

## **Thank You All for Serving on Elisha Mitchell Audubon Board**

### **Dayna Feist**

In November 1994, Dayna saw a desperate plea by Elisha Mitchell Audubon for a newsletter editor. She was looking for a volunteer opportunity and, despite not being a birder, she thought “I can put together a newsletter.” As the owner of Gatehouse Business Services, writing résumés was the core of her professional life. She was immediately “hired” by EMAS. Little did she know that it would turn into a 25-year volunteer “career.”



Almost immediately EMAS’s newsletter, The Raven, took on a more professional look. It is fascinating to read the newsletter over the years. In addition to the important but mundane content on programs, field trips, EMAS business, and fund-raising pleas, there are countless fascinating feature articles on birdlife, the threats to birds, environmental issues and opportunities for Audubon members to advocate for birds. Despite not having a background in birds – the business of Audubon – Dayna searched far and wide to hunt down many of these informative articles. Dayna continued as editor of The Raven through February 2013 when EMAS transitioned to a digital newsletter.

In 2013, Dayna took on a new role as chair of the Membership Committee. This new job proved equally challenging as National Audubon has struggled over the years to manage its digital membership records and provide timely updates for EMAS’ membership list. As EMAS moved into the digital age, our email membership list is a critical resource, allowing us to efficiently distribute the newsletter, and more recently, our Advocacy Alerts, to our more than 1,200 members.

When she steps off the Board at the end of June, Dayna will have served longer than anyone in EMAS’s 34-year history. We will miss Dayna’s smiling face at our regular Board meetings!

### **Simon Thompson**



Ask any birder in western North Carolina who is the best birder they know, and the answer is always Simon Thompson! Originally from Suffolk, England, Simon became fascinated with birds as a child living in Kenya, and the fascination never stopped. After moving to the United States more than 30 years ago, he worked as an environmental educator at Fence Equestrian Nature Center in Polk County before establishing Ventures Birding Tours in Asheville – to the great good fortune of local birders and the Elisha Mitchell Audubon.

Simon gave a presentation at an EMAS program in 1991, the first of 11 presentations he would do for us. It would have been 12 but he was stuck in England this spring and had to miss his scheduled April

talk. Simon joined the Board in 1996 as an At-Large member and soon became our Field Trip Coordinator. He frequently leads our regular bird walks and, when he is traveling around the world, most of the bird walk leaders are his employees at Ventures Birding.

Simon's contributions to Elisha Mitchell Audubon over the years are almost impossible to measure or overstate. As the face of birding in Asheville and WNC, a presenter to many organizations in the area, and a bird trip leader, Simon promotes EMAS wherever he goes. His popularity and "fame" make him a valuable fund-raiser for chapter initiatives, especially through his support of our annual Birdathon. When he is home from his travels, he brings new ideas to our Board meetings. Currently he is co-leading EMAS's Greenways initiative, helping on the identification of Chimney Swift roosting sites, and helped design our survey of "window-strike" bird kills in downtown Asheville last fall.

Although his travel commitments make it impossible to regularly attend board meetings, we know that he will continue to be a visible and valuable EMAS member for years to come.

## **Jamie Harrelson**

How did EMAS find Jamie Harrelson? We certainly lucked out. Jamie joined the Board in 2010 and helped implement our website, which was designed by an outside consultant. A few years later Jamie developed a new and improved website, built on a different platform. Except for a brief interlude, she has served as webmaster ever since.



In her first year, she took over as Treasurer and was instrumental in helping the Finance Committee update and improve the financial reporting procedures, including an improved monthly treasurer report and, for the first time, an annual budget. With timely and accurate financial data, the Board is better able to make informed decisions on expenditures.

In 2013, Jamie left the Board to return to graduate school at Western Carolina University where she received a Masters in Science Degree in biology in 2015. Her research focused on Golden-winged Warblers. EMAS immediately encouraged – strong-armed? – Jamie to return to the Board. We are so fortunate she did.

Jamie resumed her role as webmaster but, more importantly, brought her enthusiasm, knowledge and commitment to helping birds to the Board's deliberations. In the past year, she spearheaded the effort to establish a bird-friendly garden at Vance Elementary School in west Asheville, her grade school alma mater! A birder par excellence, she occasionally leads bird walks and is a big supporter of our Birdathon fundraising initiative.

Her goal was always to find a job working to help safeguard birds and in 2019 Audubon North Carolina hit the jackpot by hiring Jamie as Private Lands Technician in the office's Working Lands Program. In this role, Jamie helps private landowners in western North Carolina restore and manage their land to support Golden-winged Warblers – a job she truly loves and one in which she is making a difference.

The job is a demanding one and Jamie reluctantly decided to resign from the Board at the end of her current term, feeling that her work obligations make it difficult to give enough time to EMAS. Jamie will continue as webmaster and we know that we will see her at program meetings, bird walks and as a key member of the Bluebird's Birdathon team.

## **Cathy Walsh**



Cathy has a Ph.D. in Clinical and School Psychology from the University of Virginia and had a private practice in Mount Pleasant, SC for 27 years. She has been president of the Lowcountry Association of School Psychologists, the secretary-treasurer of the SC Academy of Professional Psychologists, the secretary of the SC Psychological Association, and the president of the Palmetto Fiber Arts Guild – all in Charleston. During those years in the birding haven of coastal South Carolina, she started birding, joining bird walks and becoming a member of the local Audubon club.

To EMAS's good fortune, she and her husband Bob decided to retire in Asheville. Not surprisingly, given her history of volunteering, she immediately got involved with Elisha Mitchell Audubon, joining bird walks and supporting our Birdathon. Impressed with her energy and dedication, EMAS invited her to run for an At-Large position on the Board of Directors and she was elected in 2018.

She soon graduated from the NC Arboretum's certificate program as a Blue Ridge Naturalist in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Her class project was to work with the City of Asheville and to collaborate with local environmental groups to convince the City of Asheville to adopt permanent guidelines to encourage and possibly require planting of native plants and prohibit planting of invasive, non-native plants on city property. She immediately sought the support of EMAS in this effort.

With dedication, persistence and tireless work, Cathy was successful. In October 2018, the City's Tree Commission unanimously endorsed Cathy's proposal. The guidelines are now official policy of the City of Asheville. Well done!

It is EMAS's misfortune that her work with the City of Asheville so impressed them that she has been asked to chair a committee on the City's Tree Protection Task Force. Knowing the time and effort that this commitment will take, Cathy decided to resign from the Board at the end of her term. We know that she will be working hard in the coming years to spread the word about the importance of native plants and to make the City of Asheville a haven for birds.

## **Bethany Sheffer**

Bethany arrived in western North Carolina from Michigan in early 2017 as an AmeriCorps member, serving as the Education Outreach Coordinator with Balsam Mountain Trust in Sylva. An avid birder, she immediately contacted EMAS and volunteered for our bird counts. Soon she was taking the long drive to attend our regular program meetings. With a Master's degree in Public Administration with an emphasis in Nonprofit Management, her passion for birds, her commitment to environmental education

and her friendly, outgoing personality, the EMAS Nominations Committee quickly recognized that she was an obvious candidate for the Board of Directors. She was elected to the board in June, 2017 and reelected to a 2<sup>nd</sup> two-year term in 2019.

Bethany immediately volunteered for almost every EMAS table event and in 2018 organized the World Migratory Bird Day festival in Sylva. EMAS has participated in the event every year since. She also served as our Program Coordinator and helped organize the children's activities at our 30-year Beaver Lake Bird Sanctuary celebration in 2019. For all of our table events, she provided a never-ending supply of wonderful educational bird materials targeted for children.

After her time as an AmeriCorps member ended, she spent time working at the Big Bald Banding migratory bird banding station but her focus was on finding a job in environmental education, hopefully with Audubon. We were delighted but also sad when she announced in late December, 2019 that she had been hired at the Sharon Audubon Center of NW Connecticut as its Volunteer Coordinator/Naturalist. In addition to designing and delivering education programs, she will reactivate the Center's MAPS or bird banding station. She left in January but reports that she loves her new job – EMAS' loss but Audubon's gain!



## Savannah Lynch



We also say farewell to Savannah Lynch, our student board member. She adeptly wore two hats during her senior year, serving as President of the UNC-Asheville Student Chapter and as a liaison between EMAS and UNCA Audubon. Savannah graduated this spring with a degree in Environmental Studies with a concentration in Ecology & Environmental Biology. She was always willing to volunteer at EMAS and UNCA events. She's interested in pursuing a career in bird conservation and wildlife management. (Editor note: hire her!) Congratulations on finishing school, Savannah. You will be missed!