



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 31, No. 3

www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

March 2008

President's Corner

by Shirley Devan

If you're a birder, winter goes by fast and spring arrives early.

In my mind, winter starts with the Christmas Bird Count. Then on January 1, I launch my new "year list", and the chase begins to add as many winter species to my year list as fast as I can before the ducks and waterfowl migrate.

January is nesting time for some birds here in Virginia, as the owls and eagles pair up and mate in what seems the dead of winter. Often by the end of January, Bald Eagles and Great Horned Owls are incubating eggs. Mid-February brings the Great Backyard Bird Count, and Great Blue Herons start building their nests. Osprey are migrating back to our area now and building their nests. You can see several osprey nests at Greensprings Trail and along the Colonial Parkway. Signs of spring are everywhere—even at the end of February.

As I type this February 28, I am watching the live "Eagle Cam" at the Norfolk Botanical Garden on my computer. With its partner, the VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the Garden has a video camera focused on the nest of a pair of Bald Eagles. You may have read in the local papers of the "love triangle" and drama at this nest earlier in February. A younger female tried to displace the older female. But the "old gal" staged a comeback and the original pair was observed mating February 27. You can see this live drama on your computer at www.wvec.com/cams/eagle.html. Watch the local papers and newscasts for updates because this story has captured the attention and imagination of many. This opportunity to see the natural world "up close and personal" reveals birding behavior that often goes unnoticed. The Center for Conservation Biology at William and Mary is using this research opportunity to learn more about the behavior and nesting habits of Bald Eagles.

As spring advances, more nest cameras will come on line. In March Peregrine Falcon nest cameras around the coun-

try will become available. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology now has nest cameras inside two Barn Owl nests in Texas and California. They will have cameras in bluebird boxes later in the spring. Go to www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse/nestboxcam/.

If you want to see for yourself the early nesting of local birds, check out the Bald Eagle nest at Jamestown Island across from the Visitor Center Parking lot. I observed the pair on and around the nest last Sunday, February 24. Also, at York River State Park, Great Blue Herons are busy with their nests at the fishing pond near the Visitor Center. They'll be incubating in a couple of weeks.

Around your own neighborhood, be on the lookout for owl and hawk nests and let us know if you find one. If you've heard owls calling in your neighborhood, there's probably a nest nearby. Look for a "squirrel's nest" near the top of a loblolly pine tree. You just might see a Great Horned Owl sitting there.

"Official" spring may be three weeks away, but for birders, spring is here!

On a different note: Tom McCary, long-time Vice President of Programs for the Bird Club, is recuperating with his brother and sister-in-law in Midlothian after surgery to remove skin cancer on his heel. He sends his grateful appreciation to all who have sent cards, notes, and get well wishes. If you want to send a note to Tom, mail it to: 2331 Castlestone Road, Midlothian, VA 23113. Phone: 804-330-9382. He will be glad to hear from birding friends.

Thank you, Wild Birds Unlimited!

A big thank you to George and Valerie Copping for a \$400 check based on purchases by Club members during the last six months of 2007. Also, thanks to you members who purchase your seed from Wild Birds Unlimited and let them know you are a WBC member.

Welcome to New Member— Alfred Brasse

Officers

President Shirley Devan	220-6269 <i>sedevan52@cox.net</i>
Vice-President - Programs Alex Minarik	220-3382 <i>mrminarik@yahoo.com</i>
Vice-President - The Flyer Fred Blystone	229-4346 <i>fmb19481@verizon.net</i>
Treasurer Chuck Rend	220-9032 <i>carjean39@msn.com</i>
Secretary Mary Anne Fennell	566-2615 <i>mafjjf07@netzero.net</i>
Member-at-Large Sara Lewis	220-2042 <i>saraelewis@cox.net</i>
Member-at-Large Joanne Andrews	259-0867 <i>kaiviti37@hotmail.com</i>
Past President Bob Long	259-9559

Committee Chairpersons

Field Trips Tom Armour	229-2363 <i>swiftyarmour@cox.net</i>
Records & Bird Counts Bill Williams	229-1124 <i>juwil2@wm.edu</i>
Library Liaison Lee Schuster	565-6148 <i>dljschuster@cox.net</i>
Refreshments Barb Streb	565-0250 <i>barbarastreb@starpower.net</i>
Membership Jeanette Navia	565-2597 <i>jnavia@gmail.com</i>
Adopt-A-Highway John Fennell	566-2615 <i>mafjjf07@netzero.net</i>
Historian Cynthia Long	259-9559

Electronic Copies of *The Flyer*

If you are willing to receive *The Flyer* electronically and forgo having a hard copy mailed to you, please email me at fmb19481@verizon.net and let me know. The written content of the electronic copy is the same as the printed, but my plans are to include more color photos (by club members when possible) that relate to the articles. So far eight members have chosen to receive their newsletters this way.

It's Dues Time!

Enclosed with this issue is a renewal form for those still owing dues for 2008.

March 19th Meeting — *Choosy Birds Choose Whom?*



Our March speaker is William and Mary graduate student Joanna Hubbard, who will present the find-

ings of her research project in which she examines female coloration and sexual selection in Eastern Bluebirds. She is one of three recipients of the William Sheehan and Ruth Beck Ornithology Research Scholarships that the Williamsburg Bird Club awarded in 2007. She is a 2004 graduate of the University of Arizona with a degree in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology

The meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. in Millington Hall, Room 117, on the campus of the College of William and Mary. Refreshments will be provided by Alice Kopinitz.

March 15th Field Trip at Green Springs Trail

Meet leader Bill Williams in the Green Springs Trail Parking lot at 8 AM.

February Field Trip to York River State Park By Bill Williams

Saturday February 16, sandwiched in between two days with temperatures in the 60s, began near 40 degrees and stayed there throughout the morning. A brisk northerly wind racing off the York River made river scanning uncomfortable at best. Nevertheless, the 12 participants who braved the chill were able to find a total of 41 species between 7:45 and 10:30 a.m. For much of the walk the group had accommodating clusters of Cedar Waxwings perched overhead with a large ground-feeding flock of Dark-eyed Juncos hopping quietly nearby. A pair of Great Blue Herons was nest building in a dead oak tree above 4 Hooded Mergansers that were actively feeding in Woodstock Pond. Out on the choppy York were 38 distant but recognizable Canvasbacks, 7 Red-breasted Mergansers, and dozens of Ruddy Ducks, as well as 2 Brown Pelicans and 5 Bonaparte's Gulls, one of which gave a close-in passing view. It seemed that virtually anytime we looked up in the clear blue sky a Bald Eagle soon came into view.

After enduring the wind, the group retreated to the forest edges and eventually to a walking/biking trail just beyond the parking lot and visitor check-station. Birds there were

unusually scarce. Once we saw the Sharp-shinned Hawk perched above the trail we understood why. As the gang headed back towards their respective cars pleased with the results thus far, a small feeding flock made its presence known. Within a matter of minutes we added 2 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a very friendly Brown Creeper, a Carolina Chickadee, and several more Yellow-rumped Warblers. As those birds were tallied, a fly-by Belted Kingfisher and 4 American Crows made the morning list.

Our bird-watching caught the attention of Jerry Van Cleave, who lives adjacent to the park and walks and photographs wildlife there daily. He showed us a marvelous portfolio of the birds he had photographed in and around York River State Park including a stunning male Purple Finch and a Wild Turkey among many others. He was particularly anxious for us to help him identify a small bird that reminded him of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet but it had a yellow spot on the top of its head, streaky breast and a yellow spot at the base of its tail. When he showed us the superb photo he taken of his mystery species we quickly identified it as... you guessed it, ole' butter-butt himself, a Yellow-rumped Warbler!

The species list for the morning was submitted to eBird and to the Great Backyard Bird Count to help further the enormously valuable citizen science data base birders are helping to create.

Twelve participants were: Joanne Andrews, Tom Armour, Cathy Bond, Shirley Devan, Bill Kay, Alice and Seig Kopinitz, Alex and Mike Minarik plus dog Kate, Margaret Ware, Dorothy Whitfield, and Leader Bill Williams.

What May Be Next: Bird Species to Look For Around Williamsburg

By Bill Williams

Williamsburg's recent month-long visit by Virginia's second documented Townsend's Solitaire stands as true testament that "opportunity favors the prepared mind". The fact that Mac Mestayer had previous experience with this species set in motion a significant pilgrimage of tourists, more appropriately birding avitourists, to his yard, to document the bird and to enjoy its captivating behavior and calls. Few would have predicted that a Townsend's Solitaire would show up in one of our hamlets much less would become species number 341 on the cumulative Williamsburg area avian checklist. Curious minds then might ponder what bird species the Colonial Historic Triangle should be on the lookout for next. Below is a list of potential birds which have a realistic chance of being detected within our environs. You never know, but be prepared just in case.

March 2008

Important Note: For more detailed information about the occurrence of these species elsewhere in Virginia be sure to consult the "Gold Book", *Virginia's Birdlife: An Annotated Checklist*, Virginia Avifauna No. 7 by Stephen Rottenborn and Edward S. Brinkley. It is available from the Virginia Society of Ornithology for \$20.00.

Please be aware that all of these species are, for the most part, considered rare no matter where they occur in Virginia. Full documentation, especially photos, will greatly add to our understanding of their status and distribution.

Black-bellied Whistling Duck Always ephemeral, this species has been seen in the Richmond area and more recently near Suffolk. Any of our marsh areas, large BMP ponds, or ephemerally flooded fields might get them to stop here May–August.

Ross's Goos This small goose has been reported among Snow Goose flocks, and sometimes alone, as far inland as Augusta County and on the Eastern Shore. Winter at Hog Island, Surry County seems to be the most likely spot for this species.

Tufted Duck Look for this real rarity among flocks of Ring-necked Ducks on our fresh water ponds from late fall through early spring.

Pacific Loon With our proximity to a wide range of salinity regimes in both the York and James rivers and their tributaries, numerous loons not only spend the winter with us, but pass through during fall and spring. This species is being reported with increasing regularity, especially along the immediate coast. Our reservoirs hold great promise too.

Eared Grebe This is another species that has been seen both east and west of Williamsburg and one that may stop over on our area's waterways and larger lakes in the fall. This species requires careful scrutiny to separate it from Horned Grebe.

White-faced Ibis A western counterpart to our Glossy Ibis, it may be encountered among flocks of the latter during spring and fall migration. Hog Island, Surry County is a great location for this species to spend a few days.

White-tailed Kite One was seen just across the Chickahominy River in Charles City County in June 1988. Spring, especially April and May, offers the best time to find this species over open lands in our more rural areas.

Black Rail This rarely encountered species has declined precipitously across the mid-Atlantic. Any of our marshes may host this highly secretive creature, especially during

spring and fall migration.

Purple Sandpiper As the rock jetties at Yorktown age and begin to collect algae they should be scanned from late fall through early spring for this species.

Curlew Sandpiper This species is overdue at Hog Island, Surry County. It has been seen as close as the sandpiper flies at Craney Island, Portsmouth.

California Gull Any winter collection of gulls should be screened carefully for this species and for...

Thayer's Gull This species is among the continuum of so-called "white-winged" gulls and is a rare winter possibility on either of our two major watersheds.

Slaty-backed Gull Yet to be recorded in Virginia, this apparently nomadic gull is turning up at many seemingly improbable places throughout North America. It looks a great deal like a Great Black-backed Gull, so be cautious.

Pomarine, Parasitic, Long-tailed Jaegers All three jaeger species are possible along either of our rivers and/or on one of the local reservoirs during fall or spring migration, especially after and during strong easterly winds.

Eurasian Collared-Dove This recently established invasive species is now breeding in several Coastal Plain locations with Isle of Wight County being the closest. It seems only a matter of time before one or more will make their appearance in a local neighborhood.

White-winged Dove With breeding populations as close as North Carolina, this dove is now being reported in Eastern Virginia annually. Its stay will likely be short. Look for it in the fall and early winter at a feeder or possibly as a fly-by over farmlands.

Black-chinned Hummingbird Any hummingbird species seen after October 1 may be something other than a Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Even in late summer be aware that other species are possible. This species is a very possible feeder bird during the winter, as is...

Allen's Hummingbird All "different" looking hummingbirds and/or winter hummingbirds must be captured and identified by a hummingbird expert before their identification can be credibly verified.

Say's Phoebe Look for this species during fall migration or possibly in winter any place where a bird could fly-catch or snatch fruits from shrubbery.

Cave Swallow During late fall, especially November, scan flocks of Tree Swallows for one or more of them. It has be-

come almost an Eastern Shore regular at that time of year.

Varied Thrush This is a possible feeder bird or visitor among low shrubbery in winter.

Black-throated Gray Warbler Four of Virginia's six coastal plain records are from Newport News during fall and late winter into early spring.

Western Tanager Individuals are possible winter feeder birds and have been seen as close as Gloucester Point and Chippokes State Park.

Green-tailed Towhee One spent the winter and early spring of 2007 in Galax, Virginia. This is a possible winter feeder bird or visitor to any area with extensive brushy tangles.

Harris's Sparrow This is a possible winter feeder bird or fall migration transient.

Bullock's Oriole Our neighborhoods seem to hold a regular winter contingent of Baltimore Orioles. This species may become devoted to a feeding station and/or fruit bearing vegetation not unlike the orioles that were found with the Townsend's Solitaire.

White-winged Crossbill Most likely a feeder bird during severe winters to our north.

Some long-shots, but nevertheless possible on rural farmland or at Hog Island, Surry County are: **Long-billed Curlew**, **Gray Kingbird**, and **Lark Bunting**. **Bachman's Sparrow** would be a real long-shot at large tracts of post-logging secondary growth. Dare we hope for **Boreal Chickadee** at a feeder, **Bohemian Waxwing** among our throngs of Cedar Waxwings, or **Kirtland's Warbler** during spring migration from the Bahamas to Michigan? How about a **Black-throated Sparrow** at a feeder or **Lazuli Bunting**, the latter documented from Newport News and Norfolk!

February Bird 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!

Feb 3: From Bill Holcombe: This ended a good week of winter visitors to my feeders: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Red-winged Blackbird, Purple Finch (female), Juncos and White-throated Sparrows. Hermit Thrush on the edge of yard. These were joined by a hord of year 'rounders that emptied my feeder daily. These included Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers plus a Pileated on a nearby oak that

made it five woodpeckers that day. Best bird of the week was a Tree Sparrow under a neighbors feeder. First glance, I almost dismissed it as a Chipping Sparrow but fortunately looked closer as it pecked its way right up to the glass door between us.

Feb 3: Joe Doyle reports they have both male and female Pileated Woodpeckers at their suet feeders. Their feeders are designed so that birds have to grasp the feeder from below thus they are hanging upside down. First the male chomped down on the suet then took off and the female started eating. Joe and Grace also birded at Camp Peary and had 41 species.

Feb 3: Gary and Ann Carpenter report seeing a Palm Warbler in their yard.

Feb. 4: Linda Scherer emails “Around mid-morning I noticed a small flock of Cedar Waxwings in the holly directly outside one of my windows. I was able to get really close views, including seeing two of the birds passing a berry back and forth repeatedly. There were also two Waxwings in the adjacent camellia bush pulling the blossoms apart. They seemed to be eating the tiny seeds.”

Feb 6: Shirley Devan reports that at 7 p.m. in the parking lot of Human Services Building on Olde Towne Road she heard a Barred Owl hooting very close by—possibly in the trees around the facility.

Feb 8: Dick Turner reports “For the last four days Eve and I have had the joy of watching a flock of 30 to 40 cedar waxwings as they systematically stripped all the berries from the holly trees in our yard. They completely stripped one tree before starting the next and when finished with the hollies they started on the pyracantha berries. I have seen 15–20 sit in a line on a wire and pass berries down the line from bird to bird. I was never able to guess which bird was going to eat the berry. Is this behavior some kind of game they play while resting after gorging? We are out of berries, but will be planting more” (*See related article on page 7*).

Feb 9: Lois Leeth reports that she has dozens of Cedar Waxwings and Robins, Eastern Towhees, Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, White-throated Sparrows and Juncos in her yard.

Feb 10: Lois Leeth sees a Brown Pelican and 3 Double-crested Cormorants at Kingsmill Marina.

Feb 10: Tom and Jeanne Armour birded CBBT #1 in 25 to 30 MPH winds. They had 2 male Harlequin Ducks, a male Surf Scoter, 6 Long-tailed Ducks, 1 Red-breasted Merganser, 9 Ruddy Turnstones, plus the usual Brown Pelicans, D.C. Cormorants, and hundreds of Ringed-billed

Gulls. Bonaparte’s, Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls were also there in smaller numbers. On Ramp Road at the Eastern Shore refuge they had 30 Northern Shovelers, 6 Black Ducks, 2 Green-winged Teal, 6 Gadwall and a Hooded Merganser. They also saw 10 Northern Gannets flying low over the Bay on their return trip over the bridge.

Feb 11: Ruth Beck reports from her yard: Red-breasted Nuthatches, 2 Pied-billed Grebes and 2 Hooded Mergansers on the lake, Red-tailed Hawk and Bald Eagle, plus Eastern Bluebirds singing and in/out of boxes. She also observed a female Sharp-shinned Hawk take a Tufted Titmouse from the feeder area.

Feb 12: Lorena Walsh report a pair of towhees (male every day, female rarely) from January 18 through February 11 at her feeder on Carter’s Neck Rd near Camp Peary.

Feb 14: Tom Armour reports that in the morning he had at his feeder: 4 Purple Finches (1 males and 3 females), a Hermit Thrush and a Brown Thrasher. At the College Creek Hawk Watch everything he saw was on or near the water: 1 Red-throated Loon, 1 Horned Grebe, 2 Brown Pelicans, 1 Lesser Black-backed Gull, 10 Red-breasted Mergansers, 13 Scaup species and 100+ Ruddy Ducks

Feb 15: Lois Leeth reports four dozen Red-winged Blackbirds, 5 Cedar Waxwings, Carolina Wren, Chickadees, lots of sparrows and finches, Cardinals, Tufted Timouse, a Mockingbird and 10 Brown-headed Cowbirds (which she quickly chased off) in her yard.

Feb 15: Tom Armour reports that he now has 8 Purple Finches—3 males and 5 females—at his feeder. He and Jean and Herb and Jane Young had an American Kestrel, 25 American Black Ducks and 125 Dunlin at Cheatham Annex.

Feb 16: Eileen Weldon reports a Common Loon, that she believes to be a juvenile, on the lake at First Colony.

Feb 17: Tom Armour reports having a total of 18 species for the Great Backyard Bird Count—the highlights being his first Red-breasted Nuthatch since last September, a Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher and 12 Purple Finches.

Feb 17: Joe and Grace Doyle found 43 species of birds while birding at Camp Peary—the highlight being 100 to 125 Tundra Swans.



Photo by Tom Armour

Feb 17: Bart and Chandi Singer report a Yellow-breasted Chat at their log suet feeder at their home in Woodland Farms.

Feb18: Shirley Devan went to the YRSP Fishing Pier at Croaker Landing and reports seeing 200 or more Canvasbacks in addition to Ring-necked Ducks, Ruddy Ducks, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Mergansers, Brown Pelicans, Great Black-backed Gulls, Double-crested Cormorants and one Common Goldeneye.

Feb 21: Brian Taber has a first year female Baltimore Oriole at his feeder.

Feb 24: Tom Armour saw 100+ Brown Pelicans at the James River Ferry dock and following the ferry as it crossed the river were 300+ Bonaparte's Gulls. On the Surry side he saw 2 Lesser Black-backed Gulls. At Sunken Meadows there were 400 Gadwalls, 1 American Wigeon, 25 Tundra Swans and 6 Hooded Mergansers.

Feb 25: On their last outing at Camp Peary for February, Joe and Grace Doyle found 38 species of birds.

Feb 28: Tom Armour reports a Hairy Woodpecker and at least 10 Purple Finches at his feeder.

Birding and Biking—February 5

by Shirley Devan

With temperatures above 70, I abandoned my planned trip to the gym and decided to “bird and bike” instead. This usually means that I ride my bike to a “birdy” spot within 2 or 3 miles of home, stop and catch my breath while I bird. Then repeat as time allows. Head home just before dark.

Today I waited until after the high school traffic at Lafayette cleared and set out about 3:30 to the WISC complex just off Longhill Road beyond Lafayette High. I saw 3 Eastern Bluebirds fly across the road in front of me as I pedaled in. I rode first to the man-made pond behind the WISC building to look for the Ring-necked Ducks and Hooded Mergansers I saw there a few weeks ago. NOTHING. Not a bird in sight. Back on the bike.

I rode the bike/hike trail behind the WISC building back out to the main entrance road. That got my heart pumping. I landed right next to the swamp and parked my bike. I spent about 20 minutes scanning the water and looking for birds in the brush next to the path. I spotted many Canada Geese on the far side of the swamp. Finally, I saw two pairs of Hooded Mergansers on the far side.

Birds started flying in and out of the brush—Northern Cardinals, Pileated Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, American Robins. I looked in my bike bag for paper to

write my notes on. Nothing. Grrrrrrrr. Have to remember all these birds.

Back on the bike. I headed back down Longhill Road along the bike path and stopped at Longhill Swamp next to Lafayette High. Very birdy. Two more Pileated Woodpeckers, two Red-headed Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Great Blue Heron, White-throated Sparrow, Northern Mockingbird, more Northern Cardinals, Brown Thrasher; Ring-billed Gulls overhead along with Turkey Vultures.

Back on the bike and headed for home before sunset and my cell phone rings with my husband on the other end.

Much better than going to the gym.

HRBC Newport News Park February Walks

by Fred Blystone

WBC members Cathy Bond and I joined leader Jane Frigo and 11 other members of the Hampton Roads Bird Club for a walk in Newport News Park on February 3. There were a total of 60 species seen during the four hours. The highlights were two Great Horned Owls sitting together in a pine tree near the Japanese Tea House and an immature Bald Eagle chasing a Great Blue Heron over the reservoir. Though the heron's evasive fight looked very awkward, it appeared to be successful—we didn't notice it giving up any of it's catch

Ten people were there for the walk on the 17th, but only 45 species were seen. So far this year, we have seen a total of 66 species during the four walks.

Walks are conducted the 1st and 3rd Sundays year round in the park by the HRBC. Meet at the parking lot to the left of the Ranger Station around 7 AM.

A Very Berry Year

From Journey North & Audubon at Home



Photo by Steve Devan

Many members have reported seeing more Cedar Waxwings than normal in their yards this winter. Also there seems to be more American Robins arounds than usual. Both robins and waxwings are flocking species in winter. That's because they both eat fruit. Flocking is beneficial because it provides more eyes to discover new sources

of fruit. Lots of fruit means flock members don't have to worry about competing.



Photo by Steve Devan

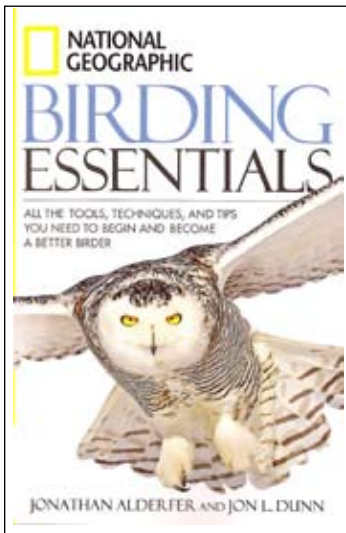
Robins are very sociable in winter, but not quite as sociable as waxwings, which are the least territorial of all songbirds. They often sit shoulder to shoulder when feeding on berries or flower petals. You can sometimes spot them passing one berry down a line of birds, each bird passing the berry to its neighbor before one

bird suddenly swallows it. This behavior may both reinforce social bonds with a flock and soften and break down the thick, waxy skin of some berries. Robins never pass food back and forth and usually don't sit quite as close together; they never sit shoulder to shoulder, even in trees.

As spring turns to summer, waxwings remain sociable but robins slowly become more territorial. Some robins will start squabbling in the feeding flocks and their switch to being territorial is what eventually breaks up their flocks.

***National Geographic Birding Essentials: All the Tools, Techniques, and Tips You Need to Begin and Become a Better Birder*, by Jonathan Alderfer and Jon L. Dunn; National Geographic, 2007; \$15.95**

By Jeanette Navia



My first introduction to birding was at a talk Bill Williams gave at the library about a year and a half ago. I followed that up with a bird walk at Greenspring Trail. Bill pointed out birds I'd never seen, like Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Ospreys, Bluebirds and Eastern Kingbirds. I joined the Bird Club and bought a pair of binoculars, trusting George at Wild Birds Unlimited to help me pick

out a good pair at a reasonable price. I put feeders on our back porch and, with the help of several field guides, began identifying house finches, titmice, goldfinches and cardinals. On the bird walks, there were many things I heard

from other birders that I didn't understand. And I couldn't fathom how birders, no matter how experienced, could look up at a bird and quickly declare its species name.

When I saw the beautifully illustrated book, *National Geographic Birding Essentials*, on the to-be-cataloged cart at the library, I flipped through it, and knew I needed to buy a copy. The writers have put together a comprehensive guide for the beginner-to-intermediate birder. They explain basics such as how to buy a pair of binoculars and use them effectively, and what information one can get (and can't get) from field guides (of course using as a sample the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* that they themselves edited). Distribution and range maps are explained as is the question we beginning birders often wonder: why are the species in field guides arranged the way they are?

Chapter 4 is devoted to the parts of a bird. Probably every part that could exist on any bird is discussed in detail – crowns, beaks, wings, flank, vent bands, scapulars, primaries, chins, carpal bars, tertial steps, everything. Chapter 5 talks about how to identify birds and gives examples of specific things to look for—eye rings, face masks, tail lengths and more. Chapter 6 discusses variation in birds. Females and males sometimes look similar, but in some species the differences are striking. Juveniles sometimes look very different from adults. Chapter 7 discusses the authors' twelve hardest species to identify.

Fieldcraft, the actual how-tos of birding, is described in Chapter 8. From obvious advice about listening for birds to the more peculiar practices of phishing and listing, it's all here. Birding hot spots, annual surveys, magazines and journals are discussed. Scopes, digiscoping, GPS units, listing software and other tools are mentioned. The last chapter is on taxonomy and nomenclature. A two-page glossary and a one-page bibliography, including websites, are included.

The only birding essential that is not discussed in detail are the specific differences between all the popular field guides, but it is understandable that the authors only discuss their own.

This is one of the many bird related books the WBC has purchased for the Williamsburg Regional Library.

February New Quarter Park Walks

February 9th was sunny and warm. Twelve participants followed Susan Powell as she led them around New Quarter Park. By the end of walk a total of 34 species had been seen or heard. Highlights of the day were a Bald Eagle and 6 species of woodpecker.

On a day with light fog and no wind, 13 participants joined leader Bill Williams for the February 23rd bird walk in New Quarter Park. Bill arrived in the parking lot at 6 am to check for American Woodcocks and was successful in hearing one fly up, plus 2 Great Horned Owls in the distance. By the end of the walk, the total for the day was 44 species, which again included all six woodpeckers.



Photo by Jeanette Navia

Participants on the February 23rd walk were (left to right): Mike Millin, Jeanne Millin, Rosanne Redin, Betty Peterson, Cathy Millar, Joe Piotrowski, Inge Curtis, Bob Long, Sara Lewis, Bill Williams, Joanne Andrews, Shirley Devan.

CALENDAR

Saturday, March 8	WBC Bird Walk, NQP, 8 am. Hugh Beard, Leader
Thursday, March 13	HRBC monthly meeting, Teta Kain, Speaker—"Australia: The Birds Down Under", 7 pm, Conference Room, Sandy Bottom Nature Center
Saturday, March 15	WBC Field Trip, Green Springs Trail, meet at trail parking lot to the left of Jamestown High School at 8 am, Bill Williams, Leader
Sunday, March 16	HRBC Bird Walk, Newport News Park, 7 am
Wednesday, March 19	WBC monthly meeting, Joanna Hubbard, Speaker—"Choosy Birds Choose Whom?", 7:30 pm, Millington Hall, Room 117
Saturday, March 22	WBC Bird Walk, NQP, 7 am, Bill Williams, Leader
Sunday, May 4	WBC Spring Bird Count (More information to follow)
May 16-18	VSO Annual Meeting (See February's issue of <i>The Flyer</i> or go to www.mountainlake-birding.com)
June 27-29	VSO Field Trip to High Knob (More information next month)