



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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January 2015

President's Corner

By Geoff Giles



Happy 2015!! What better way to start the birding year than a New Year's walk on the Greensprings Trail with Shirley Devan, a large cast of winter birds and WBC birding friends! As Shirley notes, every bird on that day is a Year Bird for your 2015 list. May it be a long list with some good

surprises!! The year that was, was a good one, capped by an extraordinary Christmas Bird Count in the Williamsburg area. As you've likely heard, we topped the previous number of species seen and heard on a Christmas Count for a new high of 120 species! That result was icing on the cake, for a day of super weather and enjoyment of good companionship among this year's counters.

There will be some good opportunities to add to your new list coming up in the first weeks of the new year. Have you had your share of duck sightings yet this year? There is a goodly number and variety at Dutch Gap, so Jan Lockwood has arranged for us to get together and go there Wednesday, 14 January. A few weeks ago the number of wood ducks in evidence there and in easy view was prodigious. Nearly all of the expected winter species of ducks were there as well. Any time of year the woodland trail and marches at Henricus are good for some surprises as well, so we will bird those as well as the impoundments. *Continued on page 5.*

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January 21 Meeting

Join us Wednesday, January 21, 2015 at 7:30 pm for a presentation by Research Biologist Fletcher Smith who will share with us his research on winter marsh sparrows on the Eastern Shore. In 2011, North American Birds published his photo essay "Subspecies of Saltmarsh Sparrow and Nelson's Sparrow."

Fletcher is a Research Biologist with the Center for Conservation Biology at William and Mary and VCU. He has presented several programs for the Bird Club in the last couple of years – each one a fascinating story!

To follow up his presentation, he will lead our field trip Saturday, January 24 to the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge to net and band sparrows. See the note below for more details about this exciting opportunity.

The meeting will be in Andrews Hall, Room 101. Please remember to display your parking pass on your car's dashboard.

Refreshments will be provided by Virginia Boyles, Marilyn Adair, and Shirley Devan.

January 24 Field Trip: Eastern Shore Sparrows

We'll have a chance to see winter sparrows "up close and personal" on our field trip with Fletcher Smith to the Eastern Shore NWR Saturday, January 24, 2015. Per Fletcher: "The best location to see these birds up close is probably the Eastern Shore refuge. The trapping involves walking through the marsh (but the marsh is hard bottom) and people would need knee boots or hip waders for that. The people who don't have boots could walk on the road and I would band the birds on the road so everyone could see them. I would need at least 3 or so people (and the more the merrier) to help "herd" the sparrows into the nets." Sounds like fun! Boots not necessary!

We'll meet at 7:15 am Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Rd. to carpool. Some birders may want to extend birding time on the Shore to the afternoon so carpools should be formed with that in mind!

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Wild Birds Unlimited

The WBC receives a 5% rebate on the pre-tax amount our Club members spend at Wild Birds Unlimited in Monticello Marketplace. Remember to let them know you are a member.

Field Trip to Dutch Gap – Wednesday, January 14

The winter ducks are "in" at the Dutch Gap Conservation Area in Chesterfield, and to enjoy them the Bird Club is sponsoring a mid-week field trip to the Park on Wednesday January 14. We should have excellent views of waterfowl such as Wood Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, Gadwalls, American Wigeons, American Coots, Northern Shovelers, and more. We will also walk a portion of the trail behind the Visitor Center that takes us along bottomlands, meadows, a small pond and wetlands in search of winter songbirds, Bald Eagles, and Wilson's Snipe.

We plan to begin birding at Dutch Gap at approximately 9:30 a.m. For those wishing to carpool we will depart from Colony Square at 8:00 a.m. If you wish to drive independently, the address is 411 Coxendale Road, Chester, 23836. The waterfowl viewing platforms are located along Coxendale Road. We will see you there.

This trip has no space limitations and there is no need to sign up. Just join us for a fun morning of birding.

Birding the Chesapeake Bay by boat – January 25

The Williamsburg Bird Club is sponsoring a boat trip to Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Islands Sunday, January 25, 2015.

Geoff Giles has chartered a large comfortable boat for this eye-level look at the bay ducks and other wonderful species around the tunnel islands. Birding and photo opportunities should be very good from the boat. The boat will stay around the CBBT tunnel islands and pilings and will likely go as far as Fisherman Island near the Eastern Shore if the birds are there. The CBBT area tends to have smoother water than ocean trips with many of the same exciting views of birds. It will be possible to do some birding from the warm, dry cabin, but the best views and photos will be from outside on deck, so clothing that protects against wind and dampness is recommended.

We will have a good opportunity to observe sea ducks, shorebirds, raptors and more from a large, comfortable boat with heated cabin, rest rooms, tables and indoor seating. WBC founding member Bill Williams will be the trip leader and help us identify the birds.

We will depart from Lynnhaven Inlet in Virginia Beach Sunday, January 25, at 9 am and return to the dock at about 1 pm. There is a very good seafood restaurant dockside for those inclined to have lunch on return. If the trip gets weathered out, we'll return your check, of course, or give you the option of a rain date about two weeks later.

Fee is \$30 per person. Your check is your reservation. Make checks payable to "Williamsburg Bird Club" and mail to Geoff Giles, PO Box 133, Lightfoot, VA 23090. Include your email address and phone # so Geoff can get back to you to confirm and let you know the final details. Sign up early so we can be sure to have enough people for the trip to go - we need 25. Reservations will be taken on a first come, first served basis until the trip is filled.

For additional info contact Geoff at tylerandal2@aol.com or (757) 645-8716. More info at Bird Club web site: <http://williamsburgbirdclub.org/>

A Summary of the December 14, 2014 Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count

By Bill Williams

The Williamsburg Bird Club's 38th consecutive Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was well, let's just say it...PERFECT! from zero-dark-thirty through the Carrot Tree compilation. Birding conditions were as pleasant and welcoming as could be asked for with calm winds, clear skies and temperatures ranging from 28° F predawn to a very comfortable 54° F in the afternoon. Ninety-three participants including two from near Charlottesville, the William and Mary Bird Club and 21 feeder watchers, among them a 10-year old, rallied and tallied 120 species, 5 more than our all-time high 115 recorded for the 16 December 1984 count and well ahead of our long-term 108 species average.

We had a very exciting entourage of count-day "Write-Ins," or as some call them, "Goody-Birds." These are truly rare species under any circumstances and/or species that have rarely been found throughout the history of the count going back to 1977. The Hog Island team spotted a Cackling Goose, our third one since this diminutive version of Canada Goose was granted full species status in 2004, and our second in as many years. Also for a second consecutive CBC the Jamestown crew identified a Greater Scaup, a diving duck that needs careful attention to differentiate it from the locally more expected Lesser Scaup. Members of that team had found a White-winged Scoter near Jamestown December 12, two days before count day. So it was quite frustrating that a "scoter" off Jamestown was just too far away to see the necessary field marks to cinch it up as "the" White-winged. That bird will go into the official tally as "Scoter sp." Undeterred the team pressed on sounding out (via audio playback) 3 Virginia Rails and a Sora. Back on December 16, 1984 we had 7 Virginia Rails and the January 1, 1954 Toano CBC had 10 Sora. There's no question the mild, windless day for our count this year was critical for these two rallids to vocalize.

On Wednesday, December 10 Bruce Peterjohn, Chief of the North American Bird Banding Laboratory in Patuxent, Maryland, came to Williamsburg to attempt to band two different hummingbirds at two different locations. One cooperated, the other did not. The one Bruce was able to band proved to be a hatch-year female Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus* visiting a feeder in Ford's Colony. On days when temperatures exceed 50°, like it did for us on December 14, wintering hummers tend not to visit feeders, preferring instead to forage on flying insects and whatever late blooming flowers there may be. It took Sharon Plocher 3 lengthy vigils at the home where the banded bird was feeding before she saw the little Miss. Confounding this for our count was that after December 10 and Bruce Peterjohn's banding effort, the homeowner confirmed there were **TWO** hummingbirds at his house! Both were *Selasphorus* hummingbirds. One for sure, because it had been identified so at banding, was *S. rufus*. The other was probably *S. rufus*, but it takes a bird-in-hand analysis to know positively it is not an Allen's Hummingbird *S. sasin*. So which of the two did Sharon see? Banded *S. rufus* or unbanded *S. rufus/sasin*? Thankfully, on December 15 the homeowner took pictures of the hummingbird(s) at his feeder throughout the day. Based on those photos which clearly show a bird with a band, and the bird's behavior, it seems pretty clear the bird observed count day was the banded Rufous Hummingbird and was so entered in the final tally. See the photo on the next page. This species has now been listed for the Williamsburg CBC 3 of last 4 years. Our first one was recorded on December 16, 2001. In all cases these were birds identified by capture and banding prior to or just after count day.

Another count-day rarity was an early morning Merlin seen zipping over the William and Mary campus. This was our 8th one in 38 years. The Skimino group picked out 7 Horned Larks, only the 3rd time since 1977 this species has made a count-day final. We had had Orange-crowned Warbler on just 5 previous CBCs. This year 5 teams ferreted out a CBC record-total of 6; Hog Island had 2, with one each for Kingsmill, Jolly Pond, Middle Plantation and Jamestown. Now becoming a testament to longevity, a male Western Tanager in Settlers' Mill made his fourth consecutive CBC appearance. A young male Baltimore Oriole was at the same feeder that day too. Our CBC has had that species 18 times in 3.8 decades, and 7 of the last 8 years.

As thrilling and remarkable as these rare birds were for count day, it was a bird that showed up at Geoff Giles feeder December 16 and 17 that stole the show. There, just inches away from his window, was a young male Rose-breasted Grosbeak, a winter first for our area and one of only a handful ever documented in winter for Virginia. See photo on next page. This guy, the December 12 White-winged Scoter and Osprey will all go into the Audubon CBC record as "Count-Week" species, not included in the final tally, but present during the 3 days prior to or after December 14.

With so many eyes on the skies and feeders we broke several Williamsburg CBC peak count records. Believe it or not our 4,671 Canada Geese broke a record that had stood 54 years. The January 2, 1960 Surry CBC recorded 4,220. This

year's 397 Gadwall bested the 215 found on the December 15, 2002 count. Breaking the Bald Eagle high count would not surprise anyone. Our 65 this time out was 4 more than the December 15, 2013 total. Likewise Cooper's Hawks seem to be everywhere locally. Last year we set a new CBC peak count with 7. This year we upped that record to 8. We tied the Red-shouldered Hawk high-count with 27, same as 2013. Our logo-bird Red-headed Woodpecker thrived and, more importantly, stayed close by this year because of a very abundant acorn crop. We had 38 for the count, 6 more than the 32 on December 16, 2012. Six Marsh Wrens was one more than the December 17, 1989 total of 5. Finding that many of this shy bird was another benefit of the quiet birding conditions. Three cheers to the local Eastern Bluebird nest-box trails. This December our total came to 436 a hefty 50 more than the 386 for the December 16, 2012 CBC. We also beat our Hermit Thrush peak count posting 62, a plus-five over the 57 from December 16, 2012.

Every CBC has its missed species. This year those included Red-throated Loon, American Woodcock, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Palm Warbler and Purple Finch.

Many, many thanks to everyone for a stupendously great day for Citizen Science. Also, a standing ovation for Carrot Tree Kitchen and our secret Santas for the best of the best compilation of table-fare and hospitality. The count results and a list of participants will be posted to the Bird Club website.



Young male Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Geoff Giles's feeder, December 16, 2014. Photo by Geoff Giles



Banded Rufous Hummingbird at feeder in Ford's Colony, December 15, 2014.

Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in Florida

By Jim and Mary Margaret Hutchins

We traveled to Florida over the holidays to visit family. To avoid the miseries of holiday flying, we drove so we could spend time each day searching for the Red-cockaded woodpeckers. The first morning we stopped in the Francis Marion Forest in South Carolina where we saw Pileated, Red-bellied, Hairy and Downy woodpeckers and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers. No RCW. The following morning we stopped at the Olostee Battlefield in Osceola National Forest, west of Jacksonville. A very helpful ranger told us where we would see the birds. As soon as we saw the first RCW, we saw another and another and another. We were hoping for one and were rewarded with so many.

Because of the number of healthy colonies of RCW in the Osceola National Forest (one of only two areas), there is a successful recruitment project of juveniles to relocate the birds to other parts of the southeast.

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/florida/landmanagement/resourcemanagement/?cid=STELPRDB5270811&width=full>

The morning we spent with the Red-cockaded Woodpeckers made sitting in parking lots on the interstates during our drive home well worth it.

President's Corner, continued from page 1

After our monthly meeting, where Fletcher Smith of the Center for Conservation Biology will enlighten us on the swamp and marsh sparrows of the Eastern Shore, we will offer the opportunity to take to the marsh with Fletcher on Saturday, 24 January, to help him capture, band and release some of the sparrows we've learned about. Dress warm for a genuinely cool and unique experience!!

We will continue our conquest of the bayside the following day, on Sunday, 25 January, with our annual Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel birding by boat trip. Doubly good this year as Bill Williams will lead us! That one is a highlight and always makes some good additions to our year lists of species seen and photographed!

Harbor seals and dolphins have become regular features of that trip in addition to the Bay and sea birds we love. In recent years we have had humpbacked whales as often as not. Harlequin ducks have been among the three species of scoters for the true hawkeyes in the crew who can spot them. Last year we had razorbills up very close. No way to say what this year's surprises might be, so we hope you'll bundle up and join us to find out!

Speaking of bundling up, it was rather nippy at last week's bird walk in New Quarter Park, but a banner day in the end, as Bill Williams found a very active group for us of the club's logo bird – the red-headed woodpecker. A group of them put on an impressive demonstration of playing tag and chasing away red-bellied woodpeckers. There were mostly buffleheads on Queens Creek and we heard flickers in nearby woods. This was interesting in view of the unique relationship of those two species. Buffleheads are cavity nesters, and it turns out the overwhelming number of their nests are in flicker cavities in trees. (That means they push their little ones out of the nest and let them drop to earth and march them to water like the wood duck does with its chicks!) It has been observed that a decline in the flicker population causes a decline in buffleheads. Support your local flicker!

Have you ever seen a male bufflehead here that was not in breeding plumage? Me neither. But they nest much farther north. Why would they (and most of our ducks in winter) be wearing their finery from October til May and molt into duller plumage on the breeding grounds? The bufflehead, like many other ducks, also in breeding plumage on their wintering grounds, finds a mate here and then flies in pairs to the breeding grounds. Wow. Our good fortune that we get to see many of these ducks in their finery during winter, probably often for that reason. Ruddy ducks and loons don't seem to subscribe to that method of pairing, so we have to live with dull plumage on them through the winter, unless we catch some of their finery as they begin to molt before they leave us in the spring to go north for dazzling their ladies and nesting.

Many of our members are enjoying participation in Project Feederwatch, as I am. I know there have been some surprise appearances and I have had one or two myself. Today a new bird for my yard list lumbered into and out of my yard. I blinked twice to see a great blue heron in the yard, apparently checking my puddles for fish, frogs, and snakes treading water? Two days of rain must have persuaded him that my yard was marsh worth checking out. In mid-December there was an unlikely visitor at my feeder – a young male red-breasted grosbeak. He stuffed himself at my feeder and happily posed for a few photos before hopefully heading far to the south to join his mates!

We remain pleased and excited that some talented young birders from the William and Mary Bird Club continue to follow in Dan Cristol's footsteps in the pursuit of knowledge of the birds and their (and our) habitat. It's great to have their talent and enthusiasm on our counts and trips and we hope you too will find the time to enjoy those with us in the year ahead! Don't forget that we share our habitat with our feathered friends, and consider having the enjoyment of putting in some native plants, trees, water or a brushpile to make our beautiful area even more livable for our birds!

December Bird Walks at New Quarter Park

December 13: Per leader Andy Hawkins: “Eleven birders started off at New Quarter Park with temperatures in the high twenties. Luckily the wind, which had been blowing for the previous few days, laid down and the morning walk was quite comfortable and very enjoyable. Some of the highlights of the walk were the number of Red-headed Woodpeckers sighted. The park is full of Red-headed Woodpeckers, probably due to a large acorn crop this year. We saw at least 8 immature and mature woodpeckers, possibly more. Two dozen Tundra Swans were spotted near the mouth of Queen Creek and Buffleheads were everywhere. Two Northern Harriers were flying over the marsh.”



Participants in December 13 Bird Walk at New Quarter Park:

Seated: Jacob Hinton, Ned Rose, Becky Rose, Virginia Boyles, Shirley Devan

Standing: Geoff Giles, Jan Lockwood, Sue Mutell, Betty Peterson, Mike Lowery, Andy Hawkins

December 27: Per leader Bill Williams: “A gorgeous morning but VERY few birds. Great company including visitors from New Hampshire! Participants: Carol and Bob Freyer, Geoff Giles, Andy Hawkins, Delight and Don Reese, Becky and Ned Rose. Thirty-two species including highlights: a Cooper’s Hawk, two immature Bald Eagles, two Red-headed Woodpeckers, two Hermit Thrushes, and over 100 Red-winged Blackbirds.

Participants in December 27 Bird Walk at New Quarter Park:

Geoff Giles, Ned and Becky Rose, Bill Williams, and Andy Hawkins



January Bird Walks at New Quarter Park

Saturday, January 10, 8 am – Hugh Beard, Leader
Saturday, January 24, 7 am – Bill Williams, Leader
Birders of all skill levels are welcome!

Reported Bird Sightings for December 2014

We want to know what you're seeing in your yard and travels.

Please share with Club members by sending your sightings to Judy Jones, Jjones184@cox.net, 229-8297, or Shirley Devan, 813-1322, sedevan52@cox.net

Members reported these, in addition to the Dec 14 CBC:

December 1: Dan Cristol reports a Winter wren in his Rolling Woods neighborhood

December 2: Nancy Barnhart, Nicholas Newberry, Matthew Anthony and Bill Williams report a Black Scoter along the shoreline at Jamestown Island.

December 2: Althea MacWhorter reports "I have had at my feeder a dozen goldfinches, house finches, Yellow-rumped warbler, tufted titmouse, cardinals, bluebirds, a carolina wren, and carolina chickadees.

December 2: Geoff Giles reports an immature Baltimore Oriole today eating hackberries on Cheatham Annex, among bluebirds, yellow-rumps, goldfinches and others. There was a flyover of sixteen Tundra Swans and a goodly number of ducks on Cheatham Pond, including Canvasbacks, Ring-neck Ducks, Gadwalls, Ruddy Ducks, Mallards and a male Hooded Merganser. There were pelicans diving on the York River.

December 4: Nancy Barnhart reports a Marsh Wren at Jamestown Island.

December 4: Linda Scherer reports a Hermit Thrush landed on my office windowsill and appeared to be watching me work at my computer. Same morning a Titmouse flew into the (artificial) wreath on the window and stashed a sunflower seed and a Carolina Wren checked out the wreath for whatever might be hiding in there.

December 6: Barry Trott reports a small flock of Purple Finches at his feeder.

December 10: Linda Scherer reports: "We stopped at an I-95 rest stop in Brevard Co, FL, (just south of Melbourne) and noticed that 2 Sandhill Cranes had made the same pit stop. They were working the grassy area adjacent to the main parking area."

December 11: Bill Williams, Ruth Beck, Inge Curtis, Brian Taber, and Dave Youker report 71 species at Craney Island on their regular survey. Highlights include: Eurasian Wigeon, Green-winged Teal (Eurasian), Wilson's Phalarope, American Kestrel, and Peregrine Falcon.

December 12: Nicholas Newberry, Matthew Anthony, and Dan Cristol report a White-winged Scoter off the shoreline at Jamestown Island

December 28: Hayes Williams reports: "At Beaverdam Park in Gloucester yesterday, we had a good number of Ruddy Ducks and Ring-necked Ducks, lots of American Coots, a few Pied-Billed Grebes, one scaup species, 8 Canada Geese, three pairs of Mallards and 2 adult Bald Eagles. The first Eagle to appear flew over the coots pretty high and didn't cause much excitement. Then it started to make passes low over the water and the coots would always duck under just before it got to them. The Eagle continued 10 to 15 minutes with no success. It finally got tired and landed on the point across from the parking area. It only got to rest a few minutes before the other Eagle appeared and bumped it off its resting spot. This afternoon (December 29), two Northern Gannets flew over us as we were crossing Coleman Bridge. They were heading up-river.



Hermit Thrush at Jamestown Island, Dec 7, 2014. Photo by Nancy Barnhart

TAKE NOTE!

Pay Your 2015 Dues!

We still need your dues for 2015!

Individual: \$15 Family: \$25

Patron: \$35 Student: \$5

Make your check payable to WBC and mail to PO Box 1085, Williamsburg, VA 23187.

Please consider adding something extra to your check to support our Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships (2 in 2015), our Ruth Beck and Bill Sheehan Ornithology Research Grants to Biology Graduate Students (3 in 2015), and feeder stations at the Child Development Resources campus. Membership dues alone do not support these 6 scholarships. We can't do it without you!!

Feed the Bird(ers)!

Feed the Bird(ers): We need your help with refreshments. Many thanks to Shirley Devan, Virginia Boyles, and Marilyn Adair for volunteering to feed us at our January 21 meeting. We have February covered, but we still need volunteers for March, April and May meetings. Would you like to help? You can email Ruth Gordon at ruthkagordon@gmail.com, or call her at (757) 208-0757. Thanks in advance.



Barred Owl, Jamestown Island, December 7, 2014
Photo by Nancy Barnhart

Birding in Central Florida

By Gary Carpenter

Ann and I visited the Sarasota/Ft. Meyers areas in Florida in November and had a couple of active birding days. While simply driving the main roads around Sarasota, Venice and Englewood, and without seriously birding we spotted: Sand Hill Cranes, Wood Storks, White Ibises, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, a Bald Eagle and an Anhinga. At Ding Darling NWR we spotted (among others): Roseate Spoonbills, Reddish Egrets, both Brown and White Pelicans, Little Blue Herons, Belted Kingfishers, Tri-colored Herons, Willets, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Gray Catbirds, and lots of peeps.

A few days later we birded the Celery Fields, outside Sarasota, and (among others) we spotted: Limpkins (photo below), Blue-winged Teal, Loggerhead Shrike, Green Heron, more Roseate Spoonbills, Ruddy Ducks, Common Gallinules, and a Red-shouldered Hawk. At Celery Fields the Sarasota Audubon Club has built an excellent viewing stand in the middle of one of the wetland ponds there. The stand is staffed most mornings by Audubon volunteers and they are adept, helpful and very friendly in assisting birders in spotting the birds in the area. We certainly recommend Celery Fields as a birding spot for anyone visiting the central Gulf coastal area of Florida.

While not actively birding, we took a couple of extended walks on Manasota Beach and around Venice and spotted: a Magnificent Frigate Bird, Black Skimmers, Sandwich - Least - Forsters - Royal and Common Terns, a Hairy Woodpecker, and Ruddy Turnstones. While biking on the Venetian Waterway Trail we also saw: Scrub Jays, Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, American Kestrels, Florida Mottled Ducks, a Red-Tailed Hawk, Blue Jays, and lots of Boat-tailed Grackles.

As always, birding is easy, fun and productive in central Fla.



Limpkins at Celery Fields near Sarasota, FL November 2014. Photo by Gary Carpenter.



Williamsburg Bird Club
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CALENDAR

Saturday, January 10	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8 am. Hugh Beard, Leader
Wednesday, January 14	Field Trip to Dutch Gap Conservation area. See page 2 for details
Sunday, January 18	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Wednesday, January 21	Meeting of Williamsburg Bird Club, 7:30 pm., Andrews Hall Room 101. See page 1
Saturday, January 24	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 7 am. Bill Williams, Leader
Saturday, January 24	Field Trip to Eastern Shore to net and band winter sparrows. See page 1 for details.
Sunday, January 25	Birding the Chesapeake Bay by boat. See page 2 for details.
Sunday, February 1	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader