

VALLEY VIEWS

Summer Breeze Edition

Potomac
Valley
Audubon
Society

Volume 34, Issue 10

July 2016

President's Note

by Michael Sullivan, PVAS President

It is a very distinct honor to begin my two-year term as President of PVAS, and I appreciate the support and trust that the members and board have in me. I know most of the recent Presidents, and these are big shoes to fill. In particular, I owe a large debt of gratitude to Jane Vanderhook and Diana Mullis for their wisdom and understanding as I learned what is required of the President under their tutelage.

Our annual meeting was held on Saturday evening June 11th at Yankauer Nature Preserve. The turnout was great, the food and beverages were outstanding, and the insects cooperated. The business part of the meeting was sandwiched in between some valuable socializing, but we did have the opportunity to recognize outgoing board members and the many, many volunteers at PVAS for all of the hours of service they provide to our organization.

We have three exceptionally accomplished people joining the board as at-large members. They are Patty Bachner, Laura Davis, and Steve Paradis. Each has a strong interest in nature and environmental education, and each brings important skills and experience to the board. In my view, we are fortunate to have a strong, engaged board as we enter a new year at PVAS on July 1st.

The business of PVAS continues. There is much to be done in regard to conservation and habitat protection. But we also want to make sure that we take time to enjoy the beautiful natural setting of the Potomac and Shenandoah river valleys, and the wonderful resources we have at hand.

Enjoy the summer!

We're Looking For Volunteers!

Of course, we need volunteers to make Fireflies, Fiddles, and Frogs happen! Could you help with activities, registration, parking cars, giving directions, and just having fun? We'll feed you and you still get the free ice cream! We also need folks to help celebrate the Fourth of July by marching with PVAS folks in the Shepherdstown Fourth of July Parade! It's a hoot! If you can help with either event, please contact Kristin Alexander (Kristin@PotomacAudubon.org) or Ellen Murphy (Ellen@PotomacAudubon.org).

Director's Report

by Kristin Alexander, PVAS Executive Director

It was great to see so many folks come out to the PVAS Annual Dinner at the Yankauer Preserve on June 11th. I truly enjoy the annual opportunity to have our members and volunteers gather together to share great stories, successes, and general camaraderie. We have a wonderful community of people.

One of the purposes of the Annual Meeting is to recognize the good work of PVAS' volunteers. To help us grasp how much volunteers "give" each year, we try to put some value on what I consider, ironically, invaluable. You just can't put a dollar value on the sense of community that is developed through volunteer projects, or the sense of relief when a volunteer says they'll take on a project, or the sense of pride and accomplishment that all of us feel when one of those tasks is completed. Volunteers truly make the PVAS world go round.

But sometimes we have to put monetary value on things so we can account for those incredible accomplishments. We've started asking volunteers to track their hours on-line with a website called "Volgistics." We know that only a handful of volunteers have done this (thank you!), but even with that handful, the results are impressive. For example, since July 2015, 2072 hours have been logged in our on-line volunteer tracking system. We know that this is only a fragment of what actually happens. According to Independent Sector (a national organization that sets value of volunteer service by state) this is a value of \$42,414. And again, we know this is only the tip of the iceberg.

We can't put a value on Wil Hershberger and Bob Dean teaching Birding 101 for 30 years, and the far-reaching impact that has had within the community and beyond, as they introduce folks to the world of birding. We can't put a value on the joy people feel when they discover that there are now composting toilets at the Yankauer Preserve instead of port-o-johns, thanks to Lou Scavnicky's leadership and help from volunteers like Tony Irwin, Bob Dean, Jeff Feldman, Mike Sullivan, and Gary Sylvester.

And it's hard to put a value on the peace of mind I have, knowing that Steve Hartmann is always taking care of Stauffer's Marsh with projects big and small, including creating a field for our pollinator meadow. Again, these are enormously significant gifts provided by volunteers! But we also know that these are just a few examples of milestones and accomplishments in this one year. We can't thank our volunteers enough for all they do, recorded or unrecorded.

Potomac Valley Audubon Society is people dedicated to preserving, restoring, and enjoying the natural world through education and action.

Purple Martins Arrive at Stauffer's Marsh!

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Steve Hartmann, the volunteer land manager at Stauffer's Marsh, the first breeding pair of Purple Martins has made the Martin house at Stauffer's Marsh "home." Steve erected the donated house three years ago and has been patiently monitoring it, cleaning it, and putting it up again each year. On June 2nd, Steve headed out to Stauffer's Marsh to mow the trails and observed a pair of Purple Martins gathering nesting materials and bringing them into the top right hole in the nest box (as viewed from the parking lot). There have been some Tree Swallows using the nest in the past, but this is the first time Purple Martins have been seen. (There are some Tree Swallows sharing the colony box with the Purple Martins. They can be seen using the hole in the bottom left corner of the house.) We have high hopes that, if this first brood is successful, we may have additions to the colony next year and that it will continue to grow. Congratulations to Steve Hartmann for this success!

2016 Birdathon Results!

The 2016 Ruth Ann Dean Memorial Birdathon included seven participating teams – six mobile "Birdathon" teams and one "Big Sit" Team.

The teams included the Boyle Family (Noelle, Tom and Rylie), the "White-Eyed Weary-o's" (Joette Borzik and Chuck Parker), the "Old Squaws" (Lynne Wiseman, Bruni Haydl, Tess England, and Carol Del-Colle), "Tufted Turkeys" (Bob Dean, Vickie Crites, Stan Corwin Roach), the "Odd Ducks" (Donna Graham and Rose Marie Evans) and the "Wandering Tattler," Wil Hershberger (who participated while traveling in the Midwest!). The "Lame Ducks" team (Jean Neely, Nancy and Elliot Kirschbaum, and Jane Vanderhook) set up their "Big Sit" in the meadow of Steamboat Run (outside Shepherdstown). The meadow was recently designated as one of PVAS's Grassland Birds Initiative sites.

The White-Eyed Weary-o's won the friendly competition with 103 species. Last year's winning team, the Old Squaws, with great humor, begrudgingly presented the trophy and plaque to Joette Borzik of the White-eyed Weary-o's at the PVAS Annual Dinner on June 11th. The "Lame Ducks" Big Sit team recorded an impressive 44 species without moving from the meadow and won the Big Sit.

This year's Ruth Ann Dean Memorial Birdathon raised funds for PVAS's conservation programs including the Grassland Birds Initiative. To date, the event has raised over \$1,000 for this purpose thanks to individuals sponsoring either their own team or the team of participating friends and family. Many thanks to all those who participated, and who supported the teams with contributions!

Harper's Ferry National Historical Park Bioblitz A Success

In celebrating 100 years of stewardship, the National Park Service conducted a shared nation-wide quest to discover and document biodiversity in the National Parks. Potomac Valley Audubon Society (PVAS) supported our local parks in that effort. A BioBlitz is an event that focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time. At a BioBlitz, scientists, students, teachers, and other community members work together to get an overall count of the plants, animals, fungi, and other organisms that live in a place. The public was invited to join teams of volunteer scientists at Bolivar Heights Battlefield in the Harper's Ferry National Historical Park. PVAS volunteer scientists for birds were Joette Borzik, Jim Farley, Deb Hale and Wade Snyder.

A total of 61 different bird species were either heard and/or seen during May 20-21, 2016 of the Harper's Ferry National Historical Park BioBlitz. The weather was sunny and in the mid 70's on Friday, May 20 when bus loads of school field trips arrived to join in the surveys. The students kept us busy, where we were leading one birding survey after another. The heavy rain on Saturday, May 21 kept some of the public away, but the birding was better for doing surveys.

PVAS volunteers also staffed two informational booths both days of the event. A special thanks goes to Lynne Wiseman for organizing our Master Naturalist volunteers to staff the Master Naturalist booth. They did an excellent job recruiting potential Master Naturalists for future programs. Volunteers staffing the booths included Charlotte Fremaux, Bruni Haydl, Jean Neely, Bill Telfair, Jim Farley, Flo Wilbik, Laura Clark, Pamela Ellis and Christine Puffinberger.

Annual Antietam Butterfly Count July 30

PVAS is sponsoring its Second Annual Butterfly Count along the Final Attack Trail on the Antietam National Battlefield in Sharpsburg, MD on Saturday, July 30. The Washington County Bird Club is cosponsoring the event. Dave Kaplan, a local butterfly expert, will lead the count. The count will be free and open to anyone with an interest, regardless of his or her expertise. This will be a perfect family activity, and children, accompanied by adults, are encouraged to attend. Participation is limited to 20 people and pre-registration is required. Easy registration is available on the PVAS website at www.potomacaudubon.org. Participants should plan to meet count leader Kaplan at the Burnside Bridge at 10:00 a.m. Sandy Sagalkin will be the co-leader and will help identify bird life during the count. The count will last about 2 1/2 to 3 hours, and cover mostly level terrain.

The park has recently been the recipient of a pollinator grant from the National Park Service, which will be used to add native wildflowers to the existing stands of native warm season grasses at the farm. The butterfly count, along with data on birdlife and other wildlife, will be used in documenting the value of the project at the Otto Farm. Potomac Valley Audubon has been active in supporting the project and assisting park personnel in monitoring bird life in the area for the last three years.

As butterflies do not fly in the rain and heavy overcast can keep them down, participants should check the PVAS website for postponements if bad weather is forecast. If the count is postponed, a notice will be placed on the website by 9:00 p.m. on the day before the count. Participants should wear sturdy footwear, dress appropriately for the prevailing weather conditions, and bring along water, a broad-brimmed hat, and insect repellent. PVAS has a limited supply of loaner binoculars for those who do not have their own. For more information, contact Dave Kaplan at janandavek@verizon.net or Sandy Sagalkin at sandy.sagalkin@gmail.com or 240-291-6465.

NHES Protects Grassland Birds and Pollinators with PVAS

Do you miss hearing the whistle of the Northern Bobwhite in fields? Breeding Bird Surveys, a program administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, have shown a decrease in grassland birds by more than 5% per year since 1966. Some birds such as the Northern Bobwhite, Bobolink, Loggerhead Shrike, Grasshopper, Vesper and Henslow's Sparrows were once common locally, but are now rarely seen or heard. Do you also miss seeing fields full of beautiful butterflies, including the iconic monarch butterfly? About three-quarters of the world's flowering plant species rely on pollinators—birds, butterflies, bats, insects and other animals—to carry pollen from the male to the female parts of flowers for reproduction. Bees, butterflies and other pollinators are declining in North America. Due to the dramatic decline of the monarch butterfly, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is evaluating whether to offer protection to the monarch butterfly under the Endangered Species Act.

The National Humane Education Society (NHES) which operates The Briggs Animal Adoption Center, located 5 miles south of Charles Town, WV, recently designated 11 acres (most of its property not occupied by structures) as a Grassland Bird Preserve under PVAS's Grassland Birds Initiative. This acreage was previously maintained as a lawn. Three acres of what is to become new grassland habitat, was converted to native pollinator fields, which provide plant nectar that supports butterflies, bees and other insects that pollinate our food supply. "The new pollinator fields at The Briggs Animal Adoption Shelter are going to attract people as well as pollinators," said Joette Borzik, Bird and Pollinator Ambassador for PVAS. "Native flower fields are breathtaking when in bloom, and the amazing butterflies the flowers attract are wonders of nature."

Much of the reason for the decline in grassland birds is due to a change in land use practices, specifically unnecessary mowing, which results in habitat loss. PVAS created a Grassland Birds Initiative in 2013 to help halt this decline in the Eastern Panhandle, and to encourage concerned landowners to provide habitat for these impacted birds. Creating grasslands also creates habitat for pollinators. There are numerous benefits of delaying or reducing unnecessary mowing, all of which save money. Benefits include reduced labor costs, minimized fuel consumption, reduced wear and tear on equipment and increased fertility of the land. "We were spending a lot of time and money maintaining an expansive lawn that provided no tangible benefits" said Jim Taylor, Executive Director and President of NHES. "Helping to save grassland nesting birds and provide a food source for monarch butterflies is much more in keeping with our mission" said Cynthia Taylor, Animal Care Administrator and Vice President of NHES.

The easiest way to help grassland birds is to practice reduced mowing, rotational mowing, late season mowing, or only mowing every few years to maintain a grassland ecosystem on lands that are not in production. This practice also keeps woody species from encroaching. For fields in production, mowing after July 15 gives grassland birds a chance to breed and produce one clutch of young. Waiting until later in the summer to harvest provides even greater chance for grassland birds to nest successfully. Planting native versus non-native plants on your property provides food for birds, pollinators and wildlife. To learn more about helping grassland birds and pollinators, visit www.potomacaudubon.org/GBI or email GrasslandBirdsInitiative@potomacaudubon.org. To learn more about the animals available for adoption at The Briggs Animal Adoption Center, visit www.nhes.org/the-briggs-animal-adoption-center/ or call (304) 725-0506.

Join July 23 Antietam Bird Walk

PVAS will sponsor a bird walk along the Final Attack Trail on the Antietam National Battlefield in Sharpsburg, MD on Saturday, July 23. The walk is free and open to anyone with an interest, regardless of their birding skills. Children are welcome, but must be accompanied by an adult. Pre-registration is strongly encouraged but not required. Easy registration is available on the PVAS website at www.potomacaudubon.org.

Participants should plan to meet walk leader Sandy Sagalkin at the Burnside Bridge at 7:30 a.m. The walk will last about 2 1/2 to 3 hours, and cover mostly level terrain. Participants should wear sturdy footwear, dress appropriately for the prevailing weather conditions, and bring along water. PVAS will provide binoculars for those who do not have their own. Various trip details could change depending on weather or recent bird sightings.

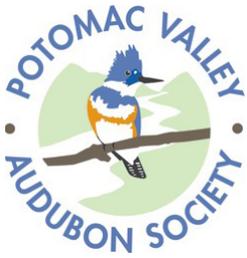
The trail the walk will follow is in the area where the Union Army made its final advance to drive the Confederate Army from Maryland on September 17, 1862, only to be turned back by A.P. Hill's final Confederate counterattack. It is also the site of an extensive effort by the Antietam National Battlefield to restore and preserve native grasslands on the Otto Farm fields in the Battlefield's southwest corner. For more information, contact Sandy at sandy.sagalkin@gmail.com or 240-291-6465.

Fireflies, Fiddles, and Frogs is Back!

Our family picnic night is back and better than ever this year! Join PVAS at Wild Goose Farm on July 13 from 6:00-9:00 p.m. (about when it gets dark) for a relaxing evening of food, family, and nature activities. We're asking only \$10 a car, for as many as will fit. (Please use your seatbelts, though!)

Bring a picnic dinner for your family, enjoy it while sitting by the pond or in the meadow, and then follow that up with free ice cream from South Mountain Creamery! Take advantage of the activities like pond exploration, making a wolf or coyote track to take home, playing nature-themed games, learning about Monarch butterflies, creating nature art, joining a "Wolf Trot" around the property and a StoryWalk. We're hoping there will even be a live wildlife display. We'll end when the fireflies come out and you've had a chance to chase them. It will be a perfect end to a summer day.

"Passports" will help your kids keep track of all the activities. When they have had their passport stamped at each station, they can claim a prize! Invite your family, your friends, your neighbors, even people you meet for the first time to this fabulous evening. We're looking forward to seeing you there! And if you can't come right at 6 p.m., come when you can.



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The Potomac Valley Audubon Society meets at 7:00 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month, September through April. Programs are free and open to the public. For additional information about PVAS or its programs and activities, please contact any of the board members listed here or see <http://www.potomacaudubon.org>. PVAS serves the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia and neighboring Washington County, Maryland.

PVAS BOARD
 PVAS Board meet-
 ings take place the
 first Thursday of
 the month (Sep-
 tember through
 June). Meetings
 are open to all
 PVAS members.
 Please contact
 the President or
 Vice President if
 you would like to
 attend.

PVAS Officers and Board Members (Year of term expiration in parentheses)

- President: Michael Sullivan (2018) msullivan@limno.com
- Vice President (acting): Jane Vanderhook (2017)..... janehook@frontiernet.net
- Secretary: Diana Gaviria (2016) jpikester@comcast.net
- Treasurer: Dan Cogswell (2017) daniel.cogswell@gmail.com
- Board Members-at-Large:
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 - Tanner Haid (2018) Tanner.Haid@gmail.com
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