



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

October 2016

President's Corner

By Geoff Giles



Got Evening Grosbeaks in your yard? Me neither. Have you ever seen one? I personally have not had the pleasure. Ever. Yet this species was a regular winter bird in our area

as late as the 1980's, and some of our members counted them in the hundreds in back yards in Queen's Lake! The question was not if they would come in the winter, but how many, and when the first and last ones of the season would appear. There is speculation over the cause of the decline in this species' population and the shrinking of its range, but it calls attention to the fact that changes to our natural world can be dramatic and are worthy of our attention.

Less troubling, but equally visible are the seasonal changes we are seeing as this summer slowly yields to fall weather. To date the foliage has just begun to discolor and fall. It's evident the hummers were looking for other cues to prompt their migration, as most have long since flown. Suddenly swarms of American Goldfinches have rediscovered thistle seed at the feeder, after a prolonged absence for their late nesting season. The stunning colors of summer have been molted into a more muted tawny yellow, so that this year's young are only slightly duller than the adults. The endless swarms of American Robins and Chipping Sparrows about in summer have dwindled down to just a few still in evidence. Black oil sunflower seeds are suddenly in much greater demand at my feeder, as Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmice and White-breasted Nuthatches seem to have already started caching those in their respective larders in preparation for a winter that has not yet showed signs of approaching.

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October 19 Club Meeting – 7 pm – Hummingbirds!

Join us Wednesday, October 19 for our regular third Wednesday club meeting when we'll enjoy a program by Bird Club founder Bill Williams on "Hummingbirds." Bill will share with us the natural history, folklore, and diversity of these flying wonders. Also, recipients of the Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships will share a few memories of their summer sessions at Nature Camp.

We'll convene in Andrews Hall, Room 101. See you there.

October 15 Field Trip – Eastern Shore

The Eastern Shore of Virginia in mid-October is a very birdy spot with the enticing possibility of finding rare fall migrants to complement the stunning hawk migration. Our leader will be Bill Williams, so join us for our October 15 field trip to the Eastern Shore. We'll leave Williamsburg at 7 am from Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Road. Carpooling is important to reduce toll costs and the size of the caravan. Stops include Island 1 of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge, Kiptopeke State Park and the Hawkwatch Platform staffed by CVWO Hawkwatcher Anna Stunkel, and Educator Caroline Sankey. There we can chat with Monarch Biologist Clay Buffkin to learn how the Monarch migration is going. Perhaps he'll tag a few Monarchs for us! We'll venture as far north as the Oyster landfill.

Bring your spotting scope if you have one. Bring water, snacks, lunch, and dress in layers for changing weather conditions. Those who want to join us on the way – meet us at the parking area just before the tollgate at the CBBT. We'll plan to leave that location at 8 am to continue our trek north.

Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee – Shirley Devan, Cheryl Jacobson, and Judy Jones – is charged with preparing a slate of officers for election at the November 16 Club meeting. We have a very important Board Position to fill – President! Geoff Giles has served nobly and well for four years and wants to take a break. We'll have two Committee Chairperson positions to fill (even though they are not elected positions) – Field Trip Coordinator and Membership Chair. Please consider giving back to the Bird Club and helping us move to 2017. Thanks!

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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.

CORRECTION

In last month's newsletter, we reported the sighting of a Pine Siskin by Jeanette Navia on July 1. The date of the sighting was actually July 31 – a rarity because of the late date. We apologize to Jeanette for our inaccuracy. Here is another look at the Pine Siskin on Jeanette's feeder.



Reported Bird Sightings for September 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.

September 5: Kathi Mestayer has female Northern Parula at her birdbath!

September 13: Jim Booth: "I had the first Brown-headed Nuthatch of the season in my yard. Other than that birds are pretty scarce, I hope due to the drought."

September 20: Tom McCary is delighted to observe a male Common Yellowthroat about 5 feet away on the other side of his dining room window.

September 22: Shirley observes an Osprey flying over the Massie Pond at Colonial Heritage. Then she spots a Summer Tanager in the woods behind her bird feeders.

September 23: While the power is out in the house, Shirley counts birds in her backyard. Seventeen species including American Redstart, Black-and-white Warbler, and a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak plus the usual suspects – titmice, goldfinches.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Wall of Birds

Member David Taylor suggested that we include a link to the just-completed "Wall of Birds." Click over to the link below to "explore the diversity and evolution of birds with this web interactive based on the Wall of Birds mural. The large-scale mural features species from all surviving bird families alongside a select group of extinct ancestors."

<https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/wallofbirds/>

President's Corner (continued from page 1)

There are still plenty of bugs and berries around. Northern Cardinals, Gray Catbirds and Northern Mockingbirds seem most attracted to the berries, including a healthy crop of beautyberries this year. As usual in late summer, my yard is teeming with Red-eyed Vireos stuffing themselves with the full red berries from a large southern magnolia. This year the vireos are also foraging for caterpillars in the leaves of the gums, red maples and hollies. They are among the last of the summer migrants to leave, so when they do finally depart we can expect to see our winter migrants coming in. A few migrating warblers passing through have appeared foraging in the foliage. Most of those I could get a good look at were American Redstarts, plus a Pine Warbler and a Black-throated Blue Warbler. Both from the standpoint of what could be seen and heard, it has been a slow migration season to date.

My neighborhood Red-shouldered Hawks have been vocal and noisy as usual. Guess they have a lot to be happy about judging by the ample numbers of frogs and snakes about this year. As usual, the hawk family spends a good bit of time scouting and hunting in the ravine near my house for amphibians and reptile table fare. Have not heard from the Barred Owl family lately, but am not worried. Last year was the same, with quiet time for them lasting until winter, when the owl's thoughts turned to courtship in anticipation of the following spring. Noticed that it seemed to be a good year for the bats in my neighborhood, with twice as many as usual active each evening. Don't know why, but the Chimney Swifts did not nest in my neighbor's chimney this year, as they usually do. Was it too hot? Too wet? Both seem possible.

Can't wait for our winter migrants to get in. Hope the warmer weather is not hitting them too hard on their breeding areas and that they are able to navigate through the ever denser obstacles to nesting and migration that sharing their habitat with our own ever-increasing numbers and impacts cause. We share a complex and beautiful natural world with them. Let's make the parts of it we impact a haven for us all.

Hope you'll join us this fall and winter on upcoming field trips to visit some beautiful natural spots and enjoy our birdlife in natural settings. And please join us for enjoyment of our birds and fellow birders at our monthly meetings, on third Wednesdays on the William and Mary campus. Hope to see you there!

Bird Club Purchases Materials for Local Library

Each year the Bird Club funds purchases of books and DVDs for the local Williamsburg Regional Library and James City County Library. Lee Schuster, our Library Liaison, works with Laura Morales at the Library to select new titles. Your membership dues fund these purchases at the Library every year. Thank you!

Look for these titles soon at the library near you.

- [American Museum of Natural History Birds of North America](#)
- [Beaks, Bones and Bird Song](#) by Roger Lederer
- [Bird Brain](#) by Nathan Emery
- [Bird Droppings](#) by Pete Dunne
- [Birds in the Backyard](#) (DVD)
- [Do Birds Have Knees?](#) by Stephen Moss
- [First Flight: A Mother Hummingbird's Story](#) (DVD)
- [Gods of the Morning](#) by John Lister-Kaye
- [One Wild Bird at a Time](#) by Bernd Heinrich
- [Owls](#) by Marianne Taylor
- [Parrot Confidential](#) (DVD)
- [Pelican Dreams](#) (DVD)
- [Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America](#)



Barred Owl, September 8 on Outer Banks. Photo by Inge Curtis.

Members' Photos



Cooper's Hawk, hatch year, at Mainland Farm, September 25. Photo by Bill Williams.



Chestnut-sided Warbler, Sandy Bottom Nature Park, mid-September. Photo by Andy Hawkins.



Brown-headed Nuthatch at feeder station, September 21. Photo by Nancy Barnhart



Yellow Warbler, September 17. Photo by Inge Curtis.



Red-eyed Vireo on Beautyberry, September 17. Photo by Inge Curtis.



Summer Tanager at feeder station, September 21. Photo by Nancy Barnhart

Nature Camp Scholarship Applications Now Available

By Judy Jones



It's finally time, WBC! Our Williamsburg Bird Club is presently accepting applications from interested candidates for three Bill Williams Nature Camp scholarships to the 2017 sessions of [Nature Camp, nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Rockbridge County, VA](#). Students who will have completed fifth through twelfth grade next June are eligible to apply.

The Bill Williams Nature Camp scholarships are intended to support students who truly have an interest in learning about the natural world and who can work and learn both independently and in groups. That's because Nature Camp is unique in its academic focus. Since it began in 1942, Nature Camp has emphasized hands-on, field-based, experiential education in natural history and environmental studies. Selected campers will be required to attend daily classes, to take notes and to maintain a notebook, to complete all written assignments, and to participate in outdoor activities in all types of weather. Campers will be expected to accept academic challenges with enthusiasm, commitment, and hard work. Those who have attended in the past have discovered the joy of learning about nature and have often returned the next year for more of what Nature Camp has to offer. The camp has taught students to love and protect the environment through its hands-on learning approach. The application can be found on the bird club website, <http://www.williamsburgbirdclub.org/> and must be postmarked by October 31, 2016!

VSO December 2 – 4 Field Trip to VA Beach

The VSO's annual field trip to Virginia Beach will be Friday, December 2 through Sunday, December 4, 2016. On Saturday a visit to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT) is featured. The last trip of the weekend will be a tram ride at Back Bay NWR and False Cape State Park on Sunday morning.

LODGING: There is a block of rooms available at Comfort Suites Beachfront (VA563). To register for the group rate you must mention the Virginia Society of Ornithology. Reserve rooms by Nov 10 for the group rate. Comfort Suites Beachfront (VA563) 2321 Atlantic Avenue Virginia Beach, VA 23451, (757) 491-2400/ FAX (757) 491-8204 \$74 + tax.

FRIDAY MORNING/FRIDAY AFTERNOON: To be announced. Waiting on confirmation with the site.

FRIDAY EVENING: A tally/meet & greet will be held at 7 pm Friday at the hospitality room of the hotel. Please bring a beverage of your choice and a nibble to share.

SATURDAY MORNING: The Saturday field trip to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT) will leave promptly at 8:00 a.m. from the parking lot of the CBBT visitor center. Participants must meet & check in at the CBBT office at 7:15 a.m. This is a half-day trip.

Participants should bring binoculars, spotting scopes, snacks, and beverages and be prepared for winter weather. Participation will be limited to the first 45 to sign up since there is a requirement to pay a security guard to accompany each group of 15. Fee for this trip is \$10 per person to pay for the security escort.

REGISTRATION FOR THE WEEKEND: It is important to register for field trips as participation is limited. Register with the trip coordinator, Lee Adams, by email by November 15 at

leeloudenslageradams@gmail.com. Please put VSO VIRGINIA BEACH TRIP in the subject line of your email, and include your name, e-mail address & cell phone number, and the field trips you are requesting.

Check the VSO web site for more info:

<http://www.virginiabirds.org/events/upcoming-field-trips/20161202-virginia-beach>

2016 Eastern Bluebird Summary for James City and York Counties

By Jan Lockwood and Lois Ullman, County Coordinators

The nestboxes were clean, the teams formed and the monitors trained, but we were anxious as the 2016 Eastern Bluebird nesting season began. Many dead bluebirds had been found in the boxes at the beginning of the 2015 season and we had fledged only 43% of those fledged in 2014. However, we hadn't found any evidence of winter roosting or recovered any dead birds during a nestbox winterizing study we'd conducted on four trails over the winter of 2015-2016, which was encouraging.

2016 proved to be a MUCH BETTER YEAR for the bluebirds, with 611 fledged compared to 345 in 2015, a 77% increase. Other native cavity nesting species (Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, and Carolina Wrens) fledged 234 in 2016 compared with 217 in 2015, an 8% increase. While this is but one season and we have not matched the productivity of 2014 when 802 bluebirds fledged from 40 fewer boxes, we're hopeful the Eastern Bluebird is recovering. Additional highlights:

- A new species on the trails, a Brown-headed Nuthatch, attempted a nesting in Poquoson;
- 2016 was an exceptionally long season, with the first egg laid on March 16 and the last chick fledged on September 9;
- 79 monitors volunteer on our 15 trails, including the trail at Poquoson Learning Garden which was erected and monitored by Poquoson Master Gardeners;
- One new trail was added this season, Kingsmill Golf Course;
- The number of nestboxes increased from 267 to 275;
- The productivity of all species fledged per box increased to 3.2 in 2016 from 2.15 in 2015; previous highest was 4.2 in 2012;
- Eastern Bluebird numbers were affected by nesting timing – Tufted Titmouse and Carolina Chickadees got into the boxes before the bluebirds; one trail fledged more titmouse than bluebirds and another an equal number of bluebirds and chickadees;
- Eastern Bluebird productivity was comparable to 2014 with 85% of the eggs hatching; it was higher than in 2012, 2013 and 2015;
- BUT only 78% of the bluebird eggs laid fledged; i.e. 55 chicks were lost to predation by rat snakes and House Sparrows, more than in previous seasons;
- House Sparrows (invasive non-native species) were present on 5 trails – building nests (removed weekly), guarding boxes to prevent the bluebirds from using them, and predated bluebird nests.

All credit is due to our trail leaders who organized, reported and held everything together, as well as our monitors/foot soldiers who went out on all those hot and steamy days and counted, photographed and enjoyed the new life they saw and supported.



Hatch day for Eastern Bluebirds April 2016 at Newport News Park Bluebird Trail. Photo by Jennifer Trevino



Almost ready to fledge – May 2016 at New Quarter Park Bluebird Trail. Photo by Judy Jones

Prothonotary Warblers at Chesapeake's Northwest River

By Shirley Devan

In 2016, Bird Club volunteers monitored 102 Prothonotary Warbler nest boxes at Northwest River Park in Chesapeake, VA. This project is sponsored by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (CVWO).

Ninety-seven per cent (99 of 102 boxes) showed nesting activity, which includes everything from a “sprig of moss” to multiple, clutches.

Only 225 nestlings were banded compared 305 in 2016. Volunteers estimate that over 185 nestlings fledged without banding. Early nesting birds faced a cold wet May and second clutches suffered from higher than usual predation, infertile eggs, abandoned nests, and dead nestlings.

New high numbers established for new female and male Prothonotary Warblers banded and recaptured. Notable recaptured birds include:

- a banded MALE Prothonotary Warbler was recaptured! He is the first male recaptured at Northwest River in the eight years of monitoring. He was banded as a nestling May 29, 2014 at a box very near where he was recaptured.
- 35 females including three at least 6 years old. One female was banded as a nestling in 2010. The other females were banded as adults in May and June 2011.
- 4 females were banded in 2012; 6 each were banded in 2013 and 2014; 10 were banded in 2015
- One female was originally banded at box 35 in May 2013 and has been recaptured at box 35 in each of the past three years.

For the first time at Northwest River, volunteers banded two clutches of six nestlings each. Until 2016, all clutches were 5 or fewer.

Save the Date!

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is one of the highlights of our birding year! Count Coordinator Jim Corliss has set Sunday, December 18, 2016, as the date for our Club's day in the field – and at our feeders – to count every species and their numbers! Plan to BE THERE! You'll hear more about this important citizen science project in the coming months.

Prothonotary Warbler and Wood Duck Project at Lee Hall Reservoir & Harwoods Mill Reservoir

By Dave Younker

The 2016 season was another good year for both Prothonotary Warblers and Wood Ducks at these Newport News locations. Prothonotary Warbler numbers rebounded from the low numbers of last year to produce more typical numbers. Harwoods Mill continues to produce greater numbers than Lee Hall. This presumably is due to less dead snags at Harwoods Mill, which makes the boxes more attractive to the warblers. Total number of warblers at Harwoods Mill and Lee Hall was 30 and 16, respectively. Wood Ducks had an amazing year at Harwoods Mill. Following our first-ever nesting last year, 5 of the 6 boxes had nesting Wood Ducks resulted in fledging 57 Wood Ducks!

Harwoods Mill Reservoir: The Prothonotary Warbler fledgling total for this location was 30, which was on par with numbers from 2 years ago. All boxes had nesting activity with 4 of the 6 producing Prothonotary Warblers. Also, 4 of 6 boxes produced two clutches of nestlings. Other nesters in the boxes included Carolina Chickadees and Eastern Bluebirds. Initial signs of nesting again occurred by mid-April with all nesting complete by the end of July.

Wood Duck nesting was very successful this past year. Only 1 of the 6 boxes didn't have nesting Wood Ducks, and it had a nesting Flying Squirrel. A total of 63 eggs were laid with 57 hatching. The low number of hatched eggs in a box was 8, and the high was 14. Multiple groups of young Wood Ducks were observed throughout the summer swimming with an adult. One Wood Duck box was subsequently used by an Eastern Bluebird and fledged 4 birds.

Lee Hall Reservoir: This location produced 16 Prothonotary Warblers which was the same number as 2 years ago. Three of the 5 produced Prothonotary Warblers and the other produced Carolina Chickadees. One box produced 2 successful clutches of Prothonotary Warblers, and only 1 box had no nesting activity. This reservoir has many dead snags, which provide acceptable alternatives to the nest boxes. Prothonotary Warblers were observed nesting in some of the snags. Many other avian species are cavity nesters, so competition for these snags is high. These boxes continue to provide an option for the Prothonotary Warblers. Many of the older boxes have suffered weather damage and will be replaced during the offseason.

22nd Kiptopeke Challenge Results from Two Local Teams

The **Gulls Gone Wild** team with members Jan Lockwood, Nancy Barnhart, Barbara Neis, and Shirley Devan totaled 87 species, far below the winning tally of 132 species and well below the target of 100 species. The Gulls birded the Eastern Shore from Island 1 of the CBBT at dawn to Chincoteague Wildlife Loop way past sunset. This fund-raising and fun-raising event for Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory featured 10 teams in the 22nd Kiptopeke Challenge. These teams tallied a total of 171 species in 24 hours – remarkable diversity even on the Eastern Shore this time of year. The Gulls' highlight birds were Piping Plover, Red Knot, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Common Nighthawk. The sudden weather change at Chincoteague late afternoon presented a challenge for all teams and depressed totals for most. One of the most amazing sights was the liftoff of dozens of White Ibis from the marsh at the Eastern Shore Wildlife Refuge. They flew directly over our heads to land in the trees near the pond on Ramp Road. Many thanks to the generous donors who supported our team and CVWO!

The **Wild Birds Unlimited** team of Brian Taber and Dave Youker came in with 94 species this year, far below their 103 tally last year. Per Brian: "What a crazy day! A fine morning, and then an extremely poor afternoon, which I don't recall ever happening to that extent at Chincoteague. A weather system just hitting Chincoteague caused very high winds, which made bird-finding very tough for us. Ocean waves were even coming into the beach parking lot! As we learned later, though, some other teams worked hard there and found some small, but good patches of birds. We again dedicated our day to friends who have passed away and this year, we thought about our long-time friend, Fenton Day, who passed away in June. He had been on previous Kiptopeke Challenge teams with Brian. Many thanks to our donors and supporters this year."

You can still support the Kiptopeke Challenge with a donation. Send a check payable to CVWO to PO Box 764, Lightfoot, VA 23090 or donate safely and quickly online at: <http://www.cvwo.org/support%20us.php>

You can read the CVWO blog at <http://coastalvirginiawildlifeobservatory.blogspot.com> written by CVWO's educator Caroline Sankey as she chronicles the fall highlights at the Hawkwatch Platform.

New Quarter Park Bird Walks in September

By *Jim Corliss*

September 10

It was a quiet morning and we were also competing with the crowd participating in the 8k-run/walk event. But down on the dock it was actually very comfortable with a light breeze. We had seven participants but we didn't stop to get a photo today. We found 25 species including an Osprey, Bald Eagle, Acadian Flycatcher, White-eyed Vireo, two Red-eyed Vireos, and four Summer Tanagers.

September 24

We had a beautiful morning for our 7AM New Quarter Park bird walk today. Twelve people participated including some out-of-towners and first-time birders. The highlight of the morning were two Clapper Rails that posed for us at different times on the far edge of the creek. Everyone was able to get terrific views including some looks through Geoff's scope. We also had two Red-headed Woodpeckers, which were very welcome given how scarce they've been in the park through the late summer months. We also had a nice Hooded Warbler near the shelters and a Northern Parula, plus some other fall warblers, which never gave us a good enough look to identify.



The participants from left to right starting in the back: Portia Belden, Bob Long, Sue Mutell, Joyce Lowry, Chris Franks, Linda Cole, Francis Hayslett, Jim Corliss, Cynthia Long, Geoff Giles, Joe Jones, Letitia Lussier

October Bird Walks at New Quarter Park will be Saturdays, October 8 at 8 am and October 22 at 7 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.



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*Pied-bill Grebe, at Bodie Lighthouse, Outer Banks, September 10.
Photo by Inge Curtis.*



Bobolinks, September 11, Outer Banks. Photo by Inge Curtis.

CALENDAR

Saturday, October 8	Williamsburg Bird Club (WBC) sponsors Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 8 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Saturday, October 15	WBC Field Trip to the Eastern Shore. See page 1 for details.
Sunday, October 16	Hampton Roads Bird Club sponsors Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Meet in the parking lot near Ranger Station.
Wednesday, October 19	WBC Monthly Meeting, 7 pm, Andrews Hall, Room 101 on W&M Campus
Saturday, October 22	WBC Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 7 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Sunday, December 18	Williamsburg Area Christmas Bird Count! Save the date!!