



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

December 2013



Thank you Gary and Ann Carpenter for letting us use your photo.

Photo taken by Ken Jenkins and used with his permission.



President's Corner By Shirley Devan

This is my last President's Corner. Next month you'll enjoy the exquisite prose of Geoff Giles, 2014 Bird Club President!

I'm writing this a few days before Thanksgiving— looking back and looking ahead— and reflecting on the wonderful support our Club members have provided over the years for the Club's education efforts. And looking ahead to the Club's commitments for 2014.

Almost since the beginning, the Club has awarded scholarships to W&M biology graduate students. These "Ruth Beck & Bill Sheehan Ornithological Research Grants" provide critical funds for the field research these students need to complete their theses. As you know, grad students are not "flush" with liquid capital and these funds often

pay for specialized equipment, gas, and other unanticipated expenses. We plan to award three scholarships in 2014.

Since 2008, the Club has awarded the "Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships" to local youth to attend this two-week field-based, experiential camp focusing on natural history and environmental studies. Often these camp experiences are "life-changing" for young people and lead them to a future in science and biology. We plan to sponsor two youths again in 2014.

Since 2010, the Club has provided bird feeders and birdseed for the "Developmental PlayGroup" room at Child Development Resources (CDR) here in Williamsburg. This room is used 5 days a week to provide the highest quality social and learning playgroup interactions for young children with many needs. These children are attracted to the room's large windows and often gaze right at the feeding birds. Sometimes this provides a wonderful opportunity to expand a child's language. Sometimes it just brings the children a little

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Updated Summary of Bird Data

The latest version of Bill Williams' *Summary of Local Bird Data through 2012: Williamsburg, James City County, York County, Hog Island WMA, Surry County* can be downloaded from our website.

Wild Birds Unlimited

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

closer to nature. Their birdseed needs now exceed what the Club has been able to provide, so we turn to you, our members, to supplement what the Club can provide.

These commitments total over \$3500. Our membership dues alone are not sufficient to support these important efforts. Wild Birds Unlimited in Williamsburg is very generous, but we still need you if we are to continue the same level of support.

You've been very generous in the past! If you still support these projects and believe they are as important as we do, then I trust you will respond with an extra donation. We greatly appreciate your support at whatever level you choose.

So, on your renewal form, please consider an extra donation to the Club for the Ruth Beck & Bill Sheehan Ornithological Research Grants Fund, the Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarship Fund, and the CDR Birdseed Fund.

Each of these is an investment in the future and reflects our Club's optimism and commitment to education (even for the toddlers!) and research.

If you are an "Individual" member, consider becoming a "Family" member or a "Patron." Encourage a birding friend to join the Club at the "Family" or "Patron" level.

Remember—we can't do anything without **YOU**. We look forward to your participation in our 2014 events. And thank you for every kindness you have shown me as President over the years. Have a great holiday season.

2014 Board of Directors Elected

At the November 20 Club meeting, the members elected the following to the Bird Club Board of Directors for 2014:

- o President: Geoff Giles
- o Vice President, Programs: Cheryl Jacobson
- o Co-Vice Presidents, *The Flyer*: Fred Blystone and Shirley Devan
- o Secretary: Catherine Millar
- o Treasurer: Ann Carpenter
- o Member-at-Large: Jeanette Navia

Geoff Giles had held a Member-at-Large position on the Board. With his election to be President, a Member-at-Large position is open. In January, the new Board will appoint a new Member-at-Large. If you would like to be considered for Member-at-Large, please contact Geoff Giles, tylerandal2@aol.com

Welcome to New Members

Nan Powell and William & Marieanne Hever

The 2013 Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count

By Bill Williams

Please hang a mistletoe sprig over Sunday, December 15, 2013 to remind yourself to participate in the 37th annual Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count. We urge everyone to find some time during the day to be a part of this significantly important citizen science effort. We have set a target this year to have at least 100 participants! The Christmas Bird Count, initiated in 1900 as a counterplay to a holiday season tradition of seeing how much game could be taken in a single day, has become one of the standards by

which international wintering bird population trends and distributions are assessed over time. Rather than removing wildlife, these counts seek to document the diversity and abundance of birdlife in a defined area. Each count encompasses a 15-mile diameter circle, in our case, one that is centered at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center. The goal for the day is to have as many observers as possible counting every bird of every species within 7.5 miles of the count center. The data are compiled and submitted to the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count website, where it becomes part of an international database, not only for North America but Central and South America too.

Whether you can join us for an hour or so or the whole day on December 15th your contribution will be exceedingly valuable. The success of the count is based on the numbers of species and how many birds can be found. This includes the common yard and feeder birds, even Rock Pigeons, European Starlings, and House Sparrows!! With that in mind we hope you will choose to join one of the field teams and/or participate from or near your home. All we ask is that you keep track of how much time that day you devote and, if applicable, how many miles you travel during your birding excursions that day. Feeder watchers, please specify the address of the location where you did your counting so it can be matched to its appropriate count section. **This is also an excellent opportunity to engage children in birding!!**

The count day will conclude with a 5:00 p.m. compilation at Carrot Tree Kitchens on Jamestown Road. This final tally arrangement is the sixth for our venerable count, a tradition we have come to thoroughly enjoy. Brunswick Stew, mulled cider, and rolls will be warm and ready for consumption by field-team participants. Carrot Tree will close for business that day at 4:00 p.m. Therefore, count participants are asked **to park behind** the bakery so that there is no appearance the business is still open.

If you plan to participate in the count please contact Bill Williams at billwilliams154@gmail.com or call 229-1124, no later than December 7.

If you have been part of a field team in the past please consider joining that team again by contacting the team leader. Please let Bill or your team leader know in advance if you plan to be at the tally—this will help determine how much food needs to be prepared. Tally HO!!

Reported Sightings November

Report your backyard birds and local sightings to Fred Blystone at 229-4346 or fredblystone@gmail.com. If you encoun-

ter interesting birds on your vacation/travels, please share!

November 2. George & Rosemarie Harris and John & Marilyn Adair bird the Guinea Marsh in Gloucester County. During the morning they identify 36 species—getting nice views of Seaside Sparrows, Nelson's Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows and a Marsh Wren.

November 3. Sandy Robertson, Joyce Lowry, Bettye Fields, Richard Hudgins, Rock Moeslein, and George & Virginia Boyles joined leader Jane Frigo and other birders for the HRBC walk in Newport News Park. Jane reported that conditions were clear and calm early but winds picked up making it feel quite chilly and blowing leaves were distracting. A total of 49 species were identified during the morning, including Lesser Scaup, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Black Duck and Mallard.

November 4. From Florida Lois Leeth reports seeing 25 Double-crested Cormorants, 12 Roseate Spoonbills, 9 Great Egrets, 12 Snowy Egrets, 6 Turkey Vultures, 2 Cattle Egrets, 6 Wood Storks, 12 Mallards, 3 Northern Mockingbirds, 2 Cardinals, and 1 Broad-winged Hawk.

November 7. During the morning, Brian Taber reports seeing a Black Scoter at Jamestown Island. Later that afternoon Bill Williams sees the same bird This is the ninth local record for this species.

November 10. From Bill Williams: "At 4:20 p.m. today a male Western Tanager was at our feeder hard at work looking for peanut hearts. We have to assume this is the same bird initially detected here in January 2009 and that has been with us through the winter each calendar year thereafter. Last fall (2012) the bird was first noted on 17 November, its earliest arrival date to that point. It was last seen 20 March 2013. We can only hope this current visit will be as long!"

November 16. Bill Williams finds a Surf Scoter off Jamestown Island.

November 17. Sandy Robertson joined leader Jane Frigo and other birders for the HRBC walk in Newport News Park. A total of 58 species were identified during the morning, including a Great Horned Owl, American Black Ducks, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren and both Kinglets.

November 18. George and Rosemarie Harris birded behind the Gloucester Public Library and found six species of woodpeckers, missing the Pileated which is often seen in the area. They ended up with 24 species.

November 21. Ruth Beck, Virginia & George Boyles, Alex Minarik, Bill Williams, Inge Curtis, and Dave Youker conducted a survey at Craney Island. They came up with 75 species, including 1 Eurasian Wigeon, 3 American Avocets,

73 Western Sandpipers, and 2 Black Skimmers. From the Kiptopeke Hawkwatch, Brian Taber reports 5 south-flying Sandhill Cranes.

November 26. The 347th bird species for the Colonial Historic Triangle—a Saltmarsh Sparrow was found in Seaford by Dave Youker.

November 30. Birding the short loop road at Jamestown Island, Shirley Devan finds 27 species of birds, including 3 Bald Eagles, 6 Red-bellied Woodpeckers, 1 Golden-crowned Kinglet, and 2 Brown Creepers.

Upcoming Events

Winter Waterfowl Walks and Winter Tram Tours at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and False Cape State Park

The Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and Back Bay Restoration Foundation will have Winter Waterfowl Walks every other Friday and every Saturday starting on December 7th. These walks will be led by Bob Ake and David Hughes and will consist of a one-mile hike along Back Bay NWR's Bay Trail. More information can be found at http://www.fws.gov/refuge/back_bay.

False Cape State Park & Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge will have winter tram tours December 8th & 22nd, January 5th & 19th, February 9th & 23rd, and March 9th & 23rd starting at 1:00 PM and lasting until around 4:40 PM. Reservations are required, to make reservations call 757-428-7128. The tours begin at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge Center and cost \$8 per person. (Trams are unheated, open-aired vehicles, so you would need to dress warmly).

New Year's Day Boardwalk Bird Show

Shirley Devan asks you to join her New Year's Day—at the Greensprings Trail Boardwalk for the Ninth Annual "New Year's Day Boardwalk Bird Show." Meet on the "old" boardwalk over the old beaver pond from 1–3 PM (not the Virginia Capitol Trail boardwalk.)

Park in the lot at the end of Eagle Way, beyond Jamestown High School. Come as you are; bring visiting family, friends and children; come early, stay late or just drop by. Celebrate the New Year with a birding adventure close to home with birding friends. Remember, every bird is a year bird on New Year's Day! Shirley hopes to see you there.

Field Trip to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Island

The Hampton Roads Bird Club's January 11th Field Trip will be on Saturday January 11, 2014. The CBBT islands during winter provide a unique opportunity for waterfowl observing—and for wind chilling—so dress warmly. And be sure to carefully attend to the time sensitive Security Protocol for CBBT Trip. The car pool roundup will be at 8 AM in the

December 2013

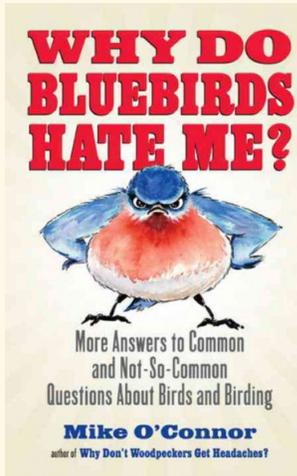
parking lot just before the toll plaza at the South entrance to the CBBT, where the group will meet their paid escort. The group will spend a few hours on the islands, then release its escort, drive to the Wildlife Refuge on Cape Charles, and reinforce themselves with lunch and hot drinks in preparation for more birding. The trip will conclude with a stop at the more public CBBT island (the one with a fishing pier) at about 3 PM. If you have any interest in this field trip you need to contact Tom Charlock at 599-3418 or email him at TomCharlock@gmail.com by December 23rd. It is also important that you read the information on the HRBC website at www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org/fieldtrips.asp because there is a security protocol that has to be followed for this trip.

VSO Winter Field Trip, NC, Outer Banks, Feb. 7-9, 2014

Make plans to join trip leaders Bill Akers, Jerry Via and Lee Adams at the Outer Banks of North Carolina February 7-9 for the VSO's Winter field trip. The trip always has great waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors, along with a wide assortment of land birds. Back by popular demand, the VSO is offering the optional Friday trip to Lake Mattamuskeet, led by VSO field trip co-chair Lee Adams. More information at http://www.virginiabirds.net/f_trips.html#OBX2014.

Williamsburg Bird Club Book Review

By Jeanette Navia



Why Do Bluebirds Hate Me? : More Answers to Common and Not-So-Common Questions about Birds and Birding, by Mike O'Connor. Beacon Press, 2013. ISBN 9780807012536. \$12.95. 185 p. Williamsburg Library call number 598.072 OCO.

I borrowed this book from the library hoping I would enjoy a few laughs while gaining a little knowledge about birds.

I almost threw the book across the floor because the jokes were so lame they got on my nerves. But the questions and answers about birds were interesting, so I kept reading. Of the seventy-six question-and-answer segments, there wasn't one I didn't find interesting.

The reason the subtitle contains the phrase "more answers" is because O'Connor wrote the book *Why Don't Woodpeckers Get Headaches and Other Bird Questions You Know You Want to Ask*, published in 2007. I have not read that book, but perhaps I should, now that I know I can

make it through O'Connor's humor and learn a thing or two. Both books are compilations of O'Connor's Q&A bird columns in a weekly Cape Cod newspaper.

O'Connor answers each question with a well-researched, interesting—and often longer—answer than the question warrants. For instance, someone asked why ducks and geese are in North American bird books, but chickens are not. O'Connor gives a brief history of the origin of our domestic chicken (they are descendants of Red Junglefowl, found mostly in Asia), and describes modern-day chicken production. He also, of course, includes a lame joke about “Emperor Sanders,” who insists on being called Colonel.

Here is another example of O'Connor's “wit”: Meredith from Connecticut asked why, since she's always thought egrets were fish eaters, she saw fields in North Carolina filled with egrets though there were no fish in sight. O'Connor begins his reply, “Egrets are now vegetarians. The thought of spearing little fish day after day has become unsettling to egrets. As a result, they have abandoned their barbaric ways, crawled out of the dingy swamps, and moved into open fields where they feed on wild, free-range tofu. By doing so, the birds not only feel good about themselves, but their breath smells way better than it did when they ate fish all day, which really helps them in the dating world.” He then discusses Cattle Egrets seriously, describing their history on this continent, having originated in Africa and expanded into South America, North America, and then Australia. He also discusses why, unlike some introduced species, Cattle Egrets have not created many problems: they don't eat fish and thus don't compete with native egrets. In the last paragraph, he jokes again, “Cattle Egrets are not vegetarians, Meredith. They eat plenty of meat, but mostly in the form of insects... [o]n the whole, they mind their own business and cause few annoyances... rare for a foreign species. Too bad we can't say the same about Mel Gibson.”

I realize that humor is different for everyone, and many people on Amazon.com have raved about this “very funny” bird book. The information is really interesting, covering things like why Cardinals are named Cardinal, what Carolina Parakeets were and how they've gone extinct, what sorts of houses Tree Swallows like, what happens when baby Osprey lose their nests, what predators eat hummingbirds, whether or not “shade-grown” coffee really does help birds or is just a gimmick (it is not a gimmick; it does help birds), and

what sort of birds are mentioned in “The Twelve Days of Christmas” (they're not “calling” birds).

I would recommend this book, and perhaps his first one, for any bird lover, as the topics are wide-ranging, interesting, and well-researched. I tried to write this review in the same vein as his book, with my own dumb jokes, but I just couldn't do it. Maybe that's why it rubbed me the wrong way. Perhaps I'm jealous of his ability to come up with something silly to say about everything.

Adopt-a-Highway

From Shirley Devan

Thanks to John Fennell for coordinating our local Highway Cleanup for the last several years. Last week John received a letter from the VA Department of Transportation congratulating and thanking him and the Bird Club for 23 years of highway cleanup, most recently along Croaker Road in Toano. Before the Croaker Road section, the Club was in charge of cleanup along Route 5 near Greensprings Road. John has decided to step back from his duties as coordinator of the Club's highway pickup team, and the Board agreed to relinquish its Adopt-a-Highway responsibilities because of the low number of volunteers on recent pickup efforts. Many thanks to John for his commitment to this project over the years.

Photo from Member



Shirley Devan took this photo of a White-throated Sparrow on November 30th at Jamestown Island

November Bird Walks & Field Trip

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

Bird Walk on November 8th at NQP



Photo by Sara Lewis

Tom McCary, Susan Nordholm, Betty Peterson, William Wallace, Geoff Giles, Joyce Lowery, Sara Lewis, Danielle Lawson, Sandra Peterson, Daniel Keener, and Bob & Cynthia Long joined leader Hugh Beard for the walk at New Quarter Park. Hugh said that the weather was beautiful but the birds didn't become active until the sun started warming up the tops of the trees around 9 AM. A total of 26 species were identified during the morning.

A Day of Days at Shirley Plantation By Tom McCary

A small but enthusiastic and dedicated band of birders joined Shirley Devan and me for the November field trip to Shirley Plantation. What a magnificent outing we enjoyed: very mild conditions prevailed and fifty species of birds kept us hopping and twitching.

Perhaps the moderate conditions kept a number of species still to our north; for example, on the Earl Pit we found only Ruddy Ducks, Bufflehead, and one female Red-breasted Merganser. Four Greater Yellowlegs were a good discovery there.

For me the "bird of the Day" was an Osprey, which we discovered at The Cove. It is indeed rather unusual to see one this late in the year. This awkward fellow—a novice at fishing—in spite of numerous plunges came up always with talons bare. His dogged determination won our praise and respect.

Another lingering bird we found was the tail-wagging Palm Warbler—right there in the goat pasture where I saw perhaps two of his cousins last month. He was one of our target birds.

A new bird for my Shirley list was spotted on a buoy in the middle of the James—a Great Black-backed Gull. Thank you, Shirley Devan, for your keen observation of this handsome bird. While watching the gull, we also discovered three Forster's Terns and a late Sharp-shinned Hawk flying over the estate.



Photo of Osprey taken by Judy Jones on the Shirley Plantation Field Trip.



Left to right: Judy Jones, Patty Maloney, Cheryl Jacobson, Janet Apel, Tom McCary, and Joyce Lowry
Photo by Shirley Devan

One of our birders, Cheryl Jacobson, has a knack for finding Eastern Meadowlarks. She has done it before, and she did it this time: eleven of these handsome creatures showed off for us in the old polo field.

These sightings and many others made this trip a day of days at Shirley. Thanks to the Carter family for giving us permission to bird there and to Janet Appel, our Director of Operations at Shirley, for providing us with a good preview of the “hot birding spots.” My thanks to Shirley Devan for helping to lead our outing.

Bird Walk on November 23rd at NQP

From Shirley Devan—“A baker’s dozen turned out for the 4th Saturday Bird Walk at New Quarter Park. Bill Williams led the charge and did a good job of getting us on the birds. Thank you, Bill!

The most exciting find of the day was a female Purple Finch, which Bill heard first and then found! Most of the group observed it flitting around with the Tufted Titmice and the Carolina Chickadees.

Down at the floating dock, three Bald Eagles circled overhead with two Red-tailed Hawks—close enough to get good looks.” A total of 32 species were identified during the morning, including 57 Double-crested Cormorants, 3 Bald Eagles, and 1 Purple Finch.



Seated left to right: George Boyles, Virginia Boyles, Cheryl Jacobson, Joyce Lowry, Jan Lockwood, Shirley Devan.
Standing: Patty Maloney, Rick Gardner, Nancy Barnhart, Geoff Giles, Bill Williams and Bob Gibbs.

Photo by Shirley Devan

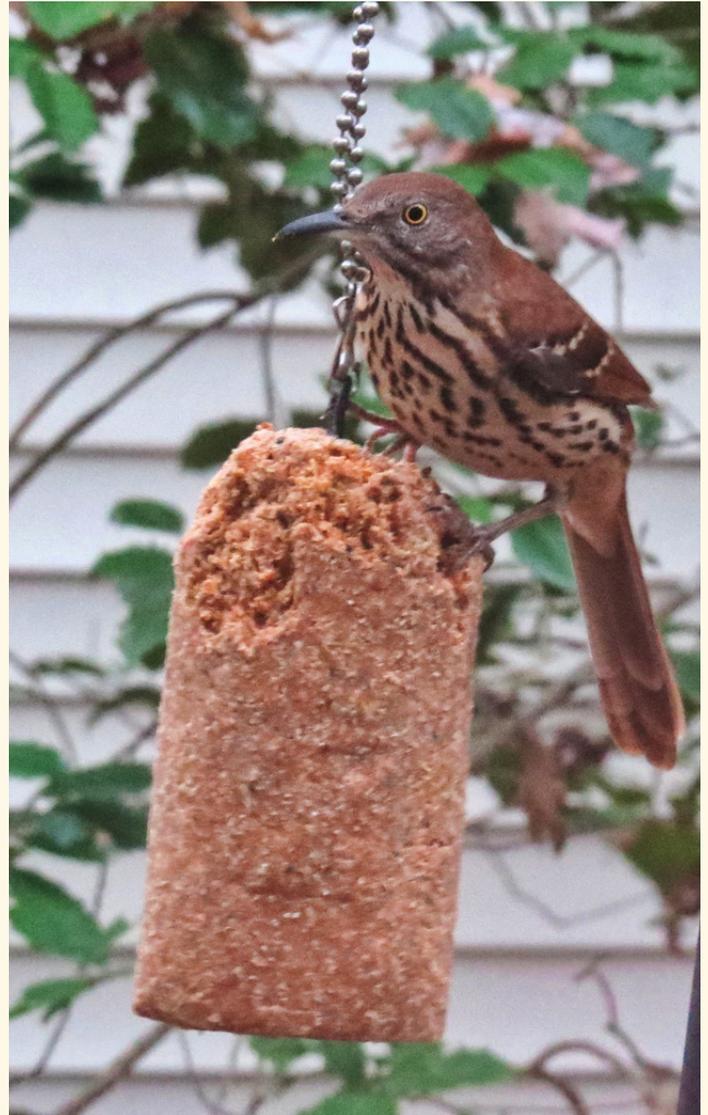
Photo taken in her yard by Shirley Devan



Hermit Thrush—taken on November 18th.



Northern Flicker—taken on November 27th.



Brown Thrasher—also taken on November 18th.

Bird ID 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 December



Novembers's Photo was of a
Brown-headed Cowbird

CALENDAR

Saturday, December 14	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8 AM. jim Corliss, Leader
Sunday, December 15	Williamsburg Bird Club's Christmas Bird Count. See Page 2.
Sunday, December 15	HRBC Bird Walk, Newport News Park, 7 AM. Jane Frigo, Leader.
Saturday, December 28	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 7am, Bill Williams, Leader.
Wednesday, January 1	New Year's Day Boardwalk Bird Show, See Page 4.
February 7-9	VSO Winter Field Trip to the Outer Banks, See Page 4