



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

January 2020

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Cheryl Jacobson



Happy New Year! This year promises to be a great year with the sponsorship of the Virginia Society of Ornithology Annual Meeting, completion of surveying for the 2nd Virginia Breeding

Bird Atlas, and continued focus on conservation. Mark your calendar for **March 14th**, when the [VABBA2](#) project will be hosting an all-day Atlas Kick-off meeting at [VDGIF](#) headquarters in Richmond. More information will follow.

We have some great programs coming up. I'm very pleased that Mike Bishop from the Northern Virginia Purple Martin Initiative will be presenting in March. Check out his Facebook posts at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/726154517544278/?multi_permaLinks=1415423978617325¬if_id=1576766945088716¬if_t=group_activity. Bishop recently posted this photo of Purple Martins at a refinery in Brazil where they go in the winter.



*Purple Martins, Brazil
Photo courtesy of
M. Bishop*

PROGRAMS

[Andrews Hall, Room 101, College of William and Mary](#), 7 pm

January 15: Speaker Bob Schamerhorn, [Alaska – "An EPIC Adventure"](#) (Click this link or see President's Corner, Page 5, for details.)



Spectacled Eider, photographed by Cheryl Jacobson in Alaska

February 19: Bird Rehabilitation. Joint meeting with the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists.

FIELD TRIPS

- **January 19:** Boat Trip to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Islands. Sign up immediately. See Page 3 for more information.
- **February 15:** [Dutch Gap Conservation Area](#), Chester. See Page 4 for more information.

BIRD WALKS

- **January 11:** College Creek Beach
- **January 25:** New Quarter Park
- **February 8:** Colonial Parkway/York River

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President's Corner (Continued)

One exciting aspect of Bishop's initiative is his goal of creating multiple use trails which include bluebird boxes, Purple Martin houses, and Chimney Swift towers. At York River State Park in the spring we will have bluebird boxes and a Purple Martin Colony, so let's set a goal of having a Chimney Swift Tower. Many areas have Eagle Scouts build their tower. Here is an example of a Chimney Swift Tower in North Carolina.



Why is it important to help Chimney Swifts?

- ***They are a helpful and unique bird***

Chimney Swifts are helpful neighbors, catching and eating insects as they fly through the air. They belong to a group of birds called "aerial insectivores." This means they eat insects while in flight. They can't perch, walk, or swim. Instead, they fly all day and roost in chimneys at night with special feet that are perfect for clinging to the vertical chimney wall. Watching a group of Chimney Swifts dive into a chimney is a stunning spectacle! Perhaps you have seen this in Colonial Williamsburg near the Peanut Shop. They nest inside chimneys as well, with only one pair occupying a given chimney at a time. Hosting swifts provides them with much-needed habitat – and it doesn't damage the chimney.

(Continued on Page 3, right column)

BOAT TRIP TO CHESAPEAKE BAY BRIDGE TUNNEL ISLANDS

By George Martin

WBC is sponsoring a boat trip to the CBBT islands on Sunday, January 19, 2020. Geoff Giles has chartered the *Bay Princess*, a large, comfortable boat, for this eye-level look at bay ducks, sea ducks, shorebirds, raptors, and more! Dan Cristol will be the lead on the boat, identifying and recording the species observed. This trip has frequently given the group some views of and photo ops of Humpbacked Whales and Harbor Seals.



Surf Scoter, Photo by Judy Jones

Birding and photo opportunities should be very good from the boat. The boat will likely go as far as Fisherman Island near the Eastern

Shore, and then out to the capes near the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay if the birds are there. The CBBT area tends to have smoother water than ocean trips, with many of the same exciting views of birds. It will be possible to do some birding from the warm, dry cabin, but the best views and photo opportunities will be from outside on deck. Clothing that protects against wind and dampness is highly recommended. The boat has ample heated cabin space with seating and table, and it's equipped with rest rooms.

Meet at the *Bay Princess's* dock by 8:30 a.m. for a 9 a.m. sailing, or those who wish to carpool should gather at the Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Road and leave there no later than 7:30 a.m. The dock, at Lynnhaven Inlet, is at 3311 Shore Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23451.

(Continued on Page 4, left column)



Black Scoter, Photo by Judy Jones

President's Corner (Continued from Page 2)

• **Chimney Swifts are losing their homes**

Unfortunately, the Chimney Swift is declining rapidly in North America. Its population has decreased by more than 90% since 1970 according to the *North American Breeding Bird Survey*, and the bird has been listed as a Threatened Species in Canada. In fact, the Chimney Swift belongs to one of the most imperiled groups of birds in the continent.

One of the factors involved in this decline is habitat loss. For their population to endure, Chimney Swifts need habitat in North America to return to from their wintering sites in South America. Chimney Swifts used to nest and roost inside of dead, hollow trees, but as people replaced forests with cities and towns, these birds adapted to using our chimneys instead. Now, the swifts are losing these too. Many traditional chimneys are being torn down or replaced with models that swifts can't use. Chimney Swifts do most of their living in the air, but they must come to earth to breed. Historically, they nested in tree cavities, but lacking old trees with suitable holes for nesting, swifts long ago turned to chimneys. Today, deterioration of brick chimneys and homeowners' increasing use of chimney caps are limiting available nest sites.

• **How and where to look for Chimney Swifts**

Chimney Swifts have a cigar-shaped body with long, narrow, curved wings. Their flight pattern is rapid, with nearly constant wing beats, often twisting from side to side and banking erratically. Many times you'll hear them with a distinctive, high chittering call while in flight before you see them.

Because Chimney Swifts congregate in communal roosts before migrating in late summer/fall, it's relatively easy to see them. Look for tall brick chimneys that are uncapped like those in historic buildings. You can observe the roost starting about 30 minutes before sunset until 10 minutes after the last swift enters the chimney.

(Continued on Page 5, left column)

CBBT Islands Boat Trip (Continued)

The captain plans to return the boat to the dock at 1 p.m. The seafood restaurant at the dock prepares a fine meal for those interested in lunch after the boat returns.



The cost for the trip is \$30 per person. Please send your check, payable to "Williamsburg Bird Club," to: Club Treasurer, Attention: Ann

Carpenter, PO Box 764, Lightfoot, VA 23090. **Please include your email address and cell phone number!**

Note that around January 5, if space on the boat is not filled, we will open the trip to others outside the WBC, Historic Rivers Master Naturalists, and the Hampton Roads Bird Club. For additional information, please contact George Martin at grm0803@gmail.com, or by phone at 757-920-5403. Or pull up the [WBC website](#). 🐦

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP TO DUTCH GAP CONSERVATION AREA

Save the Date: WBC will make a field trip to Dutch Gap near Richmond on **Saturday, February 15**. This conservation area is usually a very good place to spot wintering ducks, including Ring-necked Ducks, Wood Ducks, Pintail, and Gadwall. Last year, Club members spotted four Redheads during our trip.

We'll meet at Dutch Gap at 9 AM. The address is 341 Henricus Park Rd., Chester, VA 23836. Information on the leader and possible carpooling arrangements will be provided separately. 🐦



COASTAL VIRGINIA WILDLIFE OBSERVATORY CELEBRATES ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY

By Cathy Millar

Our November speaker was Brian Taber, who has been president of the non-profit CVWO for the last 17 years. This is the 25th anniversary of CVWO's proudly fulfilling its mission of protecting wildlife through field research, education, and habitat conservation. Brian reported on the many programs, past and present, centered around raptor, waterbird, songbird, and butterfly research conducted throughout Virginia's coastal area. He is proud of the many partnerships CVWO has established to accomplish the mission including cities, colleges, Master Naturalists, scout clubs, civic organizations, the National Park Service, and Monarch Watch, to name a few. The work is done not only by skilled biologists but also by volunteers, many of whom are our very own WBC members. Our Bill Williams was CVWO's first president. Also, thanks to your dues, WBC helps support the important work of CVWO by making an annual donation to the organization. The WBC Board has nominated CVWO for the *Jackson M. Abbott Conservation Award* to be presented to the selected recipient at the VSO 2020 Annual Meeting in Williamsburg this coming May. To further celebrate this anniversary, Brian Taber has published a collection of illustrated essays he has written: *Riding the Wind: A Birder's Ups and Downs*. For more about CVWO, please visit their wonderful colorful and informative [website](#). 🐦

WBC MEMBERSHIP

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

John Oakley
Janet Winslow

Current Members: A membership form is included in this newsletter (Page 9) if you have not already renewed for 2020. Marking the form to indicate that you wish to receive the newsletter only by email saves WBC money and paper. 🐦

President's Corner (Continued from Page 3)

• **Migration and Breeding**

Chimney Swifts are long-distance migrants and form large flocks as they prepare for their fall migration. At dusk, groups of up to 10,000 swifts may circle in a spectacular tornado-like display before finally funneling inside a large chimney to rest for the night. They winter in Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Columbia, and Brazil. In the spring when they return to the eastern United States and into southeastern Canada, mated birds weave a loose nest of twigs inside a chimney or other vertical surface, using their sticky saliva to hold the nest in place. Male and female share in the work of caring for eggs and nestlings, sometimes with the help of an unmated bird.

In Virginia, Chimney Swifts typically nest between June and August, so even if the birds are noisy, the noise is short-lived! The swift parents build a cup of sticks, glued together with their own saliva, that attaches directly to the inside chimney wall. In a typical house chimney, there is usually only one nesting pair. Chimney Swifts can only build nests in chimneys with inner walls made of stone, firebrick, or masonry flue tiles with mortared joints.

Chimney Swifts may take up residence in your brick chimney if you leave the chimney cap off. It's a good idea to keep the damper closed during summer and to schedule chimney cleanings either before or after the breeding season. If you don't have a chimney, you can build a swift nesting tower with plans from the [North American Chimney Swift Nest Site Research Project](#).

Another Great Meeting:

Our January meeting will be Bob Schamerhorn presenting about the birds of Alaska. Bob has been a great friend to our Club and has presented many times. Of course, he will have wonderful photos. The birds of Alaska are wonderful, especially in June in their breeding plumage. One of my favorite trips was to Alaska and the Arctic Circle. See my photo (Page 1) of the Spectacled Eider that I took there in breeding plumage. *(Continued in right column)*

Guatemala in 2020:

After seeing the great photos and trip information about Community Cloud Forest Conservation and Guatemala birds presented by Dave Youker and Bill Williams, are you ready to go? Join Tory and me for the trip March 23-April 3. If interested, email David Farner at guatzal18@gmail.com.

Hats off to The Center for Conservation Biology and its 2019 Annual Report:

I have recently received the CCB *Annual Report* in the mail and am so impressed with the quality of writing and research being done by the Center. The Director, Dr. Bryan Watts, will be the speaker at the VSO Annual Meeting May 1-3 hosted by our WBC. His words are beautiful and inspiring. You can sign up for the report at their website at: <https://ccbbirds.org/>. Also, the report will be posted on their website and you can read details of their work there. Many of our programs have been provided by Dr. Watts and his staff, so we are well aware of their "hard-won" skills.


I quote Dr. Watts:

Fieldwork enjoins us to the rhythm of life -- the gluttony and flights of springs, the eggs and young of summer, the leisurely flights of fall and the tests of survival during winter. The flow of the seasons pulls us inextricably into the current. There are few privileges more gratifying than to work day to day with species in the habitats where they live and to use hard-won skills to answer the many questions that impact their future.

There are many ways of contributing to the conservation mission. Find the path that suits you and help us make a more sustainable world.

Thought for the New Year:

I have shared this poem with you before but wish to do so again as it seems so important for a new year and 2020. Let us strive to heal the world through joy and find our path to help make a more sustainable world.

Once upon a time, when women were birds, there was the simple understanding that to sing at dawn and to sing at dusk was to heal the world through joy. The birds still remember what we have forgotten, that the world is meant to be celebrated. — **Terry Tempest Williams** 

2019 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT SUMMARY

By Jim Corliss

The results of our 2019 Christmas Bird Count on December 15 are still being compiled, but we've already uncovered some interesting results. First of all, participation in the bird count was outstanding. We've received data from over 120 participants so far. Some feeder watcher reports are still coming in, so it's possible we'll beat our record of 133 participants that we set in 2016 and 2017.

As far as birds are concerned, the species count is currently at 113. That's a little better than our 43-year average of 109 species. The most unusual finds this year were:

- A Yellow-throated Warbler photographed in Kingsmill. This is only our second CBC record of that species, which is presumably the same bird that was at the same house during last year's CBC.
- A Horned Lark that the Jamestown team found appears to be our first record ever in the CBC.
- A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher found by the Jamestown team is only the 6th time we've found that species in 43 years.
- Two Lesser Yellowlegs found at Mainland Farm on Saturday the 14th is only the 5th time in 43 years we've observed that species. Although these two birds were nowhere to be seen on the actual count day, we can still include them in our data as "Count Week" species!

The high counts this year (so far) are:

- 7 American White Pelicans observed by the Hog Island team. Our previous high count was 3 last year.
- 296 Forster's Terns. The previous high count was 254 in 2001.
- 78 Brown Pelicans. The previous high count was 49 in 2008.

We'll provide a more complete summary of the CBC results in the February newsletter after all of the data have been compiled, but we already know that this year's count was a huge success thanks to everyone's dedication and hard work. Thank you for your participation! 🐦



CBC CHEZ FLANAGAN

By Catherine Flanagan

Since joining the bird club, the Audubon Christmas Bird Count has become a tradition for me. I invite family, friends, and neighbors to stop by my house for help with bird ID or just to enjoy tea and conversation. I frequently get 15-20 species at my feeders. The birds are always beautiful and entertaining. It's hard not to feel happy when you see a half-dozen bluebirds at a time. This year there were fewer birds, but we did see some nice variety. The combined tallies from my feeder watchers (all in my neighborhood) resulted in 25 species reported and 134 individual birds counted. Downy, Hairy, and Red-bellied woodpeckers were noted, as well as the Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Siskin, Pine Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Brown Thrasher, and Eastern Towhee. There were no shortages of cardinals, bluebirds, chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, and White-throated Sparrows.

I highly recommend starting a Christmas Bird Count tradition of your own. It's an engaging citizen science activity for all ages. More importantly, as it explains on the Audubon [website](#), the data we collect contribute greatly to our understanding of how bird populations are changing and what we can do to protect them and their habitat. Happy Holidays! 🐦



*Yellow-throated Warbler
Photo by Jim Booth*

REPORTED BIRD SIGHTINGS

We want to know what you're seeing in your yard and travels. Please share with Club members by sending your sightings and photos to Mary Ellen Hodges at me.hodges@cox.net.

Members reported these sightings since Thanksgiving 2019.

Cheryl J. Jacobson: "I hope you got to travel to see family during the Holidays and perhaps enjoy some birds you don't usually see. For me, I usually go to Florida for Thanksgiving to see my son and we do some birding together. We keep our eyes scanning the sky for **Snail Kites** and I am always in hopes of getting some photos. This year I was successful.



Snail Kite
Photo by Cheryl Jacobson

If this species is new to you, here is some information. The U.S. population of Snail Kites is estimated at 1,000 birds and is listed as endangered both federally and in

Florida. Snail Kites feed almost entirely on freshwater apple snails. They have a delicate, strongly curved bill that fits inside the snail shells to pull out the juicy prey inside. Much of the Snail Kite's habitat has been drained, other parts inundated to depths that suit neither snails nor their namesake kites. Water quality has declined and with it, Snail Kite populations have declined as well."

Jan Lockwood: A First Year Male **Baltimore Oriole** has been visiting the feeders in Jan's yard since December 11. He is partial to Bark Butter Balls and came in search of them during the Christmas Bird Count on December 15. An adult **Red-shouldered Hawk** was seen monitoring the bird feeders in Jan's yard on December 10. His back was turned but the other birds didn't believe his apparent indifference. They were nowhere to be seen. (Continued on Page 8)

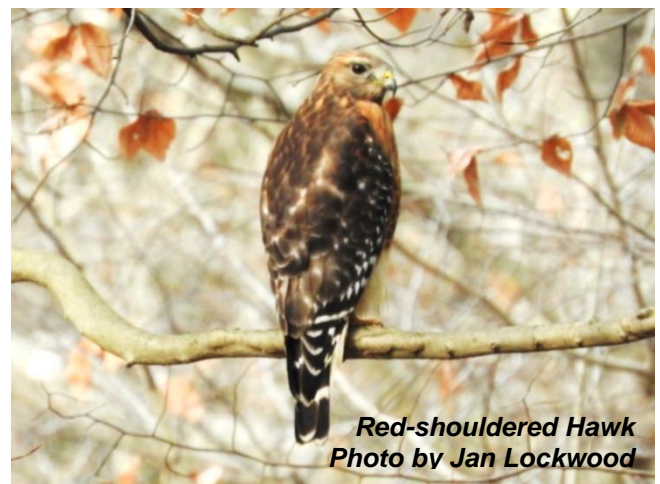
CDR SEED DONATION PROJECT

By Gary Carpenter

We have heard before about how the feeders at Child Development Resources benefit "stressed" children by calming them as they watch birds "up close and personal" at their feeders. Here is an anecdote that was passed along to us in mid-December. Marilyn Canaday, playroom supervisor and "seed filler" at the CDR reported that "... recently our coordinator ... of the CDR program came in to assist us with the children. She happened to work closely with a little girl who was having great difficulty separating from her mother. They watched the birds together to calm her and afterwards, she raved about how important the birds are to our little friends. I so AGREE!" So I think as members of the Williamsburg Bird Club we can be proud of our CDR Seed Donation project and agree that is a benefit to our community. 🐦



Baltimore Oriole
Photo by Jan Lockwood



Red-shouldered Hawk
Photo by Jan Lockwood

Reported Bird Sightings (Continued)



Catherine Flanagan:

Catherine reported that a **Barred Owl** perched for a long time on her deck railing on December 21.

Jim Booth: "I have kept feeders at my kitchen window for years: a two-tube seed feeder and a suet basket. In the summer, I take them down and just keep my yard

feeders filled. I know that it is time to rehang the window feeders again when I observe a bird fly directly at the window, stop in midair, and try to act like a helicopter, before elevating and landing on the roof of the bay window to look around for the feeders. He/She is a returner to my yard.

For the past two years, 2018 & 2019, I have also been able to observe a male **Yellow-throated Warbler** (photo, Page 6) who arrives at the window feeder about mid-December. In 2018 it took me a few days to identify the bird, which I finally did on December 14. This year, 2019, I was watching for him and recorded his presence on December 9. Both years, I was able to document his presence on the day of the Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count.

Feeder visits are usually brief and hard to photograph. Sometimes the warbler goes to the suet feeder, and sometimes to the seed feeder. As with other bird visitors, longer and more frequent visits depend on the weather. Colder weather brings more birds to the yard and longer stays at the feeders. Hopefully, the Yellow-throated Warbler will survive and continue to visit my yard for more years." 🐦

RECENT BIRD WALKS

Jan Lockwood reports that, overall, the woods and Queens Creek were quiet on **November 23** as fourteen birders searched for our area's winter birds who've recently returned to spend the colder months in **New Quarter Park**. The birders were thrilled to see their first two Red-headed Woodpeckers of the season, a Hermit Thrush gave everyone great looks as it perched pumping its tail, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets flitted through the hollies granting the group only fleeting looks, alas. A solitary Bufflehead flew by, the Ring-billed Gulls had replaced the Laughing Gulls at the Queens Lake Marina, and the birders heard Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and found a few White-throated Sparrows and Yellow-rumped Warblers. The trees compensated with a display of glorious color.

On **December 28** eleven birders gathered at **New Quarter Park** for the last walk of the "twenty teens," reports **Nancy Barnhart**. It was a beautiful day, a little quiet in the bird world, but the group was able to see or hear 30 species. The little Ruby-crowned Kinglets were a big hit as was a female Belted Kingfisher "tenderizing" a large fish she was attempting to tame before eating! 🐦

CALENDAR

JAN 11	Bird Walk, College Creek Beach
JAN 15	Monthly Meeting, Birds of Alaska
JAN 19	Boat Trip, CCBT Islands
JAN 25	Bird Walk, New Quarter Park
FEB 8	Bird Walk, Colonial Parkway/York R.
FEB 10	WBC Board Meeting
FEB 15	Field Trip, Dutch Gap Conservation Area
FEB 19	Monthly Meeting, Bird Rehabilitation
FEB 22	Bird Walk, New Quarter Park
MAR 14	VABBA2 Kick-off Meeting, VDGIF



2020 Williamsburg Bird Club Membership Form

Name		
Address		
City	State	Zip
Email	Phone	

_____ Please send me the full color version of the newsletter by email at my email address above.

_____ Please mail the black-and-white hard copy version of the newsletter to my home address above.

Membership _____ New _____ Renewing

_____ Individual \$20

_____ Family \$25

_____ Patron \$35

_____ Student \$5

I wish to make a contribution to:

\$_____ the Ruth Beck & Bill Sheehan Ornithological Research Grants Fund for W&M Students

\$_____ the Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarship Fund

\$_____ the Child Development Resources Seed/Feeder Fund

Make your check payable to the Williamsburg Bird Club and mail to:

Williamsburg Bird Club
P.O. Box 1085
Williamsburg, VA 23187

Your membership dues and additional contributions are important to the mission of the Williamsburg Bird Club. Thank you!

If you have questions about your membership, contact Membership Chair Jeanette Navia,
jnavia@gmail.com

The Williamsburg Bird Club is exempt from federal income tax under 26 U.S.C. Section 501(c)(3) and is a non-profit organization eligible to receive tax deductible donations.

A financial statement is available on request from the VA Office of Charitable and Regulatory Programs



Williamsburg Bird Club
PO Box 1085
Williamsburg, VA 23187

ANNUAL DONATIONS FROM OUR LOCALLY-OWNED BIRD STORES

The Williamsburg Bird Club wishes to express our gratitude to our locally-owned Bird Stores, Wild Birds Unlimited and Backyard Birder Seed & Supply, for their generous donations each year to the Club. Their contributions help sustain WBC's annual commitment to provide funds for the Ornithology Research Grants given annually to graduate students at the College of William and Mary as well as support other Club projects and activities.

PLEASE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT OUR LOCALLY-OWNED BIRD STORES & FELLOW WBC MEMBERS

Backyard Birder



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/>



Wild Birds Unlimited (located in Williamsburg at Settler's Market in New Town) supports the WBC by donating to the club an amount equal to 5% of the pre-tax amount spent in the store by WBC members each year. Please inform them you are a WBC member during checkout. <https://williamsburg.wbu.com/>