

The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 44 No. 5

www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

June 2020

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Cheryl J. Jacobson



I have been keeping you all informed via the WBC listserv, so I am keeping my Corner very short this month in order to have more room for all the great photos our members submitted of Breeding Bird Activity.

New Acting Co-lead for Vice-President, Programs

Welcome Tory Gussman. I recruited Tory to assist Dean Shostak as this position is demanding more time and creative approaches in order to provide programming experiences to WBC members during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will be using Zoom, a video conferencing software application, to bring you meetings and programs when we cannot meet in person. I will ask you to vote on Tory's position when the opportunity arises. Thank you, Tory, for saying "yes."

Virtual Board Meeting

On May 28th we held our first Zoom Board Meeting in order to approve our usual expenditures and deal with other necessary club functions. We approved continued support of Community Cloud Forest Conservation (CCFC). I will update you more in July about how CCFC is being impacted by COVID-19. Of course, it is difficult to plan because so much is still unknown. You will be hearing more from Dean and Tory by email about how to use Zoom. Nick Newberry has agreed to do a meeting in July using Zoom. I will maintain contact with Dan Cristol regarding the ability to use the meeting room at William & Mary, but until the College makes decisions it is not possible to plan in that regard.

Bird Walks/Field Trips

Your health and your safety are priority and at this time it is still not advisable to resume WBC bird walks or field trips. As the Commonwealth of Virginia moves from Phase 1 of the easing of COVID-19 restrictions
(Continued on Page 2, right column)

PROGRAMS

Due to continuing COVID-19 restrictions in the Commonwealth of Virginia, WBC has not presently scheduled any in-person, monthly membership meetings and programs, bird walks, or field trips through July 2020. Instead, Club leadership has been working to develop opportunities for members to come together virtually through online platforms. So far, plans have been finalized for a membership business meeting on June 16 and a program on July 15, both on Zoom, a video conferencing software application. We will use the WBC listserv to distribute directions soon on how to use Zoom and later will email a link, Meeting ID, and password for each meeting. If you have never used Zoom, you can sign up for the free Basic Meeting Plan and download the software here: <https://zoom.us/pricing>.

June 16: We will be holding a short business meeting at 6:00 PM via Zoom to catch up with each other and receive feedback from members on future WBC activities. **Please note that this is not our usual meeting day or time.**

July 15: At 7:00 PM, WBC programs will resume with a presentation via Zoom on tracking bird migration by WBC member and environmental scientist Nick Newberry. Many of you know Nick from the presentations he did for our Club while he was at the College of William and Mary. Nick also was always ready to assist in leading field trips. Nick will discuss interactive tracking, web resources, and opportunities for citizen science. His talk will feature recent findings on a few species including the snowy owl. We hope you will join in for our first Zoom program!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

| | |
|---|--------|
| 2020 Global Big Day..... | Page 2 |
| Joys & Trials of a Purple Martin Landlady..... | Page 3 |
| Birding in Williamsburg's Colonial Heritage During the Shutdown..... | Page 4 |
| Reported Bird Sightings..... | Page 6 |
| Breeding Bird Activity Photo Gallery..... | Page 7 |

WBC EXECUTIVE BOARD 2020

| | |
|---|--|
| President Cheryl Jacobson | 303-519-0989 icheryljoy@aol.com |
| Co-Vice-President, Programs Dean Shostak | 757-880-4697 deanshostak@icloud.com |
| Co-Vice-President, Programs (Acting) Tory Gussman | 757-897-3502 vgussman@gmail.com |
| Vice-President, Editor (<i>The Flyer</i>) Mary Ellen Hodges | 757-220-0566 me.hodges@cox.net |
| Treasurer Ann Carpenter | 757-221-6683 carpenter17d@cox.net |
| Secretary Cathy Millar | 757-229-1775 millar.cathy@gmail.com |
| Member-at-Large/Assistant Editor Gary Carpenter | 757-221-6683 carpent66@cox.net |
| Member-at-Large Shirley Devan | 757-813-1322 sedevan52@cox.net |
| Past President Bill Williams | 757-229-1124 billwilliams154@gmail.com |

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS 2020

| | |
|--|--|
| Membership/Webmaster Jeanette Navia | 757-707-3345 jnavia@gmail.com |
| Field Trips George Martin | 757-920-5403 grm0803@gmail.com |
| Bird Counts/Bird Walks Jim Corliss | 757-565-0536 jcorliss240@cox.net |
| Library Liaison Lee Schuster | 757-565-6148 dljschuster@cox.net |
| Refreshments Catherine Flanagan | 757-879-1997 flanagan.catherine@gmail.com |
| Historian Patty Maloney | 703-304-7885 maloney3013@aol.com |
| Records/Liaison to CVWO Nancy Barnhart | 540-454-3014 barnhartnt@gmail.com |

President's Corner (Continued from Page 1)

to other phases, WBC will continue to explore how we can venture out and still keep everyone safe. I will continue to look for opportunities to share with you virtually, such as the virtual field trips I shared on our listserv. I'm also looking for people who will provide a 30 to 40-minute Zoom class regarding birds.

I am always open to suggestions, so please email me with your ideas and feedback. I appreciated hearing from some of you that you loved the virtual field trip to the Eastern Shore. Do stay safe and well! I am thinking of you each and every day! 🐦



Northern Parula photographed during the Global Big Day by Judy Jones.

2020 GLOBAL BIG DAY

By Jim Corliss

The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology held this year's Global Big Day on May 9th. Our Williamsburg Bird Club and the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists contributed with 73 participants submitting 184 checklists. Members submitted checklists not only from our local area, but from whatever locales they happened to be birding that day including Chincoteague Island, the Outer Banks, and the Dutch Gap Conservation Area. With some of our members being far afield from Williamsburg on the Big Day, our compiled checklist included species that we rarely see within our traditional bird count circle including American Oystercatchers, Whimbrels, and Red Knots. (Continued on Page 3, left column)

2020 Global Big Day (Continued from Page 2)

Cornell's goal for the Global Big Day was for over 100,000 eBird checklists to be submitted on May 9. As of the writing of this article, a total of 122,566 have been compiled in eBird from 51,155 participants from around the world. I'm happy to say that we certainly did our part to help Cornell achieve their checklist goal. At the same time, our members racked up some of the species high counts for a single checklist within the state of Virginia, including:

- Sue Mutell with 6 Yellow-throated Warblers at Kingsmill
- Lisa Nickel with 13 Brant at Chincoteague
- Shirley Devan with 8 Brown Thrashers at Colonial Heritage
- Brian Taber with the high counts for American White Pelicans, Great Blue Herons, and Bald Eagles from Hog Island
- Bill Blair with high counts for Royal Terns, Turkey Vultures, and Eastern Bluebirds in Gloucester
- Casey McLaughlin with 10 Northern Parulas from Bassett Hall Nature Trail
- Jan Lockwood with 9 Summer Tanagers from New Quarter Park

On the whole, Virginia ranked 11th in the United States for the number of checklists submitted with 2,467. It's quite impressive that our group of bird club members and Master Naturalists submitted over 7% of the checklists for the entire state of Virginia. Our photographers had a great day also, snapping some incredible photos. (You can see more photos than the two shown here on the WBC Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/williamsburgbirdclub/>). All in all it was a terrific day and I hope everyone will be excited to participate again next year. Thank you for making the Global Big Day a huge success. 🐦



Bay-breasted Warbler photographed during the Global Big Day by Nancy Barnhart.



Photo by Cathy Millar of her Purple Martin house.

THE JOYS & TRIALS OF A PURPLE MARTIN LANDLADY

By Cathy Millar

Not long after we'd moved to Williamsburg in 1980 for my husband to do graduate work at William & Mary, and had settled into a little bungalow on South Henry Street, my husband and I set up our first ever Purple Martin house. We've learned a lot about hosting Purple Martins since then. Our first martin house was a single-story one with six rooms; a couple of years later we added a second story. Within the first year we had our first occupants, and for the next twelve years we thrilled to their return every April from their winter grounds in the Amazon basin. If we had taken the house down for the winter, they'd land on the nearest utility wires and announce their arrival with throaty chirps and clicking rattles, at which point we dropped whatever we were doing and promptly put up their lodgings. At times we were awakened in the middle of the night to a loud clamor from inside their apartments. Staggering out of bed to check that the noise was not due to a predator (never was), we'd return to bed chuckling about the possibility of a paternity squabble. Purple Martins are monogamous but promiscuous!

Then, one spring, several scouts (who are the oldest individuals in the colony) returned but the rest of the party never did. The scouts were all males and after a while disappeared. Meanwhile, we had bought the two adjacent lots so that we now had a half-acre corner lot where we built our current B&B. We also upgraded our martin house to a new two-story, twelve-room house and moved it to a wide-open space on the corner of South Henry and Mimosa Drive. To provide added depth to their space during hot weather, on each side of the house we removed the center dividers between three units. (Continued on Page 4, left column)

Joys & Trials of a Purple Martin Landlady (Continued from Page 4)

We'd thought that the extra space would also be welcomed as we'd noted that frequently the males were spending the night in the nest box with their mates and young families. I have often wondered how the female can stand it when in the early morning the male loudly serenades her within those close metal walls! This vocal behavior is thought to be an effort to attract other martins to the colony.

Martins are no match for European Starlings, who can destroy their young and eggs, so we'd also added starling excluders to the entrances wherein the shape prevents the broader-breasted starling from entering. Alas, that doesn't keep House Sparrows out, who start nests before the martins return and try to keep the arriving martins away. The sparrows necessitate frequent monitoring and nest removal. Our new site and choice of lodgings were promptly approved, and for several years five to six couples successfully fledged youngsters each year.

In 2016, the City put the utility lines on our street underground. Our martins had just started nesting when for most of the next two months work crews arrived with a variety of noisy equipment, including excavators and cherry pickers. For several days after a main sewer line was accidentally ruptured, the birds were also accosted by the roar of machinery and the glare of flood lights extending through the night. In response to a sudden loud sound, parents often dropped food they were bringing back to their young. But still they bravely carried on! At one point, I was told that I had to move the martin's house and was about to appeal their case to City management when, impressed by the heroic efforts of the dedicated parent birds, the workers and supervisor said they'd manage until the birds fledged their young.

Remarkably, three pairs successfully did so that year.

A visit to Longwood Gardens in 2017 left us impressed by a healthy colony enjoying the addition of gourds hanging beneath their house. We followed suit but, to date, our martins have only used the house. Were the colony to expand, I'm guessing the gourds would be used. Currently gourds are thought to offer the best housing.

This year, although I saw the first scout on March 27th, eight days earlier than usual, there have been fewer returning martins. A pair of House Sparrows had repeatedly been trying to build a nest, and when the first female martin was showing great interest in



Three pairs of Purple Martins successfully fledged young in 2016 despite utility work that surrounded their house for two months. Photo by Cathy Millar.

selecting an apartment, a sparrow tugged so hard on her tail that she was jerked backwards. The female martin retreated to a nearby lamp post where she remained, although her mate kept flying down to the house. For weeks afterward in the late afternoon I saw the pair on the lamp post but saw no nesting behavior. Then, to my joy, I heard them settling in to one of the nest boxes for the night on May 26th, which was also the deadline for submitting this article. The following day, another pair was popping in and out of a nest box. Although from my experience this is a late start, I have high hopes for baby martins this year! 🐦

BIRDING IN WILLIAMSBURG'S COLONIAL HERITAGE DURING THE SHUTDOWN

By Gary and Ann Carpenter

A slim silver lining emerged from our isolation during the corona virus pandemic. Residents of Colonial Heritage got the chance to walk their golf course while the course was closed to play. Those walks allowed my wife, Ann, and me to explore areas of the course that have not been available for walking for years.

Each month, for about three decades, we have kept a monthly list of bird species we saw in whatever locality we happened to be. Since 2005 that locality has been Colonial Heritage. Our birding experiences for the latter half of March and April of this year were of more than usual interest.

Birding for our monthly count begins each month right outside our back windows. We have a number of feeders that attract a fair variety of birds. Blue Jays
(Continued on Page 5, Left Column)

Birding in Colonial Heritage During the Shutdown (Continued from Page 4)

were the first birds we recorded in April of this year, quickly followed on day one by Eastern Bluebirds, a Downey Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, lots of Yellow-rumped Warblers (As always, they had been with us all winter, but in April they turned to their breeding plumage, bright black, white, and brilliant yellows.), lots of Northern Cardinals, White-throated Sparrows, a couple of Brown Thrashers, Tufted Titmouse, Mourning Doves, a Carolina Wren, and a Red-bellied Woodpecker. Then, in the evening, we heard the delightful call of Canada Geese as a "V" of six flew over our house. Over the next few days Eastern Towhees, American Robins by the score, American Goldfinch, Dark-eyed Juncos, Common Grackles, Brown-headed Cowbirds, American Crows and Fish Crows, and a magnificent Pileated Woodpecker appeared in or near our backyard. Both Black and Turkey vultures glided overhead. We had set out our hummingbird feeders early in the month and we got our first Ruby-throated Hummingbird on the 14th. Hummingbirds have appeared every day since then.

Other of the more common birds in this area showed up as we walked about the community over our usual road and sidewalk routes. These included Chipping Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlarks, Northern Mockingbirds, European Starlings, Red-winged Blackbirds, Carolina Chickadees, House Sparrows, both Red-shouldered and Red-tailed hawks, a Copper's Hawk, and American Kestrels.

But the more interesting sightings came when we began walking the cart paths of the golf course. As the weather became warmer some migrants from the south began showing up. One of our first "arrivals" for the season was the Eastern Wood Peewee, soon followed by an Eastern Phoebe and a Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher. On or near the ponds we saw a Belted Kingfisher, a Green Heron, and a Double-crested Cormorant. On one afternoon walk we saw a couple of Osprey scouting over the large pond on the course. One was being harassed by a Bald Eagle, but he looked like he was not having much difficulty eluding the eagle. By the time we got to the side of the pond the eagle seemed to have given up the chase and we tarried to watch an Osprey stoop on the water and then rise up with a rather large fish in its talons. Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, the eagle swooped out of the sky and the startled Osprey dropped his prey back into the water as he twisted sharply away to avoid the eagle. Then the two birds

flew off in different directions...neither getting their lunch that day.

On another occasion a large Great Blue Heron flew over our heads as we approached the settlement pond at the end of the 14th hole. When we arrived at the pond's edge the heron was standing nearby...and an extremely large Bull Frog was sticking out of its bill, its rear legs visible and still kicking. It seemed to us that there was no way the bird was going to get that huge frog down but we planned to stick around to watch it try. To our disappointment, the Great Blue decided he wanted his lunch to be private and he flew off down a ravine and out of our sight.

A little deeper into April and Tree Swallows and then Barn Swallows and the Northern Rough-winged Swallows showed up, cruising the fairways as they gleaned for insects on the wing. The cart path bridges over the creeks proved great places for spotting birds. The wetlands attracted three of the more common vireos we have in the area: Yellow-throated, White-eyed, and Red-eyed. Also seen there were a Louisiana Waterthrush, a Hairy Woodpecker, Great-crested Flycatcher, Swamp Sparrow, and later in the month, a Common Yellowthroat, a Blue Grosbeak, a Yellow-throated Warbler, and a Northern Parula.

As I have mentioned, we saw a Double-crested Cormorant on a lake but, other than some Canada Geese, the only other waterfowl we saw on our ponds were Mallards. For some unknown reason there seem to have been very few waterfowl in local waters in April.

So it has been something of a treat for us birders to be able to walk the cart paths and do some birding in areas usually inaccessible to us. Alas, most good things must end. Our course opened for play in May and golf-course birding was over. Ah, but, not all bad...we could golf once again! 🐦

WBC MEMBERSHIP

The purpose of the Williamsburg Bird Club is to promote interest in the study of wild birds, protect birds and their habitats, and share the joy of birding with others. To join our club, download, print, and mail the membership form from our webpage at <https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/219-2/>. Scheduled club activities can always be found on our calendar: <https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/90-2/>. 🐦

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.

Bill Williams shared a number of interesting sightings at Mainland Farm during late April and early May. On April 26 he spotted a **Lesser Yellowlegs**, and on the following day a **Least Sandpiper**. On May 3, Bill observed both a **Greater Yellowlegs** and a first-cycle **Ring-billed Gull**. Bill also reported seeing a male **Bobolink** at Jamestown Island on May 11. (All photos below were taken by Bill.)



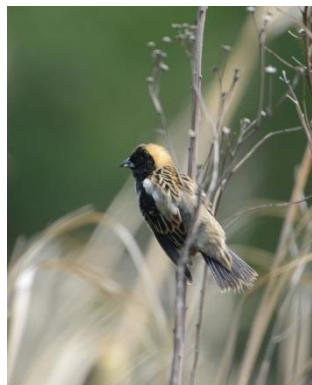
*Lesser
Yellowlegs*

*Least
Sandpiper*



*Greater
Yellowlegs*

*Ring-billed Gull (below) and
Bobolink (right)*



As **Keith Kennedy** describes it, on May 16 he "was blessed to see a **Peregrine Falcon** [first photo at right] at Chickahominy Riverfront Park. At my nearest point, it was only 75 feet away, perched on a limb... On the same day... the always breathtaking, gorgeous **Prothonotary Warbler** [second photo at right] did a fine job of posing for me."



Andrew Hawkins emailed in from the Outer Banks to report that a **White-winged Tern** was seen on 44 Salt Ponds, Cape Hatteras, NC, May 28-30. Says Andy: "The White-winged Tern is an Old World bird very rarely seen in the United States and usually in the northeast... [This bird is the] first White-winged Tern sighted in North Carolina since 1994, and only a few are recorded in Virginia in eBird." (Photos above were taken by Andy.) 🐦



PHOTO GALLERY: BREEDING BIRD ACTIVITY

This newsletter puts the focus on “Breeding Birds,” but why did we decide to do this? During this pandemic, with illness and even death all around, it seems important to look to nature for hope. John Muir said “Spring work is going on with joyful enthusiasm.” We are celebrating new life and all the “spring work” that can be seen in all our bird species. Also, we are recognizing year five of the Virginia Society of Ornithology Breeding Bird Atlas 2 and the hundreds of hours that have been spent documenting new life in Virginia. Some of you were formally involved but all of us have taken photos over the years of nest, eggs, hatchlings, etc. I hope you enjoy this focus! —Cheryl Jacobson, President

COURTSHIP DISPLAY OR COPULATION



1. Laughing Gull 2. Northern Cardinal 3. Killdeer

CARRYING NESTING MATERIAL



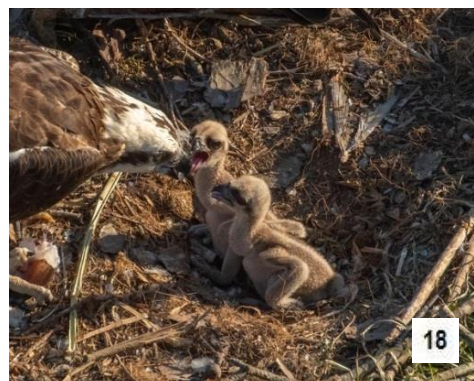
4. American Goldfinch 5. Carolina Chickadee 6. Northern Rough-winged Swallow (trying to nest in a school bus tailpipe) 7. Tufted Titmouse 8. Yellow-throated Warbler 9. Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher

NEST WITH EGGS



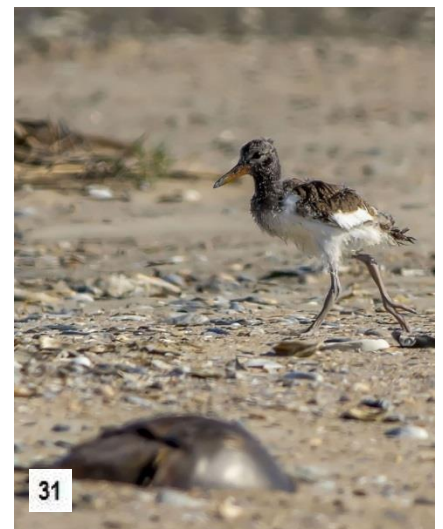
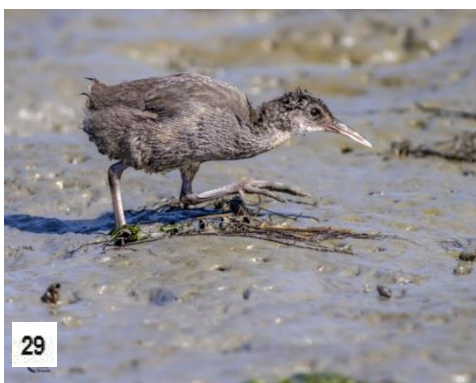
- 10. Gray Catbird
- 11. Eastern Meadowlark
- 12. Eastern Towhee
- 13. Wood Duck

CARRYING FOOD/FEEDING YOUNG



- 14. Great Crested Flycatcher
- 15. Purple Martin
- 16. Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- 17. Northern Cardinal
- 18. Osprey
- 19. Northern Flicker

NESTLINGS AND RECENTLY FLEDGED YOUNG



20. Great Horned Owl 21. Green Heron 22. Brown Pelican 23. Red-headed Woodpecker 24. Brown Thrasher 25. Northern Mockingbird 26. Black Skimmer 27. Killdeer 28. Wild Turkey 29. Clapper Rail 30. Laughing Gull 31. American Oystercatcher

Photo Credits: Judy Jones, 14-16, 20-22, 25-27, 29-31; Cheryl Jacobson, 1, 3, 4, 10-13, 24; Nancy Barnhart, 7-9, 28; Keith Kennedy, 17, 18; Bill Williams 6; Alexandra Minarik, 5; Dianne Snyder 2; Mary Ellen Hodges, 19, 23



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/>