



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

March 2015

President's Corner

By Geoff Giles



Alright already with the snow! This is Williamsburg for heaven's sake, not Buffalo!! We have had so much snow cover and frozen ground this winter that many of the birds are struggling to find adequate food and shelter.

Hope you are doing what you can for your feathered friends in the back yard. Mine are ravenous. Pine siskins have been coming with the goldfinches for a couple of weeks for turns at the niger thistle socks. Titmice, chickadees, cardinals, nuthatches, blue jays and woodpeckers are in regular holding patterns for a turn at the feeder. The flickers and other woodpeckers have been wild about suet. Normally mild-mannered and low-key birds including bluebirds, yellow-rumped warblers and hermit thrush are jumping the pecking order and forging in for their turns at the no-mess blend and suet cakes. Towhees are among the white-throated sparrows and juncos doing clean up duty with the squirrels under the feeder.

The weather has kept us at bay a few times on our planned field trips. After the weather cancelled our CBBT bridge tunnel trip, we have rescheduled another try on Sunday, 1 March. Dan Cristol will lead us and continue on to some nearby hotspots on the Eastern Shore. The weatherman owes us one, so hopefully he will come through for us on this trip. Later that week we have been able to arrange a birding trip to Curle's Neck. This trip was sensational last year, and once again Ellison Orcutt of Richmond Audubon will take us to the hotspots. Both of these trips filled quickly with waiting lists, and participants will love what we see!

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March 18 Meeting

Please join us Wednesday, March 18, 2015 at 7:30 pm in Andrews Hall Room 101 to hear Fletcher Smith speak to us on the red knots. His discussion of this threatened species will focus on the catastrophic shift of blue mussels because of climate change. The spat of the blue mussel has a characteristic blue tone from the air and is the primary prey of red knots staging on the Virginia barrier islands. This should be a fascinating talk....please add the date to your calendar! And for ticket free parking at W&M, be sure to print out and use the parking pass, available on our website.

April 15 Meeting

In April, William and Mary students who received research scholarships from the Williamsburg Bird Club will describe their research for us. They are:

Stephanie Chin speaking on the effect of dietary methylmercury on parental care of a model avian species.

Autumn Swan speaking on the effect of noise on the social structure of European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*).

Akshay Deverakonda speaking on the testing of the Incompatibility Hypothesis for Avian Divorce using radio telemetry.

Please join us in room 101 of Andrews Hall that night to listen to some great presentations. And don't forget to print out and use your parking pass, available at our website.

May 20 Meeting

Please join us Wednesday, May 20, 2015 at 7:30 pm to watch a Blue Earth video about warblers of Eastern North America. These warblers are tiny, fast, colorful, and vocal and they are definitely the ultimate birding challenge. This video explores the lives of the 39 warbler species that live and forage in Eastern North America. It will show us breeding habitats as well as share insight into these warblers' nest building and caring for chicks. Feeding, fledging, molting, and migration complete this absorbing look at such a beautiful group of birds. Please join us Wednesday, May 20th at 7:30 in Room 101 of Andrews Hall. Don't forget your parking pass!

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Wild Birds Unlimited

The WBC receives a 5% rebate on the pre-tax amount our Club members spend at Wild Birds Unlimited in Monticello Marketplace. Remember to let them know you are a member.

March 1 Field Trip: Birding the CBBT Islands by Car

The February 21 CBBT Islands Birding by Car Field Trip has been HAS BEEN RESCHEDULED because visitors are not permitted while the Islands are ice covered and dangerous. The trip will take place on Sunday, March 1st, 8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m., Dan Cristol, Leader. Birders must have signed up in advance for this trip. Details about the logistics have been sent to the participants.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS TRIP IS FULL

March 7 Field Trip: Curles Neck

On Saturday, March 7th, the Williamsburg Bird Club is planning a field trip to Curles Neck Farm on Highway 5 in Henrico County. This is a rare opportunity to visit this privately owned property with its rich and diverse bird life. For only the second year, the landowner has graciously agreed to allow us to bring a group of 20 people to bird the property. Our leader will be Ellison Orcutt of the Richmond Audubon Society who is most experienced in leading birders through the farm's fields, marshes along the James River, lakes and woods. Last year, on March 2nd, a calm, clear and mild day, the WBC group found 63 species, including a Barn Owl, a nesting Great Horned Owl, wintering waterfowl, American Pipits, and Wilson's Snipe.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS TRIP IS FULL! Questions? Contact Jan Lockwood at 757-634-4164 or nzedr@msn.com

March 22 Field Trip: Eastern Shore Sparrows

We'll have one last chance to see winter sparrows "up close and personal" on our field trip with Fletcher Smith to the Eastern Shore NWR Sunday, March 22, 2015. Per Fletcher, "The best location to see these birds up close is probably the Eastern Shore refuge. The trapping involves walking through the marsh (but the marsh is hard bottom) and people would need knee boots or hip waders for that. The people who don't have boots could walk on the road and I would band the birds on the road so everyone could see them. I would need at least 3 or so people (and the more the merrier) to help 'herd' the sparrows into the nets." Sounds like fun! Boots not necessary!

We will meet to carpool at Colony Square at 6:00 to take advantage of the tide schedule. Those driving independently should meet the group at the Eastern Shore Refuge Office in Cape Charles at 8:00 a.m. Please email Cheryl Jacobson at jcheryljoy@aol.com if you plan on going. Also please indicate if you will have boots and will help flush the sparrows. Her cell is 303-519-0989 if you have questions.

March 28 Field Trip: Chincoteague Blitz with Dan Cristol

Dan Cristol has agreed to lead us up to Chincoteague/Assateague for our March field trip on the 28th. That will be a great day of birding through a few great hotspots on the way to Chincoteague as well as through that sensational wildlife refuge. Chincoteague is the most exciting birding location in Virginia, and if you haven't been there with Dan, you haven't been! More information about the trip will be posted closer to the date.

Mi Casa? Su Casa?

By Geoff Giles

That's a question that's been on my mind lately. It seems a feathered friend is taking that to heart and has several times barged in my front door uninvited and made himself at home in my place, both upstairs and downstairs, before I have been able to unceremoniously escort him outside. He has similarly installed himself in my garage a few times this winter, until I have been able to persuade him to leave. He has aroused me from slumber on numerous occasions with loud singing just after dawn, and he helps himself to generous helpings at my feeder whenever he jolly well pleases. And he has even gone so far as to relieve himself on my car!

I guess part of the blame rests with me, as I have given him a comfy pad outside (!) of my garage, where he occasionally puts up his whole family on cold nights. This came about by accident, as my wife hung a holiday wreath on our small garage door last Christmas, and when she prepared to take it down, she noticed that a small but cozy-looking birds' nest was tucked out of sight in the middle of the wreath. Closer inspection revealed the presence of the proprietor every evening – a Carolina wren! None of the members of my family could take the wreath and nest down in the dead of winter, as we now see the wren snuggled into his roosting nest every evening. On very cold nights, and we have had some, he brings family or friends – high count is four wrens one night so far, snuggled together!

This seems to be working for him, but it's not always easy for us. We have learned to avoid coming and going through that door at night, as he occasionally explodes out of the nest close enough to whoever is in front of the door to give them a fright, and at times a new hairdo! A few times I contemplated walking around with a Carolina wren implanted beak-first in my forehead. Fortunately, he has satisfied himself with hair-raising close fly-bys instead of impacts. During daylight, when he is not in the nest and it appears the coast is clear to use the door, he often scolds me loudly from a tree just a few feet overhead when I come out. He also perches nearby and scolds when I am later than usual filling my feeder in the back yard.



Yet somehow this feathered rascal has wormed his way into our hearts. Mentions of him in my family have gone from the initial, "We've gotta do something about that bird!" to, "You'll never believe how many birds are snuggled in his little nest tonight!" Actually, the nest he has thrown together doesn't seem to offer much protection – more concealment. I suspect that the coziness the wrens experience may be from huddling, and maybe from some warmth coming through the garage door. Be that as it may, their place is outdoors, and I will continue to run this guy out of my garage every time I catch him in there. It's still my house, you know! ...Or is it?

Carolina Wren

Spring in the Blue Ridge – 2015 VSO Annual Meeting at Wintergreen

MAY 8-10

A spectacular mountain-top setting and Blue Ridge avian specialties will make the 2015 VSO Annual Meeting a can't-miss experience. Field trips along the ridges as well as down into the Rockfish and Shenandoah Valleys should yield unbeatable natural beauty ... not to mention the great company of fellow birders. Jointly hosting are the Augusta Bird Club and Monticello Bird Club, with past VSO president John Spahr serving as general chair. Our headquarters will be Wintergreen Resort (www.wintergreenresort.com). Mark your calendar and reserve your lodging now.

The keynote speaker at the Saturday evening banquet will be Scott Weidensaul, internationally known author, naturalist and conservationist. A Pulitzer Prize nominee, his books cover a spectrum of topics from bird migration, to birding history, extinct species, and early American history. His articles have appeared in publications such as *Smithsonian*, the *New York Times* and *Nature Conservancy*. He lectures widely and is an active field researcher, specializing in birds of prey and hummingbirds. After speaking Saturday evening he will join us on field trips Sunday.

On Friday evening, Dr. Marshall Faintich will introduce us to the birds of the Wintergreen and Nelson County. He is the author of *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Wintergreen*, and his wildlife photos have appeared in newspapers, magazines, web sites and presentations in Virginia and Maryland. He is the former birding activity manager for the



Rockfish Valley Trail. His website (<http://www.symbolicmessengers.com/blog.htm>) contains more than 5000 of his wildlife photos. Find more details at the VSO web site: <http://www.virginiabirds.net/VSO-Annual-Meeting.html>.

Lodging: Reserve by April 8

Rooms are being held for the VSO at special rates that will be honored not only for the meeting but also two days before and after the meeting. In addition, condos with 2, 3, and 4 bedrooms are also available for a reasonable price. Call 1-800-611-6888 (Monday – Friday 9 am – 5 pm) and ask for the Group Reservations Department.

Single/double accommodation in Mountain Inn	\$109.00
2-bedroom condo	\$189.00
3-bedroom condo	\$249.00
4-bedroom condo	\$299.00

plus 10% resort fee and 10.3% tax

Mountain Inn Rooms include kitchenette with mini fridge, small stove, coffee maker, toaster; king or queen size bed; daily maid service; and wireless Internet access. Condos include full kitchen with full-size refrigerator, coffee maker, toaster; separate living area with fireplace, bedrooms (some are lofts), and dining area; balcony or deck; laundry facilities; daily maid service, and wireless Internet access.

President's Corner (continued)

We have had two weather cancellations for our trip to the Eastern Shore to band marsh sparrows with Center for Conservation Biology bander Fletcher Smith, but Fletcher is able to give us one more date when tide, sparrows and hopefully weather will be right. This exciting trip is now planned for the morning of Sunday, 22 March. Stand by for details on carpooling/driving for that very cool trip.

We have not given up on trips to some good waterfowl destinations, including Dutch Gap conservation area. It has not been possible yet to schedule a good time when the impoundments are free of ice. Once that happens, the wildfowl should flock in and so will we. But in the meantime, 28 March will be a prime opportunity to catch up on waterfowl, shorebirds and other species not in our area on a day trip to Chincoteague, led by Dan Cristol. This one is sure to be a highlight of our birding year. Most of the birds to date that are being seen in the state, but are not yet on my year list tend to be at or near Chincoteague/Assateague. No sign up needed for that one – just join us and enjoy!!

And speaking of enjoyable, our trip to Craney Island this year, led by Dr. Ruth Beck and Bill Williams was a great day with some super sightings. Our leaders were able to get a beautiful male Eurasian widgeon to strike many sunlit poses for the photo buffs in our group. Similarly, a very photogenic snow bunting posed for all to see on a nearby rock jetty. A Lapland longspur was just as close but did not linger after being spotted. There were more canvasbacks on the river than any of us could count, which magically turned to unusually large rafts of horned grebes and red-breasted mergansers as the day progressed. Magic! And through the morning sightings of northern harriers quartering and perched kept us squinting closely to try to spot that short-eared owl we were sure was among them! We lucked out with the weather, and all around on that great trip!

We're back to Andrews Hall on the W&M campus for our March WBC meeting. Fletcher Smith will give us a great presentation on the migration of the red knots, which stage through our Eastern Shore barrier islands and the Delaware Beaches. Enjoy this one, because we are looking at the best time to schedule an overnight field trip this spring to see the massive flocks of red knots and other shorebirds on the Delaware beaches when the horseshoe crabs are swarming the shore to lay their eggs. This is a natural spectacle that every birder should have a chance to marvel at, and it's in easy reach for us. Stay tuned for that one.

In the meantime, be kind to your backyard birds. This year's extremes of weather make it important to give them any help with food, water and shelter that we can. I marvel at the bird songs in the dead of this cold winter when I walk my dog. Not only the sapsuckers and white-throated sparrows, which will leave us to nest farther north, are vocal. Cardinals, robins, bluebirds, and, oh yes, the leather-lunged Carolina wren are all clearing the rust out of their pipes and getting ready to make the sounds of spring. Nature has had some unusual extremes of weather to deal with this year, but the birds are reminding us that spring is just around the corner!

Reported Bird Sightings for February, 2015

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.

Members reported these sightings in February:

February 1 - Geoff Giles heard and saw nine woodcocks doing courtship displays at Warhill Sports Complex fields. Bill Williams saw a white-winged scoter and a long-tailed duck at the Jamestown ferry dock on the same day. He also saw about 800-100 scaup.

February 2 - Geoff Giles had six pine siskins return to his feeder after a week's absence, plus an eastern towhee, a ruby-crowned kinglet and a sharp-shinned hawk!

February 3 & 4 - Jeanne and Gil Frey reported that they saw their first ever common redpoll at their home. They also had a lone hermit thrush hanging around what looked like a wood thrush. And their walk through Chippokes State Park stirred up 13 wild turkeys!

February 6 - George and Virginia Boyles were with about 100 other birders from across the state who went with the VSO



to the Outer Banks for their field trip Feb. 6-8. This Snow Bunting was foraging beside Highway 12. Their only "life bird" for the trip was a White-winged Dove in the parking lot at Lake Mattamuskeet. John

and Marilyn Adair saw a Painted Bunting the same trip, which was a "life bird" for Marilyn.

February 8 - Shirley Devan saw four tree swallows at York River State Park. Virginia and George Boyles stopped at the marina on the way to Pea Island, and the Night-Herons were in the usual place by the back parking lot. This is an unusual photo because you can see his feet. Often they look like they just disappear into the tree.



February 13 - Dena Proctor reported seeing approximately 800 Red Head Ducks at Harwood Mill Reservoir. Mixed in were few Coots and American Widgeons. As much as she loves the Red Head Ducks, her eyes were trying to spot the pretty green and white headed American Widgeons. Here is



a tiny sampling of what she saw. She went back after lunch and they were gone!

February 17 - Shirley Devan saw a most surprising bird on the large pond at Colonial Heritage - a Ruddy Duck! The pond was mostly frozen except for areas around the fountains. The Ruddy Duck was alone but there were also Double-crested Cormorants and Ring-billed Gulls in other parts of the open water. She also reported 20 species over two days for Project Feeder Watch, the highest number of species reported so far this season.

February 16 - While at Chincoteague this weekend, Al and



Linda Sharrett were thrilled to see a huge group of snow geese hunkered down at Tom's Cove. The five in the air were a tiny clutch of at least 400 that were sitting on the beach since many of the ponds

had skim ice and the temp was about 16 degrees. They also saw lots of Tundra swans, dabbling ducks and one chilly looking juvenile black crowned night heron as well.

February 18-20 - Bill Williams, Brian Taber and Andy Hawkins observed two Vesper Sparrows on Treasure Island Road near the Gospel Spreading Farm. Bill also saw 2 swamp sparrows at the same spot and one lark sparrow at College Creek.

February 19 - Hugh Beard saw a fox sparrow in his yard. On the same day, Nancy Barnhart photographed 8 fox sparrows on Jamestown Island.

February 21 - Jan Lockwood was treated to the extraordinary sight of 27 Great Blue Herons flying along a frozen Queens Creek until they reached Queens Lake (also completely frozen) where they circled and flew back down the Creek towards the York River. All the while they were completely silent. This usually solitary species has not been very visible over the last few weeks. It was a neat experience.

Reported Bird Sightings for February, 2015 (continued)

February 20 - Fox Sparrow sightings continued as Hugh Beard and Bill Williams observed 18 Fox Sparrows at Jamestown Island. Per Hugh: "Many were feeding in a ditch along the side of the road west of the parking lot at the visitors' center. Not unusual for this spot in the winter." Also on that day, Cheryl Jacobson also saw 6 fox sparrows along Treasure Island Road. On the same day, Andrew Hawkins, Matt Anthony, and Nick Newberry observed Fox Sparrows along the Colonial Parkway and College Creek Hawkwatch site.

February 21- When Kathi Mestayer hiked Bassett Trace Trail, she saw one Hermit Thrush, one Golden-crowned Kinglet, one Eastern Towhee, plus lots of White-throated Sparrows feeding where the trail was cleared of snow.

February 21 and 22 - Brian Taber and Bill Williams discovered two Ross's Geese at Little Creek Dam.

February 22 - Brian Taber reported a Long-tailed Duck near the ferry landing and bridge to the ferry.

February 23: Lois Leeth, in warm and sunny St. Augustine, Florida saw 3 immature and 3 adult Double-crested Cormorants, 8 American Coots, 75 Ring-billed Gulls, 20 White Ibis, and 4 Mallards.

February 25 - Brian Taber, Bill Williams, and Shirley Devan went to Weyers Cave, VA to see the Smith's Longspur reported the day before at the Shenandoah Valley Airport. The bird was very cooperative and many observers were able to photograph this rarity and add it to their Virginia bird list and their life list. Officially, this was the first recorded observation of this species in Virginia. Not far away in Dayton, VA was a Trumpeter Swan along with a Mute Swan, a Tundra Swan, and quite a few winter ducks.

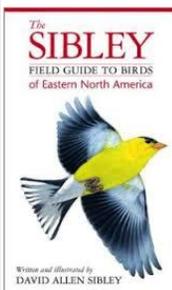
February 26 - Bill Williams reported that "The grackles have been relentless, but we've kept them away for the most part. The Western Tanager has been here several times when there's a break in the blackbird onslaught.

ONE MORE SIGHTING!!!

On February 5th around 12:30, Mike Millen saw this unusual bird in his back yard searching for a meal with a flock of robins. Best guess is that it is a leucistic robin. Isn't it uniquely beautiful?

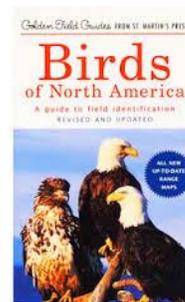


BOOK BAGS NOW AVAILABLE



Great News! At the last board meeting, money was set aside for the purchase of 10 copies of Sibley's Field Guide to Birds as well as ten copies of Golden Books Birds of North America.

Labeled and bagged, these titles are now available to use with groups of students. Sibley's is appropriate for students grades 4 and up.....the Golden Book is appropriate for younger students who are ready to bird! You can check these out by emailing Judy Jones at jjones184@cox.net or calling at 757-229-2667.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Just a reminder that the Williamsburg Bird Club Spring Bird Count will be held on Sunday, May 3rd! Put this date on your calendar, in your phone, and on the dashboard of your car so you're ready and available to identify and count! It's a great day to spend with your birding buddies outside in the spring mild weather!

TAKE NOTE!

Pay Your 2015 Dues!

We still need your dues for 2015!

Individual: \$15 Family: \$25

Patron: \$35 Student: \$5

Make your check payable to WBC and mail to:

PO Box 1085, Williamsburg, VA 23187.

Please consider adding something extra to your check to support our Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarships, our Ruth Beck and Bill Sheehan Ornithology Research Grants to Biology Graduate Students, and feeder stations at the Child Development Resources campus. Membership dues alone do not support these projects. We can't do it without you!!

Feed the Bird(ers)!

We need your help with refreshments. Many thanks to Sharon Plocher and Jennifer Trevino for volunteering to feed us at our March 18 meeting. Roger Gosden and Jan Lockwood have volunteered for April. However, we still need volunteers for our May meeting. Would you like to help? You can email Ruth Gordon at ruthkagordon@gmail.com, or call her at (757) 208-0757. Thanks in advance.

BIRD WALKS AT NEW KENT FORESTRY'S "WALK IN THE FOREST" March 21st

The Williamsburg Bird Club will lead two bird walks during the New Kent Forestry Center, "Walk in the Forest" event on Saturday March 21. Geoff Giles will lead a group of Boy Scouts and Nancy Barnhart will lead a walk for the public through the varied habitats of the Center. Both walks will begin at 8:00 a.m.

The activities of the day for the March 21 *Walk in the Forest* run from 8 am to 4 pm at the New Kent Forestry Center, 11301 Pocahontas Trail, Providence Forge, VA 23140. 8 am: Guided Birding Trip; 10 am Guided Nature Hikes start every half hour until 2 pm; 10 am Exhibits Open and Free Seedlings available. Society of American Foresters. To register contact Dave Lauthers at 757-753-8309 or email davemmc200@yahoo.com. For more information contact Lisa Deaton at 804-966-2201 or email lisa.deaton@dof.virginia.gov.

Birding North of Salt Lake City, Utah

By Jeanne and Mike Millin

Mike and I go to Utah at least once or twice every year and are always looking for new places to explore, sometimes even venturing more than a day trip from our base in Park City. We usually call one of our favorite guides and ask him to pick a place and take us out. Bill Fenimore, Senior and his son, also Bill, own the Wild About Birds Nature Center in Layton, Utah and are both experienced guides. The younger Bill did a 'Big Year' in 2014 with 345 species. This year the younger Bill took us out since his Dad was on some medication that didn't allow him to drive.



Rosy Finch

On February 6th, we started out at the Farmington Bay Waterfowl Management Area and then moved to the Farmington Bay Bird Refuge, about an hour north of Salt Lake. We saw about 18 species, among them Bald and Golden Eagles, Harriers, and Tundra Swans. Then we went into altitude to Powder Mountain Ski Area for our target birds of the day. We observed three varieties of Rosy Finch: Hepburns (a sub-species of Grey-Crowned), Grey Crowned and Black, as well as Mountain Chickadees and the highlight of the day--a Northern Pygmy Owl. It was a good day for a February trip. Someday we will make it during the great migration when 250 plus species can be seen in just the Bear River Migratory Wildlife Refuge.

Another Utah trip that is on our bucket list is to the extreme southwest area, west of St. George, to see many of the Mojave Desert species. I've wanted to see a roadrunner up close ever since my Bugs Bunny Days.



Mountain Chickadee

Photos by Jeanne and Mike Millin



Hungry bluebirds on a chilly day. Photo by Emedio Bracalante

A brown thrasher singing for his supper. Photo by Emedio Bracalante



CALENDAR

Sunday, March 1	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Sunday, March 1	Birding the CBBT Islands by car. See page 2 for details.
Saturday, March 7	Field Trip to Curles Neck with Ellison Orcutt. See page 2 for details.
Saturday, March 14	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8 am. Susan Powell, Leader
Sunday, March 15	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Wednesday, March 18	WBC Meeting, 7:30 pm., Andrews Hall Room 101. Fletcher Smith will speak on Red Knots and the impact on them of climate change. See page 1 for details.
Sunday, March 22	Netting and Banding Marsh Sparrows on the Eastern Shore with Fletcher Smith.
Saturday, March 28	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 7 am. Leader TBA
Saturday, March 28	Eastern Shore Birding Blitz with Dan Cristol. See page 2 for details.
Sunday, April 5	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader
Saturday, April 11	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk, New Quarter Park, 8 am. Alex Minarik, Leader
Wednesday, April 15	WBC Meeting, 7:30 pm., Andrews Hall Room 101. W&M students will report on their research. See page 1 for details.
Wednesday, April 19	HRBC Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Jane Frigo, Leader

Inge's Colombian Adventure

Photos and text by Inge Curtis

How can you not be tempted to visit a country with almost 1900 bird species, 20% of them being endemic? I heard about this adventure in early December and it took me just a few hours to decide. We were eight birders, from Scotland, California, Arizona, and Virginia. We met our two local guides (Christopher and Jose) in Cali, Colombia, on January 6 and at 5 a.m. the next day, we were on our way into the western branch of the Andes. The first day started out pretty tame. We rode in our van to an elevation of 6000 feet and walked through the cloud forest, encountering flame-rumped tanagers, multicolored tanagers, golden tanagers, summer tanagers, a blue-winged mountain tanager – on and on in this paradise for tanagers. The afternoon proved to be a real challenge. We had to make our way down a very steep slope with no handrail and no steps, just a muddy, slippery incline. Our guide promised me that I would forget all about my troubles once I saw this bird: the cock-of-the-rock. We waited in absolute silence for 45 minutes before the bird appeared in all its glory. We kneeled, we sat, and we stretched to get a good look through the leaves and branches. What a beautiful sight! In the past, the farmer whose land we were on used to catch the bird for the pet trade and it is to the credit of our guide that he is no longer doing this. That's because the farmer was promised by Christopher that he could "sell" the bird a hundred times over by letting birders come and see it. I do not know what Christopher is paying him, but so far, it has worked.



Cock-of-the-Rock



Long-tailed Sylph

Next, we visited a place called Kilometer 18—I do not remember the significance of this name... maybe it is 18 kilometers from Cali the way the crow flies. A lady there had at least twenty feeders going. It was impossible to keep track of them all. I was in heaven, surrounded by many hummingbirds, honey creepers and, of course, more tanagers. However, that afternoon was disappointing for me, coming from Virginia. While the other birders were thrilled by the egrets, ruddy ducks, sandpipers, I endured being covered in mosquitos and stuck in cowpies. I lamented silently, but I did get one very memorable photo, an Andean kingfisher.

Days three and four were killers. We drove for four hours on those infamous Andean roads we have all seen on TV or in the movies, complete with multiple memorials where buses had fallen into the abyss, the only thing left being the crosses above. Just when we thought our ordeal was over, we transferred to a four-wheel,

open flatbed truck, as our van would not be suitable any longer. It was another hour-long, hair-raising ride, being tossed around on the two benches on each side of the truck. It occurred to me a few times that maybe I should have stayed home. And then it got **really** interesting. After a night's rest – or should I say 'unrest' – we got back on the truck at 4:45am for a two hour ride where often half the roadway had given way. I have seldom been so scared.

The top of the mountain was magnificent. There were three endemic species there, one of them has not even been catalogued, and all of them existed in an area only a few square miles wide. I got superb images of all three species...however, I still am not sure it was worth the scare. Then we walked down that mountain, a rutted trail covered with loose rocks, wet leaves and, for kicks, an occasional vine to navigate around. **For nine hours!** Yes, for nine hours. Chris said it was ONLY eight. For all I know it was twenty hours. My legs were shaking uncontrollably and often I had to hang on to Jose's arm. I thought I would never see my kids again. All that for the Chestnut-bellied Flowerpiercer, the Munchique Wood-wren and the undescribed Alto-pisones Tapacula.



The very rare, only recently discovered Munchique Wood Wren



I chose to stay around the lodge the next morning – no mountain trail for me that day. After all, there was plenty of birding right there. Then it was on to another reserve. In the thirteen days of birding, we went to eight different national parks. Colombia has dedicated 12% of its country to national reserves, very admirable indeed for an impoverished nation.

We saw whited-capped dippers in the torrential streams, torrent ducks (far away) and the seldom seen Torrent Tyrannulet. Up and up we climbed to Rio Blanco.



Chestnut-crowned Antpitta

Mountain Mot-Mot

It was truly magical. A local farmer took us into a ‘green cave’ where even I had to lean way down to get inside. There we sat! I was chosen to sit in the very front, everyone hoping for my pictures. The farmer called them antpittas, little tennis balls with legs. My arms were getting numb holding my camera at the ready. After close to an hour, the first "tennis ball" appeared – a Chestnut-crowned Antpitta. What a cutie and, quicker than a wren, he picked up a worm the farmer had laid out and ran back into the bush. He, as well as a Bicolored Antpitta, made a quick appearance and then the show was over. I don't think any of us breathed. And it was here at Rio Blanco that I saw my first Ketzal. He was quite hidden but I was happy with the image I got.



Bearded Helmetcrest--This Hummingbird exists only in a very small area in Colombia and Venezuela, in the Andes at 14000 feet.

January 16th was my favorite day. We drove up to 14,000 feet to see a hummingbird that only exists here and at a similar height in a very restricted area in Venezuela. Unfortunately, we were in the clouds the whole time. I would have appreciated a little better light. However, the Bearded Helmetcrest was most obliging, feeding on various flowers, and I was able to ‘take’ him ‘home’ with me. I was completely unaffected by the elevation – maybe that cup of Coca tea had been a good idea. (When I drank it, I did not know that that is a controlled substance in the States. Christopher advised against buying it to take home.)

I think I covered some of the highlights for you. Now that I am safely at home, I am glad I saw those treasures. But when I finally returned to Norfolk after an 18-hour journey, I was ever so grateful to have a special friend pick me up and drive me over secure, paved roads to her home.

Green jay



Purple Throated Woodstar

