



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

October 2008

President's Corner

By Shirley Devan

Club members have several volunteer opportunities coming up and now is the time to put them on your busy calendars. You can volunteer to help with the "Walk & Talk" at New Quarter Park Saturday, December 6, when the Bird Club, along with its co-sponsors, conducts the program on the Bobwhite Habitat Restoration Project at the Park. The "Walk and Talk" will be from 10 am – 12 noon. You can volunteer to help lead the walk and answer questions from participants as we meander down to the site. The Club's co-sponsors for this event are the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society and the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists. If you can help out, contact me at 813-1322 or sedevan52@cox.net.

Also in December is the Club's 31st Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Beginners are welcome – the more eyes the better. Traditionally the group with the most eyes sees the most birds! Bill Williams is the Count Manager. Contact him at jwwil2@wm.edu or 229-1124 to let him know where you want help out. You can count for a full day or a half-day. You'll be with an experienced counter and birder and fun learning is guaranteed! Mark your calendar now for these fun events with the bird club.

October Meeting

By Alex Minarik

Club member Caitlin Kight will present a program entitled, "Birding with Batteries: Technology and the Modern Birder". An article she wrote on this topic has been accepted for publication next year in Bird Watcher's Digest. Caitlin, a recipient of our club's ornithology research grants in 2005 and 2006, is currently working on a PhD in the Applied Science Department of William and Mary.

Plan to join us on October 15, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117, Millington Hall, on the William and Mary campus to hear Caitlin's "cutting edge" talk.

Refreshments will be provided by Bob & Cynthia Long.

October Field Trip

The field trip for October will be to Newport News Park (at 8,000+ acres, the largest municipal park east of the Mississippi River) on Saturday, October 18. Please meet at 8 am with leader Bill Williams at the Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Road.

The Big Sit!

Brian Taber, CVWO

Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory will participate, for the 10th straight year, in the Big Sit, an event sponsored by the New Haven Bird Club. It's a survey to record birds seen from one small location on one day. Most states and a few other countries participate.

The CVWO site is the hawkwatch platform at Kiptopeke State Park. We have a great spot and have ended between 4th and 19th over the years, out of usually a 100+ sitting circles.

The date this year is October 12th. There is no fee and there is a free t-shirt raffle. Come for an hour or come for all day. The more people looking the better! Come on out!



Photo by Shirley Devan

Bill Williams congratulates Joey Voboril, recipient of the 2008 Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarship.

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Wild Birds Unlimited

Don't forget that the Williamsburg Bird Club 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.

September 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!

Sept 21: Joe & Grace Doyle identify 30 species of birds at Camp Peary

Sept 28: Birding at Camp Peary, Joe & Grace Doyle come up with 29 species.

Sept 28: Grace Doyle saw a pair of American Redstarts, a Black and White Warbler and a Red-breasted Nuthatch at Kingsmill Pond.

WBC September New Quarter Park Walks & Eastern Shore Field Trip

Ten people went on the walk at New Quarter Park on September 13. In addition to looking and listening for birds, the group removed 18 bags of stiltgrass. Cynthia Long provided the bags and instructed the group in recognizing this invasive species. A total of 26 species were identified during the walk.



Photo by Alice Kopinitz

On the Sept. 13 walk were Michelle Cary (aged 10), Jeannie Cary, Bill Key, Alice & Seig Kopinitz, Cynthia and Bob Long, Cathy Millar, Betty Peterson, Katie Young

Hugh Beard led the September 27th field trip on the Eastern Shore. Before rain caused Jethro Runco to close the banding station, the group was only able to see one bird banded—a Gray Catbird with an attitude. The birders then headed to the Refuge where they were joined by Dave Schuster (Hugh & his family and Dave Schuster and his daughter Jenny were camping at the park). Highlights there were a Tri-colored Heron, a Northern Harrier, a Marsh Wren and about a half dozen Black-crowned Night Herons. While the whole group was together they

had 19 species of birds. That afternoon, when the weather improved, Dave and Hugh returned to the hawk platform and saw quite a few Peregrines, American Kestrels, Sharp-shinned Hawks and Cooper's Hawks. On the way back to Williamsburg, the rest of the group saw Sanderings, a Willet, a Common Tern and Ruddy Turnstones.



At the banding station: Betty Peterson, Hugh Beard, Shirley Devan, Inge Curtis, Sharon Falconer, Linda Scherer. Jethro Runco is kneeling in front.

Bill Williams was the leader for the September 27 walk at New Quarter Park. Five other birders joined him and they were able to find 37 species of birds. There were 11 Clapper Rails (one of the Clapper Rails was in view for at least 5 minutes), also good looks at 4 Northern Parulas and a Baltimore Oriole. The group also had two Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, which established a new late date for the species for the Colonial Historic Triangle—the previous late date was September 17.



Photo by Seig Kopinitz

Bob Long, Alice Kopinitz, George Rountree, Bill Williams and Joanne Andrews on the Sept. 27 NQP walk.

Kiptopeke Challenge—Wild Bird Unlimited Team **By Brian Taber**

Our Wild Birds Unlimited of Williamsburg team was out at 5 a.m. on September 13th, for the 14th Annual Kiptopeke Challenge team birding competition, sponsored by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. We didn't have hur-

ricane remnants or high winds or hard rain as with several recent years, but it was about 95 degrees and humid at the end of the day! Because of that weather and no frontal systems, migratory birds were not on the move—but they were around. At Kiptopeke, where we spent the night at the yurt, we listened in the dark for the sounds of thrushes flying over, but didn't hear any. We looked for a Chuck-will's widow near the songbird banding station, but didn't find it as we had last year. As it was getting light, Killdeer were calling, an Eastern Screech-owl whistled and a Great Horned Owl called to get us started.

At the ramp road pond on Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge, on the edge of the saltmarsh, always a bird-filled spot, we saw and heard a good assortment including Seaside Sparrows, Prairie Warblers, Yellow Warblers and a Blue Grosbeak. We also saw 4 of the other teams in the competition there. The nearby trail gave us our only Magnolia Warbler of the day and our first of several Northern Waterthrushes. We hurriedly searched the small area around Sunset Beach Inn, then drove up Seaside Road, finding Chipping Sparrow, Palm Warbler and Eurasian Collared Dove, among others. We found a Black-throated Blue Warbler at Kiptopeke and a Merlin along Arlington Road.

Paul had visited a small wooded park south of Cape Charles harbor the day before and found a number of birds, so we decided to go there, though it had never been on our route before. The day was warming rapidly and it was already past 10:30 before we got to the park, but it was well worth the time as we found Blue-winged Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Summer Tanager, Hairy Woodpecker, Baltimore Oriole, Eastern Wood Pewee and some other birds that we have often missed in previous years. The landfill at Oyster was rather quiet, though we saw Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, plenty of noisy Fish Crows and a Cooper's Hawk chasing a flock of European Starlings.

The only stop on the way to Chincoteague was at Willis Wharf, but the mudflats at very low tide were almost empty of birds, except for a Black Skimmer and a few Willets. Chincoteague, as usual, provided many of the expected terns and shorebirds to fill out our list and even a few surprises, including Black-necked Stilt, a scaup, Wilson's Phalarope, Stilt Sandpiper and American Golden-Plover. This was a great warbler day for us, with 14 species, compared to our usual 5-8 or so. We saw another team at Chincoteague and in quickly sharing some information, found out that they had seen Bobwhite, Eastern Kingbird, Red-headed Woodpecker and several other species that we

had expected to see, but missed. We ended the day watching Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons leaving their roosts to feed in the saltmarsh after sunset, at the marina at the south end of Chincoteague.

We tied for second out of 9 teams with 114 species. One team was a “Special Venue” team, though, and only covered the Eastern Shore of VA Refuge and another team only counted from the hawkwatch platform at Kiptopeke. As an example of the great diversity of birds during this time of year, the team we tied with saw 29 species that we didn’t. Though donations are still coming in for all teams, we expect a total of well over \$3,000 and hope to win the bronze fund-raising trophy as we did last year!

Your support and tax-deductible donation is greatly appreciated and all funds will go toward the excellent field research, public education and conservation efforts of the Observatory!

Double X Birding Team and the Kiptopeke Challenge – September 13, 2008

By Shirley Devan with Alex Minarik, Lee Schuster, and Susan Powell

We all piled into Susan Powell’s SUV by 5:45 am Saturday, September 13. The back of the SUV looked like we were leaving for a two-week expedition instead of a day of “extreme birding.” Three spotting scopes with tripods, several species of field guides, the Gold Book, maps (2 of the same species), checklists, junk food, health food, chocolate, water, and sodas for at least twice as many as the vehicle could hold.

We were the Double X Birding Team from Williamsburg: Alex Minarik, Lee Schuster, Susan Powell, and I. We had committed to scouring the Eastern Shore of Virginia to locate as many bird species as possible in the 24-hour period of September 13 to benefit the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. We were “newbies”—first timers among 9 teams, some of whom have participated in this challenge for 14 years. Did we have a chance to win? Of course! We were competing against teams like the Brown-headed Nut Cases, the CVWO Platform Poachers, the Wayward Loons, and the Laughing Falcons.

Our first goal was to be on the public island of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel by sunrise and we made it – arriving at 6:32 a.m. The ever-present breeze there almost made us forget how hot and humid it was already. Alex pulled out her scope and complained, “it was all fogged up.” The first bird of the day was a Laughing Gull. The best bird we found on the rocks there was an adult Yellow-crowned Night Heron – a good bird to check off the list early.

Our next stop was brief – the pull off on the left on the bridge just beyond Fisherman’s Island. We checked off the expected species – Brown Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants on the pilings. But we spotted a Bald Eagle sitting near the top of a dead pine tree across the highway. Sanderlings were skittering around on the beach below us and Lee remarked: “Now that’s the Sanderling I know.”

We arrived at the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge at 7:48 a.m. We bumped into three other teams there – all hoping for a Glossy Ibis or White Ibis. All were disappointed but all saw the Tri-colored Heron – another good bird to check off the list any time.

One of the teams we encountered was The Wild Birds Unlimited team from Williamsburg – Brian Taber and Paul Nasca. Paul was able to clarify one of the rules that stated “95% of all birds must be seen by all team members.” What about identification by sound? Oh, right! That counts too. Whew! We were able to add the Clapper Rail to our list.

Other species we ticked off at the Eastern Shore NWR were: Green Heron, Snowy Egret, Palm Warbler, Yellow Warbler, White-eyed Vireo, American Pipit, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

We headed north on Seaside Road at 9:00 a.m. looking for birds on the wires and raptors in the skies. Sure enough we got an American Kestrel, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Eurasian Collared Doves on the wires near Magotha Road. Susan almost ran into the ditch when we spotted a Northern Harrier cruising over a farm field. We decided to take about 10 minutes to drive to the end of Magotha Road to check the pines for woodpeckers. Our investment paid off with a Red-headed Woodpecker and a Downy Woodpecker plus an American Goldfinch.

We took a detour onto Harmony Road and were astounded to find six Eastern Kingbirds in one area – with four on one stem of dog fennel. Plus a Yellow-billed Cuckoo near the same area – feeding on bag worms in the trees. After a while it seemed the cuckoos were everywhere.

We arrived at Town of Oyster and used the port-a-potty at the marina. No new birds, however, so we quickly headed over to the Cheriton landfill. In the 45 minutes there we found a Blue Grosbeak and a Cattle Egret. The surprise was that the Cattle Egret was not in the fields where they usually appear. It was perched near the top of the landfill, obviously in the witness protection program because he blended in perfectly with the gulls and vultures posed around him. While we were there we spotted a Merlin and two Sharp-shinned Hawks in a flyover.

We arrived at Willis Wharf at noon and the tide was out. Hardly a bird to be seen on the mud flats. Drat! On the other side of the bridge, we tested the new observation platform near the marina. No new birds from the new spot. Instead we got three new species across the road in the muddy marsh – a Black-crowned Night Heron, a Willet, and a Belted Kingfisher.

At 12:40 we headed north to Chinocoteague, arriving around 2 pm, but not before a caffeine break and potty stop. We needed an energy boost. At Chincoteague, we drove directly to Tom's Cove and the Snow Goose Pool near the beach. In the hour there we found 10 new species for our list: Little Blue Heron, Semipalmated Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plovers, American Oystercatchers, Caspian Tern, Royal Terns, Common Terns, Sandwich Terns, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Black Skimmers.

We finally arrived at the Wildlife Loop Road at 3:20 p.m. As reported all summer, the area is very dry with little or no water. Most of the birds we saw were in the water in the ditches by the roadside. We spotted Mallards finally at 3:35 p.m. Trying to listen for warblers and little birds in the shrubbery was pretty difficult. The town of Chincoteague was hosting a motorcycle convention and many of the conventioners were riding around the loop road with us. We "pished" quite a bit and implored the little things to "Come on, show yourself. Pish, pish, pish." We could hardly hear each other much less a bird. Alex felt compelled to remind us (again!) that we weren't out there to have fun (a remark made famous by our Bird Club's Tom Armour on many field trips)!

We bumped into Bob Ake and his team at another stop on the wildlife drive where we were all pleased to check off the single Black-necked Stilt parading around with the Canada Geese. As we turned the corner with Alex Minarik hanging out the window, she shouted "Quail – back up." Luckily no one was behind us when Susan slammed on the brakes and backed up. Sure enough all four of us got to see the two Bobwhite Quail on the side of the road. By now it was 4:52 p.m.

We burned up about 20 minutes near the end of the loop drive trying to pish out what we thought was a flycatcher. In the meantime we turned up a Blue Jay, an Eastern Towhee, a Brown-headed Nuthatch, and a Pine Warbler. No luck in identifying the little guy flitting around in the back of the trees.

Next stop was the parking lot around the Visitor Center at the Wildlife Refuge. We couldn't stir up much other than hundreds of American Robins. Suddenly they all took off

and we looked up to see a Cooper's Hawk zooming over – our first for the day, finally.

We again ran into Brian Taber and Paul Nasca again in the parking lot at the Visitor's Center and compared notes for the day. We asked Brian how many species the winning team had last year. Answer: 106 species. Ouch.

At 6:00 p.m. it was still 80 degrees and we had 95 species. How to reach 100 species? We reviewed all the expected species we did NOT have – only one sparrow, only one flycatcher, only four warblers, no swallows, no Red-tailed Hawk or Red-shouldered Hawk. Where had we gone wrong? Where could we find 5 more species with 90 minutes of daylight left?

We were feeling down. Not to mention sweaty, buggy, and sticky from sunscreen. Add in thirsty and hungry with aching eyeballs. Not a pretty picture. We had been birding for almost 12 hours and about 150 miles and we still did not have even 100 species.

We were pushing along Route 175 toward Route 13, feeling sorry for ourselves. Within eyesight of the traffic light at the intersection, I spotted a large bird in a dead tree on the left. "Stop the car." Susan jerked the SUV into the parking area of a storage unit operation. I was hoping it was a Red-tailed Hawk or a Red-shouldered Hawk. We could only see the profile but it was BIG. Alex put her spotting scope on it and revealed a Great Horned Owl – sitting in the open, panting in the bright sun. Species # 96. We were revived. Surely we could spot 4 species as we traveled south on Route 13.

As we sped south we did not see any new species; we decided to aim for Eyre Hall farm on the bay side close to Kiptopeke. After one wrong turn we ended up at the pond at Eyre Hall at 7:40. In the fading light, we ran down to the pond, hoping to see big white blobs that might be swans. Not a bird to be seen. Our day was done at 96 birds.

The winning team appears to be the Augusta County Bald Eagles – Allen Lerner (from Staunton) and Janice Frye (a last minute substitute from Richmond). They tallied 125 species from 3:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. An impressive day of extreme birding.

As it turned out we only had 94 species – we had double counted Forster's Tern and the Veery. But we had so much fun – tearing around the Eastern Shore, practically joined at the hips because all four of us had to see 95% of our birds. Birds seen by only one person did not count. So it was truly a team effort.

We have a different strategy for next year and we'll definitely break 100 species in 2009.

Many thanks to all who contributed to the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory through our team. Great fun for a great organization.

News from the Hampton Roads Bird Club

Five fellow birders joined Jane Frigo on the September 7 walk in Newport News Park. The walk began with a show put on by American Redstarts. There were 44 species identified including a Yellow-throated Vireo that was singing his heart out.

Williamsburg Bird Club members Margaret Ware, Joe Piotrowski & Eleanor Young were among the twelve birders who joined Jane Frigo on the September 21 walk in NNP. The group was serenaded by two Great Horned Owls from the other side of the reservoir. There were a total of forty-six species identified during the walk.

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. **Due to the Newport News Fall Festival, the walk on October 5th will meet in the camp ground parking lot.**

There will be a special Family Bird Walk on Saturday, October 18 that is intended for families with children ages 7–15. This walk will start at 8 am in same parking lot as the regular Sunday walks.

The September field trip was to York River State Park on the 13th. There were 15 participants and they tallied 55 species. Highlights included a Yellow-throated Warbler, all 6 species of our local woodpeckers, 3 very active Green Herons at Woodstock Pond and both Summer Tanager and Baltimore Oriole females.

The speaker for the October 9 meeting at Sandy Bottom Nature Park, 1255 Big Bethel Road in Hampton will be Randi Strutton, CEO of Hoffer Creek. She is a retired school teacher who has worked for about 10 years to keep Hoffer Creek (near Craney Island) and surrounding area a wildlife haven. Over 200 species of birds have been seen in Hoffer Creek. Randi will give an overall review of the hard work and progress made throughout the years. The meeting starts at 7 PM.

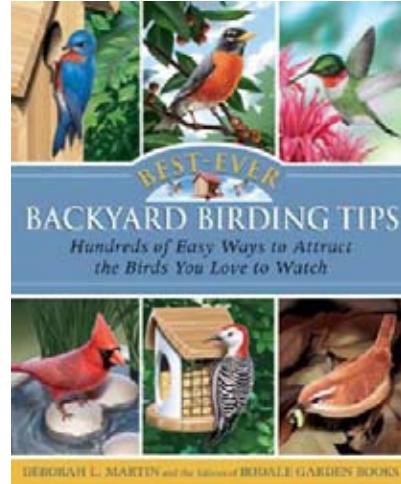
The October field trip will be on Saturday the 11th and the group will go to the Eastern Shore. If you were not able to go on our club's field trip there on Sept 27th, you might want to join with the HRBC and see what you missed. Contact Jane Frigo at birderjane@gmail.com or call her at 873-0721 for details.

October 2008

August 2008 WBC Book Review

By Jeanette Navia

The Best-Ever Backyard Birding Tips: Hundreds of Easy Ways to Attract the Birds You Love to Watch by Deborah L. Martin and the editors of Rodale Garden Books; Rodale, 2008; \$19.95. ISBN: 9781594868313. pbk. Williamsburg Library call number: 598.072 MAR



This book is *chock-full* of information on how to attract birds to your backyard, and what to do once they've learned that your yard (or porch) is a good place to visit. (Make sure you frequently clean your feeders, preferably every two weeks, for one thing!). Martin and the editors gathered tips from

birders, gardeners, amateur naturalists and other experts, and present them here in an easy-to-browse book with drawings and photos. The tips apply to people in all sorts of living conditions, from those who only have a porch where a feeder can hang to those who want to landscape their whole lot specifically for the birds.

Chapters include "Seeds and Feeders," "Plants and Landscape Features for Birds," "Sharing Your Garden with Bug-eating Birds," "Making a Birdhouse a Home," "Water Features for Birds," "Hosting Hummingbirds," "Hawks, Owls and Other Big Birds," "Sharing Space with Birds," "Understanding Bird Behaviors," and "Less-Wanted Guests: 'Pest' Birds and Other Wildlife at Your Feeders." In each chapter, in addition to lots of tips specifically about the topic, there are profiles of specific bird species that one may expect to find at one's feeders, gardens or water features.

I especially enjoyed the chapter on "water features." It emphasizes the birds' need of water, and mentions that by creating a safe place for them to drink, birds that wouldn't usually come to your feeders may visit. The authors discuss many different types of birdbaths, from simple ones to elaborate, heated ones, to ponds and other water structures. They suggest you start small: "We've seen recommendations that you set out old pots and pans in the yard as birdbaths, but we don't like the idea of turning your yard into a junkyard.... However, there is one kitchen item that we enjoy

for its decorative appeal – a stainless steel mixing bowl... Any size will do.” You can put a stone, pebbles or a brick in the middle to give the birds something to stand on. Make sure you put your birdbath somewhere where birds can quickly fly to cover if a predator comes along, and be sure to clean the birdbath regularly.

Everything you can possibly want to know about backyard birding is in this book, including how to place feeders so cats are less likely to get the birds, how to keep birds from flying into windows, how to feed birds by hand, how to choose binoculars, how to grow your own meal worms,

Stamps Used on this Issue of *The Flyer*

You have seen most of the stamps that I am using on this issue of *The Flyer* (and probably next month too). I got a little carried away in early 2007 (the stamps were issued in 2006) and bought over 100 panes of the issue. The pane is the eighth in a continuing stamp series—Nature of America and depicts beautiful images of 21 plants and animals found in southern Florida wetland areas. The birds shown on the panes are: Snail Kite, Great Egret, Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, Bald Eagle and White Ibis. The subtropical wetlands of southern Florida are remnants of a great wilderness that, until a century ago, stretched unbroken, for hundreds of miles. They still include some of the most extensive saw grass marshes and mangrove swamps in the world—wetlands that support a remarkable number of species. The stamp pane depicts a wetland community where freshwater blends with salt water along the coast, and so the art includes both freshwater and coastal species. The tenth pane in this series, which was issued on October 2nd is titled Great Lakes Dunes.

how to feed hummingbirds, what sort of feeders there are to buy, and what to do when a bird gets in the house. It should appeal to beginning birders as well as to those who have been hosting birds for a long time. Flipping through it, you can find all sorts of interesting facts and tips about birds and how to make them welcome in your life.

(This is one of twelve new purchases by the Williamsburg Bird Club for the Williamsburg Regional Library. I am very much indebted to Jeanette Navia for writing these reviews—Fred Blystone)





Susan Powell, Lee Schuster and Alex Minarik of the Double X Birding Team during the Kiptopeke Challenge on September 13, 2008

Photo by Shirley Devan

CALENDAR

Sunday, Oct 5	HRBC Bird Walk, Newport News Park, 7 am
Thursday, Oct 9	HRBC Monthly Meeting, Randi Strutton, Speaker, See Page 6
Saturday, Oct 11	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8 am, Tom McCary, Leader
Saturday, Oct 11	HRBC Field Trip, Eastern Shore, See Page 6
Wednesday, Oct 15	WBC Monthly Meeting, Caitlin Kight, Speaker, See Page 1
Saturday, Oct 18	WBC Field Trip, 8 am, Bill Williams, Leader. See page 1
Sunday, Oct 19	HRBC Bird Walk, Newport News Park, 7 am
Saturday, Oct 25	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 7 am, Bill Williams, Leader
Sunday, Oct 26	Richmond Aududon Society Field Trip, Curles Neck Farm, Henrico County, 7:30 am. Email John Coe at johncoe@verizon.net for more information. RAS field trip are open to the public.
Sun, Nov. 2	HRBC Bird Walk, Newport News Park, 7 am

Birding with Batteries: Technology and the Modern Birder—Caitlin Kight, Oct 15th