



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

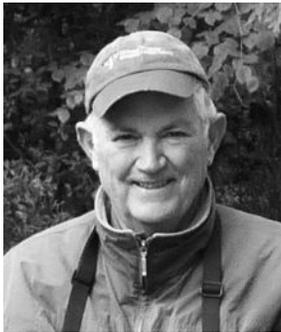
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October 2014

President's Corner

By Geoff Giles



Hi all! This lovely summer wasn't endless after all. We are beginning to see signs of a subtle but lovely turning of the seasons, including some birds moving through and some of our winter resident birds making their first appearances. On our latter bird walk at New Quarter Park in September, Bill Williams showed us a stunning array of fall migrants, including some warblers we don't often get to see in fall. How about a beautiful blackburnian warbler, or a lovely pair of black-throated blue warblers, among the flitting American redstarts and northern parulas? Wow! And then as if to emphasize that our winter friends are also getting the urge to move south, we had a yellow-bellied sapsucker and a ruby-crowned kinglet. We were rarely out of earshot and often within view of our club's logo bird, the red-headed woodpecker. And we finished the walk with an eerie silence in a birdy spot, thanks to the finally visible presence of a merlin looking for breakfast! *Continued on page 4.*

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October 15 Program – Florida Birds

Bob Schamerhorn will be our presenter for the October 15, 2014 Williamsburg Bird Club program entitled "Birding Florida's Hotspots." This will be a fun and informative program with great photos of birds! 7:30 pm, Andrews Hall, Room 101, W&M

This program displays a spectacular array of Florida birds and the places to find them. The show contains Swallow-tailed Kites, Snail Kites, Sandhill Cranes, Roseate Spoonbills, Crested Caracara, Limpkin, Florida Scrub Jays, Burrowing Owls, Painted Buntings and lots more. It is presented with colorful photographs, locality maps and discussion of some of the best places to find birds and wildlife in Florida. A printed map with location information is provided for each attendee.

Bob studied Art and Design at Virginia Tech in the early 1980's and has worked in art related fields ever since. Photography is an extension of skills he uses in his vocation as a graphic artist for Infinity Graphics, a business he started in 1996. Bob maintains a weekly photo-blog at iPhotoBirds.com and on Facebook. He is a member of the Richmond Audubon and Hawaii Audubon Societies, the Colonial Nature Photography Club and VSO.

Ruth and Deane Gordon will provide refreshments.

October 18 Field Trip to Eastern Shore

Meet by 7:30 am Saturday, October 18 at Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Road and prepare to carpool to save on tolls. The group will visit Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge and Kiptopeke State Park in the morning, aiming to finish around noon. For those who wish to continue birding in the afternoon, the group will head to "the dump" and Willis Wharf. Carpoolers should plan to ride with those whose return time coincides with theirs.

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Shop at Wild Birds Unlimited!

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

Reported Bird Sightings for September 2014

We want to know what you're seeing in your yard and travels. Please share with Club members by sending your sightings to Fred Blystone, 229-4346, fredblystone@gmail.com or Shirley Devan, 813-1322, sedevan52@cox.net

September 5. Bill Williams birds around Jamestown Island and finds a Black Tern and a Veery.

September 7. Tom McCary reports a Black-and-white warbler at Shirley Plantation in a crabapple tree, plus two Blue-gray Gnatcatchers.

September 8. Bill Williams reports 27 Veerys flying over his home near Jamestown Road – “all by flight call; very likely undercounted; birds were passing overhead and quite vocal; several instances of at least 2 birds calling simultaneously but separable spatial across the sky; slurred/buzzy "churt" distinctly different from Swainson's note and Bobolink notes”

September 9. Lois Leeth reports from St. Augustine, Florida: 12 immature Roseate Spoonbills, 8 Great Egrets, 4 Snowy Egrets, 12 Wood Storks, 1 Osprey, 8 Mallards.

September 9. Bill Williams reports 3 Sora at Jamestown Island.

September 11. Shirley Devan spots a Black-and-white Warbler in a holly tree next to the window at the home of Terry & Jack Johnston in First Colony.

September 11. Ruth Beck, Bill Williams, Virginia and George Boyles, Inge Curtis, Elisa Enders, and Dave Youker conduct the weekly survey at Craney Island and report 72 species. Highlights include: 1 Eared Grebe, 672 Northern Shovelers, 3 Black-necked Stilts, 163 American Avocets, 2 Wilson's Phalaropes, 7 Red-necked Phalarope, 1 Red Phalarope.

September 14. Brian Taber first spots a Sabine's Gull at the back of the ferry crossing the James River. *See article by Bill Williams on pg 5.*

September 14. Jan Lockwood spots a Ruby-crowned Kinglet Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Clapper Rail, and a Veery at New Quarter Park.

September 18. Ruth Beck, Bill Williams, Virginia Boyles, Inge Curtis, Elisa Enders, Alex Minarik, Brian Taber, and Dave Youker survey Craney Island and record 82 species. Highlights include: Eared Grebe, Sora, 168 American Avocets, 3 Red-necked Phalaropes, and 1 Bobolink.

September 18. Nick Newberry reports a Magnolia Warbler on Greensprings Trail.

September 19. Bill Williams finds 4 Sora at Jamestown Island.

September 19. Carol O’Neil reports a Magnolia Warbler in Governor’s Land.

September 20. Bill Williams finds a Veery at Freedom Park.

September 23. Lois Leeth reports an unusual sighting today – a Black Brant, two Wood Storks, 15 White Ibis, 12 Mallards plus a Great Blue Heron with a fish in his beak, 6 Roseate Spoonbills, and 4 Snowy Egrets.

September 27. Bill Williams finds a Sora at Jamestown Island and then locates a Clapper Rail, a Veery, and a Gray-cheeked Thrush at College Creek on the Colonial Parkway.

September 28. Bill Williams birds the Debord Tract in James City County and spots a Black-throated Green Warbler and Swainson’s Thrush. He also finds a Swainson’s Thrush and a Gray-cheeked Thrush at College Creek.

September 28. Nick Newberry finds a Black-throated Green Warbler in Matoaka Woods on W&M Campus.

September 30. Tom McCary spots a Common Yellowthroat in his yard in Williamsburg.



*A “yard bird” – Cape May Warbler, September 11, 2014.
Photo by Inge Curtis*



A “yard bird” – Summer Tanager, September 4, 2014. Photo by Inge Curtis

Results of the Kiptopeke Challenge, September 20, 2014

Two teams with Williamsburg Bird Club members participated in the 20th Annual Kiptopeke Challenge. Club member Brian Taber teamed up with Dave Youker (President, Hampton Roads Bird Club) and Chris Foster to form the “Wild Birds Unlimited of Williamsburg.” They tallied 108 species as they moved up the Eastern Shore from Kiptopeke (at 5 am) to Chincoteague and Saxis Marsh at dusk. They had a 3-owl day – Barn Owl, Eastern Screech Owl, and a Barred Owl. A lone Snow Goose surprised several teams flying low over the Oyster Landfill, including the “Wren Wrustlers” – Susan Powell, Cheryl Jacobson, Jan Lockwood, and Shirley Devan. The Wrustlers tallied 87 species as they moved from Chincoteague south to Kiptopeke throughout the day. They observed dozens of hungry Merlins migrating down the Shore but only one counted! Was that why all the songbirds were hiding? All marveled at the large numbers of night herons at the Landfill and the White Ibis coming in to roost at the Refuge. A fun day birding for a good cause – Coastal VA Wildlife Observatory! Thanks to all who contributed to one or both teams! Not too late to send a check to CVWO, 6640 Rexford Lane, Williamsburg, VA 23188.

President's Corner, continued from page 1

Speaking of Hawks, the Kiptopeke hawk watch is having an exceptional year, especially in the falcon department, with peregrine falcons and merlins especially numerous this year. The hawk watch, combined with the other temptations of the Eastern Shore in October, make that an area that is hard to beat. We have decided that if we can't beat 'em we should join 'em – so our 18 October field trip will be to the Eastern Shore. We will plan to check out the hawk watch, the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Reserve, the landfill (lovingly known by insiders as “the dump”), Willis Wharf (if time allows), and of course the CBBT going and coming. See details on page 1.

Speaking of William and Mary, a students' bird club has started on the campus and we are in close touch with this young and enthusiastic group. They are most welcomed and encouraged to join us whenever their academic schedules permit, and we hope that will be often. Some of their number will doubtless pursue knowledge and enjoyment of birds as an academic and professional discipline, as well as a source of enjoyment, so we will look forward to meeting and birding with them.

On the home front for me, I can tell looking out my window that fall is gaining on us by the resident flock of red-eyed vireos that feasts on the red berries of my southern magnolia when they ripen in fall. The first vireo scouts were checking the seedpods in late August, well before they began to yield the first berries. For the last several weeks, the vireos have been stuffing themselves on the berries. They are late migrants and go all the way to South America, so I suppose the seeds contribute to their energy reserves for the upcoming migration. It is entertaining to see them sit on a seed pod and latch on to a red seed in its fist-sized pod with their hooked beaks. They rock the seed back and forth like a dentist extracting a tooth before it comes out, then they rock back and swallow the large seed. In years past I have seen thrushes lurk in my magnolia and wait until a vireo has a seed loosened, before darting out, chasing the vireo, gulping down the seed and then going back into the magnolia to lurk and wait for another meal to be served up.

This year the beautyberries I planted in the yard, and some beyond my fence, are loaded with purple berries. I have seen red-eyed vireos occasionally eat the ripe beautyberries, but more often it has been the resident flock of cardinals that has been regularly dining on those. Maybe that's why I have a dozen or so cardinals most of the time about, instead of the usual five or so. Until a week ago I could not keep nijer thistle feeder in the yard filled because of voracious flocks of goldfinches. Interestingly, these seem to mostly be going elsewhere at present, but the Carolina chickadees have suddenly switched from black oil sunflower seeds to nijer thistle. Haven't seen that before, but the white-breasted nuthatches have come swarming in to pick up the consumption of sunflower seeds. The cooper's hawk who comes by does not seem to have changed his diet, judging by the reaction of all the other birds when he's around. And a few days ago one of the noisy and ever-present red shouldered hawks stopped soaring and squawking high above long enough to swoop down into my yard after a couple of mourning doves. He appeared to come up empty-taloned.

You will doubtless also have been struck by the abundance of acorns, hickory nuts and beechnuts our Williamsburg trees are producing this year. Will this draw the fire of the squirrels who normally expend so much creative energy going after our feeders, or simply give us a bumper crop of squirrels next year? Of course, there are other creatures out there that tend to prosper with lots of acorns and beechnuts, namely blue jays and our favorite red-headed woodpeckers. Those are said to literally follow the acorns and to swarm in great numbers to areas where the oaks are delivering mast years of acorn abundance. Maybe the unusually abundant and exuberant red-headed woodpeckers at New Quarter Park on our last bird walk were the advance contingent of legions of those beautiful and most welcomed birds headed our way.

Hope you'll join us and find out. Our twice-monthly bird walks at New Quarter Park are on the second Saturday of every month at 8 AM and on the fourth Saturday at 7 AM. The public, as well as our members, are most welcomed to join in. There are lots of avian treats and surprises, as well as great companionship, to be shared on our walks, so we will hope to see you there!

Member Photos



Another look at the Cape May Warbler at Inge Curtis's birdbath and water feature, September 10, 2014. Photo by Inge Curtis

Immature Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Inge Curtis's birdbath and water feature, September 11, 2014. Photo by Inge Curtis



Immature Blue Grosbeak, Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge, September 26, 2014. Photo by Shirley Devan

Three New Species for The Colonial Historic Triangle's Bird List

By Bill Williams

Adam D'Onofrio of Petersburg makes late summer/early fall visits to Hog Island Wildlife Management Area in Surry County as often as his work schedule allows. Adam is the Southeast Region editor for *Virginia Birds*, a Virginia Society of Ornithology's quarterly journal, and he also serves as a voting member of the Virginia Avian Records Committee. So he knows his stuff and keeps his avian radar detection on high alert.

On August 6 that acuity paid off. Walking past view-blocking corn rows at Hog, Adam eventually got in the open where water at the end of one of the impoundments could be observed. The 5 ducks in front of him were initially suspected to be Mallards...until they emerged into full view, then flew, landing as a group on a tree limb!! Their bright pink bills, long, pink legs, big bold eye-rings and very black bellies plus the broad white bar across their upper wings identified them as Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, a new species for the Colonial Historic Triangle, not to mention a very rare species anywhere in the state.

Prior to 2007 there were only 7 accepted Virginia records for this species. The first was from King William County where one was shot 7 October 1987. Since then the number of reports has grown slowly as the species has gained a breeding foothold along the Gulf Coast. The first confirmed Black-bellied Whistling-Duck breeding in Florida was 31 August 1990 when six adults were seen with "two broods of six or more." Nevertheless, provenance for individuals outside of the species' known breeding range is always an issue in determining their ornithological status. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks are such a striking species that many are kept in private collections from which some occasionally escape. Thus, when this duck is observed "in the wild" every effort must be made to determine if the birds show any indicators they have been in captivity: signs such as wing tags, leg bands, clipped wings or extensive feather wear, or, most often, clipped hind-toes (hallux).

This is where the now-that-we-know-what-it-is challenge enters another application. Adam could see at least 2 of the 5 ducks were banded. Both had blue bands on the lower left leg. A spotting-scope-in-hand stealth-creep through the Hog Island marsh edge got Adam close enough to see that one band had the white lettering A86, the other A89 or A8Y.

Gary Costanzo, Waterfowl Biologist for Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, was contacted to see if colleagues in other states had any insights about these birds. Gary reported the two ducks had been banded July 30, 2014, near McClellanville, Charleston County, SC by Mr. Billy Dukes of the SC Department of Natural Resources. Birding and ornithology at their collaborative best.

But the Best Birds scenario gets even better!!

Only a few birders have seen more species in Virginia than our own Brian Taber. So it was more than exceptional when he spotted a more than exceptional LIFE BIRD as he was ferry-cruising back to Jamestown after a Hog Island visit on September 14. There it was!!! Right there off the back of boat hob-knobbing among the ever-attendant Laughing Gulls!!!

Now here's what you need to do to appreciate what a wonderful bird this was. Get your field guide. Look up Sabine's Gull. Then pay attention to the juvenile. How striking is that? Next...look on the species' distribution map. Right!!!! It is not supposed to be here!!! We'll never know for sure why this bird ended up on our small section of the James River in mid-September. Because this species is highly pelagic it is possible the persistent northeast winds through much of the month came into play, deflecting this first-time migrant inland.

Birders from all over the state rushed to the area in high hopes the gull would perform for them. Each day through September 20 it did! But it was not a "gimme" by any means. The bird seemed to prefer following the large ferry, the Pocahontas, possibly because its propellers churned up more of the James' food resources than the smaller ferry, the Surry. Also, it was almost never seen until after mid-day. Why and where it went in the interim is unknown. More than a few folks plied the Jamestown to Scotland back to Jamestown numerous times before they saw the bird. The second deck of the Pocahontas became birding central for almost a week.

But the drama wasn't over, and here's where the story takes an even grander twist. On September 19 at about 1:30 p.m. Sabine's Gull hopeful Diana Doyle spotted the bird while fellow traveler Ernie Miller (Ernie works at the Yorktown/Newport News Wild Birds Unlimited) snapped photos. Then...RIGHT THERE BESIDE THE BOAT was...hold on to your binoculars...an adult Black-legged Kittiwake. No way!!!! Ga-hed. Look that one up. You think Sabine's Gull isn't supposed to be here. But the pictures Ernie took left no doubt. Unfortunately, the kittiwake did not stay around. It was not seen again even during the next several ferry trips Diana and Ernie took. Bummer!

For your academic interests.....Sabine's Gull was named by naturalist, horticulturist and founder of the Linnean Society, Joseph Sabine for his brother Edward Sabine, whose expertise in the meticulous measurement of longitude led to publication of a "gigantic body of work surveying the general distribution and level of magnetic force over the whole surface of the earth." Whew.

The moniker "kittiwake" is derived from the sounds the species makes. Aren't you glad you know that?



Black-legged Kittiwake on James River, September 19, 2014. Photo by Ernie Miller



Sabine's Gull on James River, September 19, 2014. Photo by Ernie Miller



Black-bellied Whistling Ducks at Hog Island, August 6, 2014. Photo by Adam D'Onofrio

September Bird Walks at New Quarter Park

September 13: Per Leader Jim Corliss: "We had a great turn-out for the club's September 13 bird walk at New Quarter Park. Eighteen birders, including "finer niners" from The Virginia Master Naturalists Cohort 9 and two visitors from Minnesota, braved the impending rain to enjoy a cool and bug-free overcast morning. Bird highlights included three Clapper Rails, one of which graced us with a nice view on the far side of Queen's Creek, plus an adult Red-headed Woodpecker that has been scarce in the park for the last year. The Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets were plentiful, and a beautiful female Belted Kingfisher posed for the group in the viewfinder of Geoff's spotting scope. Near the picnic shelters on the trail to the fire pit, Lisa Nickel found the most unusual sighting of the morning - a slumbering raccoon curled up precariously between two branches alongside a tree trunk fifty feet above the ground. Most of us glanced over the raccoon, mistaking it simply for a tree burl. But Lisa noted that the strange tree "growth" was furry, and a careful look through the scope revealed that it was breathing. It's difficult to imagine how the raccoon was comfortable given its position, and we'll need to keep an eye out in the future to see if it continues frequenting this odd resting place. Thanks to all for coming out and enjoying the nice morning.



Participants in September 13 Bird Walk at New Quarter Park:

Seated: Jim Corliss, Jan Lockwood, Brenda Uekert, Cheryl Jacobson, Joyce Lowery, Sue Mutell

Standing: Susan Nordholm, Lisa Nickel, Claire Britcher, Geoff Giles, Millie Abell, Ray Abell

Not pictured: Hal and Lana Becker, Bruce Glendenning, Jim and Suzan Griffin, Tom Mills

September 27: Bill Williams led the group around our favorite spots at New Quarter Park. The group tallied 47 species including migrating warblers: 3 Black-and-white Warblers, 2 American Redstarts, 7 Northern Parulas, 1 Blackburnian Warbler, 2 Black-throated Blue Warblers, one male and one female, and 1 Pine Warbler. Other "good" birds were Red-headed Woodpeckers, 1 recently arrived Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a Merlin, a lingering Summer Tanager, and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

Participants: Lou Amato, Portia Belden, Jim Booth, Geoff Giles, Charlotte Kline, Amy Langerud, Joyce Lowry, Michael Lowry, David Lunt, Sue Mitchell, Betty Peterson, Bill Williams.

October Bird Walks at New Quarter Park will be October 11 (8 am with leader Tom McCary) and October 25 (7 am with leader Bill Williams). All are welcome!

The Christmas Bird Count, December 14, 2014

Please mark your calendars for Sunday, December 14, 2014. That's the date for the bird club's annual Christmas Bird Count. More information will follow in the November and December Flyers. Bill Williams will be coordinating this time-honored citizen science effort.

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 in the next electronic newsletter as well as on the website.



Photo for October – what are these birds?

The September photo was of an immature Northern Gannet



CALENDAR

Saturday, October 11	Williamsburg Bird Club (WBC) Bird Walk, New Quarter Pk, 8 am. Tom McCary, leader.
Wednesday, October 15	WBC Monthly Meeting, 7:30 pm, Room 101, Andrews Hall, W&M Campus
Saturday, October 18	WBC Field Trip to Eastern Shore of Virginia. 7:30 am departure. See page 1 for details.
Sunday, October 19	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Saturday, October 25	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 7 am. Bill Williams, Leader
Sunday, November 2	Daylight Savings Time ends!
Sunday, November 2	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Saturday, November 8	Williamsburg Bird Club (WBC) Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8 am.
Sunday, December 14	Audubon Christmas Bird Count! Save the date and look for details in later newsletters.