



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

April 2015

President's Corner



By Geoff Giles
Believe it or not, spring is just around the corner. If you visit the south shore of the James River, you will already see some trees with colorful blossoms popping out here and there. So the

time for foliage, flowers and insects is rapidly approaching. Want to use the most environment-friendly means of controlling insects? Try birds!! Almost all of the birds that will nest in the vicinity of your yard will be feeding insects to their nestlings, since insects are rich in fat and protein and help the chicks grow strong and healthy quickly. It is estimated that an average Carolina Chickadee nest containing four to six chicks will consume about 9,000 caterpillars. Multiply that by the number of chickadees, cardinals, titmice, sparrows, nuthatches, towhees – the list goes on and on – and you can see that the more birds your yard supports the less you will need other means of insect control!!

Most of us have helped our birds through the rough patches of this winter by offering supplemental food sources at our feeders. There is nothing wrong with continuing to do so as the weather gets milder, as our birds will need ready sources of energy to help them to have the energy to rustle up all those insects for their nestlings. Plus we will continue to have the enjoyment of seeing them up close at the feeders. Since insects and berries will be in high demand, it is hard to beat some plantings of native species of flowers, shrubs and trees around your property. You will have the enjoyment of seeing a greater variety of our spring, summer and fall species foraging. Native species of plants give us maximum bang for the buck, since they are hardy for our climate and support our native bird species, which have evolved to feed on

Continued on page 4.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS...

April 15 Meeting

In April, William and Mary students who received research scholarships from the Williamsburg Bird Club will describe their research for us. They are:

Stephanie Chin speaking on the effect of dietary methylmercury on parental care of a model avian species.

Autumn Swan speaking on the effect of noise on the social structure of European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*).

Akshay Deverakonda speaking on the testing of the Incompatibility Hypothesis for Avian Divorce using radio telemetry.

Please join us in room 101 of Andrews Hall at 7:30 on Wednesday, April 15th to listen to some great presentations. And don't forget to print out and use your parking pass, available at our website.

May 20 Meeting

Join us Wednesday, May 20th, at 7:30 pm for a presentation by wildlife rehabilitator Pearl Beamer of Sacred Friends, a Wildlife Rehabilitation & Education Center. Her organization specializes in raptors and water birds (loons, herons, pelicans, egrets) but will not turn anything away. Her service area is primarily the Tidewater (Hampton, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, Suffolk) area but they will care for any animals as long as the animal is transported to them.

This joint meeting with the Virginia Master Naturalist Historic Rivers Chapter will be in Andrews Hall, Room 101. Please remember to have a parking pass on your car's dashboard.



Pearl Beamer (photo provided by her)

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Wild Birds Unlimited

The WBC receives a 5% rebate on the pre-tax amount our Club members spend at Wild Birds Unlimited in Monticello Marketplace. Remember to let them know you are a member.

April 18 Field Trip: Bob Ake and the Great Dismal Swamp

On Saturday, April 18, Bob Ake will lead a walk at the Great Dismal Swamp from 7:00-11:00 a.m. Those who wish to carpool will depart from Colony Square Shopping Center at 5:45 a.m. For those driving on their own, the entrance to Washington Ditch is at 3100 White Marsh Road, Suffolk VA 23434. This is an open trip and you do not need to reserve a spot.

The trip will begin at the Washington Ditch parking lot and birders should be prepared to walk about 5-6 miles during the morning - if you cannot stay for the entire walk, you always have the option to peel off and leave early.

You will be there at the best time of the year with returning warblers and other migrants to be seen and heard, including the possibility of the elusive Swainson's Warbler. Some early butterflies may also be spotted.

Please bring water, snacks, and insect repellent. There are restroom facilities adjacent to the parking lot.

Following the walk there will be an opportunity to drive Railroad Ditch to Lake Drummond.

Sign-ups are not needed for this trip. You will receive reminders and any additional information about logistics prior to each trip.

Questions? Contact Jan Lockwood at 757-634-4164 or nzedr@msn.com

June 6 Field Trip: Red Cockaded Woodpeckers

On Saturday, June 6th, Mike Wilson, Center for Conservation Biology, will lead a trip to Piney Grove Preserve in Sussex to hopefully spot some of the endangered Red-cockaded woodpeckers. Piney Grove hosts Virginia's last breeding population of this endangered species. The Nature Conservancy conducts prescribed burns to manage the pine-savanna habitat for the woodpeckers. Biologists from the Center for Conservation Biology monitor and support what is recognized as the record recovery of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker.



Red-cockaded Woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*)
Male displaying his red cockade
© Photo by B A Bowen Photography
<http://babowenphotography.com> Used by permission

An EARLY departure to catch the ferry and drive to the Preserve to meet Mike is a must if we are to see the birds as they leave the nest cavity to forage.

We will meet at the Colony Square Shopping Center at 4:00 a.m. to carpool. If you have a spotting scope please bring it for this trip. Also, you'll need to bring water, snacks and insect repellent.

Sign-ups are not needed for this trip. You will receive reminders and any additional information prior to the trip.

Questions? Contact Jan Lockwood at 757-634-4164 or nzedr@msn.com

Spring in the Blue Ridge – 2015 VSO Annual Meeting at Wintergreen

MAY 8-10



A spectacular mountain-top setting and Blue Ridge avian specialties will make the 2015 VSO Annual Meeting a can't-miss experience. Field trips along the ridges as well as down into the Rockfish and Shenandoah Valleys should yield unbeatable natural beauty ... not to mention the great company of fellow birders. Jointly hosting are the Augusta Bird Club and Monticello Bird Club, with past VSO president John Spahr serving as general chair. Our headquarters will be Wintergreen Resort (www.wintergreenresort.com). Mark your calendar and reserve your lodging now.

The keynote speaker at the Saturday evening banquet will be Scott Weidensaul, internationally known author, naturalist and conservationist. A Pulitzer Prize nominee, his books cover a spectrum of topics from bird migration, to birding history, extinct species, and early American history. His articles have appeared in publications such as *Smithsonian*, the *New York Times* and *Nature Conservancy*. He lectures widely and is an active field researcher, specializing in birds of prey and hummingbirds. After speaking Saturday evening he will join us on field trips Sunday.

On Friday evening, Dr. Marshall Faintich will introduce us to the birds of the Wintergreen and Nelson County. He is the author of *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Wintergreen*, and his wildlife photos have appeared in newspapers, magazines, web sites and presentations in Virginia and Maryland. He is the former birding activity manager for the Rockfish Valley Trail. His website (<http://www.symbolicmessengers.com/blog.htm>) contains more than 5000 of his wildlife photos. Find more details at the VSO web site: <http://www.virginiabirds.net/VSO-Annual-Meeting.html>.

Lodging: Reserve by April 8

Rooms are being held for the VSO at special rates that will be honored not only for the meeting but also two days before and after the meeting. In addition, condos with 2, 3, and 4 bedrooms are also available for a reasonable price. Call 1-800-611-6888 (Monday – Friday 9 am – 5 pm) and ask for the Group Reservations Department.

Single/double accommodation in Mountain Inn	\$109.00
2-bedroom condo	\$189.00
3-bedroom condo	\$249.00
4-bedroom condo	\$299.00

plus 10% resort fee and 10.3% tax

Mountain Inn Rooms include kitchenette with mini fridge, small stove, coffee maker, toaster; king or queen size bed; daily maid service; and wireless Internet access. Condos include full kitchen with full-size refrigerator, coffee maker, toaster; separate living area with fireplace, bedrooms (some are lofts), and dining area; balcony or deck; laundry facilities; daily maid service, and wireless Internet access.

New Quarter Park's 30th Anniversary Celebration

You are invited to join in the fun at the 30th Anniversary Celebration of the opening of New Quarter Park on May 2, 2015, from 10 am to 2 pm. Members of the Williamsburg Bird Club will lead a bird walk, the Tidewater Appalachian



Trail Club will lead a trail hike, and the Eastern Virginia Mountain Bike Association will lead a mountain bike trail ride. Archaeologists will host an artifact washing station where visitors can wash 17th and 18th century artifacts recovered from a site occupied by early owners of the site and slaves who toiled on the property when it was an outlying farm attached to Carter's Grove plantation. William and Mary Biology Department professor Dr. Doug DeBerry will lead a botany walk. The Virginia Native Plant Society will hold a sale of native plants. The NASA Skywatchers Club will set up their scopes and invite visitors to safely view the sun. Segway rides will be offered by Patriot Tours & Provisions. Colonial Disc Golf Club will demonstrate and teach disc golfing techniques. Kayaking companies Chesapeake Experience and Bay Country Kayaking will talk about their kayaking trips at exhibit booths. The Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists will exhibit and talk with visitors about their education and

citizen science activities in the park. York County Parks, Recreation & Tourism (PRT) will exhibit materials about the wide variety of recreation activities they offer to citizens.

While these activities and exhibits are featured in the area around the park office, the North American Chapter of the British Longbow Society will be holding their Tournament in the overflow parking lot area. The public is invited to observe and talk to the archers. Staff from Virginia Tech's Agricultural Research & Extension Center in Virginia Beach will be talking about the studies they are conducting at the park to aid in the management of nursery plants. There will also be a ceremony at 11:30 am to celebrate all of those who have made the park a success. New Quarter Park is located at 1000 Lakeshead Drive. For more information, contact Sara Lewis at saraclewis@cox.net .

President's Corner (continued)

them. So keep an eye out for native plant sales and add to your offerings for the feathered friends!

The winter weather has been challenging for some of our planned field trips. After three times being weathered out, we will have to delay our marsh sparrow banding trip until next year, and hope for better wind and tide conditions! We will go ahead with our Chincoteague Blitz trip, and this time the weather should smile on that one and give us some good seasonal birds. Dan Cristol will bring some William and Mary student birders to join us, so we'll have a lot of sharp eyes and ears for that trip.

And speaking of birds of the season, we will hit peak time to see and hear the spring warblers that flock into the Dismal Swamp. By popular demand, we have arranged for Bob Ake to lead us again on that one. He is a true expert on birding and the Dismal Swamp. Want to try to spot an elusive Swainson's Warbler? How about Prairie Warblers, Hooded Warblers, Redstarts, Waterthrushes, and other surprise birds? Can Bob start up a three-way hooting competition with the Barred Owls of the swamp like he did last year? Join us and see! Bob assures us that our trip has hit the prime time to see the beautiful warblers and other birds that flock to the swamp in spring and to hear their spring songs. Can't wait for that one on Saturday, April 18!

And a few weeks later, on the first weekend in May, we will have the annual Spring Bird Count. This event is similar to the famous Christmas Bird Count, but the birds of summer will be here in breeding plumage and singing their breeding tunes! Bill Williams has organized team leaders to cover sectors of the Williamsburg count area, and we welcome anyone who would like to join a team and help us count. For those wanting to participate but unable to get out that day, we welcome tallies of birds from your yard and feeder. Hope you'll join us!!

For a great birding experience, we have arranged a visit to the Piney Grove nature preserve in early June to visit the habitat and see the state endangered Red-cockaded Woodpeckers nesting. This will be on the first week in June, when the birds are feeding their nestlings in the nesting cavities and are most easily observed. We will be led by Mike Wilson of the Center for Conservation Biology, who bands the woodpecker chicks and is an expert on this bird and its unique habitat requirements. As you will see, if you join us for this trip, this specially preserved and maintained habitat also supports a vibrant population of Northern Bobwhite, warblers, and much more. This will be for a group of limited size, but a super trip, so watch for the sign-up opening and don't miss it.

After the rigors of this winter, we have surely earned a lovely spring. Hope yours is a good one and that you will continue to look out for your birds. Don't forget that if you put out nectar (oranges? grape jelly?) for the early hummingbirds you just might get a Baltimore Oriole headed north to nest who will grace your yard with some spectacular color while indulging his sweet tooth! In the meantime, enjoy your spring and look and listen for the beautiful birds headed our way!

Reported Bird Sightings for March, 2015

We want to know what you're seeing in your yard and travels. Please share with Club members by sending your sightings to Judy Jones, jjones184@cox.net or Shirley Devan sedevan52@cox.net.

Members reported these sightings in March:

March 20 - Shaune and Steve Reams reported lots of great sightings on Queens Lake. They were able to see a pair of wigeons, a Pied-billed Grebe, several Tree Swallows flying as fast as bullets, 2 returning Osprey, 2 immature Bald Eagles, a Wood Duck, 8 Great Egrets, 4 flying kingfishers rasping their call, and a pair of Mallards.

March 22 – Inge Curtis reports seeing this majestic Bald Eagle in her back yard in a nearby cypress tree.



She also has been watching a Red-headed Woodpecker all winter, as it changed from a 'brown-headed' to boldly red-headed beauty.

March 24 – Lois Leeth shared this photo of a Black Pelican. This picture was taken by her son and family on their trip to the Galapagos Islands. They not only saw this unusual pelican but also Blue-footed Boobies, frigatebirds, and many more. It sounds like a trip that members of the WBC would love.



March 25 – Kathi Mestayer reported having a good day at her feeder, seeing “a Gray Catbird, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, White-throated Sparrows, Northern Cardinals, Eastern Bluebirds, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Northern Mockingbird, all around feeder at the same time. Pine Warbler last night up in the pine (duh) trees.”

New Quarter Bird Walk on March 14, 2015

On a rather cold morning in March, six birders joined Susan Powell as she led an early morning bird walk at New Quarter Park. Joining Susan were Geoff Giles, Cheryl Jacobson, Mike Powell, Jan Lockwood, Sue Mutell, and in the front row Alex Minarik and Susan Powell. Not pictured is our every-ready photographer, Shirley Devan.



New Quarter Bird Walk on March 28, 2015

The freezing weather couldn't keep WBC birders from wandering the trails at New Quarter on a windy and cold Saturday. Braving the cold in the front row are Jan Lockwood and Sara Lewis. In the back, also frozen, are Susan Powell, Rock Moeslein, and Mike Powell.



Birding South Texas & the Lower Rio Grande Valley with Ann & Gary Carpenter, February, 2015

As some of you may recall, a birding brochure from Road Scholar was provided at one of our Bird Club meetings last year. Ann and I have experienced delightful birding programs with Road Scholar in past years and we found a couple more in that brochure that appealed to us and were being held on back-to-back weeks in February in southern Texas. To end the trip we decided to drive over to Sarasota, Florida for a short visit with Ann's Mom. Accordingly we threw everything into our Caravan, including our scope and tripod, and set off early on the morning of Thursday, February 5.

We made it to the outskirts of Atlanta that evening and to Lake Charles, Louisiana by the evening of the 6th. The only difficulty encountered on the drive was the bright light directly in our eyes as we headed southwest into the late afternoon sun. While overnighing in Lake Charles we realized we were making excellent progress and would arrive in Brownsville, Texas too early on Sunday if we continued to drive straight through on the Interstates. We decided we could do some quick "side" birding along the way. The next morning, Saturday, we dipped south and drove toward the Gulf coast. Our first stop was Sabine National Wildlife Area in Louisiana. We had only enough time to spend a few minutes on the viewing platform at the Blue Goose Trail-head but from there we spotted Belted Kingfisher, American Kestrel, American Avocets, both Brown and White Pelicans, Pied-billed Grebes and very distant and unidentifiable ducks. Other stops that morning included Pleasant Island near Port Arthur, and Tyrell Park in Beaumont, Texas. Among birds spotted that morning were a Red-tailed Hawk, Caspian Tern, Northern Harrier, Lesser Scaup, Loggerhead Shrike, Neotropical Cormorant, American Bald Eagle, Blue-winged Teal, Long-billed Dowitcher, both White and Glossy Ibis, Black-necked Stilt, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Lesser Yellowlegs, and White-winged Dove.

Keep in mind as you read through these lists that I have omitted the "usual suspects" which include: Great Blue Herons and all three Egrets, most of the Blackbirds (including the ever present Great-tailed Grackle and Red-winged Blackbird), Northern Mockingbird, most of the gulls, a lot of ducks, and some others. Further, a great many of the listed birds were seen at multiple sights and, after listing them once or twice I have not mentioned them again for the sake of brevity.

On the way to Brownsville we spotted a Crested Caracara enjoying a carrion lunch on the roadside and, at a rest stop, we were surrounded by black birds, a group of which we are sure were Brewers Blackbirds. On Sunday afternoon we joined our Road Scholar birding group for our first tour, *Birding the Texas Tropics; Laguna Atascosa to South Padre Island*, and met our two tour leaders, Bob Powell and Michael Marsden. Bob is a guide/contractor working out of the University of Texas Marine Science Institute and is not only a good birder but a pleasant and efficient tour organizer. Michael, a private birding guide who is originally from Britain, has birded extensively in the Caribbean, southwest Arizona and southern Texas. Michael and his wife, at one time, were caretakers of the Patton residence and Feeders in Patagonia, Arizona. We did some pretty intense birding over the next four days. On Monday our first stop was the Southmost Preserve of the Nature Conservancy. This tract is hard by the Rio Grande River (so close it is inside the rather useless border fence). It was first a sable palm plantation, then a citrus grove, and now the Nature Conservancy is in the process returning it to its natural fauna. Birds sighted there included: Eurasian-collared Dove, Savannah Sparrow, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Lark Sparrow, Vermillion Flycatcher, Long-billed Thrasher, White-eyed Vireo, Eastern Phoebe, White-tailed Kite, Common Yellowthroat, Indigo Bunting, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Crested Caracara, Northern Shoveler, Blue-winged Teal, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Black-crested Titmouse, and the Great Kiskadee. After lunch at the Preserve, Bob and Michael drove us over Boca Chica Boulevard on the way to Boca Chica Beach. The roadsides were much more "birdy" than the beach and during our roadside stops we saw: Couch's Kingbird, White-tailed Hawk, a number of Harris's Hawks, Eastern Meadowlark, Chihuahuan Raven, Mottled Duck, Loggerhead Shrike, Gadwall, Redhead, Least Grebe, both the Reddish Egret and a white morph, Long-billed Curlew, Black-crowned Night Heron, Black-necked Stilt and our best find, the very rare Aplomado Falcon. The falcon was quite far away but, happily, closer and better views of the Aplomado were to come.



(Aplomado falcon, photo by Gary Carpenter)

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TAKE NOTE!

Pay Your 2015 Dues!

We still need your dues for 2015!

Individual: \$15 Family: \$25

Patron: \$35 Student: \$5

Make your check payable to WBC and mail to:

PO Box 1085, Williamsburg, VA 23187.

Please consider adding something extra to your check to support our Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships, our Ruth Beck and Bill Sheehan Ornithology Research Grants to Biology Graduate Students, and feeder stations at the Child Development Resources campus. Membership dues alone do not support these projects. We can't do it without you!!

Feed the Bird(ers)!

We need your help with refreshments. Many thanks to Roger Gosden and Jan Lockwood who have volunteered for snack duty in April. However, we still need volunteers for our May meeting. Would you like to help? You can email Ruth Gordon at ruthkagordon@gmail.com, or call her at (757) 208-0757. Thanks in advance.

BIRDING CUP IS COMING UP!

Virginia Living Museum is once again sponsoring the 2015 Birding Cup on April 10 and 11. You can still register your team of 3-5 birders but registration ends on April 8th. You can sign up online by going to:

<https://thevlm.org/birding-team-registration/> or

<https://thevlm.org/birding-cup/>. For additional

information, you can contact Rock Moeslein at

4mavricks@gmail.com.

(Photo of this year's t-shirt below)



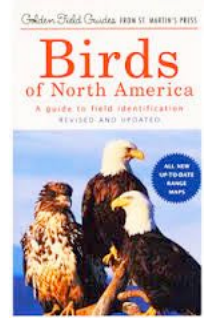
BOOK BAGS NOW AVAILABLE

Great News! At the last board meeting, money was set aside for the purchase of 10 copies of Sibley's Field Guide to



Birds as well as ten copies of Golden Books Birds of North America.

Labeled and bagged, these titles are now available to use with groups of students. Sibley's is appropriate for students grades 4 and up....the Golden Book is appropriate for younger students who are ready to bird! You can check these out by emailing Judy Jones at jjones184@cox.net or calling at 757-229-2667.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR MAY 3rd!

Reserve Sunday, May 3, 2015 for the Williamsburg Bird Club's annual Spring Bird Count. Pack up your field guides, binoculars and notebooks so you can document the bounties of the peak of the vernal bird migration. Structured along the same protocols as the Christmas Bird Count, we will send teams to as many corners of a 15-mile diameter circle centered at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center as we can. Each team's goal is to identify and count every bird of as many bird species as they can find within the 24-hour count period. Teams will be divided among sections leaders, just like those for the Christmas Bird Count. Each section leader will work with team members to establish a plan of action for the day, and will be responsible for reporting the section totals for the count's final tally. Unlike the CBC we will not keep track of the effort data-mileage, hours in the field, etc. Our count compilation event will begin at 5:00 p.m. at a place to be announced, with the final tally beginning no later than 6:00 p.m. If you have previously been part of one of the count section teams, please contact the team's leader to work out when the team will meet. Or contact Bill Williams billwilliams154@gmail.com or 229-1124 to let him know you want to participate. We are really anxious to get as many people involved as possible, **ESPECIALLY FEEDER WATCHERS!!!** We can never have enough birders, so please join us! Thanks in advance for being a part of this Williamsburg Bird Club spring event. The data we collect has significant value for the long-term understanding of our local bird populations.



Here's a photo from Virginia Boyles, just sent in from the Birding Blitz with Dan Cristol of the Eastern Shore on Sunday, March 29th. Sounds like they had a chilly but wonderful day and we'll be sharing more photos and experiences with you in our next newsletter.

CALENDAR

Sunday, April 5	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Saturday, April 11	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8 am. Alex Minarik, Leader
Wednesday, April 15	WBC Meeting, 7:30 pm., Andrews Hall Room 101. W&M students will report on their research. See page 1 for details.
Saturday, April 18	Field Trip to Great Dismal Swamp with Bob Ake 7:00-11:00 am, carpooling at 5:45 am; more details on page 2.
Sunday, April 19	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Saturday, April 25	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 7 am. Leader Bill Williams
Sunday, May 3	Spring Bird Count! See more information on page 7.
Sunday, May 3	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Sunday, May 17	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Wednesday, May 20	Joint Meeting with HRC-VMN, 7:30 pm, Andrews Hall Room 101. Pearl Beamer, wildlife rehabilitator of <i>Sacred Friends</i> ,
Saturday, June 6	WBC Field Trip to Piney Grove, "Red-cockaded Woodpeckers", with Mike Wilson, Center for Conservation Biology. 4:00 am carpool. Details on page 2.
Sunday, June 7	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader

Birding South Texas & the Lower Rio Grande Valley with Ann & Gary Carpenter, February, 2015 (continued)

On Tuesday we were driven to South Padre Island and the World Birding Center located there. On the way and at the Center we spotted: Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Plain Chachalaca, White-winged Dove, Royal and Caspian Terns, Black Skimmer, Western Willet, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Ruddy Turnstone, American Oystercatcher, Roseate Spoonbill, American Wigeon, Little Blue Heron, Clapper Rail, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Gallinule, Green Heron, Sora, Marsh Wren, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and....way, way off in the distance Michael spotted what he swore was a Common Loon. In the late evening we went to Olivera Park in the downtown area of Brownsville where Michael and Bob indicated we were in for special surprise. As sundown approached, we heard, long before we saw flock after flock of extremely raucous parrots fly into the area of the park. We saw Red-crowned, Red-lored, White-fronted and Yellow-headed Parrots in the hundreds!

Wednesday we visited the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Area. Before heading there we were taken over a lumpy, bumpy dirt road in an agricultural area. I was later told this was the "Old Port Isabel" road, and it was there that we got our best views of Aplomado Falcons. There was a breeding pair using a nearby hacking platform and we watched as they tended their nest. I even managed to get a pretty good digi-scope photo of one of them. While on this road and in an adjoining small marshy area we also spotted both White and White-faced Ibis, Eastern Meadowlark, Killdeer, and a White-tailed Kite in hot pursuit of a Cooper's Hawk. At Laguna Atascosa a few of us walked the last mile into the Refuge and we were rewarded with great views of a curious bunch of Groove-billed Anis that popped up out of the brush to see who was wandering down their road. We also had our first (of many) sightings of the beautiful Green Jay and then were further rewarded with Tropical Parula, Northern Cardinal, Canvasback, Eared Grebe, Plain Chachalaca and a Greater Roadrunner.



(Green Jay – photo used with permission of Georgia Quinn)

Our first stop on Thursday was the Sable Palm Sanctuary. Set up on the sidewalk approaching the main office was a scope aimed at a very calm looking Great Horned Owl that was nest sitting in a nearby palm and who appeared quite bored with all the fuss watchers were making over her. Also viewed within the sanctuary, among many others, were Hooded Oriole, White-tipped Dove, Long-billed Thrasher, the gorgeous Altamira Oriole, Least Grebe, Black-throated Green Warbler, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk. On our way to the next stop, Resaca de la Palma, we stopped at a nearby community and, in a large pond there, found Black-bellied Whistling Ducks in the hundreds along with some Muscovy Ducks, and a couple of Spotted Sandpipers.

At the Resaca de La Palma Reserve (our last birding spot for this program), we saw Olive Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, Black and White Warbler, Eastern Phoebe, Couch's Kingbird, Lincoln's Sparrow and Lesser Goldfinch.

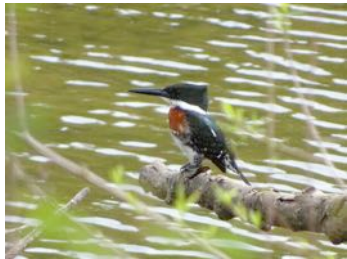
Our second Road Scholar tour did not begin until Sunday evening, February 15. We spent Friday doing necessary chores like laundry, packing and car servicing, but, in the afternoon, on our own, we returned to Sable Palm Sanctuary and revisited the Green Jay, both the Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher. On Saturday we revisited a couple of the parks we had been to earlier.

On Sunday we drove to McAllen by way of Hugh Ramsey Park in Harlingen Texas. This relatively new birding area has a growing reputation as a good birding spot. While we saw nothing new, we spotted Olive Sparrow, Spotted Sandpiper, Green Jay, Altamira Oriole and a White-eyed Vireo.

On Monday we began the second part of our south Texas birding adventure. This program was *World Class Birding in the Rio Grande Valley; Santa Ana Refuge to the World Birding Center* and our leaders were, once again, Bob Powell and Michael Marsden. First stop was the Estero Llano Grande State Park. While seeing many of the same birds we had seen the previous week we also spotted: Purple Martin, Ring-necked Duck, Inca Dove, Peregrine Falcon, Least Sandpiper, Clay-colored Thrush, Buff-Bellied Hummingbird, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Orchard Oriole, Tropical

Kingbird (virtually impossible to tell from the Couch's Kingbird without hearing them) and, perhaps our best find, a Common Pauraque (pronounced *Para-kay*). We were all quite surprised and delighted when a bobcat strolled out of the marsh and calmly ambled off down the trail in front of us. Coming out of that park we drove past a grain storage lot and found Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Bronzed Cowbirds. At the Old Hidalgo Pump House we found Prairie Warbler and Monk Parakeet.

On Tuesday, our first stop was the Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park and there, among a host of others, we spotted: Ringed Kingfisher, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, and (a wonderful surprise) a pair of Burrowing Owls!



(Green Kingfisher, photo courtesy of Georgia Quinn)

From there it was on to Anzalduas Park where we saw: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eastern Bluebird, Osprey, Cave Swallows, Vermillion Flycatcher and another Golden-fronted Woodpecker. Before our day was completed Bob and Michael drove us to a strip mall in downtown McAllen and there we waited for the setting sun....and the arrival of hundreds of noisy Green and Mitred Parakeets that took up roosts on power lines and trees in the area. On the way back to the hotel that evening, Bob heard more raucous birds outside the van's window and we stopped and found a swarm of Red-crowned Parrots in a residential tree.

On the Thursday, we went to the Santa Ana NWR. While we did not sight anything new for the trip some of the species worth mentioning were: Orange-crowned Warbler, Gray Hawk, Killdeer, Black-necked Stilt, Lesser Yellowlegs, Green Kingfisher, Sora, and another Common Pauraque. From Santa Ana we made a couple of stops in the afternoon at San Juan Wetlands, and Edinburgh Scenic Wetlands and World Birding Center. Among finds at those places were Blue-headed Vireo, Long-billed Thrasher, Lesser Goldfinch, another Vermillion Flycatcher, Lesser Scaup, and Buff-bellied Hummingbird.

(Altamira Oriole, photo courtesy of Georgia Quinn)

On our last full day of south Texas birding we made a long journey to a small town north of McAllen called Salineno which is rather well-known for its feeding station. Our target bird at Salineno was the Audubon's Oriole...which we spotted when it swooped into the feeding station for a few brief moments. Also at the Salineno Feeders were: Pyrrhuloxia, Verdin, Olive Sparrow, both the Altamira and Hooded Orioles and Lincoln's Sparrow.



From there we drove into the south Texas back country and visited Las Lomitas



(Audubon Oriole, photo courtesy of Georgia Quinn)

Ranch where we wrapped up our two weeks of birding with views of Bewick's Wren, Cactus Wren, more Pyrrhuloxia, Eastern Screech Owl, and, for those that missed it earlier, another Audubon Oriole. It was while we were at Los Lomitas that I realized I had become a "jaded" birder. I started using the phrase "...just a..." when identifying a bird. I had never seen a Green Jay in my life until four or five days ago....but now it was, "... oh, that's just a Green Jay."

From Texas, Ann and I drove across to Florida to visit her Mom in the Sarasota area. We had one good morning of birding there at the celebrated Celery Fields and had a front row seat to watch an American Bittern catch and devour a rather large water snake. And so we ended our excellent and "birdy" outing. The Texas gulf coast and the lower Rio Grande Valley are indeed birding hot spots. This is the fifth birding outing we have had with Road Scholar and we have found that they handle our birding needs extremely well. We urge any of you who are looking for well-organized birding tours that are not prohibitively expensive to examine the Road Scholar offerings. Just Google Road Scholar and search for birding programs. They are many and varied and we have never been disappointed.