



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

November 2010



President's Corner

By Shirley Devan

Everybody is a scientist! Look in the mirror and you'll see a scientist. We're all Citizen Scientists and we can all contribute to research about birds and bird behavior.

A favorite winter project is about to start—Project FeederWatch, sponsored by Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada. It's a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders in our backyards and communities. When **lots** of citizen scientists do this and **record** their data in one spot (Cornell Lab), it becomes valuable. Researchers and ornithologists use the data to track trends in the long-term abundance and distribution of birds.

It only cost \$15 (or \$12 if you are a member of Cornell Lab of Ornithology) and for that you get a research kit that explains how it works plus a subscription to their newsletter, Bird-Scope. All the funds go to support the project—materials, staff support, web design, data analysis, and a year-end report.

Counting starts November 13 so you need to sign up soon. You can count through the first week in April. You can count for just an hour or two a day once a week, or more if you're really excited about your backyard birds. Plus it's a great way to learn more about our local birds. You can record your data on paper data sheets or record online.

Here is their web site with more info and some great photos and ID tips. Is that a House Finch or a Purple Finch? A Cooper's Hawk or a Sharp-shinned Hawk?

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>

Sign up by phone toll-free in the U.S.: 800-843-2473. Sign up by mail: Project FeederWatch, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, P.O. Box 11, Ithaca, NY 14851-0011

Sign up online: http://store.birds.cornell.edu/Project_FeederWatch_p/pfw-online.htm

In April, let us know what you found out about your backyard birds after counting them all winter!

Monthly Meeting

At the November meeting, Sandy Spencer, wildlife biologist for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service will present a program titled *My Experience with the US Fish and Wildlife Service Gulf Oil Spill Response*. Ms. Spencer was part of a US-FWS team dealing with the results of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. For three weeks the team, which was based in Grand Isle, Louisiana, assisted with the reconnaissance and recovery of oiled, injured or dead birds and other wildlife.

Plan to join us on November 17th at 7:30 PM in **Room 150**, Millington Hall, on the W&M campus. Mary Anne Fennell will be providing the refreshments.

November Field Trip to Little Creek Reservoir Park

Our field trip to Little Creek Reservoir Park will be on Saturday, 20th. Please plan on meeting leader Lee Schuster at the park at 8 PM. If you are not familiar with the park it is on Lakeview Drive in Toano. You turn off of Route 60 onto Forge Road (at the Toano Fire Station) and proceed for approximately 2.2 miles until you come to Lakeview Drive. Turn left on Lakeview and go about .3 miles until you see an entrance (with sign) for the park on your right hand side. If the entrance you go in has a boat ramp, you went too far down Lakeview Drive.

Proposed Slate for 2011 Officers

The Nominating Committee, consisting of Alex Minarik, Jeanette Navia and Joe Piotrowski, has submitted the following slate for 2011 board members for the WBC.

President—Shirley Devan

Vice President-Programs—Joe Piotrowski

Vice President-Editor of The Flyer—Fred Blystone

Secretary—Jennifer Boag

Treasurer—Charles Rend

Member-at-Large—Ann Carpenter and Jeanette Navia

Voting will take place at the November 17th meeting. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor at the meeting.

Officers

President	813-1322
Shirley Devan	<i>sedevan52@cox.net</i>
Vice-President (Programs)	871-3418
Joe Piotrowski	<i>joepiotrowski@cox.net</i>
Vice-President (The Flyer)	229-4346
Fred Blystone	<i>fmb19481@verizon.net</i>
Treasurer	220-9032
Chuck Rend	<i>carjean39@msn.com</i>
Secretary	565-1753
Alice Kopinitz	<i>askop4@cox.net</i>
Member-at-Large	253-1543
Chuck Litterst	<i>clitterst@aol.com</i>
Member-at-Large	565-2597
Jeanette Navia	<i>Jnavia@gmail.com</i>
Past President	259-9559
Bob Long	

Committee Chairpersons

Field Trips	564-4542
Susan Powell	<i>smapowell@cox.net</i>
Records & Bird Counts	229-1124
Bill Williams	<i>juwil2@wm.edu</i>
Library Liaison	565-6148
Lee Schuster	<i>dljschuster@cox.net</i>
Refreshments	565-0250
Barb Streb	<i>gandbstreb@verizon.net</i>
Membership/Webmaster	565-2597
Jeanette Navia	<i>jnavia@gmail.com</i>
Adopt-A-Highway	566-2615
John Fennell	<i>mafjff07@netzero.net</i>
Historian	Open

Summary of Bird Data

The latest version of Bill Williams' *Summary of Local Bird Data through 2009: Williamsburg, James City County, York County, Hog Island WMA, Surry County* can be downloaded from our club's website.

Wild Birds Unlimited

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

WBC Offers Two Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships. Deadline January 15, 2011

The Williamsburg Bird Club requests applications from Williamsburg, James City County, and York County students in grades 5 to 12 for the Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships, two full tuition (\$700) scholarships for a two week summer camp program in 2011 at the Nature Camp in Vesuvius, Virginia.

The deadline for applications is January 15, 2011. The Williamsburg Bird Club will contact the students who earn the scholarships in early February 2011.

Complete information and application is available on our club website at www.williamsburgbirdclub.org.

Elena was at the October 20th meeting and thanked the club for her scholarship and indicated that she would apply again in 2011.



Shirley Devan and Elena Sanders, one of the recipients of the 2010 Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships.

October 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!

Oct. 1: Martha Briggs reports having her first ever Rose-breasted Grosbeak at her feeder.

Oct. 3: Virginia and George Boyles joined leader Jane Frigo and 6 other birders for the Hampton Roads Bird Club walk in Newport News Park. The Fall Festival of Folklore being held in the park resulted in less varied habit and led to fewer species than normal being seen. Osprey, Bald Eagle and Belted Kingfisher were seen at the boat landing. Common Yellowthroat, Brown Thrasher, Blackthroated Blue Warbler, Eastern Bluebirds and Red-breasted Nuthatch were seen by the archery range. While walking the power lines, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Wood-Pewee and Palm

Warbler were spotted. A total of 48 species were identified during the morning.

Oct. 7: Tom Armour reports a late female Ruby-throated Hummingbird at their flowers and feeder.

Oct. 10: Grace and Joe Doyle spent part of a beautiful day birding at Camp Peary. Among the 23 species that were seen were 2 Palm Warblers, 8–10 Yellow-rumped Warblers, 3+ Eastern Phoebes, at least 4 or more Red-headed Woodpeckers and a stunning Bald Eagle that stood out beautifully against a clear blue sky.

Oct. 10: While on the Greensprings Nature Trail, Bill Williams sees a **Bicknell's Thrush**, only the 9th record for our area.

Oct. 12: Lynda Blair sees her FOS White-throated Sparrows. She reports "I'm always happy to see these little guys return—they have lovely white bibs."

Oct. 14: On her morning neighborhood walk, Shirley Devan spotted a White-throated Sparrow foraging in the underbrush before she started.

Oct. 17: Bill Williams saw two female Black-throated Blue Warblers on the Greensprings Trail. He also had an immature White-crowned Sparrow at Mainland Farm.

Oct. 17: Virginia and George Boyles and 11 other birders joined Jane Frigo for the Hampton Roads Bird Club walk at Newport News Park. A total of 71 species were identified during the morning, including an immature White-crowned Sparrow seen at the Arboretum. It was also a good morning for woodpeckers with 7 species spotted.

October 18: Shirley Devan and a friend drove around Mathews County to visit most of the spots on the VA Birding and Wildlife Trail's Mathews County Loop. They spent the most time at Bethel Beach. When they arrived around 9 PM the tide was falling and numerous Sanderlings and Dunlin were foraging at the water's edge. Forster's Terns were diving right in front of them. Highlights for Shirley were the two Northern Harriers flying over the marsh at Bethel Beach and two more at New Point Comfort. There were twenty species seen at the Bethel Beach Natural Area Preserve.

Oct. 23: Tom Armour reports seeing 100+ Forster's Terns at the Kingsmill Marina.

Oct. 28: Dan Cristol spots two Cattle Egrets in a horse pasture at Drummond's Field near Greensprings (previously reported

late date for this species in our area was September 28). Also present were some Least Sandpipers.

Oct. 28: Inge Curtis took photographs of two Belted Kingfishers who appeared to be having a disagreement.

Photo by Inge Curtis



Oct. 29: Tom Armour reports having a Pine Siskin at his feeder—first one this fall.

Oct. 29: Shirley Devan's first post on Facebook from Australia where she and Steve are vacationing. I (the editor) have been following their trip on Facebook and have been enjoying the photos that she has posted there. I'm hopeful that Shirley will write an article for an upcoming newsletter and include some of the wonderful pictures I have seen online.

Oct. 31: Bill Williams reports a fly-over Pine Siskin at Greensprings.

The Big Sit at Kiptopeke

By Brian Taber

On Oct. 10th, Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory participated, for the 12th year, in the Big Sit, sponsored by the New Haven, Connecticut Bird Club, Bird Watcher's Digest and Swarovski Optik. The event records all birds seen on one day from a small circle. Our circle is on the Kiptopeke Hawkwatch platform.

We set a new record for our site with 88 species, surpassing the 85 in 2006 and 81 last year. The weather was warm and cloudless. There were many thousands of Yellow-rumped Warblers, but the only other warblers we managed were Northern Parula, Blackpoll, Pine, Palm and Common Yellowthroat.

Highlights included 6 new species for the event: Ruddy Duck, Northern Gannet, American Bittern, Pileated Woodpecker, White-eyed Vireo and Blue Grosbeak. Wilson's Snipe and Gray-cheeked Thrush were nice surprises as well.

The main counters were Lynn Davidson, who started at 5 AM, Hal Wierenga, our hawkcounter Zak Poulton, our songbird bander Calvin Brennan, Bob and Thuy Anderson, Harry Armistead and me (starting at 5:45 AM).

Results from all of the circles can be found at the Bird Watcher's Digest website.

And...as a bonus, it just happened to be the best day of the year so far at the hawkwatch with 2,045 hawks, 138 of which were Peregrines!

Birding on Outer Banks in October

Article and Photos by Shirley Devan



Bodie Lighthouse and Tri-colored Heron

I joined three non-birding friends at Manteo October 6–9 for a relaxing “girls’ week” at a rental house on the Roanoke Sound.

Of course I took my binoculars and spotting scope with the intention of slipping off to Pea Island or Bodie Island Lighthouse for some quality birding time.

The four of us took a road trip Thursday to Ocracoke Island and enjoyed free ferry rides to and from Ocracoke—after waiting about an hour and a half on each side to board the ferry. This on a weekday in October. Hard to imagine what the wait time is in the summer time!

I haven't been to Ocracoke in 25 years. All of us were wide-eyed (and not in wonder!) at the scope of develop-

ment on that tiny island. Hardly a bare spot that had not been paved over and the traffic was bumper to bumper—large trucks with serious fishing equipment.

For me the best part was the time on water riding the ferry. Each trip is about 40 minutes on a ferry about the size of the Jamestown ferries. Lots of gulls, terns, herons, egrets flying all around. We passed several exposed sand bars at low tide where I could see hundreds of Brown Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants loafing in the warm afternoon temperatures. Great Egrets were taking off and landing from every shore. Caspian Terns, Royal Terns, and Forster's Terns were swooping and diving all around the ferry. The return trip at sunset gave us an extra bonus with beautiful colors behind us as we headed to Hatteras. I definitely recommend the **free** ferry ride between Hatteras and Ocracoke. Next time I'll just park the car at the Hatteras ferry terminal, ride back and forth all day as a walk-on passenger and skip the town of Ocracoke.

I was only able to convince one of my three housemates to venture to Pea Island with me Friday morning. We scheduled a leisurely 8:00 AM departure and arrived just as an organized bird walk was starting at the trail next to the restrooms at the Visitor Center. The leaders were volunteers at the NWR and graciously welcomed us to the group of about 10 birders already onboard. The leaders advised us that several American White Pelicans were at the north end of the impoundment. With the recent rains, the impoundments were very full of water and we found very few shorebirds (yellowlegs) and only a few wading birds (Great Blue Herons, Tri-colored Herons and Great Egrets) hunched up on the few shrubby islands. The legions of wintering waterfowl had not yet arrived but we did see Pied-bill Grebes, American Wigeon, American Black Ducks and Mallards, plus Canada Geese and swans. The sun was behind our backs as we walked out on the dike, and we enjoyed clear blue skies and warming temperatures. A great morning to be outdoors.

In the afternoon, the place to be with the sun at your back is the Bodie Island Lighthouse observation platform overlooking the marsh. I timed our arrival for about 4:30 so I could spend a bit of time on the trail down to the sound. Again, mainly egrets and herons lurking in the tops of the vegetation and lots of Northern Flickers moving around. The trail by the canal was overgrown so I did not spend a lot of time there. I trekked back to the car to get my scope and my friend who had been napping. About 5:30 we both headed out to the observation platform at the marsh. Perfect timing —sunset behind us and birds moving to roost for the evening.

The water level was quite high in the marsh as well and we saw only yellowlegs from the shorebird family. Through the scope we got killer looks at Great Egrets, Tri-colored Herons, Great Blue Herons, an Osprey, and a few waterfowl—Black Ducks and Pied-bill Grebes. About 100 Boat-tailed Grackles descended to the nearby railings of the ramp up to the observation tower. What a racket! They were oblivious to the two of us photographing them from the deck above.



The greatest sight was a female Northern Harrier flying over the marsh and flushing all the grackles, blackbirds and cowbirds. She landed and I found her in the scope —beautiful warm brown plumage with the sun shining directly on her.

The Bodie Lighthouse is wrapped in scaffolding and looks like a short cell tower! We assumed the lighthouse was being painted and repaired. Whatever the reason, the birds love the new architecture. As the sun set, the blackbirds congregated on the top rungs of the scaffolding. Hundreds of birds arrived at a time. Quite a sight and sound. We drove off into the sunset about 6:30.

If you go down to the Outer Banks, these two spots should be on your “not to miss” list of birding hot spots.

Bird Walk at Shirley Plantation

Tom McCary and Randy Carter will lead a bird walk around Shirley Plantation starting at 8:30 AM on December 12. This is a wonderful place to bird and includes a number of different habitats. Normally you will find a nice variety of duck species and it's also a good place to look for White-crowned Sparrows. In addition to this birding opportunity, from December 1 to January 6, visitors to Shirley Plantation can enjoy guided tours of the Great House featuring family Christmas stories dating back to the 1700s. Please call 1-800-232-1613 to check on cost of bird walk and tours of the Great House.



Volunteer Opportunity—winter birding/surveys on the Great Dismal Swamp NWR

The refuge is looking for 5–6 volunteers to conduct winter bird surveys on Great Dismal Swamp NWR (both in Virginia & North Carolina Portions). Surveys will be 1 day a week and will start in Nov and run through mid-March. If you are interested contact Deloras Freeman (Volunteer Coordinator) at 757-986-3705.

750,000th Bird at Kiptopeke Hawkwatch

The Kiptopeke Hawkwatch is approaching a remarkable milestone, 750,000 birds! If you would like to learn more and even enter the cvwo contest to predict the species, date and time of the 750,000th bird...see the button on the left side of their Home Page and visit the General Blog for regular updates at www.cvwo.org.

Williamsburg Bird Club Book Review

By Jeanette Navia



National Geographic Bird Coloration, by Geoffrey E. Hill. National Geographic, 2010. ISBN 9781426205712. \$25. 260 p. Williamsburg Library call number 598.147 HIL.

In the electronic version of October's The Flyer, the bird pictured in Joe Piotrowski's Recycle Bin Photos was a

house finch with yellow on its breast. How did this yellow come about? I learned from reading *National Geographic Bird Coloration* that red breasts on house finches come from carotenoids in the seeds, fruits and buds that make up the birds' diet. No doubt this bird, living in the desert, had a different diet than birds in Virginia. The drab yellow color would result if it ingested fewer red carotenoids, had poor nutrition, or was infected with the single-celled parasite coccidia. Most (but not all) reds, yellows and oranges in birds' feathers and bare parts (legs, bills, feet, eyes, bare skin on faces) are a result of red or yellow carotenoids in insects, seeds, fish and other foods.

Black, gray and earth tones come primarily from melanin. Melanin is present in nearly all birds' feathers to some degree, and in the skin of most birds. Besides color, melanin adds structural support to feathers. There is an example of a young albino Great Frigatebird unable to fly, its feathers terribly worn out. Researchers speculated that its lack of melanin led to premature wearing of its feathers on long flights over sea.

Most blues, whites and iridescent colors of hummingbirds and grackles are produced by specific microstructures of the feathers. The physics of how these colors are achieved is explained in the book. Greens are often produced by combining microstructure coloration and yellow carotenoids. The Prothonatory Warblers we heard about in our last meeting get their beautiful yellow from dietary carotenoids and its bluish wings from structural coloration. Carotenoids, melanin, and structural coloration are the most common ways birds are colored, but there are a few other ways, which Hill describes.

How birds are colored is only part of this fascinating book by ornithologist Geoffrey E. Hill. In 2006, Hill co-edited a scholarly two-volume compendium titled *Bird Coloration*. While editing it, he "could not help but despair at the huge number of fascinating discoveries that were locked away from a broader readership." He decided to write this book for birders and nature enthusiasts. Topics include how birds see, environmental influences on coloration, the genetics of bird coloration, choosing mates by color, how and why birds use color to hide or to reveal themselves, how birds use color to signal status, the significance of variations in color patterns for individual identification, and color in the evolution of birds (the oranges/rust coloration of ducks is never from carotenoids; carotenoid pigmentation came later in the evolution of birds).

There are beautiful pictures on nearly every page. There are also tips for birders regarding identification using color in boxes throughout the text. I would recommend this for anyone interested in birds, birding, or in natural history. It is one of the more fascinating books I've read in a long time.

The Williamsburg Bird Club donated this book to the Williamsburg Regional Library

WBC October Walks

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



Photo by Jeanette Navia

Geoff Giles led the October 9th walk at New Quarter Park. He wrote "the WBC bird walk was greeted by a glorious day, with early fall showing the park at its loveliest. Although the air was still and the birds not stirring as much as they could have, there were 28 species in evidence. The most active were the Red-bellied and Pileated Woodpeckers, which were vocal and visible from several vantage points on the walk.

From left to right: Sharon Plocher, Jennifer Trevino, David Taylor, George Boyles, Virginia Boyles, Nelson Ensley, Geoff Giles, Stanley Stainaker, Jean Balulanski and Betty Peterson.

Missing: Jeanette Navia, Bob & Cynthia Long and Margaret Ware

Seven birders joined leader Hugh Beard for the October 13th field trip to Chippokes Plantation State Park. Hugh wrote "it was a lovely day for birding. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, the temperature was pleasant (I am guessing around 50), and the high winds that were predicted held off until almost 11 AM. All-in-all, the weather gods were cooperative. We saw some interesting birds and behavior. Some of the highlights were 1) a really good look at a group of meadowlarks, 2) seeing 4 Bald Eagles (2 mature and 2 immature), and 3) watching a Northern Rough-winged Swallow disrupt a large flock of cowbirds continuously, possibly using them to flush insects. Oh yeah, I forgot about the flock of Tree Swallows that appeared out of nowhere while we were waiting for the ferry. They just seemed to keep coming, appearing out of the sky over the James River."

In addition to Hugh the participants were Joanne Andrews, Inge Curtis, Shirley Devan, Anne Haupt, Jan Lockwood, Cathy Millar and Betty Peterson. A total of 41 species were seen during the day. *There was no photo taken of the participants.*

On a clear, calm morning with temperature in the low 40s at the start of the walk and a spectacular full moon setting to the west over the mist-shrouded Queens Creek marsh, Bill Williams led 13 other birders on the October 23th walk at New Quarter Park. A total of 35 species were seen, the highlight being a Snowy Egret.

Front Row: Virginia Boyles, Jennifer Trevino, Richard Smith, Stan Stainaker and Sharon Plocher.

Rear Row: George Boyles, John Schwenkler, Bill Williams, Geoff Giles, Joe Piotrowski, Laura Taylor and David Taylor



Photo by Jeanette Navia

Missing from picture: Margaret Ware and Jeanette Navia

Photos from Members



Photo by Jeanette Navia

A mist-shrouded Queens Creek during the October 23rd walk at New Quarter Park.



Two additional photos taken by Jeanette Navia during the October 23rd walk.



Three Belted Kingfisher photos by Inge Curtis.



Inge Curtis took this picture of a Yellow-rumped Warbler.



Bird ID from Recycle Bin 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 November



October's's bird is a House Finch.

CALENDAR

Sunday, Nov. 7	HRBC Bird Walk, Newport News Park, 7 AM, Jane Frigo, Leader
Saturday, Nov. 13	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8 AM, Susan Powell, Leader
Wednesday, Nov. 17	WBC Monthly Meeting. See Front Page
Saturday, Nov. 20	WBC Field Trip to Little Creek Reservoir Park, Lee Schuster, Leader. See Front Page
Sunday, Nov. 21	HRBC Bird Walk, Newport News Park, 7 AM, Jane Frigo, Leader
Saturday, Nov. 27	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 7 AM, Bill Williams, Leader
Saturday, Dec. 11	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8 AM, Geoff Giles, Leader
Sunday, Dec. 19	Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count. Details will follow in the December Flyer!

Save the Date!

The 34th Annual Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count will be on **Sunday, December 19, 2010**. We hope you will participate. Details will follow in the December Flyer!