



# The Flyer

## Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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[www.williamsburgbirdclub.org](http://www.williamsburgbirdclub.org)

February 2020

### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Cheryl Jacobson



#### **First Bird of the Year/My Year of the Owl:**

Remember, Virginia is for Lovers, so welcome to Valentine's Day in Virginia. Last February I wrote about the symbolic attachments

to various bird species in relation to Love. This year I am thinking about symbolism and birds in a broader context. I will begin with the first bird of the year. What was your first bird in 2020?

Perhaps next month you could submit a photo to the newsletter of that species along with a short informational note. My first bird of 2020 was a Barred Owl who woke me with his wonderful message that it is a New Year at 4:58 a.m. on January 1. I plan to see as many of the owl species in Virginia that I can this year.

#### **Symbolism of the Owl**

Ted Andrews, the author of *Animal Speak*, says that Native American groups have differing views of the owl. While the Pawnee thought of the owl as a symbol of protection, the Ojibwa saw it as an omen of death, although possibly not real death but rather changes that were about to occur in a person's life.

The owl was sacred to the Greek goddess of learning, Athena, and is even depicted on some Greco-Roman currency as a symbol of status, intelligence and, of course, wealth. According to myth, an owl sat on Athena's blind side so that she could see the whole truth. In Ancient Greece, the owl was a symbol of a higher wisdom. In ancient Egyptian, Celtic, and Hindu cultures the symbolic meaning of the owl revolved around guardianship of the underworlds, and a protection of the dead.

(Continued on Page 2, right column)

### PROGRAMS

[Andrews Hall, Room 101, College of William and Mary](https://www.williamsburgbirdclub.org/wp-content/uploads/ParkingPass2019-20.pdf), 7 pm.

Download W&M parking permit for use during meetings here:

<https://www.williamsburgbirdclub.org/wp-content/uploads/ParkingPass2019-20.pdf>

**February 19:** Aware (Alliance of Wild Animal Rehabilitators & Educators) representatives Colleen Harlow and Deb Woodward will talk about their work, accompanied by some of their Animal Ambassadors: Barred Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl, American Kestrel, Mallard Duck, and Red-shouldered Hawk. Joint meeting with the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists.

**March 18:** Mike Bishop from the Northern Virginia Purple Martin Initiative.

### FIELD TRIPS

• **February 15:** Dutch Gap Conservation Area, Chester. See Page 5 for more information.

### BIRD WALKS

- **February 8:** Colonial Parkway/York River. See Page 5 for more information
- **February 28:** New Quarter Park
- **March 14:** York River State Park



### GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

The 23rd annual Great Backyard Bird Count will be held **Friday, February 14, through Monday, February 17, 2020**. More than 160,000 people in over 100 countries participate in this citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds. Scientists use GBBC data to understand what is happening to bird populations worldwide. To learn how you can contribute to the GBBC, visit <https://gbbc.birdcount.org/>.

## WBC EXECUTIVE BOARD 2020

<b>President</b> Cheryl Jacobson	303-519-0989 <a href="mailto:icheryljoy@aol.com">icheryljoy@aol.com</a>
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## COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS 2020

<b>Membership/Webmaster</b> Jeanette Navia	757-707-3345 <a href="mailto:jnavia@gmail.com">jnavia@gmail.com</a>
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## President's Corner (Continued)

An owl symbolizes intuition, transition, wisdom, silence, observation, quick wit, independence, power, intelligence, and protection. Its ability to see in the dark endows it with the energies of the moon and night, as well as makes it symbolic of mystery and hidden knowledge.



### Eastern Screech-Owl

My favorite owl of this month has been the one in my photo, an Eastern Screech-Owl. As stated on The Cornell Lab website, *All About Birds*:

If a mysterious trill catches your attention in the night, bear in mind the spooky sound may come from an owl no bigger than a pint glass. Common east of the Rockies in woods, suburbs, and parks, the Eastern Screech-Owl is found wherever trees are, and they're even willing to nest in backyard nest boxes. These supremely camouflaged birds hide out in nooks and tree crannies through the day, so train your ears and listen for them at night.

**Find This Bird** - Listen in wooded areas at night for the trills and whinnies of this vocal owl. Your best chance of seeing an Eastern Screech-Owl may be to listen for the excited voices of songbirds mobbing an owl they have found. You can also look closely at tree cavities; especially on cold sunny days, you may see the owl sunning sleepily in the entrance.

**Backyard Tips** - Eastern Screech-Owls readily accept nest boxes; consider putting one up to attract a breeding pair. These owls also use birdbaths and will visit them to drink and bathe.

### Cool Facts -

- Like most raptors, male Eastern Screech-Owls are smaller than females, and are more agile fliers and hunters. The female doesn't hunt while on the nest; she and the chicks depend on food brought them by the male. Though the male is smaller, his voice is deeper than the female's.

(Continued on Page 4)

## **VOLUNTEER TO HELP WITH THE VSO ANNUAL MEETING, MAY 1-3, 2020**

*By Rexanne Bruno*

The Williamsburg Bird Club is hosting the Virginia Society of Ornithology Annual Meeting on May 1-3, 2020 at the Fort Magruder Hotel & Conference Center. WBC has hosted this meeting a half dozen times in the past; the last time was in 1995.



The VSO exists to encourage the systematic study of birds in Virginia, to stimulate interest in birds, and to assist in the conservation of wildlife and other natural resources. VSO members' interests in birds range from those who watch birds at their feeders to professional ornithologists. Most members enjoy getting out to see birds and supporting the mission of the VSO. VSO Membership is open to anyone. Among other things, the VSO organizes several field trips for members every year to places like Chincoteague, the Outer Banks, Virginia Beach, and the Eastern Shore, and it holds an annual meeting somewhere in the state every spring.

Members of the WBC formed an Annual Meeting Planning Committee and have been working on hosting the 2020 meeting since May 2018. Many thanks to these bird club members serving as Committee Chairs: Rexanne Bruno, Planning Chair; Ann Carpenter, Finance & Registration Chair; Nancy Barnhart, Field Trip Chair; Shirley Devan, Publicity Chair; Cheryl Jacobson, Program and also Exhibits Chair; and Judy Jones, Raffle Chair. These committees have done an excellent job preparing for the meeting. Now, as the time for the meeting draws near, we need volunteers from our Club to help make this meeting a success.

We need people to sell raffle tickets on Friday and Saturday, particularly during the cocktail receptions on Friday and Saturday evenings (May 1 & 2). Some great raffle prizes have been donated by local vendors and others across the state. Please consider helping out for an hour or two on Friday or Saturday; the tickets sell themselves when people find out what is

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available as raffle prizes. So, you just have to take their money in exchange for raffle tickets and turn the money into the Raffle Committee Chair before you leave.

If you want to volunteer but would rather not sell raffle tickets (or aren't available that weekend), we need help a week or so before the meeting preparing the meeting registration packets. This simply involves putting attendees' banquet tickets, raffle tickets that they've purchased when they registered, and copies of meeting materials (meeting program, list of exhibitors, scientific paper session schedule of speakers, keynote speaker biography, etc.) in individual envelopes with attendees' names affixed. We are promoting a 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' theme for the meeting so hopefully many attendees will opt to have these materials electronically delivered to their smartphones rather than receiving printed copies in registration packets. So, if VSO members support this effort, this task will be quick and easy as there won't be much to put in very many attendee registration packets.

We will also need volunteers to staff the Registration Desk on Friday afternoon and Saturday. This will just involve handing out these Registration packets as attendees arrive. You would only be expected to work for a couple of hours at a time.

Lastly, we may need a few people to help with field trip logistics. That may involve leading a caravan of field trip participants to meet their trip leader (as some trip leaders are not from Williamsburg and live closer to the field trip destination) or helping participants find their trip leader in the lobby or parking lot on Saturday or Sunday morning.

If you can help us make this meeting a success by volunteering, please email me ([rexannebruno@gmail.com](mailto:rexannebruno@gmail.com)). Include your name, telephone number and what you can help with. 🐦



## President's Corner (Continued)

- Screech-owls regurgitate the bones, fur, and feathers of their prey in an oval pellet, usually once or twice a day. The ground beneath habitual owl roosts can be littered with pellets, and you can learn a lot from them about the owl's diet. However, data from pellets may underestimate the number of soft-bodied animals, like worms and insects, the owl has eaten.
- Red and gray individuals occur across the range of the Eastern Screech-Owl, with about one-third of all individuals being red.
- Eastern Screech-Owl pairs usually are monogamous and remain together for life. Some males, however, will mate with two different females. The second female may evict the first female, lay her own eggs in the nest, and incubate both clutches.
- The Eastern Screech-Owl is known to eat a variety of songbirds, including the European Starling. Despite this fact, the starling regularly displaces the owl from nesting sites and takes over the hole to raise its own brood.
- Nestling screech-owls fight fiercely among themselves for food, and sometimes even kill their smallest sibling. This behavior, known as siblicide, is not uncommon among birds such as hawks, owls, and herons, and is often a result of poor breeding conditions in a given year.
- The oldest recorded Eastern Screech-Owl in the wild was at least 14 years, 6 months old when it was found in Ontario in 1968, the same province where it had been banded in 1955.

## Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel:

Have you ever seen a Gull-billed Tern? At the same time that [North America has lost 1 out of every 4 birds](#), the HRBT expansion threatens thousands of birds. Part of that project included paving over the South Island, which was critical habitat for a host of seabirds. The HRBT colony is comprised of the state threatened Gull-billed Tern as well as Royal Terns, Sandwich Terns, Common Terns, Black Skimmers, and a variety of gull species. Several historic colony sites in Virginia have been completely lost and numbers of all of these birds in Virginia have been declining for years. According to the American

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Bird Conservancy, unless we take action quickly to create new habitat for these displaced birds, "more than 20,000 Royal Terns and other waterbirds will return to the Hampton Roads area this spring to find they have nowhere to nest."

## Boat Trip:

The Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel islands boat trip was a great success with the opportunity to see hundreds of wonderful birds. I want to thank Geoff Giles, who established the trip years ago, and George Martin, who has continued the tradition. Also, thanks to Dan Cristol, who led the trip, and Wes Teets, who completed the eBird list.



*CBBT Islands Boat Trip, Dan Cristol in red, Wes Teets in jeans. Photo by Lisa Nickel.*

## VSO Annual Meeting:

Rexanne Bruno is chairing the organizational committee for the May 1-3 Virginia Society of Ornithology Annual Meeting and is doing an outstanding job. Please see her article in this newsletter requesting volunteers from our Club. We need many hands to assure success.

## Support Your Club's Work/Pay Your Dues:

WBC is very involved in important projects impacting birds, including the final year of the Breeding Bird Survey, establishment of Purple Martin colonies, the VSO 2020 Annual Meeting, addressing the HRBT expansion, and Nature Camp, just to name a few. Please pay your dues in support of all of our projects as well as fun field trips and bird walks (see form on Page 9).

I leave you with this thought from Chief Seattle:  
Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect. 🐦

## **FEBRUARY 8TH - WINTER DUCKS ON THE YORK RIVER**

*By Shirley Devan*

Join us February 8, 2020 for the 2nd Saturday Bird Walk - actually a drive - as Shirley Devan leads us down the Colonial Parkway from Williamsburg to Yorktown to check out the York River and the wintering ducks and swans. Recent local reports include Redhead and Bufflehead ducks, swans, Ruddy Ducks, loons, Horned Grebes, and Common Goldeneye. NOTE: The York River hosts different ducks than those seen on the recent boat trip in the Chesapeake Bay or what we expect to see at Dutch Gap on February 15th. With these three expeditions, you can add quite a few ducks to your year list!

Meet the group at 8 am at the Marquis Shopping Center just off Route 199 and Interstate 64 (not our usual Colony Square parking lot). We'll park in the side parking lot beside Target. Dress warmly and bring water and snacks. If you have a spotting scope, please bring it.

We'll bird until 12 pm, depending on how good the birds are, ending up at Yorktown where we'll check out the beach as well to see what's hanging around the fishing pier and under the bridge. Walking will be minimal until we get to Yorktown. Then we'll probably park and walk along the Riverwalk to check for birds between the Coleman Bridge and the Fishing Pier (about 1/4 mile). Carpooling is recommended because of limited parking in a few of the pullouts. You can peel off whenever you wish, but keep this in mind when forming carpools. See you there! 🐦

## **FIELD TRIP TO DUTCH GAP CONSERVATION AREA, FEBRUARY 15**

*By George Martin*

The Club's February field trip will be on Saturday, February 15, 2020 to [Dutch Gap Conservation Area](#) in Chester, VA. Rose Ryan will lead us in search of winter ducks and sparrows. Sightings recorded in eBird January 20-22 included Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, and American Wigeon. *(Continued in right column)*

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For those who want to carpool, let's meet at the Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Road at 7:40 AM for a departure time of 7:50 AM sharp. For those who wish to drive themselves, the destination address is 341 Henricus Park Road, Chester, VA 23836. There, we will meet in the free public parking lot. There are restrooms available. We plan to bird until around noon. If the weather looks bad, we'll cancel. Spotting scopes are quite useful at Dutch Gap. If you have one, please bring it! 🐦

## **ALASKA, BOB SCHAMERHORN'S EPIC ADVENTURE**

*By Cathy Millar*

Sixty-two attendees at our first meeting of 2020 enjoyed an enthralling presentation of Alaska's splendors via Bob Schamerhorn's superb photos and videos, frequently accompanied by sound track. Bob and his wife were part of a small group of photographers who traveled via van, small boat, and float plane to remote areas at the end of July and the first week of August. Photo-graphers like to make use of all available day- light, and they had to pace themselves to prevent exhaustion because night time lasted only 3 ½ to 4 hours. Bob admitted that Alaska is not the birdiest place, but he had wonderful photos of his target birds including Horned and Tufted puffin, Common Murre, Rhinoceros Auklet, Pigeon Guillemot, and Varied Thrush. He reported how thrilling it was to see birds—such as the Red-necked Grebe, White-crowned Sparrow, and Common Loon—that we see here only in winter that were in their full breeding plumage and often accompanied by chicks. His presentation also featured dramatic landscapes, glaciers, utterly adorable sea otters, humpback whales, Steller sea lions and harbor seals. His photos of a mother brown bear nursing her cubs and teaching them how to dig for giant clams and cubs at play were unforgettable. Throughout the program, Bob's passion for nature and photo-graphy was evident. This was one of several programs that Bob Schamerhorn has delivered over the years, and our club is most grateful for his generosity. 🐦

## RESULTS FROM THE 2019 WILLIAMSBURG CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

*By Jim Corliss*

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on December 15, 2019. This was the 43<sup>rd</sup> CBC for our bird club, and we highlighted it with 151 people contributing count data—the highest number of participants in our CBC history! The previous record number of participants was 133 in both 2016 and 2017. The number of feeder-watchers was the highest we've ever had at 78, and it's interesting to note how the tally of the backyard bird species listed below set records this year (previous high counts shown in parentheses).

- 213 Red-bellied Woodpeckers (210)
- 458 Carolina Chickadees (450)
- 319 Carolina Wrens (294)
- 454 Eastern Bluebirds (436)
- 55 Pine Warblers (54)
- 619 Northern Cardinals (500)

We observed 113 species this year and a total of slightly over 33,000 individual birds. Speaking of feeder-watchers, it was a local backyard that produced the one species sighted this year that we've never observed previously in our CBC—a Black-chinned Hummingbird that was frequenting a feeder in our Cheatham Annex sector! This small western hummingbird is rarely seen east of the Great Plains. This bird, along with the Ruby-throated Hummingbird sighted in our 2017 CBC, and several sightings of Rufous Hummingbirds also in recent years, highlight the importance of keeping those hummingbird feeders operational into the early winter months. You never know what kind of hummer could show up to take advantage of your kindness!

There were a handful of species observed this year that we have found only a few times in our 43-year CBC history. These included an Osprey, Horned Lark, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher sighted by the Jamestown team, Common Mergansers found in the Cheatham Annex and College

Woods sectors, two Lesser Yellowlegs in Middle Plantation, and a Yellow-throated Warbler at the same feeder in Kingsmill where one (likely the same bird) was tallied last year. The group of American White Pelicans observed at Hog Island this year was larger than ever with seven individuals. Even though it's often challenging to make your way to Hog Island, with a little patience, these beautiful birds can sometimes be sighted flying in formation from vantage points overlooking the James River along the Colonial Parkway, such as at College Creek. Pick up some breakfast and coffee, camp out at the College Creek Hawk Watch, scan the tree line near the Surry Power Station, and you might get lucky!



*Lesser Yellowlegs, photo by Brian Taber during 2019 CBC*

We were snubbed by Clapper Rails, and we also weren't able to turn up a Northern Bobwhite, which sadly is a species that continues to be difficult to find each year. It's also curious that our Green-winged Teal numbers have been low recently, with only one bird sighted in this year's CBC and also just one bird found last year. At the same time though, we found encouraging numbers of raptors (owls and hawks), and vulture numbers continue to be on the rise.

Thank you to everyone for your hard work to make 2019 another terrific CBC event for our club. We're starting to make plans for the annual Spring Bird Count, which will be in late April or early May 2020. So keep your eye out for a notice coming soon. 🐦



## BOAT TRIP TO CHESAPEAKE BAY BRIDGE TUNNEL ISLANDS, JANUARY 19

By George Martin and Cheryl Jacobson



Fifty-seven birders enjoyed a breezy morning on Sunday, January 19, motoring on the *Bay Princess* around the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel

islands and through surrounding waters. Highlights of the trip included a Peregrine Falcon flying over the boat, large flocks of Long-tailed Ducks, two Glaucous Gulls, and a group of harbor seals keeping their eyes on the boat from the water near Island #3. The group saw 37 species of birds in total. Many thanks to trip leader Dan Cristol for identifying and pointing out the birds as we approached them, and to Wes Teets for recording the sightings in eBird. Many folks photographed the sightings, and several great photos from the trip can be seen on this page.



*Great Black-backed Gull (left, photo by Mike Millin) and Great Cormorants (above, photo by Keith Kennedy)*



*Red-breasted Merganser, photo by Inge Curtis*



*Long-tailed Ducks, photos by Cathy Millar (above) and Inge Curtis (below)*



*Glaucous Gull, photo by Seth Kellogg*

The photo of the Glaucous Gull by Seth Kellogg is particularly special because it is always exciting to have young birders connect with our Club. We need the young generation to care about the environment and the birds. The future of our Earth is in their hands. Seth is a very enthusiastic young birder with great talent as a photographer who joined us on the boat trip. He is from Prince William County and is 13 years old. Seth belongs to the Blue Ridge Young Birders Club and the Northern Virginia Teen Birding Club. It is very difficult to take a photo of a gull flying by with other gulls, but Seth accomplished it very well. Thank you, Seth, for sharing your talent and enthusiasm with us. 🐦





*There was a great turnout for the January 11, 2020 Bird Walk at College Creek on the Colonial Parkway, led by Jim Corliss. WBC members were joined by several members of the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists. The group sighted 463 individual birds representing 30 species and 2 taxa.*

## HATS OFF TO HRC/MASTER NATURALIST AND WBC TRASH PICKERS

*By Cheryl Jacobson*

As part of their training requirements, members of the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists must attend a bird walk. A number of them joined WBC members on the January 11, 2020 walk at College Creek. The weather was wonderful and a large group gathered. Stephanie Thomas (pictured in the dark brown coat below) brought a large garbage bag and everyone quickly cleaned up a very trashy area along the shore. I urge all of the Walk Leaders to follow this example and carry a trash bag so if the group finds litter, it can be quickly bagged. Remember, if we love birds we must care for the environment! 🐦



*Photo by Cheryl Jacobson*



*During the January 25, 2020 Bird Walk in New Quarter Park, led by Scott Hemler, participants sighted 30 species of birds. Pictured are George Martin, Barbara Giffin, Keith Kennedy, and Paula Perdoni.*

## WBC MEMBERSHIP

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members: Jody Stephens, Bob and Barbara Loesch, Caroline Broun, and Maggie and Paul Winn.

**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. 🐦

## CALENDAR

- FEB 8 Bird Walk, Colonial Parkway/York R.
- FEB 10 WBC Board Meeting
- FEB 14-17 Great Backyard Bird Count
- FEB 15 Field Trip, Dutch Gap Conserv. Area
- FEB 22 Bird Walk, New Quarter Park
- MAR 14 Bird Walk, York River State Park
- MAR 14 VABBA2 Kick-off Meeting, VDGIF
- MAR 28 New Quarter Park
- MAY 1-3 VSO Annual Meeting, Williamsburg





## 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](mailto: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/>