



# The Flyer

## Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 45 No. 2

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

February 2021

### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Cheryl J. Jacobson



#### WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR 2021?

You may be thinking with the pandemic that you can't have goals this year, at least for now. However, it is more important than ever to do so. Why?

As stated in an [article in Psychology Today](#), "It's simply a fact: when people have goals to guide them, they are happier and achieve more than they would without having them. It's a brain thing. Achieving a goal you've set produces dopamine, a neurotransmitter responsible for feelings of pleasure." For me—and others have expressed having the same feelings—the COVID-19 pandemic can create a feeling of lack of control over our lives and our well-being. This results in it being hard to gather up the motivation to take the initial steps of setting a goal and then beginning implementation. First of all, put the goal in writing and share with others. I would love to hear about the goals you set in our next newsletter or just by email.

Perhaps your goals will be bird or conservation related. Make them relevant to you and achievable. For example, your goal might be to get outside once a week for a bird walk and entering what you see on eBird. If you invite a friend or neighbor, they may learn the joy of seeing birds. Birding together can be done safely if the [recommended precautions](#) are taken. We all know the benefits of being outside, and your data entry assists birds. Birding, either alone or together with a friend or neighbor, could also decrease the feeling of isolation created by the pandemic.

Perhaps your goal would be to assist in our club's Purple Martin Project. We need volunteers to weekly check our four colonies and report when the martins return and any other activity observed. Now that our club has four colony locations (York River State Park, New Quarter Park, Chickahominy Riverfront Park, and VIMS), there surely is a colony near you.

(Continued on Page 3)

### UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Tory Gussman and Dean Shostak

**February 17, via Zoom at 7 PM:** Tracking Whimbrel: Exploring the Secret Life and Conservation Challenges of a Migrant Shorebird, with presenter Dr. Bryan Watts. You will receive a Zoom invitation via email a few days prior to the meeting.



Whimbrel. Photo by Judy Jones.

Our annual joint meeting with the Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists on February 17 will feature Dr. Bryan Watts as guest speaker. As the Director of William & Mary's Center for Conservation Biology (CCB) Dr. Watts oversees a variety of programs ranging from monitoring and managing Virginia's peregrine falcon population to establishing a registry for shorebird roost sites in the Western Hemisphere.

Migrating between arctic nesting areas and wintering grounds as far south as Bolivia, the Whimbrel is one of several bird species relying on large geographic areas involving many different countries. According to CCB, the conservation of these types of migratory birds requires identifying a network of critical sites and managing threats specific to those sites. Before the advent of satellite telemetry suitable for tracking individual birds, little was known about migration

(Continued on Page 2)

## WBC EXECUTIVE BOARD 2020

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## Upcoming Programs, Continued from Page 1

pathways for Whimbrel using the Western Atlantic Flyway. Since 2008, CCB has used satellite transmitters to identify Whimbrel migratory routes and critical staging areas and to link specific breeding and winter territories. Dr. Watts will talk about this effort, what the research has discovered, and a blueprint for conservation of this declining species. Please join us via Zoom on February 17 for "Tracking Whimbrel."

Want to learn more? The Center for Conservation Biology is a research operation shared by W&M and VCU. It has completed over 500 research projects aimed at solving pressing environmental problems based on the fundamental belief that "the existence and quality of human life throughout the planet is so dependent on the condition of the environment that safeguarding the environment is a priority for all humankind." To learn more about the Center for Conservation Biology see <https://ccbbirds.org/>.

Looking ahead: Please mark your calendar for March 17 when Bob Ake will present "Birds of Ghana." 🐦

## JOIN IN THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT, FEBRUARY 12-15!

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the [Great Backyard Bird Count](https://www.birdcount.org/) (GBBC) was the first online citizen science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real time. The project is now a global effort, with over 268,000 individuals from 194 countries participating in 2020. You, too, can contribute to the project by counting birds for a minimum of 15 minutes, in your backyard or beyond, on any or all of four days in February, the 12th-15th, and recording what you see using either the Merlin Bird ID app or eBird. If you've never used eBird before, you can find simple instructions at this [link](https://www.birdcount.org/participate/) and even take a free online course, [eBird Essentials](https://www.birdcount.org/participate/). More information about how to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count can be found here: <https://www.birdcount.org/participate/>. 🐦



## President's Corner, Continued from Page 1

One of my goals each year is to see 125-150 bird species in Virginia in January. I am usually successful and my counts have ranged from 129-144 species. This yearly goal gets me motivated to get out and bird in January.

### New Hope for the Environment/Birds/Humans

"Bird survival is human survival and birds are telling us they are in trouble. We have no time to lose," said David Yarnold, president and CEO of the National Audubon Society, as quoted in a [recent Audublog](#). Environmental policy already being addressed by the administration of President Biden and Vice-President Harris include:

- review of the Trump Administration's rule gutting the Migratory Bird Treaty Act—the most effective bird conservation policy in our nation's history;
- a temporary halt to oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, one of America's most important bird nurseries. This immediate action is critical as lease sales began this month;
- protection for public lands like Seamounts Marine National Monuments, a vital area for sea birds as discovered by Audubon science;
- rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement, an important global accord to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reviewing climate policy with an environmental justice lens.

### Conservation

Perhaps you have a goal of supporting legislation that has positive impact for birds and the environment. Earlier, I sent out an opportunity for you to make a comment supporting Virginia's proposed regulation regarding incidental take of migratory birds. In a statement given on February 14, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam announced that "[t]he Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) will develop a regulation to define and permit incidental take of migratory birds for major commercial, industrial, and construction projects in the Commonwealth. This rule

would make Virginia one of the first states to 'back-stop' recent federal rollbacks of longstanding migratory bird protection." Since the announcement, the DWR has been working on a draft of a regulation that would provide critical protections to our bird species at the state level.

You can learn more about the proposed regulation and make your voice heard by providing comment on it at the following links:

- The need for the regulation and what it will do: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/regulations/incidental-take-of-migratory-birds/>
- The text of the proposed regulation: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/regulations/proposed-regulation-amendment/?vac=15-30-70>
- Portal to provide comments on the proposed regulation. The DWR will accept comments on the proposed regulation until 11:59 p.m. on February 22, 2021: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/regulations/public-comment-user-details/>

### Purple Martins

If you are on Facebook, I hope you check out our Purple Martin group for Colonial Virginia. The group is called [COVA Purple Martin Project | Facebook](#). I just posted a photo of working at VIMS to install our fourth colony. A special thanks to VIMS staff for being so easy to work with and so cooperative. I also posted an article about how light is resulting in early migration of Purple Martins. We will be ready! Scout birds are being seen in Florida and Georgia.

### Virtual Travel

Have you ever dreamed of going to Africa? Perhaps on a safari? One way of traveling during this pandemic is by Zoom. At our March meeting Bob Ake will present about the birds of Ghana. Since I had no idea what birds are there, I went to the internet and found this great YouTube video: [Forest Birds of Ghana – YouTube](#). Now I am very excited to attend our March meeting.

I hope to see you on Zoom. Stay safe my birding friends!! 🐦

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## WBC MEMBERSHIP —DON'T FORGET TO RENEW FOR 2021

Please welcome new members Charles Eldred and Mary Jo Bracken to the WBC! If you, too, would like to join our club or you need to renew your member-

ship for 2021, please print the form on Page 9 and mail it in soon. You may also download a copy of our membership form on the WBC [website](#). 🐦



## RESULTS FROM THE 2020 WILLIAMSBURG CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Jim Corliss

We have an intrepid group of birders here in Williamsburg. Considering the COVID-19 restrictions and the dismally full day of rain, the fact that we had over 130 people participate in this year's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on December 20<sup>th</sup> is inspiring. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the 44<sup>th</sup> CBC for our count circle. Even with the bad weather and the smaller than usual number of people in the field, we still tallied 24,480 individual birds across 118 species, including four "Count Week" species that were observed during the week around our actual count day. Being a slightly competitive person, it's always interesting to take a look at the species high counts each year. This year the following nine species posted record high counts for our circle (previous high counts and years shown in parentheses).

- 57 Wood Ducks (47 in 2018)
- 31 Wild Turkeys (27 in 2003)
- 21 American White Pelicans (7 in 2019)
- 373 Black Vultures (326 in 2018)
- 64 Red-breasted Nuthatches (51 in 2012)
- 59 Brown Thrashers (35 in 2010)
- 177 Pine Siskins (26 in 1977)
- 324 Chipping Sparrows (263 in 2012)
- 666 Northern Cardinals (619 in 2019)



*Pine Siskin, Toano. Photo by Carol Annis.*

The most notable high-count was the tally of 177 Pine Siskins (photo left) that smashed the previous record of 26 that had stood since 1977. The siskins were part of this year's northern finch "super-flight" that drove not

only the siskins, but also unusually high numbers of Purple Finches and Evening Grosbeaks into our area. My wife and I have lived in Williamsburg 26 years and we've only been graced by Evening Grosbeaks at our feeder once way back in 1996. Tory Gussman captured a photo (upper right) of one of these beautiful birds at her feeder this year during the count week. The finch super-flight has been an interesting phenomenon to observe. For more information on the conditions that drove this year's irruption of northern birds, a very good article from Audubon can be found at this [link](#).



*Evening Grosbeak. Photographed by Tory Gussman during WBC count week.*

The prize for most unusual bird goes to the Western Meadowlark that Brian Taber found at Mainland Farm the week before the CBC. This was the first state record for this species and fortunately it stayed for our count day and even beyond. Thanks to everyone who spent time out at Mainland Farm in the rain to make sure that the bird was tallied and photographed for our CBC!


The award for the most considerate bird goes to the Yellow-throated Warbler that has been continuing in Kingsmill for the last five CBCs. In 2016 and 2017, Sue Mutell photographed this bird at her feeder each year during the count week. In 2018 and 2019, the bird was observed and photographed by Jim Booth at his feeder on the CBC count days. This year Lisa Nickel observed the bird at her feeder on our count day. We don't have evidence that this is the same bird each year, but it's curious that it continues to be sighted in Kingsmill, and it's fortunate that the bird is kind enough to show up on our CBC count day at the household of a bird club member!

Thank you to everyone for your dedication to make our 2020 CBC successful. Hopefully we'll be able to conduct the 2021 CBC under normal conditions. Keep an eye out for announcements regarding this year's Spring Bird Count in a few months. 🐦

## WEB-FOOTED FRIENDS

By Cathy Millar

Bob Schamerhorn, national award-winning nature photographer with nearly 50 years of experience, once again generously shared with us his passion for nature and photography at our club's Zoom meeting on January 20, marking his seventh presentation to the WBC. His talk featured stunning photos, accompanied by audio recordings of vocalizations, and videos of web-footed waterfowl in the family Anatidae, a diverse group that includes our wintering ducks, geese, and swans as well as resident waterfowl. Surprisingly, loons, grebes, coots, cormorants, anhingas, and pelicans, despite having webbed feet, are not included in this family. We learned that most ducks are sexually dimorphic, meaning there is a difference of appearance between males and females, whereas there is no difference in appearance of most male and female geese. Bob shared helpful identification tips and unique aspects of each bird's life history, including habitat and behavior. Our only local breeders are Mallards, American Black Ducks,

Wood Ducks, and Canada Geese. Most of the others breed in Canada, Alaska, and the Arctic tundra. Bob also noted how lucky we are to see Long-tailed Ducks and Harlequin Ducks, as Virginia is their southernmost wintering range. Here are more examples of the types of interesting information included in the program: the Mallard is believed to be the ancestor of all domestic duck breeds; some of our ducks are cavity nesters; and Red-breasted Mergansers are more commonly found in saltwater habitats in their wintering range than Common Mergansers, who prefer freshwater wintering habitat. Bob has generously allowed us to make this multimedia program available until our next February meeting for our members who weren't able to attend or those who'd like to see it again. To view the program, click this [link](#) and enter Passcode: YC\*+5W\*@. One can also view more photos and purchase beautiful note-cards and calendars on Bob's website, <https://www.iphotobirds.com/>. 

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## IN MEMORY OF TOM McCARY

By Bill Williams

A devoted member of the Williamsburg Bird Club's extended family was claimed by cancer January 6, 2021. Tom McCary had been a WBC member since 1983 and was granted a Lifetime Membership at the club's September 20, 2017 Fortieth Anniversary meeting, recognition long and well deserved.

Upon completion of a career in education, Tom assumed vital roles in our organization's life before health issues compromised his activities. He served as Vice President for Programs for five years, 2003 through 2007, and then was club Historian for 2017 and 2018. His scholarship and love of birds were blended into essays for *The Flyer*, among them: "Titmouse 1, Dog 0" (Vol. 32 No. 4-April 2008); "Can't Find Birds-Pray for Wintry Day" (Vol. 39 No. 2-February 2015); "March 29 Chincoteague or Bust: Chasing Birds from Sun to Sun" (Vol. 39 No. 5-May 2015); and "Another Unusual Bird Sighting" (Vol. 40 No. 9-November 2016). He often regaled us at monthly meetings with eloquent book review recitations. Tom was a regular attendee at the club's monthly field trips and was an integral member of the club's annual Spring and Christmas bird counts, covering on foot a large area of the College Woods section, an area of Williamsburg where he grew up and resided before moving to a health care facility near Richmond. Tom occasionally led bird walks at Shirley Plantation, where he was a docent, and was

part of the bird-walk leaders team for New Quarter Park.



Portrait of Tom McCary by Shirley Devan.

Above all, Tom embodied the character, dignity, and decorum of a quintessential gentleman. To a person this will be the first and foremost memory anyone who knew him will mention. It was not uncommon to find him dining alone at one of our local eateries, dressed in a coat, tie, and hat. When approached, Tom would stand, smile delightedly as he gave a slight, gracious bow, and then immediately would  
(Continued on Page 6)



## Tom McCary, Continued from Page 5

want to know how you were doing. Learning of Tom's passing, Virginia Boyles posted this to several of us on January 24: "I remember going to the Capitol Pancake House after birding at the park [New Quarter], and the waitresses knew him by name, and what he wanted to drink before he ordered. They all loved him, and some came by to speak to him, though they were not serving that table."

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## RECENT SIGHTINGS

**First Bird of the Year.** In response to the Editor's request that members share a note about the first bird they sighted in 2021, **Tom Nilan** reported: "On January 1, I spotted a rough legged hawk over my neighborhood off South Boundary St. by the law school. He was heading southwest. Haven't seen it since." Writing on behalf of his wife, **Ann**, and himself, **Gary Carpenter** shared that their first bird of 2021 was a **Carolina Wren**: "We have had a pair of Carolina Wrens (and/or their offspring) living somewhere around our backyard for years. We see them in and around our back patio every month, year in and year out, always on the hunt for bugs . . . busy . . . ever busy. We think of Carolina Wrens as the Mighty Mites of the passerine world."



*Eastern Bluebirds. Photo by Shirley Devan.*

**Shirley Devan** shared a photo (above) taken January 16 of male and female **Eastern Bluebirds** checking out the nest box at the edge of her yard in Colonial Heritage.

**Nancy Barnhart** reported two interesting winter visitors to Virginia Beach seen on January 17: "The **Dovekie** (photo upper right) is a tiny arctic breeder not often seen from shore in their wintering grounds.

During the last year Tom, his attorney and WBC Treasurer, Ann Carpenter, worked through the logistics of a generous bequest to WBC to support our Nature Camp Scholarship funding, lasting evidence of his life devoted to education, scholarship, and birds. Tom McCary's obituary may be found at this [link](#). 🐦

Their whirring wing beat is very distinctive. The **Snow Bunting** (lower photo below) is a northern breeder that prefers sandy coasts and salt marsh in their wintering grounds. Always a treat to see!"



*Dovekies. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.*



*Snow Bunting. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.*

Nancy also submitted a photo (Page 7), taken in her yard on January 26, with the comment: "This American Robin just showed up for Feederwatch!! Gorgeous but vulnerable." The bird has a condition called "leucism," an abnormality in the deposition of pigment in feathers. You can read about the possible causes of leucism and how the condition differs from albinism on the Cornell Lab website at this [link](#).

*(Continued on Page 7)*

## Recent Sightings, Continued from Page 6



Leucistic American Robin. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.



Carol Annis shared this photo of a Cedar Waxwing in Toano.



Eastern Towhee (left) and Baltimore Oriole (right). Photo by Mary Ellen Hodges.

Mary Ellen Hodges reported that, although fewer than in the past four years, there are four **Baltimore Orioles**—one adult female and one adult and two immature males—wintering in her downtown Williamsburg neighborhood and regularly visiting her backyard feeders this year. The adult birds were first spotted September 15 (female) and 22 (male). The two immature birds were first seen on November 2 and 7. The adult female closely resembles a bird that wintered over last year, and like that bird almost never fails to chatter when she enters Mary Ellen's yard. The birds primarily eat grape jelly and mealworms, but during the two snow events the last week of January took a particular interest in suet (see photo above). 🐦

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## MURPHY'S (AND CARPENTER'S) LAWS OF BIRDING

By Gary Carpenter

Over the years, a number of “Murphy’s Laws” of birding have occurred to me. These are not original, and I am certain most of these have been seen, encountered, overheard, or expressed by all birders. But I thought it might be fun to codify these “Laws” and see if others in the Club could add some of their own or improve upon them. So here are twelve to get us started. If you think of others, send them on, and I will compile them and update the list.

1. **You needed to be here X time ago.** (The target bird was here at your present location at some previous time.)

In order to have seen whatever specific bird you are looking for, you needed to have been here at some earlier time—be it last year, last season, last month, last week, yesterday, a minute ago, or a second ago.

The bird was there then . . . and it isn’t now. This law expands to birding in general, as in: the birding here was better X time ago.

2. **BVD is a constant.**

BVD = Better View Desired. No matter how good your view, no matter how close you are, no matter how good your optics, birders always perceive that there is some better view of the subject bird.

3. **Birding while driving results in poor outcomes for both activities . . . but all birders do it.**

You cannot find birds well when you drive, and you cannot drive well while looking for birds. Yet all birders do it, to some greater or lesser degree, all the time. There is a bicycling corollary. (Cont. on Page 8)



## Laws of Birding, Continued from Page 7

### 4. ***Abundance and consistency always lead to complacency.***

When you see a species numerous times over a matter of days you become increasingly complacent and uninterested. I had never seen a Green Jay in my life, but by the fourth day of seeing them in south Texas this gorgeous emerald green bird was relegated to “Just a . . .” phraseology as in, “Oh, that’s just a Green Jay.”

### 5. ***The positives of a spotting scope in the field are offset by the negatives of carrying it around.***

Spotting scopes are a positive. Carrying them around is a negative. The Very Best Spotting Scope is the one somebody else carries and lets you use. Telescopic camera lens corollary: no one EVER lets you use their camera or lenses.

### 6. ***Beneficial habitats for birds equal noxious habitats for human beings.***

Garbage dumps. Swamps. Water and sewage treatment facilities. Birds love these habitats and would compare them to heaven. Humans hate these habitats and would compare them to hell, especially on really hot and humid days.

### 7. ***The birding is always better someplace else. (This is the “grass is always greener” birding corollary.)***

No matter where you are, the birding is (was) better where you are not . . . with the possible exception of when you are in Costa Rica, in which case Law #1 will apply.

### 8. ***Descriptions for spotting target birds are generally unhelpful and/or inadequate. (And pointing does not help and scares the bird away.)***

This law is best described by the following exchange between two birders:

Birder 1: “Oh, I have a Blue Grosbeak!”

Birder 2: “Where?”

Birder 1: “In that tree.” (In your field of view there are two hundred trees.)

Birder 2: “Which tree?”

Birder 1: “In that big thingee over there.” (In those trees, are one hundred “thingees” that are bigger than the others.)

Birder 2: “Um . . . which big thingee?”

Birder 1: “Oh . . . uhm . . . in that . . . uh . . . think it is a pine!” (Assumes that both the spotter and you know the difference between a pine, and a spruce, and a yew, and a hemlock, and a . . .)

If the correct tree is finally identified, then begins the routine of determining where in the tree the bird is located. And then . . . see Law #1.

### 9. ***The odds of correctly identifying birds from field guide illustrations vary depending on size, and location.***

The ability to correctly identify big birds from little birds is generally higher than 50:50. The odds of correctly identifying little passerines from one another through field guide illustrations drops to approximately 20:80. The odds of correctly identifying little sea-side peeps from one another through field guide illustrations drops to approximately 5:95.


Or, as put by that famous American sage, Ogden Nash:

*But a bird in the open never looks  
Like its picture in the birdie books*

### 10. ***Any distantly seen hawk of any size at all is a Red-tailed Hawk . . . until proven otherwise. It just is—Jeff Swinebroad.***

### 11. ***Any flock of LBJs (“Little Brown Jobs”) flying over an agricultural field and seen from a moving vehicle are Horned Larks . . . until proven otherwise. They just are—Craig Turner***

### 12. ***Any day spent birding equals a good day.***

Time spent birding is good time. No matter the number of species spotted, a bad day of birding is better than a good day at work. Or (with a nod to a French general): “A good day of birding is wonderful; a poor day of birding is still pretty good”. 





## 2021 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/>