

## Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023

ASNV's mission is to engage all Northern Virginia communities in enjoying, conserving, and restoring nature for the benefit of birds, other wildlife, and people.

This Annual Report reviews the major activites of the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia in fiscal year 2023, July 2022 through June 2023.

ASNV had an excellent and exciting year, thanks to the dedication and hard work of our staff and volunteers.

**ASNV expanded its conservation efforts** through its Stretch Our Parks initiative, which engages volunteers, partner organizations, neighborhoods, and civic groups to improve habitat within and surrounding area parks. We started with two pilot projects and plan to expand in the coming year. ASNV also expanded its work in rapidly disappearing grasslands habitats, installing nest boxes for American Kestrels and Barn Owls. We continued to support bird, insect and plant surveys, and increased our participation in them. We rely on our community's citizen scientists and their scientific expertise to define our goals and measure our progress.

Audubon at Home Ambassadors, now numbering 135, continued to help property owners improve wildlife habitat in northern Virginia, certifying as Wildlife Sanctuaries more than 86 properties that total more than 650 acres. Certified properties ranged in size from a tenth of an acre to a 190-acre riverside preserve. This year we certified our 1,000th property since Audubon at Home began in 2010. As of June 30, 2023, we have certified 1,025 properties that protect 8,592 acres. With our partner Plant NOVA Natives, we obtained grants and conducted a Spanish-language Professional Landscapers Conference that emphasized the use and care of native plants over non-native invasive plants and pesticides.

ASNV's Advocacy team worked for conservation of natural resources at local, state, and federal levels of government, urging our representatives to give high priority to conservation of natural areas and parks. Our volunteers fought to protect natural spaces, promote bird-friendly building

codes, replace invasive species with wildlife-friendly habitat, promote measures that fight climate change, and reduce the harm to wildlife, the environment, and public health from free-roaming cats.

We continued to expand our community, engaging new volunteers and reaching out to diverse communities. We hired a volunteer coordinator in February 2023 to identify and train volunteers for new and expanded ASNV activities, including nature walks, educational talks, and engaging the public at community events. NextGen Birders for Conservation, which targets younger participants, continued to grow, with more than 200 members. We continued partnerships with organizations serving minority neighborhoods, offering bird walks and other activities. We improved accessibility to our Zoom programs by adding closed captioning and live transcripts, to bird-watching by contributing to Birdability maps of birding locations accessible to the mobility-challenged, and to education by translating guides and pamphlets into Spanish.

ASNV's educational programs moved to a mix of online programs and in-person classes and field trips and enjoyed high participation rates. Our online classes and workshops tallied more than 2,200 participants. Forty-three people enjoyed our 6-week, online Ornithology Course. Our two programs for beginning birders were particularly well-received, and our free in-person Audubon Afternoons attracted hundreds of participants. Our educational programs for youth included a schoolyard-based field trip for third graders and a field trip to Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge for home-schooled students. We offered a scholarship for a local teacher to attend Audubon's Hog Island nature camp in Maine.

Finally, I can report that we are in **excellent financial shape**, thanks in large part to our generous donors!

Thank you to all you donors, and our members, staff, and volunteers for a fantastic year!

Libby Lyons

President, Audubon Society of Northern Virginia

## Conservation and Citizen Science



The Conservation and Citizen Science Committees support projects to conserve native wildlife and collect and analyze important natural resource information.

#### **Habitat Conservation**

We launched a new conservation program this year called Stretch Our Parks. The aim of Stretch Our Parks is to 1) benefit wildlife by expanding wildlife-friendly habitat beyond the borders of our parks into their surrounding neighborhoods, 2) help local parks build healthier and greener habitats in, around, and between key parks, and 3) increase involvement with nature of all northern Virginia communities in their neighborhood parks and backyards. This year we kicked off the program at two target areas: 1) Upton Hill Regional Park and the adjacent Powhatan Springs Park in Arlington, and 2) Four Mile Run Park and Monticello Park in Alexandria. We laid the groundwork for a program at Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Woodbridge that will start in fiscal year 2024.

Project activities this year included replacing invasive plants with native plants and multiple educational activities such as nature walks and bird walks to draw in the surrounding community. We met with local community groups and conservation organizations already



working in these areas to assess how ASNV could lend its expertise to further their work. In Monticello Park, ASNV sponsored two allday Birdathon events to spread the word about the Stretch Our Parks program. On one day nineteen different warbler species were tallied, demonstrating why this park, which hosts one of the highest concentrations of migrating songbirds in the entire region, was chosen for the program.

**In addition to continuing these activities,** the Conservation Committee looks forward to developing a model that other organizations can use to develop similar programs at other parks in northern Virginia and beyond.

We continue to seek opportunities to enhance grassland habitat, which is rapidly disappearing from northern Virginia. We partnered with a raptor expert to install two American Kestrel nest boxes in the fall of 2022 and monitored the boxes in the spring of 2023. No kestrels have yet been observed using the boxes, but we are hopeful that they will find them in time for nesting in spring 2024. We also acquired a Barn Owl box and arranged for its installation in a silo in the Leesburg area. We also continue to work with the



Advocacy Committee in opposing the development of closed areas in the Fairfax County landfill into a luxury indoor ski resort.

Conservation Committee volunteers met this year with Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources staff to begin a two-year process for updating the State Wildlife Management Plan.

## Surveys and Counts

Citizen Science surveys document trends in northern Virginia natural resources - information that supports conservation efforts.

» Christmas Bird Count: ASNV volunteers conducted the 41st annual Manassas-Bull Run Christmas Bird Count on December 18, 2022. Nearly 100 birders counted almost 20,000 birds of 82 species in this 15-mile diameter circle. There was no "grackle cyclone" this year, which brought the total count of this species down from last year's 10,000 to a mere 17. We tallied all three local falcons (American Kestrel, Merlin, and Peregrine Falcon) for only the third time this century. Other notable results include Red-breasted Nuthatch (25), Common Raven (16), and Wilson's Snipe (8).



Winter Waterfowl Count: Fifteen teams comprising 63 volunteers participated in the February 2023 ASNV Winter Waterfowl Count. They documented 34,797 individuals representing 42 species of waterfowl and other water birds. Dabbling ducks continued to show low numbers, possibly due to sparse growth of submerged aquatic

vegetation that has not recovered from excessive spring rains five years ago. Populations of divers seem to be stable. Highlights included more than two dozen Common Goldeneye and several large flocks of Lesser Scaup. We observed Tundra Swans from the Great Marsh at Mason Neck south to Quantico Marine Base.

» Northern Virginia Bird Survey: ASNV paused this survey in fiscal year 2023 to analyze the data collected over the past 30 years, working with George Mason



University. We expect the analysis to contribute to our understanding of bird species numbers and distributions across the northern Virginia region, including trends for different species at specific sites. This will help ASNV and other organizations focus conservation efforts where they are most needed. Once the analysis is complete, we will decide whether to continue this survey in future years.

Other Surveys: ASNV continued to sponsor other wildlife surveys, including the year-round Occoquan Bay and Meadowood wildlife surveys, the International Migratory Bird Day Count, and the North American Butterfly Association count. Participation in the surveys was enhanced by ASNV-hosted webinars to recruit and train new volunteers and re-acquaint returning volunteers with survey protocols. ASNV also sponsored or co-sponsored 28 bird walks in the region, which served to support and expand the community of volunteer citizens scientists.

## Audubon at Home



The Audubon at Home Program continues to help property owners restore and expand wildlife-friendly habitat in urbanizing Northern Virginia.

## Spreading the Word about Native Plants

We helped hundreds of northern Virginia residents enhance wildlife **habitat on their properties.** We received 288 requests to visit properties and advise owners on native plantings and other habitat improvements to support wildlife. We made 209 site visits and certified 86 properties totaling 650 acres as Wildlife Sanctuaries. Certified properties range in size from less than a tenth of an acre to a 190-acre riverside preserve in Fauguier County. Most certified properties were residential, but also included parkland, a day school, an historic house, a retirement community, and a common area of a homeowner association.

This year we certified the 1,000th property since the first Audubon at Home Wildlife Sanctuary began in 2010. Through June 30 of this year, we have certified a total of 1,025 properties and 8,592 acres. Habitat is wherever you find it or can create it, and the Audubon at Home motto is. "Let the critters decide." If the animals show up and use a property, it is wildlife habitat—even if it's just a tiny suburban backyard.

We spread the word about Audubon at Home in northern Virginia and beyond. Audubon at Home Ambassadors gave presentations or participated in dozens of fairs, environmental expos, garden club and homeowner association gatherings, and tabling events across the region. We trained new Ambassadors in Fairfax and Arlington, bringing

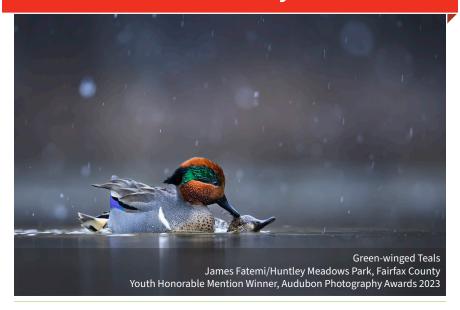


our total number across all counties to 135. We have assisted individuals hoping to organize similar programs in Virginia and elsewhere, some of whom are associated with smaller Audubon chapters. We hosted a networking get-together with three local groups and the Habitat Education Coordinator of Virginia's Department of Wildlife Resources to share information and resources. Village & Wilderness, a New England-based organization working to aggregate information and resources for innovative local conservation efforts, added our Wildlife Sanctuary Program to the directory of its Microhabitat Program Incubator, a "gathering place and central resource for established and emerging microhabitat programs to share ideas, lessons and expertise."

#### We continued our successful partnership with Plant NOVA Natives.

Together we applied for and received grants to support improved landscaping practices and habitat restoration. A grant from Transurban supported last summer's Spanish-speaking Professional Landscapers' Conference. A grant from Fairfax County's Tree Planting and Preservation Fund supports mini-grants to neighborhood associations and faith communities for hiring landscaping contractors to eliminate invasive vines that threaten trees in their common areas. Knowledgeable volunteers have conducted pre-visits to about 25 potential mini-grant applicants to help them identify invasives and come up with an invasives control plan. The grants will be awarded in fiscal year 2024, with applications due this fall. Ten grant recipients will receive \$3,000 apiece from ASNV, with a required match of \$1,500 in funds or volunteer labor.

## Advocacy



Advocacy Committee volunteers communicate with governmental representatives and recruit ASNV members to contact their representatives on important issues.

## Protecting Our Parks and Open Spaces

We urged area governments to give higher priority to their natural areas and parks. We submitted comments on Fairfax County Park Authority's budget proposal, urging greater priority to equity and accessibility, management of invasive plants, and funding for forestry and habitat protection and restoration. We urged NOVA Parks to give priority in its strategic plan to protection of natural areas. We also commented on Arlington County's draft Forestry and Natural Resources Plan, urging the county to prioritize deer management and the restoration of degraded areas that are designated as Natural Resource Conservation Areas.

ASNV worked throughout our chapter's service area to protect our **natural spaces.** We opposed the construction of the Cinder Bed Road bike path between Newington Road and the Franconia-Springfield Metro



through rare and sensitive plant communities. We opposed construction of data centers on 2,000 acres of land in Prince William County that has previously been protected from development. We also urged the National Park Service to protect trees, habitat and water quality if it repairs the George Washington Memorial Parkway between Alexandria and Mount Vernon and widens the adjacent multi-use trail. We submitted comments to the Army Corps of Engineers opposing a proposed flood wall and levee at Belle View and on National Park Service property with the argument that it would simply shift flooding downstream, including into Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. We opposed a proposal to construct high density housing adjacent to Huntley Meadows Park that would have reduced the flood plain by 50%, forcing flood waters into the park. We filed comments opposing bike paths through urban forest in Fairfax City: the trails would cause substantial damage to the forest and to the wildlife that depends on it, and alternative routes exist on low-use paved roads.

## Advocating for Birds and Wildlife

We advocated on behalf of birds, submitting comments on planned construction of residential buildings and a new high rise office building in Crystal City, urging compliance with the bird-friendly glass requirements of the county's Green Building Incentive Policy. ASNV also urged the inclusion of requirements for bird-friendly windows in Virginia's statewide building codes. We supported Virginia's constructing permanent seabird

habitat at the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel Project to replace the nesting areas that were destroyed due to construction of new tunnels and roads. We worked and are working to thwart efforts to weaken Virginia's current living shorelines law.

We continued to work to increase natural landscaping on public property and restrict invasive plants, mobilizing a group of volunteers to advocate for legislation before the Virginia General Assembly. The group wrote letters and submitted comments supporting legislation that prohibits state agencies from planting, selling or propagating plants from an invasive plant list except in limited circumstances; and legislation requiring that native plantings be prioritized on state property. Both pieces of legislation were enacted into law. We continued to urge Fairfax County officials to implement the comprehensive plan policy for natural landscaping on county land.

We opposed measures that could hasten climate change, arguing that Governor Youngkin did not have authority to withdraw Virginia from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative as he proposed. RGGI is a 12-state "cap and invest" program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and Virginia joined it by adopting a state law. The issue is now under judicial review. We opposed the Department of Environmental Quality's proposal allowing data centers in Loudoun County to operate their diesel generators during periods of high electrical use. We argued that diesel generators emit substantial amounts of pollution and that the data centers should not be paid to operate their generators to alleviate shortages that are caused by the data centers themselves.

#### We continued working to reduce the harm to wildlife, the environment and public health caused by free-roaming cats.

The state-mandated workgroup on the management of free-roaming cats, in which ASNV is a participant, submitted a report to the Virginia General Assembly's House Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources Committee that was supported by 14 of the 18 members of the workgroup. The report recommended that Virginia develop a comprehensive plan to address the overpopulation of free-roaming cats by allowing localities flexibility in developing their own plans. The signatories to the report plan to work with state legislators on the introduction of hills to address the issue

# Community Engagement, Diversity and Inclusion



Two committees, Community Engagement and Diversity and Inclusion, have enlarged the ASNV community, recruiting additional volunteers and reaching out to a broader range of northern Virginia residents.

## **Engaging a Larger Community**

In line with our strategic plan, we sought to reach a larger community in northern Virginia. A new committee, Community Engagement, improved procedures for responding to requests for talks at community events, and for bird walks and nature walks. It developed or purchased new outreach materials and, during the winter, held a training session for new volunteers to prepare for a busy spring season. Using a special-purpose grant, ASNV hired a volunteer coordinator for the first time. Through committee activities and the leadership of our new coordinator we engaged a group of 40 new volunteers to represent ASNV at community events, deliver presentations, and conduct nature walks. Our volunteers reached over 1,000 members of the public at 48 events, contributing more than 150 hours of work.

Nextgen Birders for Conservation continues to grow, engaging more young people in our activities and programs. Nextgen expanded from 50 members at the end of fiscal year 2022 to over 200 members by the end of fiscal year 2023. A group of members now plans and leads a variety of educational and social events, and one of Nextgen's initial members has joined the ASNV board of directors. The group visited the bird banding station at Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge, participated in bird walks at Frying Pan Park, and visited the bird taxidermy exhibit at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. Nextgen's activities have resulted in more young people participating in ASNV's programs, citizen science surveys, bird walks, and more.

## **Engaging a More Diverse Community**

**ASNV** continued efforts to improve access to our programs and birding. We added closed captioning and live transcripts to our online programs, and continued to contribute information on northern Virginia birding locations to Birdability's crowd-sourced maps of accessible birding locations.



With our partners at Upton Hill Regional Park, we conducted regular

walks, outings, and events for different communities, primarily through the Black and Latin/Hispanic Bird and Nature Walk Series and regular outreach to the Culmore chapter of Boys & Girls Clubs. We managed outings and presentations for residents of the Lockwood/Elmwood senior affordable housing complex, most of whom are Asian-American seniors, some with limited English language skills.

We expanded the number of educational and outreach materials available in Spanish.

We continued to work with partners, including NAACP/Arlington and the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee of EcoAction Arlington, to engage the public at community events such as those surrounding Black Birders' Week, making presentations, distributing information, and conducting bird walks and nature walks for underserved communities.

## Education



Both the Adult and Youth Education Committees offer programs to engage people of all ages and backgrounds in enjoying and conserving natural resources.

#### **Adult Education**

**ASNV's Adult Education Committee provided a mix of online and inperson programs,** both educational and entertaining. Class registrations totaled nearly 2,240. We held three of our Audubon Afternoon programs in person. We welcomed new birders to the community through two programs for beginning birders.

We offered programs on a variety of birding and other natural history topics, encouraging participants to learn more about wildlife and ecology in their community. Our programs in fiscal year 2023 included talks on hummingbirds, photographing birds, pollinator biology, wildflower identification, "slow birding," painting birds in watercolor, wildlife gardening, sparrow identification, songbird research, and observing raptor migration on Hawk Mountain. Forty-three participants enjoyed a 6-week online Ornithology Course with Dr. Chris Haney, which

we plan to offer again in spring 2024. Our speakers ranged from artists to ecologists, top local naturalists, conservationists, a board game designer and local photographers.

### The generosity of our donors allows us to offer a variety of free or low-cost programs,

including our popular Audubon Afternoons. Our largest turnout for an Audubon Afternoon featured in-person raptors, and drew a crowd of 150 people. In September we partnered with three other organizations to host Doug Tallamy for a talk to almost 500 participants on the importance of insects.





#### Youth Education

We offered a scholarship for a northern Virginia teacher to attend "Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week" at Audubon's Hog Island nature camp in Maine. Our Hog Island Scholarship Program provides educators experience and tools to inspire tomorrow's conservation leaders.

#### We continue to sponsor and provide educational materials for youth.

With our increased outreach activities, we engaged a volunteer to help us organize all of our educational materials for youth, including display materials and printed materials. We also purchased new materials for presentations and other talks, including replica scat! Another volunteer reworked and refurbished our popular Bird Beaks display and the Eagle Facts display.

**ASNV organized field trips for students,** to Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge for a group of home school students from Prince William County, and on school grounds for third-grade students at Marshall Road Elementary School. The classroom presentation and field trip to



the Refuge introduced students to common birds in the area as well as using binoculars and birding apps like eBird and Merlin. At Marshall Road, students saw, listened to, and learned about familiar backyard birds, migratory birds, and raptors, all of which were visible from school grounds. The school's Garden Educator, who arranged the spring

2023 birding outing, has requested that ASNV return to the school to repeat or expand the program.

Community events also provide opportunities to interest young people in birds and natural resources. ASNV staff and volunteers set up tables and displays at multiple community events across the region and featured activities to engage children. Activities included teaching about the different shapes of bird beaks, wing spans, binocular usage and other topics.



## Membership and Finances



Our members, donors and volunteers helped make 2023 a successful year for ASNV and its programs.

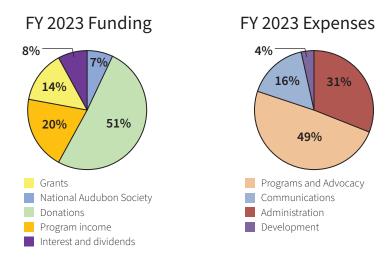
ASNV is the nation's largest independent chapter of the National Audubon Society. Our chapter has 5,123 members, 817 of them new to our chapter in fiscal year 2023. Our financial picture improved significantly this year, largely thanks to strong fundraising, higher income from Adult Education classes and higher returns on our investments. Rather than spending down our reserves by more than \$20,000, as originally budgeted, ASNV ended the fiscal year with income exceeding expenses by \$35,000.

This year's Birdathon was our largest and most successful to date, with 15 teams raising \$16,434. Participants observed 160 unique species while raising money to further ASNV's work in the region.

Our generous donors are our lifeblood. ASNV's largest source of support is from individuals. Last fiscal year we received \$102,000 from approximately 500 donors, mostly during the winter Annual Appeal. This grassroots support makes a huge difference in our ability to protect wildlife and wild places through advocacy, conservation, citizen science, and nature education.

**Maintaining some online programs** allowed us to sustain a high audience level and realize over \$34,000 in program income. We also received support from the National Audubon Society.

## Where Did the Money Go?



We depend on volunteers! These expenses do not include the tremendous value of the volunteer time that is generously given to make our programs possible. We send a big THANK YOU to all our dedicated volunteers who plan and lead walks, make presentations, engage children, families and other community groups, contribute as Audubon at Home Ambassadors, serve on the Board and Committees, and perform so many other important functions.

We are fiscally sound. We ended the year with more than \$400,000 in assets. We retain our reserves in various low-risk investments that earned \$15,000 in dividends and increased in value by \$12,000.

Our budget for fiscal year 2024 aims to support more activities, particularly around the Stretch Our Parks initiative. Because we did not have to spend any cash reserves in fiscal year 2023, the Board allocated \$28,000 from our cash reserves for the coming fiscal year activities. The Board also agreed to use \$25,000 from a bequest received in fiscal year 2021 to fund activities related to our Stretch Our Parks program. Expenditures for FY2024 are budgeted for \$221,000.

## 2023 Donor List



Our deepest thanks to all of our donors and volunteers over the last year. You are the ones who make it possible!

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Cover Photo: Pileated Woodpecker, Matt Felperin/Potomac Overlook Regional Park, Arlington



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