



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

February 2013



President's Corner By Shirley Devan

The last time Williamsburg birders had an opportunity like this, it was 1995. And before that 1969—before our Bird Club even hatched!

What is this incredible opportunity?

The 125th annual meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society March 8–10 at William and Mary's Sadler Center.

Our own Dr. Dan Cristol is organizing this event and is expecting over 300 ornithologists, grad students, and birders from around the world.

You are invited! If you are reading this you qualify as a “local birder” and can register for the two high-profile plenary talks on Friday and Saturday morning and the poster session/mixer Saturday night. Your “local birders’ ticket” gives you access to Sunday field trips to the birdiest areas in our neck of the woods. These trips cost extra because Dan has to rent a bus and provide box lunches!

Worried about a stuffy academic affair with the scientists looking down their noses at you? Don't worry! Dan's assured us that only the friendliest scientists present at this conference! This is one of the most welcoming of professional ornithological gatherings, and I think you'll enjoy the learning experience and interacting with scientists who are at the forefront of research about birds. Personally, I can't wait.

See the more detailed note elsewhere in this newsletter. Then sign up online for the “local birder ticket.” See you there! Look for familiar faces at the Williamsburg Bird Club exhibit at the conference.

Welcome to New Member

Patricia Maloney

February Meeting

Join us Wednesday, February 20th for “Wet & Wild II”, a presentation by Bob Schamerhorn. Bob describes himself as an enthusiast, not an expert. He is a fledgling of the VSO and the Lynchburg Bird Club of the 1970s, which sponsored him twice as a youth to the Nature Camp in Vesuvius, Va. He has helped publish a couple of bird books and illustrated

a few children's books as well. Several of his photos have won awards and appeared in the publications of organizations such as Audubon's Virginia IBA, eBird's website, and Nature Friend Magazine. Since 2006 he has maintained a weekly photoblog (www.iPhotoBirds.com) and every year since 2008 he has published a calendar with his nature photography. As an advocate of habitat conservation, he is a current member of the National Audubon and Hawaii Audubon Societies, the Colonial Nature Photography Club, and VSO. He gets out with his camera to enjoy the birds and the outdoors at any opportunity that presents itself. He loves to share the beauty of God's creatures, that it might bring an appreciation of nature to others.



American Goldfinch

Photo by Bob Schamerhorn

Here is a description of his program: “Every wild animal needs food, shelter and . . . water. This dynamic presentation contains over fifty different bird species drinking, bathing and splashing around. Years ago Bob added a small puddle of water to his backyard patio garden and was amazed at the diversity of birds that were attracted to it. So, he devised a way to make water constantly available to the birds. Then, as more and more birds discovered and utilized the shallow puddle, he began taking photos of the visitors. Each different time of year would bring new and exciting species, whether it was winter, breeding season, spring migration or fall migration. Come see how a little water can greatly improve the enjoyment of your backyard habitat. Bob will share his stories and experiences from hundreds of hours of observation. There is even a segment on how to built and

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Updated Summary of Bird Data

The latest version of Bill Williams' *Summary of Local Bird Data through 2011: Williamsburg, James City County, York County, Hog Island WMA, Surry County* can be downloaded from our website.

Wild Birds Unlimited

Don't forget that the WBC receives a 5% rebate on the pre-tax amount our members spend at Wild Birds Unlimited in Monticello Marketplace. You do have to let them know that you are a member.

install this simple, low-maintenance water feature and the materials used. The program is displayed with stunning still photography, plus HD video clips with audio."

Plan to join us on February at 7:30 PM in **Room 150, Millington Hall** on the W&M campus. Virginia Boyles and Marilyn Adair will be providing the refreshments. **Don't forget to use your parking permit.**

February Field Trip

By Geoff Giles

On Saturday, 19 February we will travel to the Dutch Gap Conservation Area in Chesterfield. This is a premier spot for excellent views of winter ducks and much, much more!!! The ducks are already in the fresh water marsh impoundments, and we will get up close and personal with many from viewing platforms at the marsh and from an easily accessible trail along a brackish marsh on the James River.

Expect good views of wood ducks, ring-necks, gadwalls, wigeons, coots, shovellers, and more. We likely will also have great views of eagles and other raptors, plus Wilson's snipes and a great variety of winter songbirds. This place is just a must for winter wetland species, so please join us for an easy and enjoyable morning of birding.

Geoff Giles will lead our group, and for those wishing to carpool or caravan, we will depart Colony Square Shopping Center (just south of the intersection of 199 and Jamestown Road) at 0730 AM on 19 February and make a rest and refreshment stop along the way. We will plan to begin birding at Dutch Gap at about 0900 AM. For those wishing to meet us there, set your GPS for Coxendale Road in Chesterfield, or simply print directions from the web.

Our trip will go, rain or shine, and will be a good one. No space limitations and no need to sign up. Just come, join us, and enjoy. Your binoculars and spotting scope (if you plan to bring one) will serve you well at Dutch Gap for exceptional viewing of wildfowl! Hope to see you there. For any questions or further info, feel free to call Geoff Giles at 757-645-8716 or send an email to tylerandal2@aol.com.

January Sightings

Report your backyard birds and local sightings to Fred Blystone at 229-4346 or fmb19481@verizon.net. If you encounter interesting birds on your vacation/travels, please share!

January 2. Shirley Devan reports seeing at least two male Northern Shovelers at Rennicks's Pond (Powhatan Secondary).

January 6. Marilyn & John Adair, Virginia & George Boyles, Miles & Spencer Quirion, Geoff Giles, Fred Blystone, and Barbara Hudgins joined several other birders and leader Jane Frigo for the HRBC walk in Newport News Park. Fifty-seven species were identified during the morning, including a Redhead that was spotted among a group of Ring-necked Ducks. There were also 3 Virginia Rails heard at the Swamp Bridge. Woodpeckers were well represented, as were nuthatches and Brown Creepers.

January 8. Tom Armour reports finding some good ducks at Newport News Park. He had 1 Redhead, 3 American Wigeon, 50+ Hooded Mergansers, a

few hundred Lesser Scaup and Ring-necked Ducks, and 3 Pied-billed Grebes.

January 13. Shirley Devan spent a foggy morning birding around the Warhill Sports Complex. She ended up with 25 species, including a new year bird, a Killdeer. She said her most surprising count was 17 Eastern Bluebirds foraging on one of the soccer fields—a much higher number than she normally sees in one spot. Barry Trott reports having a Red-breasted Nuthatch visiting his feeder.



January 20. Fred Blystone, John Adair, George & Virginia Boyles joined leader Jane Frigo and a number of other birders for the HRBC bird walk at Newport News Park. Among the 46 species seen during the morning were Gadwall, American Wigeon, American Black Duck, Mallard, Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Hooded Merganser, American Coot, and Pied-billed Grebe.

January 22. Hayes and Joyce Williams report having a pair of Purple Finches at their feeder.

January 25. Alex Minarik reports that there were about 120 Rusty Blackbirds and about 10 Red-winged Blackbirds in her yard and the swamp behind her house.

January 26. Brian Taber, birding the Parkway after the snow, found dozens of pipits and 2 Cackling Geese at College Creek. At the Gospel Spreading Farm he found a female Brewer's Blackbird. From Lynda & Allan Sharrett, the following report was received: "Here are some birds that swarmed our feeders—the usual suspects: a dozen white throats, Red-breasted & White-breasted Nuthatch, towhee, Mourning Doves, cardinals, Carolina Wren, Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, House Finch, chickadee, titmouse, goldfinch, crows, Red-winged Blackbird, and a Brown Thrasher who flew from nowhere up to the suet cake several times." Lynda also reported they had been in Chincoteague the previous week and saw lots of waterfowl, Tundra Swans, egrets, 2 Red-shouldered Hawks, Black-crowned Night-Heron and a Common Ground-Dove.

January 30. Ruth Beck, Virginia & George Boyles, Alex Minark, Dave Youker, and Bill Williams surveyed Craney Island. There were 66 species identified during the trip, including 1 Eurasian Wigeon and 26 Least Sandpipers.

Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships

By Shirley Devan

Once again the evaluators had tough choices to make after reviewing the 12 applications we received for the Nature Camp Scholarships. Many thanks to the evaluators: Alex Minarik, Jeanette Navia, Mary Anne Fennell, Geoff Giles, and Lee Schuster.

The Club has awarded two full scholarships for 2013 Nature Camp to:

Zoe Averett, 5th grade & Audrey Root, 6th grade. Zoe is the daughter of a new member of the Bird Club, Todd Averett. This will be Zoe's first year at Nature Camp. Audrey, who along with her parents Regina and David, is a member of the Bird Club, will be going to Nature Camp for the second year in a row on a Bird Club Scholarship.

Each student is aware that she won and the check is on the way to Nature Camp for their tuition. We are certainly grateful to the Bird Club members whose dues and contributions make these opportunities available for our local students.

Great Backyard Bird Count February 15–18

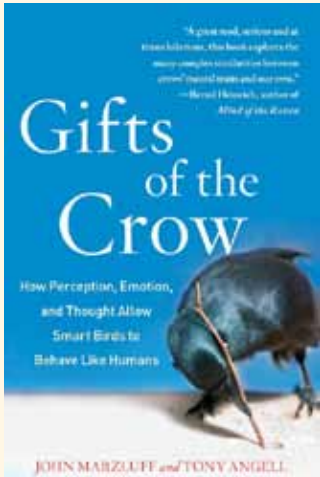
The GBBC occurs annually in February, and provides valuable data regarding avian populations. You can participate in the GBBC from the comfort of your backyard or any place you bird during this four-day period. Simply tally the number of individual bird of each species you see during your count period. Count periods must be at least 15 minutes in duration, and each new count period will require a separate tally. You must then enter your numbers on the GBBC website (<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>). If you don't have internet access, have a friend enter for you.

Photo from Member

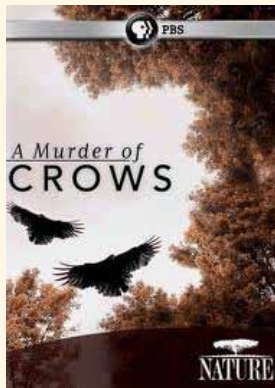


Williamsburg Bird Club Book & DVD Review

By Jeanette Navia



Gifts of the Crows: How Perception, Emotion, and Thought Allow Smart Birds to Behave Like Humans, by John Marzluff and Tony Angell. Free Press, 2012. ISBN 9781439198735. \$25.00. 287 p. Williamsburg Library call number 598.864 MAR



A Murder of Crows: Birds with an Attitude. DVD. PBS, 2010. 60 minutes. James City County Library call number DVD 598.864 MUR

I have to admit it took me over a month to read *Gifts of the Crows*, by John Marzluff and Tony Angell. It was fascinating all-in-all, but there were spots that were heavy in neurobiology. I forced myself to wade through these sections and found the book to be definitely worth finishing. While it is interesting to some that, “In birds, neural signals leaving the nidopallium go to the lower, rear portion of the forebrain, the arcopallium, which ushers electoral commands down independent, parallel circuits through the thalamus, midbrain, and hindbrain nuclei to muscle fibers whose action create behavior,” I was unable to follow it all or, and I can’t word it any other way, to care. However, there were much longer sections describing crow behavior, and these sections were fascinating!

According to the research upon which this book is based, crows are very intelligent birds. There are stories of wild New Caledonian Crows creating hooks out of plant materials to enable them to reach foods they otherwise cannot. Researchers have been able to recreate situations in labs to demonstrate that this species can figure out multiple, seemingly unrelated steps to reach treats. In other research, crows

appear to recognize individual human faces. Marzluff and his students used face masks to confirm their hypotheses that crows remember specific individuals who have disturbed them in the past, and to treat them accordingly—for up to two years. Crows also possess other traits that one might consider to be “human.” Language, insight, frolic, grief, passion, risk taking, and awareness are all discussed. Full of fascinating anecdotes, this book may stretch your idea of what goes on in the minds of some birds. There are many handsome line illustrations by Tony Angell.

I glanced through some of the reviews on Amazon.com and found that other readers, who generally liked the book, also had a hard time getting through the neurobiology. Just skim over those sections if you’re not interested. And if you are interested, there are diagrams, illustrations, and several appendices that explain what researchers currently understand about the neurobiology of crows’ brains.

To supplement the reading, or if you prefer to spend just an hour watching these amazing creatures and learning a bit about crow research, you can watch the DVD *A Murder of Crows: Birds with an Attitude*, from PBS’s Nature series. Nature spent time in Seattle with Marzluff while he and his students conducted an experiment with the face masks to see if crows teach their young to avoid specific harmful humans. The show also traveled to New Zealand where the incredible tool-making abilities of the New Caledonia Crows was demonstrated, to Japan to see how a local power company tackles problems caused by crows constructing nests with wire clothes hangers in high voltage areas, and to Austria to the Konrad Lorenz Institute to see experiments that show how quickly crows can learn tasks that allow them to receive rewards. They captured beautiful footage of these fascinating birds! The book and DVD were not published together as a set, but they cover the same eye-opening material.

Photo from Member



125th Annual Meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society

The 125th Annual Meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society will be held Thursday, March 7th through Sunday, March 10th, 2013 at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.

The 2013 WOS annual meeting also marks the 200th anniversary of the death of Alexander Wilson, the society's namesake and the ornithologist after whom more North American birds have been named than any other.

This year's conference in historic Williamsburg features a special session on the History of American Ornithology chaired by Jerome Jackson, as well as plenary addresses by Peter and Rosemary Grant and Jed Burtt.

The plenary talks will be Friday and Saturday morning, followed by three parallel scientific sessions from ~10:30 AM–4 PM on both days. The poster session will be Friday night and the banquet Saturday night. There will be an early-morning field trip for local birding Friday and Saturday before the plenaries and two more extensive field trips on Sunday morning to the site of Virginia's recovering Red-cockaded Woodpecker population (returning around noon), or Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (returning around 4 PM).

Regular registration includes admission to all scientific sessions, the opening reception (Thursday evening), a poster session/reception (Friday evening), and all snack/coffee breaks. When you register, you will be given the option to add lunch on-campus during sessions days, or you can visit the many local restaurants. You may also purchase tickets for the closing banquet (Saturday) and optional field trips.

Guest registration allows the registrant to attend the opening reception, plenary talks, and poster social, but not the scientific sessions. Guests may also purchase tickets for on-campus lunches, the closing banquet, and the optional field trips.

Local Birder registration allows the registrant to attend the plenary talks, poster social, and vendor exhibits but not the scientific sessions or the opening reception. Local Birders may also purchase separate tickets for on-campus box lunches, the closing banquet and the optional field trips at the time of registration.

More information can be found on the Wilson Ornithological Society's website <http://www.wilsonsociety.org> (just click on *Web site for the 2013 Annual Meeting, 7–9 March at William & Mary is now "live"*)



Inge Curtis says this Brown-headed Nuthatch (along with a House Finch and an American Goldfinch) was the first one she had ever seen at her feeder (January 4th).



An American Robin photographed by Inge Curtis.

WBC January Walks & Field Trip

Complete lists of species seen on each walk are on the club website at www.williamsburgbirdclub.org.



Bird Walk on January 12th at NQP.

Leader Jim Corliss was joined by Betty Peterson, Cheryl Jacobson, Sara Lewis, Bringier McConnell, Jan Lockwood, Joanne Andrews, Jeanette Navia, Cathy Bond, Jean Petkofsky, Rock Moeslein, Shirley Devan, and Cynthia & Bob Long for the walk at New Quarter Park. There were a total of 33 species identified during the morning.

Left to right: Betty Peterson, Cheryl Jacobson, Sara Lewis, Jim Corliss, Bringier McConnell, Jan Lockwood, Joanne Andrews, Jeanette Navia, Cathy Bond, Jean Petkofsky, Rock Moeslein.

Not pictured: Cynthia and Bob Long

Photo by Shirley Devan

CBBT Birding by Boat trip—a glorious day on the Bay!

Article by Geoff Giles

Photos by Inge Curtis

This year the Bay served up a perfect day for our boat birding trip, with marine mammals doing their best to steal the show from some good birds. The weather was as mild as a January day on the Chesapeake can be, with sunshine, mild temperatures and very light breeze. Brian Taber was our trip leader and spotted the best of the best for us all through the trip. We had a full complement of sixty birders and nature photographers, who enjoyed the extra treat of opening of the sun deck on top of the boat, made possible by the very mild day. So was this the winter birding trip, or the Club Med cruise?!

After enjoying obliging views of pelicans, boat-tailed grackles, red-breasted mergansers, buffleheads and several gull species at the dock, we cast off docking lines and were treated to our first surprise. As we left the dock, no more than thirty yards astern, three very large and prosperous looking dolphins did their finest Marine Land rolls on the surface—for our first ooohs and aaahs (and good mammal photo ops) of the trip!

We cruised out at a leisurely pace to the first island of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, spotting northern gannets, flocks of scoters (surf, black and white-winged), more buffleheads and mergansers, and large flocks of scaup along the way. The shaded side of the boat was chilly, but the sunny side was lined with birders who began doffing layers of their winter clothes—happily not needed in the sunshine of this very mild winter day.

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On the rocks of the first two CBBT islands we got views of ruddy turnstones, sanderlings and purple sandpipers—in addition to gulls (including a lesser black-backed), pigeons, and more well-fed looking brown pelicans. Flocks of long-tailed ducks and scoters swam and flew around us, and gannets and cormorants cruised lazily above.

On the third island, in addition to the above birds, we got a sudden surprise—a colony of visibly happy harbor seals, some basking on the rocks and a number bobbing in the gentle waves near the end of the rocks. These playful fellows presented great viewing and photo ops challenges—so much so that we were distracted and overlooked a chance to see several harlequin ducks among the flocks of scoters very close to us. We know that at least three brightly colored male harlequins were very close to us because a look at the photos following the trip plainly shows them among the surf and black scoters. One harlequin almost flew aboard, as he led a small flock of surf scoters which took off just ahead of us and flew towards and just past our boat!!



The captain continued along the bridge tunnel in a northerly direction until he suddenly steered us under the bridge pilings for great views (and photos) of a bird we rarely see—the great cormorant! Obliging, two were perched atop a piling among a small colony of their double-crested brethren, so that no questions about relative size or colorations were necessary. Everyone who took in these two species side by side was able to readily spot two more great cormorants among double-crested on another piling and to easily tell them apart. Thanks to the captain for teeing these up so nicely for us!!

Having worked our way along the bridge tunnel, the captain swung the bow around to head in the direction of the Atlantic for the latter part of our trip. We were fortunate to have seen whales there on the previous year's cruise, but the radio chatter from the fishermen, in a vast armada of small boats (fishing for rockfish!) at the line where the mouth of the Chesapeake meets the Atlantic, seemed to indicate that there were no whales today.

No matter, we would cruise that way and see what we could see on the mild bay waters.

As we went lazily along, an almost unbroken succession of small flocks of scoters and fishing gulls and gannets kept us peering at what was on the water and in the air around us. Just before we reached the first of the trolling fishing boats our mate got our attention with the call, "There's a whale, there she blows!" And so she did. As we approached, we first saw occasional spouts from humpback whales clearing their blowholes and then as we drew nearer cautiously, we saw the backs as the whales rolled and had several views of tail flukes out of the water as the huge creatures rose to the surface and then sounded!

The whales appeared contented and unhurried. They were obviously unconcerned about our proximity (fifty meters) and our many happy





viewers and photographers following their morning's activities. The humpbacks, like the dolphins, gannet, and rockfish, were enjoying the bounty of menhaden, a small forage fish, which come to the mouth of the Bay this time of the year to spawn in the briny waters of the Atlantic. It is unusual for the humpbacks to come into the Bay, but the recent warm winters seem to have changed some of nature's routines—and added the huge and amiable humpbacks to our list of sightings!!

As our half-day cruise drew to a close, we left the whales and cruised slowly along the beach of First Landing park, taking in Bonaparte's and other gulls, cormorants, and—to the surprise of some of us, a majestic adult bald eagle soaring high overhead well out in the Bay. For those among us who looked care-

fully as we approached the mouth of the Lynnhaven River, there was a wintering osprey who seemed none the worse for wear, in spite of having ignored the call to head to the Caribbean with his mates for last fall's migration.

And so, we cruised at a leisurely pace back to the dock, where not only terra firma, but also a major league seafood restaurant was waiting for us. Given a choice between windburn and a mild sunburn, most of us would opt for the latter—and that's what we took home, along with some birds for our year's list. We have seen some lovely photos resulting from the trip, including the ones which Inge Curtis shot and shared for this article. Our birding and photography group was composed of many friends from our Williamsburg local area, but others who come from the north, south, east, and west of our state. Thanks to one and all for joining us and for sharing the joys of our wonderful Bay!!

Bird Walk on January 26th at NQP

Cancelled due to inclement weather.

Photos from Members



Carol O'Neil took these photos of a Pine Warbler and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet.



Inge Curtis called this her Red-nosed
White-throated Sparrow



Shirley Devan sent in this Northern Flicker photo.



Inge Curtis took these photos of a Hermit Thrush
and a Northern Cardinal.



Bird ID Photos

By Joe Piotrowski

This feature is only on the website and in the electronic version of *The Flyer*. The answer to this month's "puzzle" will be given in the next electronic newsletter, as well as on the website.



Photo for February

January's's photo was of aa Orange-crowned Warbler.



CALENDAR

Saturday, February 9	WBC Bird Walk, NQP, 8 AM, Geoff Giles, Leader.
Thursday, February 14	HRBC Monthly Meeting, www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org for more information
February 15–18	Great Backyard Bird Count. See Page 3.
Saturday, February 16	WBC Field Trip to Dutch Gap. See Page 2.
Sunday, February 17	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7AM, Jane Frigo, Leader.
Wednesday, February 20	WBC Monthly Meeting. See front page.
Saturday, February 23	WBC Bird Walk, NQP, 7AM, Bill Williams, Leader.
Saturday, March 23	New Kent Forestry Center's "Walk in the Woods". Information in March newsletter.
April 26–28	VSO Annual Meeting. More information at www.virginiabirds.net
Sunday, May 5	WBC Spring Bird Count. More information to follow.