



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

February 2009

President's Corner

By Shirley Devan

In the last couple of years, the Bird Club has made substantial scholarship commitments to youth in our community and graduate students at William and Mary to support nature study and ornithology research. This commitment for 2009 is over \$2500.

In the past we have supported these scholarships from our membership dues, contributions from George and Val Copping at Wild Birds Unlimited, and donations by Dr. Dan Cristol of his honoraria from *The Virginia Gazette* plus other smaller sources. We are grateful to these wonderful members of our local community and encourage them to continue their support.

This year, for the first time, we have substantial financial commitments from our members who have made specific donations over and above their membership dues for our Ornithology Research Grants and Nature Camp Scholarships.

I want to use my space this month to recognize and thank these members for their contributions to these important Club efforts.

The Club has just selected two middle school students, Chandler Fox and Emily Simpser, to receive the "Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships" to attend nature camp at Vesuvius, VA this summer.

Later this spring the Club will award three "Ruth Beck and William Sheehan Ornithology Research Grants" to biology graduate students at William and Mary.

The following Club members have donated additional funds to support one or both of these grants: Joe and Grace Doyle, Winifred and John Buchanan, Dick and Eve Turner, Donnie Goodrich, Bill and Susie Kay, Tom McCary, Joe Piotrowski, Gary and Anne Carpenter, Anna and Lief Mollo, Mickey and Arlene Segó, Marilyn Zeigler, Adrienne Frank, Gary Driscóle, Sue and Felix Brandon, Joe Heyman, Gil and Jeanne Frey, Fred Blystone, and Shirley and Steve Devan.

Your extra support is inspiring and heartening in times like these and demonstrates the members' commitments to local educational efforts. Many thanks!

[If your name is not listed above, your contribution arrived too late for this note. I'll include your name in next month's newsletter. Thank you.]

February Meeting

Club member Helen Hamilton will present a program covering the birds, habitat, culture and history of Iceland.

Helen taught biology in local high schools, worked as a plant technician for the National Park Service, and completed Master Gardening training in 2004. Currently she is president of the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, secretary of VNPS, Horticulture Chair of the Williamsburg Botanical Garden, member of Stewardship Committee, Williamsburg Land Conservancy and Board Member of the James City County Water Conservation Committee.

Plan to join us on February 18, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117, Millington Hall, on the William and Mary campus. Refreshments will be provided by Lillian Woolfork and Betty Peterson.

February Field Trip

The field trip for November will be to the Colonial Parkway on Saturday, February 21. Please meet at 8 am with leader Hugh Beard at the Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Road. Please remember it can be cold along the York and James Rivers—please dress accordingly.

Welcome New Members

Barry Trott, Craig Eckenrode and Marsha & Graham Jones

Officers

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Historian	259-9559
Cynthia Long	

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.

Center for Conservation Biology

The CCB puts out an e-newsletter. You can subscribe at ccb-wm.org/news/2008_OctDeclindex.htm

January 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!

Jan 1: Before heading for the 4th Annual Greensprings Boardwalk Show,



Photo by Fred Blystone

Shirley Devan and Fred Blystone head out to start their 2009 bird list. By the end of the morning, birding in Newport News, on Yorktown Beach & the Colonial Parkway, as well as James City County, we had over 50 species, including **Monk Parakeets**, Common Goldeneye and Ruddy Turnstones.

Jan 1–2: Tom Armour reports his first feeder birds of the year

were two female Purple Finches, followed by two males on the 2nd.

Jan 3: During a walk in their Colonial Heritage community, Gary and Ann Carpenter see the following: Red-tailed Hawk (pair), Eastern Bluebirds, Palm Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, House Finch, White-throated Sparrow, American Goldfinch, American Crow, Song Sparrow, Mourning Dove and Northern Mockingbird.

Jan 3–4: Lois Leeth reports having the following in her yard; 2 American Robins, 1 Great Blue Heron, a Carolina Wren, a White-breasted Nuthatch and her regulars—Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, House Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows and a Brown Thrasher. The following day she reports juncos, Red-winged Blackbirds, doves, cardinals, Blue Jays, Brown Thrasher, goldfinches, crows and 3 House Finches.

Jan 6: Bill Williams is surprised (to say the least) to have a **Western Tanager** land on his porch. After posting this find on the va-bird listserve, e-mail popped up just saying “road trip”. The race is on. (See Bill’s write-up on page 5)

Jan 6–7: Lee Schuster reports that on the 6th she has at least 9 Pine Siskins and one Purple Finch emptying her feeders. Lots of American Goldfinches as well. On the 7th, had more Pine Siskins but few American Goldfinches. Lee is waiting for her Evening Grosbeaks to come back after many years.

Jan 8: Fred Blystone, Shirley Devan and Alex Minarik go looking for waterfowl at The Pocket in King William County and Croaker Landing. Not a whole lot on the water in either place, but it’s always nice to see Canvasbacks (at Croaker Landing). After dropping Alex off, Shirley and Fred continue on to Jamestown Island. Ended up with over 50 species for the day, the best probably the Gray Catbird at The Pocket.

Jan 9: With nothing going on at work, Fred Blystone makes a quick trip



Photo by Fred Blystone

to Dug Gap Conservation Area and Shirley Plantation. Only saw thirty species, but 10 of them were new for the year. Best bird of the day was a White-crowned Sparrow, which was more than

willing to pose for some pictures.

Jan 10: Chuck Rend reports—this morning Jean and I got a good look at two pairs of Hooded Mergansers in the pond along Route 60 near the NN/JCC line.

Jan 11: Alex and Mike Minarik go to Hog Island and see a Northern Harrier and two American Bitterns.

Jan 11: After seeing Bill's Western Tanager, Shirley Devan was inspired to come home and freshen up her feeder stations. Even put out her new Christmas gift—the Water Wiggler. She didn't get a Western Tanager, but did have 14 species in her yard.

Jan 14: Shirley Devan went over to York River State Park to see if the Great Horned Owl was using the same nest this year. No sign of the owl, but she 15 species of birds. The most interesting was the Brown Thrasher kicking at the leaf litter under the wax myrtle bushes on the bank of the Beaver Pond. Also the Red-shouldered Hawk was on the railing of the horse pasture fence on the entrance road picking at some lunch.

Jan 16: From Lois Leeth—lots of activity today. I have a new "woodpecker" suet feeder and a new covered feeder. I've seen Red-bellied Woodpeckers, 3 Eastern Towhees, 1 Blue Jay, Carolina Wrens, 3 crows, cardinals, White-throated Sparrows, doves and Song Sparrows.

Jan 16: From Kathi Mestayer—Who knew (until I did today) that cardinals, juncos and White-throated Sparrows would venture out onto the ice on my lily "pond" (half whiskey barrel) and peck away at the ice until they got teeny little sips of water" The bird bath, which has been filled with warm water twice already (it refroze the first time) was crowded with jays, more cardinals, chickadees, bluebirds, and the aforementioned. Meanwhile, two bluebirds have been lurking in the back yard, foraging in the rain gutters, with the cardinals and a kinglet. And we cleaned them out

really well!

Jan 19: Shirley Devan, Fred Blystone and Bill Williams head for the Eastern Shore for a day of birding. They visit CBBT #1, Eastern Shore of Va. NWR, Magotha Road, Oyster & Willis Wharf. Around 75 species were seen during the day—the highlight being a **Glaucous Gull** (see photo on back page) sitting on the Billy Crystal in the harbor at Oyster.

Jan 24: Lee Schuster reports she has a Baltimore Oriole visiting her yard. Still around on February 3rd.

Jan 27: Lois Leeth reports—nice showing today in spite of the rain—White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, chickadees, lots of goldfinches, doves, crows European Starlings, White-throated Sparrows and the usual sparrows.

Jan 29: Bill Williams, Shirley Devan, Alex Minarik and Fred Blystone head up Route 5 looking for some new year birds. On Turkey Island Road in Henrico County, Bill was able to find a Cackling Goose among a field full of Canada Geese. We also saw Common Mergansers, Horned Larks and over a hundred American Pipits. On Shirley Plantation we felt very lucky to flush 4 Northern Bobwhite. Total species for the day was around 55.

News from the Hampton Roads Bird Club

WBC member Margaret Ware joined leader Richard Hudgins and other members of the HRBC for the January 4th walk in Newport News Part. A total of 42 species were seen during the morning.

HRBC members were at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Islands the Saturday before the Williamsburg Bird Club were there. Highlights from the islands included thousands of Surf Scoters, hundreds of Long-tailed Ducks, King and Common Eiders, Great Cormorants, Purple Sandpiper, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black Scoter, White-winged Scoter, and Greater Scaup. The group also birded several spots on the souther Eastern Shore. Highlights from the shore were a Glaucous Gull at Oyster, a flyover flock of 30 American Pipits at the Cheriton Landfill and 7 American White Pelicans soaring with Turkey Vultures at the end of Magotha Road. The species list for the day totaled 78.

Under cold, cloudy skies, complete with a few snow flakes, Jane Frigo lead 3 other birders on the January 18th walk at Newport News Park. At the Arboretum a leucocitic Dark-eyed Junco was seen. It foraged on the ground with many other Juncos and White-throated Sparrows. Twenty Tundra Swans, Black Ducks, Gadwall, Hooded Mergansers, Mallard and a lone Northern Shoveler were concentrated in the small part of the reservoir that wasn't frozen. A total of 47 species were seen 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.

The speaker for the HRBC February 12 meeting will be Peggy Opengari who will show a video of her trip to New Zealand and Australia. Meeting is at 7 PM at Sandy Bottom Nature Park, 1255 Big Bethel Road in Hampton.

The monthly field trip on Saturday, February 14th will be to Hoffer Creek and Craney Island. Meet at 8 am in the parking lot of Hoffer Creek. The club will tour the facility, circling the lake in search of water fowl and woodland birds. They will then go down the road to Craney Island and continue the search for waterfowl and look for shore birds. Clark White will be the leader.

Directions to Hoffer Creek: From I-664, take Exit 9 onto SR 164. Follow this for 2.0 miles to Towne Point Road/Twin Pines Road, turn left off the exit ramp and proceed straight for approximately 2.0 miles. The preserve entrance is at 4510 Twin Pines Road on the left.

VSO Winter Field Trip

The North Carolina Outer Banks field trip will be February 20–22, 2009. The Clarion Inn at Nags Head Beach will be the trip headquarters. Ocean front rooms are available on a first come, first served basis. Contact information for the hotel is: P.O. Box 308, Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina, 27948; Phone:252-441-6333;

Meals are on your own. A 7:00 AM Saturday and Sunday buffet breakfast will be available at the Clarion Inn. Participants should bring lunch provisions for Saturday. For dinner there are many fine restaurants in the area.

Friday evening an orientation and slide program will be presented. Time and room location will be in the events program, which will be available at the front desk on Friday morning.

Saturday participants will be divided into smaller groups and spend the day visiting the impoundments of Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge and the beaches of Cape Hatteras National Seashore. That evening there will be a tally at 6 PM in the VSO conference room at the hotel.

On Sunday morning there will be a trip to Alligator River. The trip will depart from the hotel at 8:30 A giving those wishing to continue straight home from the field trip time to check out of their rooms.

If you have any questions, contact Bill Akers at 540-951-7692 or bill.akers@comcast.net or Peggy Opengari at 540-921-4340 or gramby@pemt.net.

February 2009

Rusty Blackbird Blitz Feb 7–15

By Sergio Harding, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

We are looking for volunteers to participate in the Rusty Blackbird Winter Hot Spot Blitz during Feb 7-15. The Rusty Blackbird is an elusive species which has undergone drastic declines over the past few decades. The Blitz will take place from Pennsylvania to Texas as a coordinated effort to acquire information on the bird's distribution and habitat use across its winter range. Participation in this important event is easy. Simply look for Rusty Blackbirds at sites where you know or suspect they may be found during this time of year, as often as you want during the Blitz period. The protocol is easy to follow, and anyone with good Rusty Blackbird identification skills is encouraged to participate. All data will be submitted via eBird, so if you are not already registered, this is a great opportunity to join. Signing up and using eBird is very easy, and you can find instructions on how to do so at the Virginia eBird site at <http://ebird.org/content/va/about/tutorial>. You may also contact Arun Bose (arun.bose@verizon.net) if you need help with eBird. Virginia eBird will also feature an article on the Blitz in the coming days, along with links to Blitz protocols and to information on the ecology of Rusty Blackbirds.

Williamsburg Bird Club Book Review

By Jeanette Navia

Winged Wonders: A Celebration of Birds in Human History, by Peter Watkins & Jonathan Stockland. Bluebridge, 2007. 207 p. \$22.00. Library call number : 598 WAT, Williamsburg Library.



Birds have appeared in poetry, mythology, religious stories and other writings throughout most, if not all, of human history. In this slim book, Peter Watkins and Jonathan Stockland have brought together some of these writings. After the introduction, in which they briefly touch on many birds, they devote one chapter each to the cock, the cuckoo, the dove, the eagle, the falcon, the goose, the kingfisher, the ostrich, the owl, the peacock, the pelican, the raven, the robin, the sparrow, the swan and the wren. There is also a brief chapter on the his-

tory of bird illustrators, from symbols of birds on ancient Egyptian walls to Roger Tory Peterson. Included is a list of state birds as well as a list of bird collective nouns: “a covert of coots ... a tiding of magpies ... a parliament of owls”. The final short chapter is about birdsong.

There is no science in this book; it is mostly about birds in writing and thought. Watkins is a vicar in London, and many of the writings are from the Bible or Christian literature. There are excerpts from nursery rhymes, Shakespeare, Psalms, snippets of poems by Edmund Spenser, Alfred Lord Tennyson and other poets. Although the authors are from England, it seems they have Americanized this edition (hence the listing of state birds).

Some of my favorite bits of information are about the origins of bird names. “The Stormy Petrel is one of the smallest of the web-footed birds, whose surface-skimming flight over wild oceans was thought to touch the waves as if it were walking on water. This led sailors, thinking of St. Peter walking on the storm-tossed waters of Lake Galilee, to attach to that bird the name ‘Petrel,’ meaning ‘Little Peter,’ from the Italian petrello.” “The word pelican comes to us directly from the Greek pelikus, meaning an axe, which itself is closely linked to the Greek for ‘woodpecker.’ The axe in question, resembling the beak of either bird, is more likely to be a slim adze than a hatchet with a square face.”

There are lots of tidbits of information in this book. It is a nice book to give as a gift to someone who likes birds and literature, or to check out of the library and dip into here and there.

Best Western

By Bill Williams

A first winter male Western Tanager appeared at our home on the rainy afternoon of January 6, 2009. It was first seen very briefly as a flash of yellow exiting the shepherd’s crook top of our bird feeder support. Within minutes it returned, this time perched on the back deck less than a dozen feet away from our kitchen window where I was standing talking on the phone with my sister. When I told her what was unfolding she said, “See. You’ll just have to call me more often!”

As this is being typed the morning of January 31 the bird is elegantly attending the feeder where it seems to relish the peanut hearts and safflower in the Choice bird seed mix from Wild Birds Unlimited. Over the course of the past 25 days it has been here daily and has been seen by more than 75 visitors from as far away as Florida.

This observation, documented convincingly by numerous photographs, constitutes the first record for this species for

the Colonial Historic Triangle-Jamestown, Williamsburg, York County. The 2007 edition of Virginia’s *Birdlife: An*



Photo by Bill Williams

annotated checklist (known as the Gold Book) published by the Virginia Society of Ornithology tells us the Western Tanager in Virginia’s Coastal Plain is a “Rare transient and winter visitor (extreme dates 17

Sep-1 May), with 20 records of single individuals, all since 1965.” Nearby records include a female at Gloucester Point, Gloucester County 29 Jan-16 Apr 1983, and a striking male at Chippokes Swamp, Surry County 18 Apr 2004. The species typically winters from Mexico through Central America southward into South America.

Unlike the male Scarlet Tanager and Summer Tanager the male Western Tanager is a brilliant lemon yellow. Its dark black wings have a very prominent white bar created by the white tips of the wings’ greater covert feathers, and there is a distinct yellow bar at the bend of the wing, the wings’ median coverts. The tail is also dark black. When the tanager is in flight its bright yellow rump is very noticeable. Perhaps most appealing, however, is the bird’s pale red face set against its otherwise bright yellow head, black eye, and black back. The flanks, breast and belly are also yellow.

Contributing to our daily excitement with the Western Tanager has been a first winter Baltimore Oriole that has been with us daily since November 18. It has adopted our hummingbird feeder as one of its sources of energy and at times has coincidentally been at the seed feeder with the Western Tanager. Speak of visions of sugar plums.....!

On many days both birds have at their respective feeding stations in the late afternoon and have been entered as species observed on a “traveling count” at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology eBird site. Once the birds have been seen we take off for our vigorous 1 mile walk around the neighborhood, noting all the bird species we see in addition to the tanager and oriole, then submit the data

to eBird following its easy on-line protocol. In so doing we are adding knowledge to an international database as well as to a growing body of information on Virginia's and greater Williamsburg's birdlife.

We have no idea how long our exceptional visitors will stay with us. To say the least, as long as they are here they warm the very coldest days, cheer up the dreary ones, and further enhance those that are the brightest.

3rd Thursday @ Your Library

By Janet Curtis

Please join WBC member Caitlin Kight as she gives a talk entitled *A Brief History of Birds in Art*, which explores the ways in which birds have been used to portray various themes and topics throughout art history, and how these portrayals have been altered by our increased scientific understanding of our feathered friends. The program will be held at the Williamsburg Regional Library on Scotland Street—7:00 Thursday, 19th February in the Youth Services Program Room. No Reservations required.

Birds of North America

The National Geographic Society is currently presenting an art exhibit "Birds of North America" at their museum in Washington (17th & M, NW). It comprises some 90 original paintings by Louis Agassiz Fuertes (1874-1927), Allan Brooks (1869-1946), NGS staff illustrator Walter Weber (1906-1979), and Jonathan Alderfer.

Many of Jonathan's pieces were prepared for various editions of the National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America (the 5th edition of which he and Jon Dunn edited), a few have appeared in other field guides, and some have not been published. (Among the latter are a set of portraits of the heads of winter gulls that should especially appeal to larophiles.)

The exhibit is free and runs through 31 May. Hours: Monday -Saturday: 9 am to 5 pm; Sundays: 10 am to 5 pm.

A little additional information is available at <http://events.nationalgeographic.com/events/exhibits/2009/01/14/birds-north-america/>

WBC January Walks & Field Trip

On the January 10th walk in New Quarter Park, the 12 birders who joined leader Tom McCary saw a total of 23 species of birds.



Photo by Cynthia Long

Front row: Sara Lewis, Cathy Millar, Karen Taylor, Shirley Devan, Angela Tambone, Betty Peterson
Middle row: Carol Fryer, Beth Fugate
Back row: Bob Long, Tom McCary, Joe Piotrowski, Tom Armour

There were 27 participants for the January 17th field trip to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Islands. There were 28 species of birds seen, including Brant, King & Common Eider and all three Scoter. The Harbor Seals that were seen were enjoying the 42 degree water, versus the birders who were walking around in the 22 degree air temperatures.



Photo by Shirley Devan

The walk in New Quarter Park on January 24th had 14 birders joining leader Bill Williams. Forty-four species were seen, including Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Harrier and three Red-tailed Hawks. Also seen were two Purple Finches.



Photo by Shirley Devan

Front Row: Joanne Andrews, Sara Lewis, Cathy Millar, Marian Bennett, Bobbie Geise. Back Row: Bill Williams, Rick Bennett. Chuck Litterst, Hugh Beard, Joe Piotrowski, Ron Geise. Missing from photo are: Al Brasel, Paul Marc Leger and Margaret Ware

Adopt a Highway Program

The WBC Adopt a Highway volunteers met on Saturday morning, January 31, and cleaned up our two mile stretch of Croaker Road. We collected 16 bags of trash in an hour!

Photo by Shirley Devan



Front Row: Beth Morgan, John Fennell. Middle Row: Bobbie Geise, Ron Geise, Rich Scherer, Mary Anne Fennell. Back Row: David Monahan, Alex Minark, Rosanne Reddin, Mike Minarik, Chuck Litterst, Jerry Melin

2009 Williamsburg Bird Club Board and Committee Chairpersons



Photo by Fred Blystone

Front Row: John Fennell, Joanne Andrews, Shirley Devan, Chuck Rend. Back Row: Bill Williams, Mary Anne Fennell, Joe Piotrowski, Jeanette Navia, Bob Long, Chuck Litterst. Their positions are on Page 2.



Glaucous Gull

Photo by Bill Williams



Photo by Beth Morgan

This fellow was stunned by our sliding glass door; he eventually 'came to his senses' and happily flew off.



Fish Eagles on the Chobe River in Botswana

Photo by Rosanne Reddin

CALENDAR

Feb 7–15	Rusty Blackbird Blitz, see page 4
Thursday, Feb 12	HRBC Monthly Meeting, Peggy Opengari, see page 3
Feb 13–16	Great Backyard Bird Count, www.birdsource.org/gbbc
Saturday, Feb 14	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8 am, Susan Powell, Leader
Wednesday, Feb 18	WBC Monthly Meeting, Helen Hamilton, Speaker, see front page
Thursday, Feb 19	A Brief History of Birds in Art, Williamsburg Regional Library, see page 6
Feb 20–22	VSO Winter Field Trip, see page 4
Saturday, Feb 21	WBC Field Trip, Colonial Parkway, Hugh Beard, Leader, see front page
Saturday, Feb 28	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 7 am, Hugh Beard, Leader

February 18th—Helen Hamilton

The Birds, Habitat, Culture and History of Iceland

