



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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April 2016

President's Corner

By Geoff Giles



Where is the first place you would look to find a beautiful Red-headed Woodpecker, the logo bird of our Williamsburg Bird Club? There are a few likely places in our area, with

Jamestown Island heading the list. But to get more specific, you look at the top of a snag in those prime spots! Wait a minute! What's a snag? What's the difference between a snag and an unsightly dead tree? Well, actually there is no difference.

Usually in trees beauty is associated with shape and color of foliage, or blossoms, or stately symmetrical shape of limbs and branches. Most people are mindful of a tree's contributions to the beauty and health of our environment in terms of displaying gorgeous spring and colorful fall foliage, and exchanging carbon dioxide for oxygen in our atmosphere. Like all living organisms, a tree comes to an eventual demise and a slow or rapid process of decay begins. At this point, most of us cease to appreciate the appearance and presence of a dead tree and are inclined to have the space cleared for something more attractive. But birders and naturalists have come to recognize another aspect of beauty in the harmonious contributions to nature of dead and decaying trees.

Our woodpecker friend, and other species of cavity nesters, appreciate the porous decaying wood as more easily workable for creating, or finding existing cavities for roosting or nesting. A standing snag, which eventually becomes a decaying tree trunk on the forest floor, teems with fungi and insects speeding the process of recycling the once-living tissue of the tree back into its constituent nutrients, which are absorbed into the organisms of the decomposers and the soil. The decomposer beetles, larvae and grubs provide high-quality nourishment for birds and other creatures higher up the food chain. *Continued on Page 4.*

April 20 Club Meeting – 7:00 pm

Each year the Bird Club sponsors the Ruth Beck and Bill Sheehan Ornithology Research Grants for W&M graduate students who conduct research on birds for their Masters' Degrees. In 2015, the Club donated grants to Virginia Greene, Nicole Ingrassia, and Sarah Wolf. In April they will share short presentations with us about their research findings.

Sarah Wolf – “Assessing the ototoxic effects of methylmercury exposure in the Zebra Finch”

Virginia Greene – “Mercury and Mate Choice in Zebra Finches”

Nicole Ingrassia – “Bird Strikes: Introduction and Project Significance”

It is vital to show our support for our grant recipients with our attendance at this meeting. We appreciate your financial support, of course, but we should also indicate our commitment to their research by attending this meeting. Last year's presentations were excellent, and Dr. Dan Cristol has indicated this year the presentations will be even better.

New Meeting Time and Place

Our meeting place is Room 1127 in the Integrative Science Center, at the College of William and Mary (to the right of Millington Hall, behind Phi Beta Kappa Hall). We are now meeting at **7:00 pm**. You can still park in front of Phi Beta Kappa. **Please check the website if you need a parking pass or a map of the campus.**

April 16 Field Trip to Great Dismal Swamp NWR

By Jim Corliss

Join us Saturday, April 16 for our field trip to the Great Dismal Swamp. We're fortunate to have Bob Ake as our leader again this year. This should be a good opportunity for some early returning warblers (Prothonotary, Hooded, Black and White), Barred Owls, and of course we're always hopeful for a good view of a Swainson's Warbler.

Our plan is to walk into the swamp for roughly 2 hours along Washington Ditch, starting at 7:00 AM, and then return to the trailhead by about 11:00. From there Bob has suggested he may go over to Railroad Ditch and possibly drive down to Lake Drummond for anyone interested in extending their visit beyond noon. *Continued on page 2.*

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Wild Birds Unlimited and Backyard Birder support Bird Club and birders

Visit Wild Birds Unlimited Store in Settler's Market. The Club receives a 5% rebate on the pre-tax amount our Club members spend at WBU. Remember to let them know you are a member.

At the Backyard Birder store at Quarterpath Crossing (near Harris Teeter), receive a 10% discount on all merchandise. Just let the kind folks there know that you're a member.

April 16 Field Trip to Great Dismal Swamp NWR, continued

If you have your own transportation and don't wish to join us for the entire walk, please come anyway and enjoy the morning for as long as you wish.

We'll carpool from the Colony Square shopping center at **5:30 AM** to arrive at the swamp by 7:00 AM. We'll make a short pit stop in Suffolk on the way. For those wishing to drive on their own, meet us in the parking lot at the trailhead of Washington Ditch by 7:00 AM. To arrive at the parking lot, travel south on White Marsh Road (Rt. 642) in Suffolk, turn left onto Washington Ditch Road, and travel approximately one mile to the trailhead parking lot on your left.

There is no need to sign up for the trip and there is no cost. Just be either at Colony Square by 5:30 AM or at the Washington Ditch parking lot by 7:00 AM

Reported Bird Sightings for March (and late February) 2016

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.

February 28: Bill Williams observes three American White Pelicans at College Creek, along the Colonial Parkway.

February 28: Bill Williams's Western Tanager continues at his home along Jamestown Road.

February 29 and March 1: Bill Williams observes first-of-the season Laughing Gulls from College Creek.

March 2: Nancy Barnhart, Lieve Keeney, Sharon Plocher, Jan Lockwood, and Les Lawrence find 2 Laughing Gulls at Jamestown: "With large group of Ring-billed gulls. Smaller, darker gray upper side. One with hood, one with developing hood."

March 3: Shirley Devan sees a Wild Turkey land in a tree in her back yard in Colonial Heritage.

March 3: Megan Massa observes Western Tanager in Bill Williams's backyard.

March 3: Brian Taber confirms three Laughing Gulls on the Jamestown-Scotland Ferry to Jamestown.

March 4: Shirley Devan has Fox Sparrow kicking up litter at the edge of the yard.

March 4 – 7: Cheryl Jacobson is excited to see a male Western Tanager at her feeder in Kingsmill. "Continues for 4th day ... less skittish and is sharing suet feeder with other birds except Brown Thrasher and Red-bellied Woodpecker."

March 8: Bill Williams still has his Western Tanager at his backyard feeder.

March 12: Brian Taber and Bill Williams observe a first-of-the-season Royal Tern at College Creek Hawkwatch.

March 13: Hayes Williams in Gloucester reports: “We had a male Purple Finch on the platform sunflower seed feeder late this morning. Also had one about a week and one half ago. These were the first sightings in about six weeks. We still had a Hermit Thrush yesterday (March 12).”

March 15: Brian Taber observes a singing Yellow-throated Warbler at the Surry side ferry dock and a Royal Tern along the ferry ride to Jamestown.

March 16: Shirley Devan and Barbara Neis observe an Eastern Meadowlark in the meadow at Colonial Heritage.

March 20: Brian Taber finds a White-eyed Vireo at Jamestown Island.

March 21 and 22: Bill Williams sees seven American White Pelicans from College Creek along the Colonial Parkway. "Continuing – group ascended from Hog Island WMA, Surry County where they circled for 30 minutes then crossed the James River into James City County at College Creek; were in James City County for about 10 minutes then returned towards Hog Island, Surry County.”

March 22: Nancy Barnhart finds a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher on Jamestown Island.

March 22: Chandi Singer reports: “around 10:30am a Red-headed Woodpecker was in our front yard. The bird was here for about 45 minutes. Very beautiful. We also had Common Flickers and Cedar Waxwings, along with the usual gang of goldfinches and sparrows.”

March 23: Inge Curtis reports “every day I have several Bald Eagles in my yard” on the Chickahominy River”

March 23: Jan Lockwood reports Baltimore Oriole in her yard. Photo below.



March 23: Brian Taber of CVWO reports: “The College Creek Hawkwatch, on the James River, in James City County, tracks the 1,000th bird of the season, to see how the season is progressing and today, Bill Williams and I were on hand as a Turkey Vulture crossed the river for that milestone...it's the second-earliest to that mark in our 20 seasons. Last year, the date was April 6th. Also, the first Caspian Tern of the season was there today.”

March 24: Hugh Beard observes two Blue-gray Gnatcatchers at New Quarter Park.

March 24: Jason Strickland observes two Caspian Terns from the College Creek Hawkwatch.

March 24: Kathi Mestayer has a “peeping” Brown-headed Cowbird. “He peeped in my bathroom window this morning! Yesterday, he hopped up about 2 feet from me and displayed several times. I think he’s confused.”

March 27: Matt Anthony ventures to Briery Branch Gap, Rockingham, Virginia to find 26 Red Crossbills.

March 28: Nancy Barnhart finds and photographs a Black-and-white Warbler at York River State Park. Photo below.



March 28 and 29: Bill Williams [March 28] and Andy Hawkins [March 29] observe American White Pelicans flying over Hog Island.



Photo of American Woodcock by Craig Hill – Jamestown Island February 10.

Pay Your 2016 Dues!

Now is the time to pay your dues for 2016. If you have not renewed yet, your dues are PAST DUE! Use the renewal form inside this newsletter. We hope you will add 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 the feeder stations at the Child Development Resources campus. Membership dues alone do not support these efforts. We can't do it without you!

Donations from local bird stores make a difference!

In March the Bird Club received donations from our two local bird stores. Wild Birds Unlimited donated \$512 and the Backyard Birder donated \$150. Thank you! Bird Club members – patronizing our local bird stores is good for your Bird Club! Keep up the good work.

Welcome to our Newest Member!

We are happy to meet Angelino Woo from Yorktown, our newest Bird Club member. If she's at our April meeting, be sure to say hello and introduce yourself.

President's Corner (continued)

In the process of decay and hosting insects harvested by birds and animals, snags and decaying dead trees provide cavities for shelter and rearing of young for a surprising variety of forest dwellers. From small birds, like chickadees, to woodpeckers of all sizes, to wood ducks, squirrels, raccoons and others, all the way up to black bears, a tree cavity is almost always home! And fallen tree trunks provide moist protected places for snakes and amphibians to shelter and survive harsh winter conditions.

In short, nature has evolved a complex web of interactions among organisms of the forest to deal with the natural death and decay of trees. These processes are interrelated and essential to the health of our environment, although it is easy to overlook and underestimate their importance. Our friend the red-headed woodpecker is just as dependent on his nesting cavity in a snag and the insects he harvests there to feed his young as he is on the acorn crops we see him drawn to for winter sustenance. Please think about him and the others which live from the cycle of decaying wood when you have an opportunity to create or preserve some of that important habitat.

This month's issue of Virginia Wildlife magazine, published by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, has an illustrated article on the subject by naturalist Mike Roberts, entitled "SNAGS: The Living Dead". It is an education in a few pages, and well worth a read!

Are you ready to Atlas? That's the new verb, for those of us who will be active participants in the Breeding Bird Atlas project. Dave Youker is ready to lead the effort and we hope you will join us!!

And are you ready to dust off those Birding by Ear tapes and re-learn your warbler warbles? Now's the time. Jim Corliss has arranged for us to get those early arrivals again this year with Bob Ake in the Dismal Swamp. Will Bob get us bombarded by territorial barred owls again this year? Join us and see. And this year a first, since the mountain warblers won't come to us, Matt Anthony will lead us to them, on our field foray to Highland County. Yee hah!!

Spring Bird Count is Sunday, May 15

Count Coordinator Jim Corliss is rounding up the "usual suspects" i.e., "sector leaders" for the upcoming Spring Bird Count. The sectors and protocol are the same as the Christmas Bird Count, and he's "counting" on the feeder watchers again to make the count successful. The more birders the better! If you've previously been on a sector team, please contact the team leader to confirm meet up time and place. Contact Jim Corliss if you want to participate: 565-0536 or email: jcorliss240@cox.net

Jim will announce tally time and place closer to the date. So stay tuned!



Tree Swallows by Inge Curtis. We'll be looking for these on the Spring Bird Count!



Deadlines approaching for VSO Annual Meeting: April 29 – May 1 in Roanoke, VA

April 19 is the deadline to register for the Annual Meeting and April 8 is the deadline to reserve a hotel room at the special VSO rate of \$99 per night.

The Roanoke Valley Bird Club is hosting the 2016 Virginia Society of Ornithology's Annual Meeting April 29-May 1, 2016. You don't have to be a VSO member to attend. In addition to lots of field trips around the Roanoke area Saturday and Sunday mornings, you can also enjoy keynote speaker Pete Dunne at Saturday night's banquet. Pete is a renowned author and speaker, longtime director of the Cape May Bird Observatory, New Jersey Audubon's Birding Ambassador, and founder of the World Series of Birding.

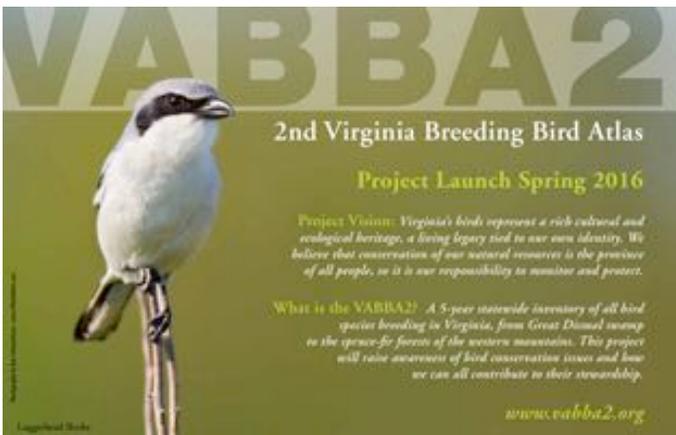
Home base for the weekend is the Sheraton Roanoke Hotel and Conference Center at 2801 Hershberger Rd. Room reservations can be made at 540-563-9300, 800-325-3535, or www.sheratonroanoke.com. Rates are \$99 plus tax, but you must use the "Virginia Society of Ornithology Annual Meeting 2016" designation when reserving your room. Check the website at roanokevalleybirdclub.com often. For more information, contact Alyce Quinn at twoquinns@yahoo.com.

Virginia's Second Breeding Bird Atlas – Showcasing the Value of Citizen Science for Conservation Research

Project Vision: *Virginia's birds represent a rich cultural and ecological heritage, a living legacy tied to our own identity. We believe that conservation of our natural resources is the province of all people, so it is our responsibility to monitor and protect.*

What is the VABBA2? It is a 5-year statewide inventory of all bird species breeding in Virginia, from the Great Dismal Swamp to the spruce-fir forests of the western mountains. This project will raise awareness of bird conservation issues and how we can all contribute to their stewardship.

Who is involved? The VABBA2 is a project of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO), coordinated by an Atlas Coordinator based at the Conservation Management Institute at Virginia Tech. Other important partner organizations include: eBird, Virginia Audubon Council and Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture. We are actively seeking to partner with local bird clubs, Audubon and Virginia Master Naturalists chapters, plus other interested organizations.



Why is the VABBA2 unique? This will be the single largest citizen science based project conducted in Virginia, relying on not only state agencies and non-profits for support, but hundreds of volunteers to help collect field data on bird occurrence and breeding status across the state.

Why is it important? Data collected by volunteers will provide critical data on the status and distribution of Virginia's birds, informing management and guiding conservation strategies.

How do I get involved? We need many volunteers to collect Atlas data, as well as assist and in spreading the word through outreach efforts. Please visit the VABBA2 website

(www.vabba2.org) for more information about participating in this exciting and ambitious project.

Nest Cams are online!

Who doesn't like nest cams? Owls and eagles are hatching online. Here's a link to a Great Horned Owl nest with two owlets in Savannah, GA: http://cams.allaboutbirds.org/channel/46/Great_Horned_Owls/

And here's a link to a Bald Eagle nest in Minnesota: <http://wowstream1.video.state.mn.us/live/dnr-eagle-cam1/playlist.m3u8>

The Peregrine Falcons are nesting again in Richmond. Three eggs have been confirmed and are likely to hatch by the end of April: <http://blog.wildlife.virginia.gov/falcon-cam/>

A Bigger Year – 2016

By Cheryl Jacobson

I am a goal oriented person so for 2016 I set goals of continuing to improve my bird identification skills, adding more photos to my eBird lists, and seeing and learning more about Virginia. To accomplish this I decided to do a Bigger Year (increase the number of bird species I have seen in Virginia), not a Big Year because I am not at that level and I have commitments to family.

In 2013 (my first year of serious birding in Virginia) I saw 230 species; 2014 was 263; and 2015 was 270. How many above 270 can I actually see in 2016 (not heard only)? A big stretch would be 300 but stretching is good!



Lark Sparrow at Back Bay NWR

Because of weather, scheduling, and family commitments, I needed pelagic birds. Thus, I spent two hours at Little Island Park, Virginia Beach, and saw hundreds of scoters, a variety of gull species, and my sought-after Razorbill. Then on to Back Bay NWR and great photos of the Lark Sparrow and met a new birder friend. He told me where to find the King Rail and sure enough, I enjoyed many views of a cooperative King Rail at his suggested location. Several weeks later I joined my new friend and others for a boat trip out of Willis Wharf to see the Western Grebe (see photo on page 8) on the Machipongo River in Accomack County and on to Gull Marsh to see three Long-billed Curlews. Besides hundreds of shore birds, the Peregrine Falcons were amazing. Recently I enjoyed seeing a Lazuli Bunting in Suffolk. None of these birds have added to my life list as I moved here from the West, but seeing them again has been extra touching. I even had a wonderful Western Tanager stop in for an eight-day visit at my feeders. Shirley said he must have known I was doing a Bigger Year but I think he knew I was missing my friends in the West (both human and bird) and stopped in to let me know that they are there when I go back to visit.



Western Tanager at Cheryl's suet feeder

As of March 18, I am at 169. Shirley Devan asked me to chronicle some of my travels and birds. With Geoff Giles and Matt Anthony I traveled to Silver Lake in Rockingham County to see the Trumpeter Swan, stopping in Staunton to see the Greater White-fronted Geese (which we missed but saw a Common Merganser) and in Louisa County for the Rough-legged Hawk, (which we also missed) and Colonial Heights for the Iceland Gull (which we also missed). Later I traveled back to Louisa County and ran into Matt and this time we successfully saw the Rough-legged Hawk.

I have loved my birding adventures in Virginia and am thankful for the birds and all my birding buddies.

Editor's Note: All photos by Cheryl Jacobson. Cheryl has also agreed to update us as the year goes along! Thanks, Cheryl for sharing your adventures!



Long-billed Curlew in Gull Marsh on Eastern Shore

New Quarter Park Bird Walk – March 12

By Jan Lockwood

Fourteen participants attended - including two visitors from the Russell County Bird Club who found information about the walk in a local newspaper. Despite overcast skies and poor lighting, leader Jason Strickland and the group spotted 33 species and watched a pair of Osprey bringing sticks to rebuild their winter-worn nest, in addition to a second pair on a distant nest (alas, none on Marker 20). Four Bald Eagles were also spotted, two of which were perched high above Queens Creek while two flew along the York River towards the mouth of the Creek. Some Red-breasted Mergansers were seen in the Creek. Once again the Hairy Woodpecker eluded us, but all other woodpecker species were seen, together with several Ruby-crowned Kinglets, while the bird feeder near the office yielded a male and female Brown-headed Cowbird.



Left to Right: Lisa Nickel, Portia Belden, Jason Strickland, Claire Stephens, Caroline Glendening, Sue Mutell, Betty Bennink, Sue Nordholm, Donna Jackson.

Not photographed: Joanne Andrews, Kathy Rose, Tresa Henry, Jane Thornhill and Jan Lockwood (behind the lens)

New Quarter Park Bird Walk – March 26

By Shirley Devan

Jim Corliss led a group of 10 birders around the Park and the “race runners.” The group tallied 40 species including a good mix of winter and spring birds – both kinglets, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, six Osprey, four Bald Eagles, two Eastern Phoebes, two Hermit Thrushes, 18 Cedar Waxwings, four Yellow-throated Warblers. The group welcomed two visitors spending the weekend in Williamsburg – Helen and Tracy Wheelock from the Lynchburg Bird Club!



Left to Right: Jan Lockwood, Sandy Columbo, Lieve Keeney, Sue Mutell, Shirley Devan, Jim Corliss, Cheryl Jacobson, Helen and Tracy Wheelock from Lynchburg. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

Field Trip to Curles Neck Farm – March 13

By Shirley Devan

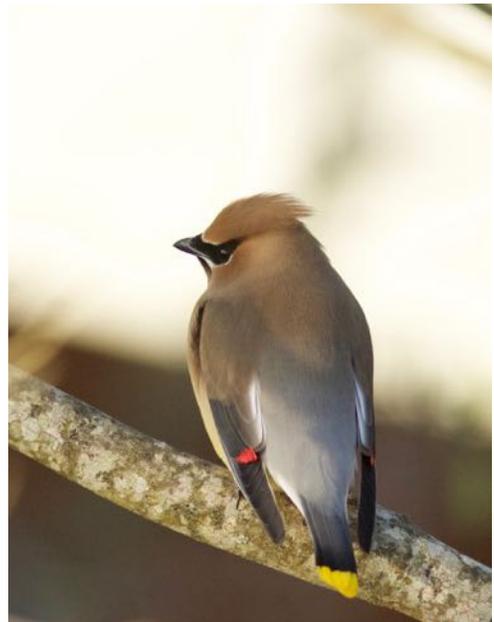
Richmond Birder Ellison Orcutt led our group of 25 around the fields and roads at Curles Neck Farm on a beautiful late winter morning that felt like spring. The group tallied 74 species. (Not every person saw every species, of course, but we all helped each other get on the birds.) Highlights included both yellowlegs species, eight Wilson’s Snipe, two American Kestrels, 17 Horned Larks, 150+ American Pipits, one White-crowned Sparrow, 24 Eastern Meadowlarks, 16 Savannah Sparrows, three Swamp Sparrows. Alas, the hundreds of Snow Geese had headed north – except for one holdout that early arrivals happened to spot. Many thanks to Ellison for gaining access for our club to this favorite hot spot!



The scope line at Curles Neck Farm March 13



"Social Drinking" Cedar Waxwings by Inge Curtis



Cedar Waxwing by Inge Curtis



Western Grebe on Machipongo River on Eastern Shore by Cheryl Jacobson



Wild Turkey March 3 by Shirley Devan – "a yard bird"



Louisiana Waterthrush at York River State Park March 28 by Nancy Barnhart



*"Love the view dear, but the house needs work!"
Osprey on nest in Queens Creek March 9 by Jan Lockwood.*



Baltimore Oriole by Elbert Cutright. "This beautiful bird came to visit us on 3-14-16 and is still with us! He has been frequenting our feeders and feeding on peanut suet dough and also dried mealworms. I have read that they liked oranges, so cut one in half and fashioned a wire hanger, but he doesn't even seem to give it a look! This is the first Baltimore Oriole that, to our knowledge, has ever paid us a visit and we are in awe of its beauty."

CALENDAR

Saturday, April 9	Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 8 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Saturday, April 16	WBC Field Trip to Great Dismal Swamp with Bob Ake. (See details on page 1.)
Sunday, April 17	Hampton Roads Bird Club sponsors Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Meet in the parking lot near Ranger Station.
Wednesday, April 20	Bird Club Meeting, 7 PM (note new time and location), the Integrative Science Center, Room 1127, W&M Campus. (See details on page 1.)
Saturday, April 23	Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 7 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Friday & Saturday, May 13-14	WBC Field Trip to Highland County with Matt Anthony. Watch for details from Jim Corliss, Field Trip Coordinator.
Sunday, May 15	Spring Bird Count! Calling all birders! See page 4! Contact Jim Corliss: 565-0536
Wednesday, May 18	Bird Club Meeting, 7 PM. Guest is Bob Schamerhorn with a photo and sound presentation on Warblers.