

The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 43 No. 3

williamsburgbirdclub.org

March 2019

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Cheryl Jacobson



Why We Need Birds/What Do Birds Do for Us

Birds play essential roles in the functioning of the world's ecosystems, in ways that directly impacts human health, economy and food production. How many ways do birds benefit us? For fun,

list them now. I will provide some answers later on in this Corner. To get you started we all know that 1. Birds control pests. Can you name another six?

Boat Trip

What a wonderful time we all had on the boat trip to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Islands on Sunday, February 3. A special thanks to George Martin, who diligently created the attendee list and waiting list and then redid it all because of the need to cancel the first date due to wind and weather. Also, thanks to Ellison Orcutt, trip leader, and Andrew Rapp, eBird guru. Ellison worked the top level of the boat and Andrew the bottom level, so all participants were able to get help to see all the birds (please see photos below of our two fantastic leaders).



PROGRAMS

**W&M Integrated Science Center, Room 1127
7 pm**

By Judy Jones

Fascinating Feathers - March 20th



Our speaker in March is Wildlife Rehabilitator, Maureen Eiger, who will be talking to us about the biology of feathers. Ms. Eiger is the Director of Help Wild Birds, Roanoke's only nonprofit wildlife rehabilitation organization

that exclusively handles migratory birds. Her talk, *Fascinating Feathers*, is an in-depth study of bird feathers, answering many of the questions birders have about this important aspect of bird biology.

Future Williamsburg Bird Club (WBC) Programs

Scholarship Recipients from William & Mary - April 17th

In April, you'll enjoy presentations by our three ornithology research grant recipients working with Dr. Cristol and Dr. Swaddle. This will be an informational and dynamic evening as we learn about the future of bird research.

Journey to Guyana - May 15th

In May, we welcome a very familiar face, our own Bill Williams, speaking about his recent journey to Guyana.

Please mark your calendars and come join us! These programs will be both educational and enjoyable!

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On Birding and Photography

On our May bird walk, we will be exploring an exciting way to look at birds. In the August 2015 issue of *Birding Magazine*, Pete Dunne wrote, "Today's cameras have opened the door to a revolution in bird identification, the second major instance in which technology has changed bird study. Consider that just over a century ago, the primary tool for bird study was the shotgun or fowling piece. Dedicated students of birds, called ornithologists, used shotguns to collect birds in the field so that their defining details could be noted. The shotgun was the stop action device of that age. The bird in hand could be studied, identified, and then rendered into a study skin both for future study and as a means of securing verifiable evidence, one of the cornerstones of science."

Please read Greg Neise's blog of March 1, 2016, at: <http://blog.aba.org/2016/03/on-birding-and-photography.html>. I will share several points from him here. "In the early 1970s, there were only a very, very few people taking pictures of wild birds. Things stayed about the same through the 80s and 90s. In late 2007, things changed. The Panasonic FZ series of cameras, with big-lens zoom capability, and effective stabilization, came to the attention of birders. It was now possible to take decent photos of birds, with a small camera that a birder could carry easily and a price tag about the same as mid-range binoculars. But perhaps more important than the camera itself, is the cost (or lack of it) of the medium the pictures are captured and stored on. And today nearly everyone has a camera phone at the ready. Also, about 2007-2009, birding forums and [Facebook](#) came on the scene, giving birders places to share the pictures they were taking. Many bird clubs are incorporating photography into their routine, bird walks and field trips as photography is as much a part of birding today as using binoculars, or a spotting scope."

Please bring your cameras of any kind, your phones, or just your eyes for our May bird walk that Judy Jones, Barbara Houston, and I will lead, and we will all explore this avenue together. As Greg said in his blog, "What matters is that we're outside, interested in and spending time with the birds around us. Everything else will fall into place." And I would add spending time with our birding friends.

The Center for Conservation Biology

I hope you all receive the e-Newsletter from the Center for Conservation Biology available at: <https://ccbbirds.org/>. You can sign up for their e-Newsletter via their web site under the tab, About Us (on the bottom right hand side of that page). The January 2019 issue was packed with great information. One very interesting article is "White Ibis Population Explodes in Virginia," by Bryan Watts. Bryan states, "Some species creep forward across the landscape. They fortify their troops and slowly take ground with the restraint of a calculated military campaign. Other species jump with wild abandon across the landscape, consuming new ground and seemingly unconcerned about the basic supports that will be needed to sustain their advance. White ibis fall into the latter category."

Additionally, Bryan points out, "The most consequential development that appears to have ignited the population has been the colony along the Chincoteague Causeway. Whatever the cause, the Virginia population has exploded, increasing from less than 400 pairs in 2013 to more than 1,500 pairs

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in 2018. Given the demographics, this explosion could not have been driven by good productivity alone but represents a flow of birds into the state from populations to the south. We should expect further expansion in Virginia and likely states to the north over the next few years.”

For fun, please see the photo I took of a white Ibis in Florida hanging out with a big alligator.



How many ways do birds benefit us (cont.)?

2. Birds pollinate plants.
3. Birds are nature’s clean-up crew (consider the lovely vultures).
4. Birds spread seeds.
5. Birds transform entire landscapes. For example, the Salt Marsh Periwinkle, *Littoraria irrorata*, grazes upon cordgrass with gusto and were it not for predators such as oystercatchers, curlews and plovers, these tiny snails would devour the entire marsh leaving only mudflats.
6. Birds keep coral reefs alive. Birds, especially seabirds, play a key role in cycling nutrients and helping to fertilize marine ecosystems such as coral reefs. Seabirds travel hundreds of kilometers to feed out in the ocean and when they return, they deposit layers of highly pungent guano at their colonies.
7. Birds inspire science. This excerpt from <https://www.birdlife.org/worldwide/news/why-we-need-birds-far-more-they-need-us?> “From the technology of flight, to the invention of zippers modelled on the barbules of feathers, humans have drawn inspiration from birds for centuries. Some of these advances have been huge: Darwin’s studies of finches in the Galápagos proved instrumental in shaping his thoughts on evolution through natural selection. But birds play a more important role than just giving us ideas. Birds are the messengers that tell us about the health of the planet. Birds are widespread and respond quickly to changes in the environment. Because of this, they are our early-warning system for pressing concerns such as climate change.”

Products Good for the Environment

Each month, I will continue to highlight an environmentally friendly product. By protecting our Earth, we are helping our birds that we all love! This month the product is recycled toilet tissue. Who Gives a Crap (ha!) makes toilet paper out of 100% recycled paper fibers, bamboo, or sugarcane. This saves water, trees, and reduces carbon emissions. The company also donates a whopping 50% of their profits to WaterAid to build toilets for those in need. Check Out Who Gives a Crap’s toilet tissue at <https://us.whogivesacrap.org/> Please note that there is a U.S. web page for ordering.

Meet Your Board

Meet Cathy Flanagan, our Refreshment Committee Chair since January 2019. When I asked Cathy if she would serve in this capacity, she did not hesitate for one second. That is the type of response that all Board Presidents dream about. Below is her story she shares with us.

I started on the path to becoming a birder when my daughter was very young, and we began feeding birds. I have always been amazed at the number and variety of birds we have on our wooded lot with a ravine in the back, not far from marshy land near the James River. Birds built nests in our garage often, mostly Carolina Wrens who chose to build in strange places such as an upside-down bicycle helmet, or a tin can that held nails. One time I caught a wren and a House Finch in a mid-air battle over my bicycle basket. We had to keep the door open during the day until the birds fledged. I credit my late sister, who was an avid birder, with encouraging our family’s interest and love of birds during this time. She loved to hear the stories of the “feathers flying” at our house as told by her young niece. She sent

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Peterson's First Guides, bird coloring books, and introduced her to some simple citizen science projects. My husband and I joined in learning with her, and we all had a keen interest in nature and wildlife. I knew we were officially "birders" when, while I was driving the carpool, my daughter said over the chatter of the other 4th graders, "Hey mom, did you see that female Rufous-sided Towhee?" Of course, I had noticed it as well. When digital photography became available, I started spending a lot of time with my camera. Over 30 years, many generations of cardinals have brought their young to the deck feeders, and I've spent countless pleasant hours watching the parents feed their young and each other. Like a doting grandparent, I have way too many photos of "my" cardinals, and I jokingly refer to the male cardinals as "William" and the females as "Mary."

Photography, and especially bird photography, has become a real interest for me. An ongoing goal is to get a good portrait of every species that visits my yard or feeders. I estimate that it's possible to see 43 species during the year without leaving my yard. On average, I see 15-20 species most days during the winter. I also enjoy drawing birds and found I could do sketches on my iPad, which I could copy and paste to correspondence or cards.



Since my husband passed away three years ago, I began taking art classes, and I joined the Native Plant Society, our Bird Club, and became a Master Naturalist (Cohort 11). I participate in bluebird trail monitoring, Project FeederWatch, and my favorite, Osprey Watch. I have watched the same pair raise the first two chicks, and then last year, three. I am looking forward to their return, which should be soon! I have the best nest to monitor as it is easy to see and photograph, located just off the pier at the marina in Queen's Lake.

Besides taking many photos and videos of "my" osprey, I couldn't help but choose them as subjects for art class. I enjoyed every step of the process of painting them (pictured below with the use of pastels) from a photograph I took of the three siblings shortly before they left the nest.

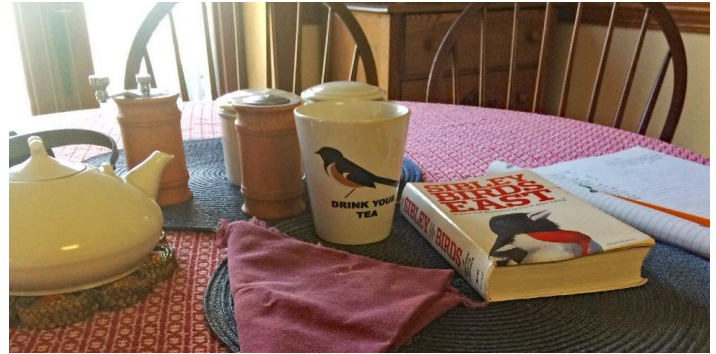


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The connection I feel with nature when I photograph, draw, or observe birds brings me much happiness and a sense of calm. One of my favorite things to do is to sit very quietly on my deck and listen to the birds in the woods and wait for them to come to the feeders. It really feels special when a bird arrives. I love the sound of their wings and how quickly they can come and go. I try to make some time each day not counting or photographing, just observing. I have a great view of the woods and can see where the birds go after stopping at my feeders. I like to watch them as they sit in the nearby dogwoods cracking open a seed or planning their next attempt at the feeders. Thoughts of my sister and husband are happy memories.

For me, the next best thing to being out with nature is reading about it. I always enjoy the latest science books on plants, ecology, nature, and of course, birds. They are the usual Christmas and birthday gifts my daughter and I share. This year I'm also really enjoying the mug she gave me. It has a drawing of an Eastern Towhee on it with the caption "Drink your tea!"

I am very happy to serve on the board for hospitality, and I attended my first board meeting last month. The Williamsburg Bird Club is the best!



MARCH 16TH – BACK BAY FIELD TRIP

By George Martin

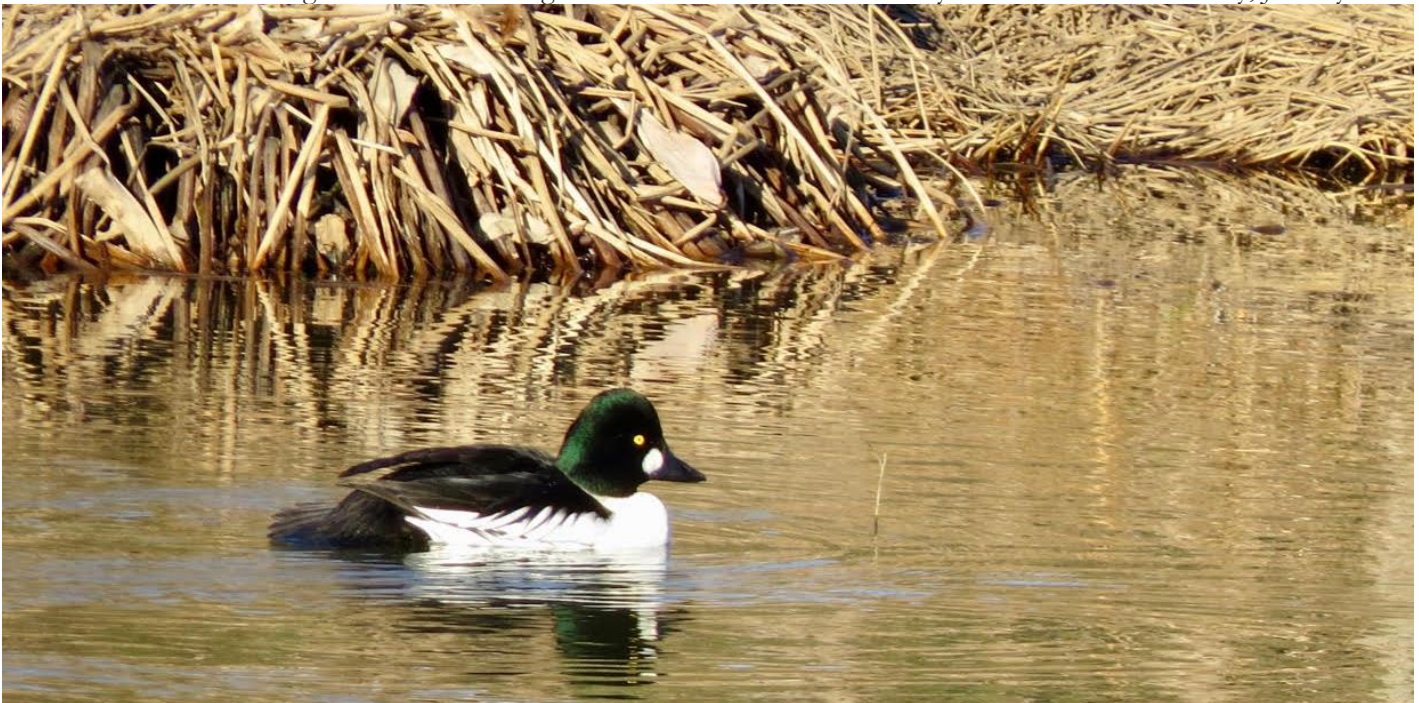
The Williamsburg Bird Club's regular March field trip will be Saturday, March 16, when Matt Anthony will lead interested birders on a trip to Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Little Island, and Rudee Inlet. We should be able to see lots of waterfowl, loons, and razorbills. Interested birders should plan to be at the Colony Square Shopping Center in time for a 7:30 a.m. departure for Virginia Beach. No signup required!

REPORTED SIGHTINGS AND ACTIVITY

(Photo credit is attributed to authors of the sightings, unless otherwise noted)

January 18 & 20

Shirley Devan reports, "I observed a male Common Goldeneye in the BMP pond next to Warhill High School. He was hanging out with two Hooded Mergansers and slumming with four Mallards. The Goldeneye was still there on Sunday, January 20."



FEBRUARY 23RD - NEW QUARTER PARK (NQP) BIRD WALK

By Jim Corliss, Photo by Shirley Devan

A wet day of birding but a great group of birders were present for the NQP Walk. View the walk's checklist online at <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S53048921>



FEBRUARY 3RD – CHESAPEAKE BAY BRIDGE TUNNEL ISLANDS FIELD TRIP

By George Martin, Photos by Judy Jones & Catherine Flanagan

Sixty-one birders enjoyed a beautiful morning motoring on the Bay Princess around the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel islands and through surrounding waters. The group saw 45 species of birds, with great looks at the Northern Gannet, Long-tailed Duck, all three scoters, and two Peregrine Falcons. The group was also treated to sights of Humpback Whales and Harbor Seals. Many thanks to the trip leader, Ellison Orcutt, and the eBird recorder for the trip, Andrew Rapp. Judy Jones kept her cameras busy during the trip, so you may enjoy her photos of a Northern Gannet and of two Long-tailed Ducks, and Cathy Flanagan also shared some wonderful photos of the seals, a Great Black-backed Gull, and Ruddy Turnstones, respectively.





FEBRUARY 16TH – DUTCH GAP FIELD TRIP

By George Martin, Photo by Rose Ryan

On Saturday, February 16, Rose Ryan led three other intrepid birders on a rainy excursion to see ducks at Dutch Gap Conservation Area outside Richmond, and the group wasn't disappointed. Twenty-nine species were recorded, with large numbers of Wood Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, Wigeon, and even a few Redheads. Rose snapped a picture of the umbrella birders! We hope for better weather next year.



FEBRUARY 9TH – YORK RIVER BIRD WALK

By Shirley Devan

Shirley takes no credit or blame for the morning's cold temperatures and winds! Thanks to 15 people, who braved the very cold temperatures to look at ducks on the York River. The link below provides a short summary sheet of the species seen at the four stops during the trip. eBird challenged the three Greater Scaup observed close in near a breakwater at the Yorktown Beach. Many thanks to those who brought spotting scopes and shared them so graciously.

Summary sheet found here: [02-09-2019 Bird Club Trip to Yorktown along Col Parkway.pdf](#)

THE GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER IN VIRGINIA: BIRD CONSERVATION FROM A STATE WILDLIFE AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

by Cathy Millar

Anyone who thought that the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) was only about hunting and fishing learned from our February speaker, Sergio Harding, that DGIF is involved in so much more including a lot of work with birds. DGIF was established in 1916 to regulate hunting and fishing, but they broadened their mission in the early 1990's to include nongame and hired biologists with a wide range of expertise. Sergio is one of three whose full-time focus is birds and has been a Nongame Bird Conservation Biologist with DGIF since 2005. He serves as the DGIF point of contact for the 2nd Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas and works with the atlas coordinator on VABBA2 planning and promotion. Sergio also is the Virginia coordinator of the Breeding Bird Survey and regularly participates in and directs avian field projects including surveys of breeding land birds, Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, Golden-winged Warblers, Loggerhead Shrikes, Piping Plovers and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Sergio's work involves coordinating with a variety of partners, universities and nonprofits to implement bird conservation projects and strategies. He noted that Virginia has one of the highest bird diversities in the Eastern United States with over 400 species that use our state at some point in their life cycle. Sergio used the Golden-winged Warbler as a case study of how DGIF approaches bird conservation through their agency programs of Regulatory Review, Land Acquisition, Habitat Management, Education and Outreach, Conservation Planning, and Research and Monitoring.

The Golden-winged Warbler is one of 80 species of greatest conservation need in the Virginia Wildlife Action Plan. This new world warbler weighs only approximately .4 oz. and as a neotropical migrant, flies more than 2,000 miles from breeding sites in North America to Latin America. Their numbers are sharply declining largely thought to be due to habitat loss, and the species is currently being petitioned for Federal listing under the Endangered Species Act. We learned that their population is split into 2 regions: the Upper Great Lakes and the Appalachians from New York to Georgia. The Virginia population returns late April. They prefer shrubby open habitats at mid to high elevations, where they build nests on the ground often at the base of blackberry bushes. They also need nearby mature forests to bring their fledglings for safety. Historically, they benefited from forest fires and clearing by settlers, but those areas have grown back, and humans have suppressed fires and flooding from opening new areas. Much of Sergio's work has been done in Southwest Virginia. DGIF helps preserve habitat by prescribed burning, thinning, mulching, and timber harvest.

Another factor in their decline is unique to Golden-winged Warblers. They share 99.8% of their DNA with Blue-winged Warblers. In areas of close contact, they interbreed and produce two different, usually fertile hybrids varying extensively in appearance: Brewster's and Lawrence's. The Brewster's is the result of pure Golden-winged and pure Blue-winged parents. The Lawrence's is rarer as it is the result of recessive genes from 2 first generation Brewster's Warbler parents.

DGIF collaborates with other groups such as W&M's Center for Conservation Biology to conduct surveys to determine geographic distribution and population trends. Golden-winged Warblers used to be found in 20 counties in Virginia, but now are located in only 15 counties. Golden-winged Warblers are secretive and not easy to spot and often require using playback of male bird song which increases detectability by 33%. Research has shown that Golden-winged Warblers prefer already occupied nesting areas and Sergio indicated that there is a possibility of using playback to lure Golden-winged Warblers to suitable habitat that is vacant and may be a management tool to expand their range.

Sergio described another ecological research project that DGIF is helping conduct that involves putting geolocators via tiny harnesses on these small birds for which satellite transmitters are too heavy. Geolocators collect two data points per day: time of sunrise and time of sunset. From this, one can get rough coordinates of where the bird has been. These geolocators don't transmit data, which means that not only does a Golden-winged Warbler need to be caught in a mist net to put the geocator on but also year later, the bird needs to be caught again to retrieve it! A total of 450 geolocators were put on Golden-winged Warblers, Blue-winged Warblers, and hybrids across their North American range, of which 76 were retrieved and only 48 had retrievable data that was not damaged by moisture. In Virginia, 25 geolocators were fitted; five were retrieved and two had retrievable data. The data showed strong evidence that the birds flew over the Gulf of Mexico, made their way over Central America, and wintered in north and central Venezuela. Whereas data from the Great Lakes population showed that they wintered in Central America. The Great Lakes population is relatively stable. The fact that the Appalachian population is in decline suggests there is a problem in their wintering grounds in South America where they may be losing habitat. Shade grown coffee and cacao plantations offer ideal conditions.

Sergio is working on improving suitable habitat at the 3,700-4,100 ft. elevation sites in Highland County. DGIF is also involved in the program, Working Lands for Wildlife, which is geared toward getting landowners to engage in land management for the benefit of Golden-winged Warblers using established guidelines. Expenses incurred are refunded by the government.

To understand what motivates people to engage in bird conservation and understand their attitudes about habitat management and perception of obstacles in carrying them out, DGIF is also involved in a Private Landowner Shrubland Management Survey. The results of these surveys of landowners in five western Virginia counties will be used to create effective communication in outreach efforts. Conservation on private lands is thought to be one of the biggest game changers for the conservation of the Golden-winged Warbler.

The Golden-winged Warbler Working Group loosely coordinates all these activities by state and Federal agencies, universities and organizations as well as those in Canada, Central and South America.

The presentation concluded with Cheryl Jacobson presenting Sergio Harding with an honorarium which, in turn, Sergio then donated his honorarium to the Virginia's Second Breeding Bird Atlas.

OUR CLUB NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT – PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP & PAY YOUR DUES FOR 2019!

Thanks, birders!

SUPPORT OUR LOCALLY OWNED BIRD STORES & FELLOW WBC MEMBERS



Wild Birds Unlimited located in Williamsburg at Settler's Market in New Town supports the WBC through donations and a 5% rebate on the pre-tax amount spent in store by WBC members. Please inform them you are a WBC member during checkout. <https://williamsburg.wbu.com/>



Backyard Birder Seed & Supply located in Williamsburg at the Quarterpath Shopping Center (near the Kingsmill Harris Teeter) supports the WBC through donations and a 10% discount on purchases for WBC members. For your discount in-store, please inform them you are a WBC member during checkout. <https://www.backyardbirder.org>

CALENDAR

March 9 - 8 am Leader: Nancy Barnhart	WBC Bird Walk, York River State Park.
March 16 Leader: Matt Anthony	Back Bay Field Trip (detail on page 5).
March 20 - 7 pm	WBC Monthly Meeting (details on page 1).
March 23 - 8 am Leader: Scott Hemler	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park.
March 24	All Flyer submissions are due for inclusion in the monthly edition of The Flyer newsletter; please submit all sightings, articles, and activity to the Editor via email: 1backyardbirder@gmail.com .
April 13 - 8 am Leader: Nancy Barnhart	WBC Bird Walk, Freedom Park.
April 16 - 7 pm	WBC Monthly Meeting (details on page 1).
April 27 - 8 am Leader: Jim Corliss	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park.
April 28	Spring Bird Count
May 3-5	VSO Annual Meeting, Mountain Lake Lodge. More details available soon: http://www.virginiabirds.org/
May 11 - 8 am Leader: TBD	WBC Bird Walk, Bassett Trace.
May 15 - 7 pm	WBC Monthly Meeting (details on page 1).
May 25 - 8 am Leader: Scott Hemler	WBC Bird Walk, New Quarter Park.

If you wish to advertise in *The Flyer*, please contact the Editor, Melinda Cousins, via email at 1backyardbirder@gmail.com for further information.



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