



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 30, Number 4

Website: [www.wmbgbirdclub.com](http://www.wmbgbirdclub.com)

April 2006

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Bob Long

Come help celebrate Earth Day 2006 at New Quarter Park on April 22. We have been invited to staff a display table with information about the Williamsburg Bird Club and birding in general. The display will likely include brochures, exhibits, binoculars etc. George Copping and Greg Millslagle at Wild Birds Unlimited will assist us. Bird club volunteers are needed from 10 am to 3 pm to conduct short bird walks in the general vicinity and to discuss backyard birds, houses, feeders, etc. Please let me know (phone: 259-9559) if you'd like to participate for 1 or 2 hours during this event. This is a great opportunity to promote our bird club and its activities. Thanks.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

All club meetings start at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 in Millington Hall at William and Mary. Mark these Wednesday dates on your calendar:

**April 19:** Brenda Tekin, a Wildlife Photographer who lives in Charlottesville but travels widely to photograph birds and other wildlife, will present "Digiscoping – The Basics." The slide show presentation will include digiscoping equipment options and results of other digiscopers. She will also share some of her photographs; show us how "digiscoping" works; and how she takes those wonderful pictures you see on her web site: <http://www.birdsofvirginia.com/>. (Digiscoping is the name of the technique of combining a digital camera with a spotting scope to obtain sharp, close-up photographs of distant objects – in Brenda's case, birds and wildlife.)

**May 17:** Thelma Dalmas, Treasurer of the Virginia Society for Ornithology who lives in Evington, VA, will present a slide show, "Spring on Warbler Row." Warbler Row is a very "birdy" forest service road in Botetourt County, famous for warblers and wildflowers in May. After her presentation, you'll still have a couple of weeks to

travel to Warbler Row to add some warblers to your year or life list. Look for more information in the May newsletter.

## FIELD TRIP TO DISMAL SWAMP

Alexandra Minarik will lead our Saturday, April 22, 2006, field trip to the dismal swamp. Meet by **6:00 a.m.** at Colony Square Shopping Center parking lot so we can form carpools and get an early start for the hour drive to Suffolk. We'll bird the Jericho ditch area at the swamp and make the usual stop at the service station in Suffolk before we get started. We will leave the Swamp at about 11 a.m. to head back to Williamsburg. Bring bug spray, water, snacks/lunch. Long sleeves, long pants, and a hat are recommended attire!

Over two hundred species of birds have been identified on the refuge since its establishment; ninety-six of these species have been reported as nesting on or near the refuge. Birding is best during spring migration from April to June when the greatest diversity of species (particularly warblers) occurs. Two southern species, the Swainson's warbler and Wayne's warbler (a race of the Black-throated Green warbler) are more common in the Great Dismal Swamp than in other coastal locations.

## APRIL BIRD WALKS

**April 8, 8:00 a.m.:** Tom Armour will lead the regular 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday Bird Walk at New Quarter Park. Meet in the parking lot near the Park Office. New Quarter Park is located at the end of Lakeshead Drive, which lies between the Queens Lake subdivision and the Colonial Parkway. From Williamsburg take the Colonial parkway toward Yorktown, turn right at the Queens Lake sign, then another quick right onto Lakeshead Drive, which ends at the park.

**April 16, 7:00 a.m.:** Jane Frigo will lead the regular 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday walk at Newport News Park sponsored by the Hampton Roads Bird Club. Meet at the Park Office parking lot. Jane's Phone #: 873-0721.

**April 22, 7:00 a.m.:** Bill Williams will lead the regular 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday bird walk at New Quarter Park. Meet in the parking lot near the park office.

## THANKS FOR THE REFRESHMENTS

Barb Streb, Chair of our Refreshments Committee, has found some very good cooks in our club. In February, Elizabeth Morgan brought the goodies we enjoyed after the meeting. In March, Gail Mann and Janet Curtis teamed up to bring pastries. In April, thank Marilyn Zeigler when you see her at the meeting because she is bringing our refreshments this month. Thanks to Barb and her team.

## COASTAL VIRGINIA WILDLIFE OBSERVATORY IN MARCH

By Brian Taber and Jethro Runco

March 31: Per Brian Taber, this was a good week at College Creek Hawkwatch on the James River near Williamsburg, as temperatures turned much milder. Since the 24<sup>th</sup>, we have tallied 178 hawks and vultures over 6 days, with today, March 31<sup>st</sup>, the nicest weather, but the least migration. There were only 5 birds and virtually none of the many Ospreys and Bald Eagles we usually see milling about and fishing, if not actively migrating. We are apparently in between waves of migrants, as even the Tree Swallows were not very numerous today. Our total of 803 represents the second-highest February/March total and is ahead of last year's pace when a new season record of 1445 was set. Other migrants have included Rough-winged Swallows, Great Egrets, Yellow-throated Warblers, and hundreds of Double-crested Cormorants. On March 27<sup>th</sup>, we found a White M Hairstreak butterfly, rarely seen around here.

March 31, songbird bander Jethro Runco reports from CVWO's First Landing State Park (Virginia Beach) banding station that March 30 was not quite the busiest day of the season. We did catch an older female Red-winged Blackbird that was very sexy. Today March 31, we saw a new wave of new Yellow-rumped Warblers, but not much else. And still no neotropical migrants. The best bird of the day was a Slate-colored Junco which might be the only one we catch this season. All in all, today was a nice day with the warm weather and the light winds through the morning. Five birds for the 30<sup>th</sup>: 1 Yellow-rumped Warbler, 1 Swamp Sparrow, 2 Hermit Thrush, 1 Red-winged Blackbird. Eighteen birds for the 31<sup>st</sup>: 15 Yellow-rumped Warblers, 1 Slate-colored Junco, 1 Hermit Thrush, 1 Song Sparrow.

On a non-bird note, the last two days have really

brought out the snakes and skinks. We have seen two different Black Racers, one Ribbon Snake, and at least ten different Northern Water Snakes. We have been getting quick glimpses of several small skinks. I have not been able to get a good enough look at them yet to identify them, but hopefully I will get some of those pinned down shortly. We have been having up to three broad-headed skinks at our house here on the park. Also heard from some of the rangers here that they had seen a black rat snake two days back as well.

Brian and Jethro encourage folks to come out to their stations and join in the fun as migration begins in earnest in April.

## BIRDS AT CAMP PEARY IN MARCH

Joe and Grace Doyle keep tabs on the birds at Camp Peary and visited three times in March – the 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup>. March 5 they found 40 species with the highlight being Ospreys on the nest in the York River. Birds found all three weeks were: Double-crested cormorants, Great Blue Heron, Canada Goose, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler, Northern Cardinal, White-throated Sparrow, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, House Finch, and House Sparrow.

March 5 highlights of 39 species: Pied-billed Grebe, Tundra Swan, Mute Swan, Gadwall, Killdeer, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, and Eastern Meadowlark.

March 12 highlights of 39 species: Mute Swan, Bald Eagle, Downy Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Gray Catbird.

March 19 highlights of 30 species: a pair of American Kestrels, Northern Flicker, Brown Thrasher, Eastern Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, and Eastern Meadowlark.

## MARCH 2006 BIRD SIGHTINGS

*Report your backyard birds and local sightings to Shirley Devan at 220-6269 (evening phone) or [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net) (home email). If you encounter interesting birds on your vacation/travels, please share!*

**March 1:** Dorothy Whitfield reports a Hairy Woodpecker at her suet feeder. March 2, she finds a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. March 3, she finds a

Bullock's Oriole moving through. Her neighbor also reported two Bullock's Orioles.

**March 3:** Shirley Devan reports from Longhill Swamp – highlights were Winter Wren, Red-headed Woodpecker investigating nest holes, Great Blue Herons mating, a Phoebe, and a Pileated Woodpecker.

**March 4:** Shirley Devan and Fred Blystone joined the Richmond Audubon Society at Dutch Gap/Henricus Park on the James River near Hopewell. Betsy Saunders was the trip leader. 39 species spotted. Highlights included: Tree Swallows, Northern Shovelers, Wood Ducks, Wilson's Snipe (5 very cooperatively perched on a log in the creek), Northern Pintail, and a Red-shouldered Hawk building a nest in a tree next to the parking lot.

**March 5:** Eleanor Young and Fred Blystone joined seven other birders and leader Jane Frigo on the regular walk at Newport News Parks on Sunday, March 5. Forty-six species were seen. The highlights of the walk were a Red-headed Woodpecker and a good look through a scope at a mature Bald Eagle. Looking forward to seeing what spring migration will bring to the park.

**March 6:** Bill Williams reports 75 Tundra Swans flew over The Williamsburg Landing about 4:00 p.m. That evening an American Woodcock was calling and displaying behind the 7-Eleven at the junction of Jamestown Road and Sandy Bay Road near the Tandem Health Care Center.

Dorothy Whitfield reports two dozen Mourning Doves, a Northern Flicker, her "regular" Purple Finch, and a female Hairy Woodpecker.

Shirley Devan reports 6 Hooded Mergansers in the pond at the intersection of Route 199 and Route 5.

March 7: Joe Doyle reports an Osprey at Kingsmill.

**March 8:** Dorothy Whitfield reports an Eastern Towhee in her yard.

Background: At the February meeting Grace Doyle noted the mating of the Red-shouldered Hawks in their neighborhood on the lake in Kingsmill. Today, Joe and Grace report the Red-shouldered Hawks defending their territory and devoting considerable time and effort to driving a Red-tailed Hawk away. They observed both Red-shouldered Hawks persistently dive bombing the Red-tailed Hawk when it was perched as well as chasing it up and down the lake! After the male and female Red-shouldered Hawks successfully drove the Red-tailed Hawk away, they celebrated by mating in the top of a nearby tree! Later, Joe and Grace saw one of the Red-shouldered Hawks sitting on a tree branch about 20 yards from their back deck enjoying a snake!

**March 8:** Marjorie Sunflower Sargent and Angie Silverstar, who relate the two following wild bird encounters at College Landing Park:

"Two happenings that might be of interest are we sighted a large mute swan at College Landing Park on South Henry Street near Route 199 intersection. He had decidedly bright pink markings on his head, but was dingy gray, not white. He appeared exhausted and stayed resting on the bank for three days. I called the wildlife agent and he rushed over because he had never before seen a live wild mute swan. When asked why the swan was not white, he told us that that particular area was very badly polluted and the polluted water had dyed the bird grey."

"It was at this same area – College Landing Park – that we found "Teddy." Or rather our Labrador, Wampum, found Teddy. Teddy was hanging upside down by one foot from a tree on the bank. He was not moving much. He was completely wrapped in fishing line and hanging from the line. Angie put Wampum in the car and then Angie climbed up and cut him loose and she patiently unsnarled him. She called me to drive over with a box to put him in as he appeared to have an injured wing. We couldn't tell what kind of bird Teddy was, but he was large – 13 to 14 inches, with a bright red cap on the back of his head and a black mustache. With Wampum the hero, in the back seat, we drove Teddy to the Peninsula Emergency Veterinary Clinic in Yorktown, near Newport News. Other members of the club may wish their phone number (757) 874 – 8115. They treat wild injured birds. It was evening rush hour and the trip was long. Teddy began to feel better on the drive, now that he was warm and untangled. He had a funny voice for a bird. He muttered "wick wick wick." Teddy received wonderful care at the hospital, was pronounced sound, and able to return to the wild. We were asked to wait another two hours while he continued to regain his strength. It was ten o'clock at night when a very happy Teddy was released back at College Landing Park. We were told he was a large male Northern Flicker."

**March 10:** En route to York River State Park, Shirley Devan reports seeing an American Kestrel on Riverview Road. At the park, I observed 4 Brown Pelicans on the York River behind the visitor center among the gulls. The Osprey platform behind the center was vacant but a lone Osprey was seen perched in a tree down the river. Perhaps waiting for a mate? Also saw an Eastern Bluebird checking out one of the boxes near the parking lot and several Bald Eagles perched and soaring overhead. On the same day, I hiked the trail behind Bassett Hall and the Williamsburg Inn running parallel to the golf course. I was with a non-birding friend with a dog, so I was not

expecting so see much. It turned out to be a birdy spot – saw 4 Red-headed Woodpeckers without even trying, plus Ring-neck Ducks, Great Blue Herons, Canada Geese, Downy Woodpeckers, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers.

**March 11:** Tom Armour reports 60 Tundra Swans fly over our home north bound and talking.

**March 11 and 12:** Dorothy Whitfield had Pileated Woodpeckers visit her suet feeder each day. Also, she finds the first tick of the season.

**March 12:** Gil and Jeanne Frey report a new Bald Eagle nest at Cobham Bay in Surry County. This is brand new this winter. It appears that the female is sitting on eggs right now. The male spends a lot of time in the immediate area guarding.

Bill Holcombe reports two Red-shouldered Hawks flying in fighter plane formation swooping through the yard, with the leader carrying what appeared to be a Robin.

**March 13:** Brian Taber reports from the College Creek Hawkwatch: East and southeast winds Saturday and southwest winds Sunday, coupled with very mild temperatures, brought good flights over the weekend, March 11 & 12, past College Creek Hawkwatch, on the James River near Williamsburg. The previous daily record, over 9 years, for Black Vultures was 19 and the season record was 71, so Tom Armour, Bill Williams and I were quite surprised that the weekend total was an amazing 57 Black Vultures, 50 of those coming on March 11. The season total for that species now stands at 80. There were also 62 Turkey Vultures, some Ospreys, Red-tailed Hawks, and a Cooper's Hawk, for an excellent 2-day total of 129. Butterflies were frequently seen flying out over the water as well.

Brian Taber reports again: "There was an early Barn Swallow in Williamsburg this morning."

Ruth Beck reports 3 Yellow-throated Warblers in her yard. "Can Blue-gray Gnatcatchers be far behind?"

**March 14:** Tom Armour reports yesterday at the Hawk Watch on the James I had no hawks, but a group of 5 Horned Grebes. They were close to shore and very close together.

March 15: Bill Williams reports from College Creek: Our first Northern Rough-winged Swallow and Royal Tern.

**March 17:** Bill Williams reports from College Creek: 346 Tundra Swans, 296 on James River plus 50 Brian Taber saw from his home off Jamestown Road earlier that morning.

Mitchell Byrd reports a singing Yellow-throated Warbler at Queens Lake.

Dan Cristol reports the first Purple Martin seen on W&M campus.

**March 18:** Shirley Devan reports a total of 14 species from a mid-afternoon stroll around Longhill Swamp on a windy day: "The usual winter woodland suspects made an appearance, but I never tire of seeing Red-headed Woodpeckers, Northern Cardinals, Wood Ducks, and Great Blue Herons, who now are firmly ensconced in the 8-nest heronry in the swamp behind the church parking lot. Several herons looked like they were incubating eggs while another pair mated ... right in plain view of the church...in broad daylight! I followed a Red-shouldered Hawk from one side of the swamp across the highway to the area next to Lafayette High. Before too long I spotted him (her?) down low on a dead log munching on an afternoon hors d'oeuvre. I got great looks through the binoculars before my wanderings flushed him out."

Bill Holcombe reports: "On a cold, windy, bright sunny morning John McDowell and I had time to check for ducks at Felsgate Creek on the York River. Not much on the river besides whitecaps and a handful of mixed Bufflehead and Hooded Mergansers inside that long sand bar. On the way we saw our first Ospreys, a pair along the James River, and my first viewing of the occupied Bald Eagle nest in large tree on the left side of the road shortly before College Creek when driving east."

Tom McCary took to the Colonial Parkway after the club's trip to The Vineyards and reports Bufflehead at Felgates Creek and several Osprey at Indian Fields Creek.

**March 19:** Bill Williams reports from College Creek: 3 Northern Shovelers.

**March 20:** Dorothy Whitfield reports the first Eastern Tiger Swallowtail butterfly of the season.

Ruth Beck reports that she still has 3 Yellow-throated Warblers in her yard. They are now enjoying the sugar water in her recently installed hummingbird feeders.

Brian Taber reports from College Creek Hawkwatch operated by the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory: "Since the last report on March 13th about the College Creek Hawkwatch, on the James River near Williamsburg, the warm weather disappeared and chilly northerly winds have prevailed. But birds were still moving with totals for March 16-19 at 15, 64, 25 and 40. We're still looking for our first American Kestrel, which came last year on March 29th. The season total is a respectable 540."

**March 23:** Tom McCary hears and then sees an Eastern Meadowlark in the horse pasture at Shirley Plantation. Then on the 25<sup>th</sup> he spots a Great Blue Heron sitting on the top of a neighbor's chimney on Richmond Road.

**March 26:** Mike Pierson reports a medium size

flock of Northern Gannets have been on the York River just south of the Coleman Bridge for last couple of days.

Grace and Joe Doyle report Barn Swallows on the Carter's Grove Road.

Tom McCary spots four White-crowned Sparrows at Shirley Plantation – the first ones seen since January. Three are adults, one is a juvenile.

Dan Cristol reports: "An adult female Rufous Hummingbird returned to a feeder in Queens Lake for at least the fourth year in a row (not necessarily the same bird), but in February instead of the usual November appearance. It was joined by a female oriole (not identified to species) around March 20th. The owner feels more than one hummer is present but Dan saw only one bird on March 26. Brown thrasher, Carolina Wren, Chickadee and Bluebird were all nest building on that day.

**March 27:** Dan Cristol reports: "Merlin flew north up Jamestown Road past Barksdale Field. Also, up to 8 Fox Sparrows have been present at my feeder all winter, with 2 present continuously, even on the mildest days, since November. In most years this species is at the feeder on only the coldest days. The flock of ~70 Rusty blackbirds present on campus all winter has left as of March 20, but one adult male was found dead and is being sent off for analysis of contaminants. This species is rapidly headed for extinction and no cause is known."

**March 28:** Dorothy Whitfield reports a complete Carolina Chickadee nest in her box in her yard after it was empty just a week before.

Tom McCary reports two adult Bald Eagles chasing each other over the main house at Shirley Plantation. Tom and the visitors enjoyed seeing them swooping and diving right above their heads.

Jeanne Frey reports from Surry County: Our spring birds have been the usual visitors, but for the first time we've observed the Hairy Woodpecker several times. Incidentally, about 2 weeks ago, I did see a Brown Pelican at the ferry dock on the Jamestown side. This is the first year that we have had no House Finches all winter, but many healthy Purple Finches. The foolish Killdeer are nesting in the field again; I wish natural selection would send some smarter ones to the trees away from tractors, snakes, etc.

*Editor's Note:* Check out Gil Frey's photos of the Bald Eagles' nest on our club web site:

<[www.wmbgbirdclub.com](http://www.wmbgbirdclub.com)>. Per Jeanne, "Gil is the ardent photographer, I am the observer. We have such an interest in this eagle family, and it will be so much fun to watch them develop. We have a good vantage point lookout, which should

prove a boon when these babies mature."

**March 28:** Bill Holcombe reports: "Two interesting bird sightings taking the 4:45 p.m. ferry. There were two pods of tightly packed American Coot with 30-40 in one and 40-50 in the other, presumably collecting for the flight north. There were also numerous Laughing Gulls with the full, shiny black heads looking very much like they are ready for the summer season. These were rounded out by an Osprey sitting on a post."

**March 30:** Brac Bracalente reports from Queens Lake: "My house is just one lot from the lake. A pair of Red-Shouldered Hawks has been flying around my house and neighbors' houses for the last couple of weeks. I hear them every day and see them most days. They keep visiting squirrel nests, I think, high up in Beech and Oak trees on our properties. The nests are made only of twigs and branches. They're either looking for young squirrels or are trying to pick out a nesting site. I am hoping they will nest in one I can easily see so I can take photos."

**March 31:** Shirley Devan reports from a "bike and hike" outing to Freedom Park and Colby Swamp – two adult Bald Eagles soaring above, plus a juvenile flying across one end of the swamp and landing on a tree. Is there a nest nearby? Also saw two Great Blue Herons in the Swamp plus Dark-eyed Juncos around the ellipse garden.

## ANNUAL SPRING COUNT

The Spring Bird Count will be Sunday, April 30, according to Brian Taber, organizer for this annual club event. Take this opportunity to go with an experienced birder/leader to check out a location you've not birded before. You're sure to see some surprises and perhaps add a bird or two to your year or life list.

The procedure is just like the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, same areas, same leaders, but there's no fee. The groups count birds in a circular territory 15 miles in diameter. The center of our circle is the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center. Contact one of the area leaders listed below to join this fun event and important count. Contact these volunteers to get the details about where and when to meet:

College Woods, Ruth Beck, 566-8234

Hog Island, Brian Taber, 253-1181 (h) or 259-3123 (w)

Jamestown Island, Dot Silsby, 596-3252

Jolly Pond, Lee Schuster, 565-6148

Kingsmill, Paul McAllister, 229-1323

Middle Plantation, Hugh Beard, 221-0499

Skimino, Bettye Fields, 930-0177

Tom Armour, Camp Peary (participation limited)

due to security issues)  
Bill Williams, Cheatham Annex, (participation limited due to security issues)

## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to the club: Jerry Melin, Thomas and Zoe Ann Graves, Robert Bernd, Suzy Woodall, Lana Wingate, Lois Leeth, and Pam and Sandy Stromberg. We hope to see you at the April meeting or bird walks.

## PROTHONOTARY WARBLER PROJECT

By Brian Taber

At the February meeting, Ruth Beck made a presentation about the Prothonotary Warbler Project sponsored by the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. For just \$50, you can sponsor the installation of a Prothonotary Warbler nest box in First Landing State Park. These beautiful little yellow warblers are of special concern these days because of declining habitat. Conservation efforts by CVWO have installed 80 boxes at the Park over the last few weeks. Sponsor a box and you'll receive a report on how your "family" fared this season.

For more information, contact Brian Taber, CVWO, [taberzz@aol.com](mailto:taberzz@aol.com) or Bob Reilly, who is coordinating the project at [rjreilly@vcu.edu](mailto:rjreilly@vcu.edu). Sponsorship donations may be sent to CVWO, P.O. Box 1225, Virginia Beach 23451.

## CURLES NECK FARM

By Fred Blystone

On March 12th, I went on a bird walk with the Richmond Audubon Society at Curles Neck Farm in Henrico County. The 5,000+ acre farm offers many different birding habitats. The 70 or so people split into several groups and drove around the property. Curles Neck Farm lived up to expectations — its diverse field, grassland, shrub, pond, wetlands and river habitats provided us with a total of 74 species during the walk that lasted from 6:30 a.m. until noon. The group I was with saw 65 species. The highlights for me were — Snow Geese (both phases), Common Mergansers, Great Horned Owls (2 adults — one in a nest with three owlets), Horned Larks, American Pipits and White-Crowned Sparrows. The farm (which you need to have permission to bird) was sold on March 6th and a large portion of it will probably end up being developed. I hope you all have the opportunity to bird there before that happens.

## MARCH 18 FIELD TRIP TO THE VINEYARDS

By Tom Armour

Randy Coleman, Molly Summerville, Pat Eaton, Charles Rend, Betty Peterson, Shirley Devan, Marilyn Zeigler, Dorothy Whitfield, Tom McCary, Jeanne Armour, and Tom Armour made the trip in the bright sun and cold wind. We had a total of 30 species, including the 4 we picked up at Treasure Island Road. List is: Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallard, Ring-necked Duck, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Killdeer, Common Snipe, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, House Finch, and House Sparrow. Many thanks to Randy Coleman (and his spotting scope) for such a great job leading us around The Vineyards and for being our host for the morning.

## MARCH 25 BIRD WALK AT NEW QUARTER PARK

The threat of rain did not deter 11 birders who turned out for the regular 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday bird walk at New Quarter Park. They were rewarded with a dry morning and 34 species. Highlights were 7 Red-headed Woodpeckers, a Northern Harrier, at least 5 pair of Ospreys on nests, and 4 Great Blue Heron nests with one pair preening and courting. Thanks to Tom's great spotting scope, the group was able to get good looks at the Great Blue Herons and the Ospreys.

## COLLEGE CREEK'S ELOQUENT NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD

By Bill Williams

As some of the first sustained spring-like weather wafted its way across the James River at College Creek on March 8, the resident Northern Mockingbird there took to regaling all within earshot with its versatile bird-songs repertoire. The pre-1607 native peoples knew this species as "400 tongues," for all the right reasons. Our College Creek bird started its potential American Idol routine with a great rendition of a Bald Eagle, before toning it down a bit with the scold notes of a Red-eyed Vireo. Brown-headed Nuthatch calls were then interspersed with Northern Cardinal, and a partial Chuck-will's-widow song. The finish included arduous flurries of Eastern Bluebird,

Purple Martin, Carolina Chickadee, Summer Tanager scolds, and a Great Crested Flycatcher.

So can you add these species to your year list? Eh.....!! How would this Mockingbird learn those songs if the birds it was imitating were not somewhere nearby? Well, yes, but many of these species are out of the country for the next several weeks. OK. Let's wait for the real thing, with thanks to our local songster for jogging our memories and reminding us that spring is just around the corner!! Lister's blisters.

## **BIRD SIGHTINGS AROUND OKEHAMPTON ENGLAND**

From Tony Dion

*(Editor's Note: Tony and his wife Chris were active members of the Williamsburg Bird Club until they moved to Great Britain last spring. Here is a report from their neighborhood!)*

Thought I'd write and list the birds we've seen since we've been here. Most are common in England; however, quite a few don't make it to the U.S. A.

No particular order. Just used our RSPB (Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds) bird book, and listed the ones we've seen: Little Grebe, Cormorant, Little Egret (semi-rare here), Grey Heron, Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Brent Goose, Canada Goose, Mandarin, Teal, Mallard, Pochard, Eider, Goldeneye, Kestrel, Peregrine, Pheasant, Moorhen, Coot, Avocet (semi-rare here), Curlew, Redshank, several different gulls, Rock Dove (also known as Feral Pigeon), Kingfisher, House Martin, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin\*, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Mistle Thrush, Firecrest, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Nuthatch, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Crow, House Sparrow (declining here), Starling, Chaffinch, Brambling, Greenwich, Bullfinch, and Girl Bunting.

\*The Robin here is much smaller than the US version, only 5-6". They are NOT gregarious birds; quite the different, very territorial and will not let another robin near their patch.

## **BACKYARD HABITAT**

By Cynthia Long

April is an explosion of blossoms and birds. The hummingbirds arrive early to sip the nectar of our native columbine, *aquilegia canadensis*. As soon as its red and yellow flowers unfold I know it's time to look for hummingbirds. Columbine is a "can't fail" plant for your garden, needing only partial sun and good drainage. It's easily started from seed, which can be collected from ripe seed pods in mid-summer and scratched into the soil.

Its only drawback is the columbine leaf miner, which makes ugly white lines in the delicate leaves. I find they can be controlled by picking the affected leaves off as you see them and disposing of them in a sealed bag.

Coral honeysuckle, *Lonicera sempervirens*, is another hummingbird favorite. This vine looks good year around with its nearly evergreen foliage. The blossoms grow from interesting perfoliate leaves – it's a lovely, graceful addition to a bouquet. Coral honeysuckle is great on an arbor or a mailbox – our mail carrier gets to enjoy it every day. It likes full sun. There is also a yellow variety of the coral honeysuckle named after colonial botanist John Clayton. It was re-discovered in Gloucester County by my wild-flower friend, Sylvia Sterling, and is now grown for commercial nurseries.

18<sup>th</sup> century historian Robert Beverly wrote of coral honeysuckle, "Colonel Byrd, in his garden, which is the finest in that country, has a summer house set round with the Indian honeysuckle, which all summer is continually full of sweet flowers, in which these birds delight exceedingly. Upon these flowers I have seen ten or a dozen of these beautiful creatures together, which sported about me so familiarly that with their little wings, they often fanned my face." Don't you know Colonel Byrd had to be a charter member of the Williamsburg Bird Club!

Both columbine and coral honeysuckle are in bud as I write this, even though a light snow is forecast for tonight. Where can you buy these wonderful Virginia natives? Come to the annual plant sale at the Virginia Living Museum, May 6, 7 and May 13 & 14. The John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society will be happy to accommodate you.

## **SPRING BIRDS YOU'RE LIKELY TO SEE IN YOUR YARD**

Spring in our area is magical as warm weather migrants pass through headed north while some decide to hang around and raise a family. The list of birds you're likely to see in your yard or in the "birdy" spots around town is too long to list here. But you can see them on our club web site: [www.wmbgbirdclub.com](http://www.wmbgbirdclub.com). Print out the list and check them off this spring. To increase your chances, take in the trip to the Dismal Swamp April 22 or participate in the Bird Walks at New Quarter Park and Newport News Park.