



# The Flyer

## Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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[www.williamsburgbirdclub.org](http://www.williamsburgbirdclub.org)

June 2016

### President's Corner



By Geoff Giles

Living in my neighborhood is a hoot. More specifically a Barred Owl hoot. An amorous pair has given us salutes to the dawn, the evening hoot, and even what seems to be a call to afternoon high tea from time

to time. But lately there has been even more to the story. On 9 May, a neighbor called excitedly and asked me to come over and give him some advice about "something on his back deck" that might need some help. I went expectantly and he led me to his kitchen window to look at the deck. On the railing, just a few feet from the kitchen window, sat a smallish hunched shape with a rounded head, with the unmistakable wing feathers of a Barred Owl, but little pattern on the breast – still having the owlet's downy feathers it would grow out of. A baby Barred Owl – so that's what all the hooting's about!

My neighbor wanted to know if he should take it in, should feed it something, or if there was someone he should call to have it cared for. Looking over the little fellow, we could not see any signs of injury or distress, and I suggested we let the owlet's parents care for their little one. Since it is not unusual for an owlet to leave the nest before being able to fly, there are many known cases of owls continuing to feed their offspring out of the nest for as long as they needed to be cared for, until they can fly and fend for themselves. We resolved to let the owl parents care for their young one, and noted that he actually had made a fortunate landing on the deck railing, two floors above the ground, where he should be safe from cats and other ground predators. While we talked about him, he swiveled his head in our direction and appeared to study us with big brown eyes. We had seen his parents, flying and perched, and agreed that this fellow was a chip off the old block of his parents. So we called him Chip. *Continued on page 3.*

### Chip – the Barred Owlet

Photo by Geoff Giles



### Summer Recess!

The Club will take a break this summer. Our next Club meeting will be Wednesday, September 21 and our next newsletter will be in August. Let us know about your adventures and travels and what birds you're seeing this summer – particularly the breeding activity you find in Virginia. Send your notes to Newsletter Co-Editors, Shirley Devan, [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net) or Judy Jones, [jjones184@cox.net](mailto:jjones184@cox.net).

### Spring Bird Count Results

By Jim Corliss

Our May 15 Williamsburg Spring Bird Count was a huge success. Thank you to everyone who turned out for the count. Between observers in the field and feeder-watchers, our group of 69 participants tallied 143 species for the day. The species count was slightly lower than our average of the past ten years (148), but nonetheless, we still set some records and tallied some unusual finds.

Modest increases were observed in some of our common residents, such as the Canada Goose, for which we tallied 590 birds compared to the previous record of 506 from the year 2014. *Continued on page 5.*

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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.

## Reported Bird Sightings for May 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).*

**May 1:** Brian Taber photographs a flock of 17 American Avocets flying low, headed north, at College Creek Hawkwatch Site along Colonial Parkway. The same day he observed 18 Willets (Western) at Jamestown Island standing with Royal Terns and Ring-billed Gulls.

**May 2:** Sue Mutell and Lieve Keeney see one American White Pelican fly over York River State Park.

**May 3:** Kathi Mestayer reports Black-and-White Warbler and a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher in her yard near John Tyler Highway.

**May 3:** Brian Taber finds a Blue-winged Warbler at Powhatan Creek Trail.

**May 4:** Erin Chapman reports a Swainson's Thrush in Matoaka Lake and Woods, near William and Mary.

**May 5:** Matt Anthony and Anna Internicola find a Black-throated Green Warbler and a Swainson's Thrush on Bassett Hall Nature Trail.

**May 6:** Jim Booth reports: "In addition to the usual yard birds this week I've had a pair of Gray Catbirds, a Cedar Waxwing, and best of all a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. He is the first I've ever seen in Williamsburg."

**May 6:** Brian Taber reports "three Anhingas just flew over my yard in James City County, low enough to see quite well. One even vocalized ... or I probably would not have looked up and seen them."

**May 9:** Bill Williams finds two Common Terns at College Creek Hawkwatch Site along Colonial Parkway.

**May 11:** Hugh Beard observes a Chuck-will's-widow in Freedom Park at 7 pm.

**May 20:** Shirley Devan observes a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak in her backyard in Colonial Heritage, but not at the feeder.

**May 20:** Bill Williams finds a Willet and a Black Tern at College Creek, along the Colonial Parkway.

**May 24:** Chandi Singer reports that an American Redstart flew into their window in Woodland Farms. It recovered and eventually flew off after Chandi snapped a photo, seen on page 5.

**May 30:** Cathy Millar reports from her house on South Henry St: "I wasn't able this year to find where in my hedgerows the Eastern Towhees were nesting but I am now seeing fledglings following parents demanding to be fed. Also a friend has posted pictures of a pair of Great-crested Flycatchers building a nest in the martin house at College Landing Park just down the street from me."

## President's Corner (continued from page 1)

The next day my neighbor called to say that all seemed to be working well, that Chip's mother had flown in several times and perched beside him on the railing while feeding him. He noted that the mom seemed huge when coming in silently on outstretched wings, compared to her owlet. I told him that owlets normally walk around on a branch near their nest for some time before they are finally able to fly off, and that his deck might afford a safe place for that phase. My neighbor agreed to surrender his deck to Chip's needs until he was ready to move on. It was apparent that the owlet had wormed his way into my neighbors' hearts in a very short time!

Over the next several days, my neighbors watched as Chip first walked about on the railing, then one morning was perched on top of the higher trellis on the deck, and a day later was perched on a horizontal limb about ten feet above the deck. The mother continued to appear several times a day to feed him. In the days that followed, Chip was perched on ever-higher branches and when the mother came to feed him, my neighbor noticed that she seemed to occasionally prod him to take off and fly. One morning Chip was gone and his mother did not appear. My neighbors were distressed, concerned that something might have happened to their little visitor. There was no denying that the stepparents of an owlet also experience the "empty nest syndrome."

Interestingly, my son and my chocolate lab seemed to have a Chip sighting a few days later. My son noted two owls perched side by side on a high branch in the wooded lot opposite our house. It seemed to my son that one owl was taking hooting lessons from the other. Fortunately, if it was Chip, he is learning to hoot from his mother, who does a perfect tuneful rendition of the classic Barred Owl "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?" (Chip's father is tone deaf and would not be a good voice coach!) My son noted that the second owl seemed to be trying to imitate the first, but was tentative and only getting it partly right. I'm sure we'll be hearing more from Chip! On a separate note, we still hear his father occasionally belting out his tune – on his one very untuneful, flat note.

The bluebirds in my yard fledged a healthy clutch of five, then seemed to take a break before making a second nest. When they did, three lovely blue bluebird eggs appeared within as many days, and then – nothing. The bluebirds came to my feeder with chicks from the first clutch tagging along and begging meals, but they appeared to abandon their second nest and eggs. Interestingly, the same thing happened at a neighbor's house, also with three abandoned eggs. After fully a month, my neighbor found eggshells under his bluebird house one morning and the eggs were gone from the nest. I was tempted to clean the nest and apparently unviable eggs out of my box to see if the bluebirds would make a fresh start, but then I decided to see what would happen if I did nothing and let the birds decide if and how to proceed. A week and a few days later I noticed a pair of bluebirds coming and going from my box. When I took a peek inside, there were three new bluebird chicks, which seemed to have hatched from the "unviable" eggs. I had read that bluebirds sometimes have inexplicable pauses, sometimes long ones, in their incubation, but I had to see this to believe it.

My native fruit-bearing trees that I planted in the yard are doing well this year, with nice blossoms. My favorite ones are the serviceberries, also known as Juneberries (*amelanchier* species). They are loaded with berries this year, and as usual are a hit with the birds when the berries ripen. New this year in those berry trees is a pair of Cedar Waxwings that have been regulars stuffing on the berries for more than a week now. I have not seen just two cedar waxwings, and not a flock, previously, and the fact that these two pass berries to each other to eat makes for some touching scenes. The above activities seem a strong indication of amorous intent, so I'll be keeping an eye out for this couple to have chicks with them as the summer progresses. A number of birds in my yard and neighborhood are already teaching their fledglings to fly, feed and fend for themselves. We hope that you will share your observations of breeding birds with the ongoing Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas project. Our observations can make important contributions to science to benefit our birds and nature. While you're at it, we wish you a great summer ahead!

## Virginia's Second Breeding Bird Atlas – Why Do We Bird?

[*Editor's Note:* Just a quick update on the progress of the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas: As of May 31, 309 participants have submitted over 5,800 checklists this spring!! So far, 135 species of birds have been confirmed as breeders by eBird users. The numbers increase daily! Each Flyer will contain information about Virginia's Second Breeding Bird Atlas – VABBA2! This month's note was written by Ashley Peele, VABBA2 Coordinator.]

A question we seldom ourselves is why we bird and why we keep track of our observations? To what purpose is this diligence? For some, it is purely for our own edification, for the betterment of our own knowledge. For others, it is the sense of achievement in meeting a birding goal. And for still others, it may be the contribution our observations can make for some larger purpose. All of these are sound and worthwhile reasons. Yet, I want to focus on that last one for a moment.

One of the greatest challenges that folks working in environmental conservation face is too little information. This is ever a limiting factor whether one is petitioning congress to pass a piece of conservation legislation or trying to get an accurate estimate of a species' population size.

Many of you have come across the new rallying cry of “Have you reported your data to the atlas?” Please know that this isn't meant to badger you, but is instead driven by a desire to use your data for a specific and important conservation purpose. Breeding data captured within the Atlas eBird portal (not eBird generally) will be the basis for reassessing state conservation and management strategies over the next decade. I know this takes a little (or even a lot) more effort, but I believe, and hope you do too, that this is a goal worth contributing to. To that end, please consider taking the plunge and reporting your breeding bird observations through the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas eBird portal. It's fun to watch your list of “confirmed breeders” grow for your blocks!

Now, for those of you who are not yet “expert” birders, remember that this project falls to you as well. Yes, we do encourage you to err on the side of caution when uncertain of a species identification. But! I know for a fact that novice or intermediate birders, those perhaps uncomfortable with birding by ear or uncertain of their spring warbler IDs, are generating good and important data on breeding birds.

Once you've tried this whole atlasing thing out, I think you'll see that this isn't the onerous task our minds often turn it into. As a wise and learned naturalist suggested to me only this morning, new atlasers should start with baby steps. Log the birds in your yard, then your neighborhood, then venture further afield. Work in teams and use the opportunity to learn from each other. If possible, drag along a young'un to battle the rampant generational disconnect from the natural world. But at the end of the day, just use your head and record what you observe.

Thanks for your time and for all the work you do for the birds of VA.

*Ashley Peele, Ph.D. VABBA2 Coordinator*

<http://ebird.org/content/atlasva/>

## VIMS OspreyCam – Live View of Local “Fish Hawks”

“Watch real-time images of an osprey family during their annual nesting and breeding season on the waters of Chesapeake Bay. The images—brought to you by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science—come from a nesting platform in the waters of York River immediately in front of VIMS' campus in Gloucester Point, VA. The nest site protects the resident ospreys from predators and gives them easy access to nearby York River fishing grounds.”

<http://www.vims.edu/bayinfo/ospreycam/>

## Dr. Dan Cristol's Spring Ornithology Class Blogs

Dr. Dan invites you to check out the web sites of his spring ornithology class where you can see all the students' photos taken this past semester plus read several student essays about campus birds.

For photos, visit: <https://wmornithology.wordpress.com>

For essays, visit: <https://ornithologyadventures.wordpress.com/2016/04/30/on-our-house-finches-in-residence/>

## Spring Bird Count Results, continued from page 1

Similar increases produced new records for Red-tailed Hawks (37), Barred Owls (17), American Crows (250), and Carolina Chickadees (244). While it is certainly gratifying to know that these birds are doing well in our area, I admit that I was much more excited that we also broke the record for Cedar Waxwings. This year we tallied 589 waxwings, breaking the 34-year old record of 534 that were counted way back in 1982! It's comforting to know that this beautiful bird is flourishing in Williamsburg and that we should be able to enjoy its handsome colors for many years to come.

This year's count also produced one "first," which was an adult White Ibis found by the Hog Island team. The bird was observed flying and positively identified by its white plumage with black wing tips and long decurved red bill. In the 39-year history of the Williamsburg Spring Bird Count, this was the first time we were fortunate enough to find this bird that is quite rare for our area.

While not a new record, our tally of 190 Eastern Bluebirds was a welcome result of this year's count. The cold winter of 2014 was especially difficult on our local bluebird population, and this was evident last year when our count total hit a five-year low of 105 birds (the high count is 202 set in 2012). It was heart-warming this year to see that the bluebirds appear to have bounced back well, with much of the success likely due to the efforts of the many WBC members and Virginia Master Naturalists who maintain and monitor our bluebird trails.

It's also interesting to see evidence of how the count timing affects the numbers of particular species. Since the count is conducted during spring migration, shifting the date sooner or later by a couple of weeks in any given year can dramatically influence the results as waves of different species migrate through our area. The May 15 date of this year's count was later than usual, with every count of the past ten years being in late April or the first week in May. That opened the door for the Blackpoll Warbler to make an impressive showing. The blackpoll is one of the last warblers to migrate through our area on its way to breed in Canada. This year we tallied 82 Blackpoll Warblers, which is more than the total of the last ten years *combined*. There have only been two other years with comparable blackpoll counts, and both were on similarly late count dates. These were May 15, 1983 with 83 birds counted, and May 11, 2003 when we set the blackpoll record of 104.

Whether you count in the field or observe birds at your feeders and in your neighborhood, your contributions are

important to our Christmas and spring bird counts. Feeder-watchers especially bolster the count numbers to provide a more realistic understanding of the local bird populations. In our Middle Plantation count area, for example, a steadfast contingent of feeder-watchers observed at least half of the birds counted in that area for 25 different species including Mourning Doves, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers, Blue Jays, Eastern Towhees, Brown Thrashers, Gray Catbirds, Pine Warblers, and House Wrens. Continuing to consistently monitor the birds in all of our environs, whether in our local green spaces or in our backyards, will provide us with the clearest possible picture of how our feathered friends are fairing not just in Williamsburg, but also in their distant breeding or wintering grounds. Everyone's contributions to this broader understanding of our bird populations are greatly appreciated.

## Members' Photos

See pages 8 – 10 for more color photos from members.



*American Redstart on her deck May 24. Photo by Chandi Singer.*



*Belted Kingfisher carrying food to nest at College Creek May 10. Photo by Bill Williams.*

## Recipients of Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships



WBC members were very pleased to meet the three recipients of the Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships on Wednesday night, May 18<sup>th</sup>, at the Club's Meeting. Standing with Judy Jones and club president Geoff Giles are (L-R) Audrey Root, grade 9 at Jamestown High, Bridget Wilson, grade 8 at Hornsby Middle School, and Jesse Nelson, grade 11, also at Jamestown High School. The three students were excited about their upcoming adventures at Nature Camp this summer. They will recap their experiences in short 5-minute presentations at our October meeting. We look forward to hearing their presentations.

## Welcome to new Bird Club members!

We are pleased to welcome these new members to our Club:

Dennis and Nancy Cogswell  
Olivia Hajek, W&M student  
Shawn and Katrina Dash

Hope to see you soon at a Bird Walk.

## W&M Student Nick Newberry's Research

Biology Undergraduate Nick Newberry received a 2015 Ruth Beck & Bill Sheehan Ornithology Research Grant – one of the few undergraduates to be so honored. Per Nick: His research focuses on “relationship between birds and housing prices from both an economic and biological standpoint. I will do so by conducting short bird counts in front of recently sold homes. All of my surveys will take place in the greater Williamsburg area. So, for those of you who live in the area don't be surprised if you see a binocular-toting college student standing around in your neighborhood this summer. Actually, it is my hope that you will share what you learn here about my research with your neighbors. I encourage you to read the abstract on my blog to gain a better understanding of the what's and the why's of my research. The “How”, however, should be quite interesting and is what this blog is about, so, please join me in this journey to find out how, why and if birds impact how we value our homes.”

<http://ccsummerresearch.blogs.wm.edu/2016/05/18/a-new-look-at-your-backyard-birds-what-are-they-really-worth/>



## Master Naturalists' Basic Training Class Starts Sept 6

The Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists is accepting applications for its annual six-month Basic Training session. The session starts September 6, 2016 and continues to March 8, 2017. The group meets about twice a month on Tuesday evenings and participates in six weekend classes/field trips over the six-month period.

People who are curious about nature, enjoy the outdoors, and want to be part of natural resource management and conservation in Virginia are perfect candidates. Enrollment is limited to 20 people and the fee is \$175, which includes all materials and instruction. The application can be downloaded from the Chapter's web site: [www.historicrivers.org](http://www.historicrivers.org) Enrollment is first come, first serve. Questions? Contact Basic Training Co-Chairs Jennifer Trevino, [jbktrevino8@cox.net](mailto:jbktrevino8@cox.net) or Sharon Plocher, [sharonjp4@cox.net](mailto:sharonjp4@cox.net).

## VSO Has New Web Address

Fix your bookmarks to change the web site for the Virginia Society of Ornithology to:

<http://www.virginiabirds.org>

## Virginia Society of Ornithology Awards Conservation Grants Every Year

Worthy candidates or organizations who are conducting research in the field of bird conservation with potential benefits to Virginia species and habitats or that increases our knowledge about native species or suite of species are encouraged to apply for a VSO Conservation Grant.

The VSO Board of Directors has budgeted \$2,500.00 annually. Awards are usually \$500.00, \$1,000.00 or occasionally more, depending on the worthiness of the project.

Applicants are encouraged to submit a request in writing to the Conservation Committee Chair. Each application should include:

1. A short research proposal describing benefits to our knowledge of Virginia's avifauna or to a Virginia species.
2. Requested funding level.
3. Detailed budget for requested funding.
4. Agreement to report back to the VSO at the end of the project.

The Conservation Committee will then consider each application, confer with the entire VSO Board, and notify applicants of an award by August 15<sup>th</sup> and November 15<sup>th</sup> each year.

Just to be clear, there are 2 separate competitions for these awards; this is not a two-step process.

There are two deadlines for application: **JUNE 30** and **OCTOBER 31**.

Please submit your application for a grant (or any questions) to Patti Reum, Chair, VSO Conservation Committee, at [pareum@gmail.com](mailto:pareum@gmail.com)

## New Quarter Park Bird Walks in May

By *Jim Corliss*

We had a great group come out to enjoy the long-awaited warm and dry weather on our regular walk in New Quarter Park May 14. Highlights of the 47 observed species were the plethora of Blackpoll Warblers (5) plus a Red-eyed Vireo on its nest. Other warblers included: American Redstart, Northern Parula, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Yellow-throated Warbler. The most numerous bird was Cedar Waxwings at 14 followed by Blue-gray Gnatcatchers at 8.



*Participants in May 14 Bird Walk at New Quarter Park. Seated: Bob Long, Joyce Lowry, Cheryl Jacobson, Jan Lockwood, Cynthia Long. Standing: Jim Corliss, visitors Tom Banks and Linda Spruill, Lisa Nickel, Sue Mutell, Lynn Collins, Susan Nordholm. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.*

## May 28 New Quarter Park Bird Walk



*Participants in May 14 Bird Walk at New Quarter Park. Seated: John Adair, Sara Lewis, Joyce Lowry, Marilyn Adair, Jason Strickland, Leader, Bruce Glendenning, George Reiske. Standing: George Boyles, Virginia Boyles, Geoff Giles, David Lunt, Lisa Nickel, Sue Mutell, Mike Lowery. Photo provided by John Adair.*

## Members' Photos!

Many thanks to Bird Club members who submitted these stunning photos. Make a note to yourself – keep your camera with you at all times, particularly during the June/July breeding season. Enjoy!



*Great Horned Owllet along James River, April 16. Photo by Barbara Houston*



*Brown Thrasher fledgling, May 9. Photo by Judy Jones*



*Gray Catbird eggs in her yard, May 10. Photo by Cheryl Jacobson*



*Gray Catbird fledgling in her yard a few weeks later, May 30. Photo by Cheryl Jacobson*



*Carolina Wren carrying nest material in his yard May 25. Photo by Bill Williams.*



*Brown-headed Cowbird investigating Carolina Wren nest in his yard a few days later – May 29. Photo by Bill Williams.*



*Red-eyed Vireo on nest at New Quarter Park May 14. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.*



*Red-bellied Woodpecker adult and fledgling. Photo by Sue Mutell.*



*Northern Cardinal nestlings in her yard, May 7. Photo by Cheryl Jacobson*



*Eastern Phoebe with nest material, May 9. Photo by Judy Jones*



*Rose-breasted Grosbeak in her yard, May 27. Photo by Barbara Houston*



*Summer Tanager in her yard, May 22. Photo by Sue Mutell*



*Eastern Kingbird at Cumberland Marsh, May 7. Photo by Nancy Barnhart*



*Magnolia Warbler at Cumberland Marsh, May 7. Photo by Nancy Barnhart*

## CALENDAR

Saturday, June 11	Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 8 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Sunday, June 19	Hampton Roads Bird Club sponsors Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Meet in the parking lot near Ranger Station.
Saturday, June 25	Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 7 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Sunday, July 3	Hampton Roads Bird Club sponsors Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Meet in the parking lot near Ranger Station.
Saturday, July 9	Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 8 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Sunday, July 17	Hampton Roads Bird Club sponsors Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Meet in the parking lot near Ranger Station.