



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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February 2017

President's Corner

By Bill Williams



Birders venturing to the island of Hispaniola would hardly consider going to Los Cerezos*, a loosely organized community of wood-framed dwellings approximately 7 km from the Haitian border in the Dominican Republic's heavily deforested Dajabon Province. Travel there is at best rigorous, and there are zero accommodations or amenities anywhere nearby. Yet there we were, Bob Ake, Bill Akers, Lenny Bannkester, Jerry Via, Dave Youker and I, near midnight on December 10, 2016, flashlights on, trekking several hundred meters down a clay-based, deeply rutted, moisture slick roadbed to a family compound we would call home while we searched for birds the next 4 days! Indeed, we had come to Los Cerezos under the auspices of the Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO) and Fairfax-based Earth Sangha to document the diversity and abundance of bird species on 3 relatively small plots of land owned by Manolo Sanchez and Cosme Quezada, members of Tree Bank Hispaniola, a partnership between Earth Sangha and the Asociación de Productores de Bosque, Los Cerezos. Earth Sangha's mission is ecological restoration as a form of socially engaged Buddhism.

The Los Cerezos Tree Bank program is designed to enable Asociación members like Cosme and Manolo to conserve tropical forests and promote sustainable agroecological practices through the propagation of native trees. Knowing the avian composition and utilization of their properties would serve as a vital asset for planning land use best practices.

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February 15 Club Meeting – 7 pm – JOINT MEETING WITH THE HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER – MASTER NATURALISTS

By Cheryl Jacobson

Please join us at 7:00 pm on Wednesday, February 15th, in Andrews Hall, room 101, for a program with Dr. Leslie Bulluck from VCU. Her topic will be her work with Prothonotary Warblers and she will discuss the food web with an emphasis on the impact of toxic algae on the Prothonotary Warbler's diet.

Photo by Judy Jones

March 15th Meeting – Birds and Housing Prices – Is There a Connection?

W&M student Nick Newberry will share his research with us. How does having a diverse population of birds in your yard increase the dollar value of your home? Nick will present information regarding his research findings. His study is a follow up to a study by Farmer, Wallace, and Shiroya on Bird diversity and the ecological value in urban home prices.

February 18th Field Trip: The Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Islands by Car

By Shirley Devan

Winter sea ducks are the highlights when birding the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT) islands in February. Join us Saturday, February 18, 2017, for a driving tour of the three closed-to-the-public islands of the CBBT. This trip is time sensitive as we must have your registration by February 4th. The cost is \$10 and you must get your registration and check to Shirley Devan by the 4th. The registration form can be found at:<http://www.cbbt.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2011RevisedINDIVIDUALBirdingApp.pdf>

Mail PAGE 2 of the form along with a \$10 check (per person) to Shirley Devan, 6227 Tucker Landing, Wmsbg, VA 23188. Make the check payable to Shirley Devan.

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Reported Bird Sightings for January, 2017

December 25: Chris and Karen Griffin wrote, "I think this is a Black Skimmer juvenile. While walking on the beach at Virginia Beach on Christmas Day, we saw two skimmers hanging out in a large group of gulls. The rest were Ring-billed Gulls but the pair of skimmers really stood out."



January 1: Hayes and Joyce Williams reported, "we saw over 400 Hooded Mergansers at Beaverdam Park. They were moving slowly in a long line much like Red-breasted we have seen there in other years."

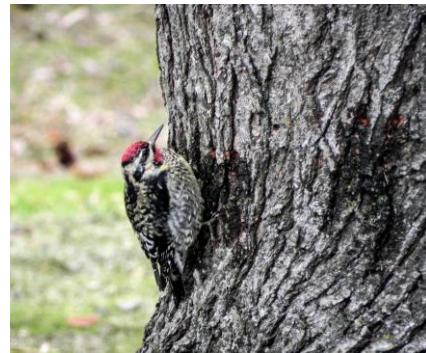
January 3: Nancy Barnhart observed and photographed a Rose-breasted Grosbeak at YRSP.

January 3: A Western Tanager continued to be seen at the feeder of Bill Williams in Settler's Mill neighborhood off Jamestown Road.

January 7-9: Jeanne and Gil Frey tell us that, over in Surry, "The recent snow brought us a few new visitors here at Birnam Wood. The usual visitors included Dark-eyed Juncos, American Goldfinches, House and Purple Finches, Carolina Chickadees, Titmice, Northern Cardinals, Blue Jays, nuthatches, White-throated Sparrows, Hermit Thrushes, a Barred Owl, Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and Mourning Doves. New to our site was a lone Tree Sparrow, who certainly enjoyed the finch feeder for 3 days. An unusual Titmouse also appeared and sported a mottled gray back, obviously a genetic mutation."



January 10: Jeanette Navia was down with her Mom in Raleigh and took this photo (right) out the front door. She explained, "They are eating leftover sweet potatoes in this photo. They come every morning; often there are two hawks, many crows and several squirrels.



Mom says the crows and squirrels know that the hawk won't get them when they are all down on the ground eating."

January 13: Virginia and George Boyles spotted a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in their yard. (left)

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President's Corner (continued from page 1)

Because our arrival was in the deepest dark of night, we were completely unaware of our immediate surroundings. All we quite quickly came to know were our sleeping arrangements, where our “necessary house” and outdoor shower were, and that there was seldom any electricity and no potable water. Fortunately the latter necessity was amended by a 5-gallon potable water bottle for each of the two 3-person bed-quarter “rooms” that had been prepared. Each of us was provided a mosquito-net-covered bed, basically a mattress on a frame, with a pillow, clean sheets and blankets. Our thin-walled rooms had concrete floors, tin roofs and essentially no furniture. The occasional nail in a wall beam served to hang a hat or maybe a shirt. In the room Bob, Dave and I shared had we pulled a wall plank away we would have been staring into our host’s sleeping quarters! Bill, Lenny, and Jerry had 3-bed out-building about 30 meters away not far from the “shower” and a rope line for drying clothes.



Photo of a Narrow-billed Tody by Bill Williams

Well before dawn our first morning, Red Jungle Fowl (domestic chickens!) just outside our door sounded their sunrise promoting overtures. With kid-like anticipation of new birds, we were about to see we quickly groped around for clothes, footwear and binoculars only to step outside into a light mist over the compound and the forested valley below. Right away Hispaniolan Woodpeckers, very reminiscent of our Northern Flicker, announced themselves as they darted into a tree already occupied by an active male American Redstart and a Bananaquit. And just like that, there was a tiny, bright green and white Narrow-billed Tody, then a Black-throated Blue Warbler with a couple of Gray-headed Palm-Tanagers and a Hispaniolan Pewee and...in the top of the tree...a Palm Chat, Dominican Republic’s national bird! We were on a roll. In retrospect, that scenario of encounters our first hour of Los Cerezos daylight encapsulated the essence of our birding experiences-local endemics sharing resources with neotropical migrants. We could only guess that any individual of the 10 warbler species we would eventually record had been or will be documented by Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas participants.



Photo of the Hispaniolan Spindalis by Bill Williams

The remainder of that first morning was spent meeting with Cosme and Manolo in preparation for them showing us the 3 plots we would “survey” as 2-member teams; Bill and Jerry, Bob and I, Dave and Lenny. One of the plots was a bean field in the early stages of reforestation. Another was a forest remnant in a stream valley, and the third was a shade-grown coffee stand. What became very apparent as we walked in the mid-day heat on that and subsequent days was how highly fragmented the gently sloped land was, ranging from small home sites to fenced cattle pastures to tiny, disturbed woodlots.

As we trudged “home” late that afternoon, a rather imposing storm developed. As fast as we tried to walk to get ahead of the impending deluge, it was evident we would not make it back to our dry accommodations in time. All at once out of the impending gray, a truck pulled up, everyone insisting we pile in to go to Cozme’s house just down the road. Within minutes, as the rain intensified, the pick-up stopped at Cozme’s, and we scampered to get under his front entrance overhang. Above us water poured from a roof gutter into cistern beside the house. Hardly had we settled in for the wait than Cozme’s wife brought out a tray of passion fruit drinks with ice rendered from purified water. We were overwhelmed with gratitude and surprise. There simply weren’t words sufficient enough to describe how delightful that was. A half-hour later she returned with hot chocolate! Such were the people we met daily.

Over the next three days our 2-member teams visited the 3 sites, alternating each day so each team visited each site once. Our protocol was simple, count every bird of every species at each site beginning as close to 8:00 a.m. as possible until noon. That start-time became unintentionally flexible given that one site was a 2 km walk from our “house”, and the other two were roughly (in every sense of the word) 4-5 km away, necessitating a ride there in the bed of a reasonably reliable four-wheel drive vehicle.

President's Corner (continued from page 3)

The combined number of species detected at the three study sites was 39, including American Redstart, Black-and-white Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Parula, Ovenbird, Prairie Warbler, Palm Warbler, and Yellow Warbler. Other familiar faces noted were Red-tailed Hawk,

Cattle Egret, Killdeer and Northern Mockingbird, all likely island breeding residents.



Prairie Warbler photo by Bill Williams

For the entire adventure the species total was in the mid-40s, among those 18-20 endemics. The first species Bob and I recorded each morning at our respectively study plot assignment was Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo. Whenever one of those vocalized Cozme and/or Manolo would look at us, point in the direction of the sound, and with a grin, say "bo-bo", their colloquial name for the bird. Other notable species were Hispaniolan Spindalis, Loggerhead Kingbird, Gray Kingbird, and Red-legged Thrush. We also encountered 3 hummingbird species Antillean Mango, Hispaniolan Emerald and the very tiny Vervain Hummingbird.

We knew, of course, this initial effort was going to be a learning experience for us, Earth Sangha, the Asociación, and the local community. Without question it was a success, one the VSO hopes to build on next year and beyond. We, the visitors cannot begin to fully sing enough praises for Earth Sangha's Chris and Matt Bright who were with us throughout our stay. They, the generous, beautiful, gracious family we shared quarters with, in fact everyone we met, made our time in Los Cerezos a treasured life-experience gift. The language barrier for several of us was deftly circumvented by Chris, Jerry, and Lenny. The bridges built among the team and our hosts were extraordinary.

*Because inquiring minds want to know..... the Spanish-to-English translation of "los cerezos" is "cherry". Unfortunately, we saw no signs of such a delicacy! However, we did chew on sugarcane and devour the fresh-picked tangerines Cozme and Manolo brought to us as we did our field work. Muy bueno! Muchas gracias todos! Excelente!

IT'S TIME TO PAY YOUR DUES!

2017 is our Club's 40th year! And we have 40 years of community support to celebrate and continue! So send in your check and support your WBC! Remember – we can't do anything without **YOU**. We look forward to your participation in our 2017 events and your continued financial support.

Photo of the Red-bellied Woodpecker by Catherine Flanagan

SUPPORT OUR LOCAL BIRD STORES!

Visit the **Wild Birds Unlimited Store** in Settler's Market in New Town. The WBC receives a 5% rebate on the pre-tax amount spent by our Club members. Be sure to tell those generous owners that you are a member!

Backyard Birder



The Backyard Birder at Quarterpath Crossing (near the Kingsmill Harris Teeter) gives each us at the WBC a 10% discount on all merchandise. Just let the kind folks there know that you're a member to get your percentage off!

SIGHTINGS (Continued from page 2)

January 14: Mary Anne & John Fennell have a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker as daily visitor to their suet. Also they are often greeted by a small flock of Purple Finches. Finally, an unidentified warbler with bright yellow breast, wing bars and green back hangs out on the suet daily.

January 15: Andy Hawkins spotted these Snow Buntings at Fort Monroe in Hampton.



January 15: Judy Jones and Barbara Houston were thrilled to see a pair of Common Goldeneyes at the beach in Yorktown.

Andy Hawkins saw the same pair on January 18th. This is Andy's photo.



January 15: John Adair took this photo of a Fox Sparrow at Newport News Park.

January 16: Brian Taber reported a Clay-colored Sparrow at his house near Jamestown Road. "Paler, buffier than nearby Chipping Sparrows, pale lores, buffy supercilium, whitish crown stripe, gray nape, obvious white malar."



January 18: Shirley Devan spied this Barred Owl in a tree at the Warhill Sports Complex.

January 19: Jan Lockwood was able to see two great birds at New Quarter Park. She writes, "Several Dark-eyed Juncos were taking turns bathing vigorously in a puddle. A male Purple Finch flew in to bathe and at one point they were joined by a Hermit Thrush. The Thrush flew off but I was able to find him in a nearby tree."

January 20: Cheryl Jacobson and Nancy Barnhart were excited to see this Eurasian



Wigeon at Pleasure House Point. Cheryl took the photo seen above.

January 21: Bill Williams found a Yellow-headed Blackbird at the junction of Forge Road and Little Creek Dam Road. "An adult male; foraging in a mixed species blackbird flock; flock and sub-flocks were actively moving about, flushing then resettling; bird's head and neck were observed as it was feeding; blackbird with bright yellow head, throat and upper breast; black eye line; was not relocated when flock flushed, thus was not seen in flight; fifth local record"

January 22: Mike Jaskowiak got this great photo of a Pileated Woodpecker at Fords Colony. (right)



January 30: Bill Williams observed the Clay-colored Sparrow at Brian Taber's house near Jamestown Road.

January 30: That beautiful Western Tanager continued to be found at Bill Williams' feeder.

Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas – Year 2

By Dave Youker, Region 11 Coordinator

The Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas (VABBA) is in its second year. The time to start preparing for the 2017 breeding season is now. Certainly those early breeders like owls and eagles are already busy. But it's also the time to start planning which blocks you'd like to survey this year. Now that we're veterans of the process, consider branching out to new locations. Use the topographical maps on the VABBA2 website to evaluate which habitats are contained in your block and then determine how to cover these areas.

Priority Blocks will remain as during 2016. There are two reasons for this. First, many of the priority blocks were not surveyed, as many people wanted to survey their local areas in order to get comfortable with this Atlas process. Second, we need these blocks covered for purposes of baseline comparisons with the first Atlas. So when you go to the website to sign up for a block, you'll see the priority blocks outlined in purple again.



Photo by Catherine Flanagan

I hope you'll consider taking one or more of these priority blocks this year. Of course, any blocks you survey will be greatly appreciated. I'm hoping each of you will continue to monitor a block in Region 11 during 2017. Once again, I truly appreciate the time you dedicate to this important conservation effort.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me at Youkerd@aol.com.

Upcoming Field Trips (always held on the third Saturday of the month)--

Saturday, March 18: Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge with Leader Rob Bielawski. Details to follow in the March newsletter.

Saturday, April 15: Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge with Leader Bob Ake. Details to follow in March and April newsletters.

A Query from Jean Booton

Does anyone know of a woodworker who does hand carving? I am a new member, Jean Booton, and am beginning to carve birds. I would like to study with someone who has experience with sharpening tools and following drawings or patterns and might enjoy sharing this knowledge. My phone number is 757-407-5127. Thank you in advance.

New Quarter Bird Walk on January 14th

By Shirley Devan

Thanks so much for sharing Saturday morning birding with us at New Quarter Park. The temperature was much cooler than we would have liked but we all had on extra layers. Our group of 19 birders observed 29 species. We got good looks at Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers (6 of them!) and saw four Bald Eagles! Always a treat!



Here is the group photo taken at the fire circle:

Standing (left to right) -- Joyce Lowry, Carol Ely, Jim Madden, Barbara Neis, Sue Mutell, Portia Belden, Alice Byrne, Bob Byrne, Shirley Devan

Sitting (left to right) -- Wayne Moyer, Jan Lockwood, Lynda Sharrett, Nancy Barnhart, David Lunt, Cathy Flanagan, Karen Grass

Not pictured: Mary Haines, Judy Zwelling, Maggie Coleman

New Quarter Bird Walk on January 28th

By Jan Lockwood

Nine hardy birders joined Joyce Lowry and Jan Lockwood on a frosty morning for the fourth Saturday Bird Walk in New Quarter Park. As we stood on the floating dock on Queens Creek and happily tallied the Cormorants, Bufflehead, Ring-billed Gulls, Common Loons, a Bald Eagle, a flyby Redhead, Hooded Mergansers, Turkey Vultures, a Kingfisher and Killdeer, we dubbed ourselves "the Landlubbers", knowing that our footing was almost certainly steadier than that of our WBC friends aboard the Bay Princess! A Purple Finch, a Hermit Thrush, two Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a very cooperative Brown Creeper, and an industrious Yellow-bellied Sapsucker rewarded our walk in the woods. While we missed the American Woodcock and Northern Harrier, we were pleased to reach 34 species.



Photo by Jan Lockwood

Photo of "the Landlubbers": Back row: Joyce Lowry, Sue Mutell, Rochelle Colestock, Harry Colestock, Mike Carruth

Front row: Mary Jo Headley, Susan Wolfe, Sara Lewis, AnnMarie Wojtal, Robert Wojtal

CBBT by Boat

By Geoff Giles



Photo by Carol Annis

Our trip for birding on the Bay for the winter of 2017 came off smoothly and provided a unique experience for our club members and fellow Virginia birders and nature lovers! On January 28th, in spite of wind and waves, we were able to ply the Chesapeake and catch sightings of Razorbills, Harlequin Ducks, Red-necked Grebes, Gannets, and Brandt. We saw most of the Bay's wintering species thanks to Dan Cristol's guidance and the sharp-eyed assistance from his W&M contingent and other sharp birders in the boat. The seal antics were particularly entertaining this year. The bundled-up birders made pleasant memories as they watched the seals frolics in the glistening sunshine on the Bay on that chilly day.



Photo of the seals by Inge Curtis

Thanks in particular to Ann, Shirley, Cheryl, and Cathy. These four get great kudos for doing critical parts of making the trip happen and work smoothly! A special thanks to Dan, too, for his expertise and enthusiasm in guiding us through the wind and waves to the good stuff we saw! It is particularly enjoyable to see the young birders that Dan inspires and coaches pushing the boundaries where few bleary-eyed undergraduates would otherwise get to go.



Photo of the Northern Gannet by Inge Curtis

A Rare Yellow-Purple Finch

By Cheryl J. Jacobson



I love my Purple Finches and every year look forward to their return. Usually several females come and are soon joined by one male. This year I now have three females and two males. One of the birds, which I assumed was a female, has a yellow throat patch. See photos of the beautiful male (left) and the rare female with the yellow throat patch (right).



I sent my photo to Dave Youker who responded that he had never seen this but would do some research. Later he responded that he learned that it may relate to diet. I also did some research at this site:

<http://www.sibleyguides.com/2012/07/a-yellow-purple-fin-in-ontario>

David Sibley discussed the role of diet in the yellow-purple-fin. He also stated, "In Purple Finch yellow color is very rare, and often comes along with abnormal streaking, which may mean that it is hormonal." The information is fascinating and is worth your time to read it in full.

Results from the 2016 Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count

By Jim Corliss

In the 2015 Christmas Bird Count (CBC), I made special mention of the incredible level of participation we've enjoyed in recent years. It was the second time that our number of count participants topped 100 and, being optimistic for the future, I commented that "the day will come when the participants outnumber the species!" Well, it didn't take long. We had an incredible 133 people, comprised of 67 field observers and 66 feeder watchers, tally 117 species of birds on our December 18, 2016 CBC count day. With the addition of 3 "count week" species that were observed in the days before and after the count, our participants outnumbered the species 133 to 120!

The 2016 CBC brought record numbers of Canada Geese with a high count of 7,725 (was 4,671), and American Crows that tied their record high of 479 set during the previous year's CBC. Black Vultures also made a record showing of 211 birds, just beating out the previous high of 209 set in 2013. So I know what you're thinking – it's difficult to get excited about more geese, crows, and vultures. But we also observed record numbers of Dunlin (185), Cooper's Hawks (9), American Goldfinches (425), and Rusty Blackbirds (156). The Rusty Blackbird tally thoroughly eclipsed the previous high count of 92 set in 2004, thanks to a large flock observed in the College Woods count sector.

We didn't observe any "firsts" in the 2016 CBC – those being species that we've never tallied throughout our 40-year history. But we did find some uncommon species that have been observed only three times or less in our count circle. These included an American White Pelican and a fly-over Brant observed by the Hog Island team, a Northern Gannet that made its way unusually far up the York River so it could be spied in the Cheatham Annex sector, and a Sedge Wren that MattAnthony coaxed to sing a few notes on Jamestown Island.

Our feeder watchers were out in force during this CBC. Along with large numbers of the birds we expect to see at feeders in December, there were also some nice feeder surprises that included Orange-crowned Warbler, Baltimore Oriole, and a *Selasphorus* (Rufous/Allen's) Hummingbird. The intrepid Western Tanager that has been visiting Bill Williams' feeder for many winters now was also present and accounted for yet again this year.

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Photo of a determined cormorant biting off more than he could chew—taken by Judy Jones on the CBC

Thank you to everyone who helped to make our club's 40th anniversary CBC such a huge success. It's exciting to watch the growing participation throughout our local community in support of this important citizen science project. Special appreciation also goes to Jan Lockwood, Sara Lewis, and Jeanette Navia for all of their help in arranging and setting up the meeting space and the refreshments for the compilation meeting. Our club's Spring Bird Count is just around the corner on April 30th. Let's keep the momentum going for that count with another record number of participants!

An overview of the summary submitted by Jim Corliss for the WBC. Many thanks, Jim, for all your hard work!

2016 Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count Summary
Count Date: December 18, 2016

Species	Total	Species	Total	Species	Total
Canada Goose	7,725	Virginia Rail	1	House Wren	2
Bram	1	American Coot	16	Winter Wren	5
Mute Swan	6	Killdeer	40	Marsh Wren	2
Tundra Swan	32	Greater Yellowlegs	5	Carolina Wren	203
Wood Duck	12	Dunlin	185	Sedge Wren	1
Gadwall	156	Bonaparte's Gull	157	Golden-crowned Kinglet	77
American Wigeon	39	Laughing Gull	22	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	82
American Black Duck	70	Ring-billed Gull	762	Eastern Bluebird	273
Mallard	943	Herring Gull	43	Hermit Thrush	16
Northern Shoveler	5	Great Black-backed Gull	28	American Robin	525
Northern Pintail	14	Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	Gray Catbird	3
Green-winged Teal	19	Forsster's Tern	37	Brown Thrasher	24
Canvasback	1	Rock Pigeon	161	Northern Mockingbird	62
Redhead	11	Mourning Dove	184	European Starling	680
Ring-necked Duck	303	Eastern Screech-Owl	2 (cw)	Cedar Waxwing	84
Greater Scaup	1 (cw)	Great Horned Owl	8	Orange-crowned Warbler	4
Lesser Scaup	5	Barred Owl	3	Pine Warbler	27
Bufflehead	242	<i>Selasphorus</i> Hummingbird	1	Yellow-rumped Warbler	424
Common Goldeneye	1 (cw)	Belted Kingfisher	21	Western Tanager	1
Hooded Merganser	271	Red-headed Woodpecker	7	Eastern Towhee	62
Red-breasted Merganser	1	Red-bellied Woodpecker	159	Chipping Sparrow	221
Ruddy Duck	1,045	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	45	Field Sparrow	4
Wild Turkey	6	Downy Woodpecker	121	Savannah Sparrow	65
Common Loon	1	Hairy Woodpecker	16	Fox Sparrow	5
Pied-billed Grebe	28	Northern Flicker	106	Song Sparrow	153
Horned Grebe	1	Pileated Woodpecker	27	Swamp Sparrow	19
Northern Gannet	1	American Kestrel	3	White-throated Sparrow	680
American White Pelican	1	Merlin	1	Dark-eyed Junco	506
Brown Pelican	9	Peregrine Falcon	1	Northern Cardinal	482
Double-crested Cormorant	1,117	Eastern Phoebe	8	Red-winged Blackbird	2,478
Great Blue Heron	84	Blue-headed Vireo	1	Eastern Meadowlark	4
Great Egret	2	Blue Jay	137	Rusty Blackbird	156
Black Vulture	211	American Crow	479	Common Grackle	476
Turkey Vulture	322	Fish Crow	2	Brown-headed Cowbird	45
Bald Eagle	63	Carolina Chickadee	415	Baltimore Oriole	1
Northern Harrier	3	Tufted Titmouse	367	House Finch	206
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	Red-breasted Nuthatch	14	Purple Finch	1
Cooper's Hawk	9	White-breasted Nuthatch	122	Pine Siskin	2
Red-shouldered Hawk	18	Brown-headed Nuthatch	20	American Goldfinch	425
Red-tailed Hawk	23	Brown Creeper	23	House Sparrow	61

(cw) Indicates species was observed during the count week but not on the count day



Photos taken at Betty Peterson's house on January 24th by Inge Curtis....while waiting for a recalcitrant kinglet to appear!



BIRDS IN THE SNOW



These birds in the snow were photographed by Barbara Houston.



These snowy beauties were photographed by Catherine Flanagan.



THE AMERICAN WOODCOCK – BREEDING BIRD INFORMATION TO HELP US OUT WITH VABBA2

By Ashley Peele, PhD, State Coordinator for the VA Breeding Bird Atlas

For many, the American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) remains a somewhat mysterious species and for good reason. A forest-dwelling bird species doesn't seem remarkable until we consider that the woodcock is in the shorebird family, Scolopacidae. Suddenly, this species takes on a much more intriguing aspect. Adding to its mystique, the American Woodcock is highly cryptic, displaying beautiful tawny, black and gray plumage that blends perfectly with brown grasses and woody debris of forest floors. Lastly, they are not well studied and gaps exist in our knowledge of their life history.

Where AMWO dwell... Open fields or large forest openings are ideal for the display flights of male American Woodcock. In particular, males prefer to use young forests and abandoned farmlands for singing grounds. When foraging, woodcock prefer moist forest floors, which are likely to have an abundance of prey like earthworms lurking in the soil. Their long bills, similar to that of a snipe, are extremely sensitive and used to probe for prey in the soft soils. During the breeding season, female woodcock similarly place nests in young or middle-aged forests with lots of openings and damp soils.

What AMWO sound like... Many people are familiar with the ‘peent’ call given by males, both to communicate with other males and to attract females. Males give this call, before and after doing their characteristic display flight

in which they fly to a great height before spiraling back down towards earth. As they descend, the male woodcock produce a ‘twittering’ sound. This was long believed to be a vocalization, but researchers have demonstrated this is
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actually a mechanical noise, produced by air moving between the outer flight feathers, or primaries, of each wing.

When AMWO arrive... They are already here! According to the VA Gold Book, American Woodcock are uncommon to common winter residents in the coastal plain and uncommon winter residents in the Piedmont, Mountains and Valleys. A quick look at eBird reports show that birders around VA have been reporting male ‘peenting’ calls, since late December. These displays are likely resident or overwintering birds. Peak migration of woodcock occurs from February-March in Virginia.

When AMWO breeding begins... While American Woodcock are considered uncommon summer residents, their cryptic plumage and quiet behavior in the forests means they may often go undetected. Egg laying dates range from: 11 Feb-21 Apr (Coastal Plain), 3 Mar-20 May (Piedmont), and 1 Apr-18 May (Mountains and Valleys). However, local reports of AMWO nests in southwestern VA show AMWO females consistently laying eggs by late February or early March. If this is the case in the mountains, it’s likely that more eastern nesting woodcock are similarly active by late winter.

So, with all of these uncertainties, how should Atlas surveyors assess AMWO in their block?

Identifying likely habitat is the key step. Consider whether your block has open habitats and young forests or regenerating farmland that AMWO prefer. Then, do a little evening or dawn stake out for displaying males. While woodcock will display during migration, their presence in winter indicates that the location is indeed a good one for the species. Once the nesting season has begun (early February), strolling through likely forest patches is the best way to pick up woodcock on nests, flush family groups, etc. However, this effort should be combined with your regular Atlas efforts. I only recommend directing effort toward AMWO searching, if you have good habitat and reason to believe they may be nesting in the area. The hunters amongst us may already know likely areas to check out for AMWO, since their time in the woods can familiarize them with AMWO and other cryptic forest species.
Story of an AMWO confirmation!

Brian Murphy, an atlas volunteer and professor of Fisheries Science at Virginia Tech, shared his story of finding American Woodcock breeding on his property last winter. After documenting males displaying in February of 2016, Brian’s dog, a pointer, flushed the female off her nest. He was able to find the nest and confirm the female was on eggs. (Note! Great care was and should always be used when approaching potential nest areas. Females can abandon nests if too much disturbance occurs, so always use caution. Dogs are in fact a great tool for assessing AMWO presence, but only well trained animals should be used.) In April, Brian’s dog found the AMWO chicks and Brian was able to confirm all four eggs hatched and chicks had fledged. This female nested in grass beneath tall shrubs. The shrub cover, moist soils, and adjacent fields made this an ideal location for an AMWO nest. The American Woodcock is an interesting species and one that is typically under-reported for breeding bird atlas projects. If you think you may have good habitat in your Atlas block or your property, spend some evening listening for the plaintive ‘peents’ and twittering of male woodcocks displaying. You may be surprised what you find.

Huge thanks to Atlas volunteer and VT professor, Brian Murphy for sharing his experience.



American Woodcock photo by Judy Jones

**Our Field Trip on January 21st to
Sandy Bottom Nature Park, Hampton and Messick Point, Poquoson**

By Shirley Devan

Twenty-one hearty birders joined Andy Hawkins at Sandy Bottom Nature Park in Hampton Saturday, January 21, 2017 for a walk around this city park and its varied habitats. For many birders it was their first visit to this park and everyone was happy to see the variety of birds, even on this foggy morning.



Photo by Inge Curtis

Highlights of the 33 species included a Great Egret posing mystically in the fog in a deciduous tree, an Eastern Phoebe, a Fox Sparrow in a tree rather than foraging on the ground, and 22 American Wigeon. Then most of the group followed Andy to Messick Point in Poquoson to examine the mud flats and the pilings. Despite the still foggy conditions at 11 am, the scopes were able to pull in Dunlin, Greater Yellowlegs, Red-throated Loon, Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Northern Harrier, Forster's Terns, and 45 Boat-tailed Grackles.



Photo by Shirley Devan

After lunch at the local Crab Shack, several proceeded to Fort Monroe to look for whales and other wildlife. Many thanks go to Andy for showing us one of his favorite birding spots.



Photo by Inge Curtis

And thanks to the birders who braved the damp, chilly and very foggy conditions to make this field trip such a success.



Photo by Inge Curtis

Why eBird is the Greatest Thing Since Sliced Bread

Reprinted with permission from Mike Stinson of Dylwin, VA

1. **It's free.** You can keep and analyze your bird records for free. You can get a free backup of them whenever you want to download it. Yes, you have to have internet access, but even that is often free these days. And all the other fun stuff I'm about to mention is free... but priceless.
2. **It's got lots of pretty pictures.** You can search for photos and videos and enjoy looking at them – for education, or just for eye candy.
3. **It's got sounds, too.** If you want to listen to recordings of birds, many of those are on eBird as well, and more are being added regularly.

4. It will help you find rare birds. If you like to chase rare birds, you can use the alerts to tell you when and where they've been seen. But more than just seeing a rare bird, it's good to know why a bird is rare, so...

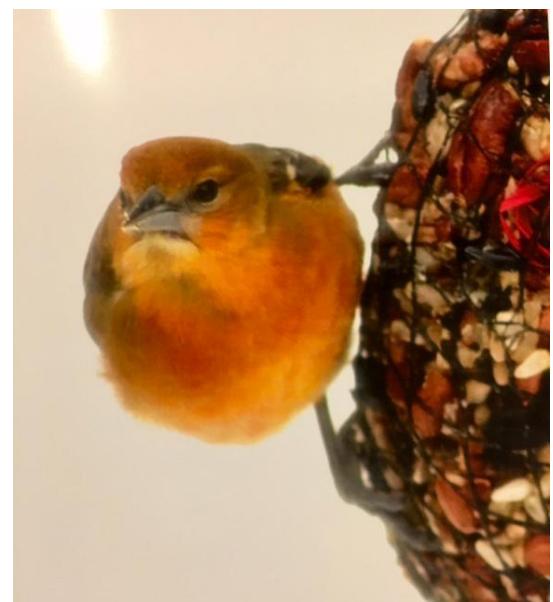
5. It will help you understand bird distribution. Understanding when a bird is rare is understanding when it's not common. The understanding of which birds are common in an area, and when, is something eBird constantly gets better at teaching to us. We spend most of our time looking at common birds so it's good to know more about them.

6. It keeps getting better. I hesitated for a while before I started using eBird because it was not worldwide in scope. Then it was. People complained that you couldn't upload photos to eBird. Now you can. People wanted to add personalized pages to eBird. Now they can. And so on.

7. It is truly creating science. As long as the peer review process holds up, eBird is science. If you're not a professional scientist, this is a way that you get to contribute to science. Your data will be there for reanalysis long after you're gone to the Great Migrant Trap in the Sky. Having worked on several breeding bird atlases before, I can assure you that eBird is a faster way to get the data compiled and to visualize the atlas as a work in progress. Lots of scientists work with eBird, trying to improve it. And...

8. Fixing mistakes is easy. If you mess up your reports you can go back to your checklist and edit them. If a reviewer makes a mistake (and of course we do), it can be fixed easily.

9. Got privacy if you want it. Many people use eBird but don't post their list totals publicly; that's an option that's available (and another improvement that has been made along the way; v. #6 above). If you see a rare bird, you can make that sighting private as well. You can make "Your Profile" available, but you don't have to.



Female Baltimore Oriole by Sharon Plocber

10. It plays well with others. Using eBird does not stop you from using any listserv. It does not stop you from sending your friends a text when you find a good bird. It does not stop you from blogging or Facebooking about birds. It does not stop you from writing notes on paper in the field (I still do). We're still finding new ways to use eBird... for example, eBird records are now being used as the basis for accelerated acceptance of records by some state bird records committees (including Virginia's)... cf. #7 above. But...

11. You can take your ball and go home if you want to. A lot of us enjoy eBird, and spend a lot of time with it. No one says it's perfect, but it's a great tool that did not exist all that long ago. But no one is making anyone use it. If you want to keep your data to yourself, if you want to report them in a context that lacks any sort of peer review, if you want to support an alternative to eBird that offers what it offers at a competing price... go for it.

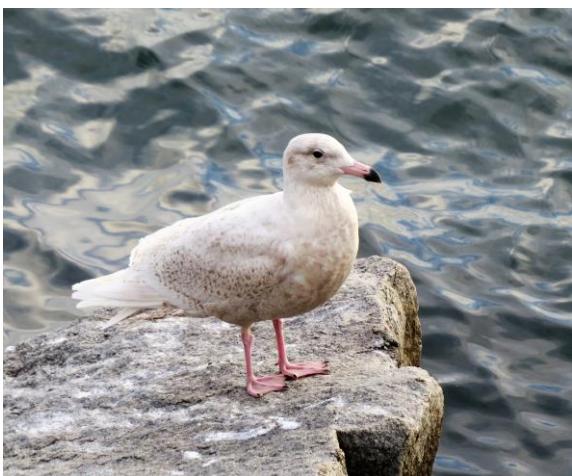
Pileated Woodpecker photo by Sharon Plocber

12. It gives us something to talk about on a snow day (or while waiting for that rare bird to come back). Birders love to talk about birds, and about other birders. eBird gives us something else to talk about. I've been emailed and asked in person many times, "why does eBird...?" Sometimes I know the answer, sometimes not. It's ok. It's what we do!

January 4, 2017...A Hat Trick, Trifecta, Turkey of a Day

By Cheryl J. Jacobson

In case you don't know, this is three successes of the same kind, especially consecutive ones within a limited period.



It is not often that a birder is able to see three Virginia rare birds in a half a day. On January 4th on my way to look for the Lucy's Warbler at the Cheriton Landfill, I stopped at Island 1 of the CBBT and was immediately rewarded with a Glaucous Gull. (See photo of this beautiful gull). When I arrived at the Landfill, about 30 other birders and I searched for over 3 hours to locate the Lucy's Warbler. In the process, we also saw a Nashville Warbler.

Please check out this blog for photos and also to learn about Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory:

[http://coastalvirginiawildlifeobservatory.blogspot.com/Lucy's Warbler](http://coastalvirginiawildlifeobservatory.blogspot.com/Lucy's%20Warbler)

In the blog, Brian Taber describes the Lucy's as a cavity-nesting breeder of far western desert mesquite areas. Amazingly this Lucy's Warbler, Virginia's first record, was found on December 31st by Ned Brinkley on Virginia's Eastern Shore! It has stayed for several days—to the delight of many.

Some Great Photos by Some Great Photographers....



Jan Lockwood's Purple Finch and a Dark-eyed Junco take turns bathing in a puddle in New Quarter Park. They were joined by this Hermit Thrush who, although very clean after his bath, remained reluctant to be photographed.



Shirley Devan took this photo of a Common Loon in New Quarter Park on January 13th. (Left)



More Great Photography...

Yes, Inge Curtis finally did get her photo of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet at Betty Peterson's home on January 24th.



Barbara Houston captured this photo of a Dark-eyed Junco waiting for warming weather on January 15th.



Catherine Flanagan discovered an upside down Carolina Wren at her feeder on January 7th.

CALENDAR

February 3-5	VSO's Winter Field Trip to the Outer Banks – Reservations Required
Sunday, February 5	Hampton Roads Bird Club sponsors a Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Meet in the parking lot near Ranger Station.
Saturday, February 11	Williamsburg Bird Club (WBC) sponsors a Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 8 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Wednesday, February 15	WBC Monthly Meeting, 7 pm, Andrews Hall, Room 101 on W&M Campus—parking pass needed. Combined meeting with Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists....see page 1 for details.
February 17-20	The Great Backyard Bird Count—details at http://gbbc.birdcount.org/
Saturday, February 18	WBC Field Trip – CBBT by car—reservations needed. Details on page 1.
Sunday, February 19	Hampton Roads Bird Club sponsors a Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Meet in the parking lot near the Ranger Station.
Saturday, February 25	Williamsburg Bird Club (WBC) sponsors a Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 7 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Wednesday, March 15	WBC Monthly Meeting, 7 pm, Andrews Hall, Room 101 on W&M Campus—parking pass needed. See page 1 for details.
Saturday, March 18	WBC Field Trip – Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge—more details to come in next month's newsletter
Saturday, April 15	WBC Field Trip – Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge—more details to come in next month's newsletter