

# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Vol.43. No 6 September 2019

# President's Corner

By Cheryl Jacobson

#### **FALL BEGINS**

As I contemplate the beginning of our fall meetings, I will begin with a few of my favorite quotes.

- "By all these lovely tokens September days are here, With summer's best of weather and autumn's best of cheer."

  —Helen Hunt Jackson
- "August rain: the best of the summer gone, and the new fall not yet born. The odd uneven time."
- -Sylvia Plath

"Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened."

—Dr. Seuss

I hope you are smiling as you think about your summer perhaps you traveled to your favorite places and had sightings of your favorite birds or perhaps you traveled to newplaces and saw new species. Every year I go to Audubon's Sweetwater Preserve near Gainesville, Florida.



#### **Cheryl Jacobson**

Please see my photos of two of my favorite species seen there, Purple Gallinule and Common Moorhens with chicks.

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### SEPTEMBER 18 BIRD CLUB MEETING

Mark your calendars for 7:00 pm, September 18th and our first fall bird club meeting for 2019! Our speaker is Chance Hines, a research biologist for CCB, The Center for Conservation Biology. Chance has been working seasonally with CCB since 2014. Chance is in charge of monitoring Red-cockaded Woodpecker populations at Piney Grove Preserve and the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. He also studies his beloved passerines while researching wintering Ipswich sparrows along the Atlantic Coast. His graduate work in ecology and his statistical analysis skills has made him an integral part of the CCB team. The title of his talk to us will be "Foraging Habits of Fall Songbirds on the Eastern Shore of Virginia," as he shares with us his research on migrating songbirds and their fall diets. It will be a great chance to learn more about those lovely birds we seeing flying past us on their way south.

See map on page 11 to help you figure out how to get to Andrews Hall, Room 101, for our meeting. For those of you who've joined us in past years, this was our room BEFORE the Integrated Science Center. But access is now a little strained due to the construction outside of Phi Beta Kappa Hall. So print out your parking pass and give yourself extra time to wend your way over to our room 101. Please note that this parking pass is for Morton Lot and the Parking Deck only with all of the rest either under construction or given to students. The walk from Morton Lot to Andrews 101 is short, but from Parking Deck (24 Ukrop Way) it's a bit longer, as one has to get out of the deck, cross the street to Morton Lot, and then walk through all of Morton lot. Because of all of the construction, Gary Carpenter and his team will be out there the first night to help people navigate around the Muscarelle Museum area.

We are looking forward to finally getting back together again this fall. Remember, Andrews 101 at 7:00 pm, September 18. **See you then! See map on page 11.** 

#### **BIRD CLUB PLANS**

Four activities will be the focus of our coming year: 1). Last year of the Breeding Bird Atlas 2). VSO 2020 Annual Meeting in May 2020 3). Continuation of Purple Martin Project and 4). Efforts to reduce use of "Single Use Plastic" and to provide environmental information. Of course, we will continue with our other long-term activities of bird walks, field trips, counts, etc. It promises to be an exciting year!!

#### INTERESTING INFORMATION ABOUT BIRDS

PARASITIC BIRDS-At one of the recent bird walks in New Quarter Park the group was horrified to watch a tiny Blue-gray Gnatcatcher feeding a fledgling Brown-headed Cowbird. I also had the same reaction when I saw a Carolina Wren taking pieces frommy suet feeder to my deck rail to feed a fledgling Brown-headed Cowbird. I've beenasked several times why the parents don't recognize the Cowbird chick as not their same species. This is what I learned. Audubon had some interesting speculation: Some species will incubate the egg and rear the nestling as one of their own. Species vary in their reaction to Cowbird egg deposition. Robins, Gray Catbirds, Blue Jays, Cedar Waxwings, Northern Orioles and Brown Thrashers tend to recognize and reject Cowbird eggs (88% of time). Perhaps these six recognize them by size and shape. Phoebes tend to accept the eggs. It seems possible that cavity-nesters would be less likely to recognize and reject Cowbird eggs because they see them less often, they nest in dark locations, and some (like Tree Swallows and bluebirds) do not have large bills that would make egg removal easier. Cowbird eggs laid in House Finch nestsoften "disappear"; or the chicks die due to the diet (all vegetable matter) fed by foster parents.



Purple Gallinule





Common Moorhens with chicks

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#### **WBC EXECUTIVE BOARD 2019**

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#### WBC-FALL 2019 FIELD TRIPS

By George Martin, Field Trip Coordinator

Mark your calendars for field trips in September and October!

#### **SEPTEMBER**

ON SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, Jason Strickland will lead a bird walk at Newport News Park. The field trip will start early—be at the park at 7 AM! Interested birders should meet Jason at the parking lot near the ranger station.

#### **OCTOBER**

ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 19, we'll head to the Eastern Shore for a day of birding. Matt Anthony will lead us at several sites, including the Eastern Shore NWR, Kiptopeke State Park, and the Northumberland landfill. My plan is to have the trip be similar to what the Club did last October–if you liked that trip, this one should be good as well. Those interested in carpooling should meet at the Colony Square Shopping Center at 7:15 AM for a 7:30 AM departure.

#### WHY DO BIRDS WIPE THEIR BEAKS?

In reading from various Audubon sites, I learned that there are a number of possibilities. That birds wipe their bills primarily to clean them-is generally agreed upon, based on logic and observation. As widely noted, birds frequently bill-wipe after eating messy foods such as suet, fruits, or juicy insects. Also, it has been documented that like fingernails or hair, the outer portion of a bird's beak is made of the protein keratin and grows nonstop. Foraging and feeding wears this outer layer, giving the bill its shape. Starlings and other species, shift their diets at different times of year, eating mainly bugs and worms during breeding, but switching to lots of fruits and seeds in fall and winter. Observation has shown that bill-wiping might help birds hone their beaks into shapes that work best for grabbing whatever type of food they're focused on. Another speculation relates to mate selection. Preen oil, which birds produce through a gland and use to maintain and waterproof their feathers, contains odors and chemical signals that play a role in mate choice. Some researchers have wondered if birds might be slathering preen oil on nearby surfaces to release those smells and lure a mate.

#### **FALL MIGRATING BIRDS NEED YOU**

Fall and winter are when birds rely most heavily on backyard feeders to supplement their diets and fuel their migratory journeys. Help birds make the most of your backyard food by setting up an assortment of feeder types and bird seed varieties—from suet feeders to thistle, platform feeders and more. And when fall migration ends, your feeders will support your winter residents all season long.

#### SINGLE USE PLASTIC

While living in the West, I spent 100s of hours hiking in the Rocky Mountains. I know many of you visit there frequently and also share my love. I recently read about this research that continues to stress our need to address our use of plastics.

A hard rain is falling on the Rocky Mountains. It's 39 degrees the kind of rain and chill that brings an even harder reality home to many Americans: Plastic has permeated every facet of our planet. Even the clouds.

A study from scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey has found that 90 percent of rainwater samples from eight different locations along the Rockies contained plastics. Even more surprising, some of those sites are hardly frequented by humans at all. So how did microplastics find their way to those lofty heights?

Blame it on the rain. Or, more precisely, on tiny plastic particles that are shed into the atmosphere before hitching a ride back down on a raindrop.

The study, which focused mostly on sites between Denver and Boulder, Colorado, documented The frequent observation of plastic fibres in washout samples from the remote sites in Rocky Mountain National Park and suggests that wet deposition of plastic is "ubiquitous and not just an urban condition"; The microplastics found in rainwater are invisible to the naked eye, with researchers having to magnify samples 20 times to see them.

According to a recent study from Canada's University of Victoria, humans inadvertently eat 50,000 particles of microplastic every year

Until next month, I leave you with some thoughts by Toni Morrison, Nobel laureate, and my photo of a a soaring Northern Gannet



"At some point in life the world beauty becomes enough.

You don't need to photograph, paint or even remember it. It is enough."

-Toni Morrison

"IF YOU SURRENDERED TO THE AIR, YOU COULD RIDE IT."

- Toni Morrison

# HATS OFF TO SCOTT HEMLER

By Cheryl J. Jacobson

Last year when I asked for new volunteers to lead bird walks, Scott Hemler indicated a willingness to do so, although he felt like he was a beginner and was unsure of his skill. We reassured him that everyone on the walks helps spot and id the birds. Scott learned fast and has become a great leader. I have received many positive comments about how helpful he is on walks. He says he thoroughly enjoys leading the walks and that is obvious by his great smile and enthusiasm.

On our walk at Bassett Hall Nature Trail on August 10, 2019, we had 13 birders identify 31 species of birds. There were many comments from people about how they enjoyed the beautiful trail. Some said they planned to walk the trail again and would bring some family members. Several of the birders were new to the area and plan to attend WBC Meetings and join our Club.

The group especially enjoyed the Red-headed Woodpecker and seeing the trees where there is a nest cavity. At least two juveniles flew off as the group approached. (dingier brown version of adult). We also enjoyed a Great Blue Heron at the pond.

Won't you consider becoming a Bird Walk Leader? Please see my photos of walk participants, the Redheaded Woodpecker, and the Great Blue Heron.



BIRDERS SEEN ON BASSETT HALL NATURE TRAIL 8/10/19







Red-headed Woodpecker

#### BIRDS SEEN ON BASSETT HALL NATURE TRAIL 8/10/19

Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Great Blue Heron
Red-shouldered Hawk
Barred Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Pileated Woodpecker
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Acadian Flycatcher
Eastern Phoebe
Red-eyed Vireo
Blue Jay

American Crow

Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
White-breasted Nuthatch
Carolina Wren
Northern Mockingbird
Eastern Bluebird
American Robin
American Goldfinch
Eastern Towhee
Common Grackle
Common Yellowthroat
Pine Warbler
Yellow-throated Warbler
Summer Tanager
Northern Cardinal

# OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER UPCOMING PROGRAMS

On **October 16**, Dr. John Swaddle will return to update us on his continuing research into bird collision avoidance.

And on **November 20**, we are lucky enough to claim as our speaker Brian Taber. He will be sharing with us programs and information about CVWO and their 25th anniversary.

# THE BIRD CLUB GOES INTERNATIONAL

By Bill Williams

We take for granted that the Williamsburg Bird Club (WBC) has far-reaching influence. Now we can claim that reach extends into Central America. In April 2019 WBCcontributed a brand new pair of Nikon binoculars, toothbrushes and tooth paste, and a copy of the Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Northern Central America to the Community Cloud Forest Conservation in Coban, Guatemala. The dental supplies were provided by James A. Burden & Dr. Associates of Williamsburg. The binoculars had been a gift to the bird club from Dr. Tom Powers, Chairman of the Historic Virginia Land Conservancy, who in turn had received them from his father. Tom requested of the club that the optics find a useful home. We think they did as did the field guide, donated by Morrison's Flowers and Gifts of 'Williamsburg, and the oral care products.

Ornithology is one of the comprehensive educational environmental stewardship programs CCF provides for fourth though twelfth grade students from surrounding villages, with special interest in facilitating opportunities for young ladies.

Gloria, the young lady in the picture wearing the binoculars the WBC donated, is standing with CCF Director, Rob Cahill who is telling a group of about 50 fourth and fifth graders about the WBC gifts.

Gloria, in the 12 th grade, is one of the ornithology instructors and has plans to go to university to become a teacher. Also pictured are some fourth and fifth graders employing dental hygiene skills with supplies presented by the WBC.







GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER ALONG THE GREENSPRINGS INTERPRETIVE TRAIL

If you've just fledged there's nothing more enjoyable than sunbathing. That's what this hatch-year Great Crested Flycatcher was doing on the Green Springs Interpretive Trail boardwalk July 10.

Photo by Bill Williams

# **BREEDING BIRD ATLAS**

By George Martin, Field Trip Coordinator

The Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas project was started four years ago, with the goal of canvassing areas across the Commonwealth for breeding birds. The Williamsburg Bird Club agreed to survey 18 priority blocks for the Atlas in Region 11, which extends from Newport News west to the eastern suburbs of Richmond and south to the North Carolina border. Four of those priority blocks had not yet been surveyed.

On Saturday, May 18, the Club decided to use the normal field trip day to "bust those blocks". Eleven club members split into four teams to conduct the initial surveys for the four open blocks. And the results were quite impressive. On the priority blocks, 18 species were confirmed as breeders. Confirmation was based on an observed activity, such as adult birds sitting on a nest, adults carrying food, observing newly fledged hatchlings, etc. Similar observations were used to classify species as either "probable" breeders or, less definitively, "possible" breeders. The teams identified 15 species as "probable" breeders, and 33 species as "possible" breeders.

And there were a few interesting identifications. Two teams heard northern bobwhites calling. Two teams saw groups of Mississippi kites. A red-headed woodpecker was observed carrying food ("confirmed"!). Eleven warbler species were identified, two categorized as "probable" breeders. In total, the teams identified 78 species.

Many thanks to the team captains for organizing their teams for last Saturday's surveys. The team captains for each block, and the team members, are:

**Cheryl Jacobson**, Emporia SE, with **Geoff Giles, Cathy Millar, and Judy Jones** 

Rexanne Bruno, Purdy SE, with George Martin
Nancy Barnhart, Cherry Hill SE, with Shirley Devan and
Jan Lockwood

Bill Williams, Sebrell SE, with Tory Gussman

There will be followup surveys done at some point in the future to complete the surveys for these blocks. Dates and times haven't been set yet. If you're interested in participating, please contact George Martin <a href="mailto:(grm0803@gmail.com">(grm0803@gmail.com</a> or one of the team captains.

# **MORE BREEDING BIRD ATLAS**

By Cheryl Jacobson, President

I am very excited about the video link that updates everyone about the status of the Breeding Bird Atlast 2. (www. virginiabirds.org/home). The video info is at the top of the home page.

As you know, our Club has been supporting the Breeding Bird Atlas efforts through a club donation and hundreds of hours of observation and data entry. Next year will be the last breeding season (5th) for the project. Our Club volunteered to survey 18 blocks and all but five have been completed. Thank you everyone who has assisted in our blocks.

The project is providing a wealth of information about the breeding birds in Virginia. More than 200 species have been recorded across the commonwealth, with 190 so far being confirmed as breeders.

I hope you will watch the video and consider making a donation. I will be writing more about the project in my President's Corner in the future.

# June 8 Bird Walk Powhatan Creek Trail

Led by Nancy Barnhart

Hi friends. We had a fun, and basically dry, bird walk on Saturday at Powhatan Creek Trail. Eight folks took a chance on the weather and we lucked out. We tallied 49 species and observed some good breeding bird behavior; Acadian Flycatcher on a nest, recently fledged Hairy Woodpeckers, mating behavior between two Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Prothonotary Warblers around the nest boxes, nice looks at male and female Blue Grosbeaks, and this Yellow-throated Warbler which may have been taking this food to nestlings or maybe was just hungry!



# KIPTOPEKE CHALLENGE

By Dave Youker

We're also celebrating the 25thanniversary of the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (CVWO) which sponsors the KC. Help us celebrate our anniversary and have fun birding at the same time. The KC is a birding event that supports the habitat conservation, avian research and outreach mission of CVWO.

Our mission includes the Kiptopeke Hawkwatch, songbird research, Monarch tagging project, various avian nesting and butterfly studies, and a host of other programs all of which can be found on our website www.wildliferesearch. org.

For those unfamiliar with the KC, individuals are encouraged to form teams oftwo or more and participate in one of the four categories: 24-hour, 3-hour, Youth, and Special Venue.

Teams try to identify the greatest number of bird species on this day anywhere in the coastal plain of Virginia which has been defined as any area east of Interstate 95.

Explore new birding locations as a Special Venue, challenge another group or bird clubs in a 3-hour outing, or put in a full day of birding in the 24-hour category.

Teams are encouraged to gain supporters for this event, and 100 percent of all donations go directly to accomplishment of the CVWO mission.

Five birders from the Williamsburg Bird Club—Jan Lockwood, Nancy Barnhart, Barbara Neis, Sue Mutell, and Shirley Devan—will compete against other teams to find the most species of birds in a 24-hour period, September 28, 2019.

The Wandering Whimbrels–Brian Taber and Dave Youker –will be racing around the Shore as well.

We already know who the winner will be...CVWO!

CVWO has provided financial, volunteer and logistical support for songbird, diurnal raptor, and Monarch Butterfly research and education on the lower Delmarva Peninsula for the past 25 years. As autumn approaches, CVWO is sponsoring these programs:

- 43rd annual Kiptopeke Hawkwatch. Anna Stunkel will be on the platform for her fourth year. She'll be counting hawks September 1–November 30. Be sure to visit!
- CVWO's Monarch Butterfly migration studies will continue, providing crucial data for understanding the migration needs and patterns of this beleaguered species.

The value of these long-term studies cannot be overstated in view of climate change predictions, implementation of off-shore wind-energy technology, and potential



2018 Subadult Shorebirds



2018 Wild Birds Unlimited

changes in land use practices, to name only a few. CVWO needs your help to sustain these research efforts this fall and beyond. Through the Kiptopeke Challenge you can support CVWO and make a difference right away!

The Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (CVWO) is a non-profit organization whose mission is the protection of wildlife and habitats in coastal Virginia through field research, education, and land conservation. The CVWO is a 501(c)(3) organization; donations are tax deductible. The CVWO's new web site has additional information about its organization, programs, and research: www.vawildliferesearch.org

Please sponsor these Williamsburg teams. Please send your donation check, payable to CVWO, to:

- Shirley Devan for the Gulls Gone Wild, 6227 Tucker Landing, Wmsbg, VA 23188
- Brian Taber for his team,
   103 Exeter Court, Wmsbg, VA 23185

# YELLOWSTONE'S HARLEQUIN DUCKS

Story and Photo by Cathy Millar

Watching Harlequin Ducks on our winter field trips to the Chesapeake Bay is always one of the highlights of my birding year. In early June of this year, I got to see Harlequins again as they worked the white waters of Yellowstone River's LeHardy's Rapids that were flush with snowmelt runoff and at an elevation of about 7,730 feet. Harlequins inhabit two separate and distinct ranges: Pacific Coast and Atlantic Coast, with one documented exception in 2018, when a Pacific Coast Harlequin from Glacier National Park was found in Long Island. Yellowstone is thought to be the southernmost inland area where West Coast Harlequins migrate to breed. The female selects a life-long mate while still on the coast and in May, the male follows her inland to her natal stream where he guards her from other males while she probes the underwater rocks for insect larvae to build up sufficient fat resources for developing and laying eggs. Near the stream, the male helps her build a nest in a well-concealed depression on the ground lined with vegetation and down, but once she lays her three to seven eggs, the male departs for the coast for his annual molt, leaving her to incubate the eggs and raise the chicks on her own. The males' colorful plumage earned the species the name, Harlequin, a 16th to 17th century colorfully-dressed theatre clown and it could readily draw the attention of predators to the nest. There are only an estimated 20-24 Harlequin Duck pairs that breed in Yellowstone.

I arrived toward the end of their breeding season and saw only one female who'd apparently not yet nested and was accompanied by her mate as they fed in the rapids. Sunning on a rock in the middle of the rapids were three other males, who'd soon be heading back to the coast. The Harlequin is the only North American duck that requires fast-moving streams for part of its life. In September, after the hatchlings have mastered paddling techniques and learned to catch their own food on calmer backwaters, they and their mothers start making the 600-mile migration back to the Northwest Pacific coast. Wintering each year in often the exact same favored shallow rocky intertidal area, Harlequins find and reestablish bonds with their mates. A long-lived duck, the Harlequin can live up to 15 years.

Whereas the total Pacific population of Harlequins breeding in western North America and Asia is about 300,000, there are fewer than 15,000 breeding in eastern Canada, Greenland and Iceland in the Atlantic population. The ones we see on the Chesapeake seem to come primarily from a breeding population of fewer than 2,000 in Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, with the closest



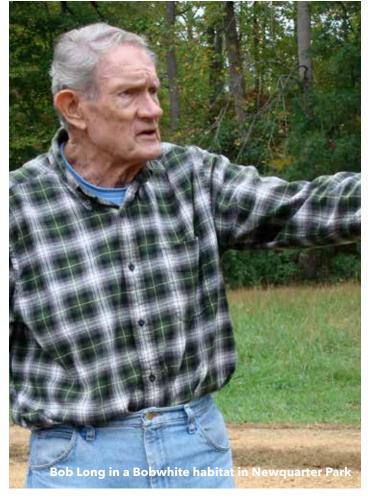
nesting population on the Gaspe Peninsula. They winter from Newfoundland to here in Virginia, with the majority wintering in the Gulf of Maine.

Harlequin populations are declining on both the West and East coast. Compared to other waterfowl, Harlequin Ducks have extremely low reproductive potential. The clutch of eggs is usually small and if the nest is predated or washed away by flooding (a more frequent occurrence with climate change), there is no chance of a second clutch because all the males have departed. It is estimated that only ten percent of hatchlings survive to the average breeding age of two for females and three for males with successful breeding remaining low until the age of five. Habitat loss from logging and human disturbance is a growing problem, especially since female Harlequins return only to their natal stream to breed. Oil spills on the west coast have killed many wintering Harlequins.

Watching the Yellowstone Harlequins diving and swimming against the turbulent current and preening on rocks was a joy to behold. An equally enthralled observer commented that some consider the Harlequin Duck to be the spirit animal of kayakers. They are definitely one of the many wonders of Yellowstone National Park, and I will always think of them when I see their East Coast counterparts on our Chesapeake Bay.

# IN MEMORY OF BOB LONG

Story and photo by Shirley Devan



Bob Long, a tireless, enthusiastic Bird Club member, former President, and a chief cheerleader, died August 11, 2019 in a local hospital. His wife, Cynthia, and his son Mike and daughter-in-law along with Jim and Joan Etchberger were with him.

A memorial service was held Saturday, August 17, 2019 at 3:00 pm at the United Methodist Church, 500 Jamestown Road.

Per the obituary, "Bob could fix anything and will be fondly remembered for his quick wit. He was a great husband, a great father, and very fun grandfather. Throughout his long life he enjoyed snow skiing, tennis, and many other sports. When he was too old for that he enjoyed reading, cycling, birding, and gardening with his wife Cynthia. He had a long career at NASA as a computer scientist and after retirement drove the Williamsburg Bookmobile."

Bob was President of the Bird Club in 2006 and 2007. He and his wife Cynthia were the driving force behind our awesome 2007 "Thirty Birdy Years" celebration and instrumental in establishing our long term ongoing relationship with New Quarter Park. They often would bike from their house in Queens Lake to the Bird Walks at the Park.

Bob was always eager to take his bluebird house off the post in his garden and show you what was inside and was proud of the nestlings their box produced.

Gary and Ann Carpenter recall that "Bob was the first Club president that Ann and I knew when we joined in 2006. Bob and Cynthia were both so very warm and welcoming

and such birding enthusiasts that we took to them immediately. Bob's interest in birding in general and the Club in particular was infectious. He was a delight to be around. He is already missed."

Bill Williams recounts that Bob was "a very dear man, doubly dear with Cynthia. Bob's spirited grace and dignity blessed all who were fortunate to share time with him. He made the world a richer place."

And thanks to Bob Long, Jeanette Navia got involved in the bird club!

The Bird Club and our community will miss him for a long time. Keep Cynthia and his family in your hearts.

The family requests that memorial contributions be made to the Williamsburg Bird Club, PO Box 1085, Williamsburg, VA 23187.

Rest in peace, Bob



# Williamsburg Bird Club PO Box 1085 WILLIAMSBURG 23187

