



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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May 2017

President's Corner

By Bill Williams



What's in Your Block?

When the Virginia Society of Ornithology conducted a statewide Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas (VBBA) from 1984-1989, it had to make sure the entire state's extensive and diverse landscapes were thoroughly and systematically canvassed for breeding birds. In the absence of a structured protocol for areas of the state to be covered, the VBBA outcome would have been a set of data from disjunct habitats in or near population centers plus a mix of well-known locations where birds tend to concentrate. To make this project meaningful for long-term bird conservation and stewardship, protocols to standardize data acquisition and entry were developed. Among those was an organizational strategy for adequately surveying every corner of the Commonwealth.

Modeling the breeding bird atlas successes of states such as Maryland, Pennsylvania and Ohio, Virginia's landscape was divided into a grid of sampling 'blocks', each one-sixth of a 7.5-minute U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) topographic quadrangle, a 23 sq. km area, approximately 9 sq. miles. Every block was assigned a two-letter directional code: northwest (NW), northeast (NE), center-west (CW), center-east (CE), southwest (SW), or southeast (SE). The southeastern (SE) block in each USGS quad was designated as a 'Priority Block'. A primary goal for the VBBA was to make sure every Priority Block was thoroughly censused. To accomplish this feat, the state was divided into 12 Atlas Regions, each with a Regional Coordinator who worked with local birders to man as many Priority Blocks as possible, with additional coverage of many of the non-Priority Blocks.

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May 17th Meeting – 7:00—What Do Birds Eat?

Andrews Hall, Room 101

Story and Photo by Cheryl Jacobson

Our May meeting is in Andrews Hall, Room 101, and our speaker promises to be very interesting. Ashley Kennedy, PhD student at the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware will provide us an opportunity to become involved in an important research effort. It is titled: **What Do Birds Eat? Help Us Find Out!**" To answer questions about birds' feeding preferences, and ultimately to help us make better-informed decisions about bird habitat management, Doug Tallamy's lab at the University of Delaware is undertaking a long-term research project—but they need help from citizen scientists to make it work! They are compiling a database of bird-insect interactions based on photos contributed from all over North America. Anytime you see a bird with an insect in its bill, snap a photo. Their team will then identify the arthropod prey and add it to their database. Here's there website: <http://www.whatdobirdseat.com/>. Parking passes can be obtained at www.williamsburgbirdclub.org.



NEST CAM FUN....

By Shirley Devan

Some of you may be interested in some fun nest cams nearby:

- Peregrine Falcon nest cam in Richmond:
<https://blog.wildlife.virginia.gov/falcon-cam/>
- Bald Eagle Nest Cam in Washington at National Arboretum <http://www.dceaglecam.org>
- Osprey Nest Cam in Richmond (while waiting for eggs to hatch, observers are keeping track of the "trash/garbage" the Osprey bring to the nest!)
<https://www.richmondospreycamera.com>



2017
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Reported Bird Sightings for April, 2017

(Send your sightings to Judy Jones at jjones184@cox.net)

April 1: No foolin'-- Jim Booth really did have a beautiful male Yellow-throated Warbler in his back yard.

April 2: Ann and Gary Carpenter spotted Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher, Hermit Thrush, titmice, chickadees, robins, and crows while walking in Freedom Park.



April 2: Several bird club members were able to see a pair of Peregrine Falcons at Chickahominy Riverfront Park. The hope is that they will become a nesting pair.
(photo by Inge Curtis)

April 4: Nancy Barnhart, Joyce Lowry, Judy Jones, and Les Lawrence were very excited to hear and see an early arrival while walking in Freedom Park-- an Ovenbird!
(photo by Nancy Barnhart)



April 5: Carol O'Neil most likely had the area's first Ruby-throated Hummingbird at Governor's Land. "It buzzed my face as I was taking down the Hummingbird feeders due to possible strong storms the next morning. I had not seen it at the feeders yet, but have Trumpet Honeysuckle and other flowers blooming that it may have been feeding on earlier. So I left one feeder out for it."

April 11: Sara Lewis writes, "Two pairs of Red-shouldered Hawks are nesting in front yards along my dog-walking route in Kingwood, one on Oxford Road and the other on Dover Road. It's been fun to watch now that, in one of them, the female is incubating her eggs while the male is noisily watching over her from a high perch across the street."

April 11: Andy Hawkins saw a Sandwich Tern at Messick Point in Poquoson. He described it as, "Sitting on pilings with Forster's Terns but was much larger. It had a black bill with yellow tip."

April 11: Nancy Barnhart saw an Eastern Kingbird at Jamestown Island on the Causeway. "It was a large flycatcher. With its crested head, dark back, wings, and tail, as well as the white terminal tail band (which was very visible), both observers were very confident of the identification."

(Continued on page 4)

President's Corner (continued from page 1)

The Colonial Historic Triangle was part of Region 11 for the 1984-1989 VBBA. That structure was carried over for Virginia's second Atlas (VBBA2) which began in 2016. Region 11 includes all of Charles City, Surry, York, and Sussex counties, the cities of Williamsburg, Newport News, Hampton, and Poquoson and most of James City, New Kent, Greenville, Southampton, Prince George, and Isle of Wight counties. Dave Youker who resides in Yorktown, is our skillful VBBA2 Regional Coordinator. He wants to hear from us!!

Photo by Mike Jaskowiak



Dr. Ashley Peele, the VBBA2 Director, compiled a comprehensive map of the amount of block coverage accomplished during 2016. Wouldn't you know it? Priority and non-Priority blocks around Williamsburg stood out like a Northern Cardinal on a snow bank with a high degree of VBBA2 data entry. As great as the 2016 VBBA2 local effort appears, there are still Priority Blocks right under our wings that have yet to have ANY data recorded. These include:

Toano SE-James City
Providence Forge SE-Charles City
Walkers SE- (Lanexa)-New Kent, Charles City and James City
Brandon SE-Charles City
Roxbury SE-Charles City
New Kent SE-New Kent

Tunstal SE-New Kent
Surry SE-Surry
Hog Island SE-Surry
Claremont SE-Surry
Savedge SE-Surry

There are many non-Priority Blocks nearby that are also chirping for coverage. Even if these are not Priority Blocks, they are still a priority! The more we know.....So how can a willing birder find out where these blocks actually are? It's as easy as identifying a male American Goldfinch! Enter <http://ebird.org/content/atlasva/news/first-va-breeding-bird-atlas-data/> and then click the Atlas Block Explorer. Region 11, with all of its blocks, is clearly outlined. Zoom in to find every Region11 SE block, thus Priority Block, encased in purple. Any block that is shaded, Priority or otherwise, already has some VBBA2 coverage.

Click on any block to find a short menu to: sign up to be an Atlaser for that block; download a topo map of that block; or download a species list from the first VBBA. The latter is so much fun and a real eye-opener. Here's a sample: During the first VBBA, 38 species were "observed" in Priority Block Toano SE, 9, of which were "confirmed" as breeders-Great Blue Heron, Eastern Phoebe, Barn Swallow, Purple Martin, Northern Mockingbird, Eastern Bluebird, European Starling, House Sparrow, and Chipping Sparrow. Walkers SE Priority Block (near Lanexa) had 34 species with 5 confirmed-Osprey, Eastern Kingbird, Barn Swallow, American Robin, House Sparrow.

The challenge for VBBA2 is to beat the block. By doing so we learn what, if any, changes have occurred among a respective block's bird populations in 30 years and potentially what contributed to those changes. This is only one of the many reason's the VBBA2 is SO IMPORTANT. So, please consider Atlasing a block near you. Dave is very much ready to get Region 11 fully covered and we're part of that solution.

Because inquiring minds want to know, there were only two Colonial Historic Triangle blocks (non-Priority) where House Finch was confirmed as a breeder during the first VBBA: Williamsburg, SW and Hog Island, NE. For Priority Block Williamsburg SE, House Finch was listed as "probable". The Williamsburg, CW block shows House Finch as a "possible" VBBA breeder. How will these data from 30 years ago compare to the 2016-2020 VBBA2? Let's all peck away at this to find out!!!

Western Tanager taken by Inge Curtis at her home



SIGHTINGS (Continued from page 2)

April 11: Linda Scherer tells us, "Finally put my hummingbird feeder out this afternoon and had our first customer within an hour. I also cleaned and refilled the birdbath and almost immediately had a crowd lined up to use it, including Blue Jays, a Brown Thrasher, a pair of House Finches, two White-throated Sparrows, a male Downy Woodpecker, and several chickadees and titmice. Later this afternoon a bluebird and a towhee showed up. They really appreciate the clean water."

April 14: Deb Woodward discovered her first Ruby-throated Hummingbird of the season in her yard at Colonial Heritage. And Shirley Devan, about 1/4 mile from Deb Woodward as the hummer flies, had her first hummingbird around 7 pm.

April 15: Cathy Millar was very excited to report that, "Despite the challenges of having extensive and very noisy road work at the foot of our house the entire nesting season last year, the first Purple Martins (3 males) returned to the Millar Martin Maison on the corner of South Henry Street and Mimosa Drive. We're hoping they'll stay, despite the absence of the utility lines that were a favored spot for their neighborhood gossip chatter but, alas, the city has buried them underground."

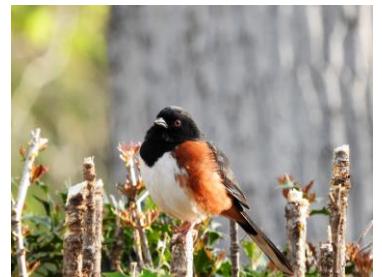
April 15: Brian Taber still had the Clay-colored Sparrow at his feeder – "continuing since January 16th".

April 16: Nick Newberry saw 20 Anhinga flying up the York River from his perch on the bluff at York River State Park. As Nick related it: "Well, I was sitting under a tree on that scorching day and saw a flock of presumed cormorants flying up river about 300' above the water level, which was about eye level with us (up on the cliffs). Out of reflex, I took a look through binocs and instantly realized these weren't cormorants. The amount of white in the wings, terminal tail band and shape were instant giveaways. I was able to manage some poor shots. These birds were possible overshoots after the strong southerly winds last night...or there is/will be a nesting colony in King & Queen? Not far upriver of the park headquarters, they began gaining altitude, heading north over Gloucester."

April 20: Jan Lockwood took this photo of a Pileated Woodpecker attacking the base of a Dogwood tree, which is succumbing to disease. The tree is within a few feet of the road but the bird wasn't at all perturbed.



April 21: Jan Lockwood was also excited to see this handsome Eastern Towhee in the parking lot at New Quarter Park. Also, the Carolina



Chickadees are excavating a nest hole on East Queens, very close to the road.

April 22: Bill Williams found an early Veery, Powhatan Creek Trail, James City, Virginia. Per Bill: "Warm, uniformly reddish brown; slight pale tan eye-ring; tail same warm reddish brown as the rest of the upper body; eliminated Hermit Thrush because this bird showed no tail flicking, wings were held along back, not drooped; perched profile more forward leaning, not erect; what little could be seen of the upper breast was subtle pale brown spotting; earliest local record by 6 days (formerly 28 April)"

April 23:
Shirley Devan was thrilled to see "a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak



on my feeder this afternoon! Anybody else seeing them? I think this weather system is bringing in some birds because I also had a Black-and-white Warbler and a Black-throated Blue Warbler in the trees behind my house. In total, I had 26 species in my yard today — morning and afternoon. Why leave home?"

April 28: Cindy Baker was excited to see a Rose-breasted Grosbeak and a Black-throated Blue Warbler at her feeder. She lives right on campus and that day was the last day of classes. It was fascinating that, despite the commotion and activity, those two birds picked that day to visit.

May 20, 2017: Field Trip to Bassett Trace Nature Trail

By Shirley Devan

Join us on Saturday, May 20th, to explore a local treasure – Bassett Trace Nature Trail. This is one of the “Great City Walks” in Williamsburg as described by the City’s brochure. Bird Club member and Master Naturalist Nancy Barnhart will be our leader.



Photo by Jan Lockwood

Most of this trail is on property owned by Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. It is a stunning walk through a mature hardwood forest with tall canopy trees and surprising understory. The dirt trail, often accommodating only single file, goes up and down two ravines and is described as a “moderately difficult trail meandering through the wooded areas between two golf courses. The path is rough at times and there are stairs in two locations.” The bird life is diverse, but there are MANY leaves so patience and listening are valuable skills in May on this trail. Several spots on the trail open up to view numerous dead snags where woodpeckers and raccoons are often spotted in cavities.

Meet by 7:30 am in the parking lot just off Francis Street. From Francis Street, turn into the parking lot marked by the sign for “Shield’s and King’s Arms Tavern Parking”. Meet the group in the parking lot. Be sure to bring water and a snack and wear comfortable, closed-toe shoes. We’ll proceed at a leisurely, birding pace for about a mile before returning the way we came. For those who want to continue to the Green Course Clubhouse for lunch, you’ll almost be there. We will aim to be back at the cars by noon. Of course, participants can always return by the same route if they want. This trip is free and open to the public. No need to register in advance.

New Quarter Bird Walk on April 8th



April 8th was a great morning to be outside at New Quarter Park, with ten happy birders enjoying the sunny, breezy, and 45°F day. Led by Jim Corliss, they were able to see a total of 29 species, including four Bald Eagles and eight Yellow-throated Warblers.

Kneeling: Bruce Glendening

Front: Left to right: Susan Wolfe, Joyce Lowry, Lynda Sharrett, Cheryl Jacobson, Shirley Devan

Back row: left to right: Sue Mutell, Jan Lockwood, Wayne Moyer, Jim Corliss, Tom McCary



Both photos courtesy of Shirley Devan

New Quarter Bird Walk on April 22nd

The list of birds from NQP this past Saturday totaled 44 species. One of the highlights was a Red-headed Woodpecker! We also were happy to see some new arrivals as well as a few lingering winter visitors. Will those yellow-rumps ever leave? Lots of listening and way too many leaves on Earth Day!! Participants were: Front row: Cheryl Jacobson, Jan Lockwood, Shirley Devan
Back row: Andy Hawkins, Leader, Wayne Moyer, Sue Mutell

Just a reminder....

There will be no field trips in June or July....summer break, you know. And, of course, we won't have our Wednesday night membership meetings in June, July, or August. Also, our newsletter will have one summer issue but will resume normal schedule in the fall.



Celebrating Earth Day at the Monarch Festival at William and Mary on April 22nd



It was an overcast sky on Earth Day but that didn't stop our Williamsburg Bird Club from sharing the love of birds and the joy of birding with all who turned out for the Monarch & Music Festival at William and Mary.

Staffing our booth were (left to right): Lieve Keeney, Gary Carpenter, Ann Carpenter, Cathy Millar, Jeanette Navia, Cathy Flanagan, Christina Clarke, and (not pictured) Bill Williams. Behind the camera was Judy Jones.

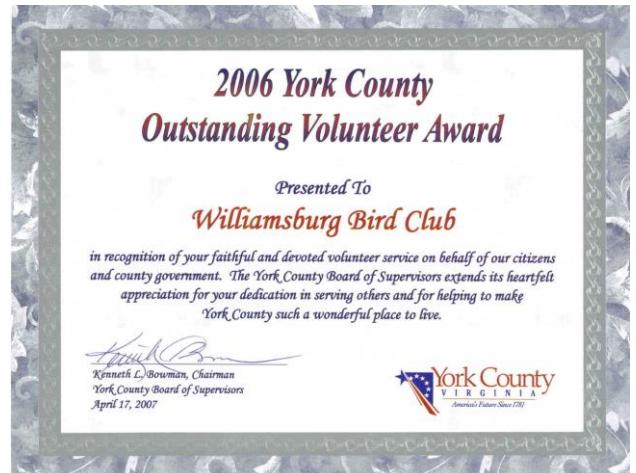
LOOKING BACK.....to 2006

WBC RECEIVED YORK COUNTY OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEER AWARD

On April 17th, 2006, our WBC was awarded the 2006 Volunteer of the Year award from York County. Below is an excerpt of the nomination written by Molly Nealer of New Quarter Park.

"The Williamsburg Bird Club merits recognition --

- for developing and leading bird watching walks twice a month,
- for developing and conducting two nature camps,
- for contributing funds for the purchase of bird watching guides and binoculars, and
- for promoting the birding environment at New Quarter Park to their members and the bird watching community at large.



The Williamsburg Bird Club Web site at www.wmbgbirdclub.com promotes New Quarter Park as a "Local Birding Hot Spot" and one of the "Best Birding Areas around Williamsburg." The club has adopted the Park for twice-monthly bird watching walks and has devoted a section of their Web site to text and photos related to these trips. Beginning last winter, a record of all birds observed at the Park on each walk has been submitted to eBird.org. The Williamsburg Bird Club has put New Quarter Park on the map of database information on this prestigious birding Web site.

This award recognizes the Williamsburg Bird Club for their support of New Quarter Park. Their use of the park, dedication to maintaining it as a birding hot spot, and open invitation to the citizens of York County and the surround area has earned the respect of York County Parks and Recreation. They have heightened community awareness of the Park's natural resources in a manner that would have been impossible without their voluntary contribution of enthusiasm, knowledge, and caring."

OUR APRIL 15TH FIELD TRIP TO THE DISMAL SWAMP

By Shirley Devan, Co-Field Trip Coordinator



Left to right:

Bill Williams, Jan Lockwood, Cheryl Jacobson, Betty Peterson, Ann Carpenter, Gary Carpenter, Sylvia Giese, Lieve Keeney, Nancy Corbin, Brian Corbin, Tom McCary, Sharon Plocher, Sue Mutell, Mitchell Byrd, Nancy Barnhart, Shirley Devan, Ron Giese, Anita Angelone. Nancy and Brian Corbin, from Cornell, NY, were visiting his mom, Sylvia Giese.

Bill tallied 29 species for the morning. We counted 7 warbler species: Ovenbird, Prothonotary Warbler, Swainson's Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler (looking very handsome in breeding plumage!), and Prairie Warbler. The usual target bird for the "Dismal" is the Swainson's Warbler, which we clearly heard as we drove out the exit road. We piled out of the cars, peered into the woods, and pointed! He's OVER THERE – so close! But we never got the binocs on him!! No bears, but we did see two Wild Turkeys on the trail right after we arrived. Many thanks to Bill and to those who drove and carried Club members.

HATS AVAILABLE!!



With as much birding as we all do, the right ball cap is definitely a necessity. So why not share your passion for both birding and for the Williamsburg Bird Club, and buy a WBC hat. The donation is only \$20 and we have 8 still available. Just bring your check (made out to Williamsburg Bird Club) or your \$20 bill to the next meeting, and you can walk out of the meeting looking stylish and trendy!

PATCHES AVAILABLE TOO !!!

The Bird Club has these patches for sale! These are delightful additions to your bags, jackets, hats, shirts, sweatshirts...you name it, it'll look better with a Williamsburg Bird Club patch



attached. We are asking a donation of \$5.00. If you want one but can't make it to the meeting, send a check for \$5.00 (payable to Williamsburg Bird Club) to PO Box 1085, Williamsburg, VA 23187 and we'll mail you your patch. (Be sure to include your mailing address with the check!)

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 of 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.

CALENDAR

Save the Chesapeake Bay

By Gary Carpenter

As members of the Virginia birding community who are aware of the importance of protecting and preserving the natural wonders of our region, you may have been alarmed at recent threats to drastically reduce the funding for the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. Our wonderful Bay and its adjacent wetlands, so critically important for the Commonwealth's avian diversity as birding habitat, has just recently begun to show recovery from decades of ravishment. Its continued health is largely dependent on this funding. If you wish to express your concern to some of Virginia's congressional members who represent districts on the Bay or its tributaries, here are some addresses for you:

Senator Mark Warner
703 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20510



Senator Timothy Kaine
231 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20510

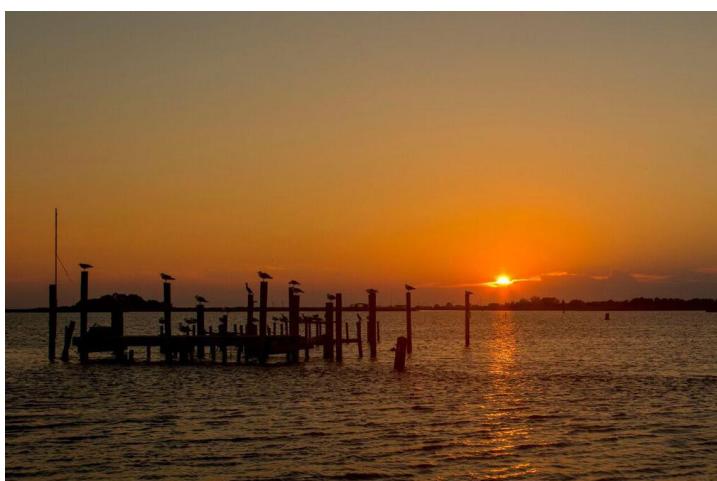
Rep. Rob Wittman (VA 1st Congressional District)
2055 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515



Rep. Scott Taylor (VA 2nd Congressional District)
412 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515

Rep. Bobby Scott (VA 3rd Congressional District)
1201 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515

Rep. Donald McEachin (VA 4th Congressional District)
314 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515



Photos by Barbara Houston

Atlas-ing and Angry Birds

By Ashley Peele

Some of you may be asking, what codes should be used for ‘angry birds’? Three different breeding codes apply, so let’s clarify when to use each of these.



Photo by Inge Curtis

A – Agitated Behavior. This code applies when *birds give angry chip notes, often flying or walking repetitively through the same area*. They will often raise their head feathers and body feathers, as further signs of agitation. (Remember—‘pishing’ negates this code, because you won’t know if their agitation is caused by your behavior or the presence of a nest.)

T – Territorial Defense. This code covers several major and common behaviors...

- *Chasing and scolding* individuals of the same species (intraspecific aggression) or a different species (interspecific defense).
- *Counter-singing* with males of the same species. This can sound much like a duet with one male echoing or attempting to overshadow the song of another.

These two codes are similar and some situations will arise where either could be used. In such cases, don’t fret over which to apply. Since they are both in same category, this isn’t a huge concern.

Distraction Display – DD. This code occurs *when an adult feigns injury or uses another extreme behavior to distract an intruder from a nest or young*. With the exception of species like Killdeer, this type of behavior is relatively uncommon. Most examples of aggressive or defensive behavior will fall under the A or T codes, so be cautious when applying the DD code.

Note! Agitation and distraction displays mean that a bird is likely stressed out by your presence. Make every effort to leave the immediate area quickly when you begin observing either A or DD.

Thanks for all your efforts. Keep that early breeding data rolling in and remember to check out the new [Atlas Facebook group](#). And enjoy the early spring migration as it continues to ramp up!

Birding Trip to the Yucatan

At the April 19th meeting, Gary and Ann Carpenter announced that they had signed up for a Road Scholar tour entitled : ‘*Birding the Mayan Ruins of the Yucatan from the Caribbean to Palenque*’. The Road Scholar catalog description of the trip reads; “Combine exceptional birding with exploration of four of the most fascinating cities of Mayan world, Chichen Itza . . . Uxmal, Calakmul and Palenque. With your binoculars, explore the environmentally diverse Yucatan and its 500-plus bird species, immerse yourself in the history, tradition, and ancient mysteries that define this fabled land.”

Road Scholar is offering this tour seven times January through April and twice in November of 2018. All of the tours are limited to 12 persons. The specific trip that Gary and Ann have chosen is from **February 19 to March 3**. They were the first to sign up for that particular trip, so, as of April 17 there were 10 spots left. Anyone interested in joining the Carpenters should contact Road Scholar (877-426-8056) and enquire about program number **3713EHJ**.

Brown Creepers Are Creeping In

By Cheryl J. Jacobson

The Creepers are moving! We're currently in the middle of the peak Brown Creeper migration season. Haven't noticed this species yet? Not surprising! While they are a regular, if not common, wintering species in VA they are so quiet and cryptic that we often overlook them.



It's interesting to note that they were confirmed breeders in Virginia in the first Atlas. Remnant populations of creepers bred in Fairfax and Rockingham County in the mid-1980s. Since that time, the species has not been well documented, so the question we have for Atlas is how many Brown Creepers are left?

Thus far, the most likely potential breeders were found singing in Giles County last May and June. May is the start of their nesting season, so keep an eye and ear out for this tiny species in western and northern VA. They prefer to nest in dense tree stands, tucking nests in between the trunk and loose bark of a dead or dying tree. Finding those nests will be a challenge, but you may catch Dad Creeper landing at the base of a tree and carrying food upwards toward his hidden nest. Even basic data on where Brown Creepers are singing in Virginia during the breeding season would be valuable for the project.

Check out this page to read more about this species and listen to their song.

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brown_Creeper/sounds

Birders Needed!

By Dave Youker, Region 11 Coordinator

Virginia is in its second year of a 5-year Breeding Bird Atlas. For those who participated last year, thanks for making that first year a big success! Also, for those who contributed last year, you should have finished up any residual work in your block...and it's time to sign-up for new blocks. The main emphasis again this year is the Priority

Blocks. Many of you wanted to get experience last year by working in your local blocks, but now it's time to branch out to new territory. Each block now has the list of species from the first Atlas, so you can see what species were seen and confirmed. It's a great tool to compare the changes in your particular blocks.

If you didn't participate last year, now is the perfect time to volunteer some of your time. You'll learn a lot about breeding bird behavior. Don't feel like you have the skills to participate? There is plenty of help. Training is available in many forms both online and in person. You can also 'atlas' with other birders.

Many birds are already exhibiting breeding behavior, and the activity will really pick-up over the next two months. The last of our winter residents will be leaving us, and our summer birds will be here soon, eager to set-up territories. It's a great time to be out in the field witnessing this breeding behavior.

If you have any questions or need training in 'atlas-ing', don't hesitate to contact me at Youkerd@aol.com.

Photo of Peregrine Falcon taking flight by Inge Curtis



Big Bend Birds—A Birder's Bucket List Checked Off

Article and Photos by Nancy Barnhart

Big Bend National Park has been on my bucket list for a long time. So when Ken and I finally decided to plan a visit, it seemed only natural to go when there was a chance to see the rare and very local Colima Warbler. According to David Sibley, this bird is only found "in oak woods in higher elevations of Chisos Mountains". A search of eBird confirmed that this was where we had to go to see it. Big Bend National Park is billed as one of the most remote places in the lower 48 states and it lives up to its billing. The volcanic Chisos Mountains are a magical place, popping up in the middle of the Chihuahuan Desert. They contain a sky island relict forest that is an oasis to migratory birds and the breeding

ground to the Colima Warbler. Finding this somewhat "understated" warbler required an 11 mile hike with a gain of 1900 feet to get to its preferred habitat of oaks, maples, pines, and Arizona cypress above 6000". We started at 6:45

am and found success a few hours later. It was quite exciting to first hear and then see this special little gem! Before the day was over we saw 6 Colima

Warblers along with Townsend's, Wilson's, Nashville, Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warblers, Painted Redstart, Acorn and Ladderback woodpeckers, Ash-throated, Dusky, and Cordilleran flycatchers, Blue-throated, Black-chinned, and Broad-Tailed hummingbirds, Hutton's and Cassin's vireos to name a few. We finished up 10 hours later, tired but thrilled with success! Big Bend is definitely a very special place to find a very special bird!



Other favorites in the Park included the Vermilion Flycatcher and Scaled Quail.



Tackling Tricky Breeding Codes (Part 1): The Possibles

By Ashley Peele, VABBA2 Coordinator

Breeding behaviors and the use of breeding codes to describe these behaviors is probably the most unique, interesting, and important aspect of a Breeding Bird Atlas project. In Virginia, we have a diverse bird community, which makes collecting breeding evidence both fun and challenging. The Atlas handbook provides detailed descriptions of each breeding code, but sometimes it is still a little difficult to know when and how to apply certain codes. In this series of articles, we highlight some of the trickier codes from each category and provide additional information on when to use them and what species they apply to. For this first installment, we'll start out with the Observed and Possible codes...

Observed Category:

Observed – no code

If you include a species on your checklist with no breeding code, then it is automatically classified as observed. Observers should be reporting every species they detect on a checklist, so any species for which you have no other evidence of breeding will fall under this code.

Flyover – F

This observation applies to species that are observed *flying overhead, but not landing anywhere within the block*. However, as with all breeding codes, you only want to use this code if you suspect the bird could be breeding in your block. There are several examples of species it should generally not be applied to.

- Swallows and swifts foraging in the air above you – these birds may not obviously land in your block, but they are using the aerial habitat. For this reason, don't use the F code, unless you see these birds actually passing through.
- Gulls, Terns, Egrets, Herons, and Pelicans – these species range far from their breeding colonies to forage, so a Flyover rarely means they are breeding in your block or even an adjacent block. *Avoid using F for these species, unless you have reason to believe there is a breeding colony in your block.*
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Possible Category:

The Singing Codes – S and S7

(S7 is a Probable code, but the same rules apply to both.)

These codes only apply to species that *have a song, vocalization, or produce another sound specifically associated with breeding*. Typically, these are given by the male bird and what you'd normally think of as a song. However, there are always a few exceptions to keep Atlasers on their toes. Rather than listing all the species that DO have breeding specific vocalizations, we will focus on those that DO NOT fit into this category. Let's consider some examples of these...

- Waterfowl (ducks, geese, swans, etc.)
- Shorebirds
- Wading Birds
- Vultures
- Pigeons
- Terns, Gulls
- Corvids (jays, crows, ravens)
- Common Nighthawk (booming sound produced by male diving behavior can be coded as S)
- Swallows and Swifts (Barn Swallows do sing occasionally, but it is difficult to distinguish from their call.)
- Blue-gray Gnatcatchers (males/females call frequently, but males only rarely sing early in the breeding season).

Allaboutbirds.org is a great website for digging into questions about birds breeding behavior and vocalizations. If you want to really dig in, we can help you get a discounted membership to [Birds of North America](#), the best (in my opinion) online repository for bird life history information.

We'll pick up our next article with the codes from the Probable category.

35 Years of Ornithology Research Grant Scholarships

By Ann Carpenter

By 1982, just five years after hatching, the Bird Club was financially strong enough to grant research scholarships to Graduate Students who were studying ornithology at the College of William and Mary. A proposal for these scholarships was presented to and approved by the membership in November 1981. The rationale was that the club was being supported by the College which donates the club meeting space free of charge; one of the club's primary goals is to educate people about birds; and the club could afford to support a scholarship from fund-raising projects. In fact, the third Bird Seed Sale, a project initiated in 1980, yielded over \$1800 to be used towards these grant awards. The Board voted to award a total of \$500 per year for these scholarships.

When the Bird Club announced to the College of William and Mary's Biology Department that it was offering a scholarship stipend for ornithological research for one of its students, the club had no idea there would be so many worthy applicants. Therefore, instead of one, the club made two awards of \$250 each to Bob Anderson and Fenton Day. Bob proposed studying the feeding and population dynamics of Oystercatchers, while Fenton proposed looking into the effects that Herring Gull colonies have on adjacent tern and skimmer colonies.

In 2004, the Bird Club named the research grants in honor of William J. Sheehan, a Charter Member, the Club's first Secretary, and the keeper of local bird club records from Day 1. In 2007, at the club's 30th anniversary meeting, it was announced that one of the scholarships would be named to honor Ruth Beck, retired professor of Biology at W&M

and a charter and founding member of the Bird Club. The scholarships are now called the Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Ornithology Research Grants.

Awards were made to one or two students per year until 2006 when the number was increased to three awards per year. Award amounts increased to \$500 per student in 2000 and to \$600 per student in 2014. Following the passing of Dr. Ruth Beck in 2015, the club received more than \$5,000 in memorial donations. These funds are being devoted to the research grants, allowing the club to make four awards in 2015 and five awards in 2016. In addition, the club receives semi-annual donations from Wild Birds Unlimited which also go toward funding the research grants. Members also may make designated donations to the grant fund.

Since 1982, the Bird Club has awarded 72 grants, totaling more than \$35,000, to 66 graduate and undergraduate students. The mentors to the grantees over the last 35 years have included: Mitchell Byrd, Ruth Beck, Dan Cristol, John Swaddle, Matthias Leu, and Bryan Watts. Twenty-five of the grantees' projects led to published, peer-reviewed articles. Each year, in the spring following the award, the students present the results of their research studies at a Bird Club meeting.

Student Researcher and WBC Grant Recipient Carly Hawkins and two Zebra Finches

This year's awardees are Megan Thompson, "A Study of the Cognitive Memory of Birds and their Ability to Avoid a Toxic Food Source"; Carly Hawkins, "Investigating the Effects of Anthropogenic Noise Disturbance on Songbird Social Networks"; and Ananda Menon, "The Effect of Mercury on Reproductive Function in Male Songbirds".

A complete list of the Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Ornithology Research Grants Awardees and Projects can be found on the Williamsburg Bird Club web site, www.williamsburgbirdclub.org.





Photo by Mike Jaskowiak of an Osprey at Jamestown (left)

Photo by Cindy Baker of Rose-breasted Grosbeak at the feeder (below)



CALENDAR

May 5-7 (Fri.-Sun.)	VSO Annual Meeting in Richmond—details can be found at: http://www.virginiabirds.org/events/annual-meeting/2017-opening-announcement
Sunday, May 7	Hampton Roads Bird Club sponsors a Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Meet in the parking lot near Ranger Station.
Saturday, May 13	Williamsburg Bird Club (WBC) sponsors a Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 8 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Wednesday, May 17	WBC Monthly Meeting, 7 pm, Andrews Hall, Room 101 on W&M Campus—parking pass needed. See page 1 for details.
Saturday, May 20	WBC Field Trip to Bassett Hall Nature Trail. See page 5 for details.
Sunday, May 21	Hampton Roads Bird Club sponsors a Bird Walk at Newport News Park, 7 am. Meet in the parking lot near the Ranger Station.
Saturday, May 27	Williamsburg Bird Club (WBC) sponsors a Bird Walk at New Quarter Park, 7 am. Meet at the parking lot near the office.
Saturday, May 27	VSO Field Trip to Piney Grove to see the Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Details at: http://www.virginiabirds.org/events/upcoming-field-trips-index/