



# the Newsletter of the Richmond Audubon Society Thrasher

JULY/AUGUST 2013 VOLUME 40, ISSUE 4



## Bob Schamerhorn

RAS Member and  
Nature Photographer

Bob's fascination with nature has been with him since the beginning. His curiosity of nature had him exploring everywhere from his childhood neighborhood woodlands in Lynchburg, Virginia, to the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, all the way to the salt-marshes of the Outer Banks. He is a fledgling of the Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO) and the Lynchburg Bird Club of the 1970's, which sponsored him twice to The Virginia Garden Club's Nature Camp as a youth. Years later he studied Art and Design at Virginia Tech and afterwards lived in Bedford County until he relocated to Richmond in the fall of 2006. Bob joined the Richmond Audubon Society in hopes of finding out where the local birds and birders hang out.

Professionally, Bob is a self-employed Graphic Artist for the sole-proprietorship Infinity Graphics, which he founded in 1996. It is often assumed that he is a professional nature photographer, but not so. Photography is a VERY expensive hobby, but not his vocation. Some of his photos have won awards and appeared in various publications such

as: Audubon Virginia's IBA Annual Report and Newsletter, eBird Virginia's website and Nature Friend Magazine to name a few. He also maintains a weekly photo-blog at [www.iPhotoBirds.com](http://www.iPhotoBirds.com) and on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/iphotobirds) (www.facebook.com/iphotobirds) His knowledge of nature and years of experience have become great tools that aid in his photography.

Bob is an advocate of habitat conservation. He wishes, "That these images bring you a lasting moment of gratitude for God's awesome creations; may we appreciate and protect the glorious gift of this Earth." He strives to capture the individual characteristics and specific behaviors that make each species unique, doing whatever they naturally do. Bob is currently a resident of Richmond, where he lives with his best friend and number one supporter, his wife Lori. He gets out with his camera to enjoy the birds and the outdoors at any opportunity that presents itself. He considers himself an enthusiast, not an expert!



Cedar Waxwing, Richmond Birdbath

[see more photos by Bob on page 7](#)

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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  
Richmond, VA 23261

(804) 257-0813  
[www.RichmondAudubon.org](http://www.RichmondAudubon.org)

Richmond Audubon Society is a registered non-profit 501 (C) (3) charitable organization. Donations are tax deductible.

Thanks to these Thrasher Volunteers:

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

### Publication Schedule

The Thrasher is issued six times a year. Please submit articles to [thrasher@richmondaudubon.org](mailto:thrasher@richmondaudubon.org) no later than the 10th of the month before each issue. Deadline for the next issue is **August 10.**

# President's Message

Lewis Barnett



## Bird-a-thon

Our annual springtime Bird-a-thon fund raiser is wrapping up as I write this. We had an all-time high four teams participating this year, cause for some celebration. You may have gotten the status reports online as teams finished up their Big Days, but I will recap here for posterity. My own Crazy Coots and the newcomer Purple Martians fought through a sputtering and late songbird migration, both teams working around the May 4 walk at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. The Coots finished the day with 95 species. The Martians, working on a 5:00 pm to 5:00 pm 24 hour cycle and pushing a little farther east did better, clocking in with 119 species. Birdzerk! had kept a low profile after a late April Big Day that started in Richmond and ended on the Eastern Shore. They eventually came clean with an impressive total of 135 species – anyone know if that's a record? The Ducklings are flying under the radar this year – no reported Big Day total as of the Thrasher deadline, but they are raising money. I can only

assume that this is the "quiet phase" of their campaign.

And that, of course, is the real point of Bird-a-thon – raising funds to support the activities we all value. If you enjoy our membership meetings, your donations pay the rent for the meeting space, the honoraria for the speakers, and buy some of the refreshments. If the Thrasher newsletter is your favorite part of Richmond Audubon, your donation helps defray the publication costs. If boots-on-the-ground science and conservation is your thing, your dollars are supporting our MAPS banding program and various projects with James River Park and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. If environmental education is your focus, you could be supporting our build-a-birdhouse programs with Chesterfield County Libraries or teaching gardens at two Richmond City schools. Just about any aspect of our organization requires money to operate, and it all happens due to the generosity of our members and the time and effort contributed by our volunteers.

If you have already made a donation, sincere thanks. If you haven't, please consider making a donation. Checks can be mailed to Richmond Audubon Society, P.O. Box 26648, Richmond, VA 23261 – or check out the web site to donate online.

# The Migrating Purple Martins

**Adolph White**

The Purple Martin is the largest member of the of the Swallow family. They are much larger than Tree Swallows and Barn Swallows. Even though the smaller Swallows are alike in appearance to the Purple Martins, they can't glide as smoothly as the Purple Martins. This gliding skill is what makes the Purple Martin unique. For instance, while flying, the Tree and Barn Swallows make a rapid tweeting choppy loud sound while the Purple Martins have a slow extended chirping sound which matches their slow extended interval of their gliding patterns. Therefore, the Purple Martin has been classified as a bird with aerobatic skills.

The Native Americans were the first to notice the Purple Martins on North American soil in the 1600's. During that time they put up gourds for the Purple Martins because they noticed that these birds were eating flying insects and hoped that they would reduce the insects that were eating their crops. They did see a decrease in at least some of the insects. Today, those who are hosting the Purple Martins in their backyards are still using the gourds --both natural and plastic. Purple Martins houses are being used also. Furthermore, the hosting families are named Purple Martin landlords.

Most of these landlords have researched the culture of the Purple Martin to the extent of installing and modifying and refining Purple Martin houses to increase the bird's protection from snakes, owls, hawk, and other birds that will attempt to take up residence in these houses. The Purple Martin landlords have an email and phone network they use to acquire and exchange information regarding making the Purple Martin's visit a safe, successful, and pleasant one. See the Purple Martin Conservation Association website for more information at <http://purplemartin.org/>

Our eastern Purple Martins migrate 5,000 miles from Sao Paulo, Brazil, to work their way up the east coast. They arrive in Florida in January of each year following the warming temperatures. They first appear in Richmond, Virginia around March 15th looking for their nesting homes. After going through the nesting cycle and after all chicks

are fledged, they will arrive at the 17th Street Farmers' Market, Shockoe Bottom, downtown Richmond roosting site in late July as a first stage of their migration back to their winter home in Brazil. We hold our Purple Martin Festival the first weekends of August when they are most plentiful in order to see thousands of these wonderful birds land in the few Bradford Pear trees along the street. See website for more information <http://gonetothebirdsrva.com/>



Photo by Kathy Laine

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## July and August

**Caroline Coe**, Program Chair

There are no RAS Member Programs scheduled in July or August. Please consider attending the 6th Annual **Gone to the Birds Festival** on Saturday, August 3, 2013 from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM at Richmond, Virginia's historic 17th Street Farmers' Market, where the featured star will be the Purple Martin.

Our monthly members' meetings will resume on Thursday, September 19, 2013.

# Ovenbird

Naseem Reza



Photo by Steve Baranoff

According to the Birder's Handbook, the Ovenbird gets its name from the shape of its nest that is constructed at ground level in deciduous forests and resembles a Dutch oven. Despite its name, the Ovenbird is a *warbler* that breeds in Eastern and Midwestern states and winters in Florida and Central America.

The Ovenbird song is a loud series of *teacher, teacher, teacher* that is often heard but the bird is seldom seen. If you go to this link <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Ovenbird/sounds> and listen to its song, chances are that it will sound familiar. Look for it on the forest floor walking (not hopping) with its tail in the up position. In Virginia, the Louisiana Waterthrush can be mistaken for an Ovenbird but the Waterthrush habitually pumps its tail and does not have the orange crown stripe of the Ovenbird.

The Ovenbird lays 4-5 eggs, white with brown markings, and the female does the incubating. The eggs hatch in less than two weeks and the chicks fledge in about 10 days with both parents providing a protein rich diet of insects and worms. This species is a common host for the Brown-headed Cowbird.

The American Bird Conservancy Guide to Bird Conservation states that the Ovenbird is very prone to crashing into tall communications towers because the red lights on the towers interfere with the bird's navigation system. Another hazard for the Ovenbird is the loss of habitat on its breeding ground due to overgrazing of the forest understory by the ever increasing white-tailed deer population. In addition to the Ovenbird, other ground nesting birds such as the Kentucky Warbler are impacted. Despite these challenges, the song of the Ovenbird rings loud and clear in the forest during Spring and early Summer.

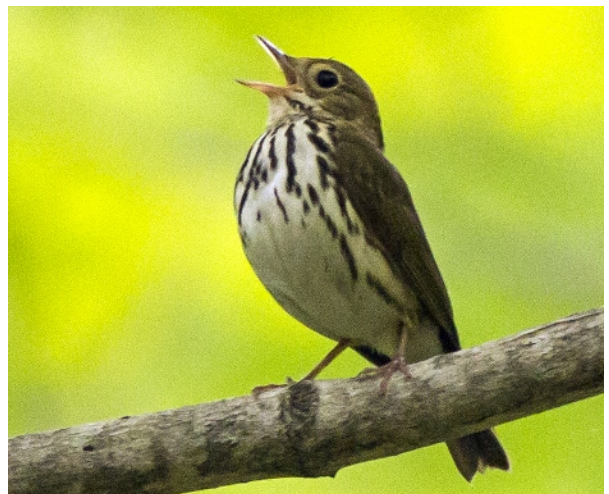
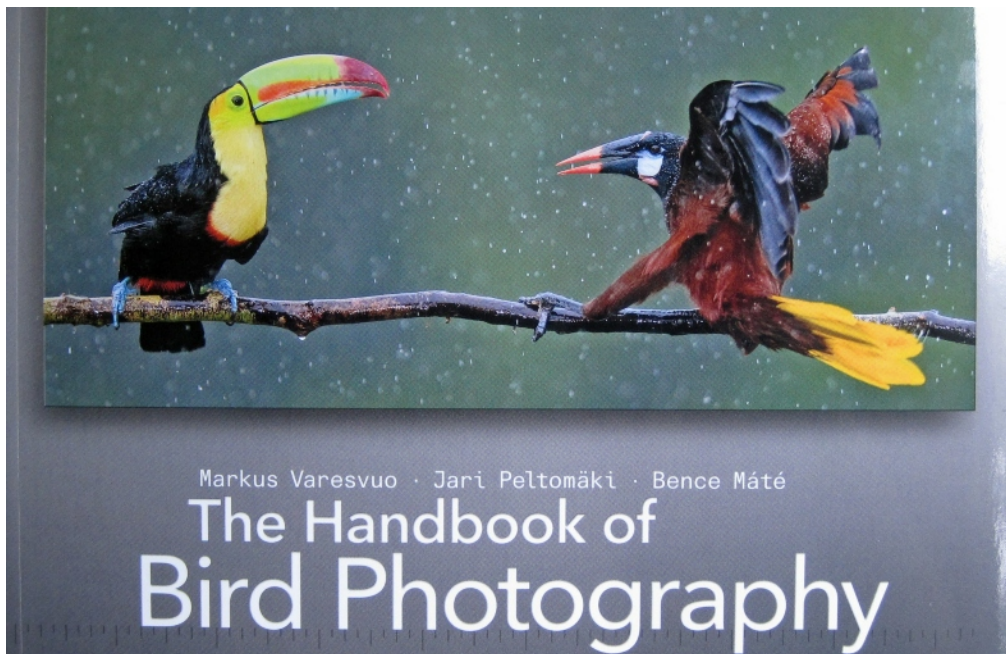


Photo by Naseem Reza

## Book Review By Naseem Reza

# Bird Photography with a European Flair



True to its origin, this translation from Finnish retains its strong North European flavor despite the cover picture. The three authors who are also professional photographers, have combined their collective knowledge and extensive experience to offer the very latest information on bird photography. Each author focuses on the subject matter he is thoroughly familiar with and comes up with practical advice ranging from camera gear, including lenses and accessories, to techniques that have worked well for them. Included are technical topics such as proper exposure for different situations, as well as the use of props such as blinds to get closer to the subject. One downside to the camera/lens recommendations is that only the high end (read very, very expensive) gear from Canon and Nikon is covered. Most aspiring and even dedicated bird photographers will have a hard time justifying the purchase of the recommended gear.

Perhaps the best feature of the book is the inclusion of many beautiful bird photos taken by the authors, primarily in Northern Europe. All photographs include details such as the camera settings, location and date. In addition to the many dramatic shots from Finland, Iceland and Norway, limited coverage is also given to sites in Israel, Japan, Greece and Hungary. Costa Rica and Brazil represent a few tropical species and yes the United States is represented by the legendary flocks of wintering Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese at the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico.

You don't have to be a bird photographer to enjoy this book. The bird pictures are just stunning and include a lot of action shots. This reference book justly deserves a place on your coffee table.

**The Handbook of Bird Photography**  
**By Markus Varesvuo, Jari Peltomaki**  
**and Bence Mate**  
**358 pp. Rockynook, Paperback, \$49.95**



## Field Trips

### Ellison Orcutt

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/](http://www.freelists.org/archive/va-richmond-general/)) or the RAS website for any late breaking news about field trips ([www.richmondaudubon.org/ActivFieldTrip.html](http://www.richmondaudubon.org/ActivFieldTrip.html).)

### July 7th Sunday

*Bryan Park* with Sue Ridd:

Start time: 1/2 hour after sunrise

Meeting location: Shelter 1, Joseph Bryan Park

Join Sue Ridd for early morning birding in Bryan Park.

For more information, call Sue at 270-5365.

### July 20th Saturday

*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. Explore this great birding destination to see what birds are around. You never know what will turn up at Dutch Gap.

For more information, contact

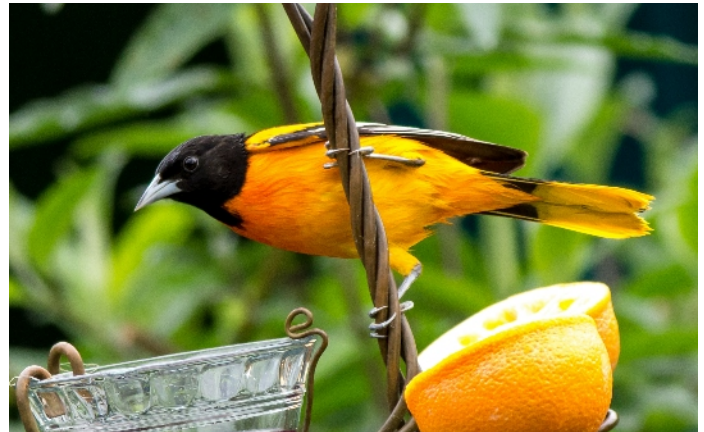
[betsyben65@yahoo.com](mailto:betsyben65@yahoo.com).

### August 3rd Saturday

*Lewis Ginter* with Tyler Turpin:

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-members. Walk will finish around 9:30 - 9:45 AM. Contact: Tyler Turpin at (804) 317- 9478 or email [tylerturpin@earthlink.net](mailto:tylerturpin@earthlink.net) to sign up. Also note, the trip requires at least 4 participants to sign up by the Wednesday before the trip or those trip will be canceled.



Baltimore Oriole, Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, MA

### August 4th Sunday

*Bryan Park* with Sue Ridd:

Start time: 1/2 hour after sunrise

Meeting location: Shelter 1, Joseph Bryan Park

Join Sue Ridd for early morning birding in Bryan Park.

For more information, call Sue at 270-5365.



Wild Turkey entering Audubon facility at Wellfleet, MA

### Editor's Note:

Our own Ellison Orcutt is spending his 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive Summer in Cape Cod working for Mass Audubon's Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary. Along with his many important duties there, he has been tasked with recruiting local turkeys to join the Massachusetts Audubon Society and relocate orioles from Baltimore to Cape Cod.

**Bob Schamerhorn - continued from page 1**



**Courting Great Blue Herons, Richmond Heron Rookery**



**Peregrine Falcon, Blue Cypress Lake, FL**



**Male Belted Kingfisher, Chincoteague NWR**

## **From the Editor**

**Bob Schamerhorn** is our featured nature photographer in this issue. Since joining RAS in 2006, Bob has generously donated his time and special skill set to the Richmond birding community.

In our continuing series of birds that are often heard but seldom seen, the Ovenbird gets the limelight in this issue.

Richmond Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 26648  
Richmond, VA 23261  
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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

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