



the Thrasher

the
Newsletter of the Richmond Audubon Society

JULY/AUGUST 2012 VOLUME 39 ISSUE 4



Steve Baranoff

RAS Member and
Nature Photographer



Steve Baranoff, a nature photographer, resides in both Richmond and Austin, Texas. Born in Canada, he moved with the family to California, Missouri, and finally to Texas because of his father's work as a university art professor. He first visited Richmond in 1995 when his wife, Etti, began her work as a professor at VCU. Upon his retirement from his engineering job in Austin in 2008, he embraced Richmond as a second home with new friends and a welcoming community of many talented birders and nature photographers. Steve is currently a member of RAS and the Focus Group Camera Club in Richmond.

Steve's interest in nature and particularly wild birds began when he was six years old and living in San Bernardino, California. His family's home adjoined the wilderness of the undeveloped hills that separated the city from the desert. Those hills became his playground for hours each day where he discovered tarantulas, trapdoor spiders, swallow-tailed butterflies, gopher snakes, chicken hawks, and much more. In 1959, when the family lived in Columbia, Missouri, he became immersed in the birding world and acquired his first Audubon bird book.

Austin, Texas became his home in 1960. There he attended junior high and senior high schools and the University of Texas at Austin (UT). While studying electrical engineering, he learned about photography and took advantage of the student labs to develop and print his images. At UT,

Steve met other photographers and learned from them. His father, primarily a "street" photographer, introduced Steve to his colleagues at the University, including the famous depression era photographer, Russell Lee.

Steve's first engineering job was in Israel where he lived for eight years. In Israel, Steve met Etti, was married and had two daughters. The subjects of his photography during those years were his wife and their two daughters. The darkened kitchen in their apartment served as his darkroom.

Steve and his family moved from Israel to Austin in 1977 where he rediscovered nature by acquiring a boat and fishing on central Texas' lakes. In the 90's, Steve and Etti were introduced to sea kayaking while visiting Vancouver and this led to many years of flat water paddling and enjoying nature. The combining of kayaking with photography provided Steve with the ability to quietly approach and photograph many species of wild birds in their natural habitat.

Steve was introduced to digital photography through his engineering work. There he used the first point and shoot (P/S) digital cameras for documenting development tests performed in the Yuma desert. The fresh images were instantly emailed to colleagues back in Austin. When P/S cameras improved and were readily available, Steve spent a few frustrating years trying to use them to photograph wild birds. When Canon introduced their first digital Canon Rebel (300D)

DSLR, Steve bought one and started photographing backyard birds using a 70-200 mm lens borrowed from work.

Steve primarily photographs in Virginia, Texas, and California. Other locations have included Bosque del Apache in New Mexico, Crested Butte in Colorado, and Quebec and Ontario, Canada. In Virginia, Steve's favorite Virginia locations are Richmond's downtown great-blue heron rookery, the city parks along the James River, and Assateague. Two other very special locations are his apartment balcony near the Lee Bridge and the deck of Mike Ostrander's boat.

Steve strives to capture quality images of wild birds in their natural habitats including birds in flight (BIF). The images are used to create natural and tasteful prints that are displayed as bird art. His images have been used in bird reference books, a birding magazine, and wildlife refuge pamphlets.

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Richmond Audubon Society

The Richmond Audubon Society promotes the enjoyment, understanding, and preservation of birds, other wildlife, and habitat through education, advocacy, and fellowship.

Important Notices

RAS membership meetings are on the 3rd Thursday of the month except June, July, August and December. Meetings are at 7:00 PM, and are held at St. Luke Lutheran Church at Custis Road and Chippenham Parkway unless notified.

RAS Board meetings are held on the 2nd Thursday on alternate months starting in January (except June and August). In July, the Board has its annual strategic planning retreat. RAS members are welcome to attend board meetings, but let the President or Secretary know due to space considerations. Meeting locations vary; contact the President or Secretary for location details.

Richmond Audubon Society is also a chapter of the Virginia Society of Ornithology and the Virginia Conservation Network.

Richmond Audubon Society
P.O. Box 26648
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www.RichmondAudubon.org

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Lewis Barnett, Louise Reza: Proofreading.
Ben Griffon: Mailing List.
Carl "Spike" Knuth : Illustrations.

Publication Schedule

The Thrasher is issued six times a year. Submit articles no later than the 10th of the month before each issue. Deadline for the next issue is August 10.

President's Message

An evening in the Wetlands

Lewis Barnett



On the evening of April 24, I dropped by the Wetlands section of James River Park after work. Spring migration was well under way at that time, so I was hoping to catch a new arrival or two in that little slice of free time I had found. Other than my first City-of-Richmond Common Yellowthroat of the year, there wasn't much in the way of detectable migrants at that time of day, but it turned into a rather remarkable hour in the woods.

I found an active Downy Woodpecker nest easily visible from the trail on the right about 50 yards into the park. This is just opposite a jumble of sycamore logs that were cut to clear the trail after Irene. There's a broken off snag with a perfectly round hole near the top, about twenty feet off the trail. As I looked at the hole through my binoculars, thinking to myself that it looked like a perfect nest site for something, out poked the head of a female Downy Woodpecker.

I took the turn down the trail to the boardwalk, listening for anything that might be singing. Not much was, except for one Common Yellowthroat that I could hear periodically from the direction of the meadow. But I did detect movement off to the left of the trail – a male Ruby-throated Hummingbird was flying back and forth, tracing a shallow "U" in the air. This was a display flight that I had read about in David Sibley's field guide, but had never actually witnessed.

I backtracked to the pond. As I was peeking from the eastern-most blind at a Swamp Sparrow preening in a bush by the pond's

edge, out swam a beaver trailing a few fronds of what looked like some sort of tall grass.

Walking down towards Pleasant's Creek, there was a ruckus off on the trail that leads west from the pond, which turned out to be a mixed flock of Cardinals and Chickadees mobbing a Barred Owl that was on the ground, presumably with some tasty bit of supper. I got an interesting look as the Owl flew off, looking a bit disheveled and annoyed at all the attention.

There were Purple Martins, Barn Swallows and Tree Swallows flying over the river. As I was watching them, an Osprey flew out from the south bank, low over the water, trailing its talons in the water, a bit like the hippogriff over the Black Lake in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Once or twice as it crossed the river, it seemed to dip its beak downwards, as if it was drinking on the wing like some swallows do. I had never seen anything like that.

As I was leaving, I took the time to track down the Yellowthroat, which was singing strongly from high up in the good-sized juniper on the eastern edge of the meadow.

Definitely the best hour of my day.



© Naseem Reza

From the Kitchen Window

John Coe

In evening as storm clouds pass, and streams of gold wash
the banks of grey
And bathe the hills with sunset colors...
And Ravens call...and birds fly quietly to secret roosts
John from the O'Bryan farmhouse in
Blue Grass, VA

At home. The window's open. It's early June. A Wood
Thrush sings as the hint of morning highlights the tree
branches, and the cardinal joins in. And he sings and
sings and sings his serene flute-like notes until the sun rises
and then he's gone. It's been several years since we have
heard the Wood Thrush here and he stayed for just this
day. A lot of years have passed by the window. Our stay-
at-home birds have not changed much – the cardinals and
the chickadees, the wrens and titmice, the nuthatches and
woodpeckers, the gold finches and house finches and all

their friends still wake us up in the morn and delight us
with song and color. But times have changed and the view
out back is not the same as it was. The trees are still there
and the little stream down below, but the birds that used to
stop by in migration, some to stay and raise their young are
mainly absent. The Wood Thrush, probably a lonely male
in search of a special place, was a joy to hear, if only for a
day.

The Kitchen Window will be traveling some, we have a
home on wheels now so I will take notes, and the next view
out the window maybe will be from who knows where.

The full moon in July, called the Buck Moon occurs on
July 3rd at 12:51 pm. The full moon in August, named the
sturgeon moon occurs at 9:27 pm on August 1st, and then
again on August 31st, a BLUE moon!

RAS Picnic

For the 21st consecutive year, the RAS picnic was
graciously hosted by the Snyder family in Varina.
This year's highlight was a very special magic show
performed by RAS member Larry Rohr. It was a treat
to watch Larry interact with the four children in
attendance. The adults were also enthralled.

Thank you Nelda for continuing this tradition.



2012 Bird-a-thon Wrap-up

Lewis Barnett

You've heard a lot recently about Richmond Audubon's Bird-a-thon. Bird-a-thon is one of our organization's major fund-raisers every year. Anyone can form a team and solicit pledges based on the number of species the team is able to find during a selected 24 hour period during the month of May. It's a great way to help Richmond Audubon, and to have a fun day in the field with your birding buddies.

We had three teams again this year, *Birdzerk!*, the Crazy Coots, and the Good, the Bad and the Ugly Ducklings. All three teams did their birdathon big days over the weekend of May 12 – 13 this year. The Ducklings left the drakes at home this year and did their big day in Highland County. They found some great birds that are tough or impossible in the Richmond area, such as Black-billed Cuckoo, Warbling Vireo, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, Golden-winged Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, and Bobolink. Pam Dummitt submitted the following report about the Ducklings outing.

This year, five members of The Good The Bad And The Ugly Ducklings Birdathon Team began the count at Margaret O'Bryan's Highland County farm with a gorgeous Redstart singing from a treetop in clear view. It was soon upstaged by an extended appearance from a handsome Brewster's Warbler flitting, perching and singing in low shrubs near the deck. A Black-billed Cuckoo called all the while from the woods not far from the road that runs in front of the farm.

Meandering along Wimer and Hardscrabble Roads, we car-birded our way up to Laurel Fork. Centered in a low bank next to the road, a Junco had skillfully camouflaged the entrance to its nest beneath a moss-covered rock. Tiny blue-gray feathers around the opening were the only clue to the household inside. Julie and I watched and waited for it to go in, just to be sure.

We parked to look and listen just below the last hairpin turn heading up the mountain. Scarlet Tanagers and Redstarts were trash birds, while a Blackpoll's squeaky wheel needed grease just out of sight.

Stopping for a snack break near an abandoned farmhouse, we were surprised by a Kingfisher suddenly darting across the road in front of us. He chattered his way toward a nearby beaver pond, probably hoping for snack of his own. Shrikes and Golden Eagles failed to make an appearance. The hoped-for Long-eared Owls and Woodcock were also no-shows during our count period. John Spahr reported seeing/hearing both species from the road in front of the farm earlier in the week. He was scouting the area for Golden-winged Warblers in anticipation of the survey being conducted by VCU over the weekend.

We ended our count with 85 species, substantially less than in previous years. But I think I speak for the team when I say we would do it all over again in a hummingbird's heartbeat.

Back in Richmond, the Coots struggled with an uncharacteristically quiet day in James River Park, missing several expected species along the way. Highlights were Swainson's Thrush singing at 42nd Street, along with Canada Warbler and Chestnut-sided Warbler. Louisiana Waterthrush at Crewe's Channel was a nice surprise. We closed out the day with calling Whip-poor-wills at the West Creek soccer fields. The Coots ended the day with 94 species.

Birdzerk! (because you have to be a little crazy to do a Bird-a-thon) did their big day on Sunday, covering much of the same ground that the Coots had trod the previous day, but with better success – they finished with 105 species. Bob & Lori Schamerhorn started the day very early by recording numerous species at their

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feeders at their North side home, while drinking coffee in bed, via their wireless camera setup that delivers images to their TV. They then birded Bryan Park and the Wetlands before meeting Al & Linda Warfield at 42nd St in JR Park around 7:30 am. Later Steve Baranoff (camera in tow) joined them there. Highlights of 42nd St included a pair of very active Swainson's Thrushes in the trees above the parking lot. Naseem birded his immediate yard while keeping tabs on his young granddaughter. The two couples then hit the Tredegar area of the James, Brown's Island, and the Pipeline Rookery. After a short lunch break they went to Henricus (Dutch Gap). The Warfields had to leave around 3 pm, after which Bob & Lori finished up with Crewe's Channel, the Richmond National Battlefield Park, Shirley Plantation, and then Chamberlayne Marsh on the way home. There they discovered a total of 40 Great Egrets apparently roosting. Overall, team

Birdzerk! had a great day. The team members had so much fun that they are already planning for next year.

If you haven't had an opportunity to do so yet, it's not too late to make a donation to support your favorite Bird-a-thon team – or just to support Bird-a-thon in general. Just make your check out to Richmond Audubon Society, write the name of your favorite team in the memo (or just "Birdathon" if you don't want to choose sides), and put it in the mail to us at P.O. Box 26648, Richmond, VA 23261. If you're comfortable using PayPal, just visit the RAS web site (www.richmondaudubon.org) and click the "Donate" button. You'll have an opportunity to add a message to go along with your donation. In either case, your donations go directly to support Richmond Audubon's conservation, education and advocacy program.

September Program

Caroline Coe, Programs Chair

Richmond Audubon does not have monthly member programs in July and August. Instead, join some of your family and friends in an outdoor picnic with a juicy ripe watermelon and keep an eye out for birds in your yard to report at the September meeting!

Brian Taber, President of the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, will be our speaker on

Thursday, September 20, 2012. In 2013, the Kiptopeke Bird Banding Station will celebrate 50 years of bird banding and Brian will share some of the past and a vision of the station's efforts going forward. So mark your calendars, the meeting will be at 7:00 PM at St. Luke Lutheran Church, located at Custis Road and Chippenham Parkway. (more details will be provided in the September/October THRASHER)

Cookies and coffee will be served starting at 6:30 pm. Many thanks to Linda Warfield for the wonderful programs she has arranged for RAS in the past 2 years. She has completed her term and I'll be taking over. So, as we plan our future meeting, let me hear from you with suggestions. You can email me at programs@richmondaudubon.org

From the Editor

Starting with this issue, it is my privilege to serve as the Thrasher editor. Following Arun Bose (the last 3 years) and Al Warfield (the previous 8 years) will be a challenge. I will work hard to maintain the high standard they have set.

The Thrasher will highlight a different Richmond Audubon Society (RAS) member/photographer in the

next several issues. Steve Baranoff and his work is showcased this month.

I look forward to receiving your suggestions and comments regarding your Newsletter.

Naseem Reza thrasher@richmondaudubon.org

Field Trips

Lewis Barnett



These are all the RAS trips that have been submitted as of the publication date.

Check the RAS listserv

(if you don't subscribe the archives are at

www.freelists.org/archive/va-richmond-general/)

or the RAS website for any late breaking news

about field trips (www.richmondaudubon.org/ActivFieldTrip.html.)

Sunday, July 1 – Bryan Park

Meet Sue Ridd at Shelter #1 thirty minutes after sunrise for the monthly walk in Bryan Park. Call Sue with any questions at 270-5365.

Saturday, July 14 – Dutch Gap with Betsy and Ben Saunders

Meet Betsy and Ben at 8:00 AM at the entrance to Henricus Historical Park/Dutch Gap Conservation area. Local breeding birds will be the focus of this walk. For more information, contact betsyben@juno.com.

Saturday, August 4 – Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens

See the birds of Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens. Meet in the rotunda of the visitor center at 8:00 A.M. Cost will be \$6.00 for non Ginter members, finish around 9:30 - 9:45 AM. Contact: Tyler Turpin at (804) 317-9478 or email tylerturpin@earthlink.net to sign up.

Saturday, August 4 – 17th Street Farmer's Market – Gone to the Birds Festival

Come see the Purple Martins as they fly into the Bradford Pear trees one hour before sunset! Specialists from the Purple Martin Conservation Association will be there to answer your questions. Richmond Audubon, DGIF, Virginia Audubon and the VSO will be present to answer birding or habitat questions as well. Gelato is available for a nominal fee. Festival starts at 6:00 pm. For more information: www.gonetothebirds.org.

Sunday, August 5 – Bryan Park

Meet Sue Ridd at Shelter #1 thirty minutes after sunrise for the monthly walk in Bryan Park. Call Sue with any questions at 270-5365.

Saturday, August 18 – Dutch Gap with Betsy and Ben Saunders

Meet Betsy and Ben at 8:00 AM at the entrance to Henricus Historical Park/Dutch Gap Conservation area. Local breeding birds and early migrants will be the focus of this walk. For more information, contact betsyben@juno.com.

Sunday, September 2 – Bryan Park

Meet Sue Ridd at Shelter #1 thirty minutes after sunrise for the monthly walk in Bryan Park. Call Sue with any questions at 270-5365.

Saturday, September 15 – Dutch Gap with Betsy and Ben Saunders

Meet Betsy and Ben at 8:00 AM at the entrance to Henricus Historical Park/Dutch Gap Conservation area. Fall migration should be well under way, so you never know what might turn up! For more information, contact betsyben@juno.com.

Saturday, September 29 – Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens

See the birds of Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens. Meet in the rotunda of the visitor center at 8:00 A.M. Cost will be \$6.00 for non Ginter members, finish around 9:30 - 9:45 AM. Contact: Tyler Turpin at (804) 317-9478 or email tylerturpin@earthlink.net to sign up.

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Wood Duck

Bald Eagles



Roseate Spoonbill



Painted Bunting

Please go to
<http://www.birdsinphotos.com>
to see more of Steve's work.

**NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY
Chapter Membership Application**

Yes, please enroll me (us) as a **new** member(s) of both National and Richmond Audubon Societies at the address below, **at the introductory rate**. A subscription to the NAS magazine, *Audubon* is included.

Individual/Family Member(s) \$20 enclosed

Student/Senior Member \$15 enclosed

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ ZIP _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Make check payable to **National Audubon Society and write "C0ZX530Z"** on the check. Send your check and application to:
**Richmond Audubon Society,
P.O. Box 26648, Richmond, VA 23261
C0ZX530Z**

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