organize and attended this trip!

Species Highlights

Nocturnal bird survey time has been on the rise, since the first VABBA2 field season. In fact, nocturnal effort has increased more than **250%** from 2016-2018. It is interesting to note that not all nocturnal species breeding codes are observed at night! In June 2018, Matt Anthony and Erin Chapman reported the first confirmation of Chuck-Will's-Widow breeding for the entire state in Lee county. As is often the case with nightjars, these two young birders flushed a female off of her nest while hiking through the woods.

Another exciting breeding confirmation also came from southwestern Virginia. Garrett Rhyne, a VA Tech student and Atlas point-count technician reported the first confirmation of Swainson's Warbler breeding for this second BBA. As part of his senior research project, he actually confirmed multiple breeding Swainson's while conducting surveys in Buchanan, Dickenson, and Grayson counties.

Missing Species of the Piedmont

Comparison of statewide maps for common breeding bird species (see

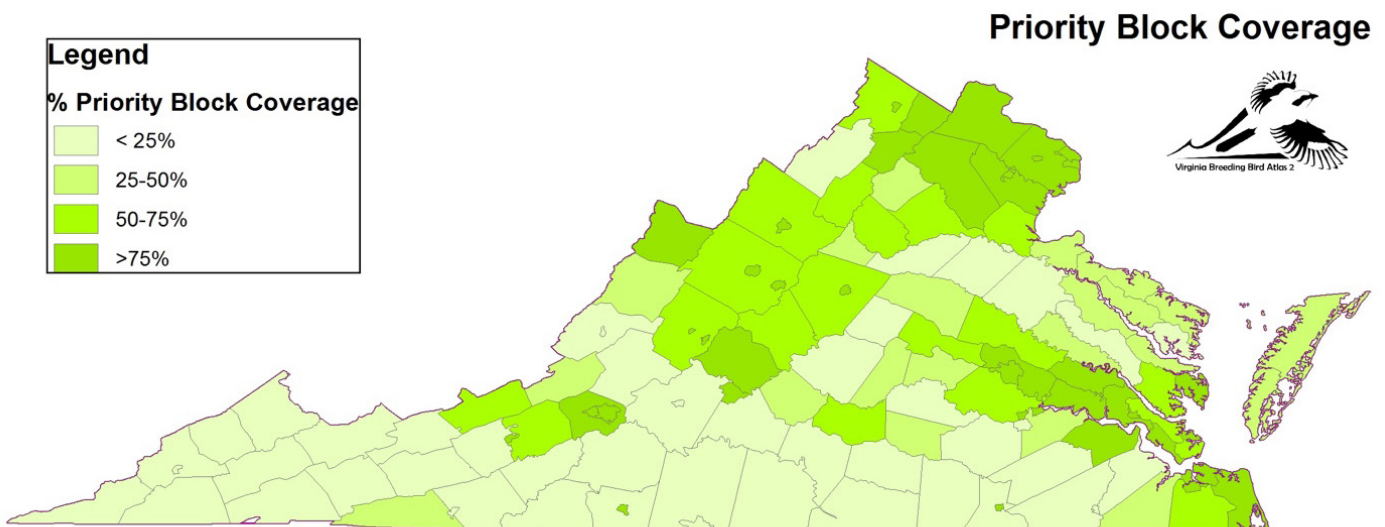
2018 Summary or Atlas Species maps t <https://ebird.org/atlasva/explore>) reveal that many are underrepresented in the southern Piedmont. Species like the Barn Swallow, Yellow Warbler, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Blue Grosbeak, and Red-headed Woodpecker appear rare in counties such as Campbell, Fluvanna, Lunenburg, or Greensville. However, comparison with the statewide survey map (below) illustrates that this is likely a result of low survey coverage in these southern counties.

Regional Focus for 2019

Large regional birding communities, or in some cases a dedicated few, have done a fantastic job of surveying priority blocks throughout much of Virginia. The dark green counties illustrate plainly where birders live or frequently travel to. However, if this project is to accurately document breeding distributions across all of Virginia, our attention must now turn toward the central and southern counties. These regions have spectacular bird habitats and low human population densities. Instead of being a problem, this situation creates an opportunity for intrepid birders. A few days spent logging breeding

data in Priority Blocks in Halifax, Caroline, or Tazewell counties can represent a leap forward for their regions.

So, consider this a call to action! Any VSO members who live or can travel to the light green counties can make a huge contribution to the project. Please reach out to the regional coordinator for the region (contact info at amjv.org/vabba/contacts or reach out to us on the Atlas Facebook page www.facebook.com/groups/VABBA2. The Atlas community is a large, growing, and eager to educate!



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Name & Address: _____

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____ Check here if you wish to receive VSO publications electronically by email via Constant Contact. 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	\$60	
___ Sustaining Membership	\$35	
___ Family Membership	\$25	
___ Active Membership	\$20	
___ Student Membership	\$10	
___ Life Membership (individual)	\$500	

I would like to make a donation to:

- \$ _____ Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas 2 project
\$ _____ American Kestrel Nest Box Project
\$ _____ VSO Conservation Fund
\$ _____ VSO General Fund
\$ _____ VSO Endowment Fund/
\$ _____ J. J. Murray Student Research Grant Award

VSO Merchandise

- Virginia's Birdlife "Gold Book"
(Rottenborn, Brinkley 2007) \$20.00
VSO Arm Patch \$4.00
VSO Cloisonné Pin \$5.00
VSO Field Checklist FREE!
Download the latest 2018 list at:
[www.virginiabirds.org/publications/
field-checklist](http://www.virginiabirds.org/publications/field-checklist)

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM WITH YOUR CHECK, PAYABLE TO THE VSO:

VSO

PO BOX 5994

WILLIAMSBURG, VA 23188-5994

**You may also join, renew and purchase items
online at:**

www.virginiabirds.org/membership-and-donate

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!

[The Virginia Society of Ornithology is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and all membership fees, donations, and contributions are tax deductible.]