



# The Flyer

## Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

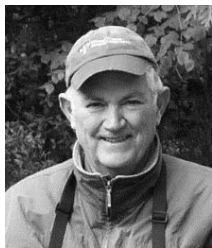
Newsletter of the

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May 2016

### President's Corner



*By Geoff Giles*

To feed or not to feed (in summer) – that is the question? So OK, WHAT is the answer? Well, since feeding our backyard birds is fully as much for our enjoyment as it is for

providing sustenance for the birds, and since it has been consistently demonstrated that our feeder offerings provide only a small portion of what the birds are consuming when other food is plentiful, the answer seems to be...drum roll...well, yeah, go ahead and feed 'em to your heart's content!!

I am sitting on my back deck as I write. Ten feet away is a red Amish barn bird house, which has been chosen by my nesting Carolina Chickadees to be their home, since my bluebird box was already taken. The bluebirds have fledged five young already and are redecorating their box in preparation for a second clutch (they fledged three clutches of five chicks each last year!). The male chickadee popped up on a perch five feet in front of me and called loudly, evoking a chorus of tiny chickadee voices from his barn home. He hopped over and went inside and left without a fresh green inchworm he had brought in. The kiddie chorus continued louder, and he frantically flew straight to my feeder and grabbed off a hunk of no-melt peanut suet and flew back in to the family, obviously to stuff another mouth.

This is suet in name only, as it does not have the greasy consistency of lard, but instead more closely resembles peanut butter with nut chunks, or bark butter. This has been the single item in greatest demand at my feeder through the last several summers. A number of birds come exclusively for this offering and it is apparent that many are feeding chunks to their young, particularly the bluebirds and a variety of woodpeckers, including downies, hairies and red-bellies. These birds typically help themselves to a few bites of the

*Continued on Page 4.*

### May 18 Club Meeting – 7:00 pm

Come join us on Wednesday, May 18<sup>th</sup> and hear a wonderful program by Bob Schamerhorn. He is an incredible photographer who has developed a new presentation, one which matches photographs of warblers with their calls. So, if you love warblers, or love great photographs, want to review warbler songs, or just love hearing an excellent presentation, this is the program to see.

### 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.**

### May15th -- The Spring Bird Count

*By Jim Corliss*

This year's Spring Bird Count will be held on Sunday, May 15th. Similar to the Audubon Christmas Count, our Spring Bird Count is an all-day, all-out tally of every bird that we observe in our "count circle". Our circle is 15 miles in diameter with its center in downtown Williamsburg (the Williamsburg Visitor Center to be exact). We have eleven individual count areas within the circle, each with a leader who coordinates the teams, or parties, working in that area. At the end of the day we meet to tally numbers and then several weeks after the count we'll publish the results. This year, our end-of-day tally meeting will be held in the meeting room at the park office in Freedom Park off of Centerville Road. The tally meeting will begin at 5:00 PM with sandwiches, cookies, and drinks being served for the weary counters.

If you're not already signed up on a team, please consider doing so. Even though the count lasts all day, any amount of time which you can contribute to a team is very helpful. The more ears and eyes we have in the field the more birds we'll find and the easier it will be for each team to keep their data organized. If you would like to participate but don't know how to get started, please contact Jim Corliss at [jcorliss240@cox.net](mailto:jcorliss240@cox.net) or by phone at 757-565-0536. We hope to see you on count day!

## 2016 Officers

**President** 645-8716  
Geoff Giles [tylerandal2@aol.com](mailto:tylerandal2@aol.com)

**Vice-President (Programs)** 206-1046  
Cheryl Jacobson [jcheryljoy@aol.com](mailto:jcheryljoy@aol.com)

**Co-Vice-Presidents (The Flyer)**

Shirley Devan 813-1322  
[sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net)

Judy Jones 293-8297  
[jjones184@cox.net](mailto:jjones184@cox.net)

**Treasurer** 221-6683  
Ann Carpenter [carpent66@cox.net](mailto:carpent66@cox.net)

**Secretary** 229-1775  
Cathy Millar [millar.cathy@gmail.com](mailto:millar.cathy@gmail.com)

**Member-at-Large** 707-3345  
Jeanette Navia [jnavia@gmail.com](mailto:jnavia@gmail.com)

**Member-at-Large** 634-4164  
Jan Lockwood [nzedr@msn.com](mailto:nzedr@msn.com)

**Past President** 813-1322  
Shirley Devan [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net)

## Committee Chairpersons

**Field Trips** 565-0536  
Jim Corliss [jcorliss240@cox.net](mailto:jcorliss240@cox.net)

**Records & Bird Counts** 229-1124  
Bill Williams [billwilliams154@gmail.com](mailto:billwilliams154@gmail.com)

**Library Liaison** 565-6148  
Lee Schuster [dljschuster@cox.net](mailto:dljschuster@cox.net)

**Refreshments**

Jan Lockwood [nzedr@msn.com](mailto:nzedr@msn.com)  
Ruth Gordon [ruthkagordon@gmail.com](mailto:ruthkagordon@gmail.com)

**Membership/Webmistress** 707-3345  
Jeanette Navia [jnavia@gmail.com](mailto:jnavia@gmail.com)

**Historian** 229-2830  
Tom McCary

## New Quarter Bird Walk on April 25<sup>th</sup>

On April 25<sup>th</sup>, eight club members participated in our monthly 7:00 AM bird walk in New Quarter Park. The weather was pleasant and the group found 54 species as we walked from the parking lot down to the point. Many regular summer residents had arrived, including male Summer Tanagers singing high in the trees and a host of warblers including Black-throated Blue, Prairie, Yellow-rumped, Black and White, and eleven Northern

Parulas. Several Wood Thrushes and Ovenbirds were also singing off in the woods but of course always stayed out of sight. A special treat was a trio of White-eyed Vireos that afforded us excellent views as they followed us around the Bobwhite habitat area. It was a great way to kick off the spring birding season.

## Reported Bird Sightings for April 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](mailto:jjones184@cox.net) or Shirley Devan [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net).*

**April 3 & 4:** Lois Leeth spotted 25 Anhingas in a V formation, flying north over the coast at her home in Florida. And the next day, Lois saw 14 American Coots, 8 Mallards, 2 Great Egrets, 6 Roseate Spoonbills, 20 gulls, 6 Brown Pelicans, 20 Snowy Egrets, 1 Brandt, and 6 Double-crested Cormorants. They were all enjoying her pond!

**April 4:** Brian Taber, in sharing information about Hawkwatch, related the following: "After our 2nd best February, we had our 3rd best March and so reached 1,000 on the 2nd earliest date in our 20 seasons...but...weather conditions were poor for migration from about March 24 till now, with only 69 birds for those 12 days. Our best week in March was 377. Hopefully, the diversity will increase quite a bit in April. However, today, in very strong winds, we saw our first Merlin. The Hawkwatch is located on the James River, in James City County."

**April 14:** Andy Hawkins photographed these two beautiful birds at the Washington Ditch in the Great Dismal Swamp, a couple of days before the WBC ventured there. The first is a White-eyed Vireo singing away.

The second is a male Common Yellowthroat sending out a message.



**April 19:** Barbara Neis saw a Rose-breasted Grosbeak at her feeder. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, she spied a Blue Grosbeak at the same feeder!



## Reported Bird Sightings for April 2016 (con't.)

**April 20:** Brian Taber, updating us on the HawkWatch, related the following: "Diversity has improved, as it does in April at College Creek Hawkwatch, in James City County. Today, Bill Williams and I recorded 11 species, the most for a day, which has happened only 5 other times during our 20 late winter/spring seasons. Four of the other 5 were between April 20-27. They were: Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, and Merlin. We also saw 2 American White Pelicans."

**April 29:** Les Lawrence saw an Indigo Bunting at his house as well as a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. On the same day, Deane Gordon saw a Rose-breasted Grosbeak at his feeder. So did Les Lawrence. So did Portia Belden, Sue Mutell, Barbara Neis, Shirley Devan, Tory Gussman, & Mary Ann & John Fennell! Wow! They're everywhere!

**April 30:** Mary Anne & John Fennell were so excited to have a Scarlet Tanager on their deck rail. This is a new bird for their yard.

### They're Everywhere.....The Beautiful Rose-breasted Grosbeak

*By Melinda Cousins*

I imagine, in the birder world, my life list is rather small, whilst a majority of my birding adventures are done near living spaces. So, when I had the pleasure of seeing a pair of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in my backyard this week, I was ecstatic. The thrill made me want to skip work to watch these migrants flitting by on their way north. I first identified an unfamiliar, "teek" or "chink" call in the backyard one morning which required further surveillance. Spotting the male in a tree, his striking black, white and red

markings were breathtaking! He alighted on a feeder, and I was mesmerized.

A female also accompanied this male. The pair was enjoying peanut pieces, hulled sunflower, and a fruit & nut blend from varied feeding stations.

Adult males are

primarily black and

white with a vivid red chevron extending



*Male Rose-breasted Grosbeak Photo by Melinda Cousins*

from the throat down the middle of the breast, with a red wing-lining. Females and immatures are brown and heavily streaked, with a thick, bold whitish stripe over the eye.



*Rose-breasted Grosbeak photo by Deane Gordon*



*Female Rose Breasted Grosbeak – Photo by Melinda Cousins*

migration, the Rose-breasted Grosbeak may stop in a wide variety of habitats including urban areas and wetlands, and may be found individually, in pairs, or in loose flocks. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are primarily gleaners and feed on a variety of fare based on availability and season, including many types of insects, fruits, and seeds. They are recurrent visitors to bird feeders, and it's an honor to be a refueling stop for birdlife.

Still frequenting the backyard feeding stations six days later, we counted three males this time! I have heard of additional sightings in Queen's Lake and Settler's Mill within the past week, so I wish *you* much success in spotting this migrant during your birding adventures, wherever they may be.

*Male Rose-breasted Grosbeak—Photo by Sue Mutell*



A long distance migrant, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks fly from northern American (and Canadian) breeding grounds to Central and northern South America.

During

## President's Corner (continued)

no-melt peanut blend and then fly off with a chunk in their beaks in the direction of their nests. In the case of the bluebirds, after fledging they follow the male to learn to forage. In addition to their rounds of bug hunting, the babies follow him right to the peanut cake and help themselves. While there is no question that baby birds need a diet rich in bugs to help them grow and develop quickly, my bluebird fledglings have been robust and none the worse for wear for their feeder offerings. I like to think that the parents may have benefitted as well from being able to grab a quick bite between foragings for bugs to feed their broods.

The peanut cakes are available in non-greasy forms with other goodies in them including chunks of other nuts, berries, and even bugs! They also come laced with red-hot peppers, which are supposed to deter persistent squirrels which manage to get to your feeder. One family in our area had a Baltimore Oriole come to her chili-flavored cake, apparently mistaking its red color for citrus. I have so much activity with the peanut flavor that I tend to stay with that one most of the summer. Currently my most numerous visitors to that and to my feeder are Yellow-rumped Warblers, whose colors are stunning this late in their winter range. I am also getting regular visits to the cakes from Pine Warblers and for several days now a Yellow-throated Warbler (first for my yard!) has followed one of those to my feeder and is now coming back to visit the peanut cake.

Other birds are nesting and busy with young, including Carolina Wrens, House Finches, and cardinals at my house. Two days ago as I sat on my back deck, pandemonium erupted all around me. From a holly tree ten feet from my nose, a loud, piercing, sustained alarm call rang out from a Carolina Wren. This noise was as loud and jangling as a car alarm and almost instantly my yard erupted. I would have judged that there were no birds around, but in an instant the trees in all directions burst forth an army of small birds which flew directly into the holly tree. There were more than thirty birds and they were acting mad as hornets, swarming to and in the holly tree while the agitated wren continued his jangling alarm. I watched transfixed, trying to determine the cause of the commotion, until finally two cowbirds fled. Immediately the din quieted and the small birds filtered back to their invisible roosts in nearby trees. I pondered why the excitement, and concluded that the wren's agitation was because the cowbirds were close to his own nest...but talk about a neighborhood watch!

Some of my most vocal bird neighbors this year have been a pair of Barred Owls, whose recording studio for the duet they plan to enter in Williamsburg Has Talent is clearly just behind my house. I know that at least the male in this duo has been here for the last several years, because his song is unmistakable. I call him Johnny One-Note. He is quite obviously tone-deaf, and sings "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?" on one note. The rhythm is perfect, but the guy can't carry a tune. I thought he was kidding the first time I heard him sing. His mate replies to him with both rhythm and tune, showing him repeatedly what he's supposed to say – but the guy is hopeless. So the two of them just keep belting out their song, morning, noon and night. Sometimes a couple of the neighborhood hounds join in, and I have to admit, they are often more on key than Johnny!



*Barred Owl Photo by Judy Jones*

Speaking of sounds, it's time to dust off those Birding by Ear tapes and CD's. Warblers, tanagers and vireos are showing up in ever greater numbers. Seems like the prettier the bird, the harder it is to find. Since about ninety percent of the birds we can detect are by their sounds, particularly once the trees leaf out, it sure helps us figure out where to look when we can recognize where a bird is and which species it is by its voice. If you have taken the plunge and use a smart phone, I find an application called The Warbler Guide a really cool and useful one. Not only does it have the warblers' songs and calls at your fingertips, but great pictures, range maps, and useful info.

As I conclude at dinner time, Johnny One-Note and his patient consort have tuned up to blow the rust out of their pipes. A friendly pooch has joined the chorus. All's right with the world at my house. Hope that you too are getting to experience the joys of springtime in Virginia!!!



## Forget Birding! We're Now "Atlasing"!!

By Shirley Devan

**Virginia's Second Breeding Bird Atlas (VABBA2)?** It's only the biggest statewide "birding" project for the next five years! This breeding bird atlas will survey all bird species breeding in Virginia. The data collected by birders and citizen scientists will help managers make better decisions about conservation of our natural areas.

**Why is it important?** Virginia's first Breeding Bird Atlas was completed over 25 years ago – in the late 1980's. Many Bird Club members live in areas that were then farms and forests. To say that big changes have occurred across Virginia's landscapes is an understatement. The second BBA will tell



*Pine Warbler gathering nesting material --Photo by Shirley Devan*

us how birds are responding to urbanization, climate change, sea level rise, and other alterations to our state.

The VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is one of the major sponsors and funders of this project. The Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO), the primary birding organization in the state with over 800 members, is the other major sponsor. The BBA steering committee has members from each of these organizations. For example, Bill Williams, our Bird Club's founding father and member of the VSO board, is on the Steering Committee. This project is supported with funding and expertise from the premier birders and ornithologists in Virginia.



*Brown Thrasher chick -- Photo by Cheryl Jacobson*

**Who Collects the Data?** WE DO! Citizen scientist volunteers will collect most of the data across the state over the next five years. Bird Clubs, Audubon Societies, Sierra Clubs, Master Naturalists, schools, colleges, and other natural resource conservation groups around the state will have "boots on the ground" observing and recording breeding bird behavior.

**How does it differ from "regular" birding?** "Atlasing" is more fun! Do you like detective work? Do you like following clues and solving a mystery? That's what atlasing is all about.

Instead of racing around trying to tally as many species as possible, we'll be focused on observing birds' behaviors related to breeding. That means slowing down and watching what birds do and where they go. For our local bird walks and field trips, the leaders and participants will be observing and collecting breeding bird behavior on every outing. I think you'll find it addictive!

**So how does it work?** The secret to the success of the BBA is "divide and conquer." For this project, Virginia is divided into 12 regions. Most of us live in Region 11. Dave Youker, President of the Hampton Roads Bird Club, is our Regional Coordinator. Dave's contact: [youkerd@aol.com](mailto:youkerd@aol.com)



*Carolina Chickadee collecting insect for young. Photo by Inge Curtis*

Additionally, Virginia is divided into a sampling grid of single units or "blocks," using the 7.5 minute topographic quads prepared by the US Geological Survey (USGS). For the atlas, each quad is divided into six blocks, each of which is about 9 square miles. Each of these six blocks is assigned a two-letter directional code: NW (northwest), NE (northeast), CW (center west), CE (center east), SW (southwest), or SE (southeast). The SE block (southeast) is the "Priority Block."

A block is the basic unit within which atlasers will conduct surveys of breeding birds. The goal is to maximize the number of species recorded in each block and to confirm breeding to the extent possible.

Atlasers will focus on Priority Blocks in years 1 and 2 of the survey and then turn our attention to other blocks. Atlasers are certainly not restricted from surveying in other blocks. Atlasing in our own yards and neighborhoods is welcome, important and encouraged. After all, we all live in a "block" that will need to be surveyed by 2020.

If you're vacationing in the mountains in Virginia and observe breeding behavior on your hikes, please record it. The

western regions of Virginia will be the most challenging to cover, because there are fewer observers and more difficult terrain.

Once breeding behavior for a species is “confirmed,” then we don’t have to survey for that species in that block again in the five-year period. Move on to other species.

There are three breeding categories: Possible, Probable, and Confirmed. Within the “probable” code are seven behaviors, such as “pair in suitable habitat,” “courtship display or copulation,” and “territorial defense.”

In the “confirmed” code are 13 behaviors, such as “carrying nest material,” “carrying food,” “fledged or downy young,” “fecal sac,” or “nest with eggs.”

**Where does the data go?** This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century after all so the data will go online to the world-class birding database, eBird, sponsored by Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The VABBA2 has contracted with eBird to create an Atlas “portal”



*Blue-gray Gnatcatcher sitting on eggs -- Photo by Nancy Barnhart*

which you should use to record your observations. Here is the address: <http://ebird.org/content/atlasva/> You’ll also see several how-to tutorials here.

If you already have an eBird account, you’re good to go! Your favorite birding locations will pop up in your account so you can record your observations as you always do. The beauty of the Atlas portal is that you can record breeding behavior in a drop down menu for each species. No need to worry which “block” you are in. eBird automatically knows in which block you were birding! But! Remember to be aware of block boundaries and to split up checklists if you cross one.

If you’re a “map nerd” like I am, then you’ll love the maps available for each of the 4412 blocks in Virginia. Here is

the web site: <https://vafwis.dgif.virginia.gov/BBA2/BlockExplorer/> Check out your house to see if you live in a priority block (outlined in purple). If you do, let me know ([sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net)) or consider signing up to be a Block Captain via the VABBA2 Block Explorer tool.

Several Bird Club members have already signed up for Priority Blocks in the Williamsburg/James City/York County area. We’ll be requesting volunteers to help with surveys this spring and summer. We encourage newer birders to team up with one or two more experienced birding friends to cover an atlas block together.

So stay tuned. Meanwhile if you observe breeding behavior in your yard birds, record it in the VA BBA eBird portal or let me know. I’ll be glad to help!

I encourage you to check out the excellent VABBA web site: [www.vabba2.org](http://www.vabba2.org) You can download maps, handbooks, checklists, quick reference guides, breeding timeline bar charts, land access materials, breeding codes and more. The VABBA team, led by Dr. Ashley Peele, has done a great job providing atlasers with a wealth of resources.

You’ll be hearing much more about the Breeding Bird Atlas as the months go on. Please consider volunteering to help. We need all the eyes and ears we can get.



*Brown-headed Nuthatch feeding young -- Photo by Judy Jones*



## The GREAT Great Dismal Swamp Field Trip

by Bob Ake



*The Gang at the Great Dismal Swamp – Photo by Shirley Devan*

were taken. A smaller but still substantial flock of Rusty Blackbirds than the one we witnessed on Thursday was encountered with several seen perched high in trees for good looks. Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers seemed to be everywhere, muttering their pre-breeding-ground soft warbly trills which interfered with distinguishing bird songs. Butterflies were again somewhat diminished from what I might have expected. The cold weather was probably the reason. The butterfly list in no particular order: Palamedes Swallowtail 2, E. Tiger Swallowtail 6 including a black morph, Zebra Swallowtail 4, Pearl Crescent 8, Carolina Satyr 32, Azure sp 2, skipper sp 1. The only mammals we saw were several deer and squirrels. Another party we met reported seeing a bobcat on Lynn Ditch.

### Katie Fallon to Speak to us on September 21<sup>st</sup>

Great News....author Katie Fallon has agreed to be our guest speaker at our Sept 21<sup>st</sup> bird club meeting. Since the Cerulean Warbler is the fastest declining warbler in the U.S., this is a critical topic for us to learn about.



*Photo provided by Katie Fallon*

**Katie Fallon** is the author of two nonfiction books, *Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird* (University Press of New England, forthcoming) and *Cerulean Blues: A Personal Search for a Vanishing Songbird* (Ruka Press, 2011). *Cerulean Blues* has been described by Pete Dunne as “part journey, part documentary, and wholly engaging; a tribute to both a bird that bridges continents with its wings.” Katie has been called a rising star and her essays have appeared in a variety of magazines and been nominated for several awards.

Katie has taught creative writing at Virginia Tech and West Virginia University, and notably, her first word was “bird.” She helped found the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving wild birds through scientific research; outreach and public education; and rescue and rehabilitation. The ACCA is based near Morgantown, WV, and each year treats more than 200 injured wild birds, conducts dozens of environmental education programs, and sponsors citizen-science research projects.

A lifelong resident of Appalachia, Katie’s great-great grandfather, great-grandfather, and grandfather were coal miners in West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Both of her parents were public school teachers. In addition to writing, teaching, and caring for injured wildlife, Katie enjoys birding, hiking, travel, canoeing, yoga, and wine. She lives in Cheat Neck, WV, with her daughters Laurel and Cora, spouse Jesse, beagle-ish rescue dogs Liza Jane and Sally Ann, and (formerly) wild horses Rosie and Ranger.

## More Photos of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks....



*Photo of male Rose-breasted Grosbeak by Renee Dallman*



*Photo of both female and male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks by Shirley Devan*



*Photos of female (left) and male (right) by Sue Mutell*



*Photo of female Rose-breasted Grosbeak by Barb Bucklin*



*Photo of male by Jim Easton*



## More Photos of our “Atlas-ing” Birds....



*(Left)  
American  
Robin bringing  
food to young –  
photo by Shirley  
Devan*



*(Right)  
Prothonotary  
Warbler male  
singing for a  
mate – photo  
by Inge Curtis*



*Brown Thrasher parent (chick nearby) – photo by Cheryl Jacobson*



*Eastern Phoebe adult with spider for young – photo by Judy Jones*



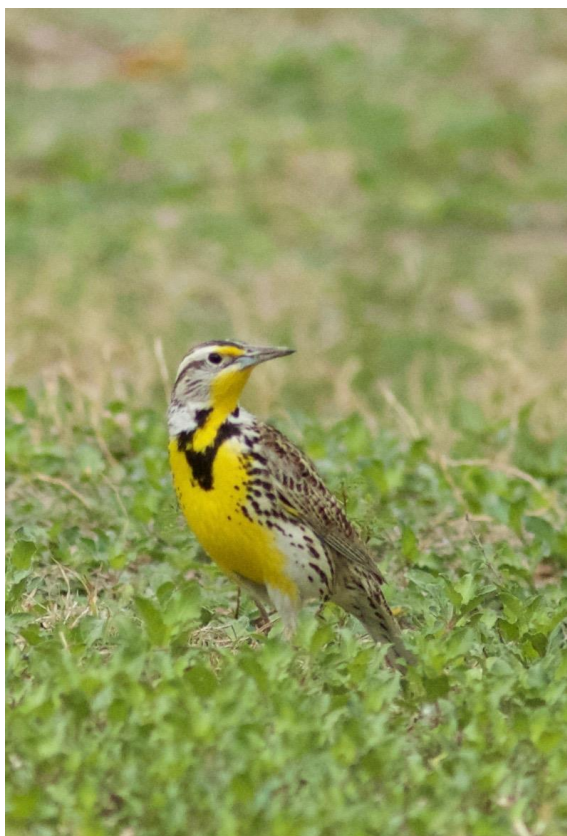
*Killdeer parent and chicks – photo by Shirley Devan*



*Brown Thrasher singing – photo by Judy Jones*



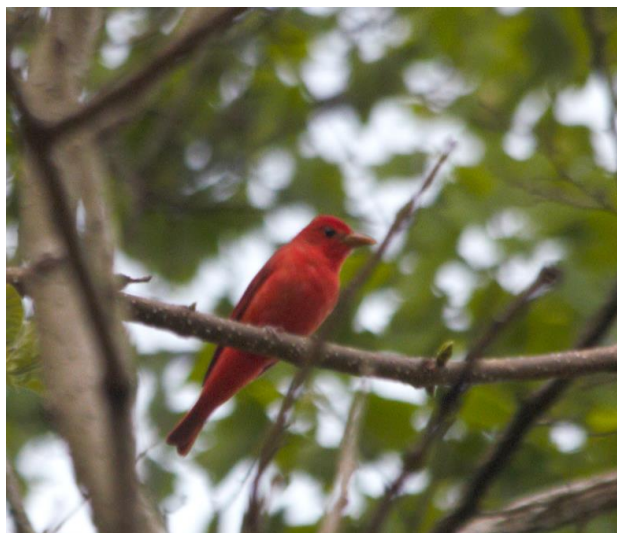
## Photos Taken Recently....



*Western Meadowlark – Photo taken in Texas by Inge Curtis*



*Black Swan in Crozet, Virginia during the first week of April – Photo by Cheryl Jacobson*



*Summer Tanager seen in New Quarter Park on the bird walk on April 25<sup>th</sup> – Photo by Andy Hawkins*

## CALENDAR

Saturday, May 7	Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 8 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Friday & Saturday, May 13-14	WBC Field Trip to Highland County with Matt Anthony. Sorry, this trip is full.
Sunday, May 15	Spring Bird Count (See details on page 1.)
Sunday, May 15	Hampton Roads Bird Club sponsors Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Meet in the parking lot near Ranger Station.
Wednesday, May 18	Bird Club Meeting, 7 PM (note new time and location), the Integrative Science Center, Room 1127, W&M Campus. Guest is Bob Schamerhorn with a photo and sound presentation on Warblers. (See details on page 1.)
Saturday, May 21	Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 7 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Sunday, May 29	Hampton Roads Bird Club sponsors Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Meet in the parking lot near Ranger Station.