VSO Newsletter

A publication of The Virginia Society of Ornithology



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Visit the VSO on line at http://www.virginiabirds.net

Virginia eBird: http://ebird.org/content/va/

Va-Bird Listserve

http://mailman.listserve.com/ listmanager/listinfo/va-bird

Dates to Remember

MAY 1–3, 2008 VSO ANNUAL MEETING

MAY 29–31, 2009 MTN. LAKE MIGRATORY BIRD FESTIVAL

JUNE 6, 2009 VSO PINEY GROVE TRIP

VSO Foray 2009 Greensville and Sussex Counties

In search of Bachman's Sparrow

The 2009 VSO Foray will be held June 12-17, 2009 in Greensville and Sussex Counties. In addition to tallying all species this will be an extensive search for Bachman's Sparrow, a species that was reported during the last foray held in the area in 1991. Depending on the number of available participants, the foray area may be extended to search for Bachman's Sparrow sites in nearby counties, for instance Southampton and Isle of Wight.

The 1991 foray found 103 species typical of the southern interior coastal plain and

piedmont. Greensville County is well known as a location for breeding Mississippi Kite. Piney Grove in Sussex County is the site of successful breeding colonies of Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Henslow's Sparrow was found in Sussex County outside the official 1991 foray period. Notable in the 1991 foray was a report that Northern Bobwhite was common. Given the decline of the species overall, the foray will be an important opportunity for comparison.

Continued on Page 7

Officer and Board of Director Nominees

At the 2009 VSO annual meeting the membership will vote to elect the society's officers and three members of the board of directors. Officers are elected annually; board members every three years. Terms run from July 1 to June 30 each year.

The nominating committee will present the following slate to the general membership at annual meeting business session. Nominations from the floor will also be accepted at that time.

Officers

President: Rexanne Bruno, Lynchburg Past President: David Spears, Dillwyn Vice President: Andrew Dolby, Fredericksburg

Secretary: Alyce Quinn, Roanoke Treasurer: Barbara "Sue" Thrasher,

Lynchburg

Newsletter Editors: Linda Fields and

Alan Schreck Arlington Raven Editor: Paul Cabe, Lexington Membership Secreatary: Thelma Dalmas, Evington

Board of Directors Terms Ending 2012:

Susan Brown, Parksley (Eastern Shore) Shirley Devan, Williamsburg Keith Carson, Highland County Biographies of the nominees can be found on page 6.

Thanks to nominating committee members David Clark, Adam D'Onofrio, and Glen Eller for their work and to David Spears, Rexanne Bruno, and Bill Williams for their advice and nominee suggestions.

John Spahr Nominating Committee Chair



President's Message: My Year List



VSO President David Spears

How many species of birds can one birder see in Virginia in a year? I read that the record was 346. Todd Day and Ned Brinkley are tied, according to a cursory Google search. I have never been much of a "lister" but since 2008 was going to be my last full year as president of the VSO, I decided to keep a count just for fun.

The year started with two Christmas Counts in

early January. The first was the Waynesboro count, where I was lucky enough to get on a team with past president John Spahr and the wunderkind, Tim Hodge. Then the next day was my own club's count at Darlington Heights in Prince Edward County. Those two days gave me a good start, with all the common winter birds and a few not-so-common ones as well.

In mid-January, I made a big one-day loop through central and southeastern Virginia with my son, Evan. (I wrote about that day in my spring column last year). The day yielded some goodies — Pacific, Red-throated, and Common Loons, White-winged and Surf Scoters, Townsend's Solitaire, Eurasian Wigeon, and Short-eared Owl. It's easy to add new birds to the list in January.

In February, I made another trip with Evan, this time an overnighter to cold and snowy Highland County. We picked up Evening Grosbeak, Loggerhead Shrike, Rough-legged Hawk, but somehow missed Golden Eagle. Disappointing. But on the way home, we swung by Verona and got that Painted Bunting.

Before I knew it, it was March and spring migration was underway. A trip to Kerr Reservoir on March 11 produced the first swallow of the year, an early Northern Rough-winged. Late March provided my first warblers (not counting Yellow-rumped, of course) - Black-and-white and Louisiana Waterthrush. In early April the first Whip-poor-will arrived and by the end of the month a huge wave of warblers, vireos, tanagers, flycatchers, thrushes and orioles was sweeping through my yard.

If April is the cruelest month, May is the birdiest. At the VSO annual meeting in Mountain Lake, Giles County there were warblers galore, many that I had missed in the Piedmont, not to mention cuckoos and thrushes and more flycatchers. There were even a few Pine Siskins still hanging around the thistle feeders. In June, the VSO field trip to High Knob produced more warblers and a surprise flock of Boblinks near the Lonesome Pine Airport.

July and August didn't give me anything new but the VSO field trip to Chincoteague in September provided all the expected shorebirds, herons, egrets, gulls and terns, not to mention Wilson's Phalarope, Merlin, and Peregrine Falcon. A single Lark Sparrow was a nice bonus. In October, I made two trips to see the Brown Booby on Claytor Lake in Pulaski County but somehow missed it both times.

On the way back home from a business trip in early December, I swung through Madison County and joined the roadside crowd peering at the Snowy Owl. A few days later I was off to Virginia Beach for the VSO field trip to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-tunnel, Northampton County and Craney Island. Got the Eurasian Collared Doves at the usual spot and added Great Cormorant, Long-tailed Duck, and a few other ducks I had missed earlier in the year. Common Moorhen was a nice find on a pond in a Cape Charles subdivision

December 24, Christmas Eve. It's early morning, the whole family is still asleep and I have a few free hours. Lynchburg is just over an hour away. Why not sneak away to see that Calliope Hummingbird? I'm there by 8:00 am and the bird cooperates, appearing every few minutes at the heated feeder. While we're standing there, a flock of geese flies over with one really small one with a short neck and nearly nonexistent bill. Cackling Goose! That turned out to be my last species of the year.

So, how many species can one birder see in Virginia in a year? The answer for this guy was two hundred and thirty-six. Was I disappointed that I didn't even make it to 300? Not really. I did what I could when I could, didn't lose my job or my wife over it, and still had a very memorable year of birding. Now, where's that checklist for 2009?



Conservation Corner:

The Center for Conservation Biology

The VSO took another step towards becoming more active in bird conservation matters by initi-Lating its Bird Conservation Action Alert network. In mid-November, every VSO member who had an email address registered with the VSO should have received an e-mail from the conservation chair concerning the Act for Songbirds campaign, organized by the American Bird Conservancy. This was in support of the reauthorization of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) by the outgoing Congress. The e-mail provided information for members to contact their own representative and senators on this issue. As of this writing (January 2), the outcome of the campaign is not know but thanks to everyone who acted on the alert. If you did not receive the alert but would like to be added to the list for any future conservation alerts, please send your email address to stephendeccles@gmail.com.

The VSO Conservation Committee approved three new small grant awards in November. A grant of \$1,000 was made to Charles Clarkson, to help conduct an assessment of coastal wetland habitat for successful breeding of wading birds and survival of nestlings. A grant of \$1,000 was made to the Audubon Important Bird Area (IBA) Program in Virginia, to help survey, collect, and enter data on Virginia's IBAs for several high priority species including, Cerulean Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler, Henslow's Sparrow, Red-headed Woodpecker, Bicknell's Thrush and Rusty Blackbird. This grant will also be used to work with county planners to incorporate

IBAs into updates of their comprehensive plans.

A grant of \$500 was made to assist

L o u d o u n

Wildlife Conservancy in conducting its county bird atlas project. The VSO conservation committee may contribute additional funds, on completion of the 5-year effort, to assist in disseminating its results.

With these thee grants and those made previously the initial funding of the small grants conservation fund is just about exhausted. However, replenishment has started with two members of the Committee donating \$2,000 in additional funding. Contributions to the fund may be made by sending a check to the VSO treasurer: Sue Thrasher, 120 Woodbine Drive, Lynchburg VA 24502. Make the check payable to the VSO and note that it is for the small grants conservation fund.

When the VSO has built up more of a grant record, the Committee will start approaching commercial and foundation sources for additional funding on a regular basis. But success here depends on whether funding can be attracted from VSO members first.

Stephen Eccles Conservation Committee Chair

Editors:	

Linda Fields Alan Schreck

Editorial Address:

1573 21st Court North Arlington, VA 22209 vsoeditors@virginiabirds.net

Change of Address:

Thelma Dalmas 1230 Viewmont Dr. Evington, VA 24550-2006 jtdalmas@juno.com Send submissions electronically via email whenever possible. Attach text as Word document or plain text file. Attach images as tifs; scan photos to 300 dpi and line art to 1000 dpi.

You may also mail your submission on a PC formatted diskette. Hard copy may be mailed, but must be received two weeks prior to deadline.

Submissions may be edited for style or length.

2009 Submission Schedule

<u>Issue</u>	Copy Due
Spring	Jan 23
Summer	May 15
Fall	Aug 14
Winter	Oct 30

Birds reported in this newsletter may not have been approved by VARCOM (The Virginia Avian Records Committee).

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Virginia Beach Trip Report

Birders from all parts of Virginia and a few from North Carolina ventured out for a weekend of birding in early December. Friday afternoon began with a trip to the Whitehurst Tract in the Pungo area of southern Virginia Beach and ended with a stop at Mackay Island in nearby North Carolina where thousands of snow geese arriving for the night provided marvelous viewing. Eight raptor species were the highlight of the afternoon.

In the evening participants enjoyed the hospitality of the folks at the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum. John Gallegos, wildlife biologist at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge gave an overview of Back Bay and its exciting avian population.

On Saturday morning 44 birders met at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel to view the birds from the four tunnel islands. The CBBT bird count was low this year. However, participants did get to see Northern Gannets doing their diving routines.

The birders who continued from the bridge tunnel to the Virginia Eastern shore enjoyed excellent birding which added many species to the weekend list. Common Moorhen and Eurasian Collared Dove were great additions. The Eastern Shore may become a formal part of the weekend in coming years.

On Sunday morning 24 birders went to Back Bay NWR for the annual tram ride to False Cape State Park and five birders went to Craney Island. Species observed on these two stops brought the weekend total to 124.

Thanks to VSO president David Spears and vice president Rexanne Bruno for serving as trip leaders and to the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritag

e Museum and John Gallegos for the Friday evening event.

The 2009 Virginia Beach field trip will take place on Dec 4–6, a great way to top off a year list.

Clark White VSO Trip Committee Chair

Be A Part Of The Tracking Project And Cutting-Edge Research Of Virginia's Own Golden Eagle—Adopt Virgil Caine

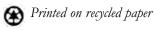
Virgil Caine is the name of the threeyear old Golden Eagle who was banded and fitted with a telemetry unit by eagle biologists from the Center for Conservation Biology in March 2008. She was trapped in northwestern Highland County, Virginia, and stayed there a short time before migrating north. She spent the months of July and August on the Gaspe Peninsula in Quebec, Canada. On August 4 she began her slow journey southward. She spent the entire month of August and half of September in the extreme northwest portion of Maine along the Canadian border. By September 20 she reached the northern tip of New Hampshire and headed into northern Vermont. September 26 she was again moving southward, travelling for about six days in a southwesterly direction and reaching Pennsylvania on October 5. By the end of that day she was in West Virginia. On October 7 Virgil returned to Highland County and spent a couple of days in

the area known as "The Stamp" near Middle Mountain, not far from her place of release and northern migration path last spring. On October 9 she flew southward over Monterey Mountain and crossed Route 220 south of Monterey into Bath County, spent a day in Pocahontas County, West Virginia and was in southwestern Virginia by October 11. She abruptly changed her southward course to a more easterly direction and settled near Grayson Highlands. In late October she headed north along the Virginia - West Virginia border and was back in Highland by Halloween. For about a week she stayed in the vicinity of Sounding Knob in the Lantz Mountain range. From November 8 through 23 she was near the border of Augusta and Highland counties. She moved north into the area bordering Rockingham County, Virginia and Pendleton and Hardy counties, West Virginia in late November 2008 and remains there as of this writing in January.

If you would like to adopt Virgil Caine, www.seaturtle.org/tracking/adopt. Search for Golden Eagle "Virgil Caine" and push "PICK ME". You can chose from various levels of adoption packets, running from \$25.00 to \$100.00. With each packet, the donor gets maps, pictures, and information about the eagle. The money goes directly towards paying for the satellite telemetry project. The 2007 Golden Chase birdathon raised close to \$8,000.00. However, funds are now needed to keep this project going for at least two more years. Golden Eagles mature and are able to breed at age five, so it is essential that the tracking continues until Virgil Caine reaches breeding age.

For more information about the project call Patti Reum at 540 474-3860 or e-mail pareum@gmail.com

Patti Reum



New Members August 2008 to January 2009

The VSO bids a warm welcome to: Gordon and Roseanne Bratz, Lynchburg Joelle Buffa and Clyde Morris, Greenbackville Linda Chaney, Partlow Stacey Cilenti, Virginia Beach Candie and Vic Delnore, Norfolk Richard and Diane Donnelly, Moneta Carl and Barbara East, Forest Howard L. Gary, Culpeper Paul Glass, South Boston Diane Jadlowski, Montpelier David Ledwith, Falls Church Bill Miller, Amherst Becky Minor, Scottsville Ann Moore, Hampton Mr and Mrs. David A. Paton, Mineral Steve Sheffield, Crofton, MD

New National Geographic Exhibition Birds of North America

Long before photographic equipment could accurately capture fast-moving birds, National Geographic commissioned detailed painted portraits of birds that allowed people to study and appreciate the differences among species. Birds of North America, a new exhibition at the National Geographic Museum, will feature more than 90 of these original bird paintings from 1914 onward. The exhibition will run from January 14 to May 31, 2009.

The paintings in the exhibition come primarily from four artists. Louis Agassiz Fuertes (1874-1927) undertook many expeditions throughout the Western Hemisphere, making sketches and collecting bird skins. He contributed to National Geographic magazine and more than 50 other publications. After Fuertes' death, National Geographic commissioned his friend Allan Brooks (1869-1946) to paint hundreds of illustrations for a series of articles in the 1930s on bird families in the United States and Canada. Walter Weber (1906-1979) was a staff illustrator for National Geographic for 22 years. Two of his paintings, featuring greater white-fronted geese and trumpeter swans, were chosen for the annual Federal Duck Stamp issued by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In 1967 the U.S. Department of the Interior recognized him as one of the nation's outstanding wildlife artists.

Jonathan Alderfer, the only modern artist featured in the exhibition, began his career as a bird painter in the 1980s and has become well known in the birding community for his expertise as a field ornithologist. Alderfer has contributed extensively to several editions of the National Geographic Field

Guide to the Birds of North America and co-edited the current fifth edition. In October, National Geographic will publish National Geographic Illustrated Birds of North America, Folio Edition, a stunning large format of the fifth edition field guide. The National Geographic Museum, 1145 17th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., is open Mondays through Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed Dec. 25. Admission is free. For information the public should call 202 857-7588 or visit www.ngmuseum.org.

Birds of Loudoun County serves as foundation for five-year Bird Atlas **Project**

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is proud to announce the completion of the Birds of Loudoun County checklist. This list includes over 295 bird species identified in the county through September 2008, with over 110 confirmed or probable breeders. The information for this list was gathered from a variety of sources, ranging from local nature preserve and individual bird lists and bird count data to Virginia Avian Records Committee (VARCOM) reports. The bird list can be found at http://www.loudounwildlife.org/PDF_Files/LWC_

Bird_List_2008.pdf. The checklist serves as the foundation for an exciting five-year Loudoun County Bird Atlas Project, organized and funded by LWC. From spring 2009 through spring 2013, members of LWC and other volunteer birders will donate their time to the atlas with bird experts consulted for quality control. The main objective is to establish a comprehensive list of birds in Loudoun County, including their dates of occurrence and distribution throughout the county. Most bird atlases are focused at the state level and provide data only on breeding birds. The Loudoun County Bird Atlas is unique in that the project is county-wide and will have yearround data for both breeding and non-breeding birds. To accomplish the task of collecting data, the county will be divided into blocks of approximately 10 square miles. Participants will be assigned to different blocks to ensure county-wide coverage and will use a field card to record their observations. Data processing will be handled by BBA (Breeding Bird Atlas) Explorer, a free online system hosted by the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and National Biological Information Infrastructure. A Birds of Loudoun booklet will be published in 2014, providing the atlas results and information on important bird areas within the county. If you are interested in volunteering with this project, please contact Spring Ligi at sligi@loudounwildlife.org.

Spring Ligi, Atlas Coordinator

Meet the VSO Officer and Board Nominees

Officer Nominees

Rexanne Bruno - nominee for president

Rexanne retired a few years ago from Lynchburg College where she taught mathematics and statistics. She has served on the VSO Board for the past three years, most recently as vice president. She has edited the Lynchburg Bird Club Newsletter for seven years and recently became the compiler for the Lynchburg Christmas Bird Count. She has been birding in Virginia off and on since the mid 1980s as her husband is from Tidewater. Rexanne chaired the VSO ethics policy committee. She is pleased with the Principles of Birding Ethics that were recently adopted by the VSO Board, stating "Some may not completely agree with every word of the policy but I think we all recognize the need for it." If elected, Rexanne would like to pursue increasing membership in the VSO and its educational outreach.

Andrew Dolby - nominee for vice president

Andrew is an Associate Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Mary Washington. He recently completed a three year term on the VSO board and as chair of the Research Committee, which plans and coordinates the annual breeding bird forays.

Andrew summarized his vision for future service to the VSO....

I feel a strong sense of dedication to the VSO, and therefore, I am delighted and honored to be nominated for the position of vice president. If elected my first priority would be to assist and support the VSO president. My primary areas of focus would be conservation, education, and expansion of the society's membership. These issues, of course, are interrelated and have received much attention from recent VSO leadership, but I would build upon the hard work of my predecessors in continuing to address them.

First, we are all well aware that birds are in crisis around the globe, and their unrelenting decline represents the ultimate threat to our organization. I would maintain current support for an active and well-funded Conservation Committee and would facilitate deeper partnerships with other organizations which share our avian conservation mission. In my opinion, some of our most successful recent activities have comprised collaboration with or support for partner organizations such as the Audubon Society, the American Bird Conservancy, and VDGIF. By working with others, we can help ensure that our resources will be applied to do the most good for birds.

Furthermore, conflict will only increase between bird conservation and human industry in future years, and protection of birds will continue to collide with agriculture, development, and the harvesting of natural resources. Given the economic nature of this ongoing clash, we must be better prepared to defend bird conservation on economic grounds. Therefore, I would additionally explore the possibility of commissioning an impact study of birds and bird-related commerce on Virginia's economy. Ecotourism and sales of bird-watching equipment and supplies generate jobs, tax revenue, and other benefits for our state. If we could quantify and fully characterize those benefits, we would be better equipped to argue the case for bird conservation before our state policy-makers.

Second, as we are also well aware, education is crucial to the continued understanding, appreciation, and protection of birds. As the great Senegalese ecologist Baba Dioum best put it, "In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught." Therefore, I would support a vigorous education committee and expansion of our existing research grant programs for both graduate and undergraduate students. Among other priorities, we must further develop our outreach to young people through dissemination of educational programs and materials to youth programs and schools.

Finally, I would work to increase our membership and would continue previous efforts to evaluate and improve our marketing and publicity strategies, including launch of a new Website which would provide additional forums for discussion, electronic resources for educators and researchers, and a new means of communication between VSO members and leadership.

Board of Directors Nominees

Susan Brown — Parksley, VA (Eastern Shore)

Susan has been a birder since 1968. Much of her early birding experience was in California where she did postdoctoral studies at University of California at San Francisco and Stanford University. She holds a BA in Biology from Randolph-Macon Women's College and a PhD in Cell Biology from Harvard. Most of her professional career was as a faculty member of the University of Michigan Medical School, Department of Cell, Developmental and Neurobiology. The annual spring warbler migrations were highlights of her Michigan birding experience. She retired as a full professor and, with her husband Wes, also an avid birder, moved to the Eastern Shore of Virginia, selecting the area in part for the quality of its birding. Since moving to Virginia Susan and Wes have enthusiastically participated in many of the VSO field trips and annual meetings. They have also focused on tropical birding, spending two to four months each winter in places like Ecuador, Mexico,

Meet the Nominees

Continued from page 6

Costa Rica, Africa, and Madagascar. This year they will be adding Cuba to that list.

Shirley Devan — Williamsburg, VA

Shirley has a BA in history and an MBA from William & Mary and has lived in Williamsburg since 1971. She began birding in the early 1990's and joined the Williamsburg Bird Club in 1993. An active birder in the Williamsburg area, she attends most of the local bird club's field trips. She keeps an annual Virginia bird list and in 2008 observed 230 species in our state. She has served the Williamsburg Bird Club as newsletter editor and Web master and is the current president. She was active in planning and implementing the "Thirty Birdy Years" celebration in 2007 for the Club's 30th Anniversary and installed the Members' Bird Art Show at Williamsburg Regional Library as part of that celebration.

Shirley is also active in the local Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalist Program and completed her requirements for certification in 2008. She currently serves that organization as vice president of programs and co-chair of the Training Committee. In 2008 she helped initiate and coordinate a project for Northern Bobwhite Habitat Restoration at New Quarter Park near Williamsburg. She has also assisted Ruth Beck with shorebird monitoring and Least Tern nesting monitoring at Craney Island in 2008 and plans to help again in 2009.

Shirley is fortunate to be able to learn from some of the best birders and ornithologists in the Williamsburg area. She says she wishes she was as skilled a birder as Bill Williams or Ruth Beck. They set very high standards for folks. She loves being out in the woods with them and others because she learns something new every time she

goes out. She also enjoys going out with new birders and sharing the joy and discovery of birding.

Keith Carson — Highland County, Virginia

Keith moved to Highland County in 2006 and has actively involved himself in conservation and birding activities. He presently serves as president of the Bath-Highland Bird Club. He is also the land steward for the Nature Conservancy in the Warm Springs, Bath County. He is a Certified Virginia Master Naturalist and the current vice president of the Allegheny Highlands Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalist program. He also volunteers for the Virginia Department. of Game and Inland Fisheries Complementary Workforce Program.

Keith is a retired professor at Old Dominion University, where he was on the faculty from 1981 to 2006 in the Department of Biological Sciences, with a joint appointment in the Department of Pathology and Anatomy at Eastern Virginia Medical School. His formal education includes a BS in Biology from North Carolina State University and a PhD in Neurobiology from University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. While living in Norfolk he was a member of the Cape Henry Audubon chapter.

As a trained biologist his interests and knowledge certainly includes birds but also extends to other taxa. He holds memberships in the American Society of Mammalogists, the Virginia Native Plant Society, and the Virginia Chapter of the Wildlife Society.

VSO Foray 2009

Continued from Page 1

The foray area includes four major river systems but few significant large bodies of water. There are a few sites on the Virginia Birding Trail as well as three Virginia DCR Natural Area Preserves (Chub Sandhill, Cherry Orchard Bog, and Dendron Swamp) and a city park in Emporia itself. There may be access to private land but much of the survey will be done from the roadsides of mostly low volume rural roads.

The foray headquarters will be Holiday Inn Express Hotel and Suites, 434 336-9999. Other accommodation in the area include: Best Western Emporia, 434 634-3200; Sleep Inn 434 348-3900; Quality Inn 434 348-8888; Days Inn Emporia 434 634-9481; Hampton Inn Empo-

ria 434 634-9200; and Country Inn & Suites Emporia (opens April 15) 434 336-0001. There are also campgrounds at Jellystone Park, 434 634-3115. Participants covering Sussex County may want to consider staying at the Airfield 4-H Conference Center, 757 899-4901

Anyone wishing to participate in the foray should contact Wendy Ealding at WEalding@aol.com or 804 598-9243

VSO Officers

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VSO Board of Directors

TTerms Expire 2009 Adam D'Onofrio, Petersburg David Clark, Norfolk Glen Eller, Galax Terms Expire 2010 Bob Riggs, Lebanon Jennifer Gaden, Charlottesville Arun Bose, Richmond Terms Expire 2011 Paul Nasca, Fredericksburg Wendy Ealding, Powhatan Patti Reum, Highland County

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