

FBC Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck NWR Outing – March 10, 2018

By Sally Knight
Photos by Jeff Pozner

The weather forecast was for sun and a high of 50 for the day, but at 8:00am it was still on the cold side. Eight participants, including two new members, met at the entrance gate to Mason Neck State Park. As we waited for the park to open, those anxious to get started were busy scanning the treetops where a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was spotted.

At the visitor center, we lined up along the fence overlooking Belmont Bay and scanned the waters with our scopes. We were pleased to find that not all the ducks had left for their breeding grounds. There was a large flotilla of Lesser Scaup, with a few Canvasback and Ring-necked Ducks mixed in. Towards the far shore there was another large flotilla that turned out to be American Coot, a couple of Bald Eagles flew overhead, and the first of several Great Blue Herons graced us with their presence. Mike Lott informed us there is a large heron rookery close by.



We then proceeded to the Bay View trailhead, a one mile loop to the left of the visitor center. On the way we heard a Pileated Woodpecker doing his Woody Woodpecker impersonation, and White-throated Sparrows flitted along the shoreline. Apart from a couple of dog walkers, we had the trail to ourselves which facilitated both seeing and hearing the birds. A nice surprise was the number of Wood Ducks seen on the ponds along the trail, since they tend to be secretive. We heard and saw many of the usual birds – Cardinals, Titmice, Chickadees,



White-breasted Nuthatches and nice looks at a couple of Golden-crowned Kinglets. Both American and Fish Crows were heard and a Belted Kingfisher flew by with its distinctive rattle. Back in the open we came across many American Robins, European Starlings with a couple of Brown-headed Cowbirds, Eastern Bluebirds, and a Phoebe was calling. We also heard, and

eventually saw, a female Eastern Towhee.

Our next stop was a short drive back along the entrance road to the Woodmarsh Trail of the Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck NWR. This is a woodland trail that ends up at an observation deck overlooking the Great Marsh. We met a group of dog walkers at the trailhead that said an owl had been perched and was calling right above them a few minutes before we arrived. Darn! We kept our eyes and ears open hoping to spot it – to no avail. We guessed it was probably a Barred Owl. We did however hear Tundra Swans cooing – they over winter on the Great Marsh – so we were optimistic we would see them. Birds along the trail were fairly active and included a couple of Hermit Thrushes, two frustratingly difficult to see Brown Creepers, and one Rusty Blackbird busy working the leaf litter. At the marsh itself, we were disappointed to find no Tundra Swans! However, we did find many American Black Ducks, Mallards, Hooded Mergansers, Green-winged Teal, and one Greater Yellowlegs.



Some of the group made one final stop at the George Mason Conflict Resolution Center on the other side of Belmont Bay. Birders are welcome to walk the wooded, waterfront property, but must contact the center first to make sure it's not in use at the time of the visit. The promise of temps reaching the low 50's did not materialize and with no new birds we concluded our outing.

Photos in order: American Coot, Hermit Thrush, Green-winged Teal, Rusty Blackbird

Trip Participants: Sally Knight, Mike Lott, Jim Goehring, Tim Stamps, Mary Hartigan, Brenton Mundt, Jeff and Joan Pozner.

Trip Birds: 53 Species

Canada Goose
Tundra Swan
Wood Duck
Gadwall
Mallard
American Black Duck
Green-winged Teal
Canvasback
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
Bufflehead
Hooded Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Turkey Vulture
Bald Eagle
American coot
Greater Yellowlegs
Ring-billed Gull
Mourning Dove
Belted Kingfisher
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
Eastern Phoebe
Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow
Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Carolina Wren
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird
Hermit Thrush
American Robin
Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
Dark-eyed Junco
White-throated Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Eastern Towhee
Northern Cardinal
Red-winged Blackbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Rusty Blackbird
American Goldfinch