



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

February 2015

President's Corner



By Geoff Giles
Wow! What a winter and what a CBBT birding by boat trip!! More on that later. This year the story has been that the weatherman giveth and the weatherman taketh away. Taken away was

our planned trip to Eastern Shore marshes to band saltmarsh sharp-tailed and Nelson's sparrows, to be led by Center for Conservation Biology scientist Fletcher Smith. Drenching rain on the scheduled day made it unsafe for the birds to be banded under those conditions, so Fletcher gave us an alternate date when the tides will be right in the marsh for banding. This trip is now planned for 5 February, and the weatherman has been put on notice that he will be expected to deliver a decent day this time. Join us if you can!

Also dealt a weather cancellation was our planned trip to Dutch Gap, one of our favorite duck spotting places. This time the problem was a stretch of brutal cold weather which turned the marsh and impoundments there, normally teeming with a variety of beautiful ducks, into an extensive area of solid ice with few to no patches of open water to attract and support the wildfowl we hoped to see and photograph. Jan Lockwood, our Field Trip Chair, is not easily discouraged however. Jan will make the Dutch Gap opportunity available to us again sometime before mid-March, so that we are sure to have the enjoyment of being close up with a variety of beautiful wildfowl before they depart for nesting much farther north. She will work that in among other activities already planned and get word out to our members. *Continued on page 4.*

February 18 Meeting

Join us Wednesday, February 18, 2015 at 7:30 pm for a presentation by wildlife rehabilitator Pearl Beamer of Sacred Friends, a Wildlife Rehabilitation & Education Center. Her organization specializes in raptors and water birds (loons, herons, pelicans, egrets) but will not turn anything away. Her service area is primarily the Tidewater (Hampton, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, Suffolk) area but if they will care for animals from anywhere, as long as the animal is transported to them.

This joint meeting with the Virginia Master Naturalist Historic Rivers Chapter will be in Andrews Hall, Room 101. Please remember to display your parking pass on your car's dashboard.

Refreshments will be provided by Jan Lockwood, Jennifer Trevino, Sharon Plocher, and Roger Gosden

February 5 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 Thursday, February 5, 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! Fletcher Smith has also sent an invitation to "Box" where you can link to his sparrow presentation.

We will meet to carpool at Colony Square at 6:00 to take advantage of the tide schedule.

Please email Cheryl Jacobson at jcheryljoy@aol.com if you plan on going. Also please indicate if you will have boots and will help flush the sparrows. Her cell is 303-519-0989 if you have questions.

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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 Craney Island, Saturday February 7, 2015

Craney Island is an area in Portsmouth where materials dredged from the Elizabeth River are deposited. Managed by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, it is open to the public for birding only every second Saturday and we are most fortunate that Ruth Beck and Bill Williams have agreed to guide us there. Dr. Beck has worked for several years with the facility's management to preserve the island's critical habitat for the use of migratory and resident waterfowl and Bill Williams has assisted her in her conservation work at Craney by conducting weekly censuses of the birds. Birding hours begin at 8:00 a.m. when the gate will be opened for us. We need to finish by 1:00 p.m.

For those who wish to carpool, we will depart from Colony Square on Jamestown Road by 6:30 a.m., so please arrive a little early to allow some time to set up the carpooling. **For those driving separately,** the carpooling group will meet you at the McDonalds at 6201 College Drive. This is at the intersection of College Drive and Hampton Roads Parkway in Suffolk/Portsmouth and the best opportunity for a restroom break.

It is important to be on time. **Please be ready to leave the McDonalds at 7:30 a.m.** because Ruth and Bill need to arrive at the **Craney Island gate with the entire group at 7:45 a.m. to be admitted.** The roads on the island are not paved and we are advised to consolidate into vehicles with a higher road clearance to handle the terrain (no Prius!). Additional vehicles may be parked at Craney. You will be birding by car with frequent stops to view/scope the birds. Please dress for the weather and bring drinks and food for your comfort.

Please email me if you will be there. It will be helpful for Ruth and Bill to know how many people are coming. Questions? Call or email Jan Lockwood - 757-634-4164 - nzedr@msn.com

Birding the CBBT Islands by Car – February 21

FIELD TRIP TO THE CBBT ISLANDS BY CAR - THIS TRIP HAS ONLY 2 SPOTS LEFT

On February 21 Dan Cristol will be leading a group of 30 folks as they bird the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel islands, 8:00 - 11:00 a.m. To comply with CBBT security requirements **YOU MUST PRE-REGISTER** by completing a form with details about your name, address, phone, email and Drivers' License - available at <http://www.cbdt.com/forms/2011RevisedINDIVIDUALBirdingA pp.pdf>. **The cost is \$10.00 payable in advance** to cover the cost of the police officers who will escort us around the islands. Please mail the form and payment to the Williamsburg Bird Club, P.O. Box 1085, Williamsburg, VA 23187. Call Jan Lockwood at 757-634-4164 or email nzedr@msn.com for more information. Registrations will be accepted in order of the date stamp on the envelope. Car pooling and driving directions will be emailed to those registered at a later date.

Can't Find Birds? Pray for a Wintry Day!

By Tom McCary

For a number of reasons I've gotten off to a slow start on my annual bird list this year. Cold days have kept me inside quite a bit, and my fingers have twitched more from the weather than from the writing of my list. By and large my rambles have been confined to my local patch. Like me, the birds seem to have hunkered down.

Avian appearances seemed few and far between after New Year's Day. Even the occasional sunny morning brought only the usual suspects to my yard and feeders. My ebullient Carolina Wren deserted me. The neighborhood crows became my companions instead. Those sagacious birds kept on cawing. No doubt they sensed a change was coming.

That change was witnessed on the morning of 14 January when I awoke to discover that the predicted sleet storm had arrived indeed. My trees and bushes were covered with icicles; everything was aglow and aglitter. My very lawn, an unpretentious admixture of wild onions, a variety of grass, and troublesome weeds, glistened with ice. And everywhere I looked I saw birds.

By far the robins were the most numerous: scores covered the holly trees while a few others preferred to forage on the ground beneath. The hollies likewise saw a smaller contingent of cedar waxwings, their bright colors shining as they hovered about.

While the holly feast dominated the front yard, the more open back lawn attracted a greater variety of birds. My Carolina wren was back under my feeder, making his January debut. He was joined by a white-throated sparrow and a female eastern towhee. 'Ere long her handsome mate appeared. A male cardinal provided more color.

The saturated yard itself gave ample prancing room to a colorful trio of red-winged blackbirds which, although greedy, appeared to search the premises with a certain disdain. "Not the best, but it's filling," their body language seemed to say. On the other hand, a pair of bluebirds evinced their usual sweetness. A flicker represented the woodpecker tribe. And here, as in the front, the most ubiquitous bird was the American robin.

Again the next day the birds were omnipresent. The more robins and waxwings I observed, the fewer red holly berries I began to notice. Little wonder some of the sated robins started to stare at me with a vague look. That expression from the 1920's, "It's the berries," took on a whole new meaning.

By late morning I was ready to venture out. Then suddenly I heard it – that loud preternatural cry. Could it be? A bird I had only seen once in my yard before? The eerie call came from the front yard. I ran downstairs and peered out the window. Nothing. Not a thing.

And then there he was. Circling around my dogwood tree, only a few feet from Richmond Road appeared in all his glory a magnificent pileated woodpecker. Entranced I watched him for some while until he took flight to my neighbor's yard. What a gem! What a wondrous sight!

Later as I crossed the lawn the ice had dwindled considerably. Yet my birds remained. Instead of a pair of bluebirds I had five. My flicker showed up again. A song sparrow fed beneath my feeder. But the regal pileated ruled the day.

The ice was gone the following day and the birds with it. Everything was just as it was before. As one does this time of year, I thought about spring. Now I knew – I could wait, and enjoy it. For each season has its own anticipation and its own reward. The birds of a wintry day are proof of that.



Photo by Inge Curtis

President's Corner, continued from page 1

On the much brighter side, the weather for our Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel birding by boat trip was a dream – mild temperatures with very light to nearly no breeze. And the Bay birds and wildlife gave us a memorable day. Nearly all the usual suspects (birds, that is) for this trip were out in fair numbers and visible. Those included northern gannets, surf, black and white-winged scoters, long-tailed ducks, lesser black-backed and Bonaparte's gulls, red-throated loons and purple sandpipers. The rare avian treats this trip were a couple of harlequin ducks which lazed on the rocks of the second CBBT island and then took to the water to give us swimming photo ops. Those and a close flyby of two razorbills across our bow made the birders' day. Island three had a sizeable colony of harbor seals again this year. They bobbed lazily around the rock jetty, showing no worries as we passed slowly by.

And then there were the whales! The humpbacked whales outdid themselves this year for our benefit, rolling and blowing through their blowholes at first in the distance, as we sailed slowly toward Cape Henry. Soon other whales began doing the same in the direction of Cape Charles. Then out of the blue an exuberant humpback came hurtling entirely clear of the water, rolling over on his back in mid-air, just ahead of our starboard bow and then crashed back into the Bay. That whale and a few of his companions were around our boat until it was time to sail on. The spectacular breach, was truly a breathtaking sight, and was captured by two talented photographers among our crew, Inge Curtis and Bill Hohenstein. Other photographers among us got numerous shots of humpbacks rolling and slapping the water with their huge flukes. The whale antics were a great finale to a beautiful day of birding on the Bay!

If you missed that one, don't despair. Jan has organized several more opportunities to enjoy the winter avian visitors. First is a foray to Craney Island on 7 February. If you've ever birded there, we need say no more. It is an isolated area of extraordinary habitat, which is managed to sustain breeding and migrating populations of wildfowl by our own Dr. Ruth Beck. She will lead us through this birder's mecca with Bill Williams. That will be followed by a birding tour of the restricted islands of the CBBT, led by Dr. Dan Cristol on 21 February. Advance sign-up is required for remaining spaces on that one, and after we have enjoyed the birds of the islands and Bay, Dan will divulge a few of his favorite birding hotspots on the nearby Eastern Shore. Dan has also agreed to lead us up to Chincoteague/Assateague for our March field trip (third weekend). That will be a great day of birding through a few great hotspots on the way to Chincoteague as well as through that sensational wildlife refuge. Chincoteague is the most exciting birding location in Virginia, and if you haven't been there with Dan, you haven't been!

These three trips are birding blockbusters for our members, and Jan has one or two more she is planning to work in, including Curle's Neck and Beaverdam Park in Gloucester, before the winter birds hear the call of wild and go north to nest. Hope you will take advantage of these, and won't miss the next WBC monthly meeting which will be especially cool. We will hear from a wildlife rehabilitator, who will bring some of the resident raptors from the facility to our meeting. We'll be joined by the local Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists for that meeting in Andrews Hall of the W&M campus.

The Virginia Master Naturalists make many contributions to citizen science programs and we are hoping you are planning to do likewise for one event that is upcoming. February 13-16 is the annual Great Backyard Bird Count. If you have not participated before, you can learn how to do so and sign up at gbbc.org. It's easy, it's fun and don't be fooled by the name. It takes in more birding territory and birds than only your back yard. But let's not forget that for most of us the greatest opportunities to see our native species up close and learn to recognize them and their songs begin right in our own back yards.

Hope you are mindful of the fact that winter is a great time to plant native trees and shrubs in the Williamsburg area. You can make valuable additions to the wildlife value of your back yard with addition of species that offer food and shelter for your birds. Native species of plants will do the most to support their food chain and also tend to be hardiest in our climate. Hollies, dogwoods, serviceberries, red cedars, wax myrtle, viburnum species – the list goes on and on of the natives that will add food, shelter and beauty to your back yard. And water for the birds will be as beneficial to the birder as the birds, in terms of the close-up unguarded moments you will share with the wild birds that depend on it. Let's enjoy this winter's occasional sprinkle of snow and bare branches that don't conceal the birds, 'cause another spring won't be far behind!!

January Bird Walk at New Quarter Park

January 10:

Not often does a second Saturday bird walk at NQP start out with below freezing temperatures and end up at 10:30 with below freezing temps, but the hearty group at NQP this past Saturday “enjoyed” just such a phenomenon! Low 20s at 8am and high 20s at 10:30. Whew! Luckily, the sun was shining...

Many thanks to Hugh Beard for leading the way and helping us see and hear the birds! You've got great ears, Hugh!

We tallied 25 species but the most surprising birds may have been the two Killdeer on the ice at Queen's Creek at low tide. No ducks in the near areas of Queen's Creek — too icy! We were very pleased to see 5 Bald Eagles and 4 Red-headed Woodpeckers.

We stood for several minutes (with the sun on our backs) and enjoyed watching Yellow-rumped Warblers, Eastern Bluebirds, and a Carolina Chickadee feed at the sap streaming out of the sap wells on a red maple tree. The culprit, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, made a brief appearance on the tree but the feeding frenzy was intense and he did not tarry. I've attached a photo of one of the Eastern Bluebirds on the red maple enjoying the sap.



Visitors this morning were Jalen Waller and his mother, Michelle Lakins-Waller. For his Scout project, Jalen will install several Wood Duck boxes around the likely habitat at New Quarter Park. Welcome, Jalen and Michelle. Glad you joined us!

Here's the photo of the six frozen, er...hearty birders:



Participants in January Bird Walk at New Quarter Park:

*Shirley Devan,
Joyce Lowry,
Jan Lockwood,
Michelle Lakins-Waller,
Jalen Waller, and leader
Hugh Beard*

*Photos and Narrative
By Shirley Devan*

January 24: There were only had two participants for the rain shortened bird walk on Saturday, January 24th at New Quarter Park. Jan Lockwood and Bill Williams birded in the rain for a while but the list of sightings was a small one and they finally headed home to dry off and warm up.

Reported Bird Sightings for January, 2015

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, 293-8297, or Shirley Devan, 813-1322, sedevan52@cox.net

Members reported these sightings in January:

January 3: Bill Williams reports a Marsh Wren at Jamestown Island.

January 9 - 12: Christine and Dave Wilcox visited Tucson, AZ and reported these western birds: Red-naped sapsucker, Verdin, Cinnamon Teal, Abert's Towhee, Gila Woodpecker, Vermillion flycatcher, Lesser Goldfinch

January 10: Gary and Ann Carpenter report Pine Siskins at their feeder – first this season.

January 15: Brian Taber reports a Long-tailed Duck near the Jamestown-Scotland Ferry.

January 17: Bill Williams finds a Greater Yellowlegs at Chickahominy Riverfront Park

January 17: Hayes Williams reports from Gloucester: “We have been having a Purple Finch at our sunflower seed platform once in a while for the past month...sometimes a male and rarely a female. During the recent two icy days, they really moved in. A pair were there at least twice, sometimes two males, and sometimes three females. On one occasion, we briefly had a partially leucistic male. It was very whitish on the sides of the head and breast. None have been seen since the ice melted off the trees.”

January 20: Matt Anthony at W&M reports a Greater White-fronted Goose at Mainland Farm.

January 23: Matt Anthony and Nick Newberry find a Blue-headed Vireo at Bassett Hall Nature Trail

January 23: Lois Leeth reports from St. Augustine, FL: 3 White Ibises (sitting on a telephone line!!), 2 Eastern Brant, 8 Pied-bill Grebes, 6 Double-crested Cormorants, 1 Greater Scaup, 1 Great Egret, 10 Snowy Egrets around her lake.

January 24: Hayes Williams reports from Gloucester: “FOS Pine Siskins on our sunflower chips feeder. A small flock (8-10) argued with the Goldfinch and each other about 1 PM until all the seeds were gone. Purple Finches have been coming back to the sunflower seeds again yesterday and today. The pair of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers has started working on another tall Tulip Poplar tree together. Last week I discovered they have started working on the Foster Holly doing their waffle pattern in the same area as last year. I was surprised to see the sap running down the tree trunk. While I was up close to take a picture, a small bird came close to get sap but was spooked by me. I didn't see what it was. As soon as I moved away from the tree, a sapsucker was back working it again. Joyce and I both saw one of them working it several times during the week.”

January 26: Bill Williams reports Long-tailed Duck near the Jamestown--Scotland Ferry

January 26: Bill Williams reports a Greater Yellowlegs at Chickahominy Riverfront Park and Andy Hawkins reports the same species on Beecham Drive in Yorktown.

Welcome to our newest WBC members:

Joe Cade and Dena Proctor
Bob and Carolyn Gibbs
Katrina and Shawn Dash
Portia Belden
Barbara Houston
Joanne Shostak
Ned Rose
Jane Maule
Ginny Broome
Lois Shevlin

Hope to see you soon at a meeting or field trip.



Birders on the Chesapeake Bay

Photo by Barbara Houston

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 six scholarships. We can't do it without you!!

Feed the Bird(ers)!

We need your help with refreshments. Many thanks to Jan Lockwood, Sharon Plocher, Jennifer Trevino, and Master Naturalist Roger Gosden for volunteering to feed us at our February 18 meeting. We have 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.

CVWO's Spring Hawkwatch Begins Feb 10

By Brian Taber

The 19th consecutive season of the College Creek Hawkwatch will begin, weather permitting, on February 10th, at the smaller pull-off at the College Creek site on the Colonial Parkway, about 3 miles southeast of Williamsburg.

Sponsored by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, it's the only regular late winter and spring hawkwatch in Virginia. The hawkwatch is run by volunteers, mainly Brian Taber and Bill Williams, but others are always welcome to come and help. It usually runs from about 9 a.m. to noon or early afternoon, depending on the flight and weather. Earlier and later times of the day have been tried, but birds seem mainly to cross the James River there in the morning as the air warms up. It is not conducted in rain or snow or heavy wind. Other species, such as swallows, waterfowl and shorebirds are often seen as well. The hawkwatch runs through May. Please join us!

Great Backyard Bird Count Feb 13-16

By Zachary Slavin of the National Audubon Society

The next Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will be held February 13-16, 2015. This fun, free, family-friendly activity is a great way to introduce birders of all abilities to citizen science and is your chance to make sure your local birds are represented as part of the international count. Participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count is as simple as counting birds for as little as fifteen minutes on one or more days of the count then reporting the results online at BirdCount.org. Don't be fooled by the name—you can count absolutely anywhere you see birds – in your backyard, at your favorite local park, or even out your office window.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is powered by eBird, a program that helps you track your bird observations while making them available to other birders as well as researchers and conservationists. Regular eBird users can participate in the GBBC by submitting checklists to eBird as they usually would. Make sure your local birds are represented by getting out to count and by spreading the word about the GBBC. Also, don't forget to submit your photos taken during the GBBC weekend to the GBBC photo contest. You can check out some of the amazing winners from our 2014 contest for inspiration! Last year more than 142,000 people from 135 countries reported more than 4,200 species and over 17 million individual birds, providing an incredible snapshot of winter bird populations and distribution in North America and beyond. Get started today, and don't forget to make your local birds count!

The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with Bird Studies Canada and many international partners.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is made possible in part by sponsor Wild Birds Unlimited.



Photo by Judy Jones

BIRDING ON THE CHESAPEAKE.....JANUARY 21st...BIRDING MEMORIES



RING BILLED GULL *Photo by Barbara Houston*



NORTHERN GANNET *Photo by Shirley Devan*



BREACHING HUMPBACK *Photo by Inge Curtis*



WHALE OF A GOOD TIME *Photo by Cathy Millar*

CALENDAR

Sunday, February 1	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Thursday, February 5	Field Trip to Eastern Shore to net and band winter sparrows. See page 1 for details.
Saturday, February 7	Field Trip to Craney Island with Ruth Beck and Bill Williams. See page 2 for details.
Tuesday, February 10	CVWO's Spring Hawkwatch begins. See page 7 for details.
Saturday, February 14	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8 am. Tom McCary, Leader
Sunday, February 15	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Wednesday, February 18	WBC Meeting, 7:30 pm., Andrews Hall Room 101. Pearl Beamer, Wildlife Rehabilitator. Combined meeting with Virginia Master Naturalists. See page 1 for details.
Saturday, February 21	Birding the CBBT Islands by car. See page 2 for details.
Saturday, February 28	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 7 am., Leader TBA
Sunday, March 1	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Saturday, March 14	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8 am. Susan Powell, Leader
Saturday, March 15	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Wednesday, March 18	WBC Meeting, 7:30 in Andrews Hall, room 101