



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 29, Number 10

Website: [www.wmbgbirdclub.com](http://www.wmbgbirdclub.com)

November 2005

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Alex Minarik

I'd like to take the opportunity in my last President's Corner to acknowledge and thank the 2005 officers and committee chairmen for their service to the Williamsburg Bird Club. It has been a pleasure working with them towards the purposes of our club. I also want to thank the membership for their support. The coming year promises to provide lots of opportunities to participate in several exciting new projects such as a whip-poor-will and chuck-will's-widow population survey, a purple martin recovery program, and sponsorship of a natural history camp in the spring. I encourage your continued support of all the club's activities and the incoming officers in 2006.

## NOVEMBER 16 MEETING

Plan to join us Wednesday, November 16, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 at Millington Hall at William and Mary to learn more about feeding birds in winter. George Copping, owner of the local Wild Birds Unlimited store, will share tips and recommendations for the most nutritious and attractive feeding methods for your backyard visitors.

## NOVEMBER 19 FIELD TRIP

Join Tom Armour Saturday, November 19, when he will lead the group along the York River via the Colonial Parkway, where we can expect to see some recently arrived water fowl.

Meet the group at 8:00 AM at the parking lot at Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Road (near the Fresh Market). This is a good trip for spotting scopes. Dress in layers – it could be windy on the river!

## NOMINEES FOR 2006 BIRD CLUB BOARD

At the October 5 meeting the Board of Directors appointed the nominating committee of Ruth Beck, Chairwoman, Marilyn Zeigler and Shirley Devan, and charged them with presenting a slate of candidates for consideration and voting at the November meeting.

The nominating committee submits the following candidates for the Club's Board of Directors for 2006. Voting will take place at the November meeting. The term of office is one year for each position.

**President:** Robert (Bob) Long

**Secretary:** Fred Blystone

**Treasurer:** Charles Rend

**Vice President and Program Chair:** Tom McCary

**Vice President and Co-Editor of The Flyer:** Phil Young

**Vice President and Co-Editor of The Flyer:** Shirley Devan

**Member-at-Large:** Mary Anne Fennell

**Member-at-Large:** Bill Williams

## THANKS TO VOLUNTEERS WHO BRING REFRESHMENTS

Barb Streb has coordinated our post-meeting refreshments this year and has worked with member volunteers who have generously provided beverages and "treats" for our social get together before we head home. Many thanks to Barb and these member volunteers for the fall meetings: September: Phyllis and Dave Lee; October: Marilyn Zeigler and Eleanor Young; November: Dorothy Whitfield.

## WHAT IS A LISTSERV... AND DOES IT HURT?

Interested in knowing what other birders around Virginia? Subscribe to VSO's "listserv"! A

"listserv" is an automated email service where a computer (thank goodness!) collects all the daily emails submitted by birders who write in about their sightings and adventures. Then, the computer automatically distributes these notes to all the members who have signed up to receive the emails. And best of all, it's free!

The Virginia Society for Ornithology maintains a popular listserv. Subscribers can choose to receive individual bird reports as they are reported throughout the day or to receive a single "digest" version of the day's reports. Or for those who only wish to read reports that have previously been reported, they can go to the archives whenever they wish without having to subscribe. To subscribe to VA-bird:

1. Address an email to: [va-bird-request@freelists.org](mailto:va-bird-request@freelists.org)
2. In the subject field, type: subscribe.
3. Leave the text field blank.
4. Hit the "send" button.

That's all there is to it. You will get a message back with instructions and information on administering your account. Follow the instructions. Then, you are on.

There are several "listservs" around the state. To see the lists and how to subscribe, point your internet browser to:

<http://www.virginiabirds.net/index.htm> (the VSO's web site) and then click the "listservs" button on the left.

## AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT DECEMBER 18

The 106th Audubon Christmas Bird Count will take place December 14 thru January 5 and the 28th Williamsburg celebration of this event takes place Sunday, December 18. That is the day that Bird Club members split up into nine groups, take to the field at 7 a.m. or earlier and do their best to count every bird that they can identify by sound or sight in their assigned areas. At 5:00 p.m. the leaders and diehards meet back in the William and Mary Biology Department to compile the day's work into one chart showing the number of species and the number of birds identified. Most of the time our species count ranges between 109 and 112.

For those members hooked on this event, it is one of the Bird Club's most satisfying activities. If you would like to join that group just pick an area that you would like to work in and call the leader of that area and find out where and when they will gather to start the day.

Camp Peary unfortunately is limited to a few participants cleared by the security forces there. Sometimes that also applies to the Cheatham Annex Area but it is not quite so rigid, so we list that as an area to call if it interests you.

Cheatham Annex, Bill Williams, 229-1124  
College Woods, Ruth Beck, 566-8234  
Hog Island, Bryan Taber, 253-1181  
Jamestown Island, Dot Silsby, 596-3252  
Jolly Pond, Lee Schuster, 565-6148  
Kingsmill, Paul McAllister, 229-1323  
Middle Plantation, Hugh Beard, 221-0499  
Skimino, Bettye Fields, 930-0177

You will need a lunch and something to drink. Early it can sometimes be very cold, but it warms up as the day goes on. The groups move about by cars so you'll have a place to stash your lunch and layers of clothing that you don't need.

This is a truly satisfying event. Call one of the coordinators listed above to sign up for a location you're interested in. TRY IT. YOU'LL LIKE IT!

## VSO VIRGINIA BEACH FIELD TRIP DECEMBER 2 – 4

The Cape Henry Audubon Society, with support from the Virginia Beach Audubon Society, the Hampton Roads Bird Club and the Back Bay Bird Club will host the VSO (Virginia Society for Ornithology) annual field trip to Virginia Beach, December 2 – 4. The weekend starts with a Friday afternoon field trip to the Whitehurst Tract. Featured field trips include a visit to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Saturday and a full day at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge/False Cape State Park on Sunday. This year, space on field trips is limited and advanced registration is required. Contact Clark White, 101 Brookstone Court, Yorktown, VA 23693. Phone: 757-875-7649. Email: [cwbirds@cox.net](mailto:cwbirds@cox.net)

## FIELD TRIP TO JAMESTOWN NETS 44 SPECIES

By Tom Armour

Nine club members braved the poor weather to Jamestown Island on our October 22 field trip. In spite of the low clouds and poor visibility that

made all of the birds appear a uniform gray color, we were able to get 44 species. There were many Yellow-rumped Warblers plus many unidentified due to the poor visibility. Some highlights were two Greater Yellowlegs that did a great close-up flyby while calling, and good looks at Caspian and Forster's Terns. There were still many Laughing Gulls on the James River, most in winter plumage; they apparently haven't started their migration yet. We also had a good scope look at an adult Bald Eagle. The following made the trip: Duryea Morton, Dick Kiefer, Linda Scherer, Marilyn Zeigler, John and Mary Anne Fennell, Frances McDaniel and David and Phyllis Lee.

## OCTOBER BIRD SIGHTINGS

*Report your backyard birds and local sightings to Shirley Devan at 220-6269 (home phone) or [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net) (home email). If you encounter interesting birds on your vacation/travels, please share!*

Bill Williams reports:

Saturday, **October 1** at New Quarter Park there was a Ruby-crowned Kinglet consorting with 1 Eastern Phoebe, and 5 Eastern Wood-Pewees. The Owl Prowl at New Quarter that night produced 2 dueling Eastern Screech Owls for the 38 participants.

Sunday, **October 2** Green Springs Trail had 1 Brown Creeper, 16 Gray-cheeked Thrushes flying over predawn, a Black-throated Green Warbler and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

The next day, **October 3**, at New Quarter Park, a small copse of trees near the picnic shelters had 4-5 Red-headed Woodpeckers, 1 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, 6 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and a Scarlet Tanager.

**October 2:** Tom McCary spots a lone Prairie Warbler at Shirley Plantation.

**October 2:** Eleanor Young reports from the bird walk at Newport News Park: Bald Eagles, Belted Kingfishers, Northern Parula, American Robins, American Goldfinch, Mockingbird, Carolina Wren, Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Crow, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Cardinal, White-breasted Nuthatches, Indigo Bunting plus an unidentified hawk.

**October 2:** Grace and Joe Doyle report 40 species on their weekly visit to Camp Peary. Highlights include: Clapper Rail, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Tree Swallow, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, White-eyed Vireo, Pine Warbler, Palm Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Eastern Towhee,

Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Orchard Oriole, and American Goldfinch.

**October 3:** Bill Williams reports from New Quarter Park-6 Clapper Rails, 5 Red-headed Woodpeckers, 1 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, 2 Eastern Wood-Pewees, 6 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, 1 Scarlet Tanager.

**October 9:** Shirley Devan saw at least 2 Red-headed Woodpeckers at Longhill Swamp next to Lafayette High School.

**October 9:** Bill Williams reports from Green Springs Trail: 1 Yellow-billed Cuckoo, 1 very cooperative Sedge Wren, at least 2 Wood Thrushes, 1 Veery, 1-2 Gray-cheeked Thrushes, 1 Swainson's Thrush, 4 Northern Parulas, 1 Black-throated Green Warbler, 2 American Redstarts, 2 Summer Tanagers, 2 Swamp Sparrows.

**October 9:** Bill Williams reports from Green Springs Trail-1 Bicknell's Thrush, 1 Black-throated Green Warbler

**October 9:** Grace and Joe Doyle report 32 species on their weekly visit to Camp Peary. Highlights include: Black Vulture, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Killdeer, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Eastern Phoebe, and Common Grackle.

**October 12:** Tom Armour reports: "I had an American Redstart in the yard this am."

**October 14:** Tom Armour reports: "this morning 100+ Tree Swallows feeding over the marsh at the end of Treasure Island Rd. and an Eastern Phoebe at the Vineyards

**October 15:** Eleanor Young visited Kiptopeke State Park and the Hawk Watch Platform and the Song Bird Banding Station, which was having a very good day. She observed banding of Nashville Warbler, Vesper Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, Carolina Wren, Gray Catbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler.

**October 15:** Bill Williams reports from New Quarter Park: "After rain all week the passing front overnight opened the skies for moving neotropical migrants this morning. 3 flyover Common Loons, 1 Eastern Screech Owl, 5 Chimney Swifts, 1 Eastern Wood-Pewee, 1 Hermit Thrush, 15 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, 1 Blue-headed Vireo, 2 Nashville Warblers, 1 Cape May Warbler, 1 Black-throated Green Warbler, 1 Indigo Bunting.

**October 16:** Bill Williams reports from Green Springs Trail: 4 Green-winged Teal, 8 Chimney Swifts, 4 House Wrens, 1 Gray Cheeked Thrush, 1 Wood Thrush

**October 16:** Eleanor Young reports from the bird walk at Newport News Park: Gray Catbird, Eastern Towhee, Yellow-rumped Warbler,



kinglets, American Goldfinch, Belted Kingfisher, American Robin, Mourning Doves, Chipping Sparrow, Green Heron, Carolina Wren, Brown Thrasher, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Mockingbird, Pine Warbler, Tree Swallow, Northern Cardinal and Carolina Chickadee.

**October 16:** Grace and Joe Doyle report 31 species on their weekly visit to Camp Peary. Highlights include: first Ruddy Ducks of the season (several rafts), Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Killdeer, Tree Swallow, White-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Warbler, Song Sparrow and American Goldfinch.

**October 17:** Tom McCary finds a Ruby-crowned Kinglet at Shirley Plantation plus more than 100 Chimney Swifts flying over headed south. He also reports three American Kestrels on the wires at Shirley Plantation – the most he's ever seen on one day there.

**October 18:** Tom Armour reports: "this p.m. there were 25+ Laughing Gulls hawking insects in the strong wind over the trees and fields at the end of Treasure Island Rd."

**October 21:** Gil and Jeanne Frey report: "We spent 2 weeks sailing the southern coast of Ireland in late September where we saw the usual sea birds – lots of oystercatchers, herring gulls, and spectacular gannets. Four whistling swans visited our vessel one evening at dusk, looking for a handout. Rather spoiled?!? We spent a few days in Dublin where at Trinity College, in addition to the Book of Kells, we observed surprisingly handsome carrion crows, rather resembling tenured professors in their gray and black plumage. European wagtails were everywhere. We've been home several weeks, and have very few visitors at the feeder just now. Other than nuthatches, chickadees and titmice, zilch!! This is strange. After the Prothonotary Warblers in early September we have seen no other warblers. Guess they're miffed with us for leaving the feeders empty in our absence!!!"

**October 22:** Bill Williams reports from Green Springs Trail-a lone Chimney Swift at 7:35 at the trail extended the local late date for this species by 3 days.

October 22: Tom McCary reports a female or immature Common Yellowthroat moving around in the hedge in his yard plus he heard White-throated Sparrows in the neighborhood for the first time this season.

**October 23:** Bill Williams reports from Green Springs Trail: "2 pairs of Great Horned Owls singing alternating duets! 1 Blue-headed Vireo observed singing!"

**October 23:** Linda Scherer reports her first

White-throated Sparrow under the feeder.

**October 26:** Shirley Devan reports a flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers on the loop road at Jamestown Island about noon. Difficult to determine exact number because the birds were moving and she was bike riding!

**October 28:** Tom Armour reports: today at the Airport I had three Savannah Sparrows. Also on Treasure Island Road, there were 10 Eastern Bluebirds and 5 Eastern Meadowlarks.

**October 29:** Tom Armour reports the first Dark-eyed Junco of the season at his feeder.

**October 30:** Linda Scherer reports her first Dark-eyed Junco under the feeder.

**October 30:** Grace and Joe Doyle report 32 species on their weekly visit to Camp Peary. Highlights include: Pied-billed Grebe, Ruddy Duck, Black Vulture, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, Gray Catbird, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle and American Goldfinch.

**October 31:** Tom McCary reports MANY Robins all over Williamsburg, discovered in his walk along Richmond Road to the Post Office.

## CLUB DONATES BOOKS, VIDEOS TO WILLIAMSBURG LIBRARY

According to Lee Schuster, the club purchased and donated the following books and videos to the Williamsburg Regional Library:

*The Feeder Watcher's Guide to Bird Feeding* - book

*A Photographic Guide to North American Raptors* - book

*The Singing Life of Birds: The Art and Science of Listening to Birdsong* - book

*The Grail Bird: Hot on the Trail of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker* - book

*Ravensong: A Natural and Fabulous History of Ravens and Crows* - book

*The Audubon Backyard Birdwatcher: Birdfeeders and Bird Gardens* - book

*The Wind Masters: The Lives of North American Birds of Prey* - book

*Identify Yourself: The 50 Most Common Birding Identification Challenges* - book

*Crows in our Hands* - book

*Birds, Birds, Birds! An Indoor Bird Watching Field Trip* - DVD

*Bird Song Ear Training Guide: Who Cooks for Poor Sam Peabody?* - CD

Look for these items at the Library! Thanks to Lee for making this happen!

## BACKYARD HABITAT

By Cynthia Long

Fall is the best time for adding plants to your backyard habitat. Beautyberry makes a spectacular show of purple berries in October and November. The fruit is eaten by bobwhites, brown thrashers, cardinals, catbirds, mockingbirds, purple finches, robins, towhees and woodpeckers. It is sometimes called “French mulberry” although it is neither French nor a mulberry – it is actually a Virginia native in the verbena family.

My beautyberry planted itself, not exactly where I would have located such a sprawling shrub, but I wouldn't dare move it from the spot where it's obviously happy. It is locally abundant in New Quarter Park just down the street, so some feathered friend must have delivered it by avian express.

A wildflower friend says she had great success just dropping the berries in the soil and scratching them in. The next year she actually had plants that produced berries. They are also supposed to be very easy to root from a cutting. If you actually have to buy a plant, the Colonial Williamsburg Nursery on Duke of Gloucester Street is very reliable in stocking Virginia natives. There is also a Japanese species, so it is important to be sure you are getting our own *Callicarpa americana*.

The spectacular purple berries are arranged in clusters around the stems, and are much-loved by flower arrangers. I think the ladies of Bruton Parish must pick it early and keep it in cold storage until they do their Christmas door decoration at the gift shop. You can see some great pictures of this lovely shrub at several websites, just type in *Callicarpa americana*. Beautyberry grows in either sun or partial shade, and was unfazed by the drought. The blooms in the summer are rather indifferent small flowers, but I promise that you and the birds will be dazzled by the October fruit.

## CROW MAGNET FOUND AT MAINLAND FARM!

By Bill Williams

The Green Springs Trail renders her secrets slowly with gentle patience. Few of the revelations experienced there so far can compare with the one that occurred around 8:00 a.m. (EST) on 16 October 2005.

Plaintive Song Sparrow call notes were the only

sounds wafting on the northwest wind that sliced across the Mainland Farm field as a colorful collection of Variegated Fritillary, Cloudless Sulfur, and Buckeye butterflies danced in brilliant silence among the yet-to-be harvested yellowing soybeans. That quiet changed suddenly as an American Crow flying along the dense white pine grove that splits the cultivated and fallow fields made its presence known to the morning with typical bravado. Quickly, however, it became apparent that something special was afoot when a second crow joined the first and both became loudly concerned over something they encountered in the pine stand.

Birders learn early on that cornered birds of prey are usually the object of such cacophonies of corvid consternation. In this case though, what seemed at first to be a rather predictable and ordinary scenario began to play itself out in a most unique and unusual way. As the crow pair escalated their protestations they were joined by, not one, but 2 Red-shouldered Hawks, both of which seemed to burst their epaulets with loud, strident screaming, virtually drowning out the cawing crows. What makes this so unusual is that on uncommon occasions crows make this species the object of their self-appointed mischief! Such an exceptional joining of forces was a clear indication that whatever the foursome had at bay was more than typical fare.

Despite careful angling for a glimpse of what had these birds so frenzied, no obvious object of their ire could be discerned. They flew in and out of a small cluster of trees that was dense enough a different tact for viewing seemed warranted. Taking advantage of the shelter of the wind blown trees, the mobbing birds were cautiously approached along the edge of the pine stand to a point where they were just overhead in a small opening in the tree canopy. Not more than 10 meters away a crow dashed in and out of a tree top accompanied by one of the hawks. Both seemed completely unaware of the 8 power binoculars focused on the form they were harassing. There, staring back, was the dark-eyed, white face of the farmer's monkey-faced owl, what we more appropriately call a Common Barn Owl. It weaved back and forth not sure which nuisance to its diurnal roost was more threatening, 2 hawks and 2 crows, or a birder enhancing his failing eyes with contoured glass. The bird was not flushed and soon its tormentors departed for their more normal daily routines.

This is the second Green Springs Trail record for an increasingly hard to find owl. The first record, last March, was a bird observed flying over the fallow field very close to the spot where this most recent sighting occurred. Locally, this observation becomes only the eleventh of record. Sadly, the

area around the section of Mainland Farm where the owl was seen was prepared for home sites last winter. Within a year or so houses will occupy what is now a fallow field where Northern Bobwhites used to sing, where the owl probably forages, and where the Red-shouldered Hawks are currently seen each week. Lister's blisters.

## **A BIRDY SPOT CLOSE TO HOME**

By Shirley Devan

We're all keeping a sharp eye on our car's gas gauge these days. Not that birding is not worth a gallon or two of gas. But if a "birdy" spot is within walking distance of home, then I'll save that gallon for another day.

Luckily, Longhill Swamp is within a ½ mile walking distance of my house and I spend not nearly enough time there. October 29 was a breezy, cool, sunny autumn day – in other words – perfect! I walked down to Longhill Road, then along the front of Lafayette High School, toward the swamp that lies on either side of the highway. Too windy, I thought, for much bird activity and too late in the day (11:30 a.m.) to see many birds. That's OK, I thought, I'll just get my dose of Vitamin D and walk a mile or two to stretch my legs. I hoped I might see a hawk or two flying overhead along with the Turkey Vultures.

First stop was the bridge overlooking the swamp next to the high school. A Great Blue Heron was scrunched up against the wind, but not much else in evidence. I scrunched up against the wind as well and stood there for a few minutes with the sun on my back waiting to see what might fly by. Reward came in the form of a pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers flying back and forth from the swamp to the wooded tree line next to the high school. A good birding day already!

I crossed Longhill Road and walked along the edge of the swamp next to the Christian Life Center parking lot. Volunteers were mowing the grass and preparing for a youth boot camp later in the afternoon. I asked one of the men if it was OK to walk along the church property to access the swamp. He gave me permission and agreed it was a beautiful spot. At the back of the parking lot, I made my way down to the water line. Since I had my boots on, I ventured out into the swamp on a bit of high ground. Evidence (not recent) of beavers was all around – a 10" diameter oak next to a large root ball of a tree probably felled by Hurricane Isabel. I reached midway across the swamp, after one slightly damp slip, before I ran out of dry footing. At first I saw "only" Northern Cardinals. One should not be so blasé about such exquisite birds just because they are so abundant! Patience rewarded me with ANOTHER pair of

Red-headed Woodpeckers flying among the dead trees. Then the Yellow-rumped Warblers appeared. Their yellow rumps glowed like headlights in the sun as they flitted in the wax myrtle bushes around the swamp. Then a White-throated Sparrow appeared in the bushes; then a Brown Thrasher. Several Northern Flickers crossed back and forth. I spotted a Belted Kingfisher sitting on a branch – scrunched up against the wind. Birds all around!

Towering above all against the crystal blue sky were the 10 Great Blue Heron nests in the tops of the dead trees, waiting to be refurbished for the 2006 nesting season.

I identified 14 species, but I'm sure I missed quite a few that I could not identify by song. Also, I'm sure there were several "confusing fall warblers" that I could not identify. Nevertheless, a very "birdy" spot, a beautiful fall day, and I didn't have to burn any gas to get there! I encourage club members to explore this swamp, particularly if you live on this side of town. I vow to venture down there more often.