



# The Flyer

## Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 45 No. 5

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

May 2021

### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Cheryl Jacobson



I love spring! With it comes the greening of the earth and the songs of spring migration.

This poem, "Spring, the sweet spring," by Thomas Nashe, expresses the feeling that comes with spring. The songs of the cuckoo, the nightingale, the lapwing, and the owl sing out!

*Spring, the sweet spring, is the year's pleasant king,  
Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring,  
Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing:*

*Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!*

*The palm and may make country houses gay,  
Lambs frisk and play, the shepherds pipe all day,  
And we hear aye birds tune this merry lay:*

*Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!*

*The fields breathe sweet, the daisies kiss our feet,  
Young lovers meet, old wives a-sunning sit,  
In every street these tunes our ears do greet:*

*Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to witta-woo!*

*Spring, the sweet spring!*

(Continued on Page 3)



Common Yellowthroat. Photographed in April by Carol Annis in Toano.

### UPCOMING PROGRAM

By Tory Gussman and Dean Shostak

**May 19, 7:00 pm: Climate Change and its Effect on Food for Migrating Birds**

Dr. Amanda Gallinat is an ecologist who studies how environmental change affects plants, birds, and their interactions. At our May 19 program, via Zoom, Dr. Gallinat will present findings from her research on the effects of climate change on the timing of fruit ripening and bird migration in the northeast, including impacts in the fall season. Her research incorporates the historical field notes of Henry David Thoreau, long-term bird banding records, museum specimens, and field observations. 🐦

### CALENDAR

There will be no WBC business/program meetings in June and July this year, nor will we be publishing a newsletter for these months. Meetings and the newsletter will resume in August 2021.

<b>MAY 2</b>	Annual WBC Spring Bird Count. Details were distributed via the club email listserve on April 25, 2021. Contact <u>Jim Corliss</u> for information.
<b>MAY 8</b>	Global Big Day. Information available at <a href="https://ebird.org/news/global-big-day-8-may-2021">https://ebird.org/news/global-big-day-8-may-2021</a> .
<b>MAY 10</b>	Field Trip to AWARE Wildlife Rehabilitator. Details were distributed via the club email listserve on April 26, 2021. Contact <u>George Martin</u> to reserve a space.
<b>MAY 14</b>	Warbler Road Field Trip. Contact <u>Cheryl Jacobson</u> to inquire about available spaces.
<b>MAY 19</b>	Program/Business Meeting.
<b>MAY 22</b>	Bird Walk, New Quarter Park. Contact <u>Cathy Flanagan</u> to reserve a space.
<b>JUNE 9</b>	WBC Board Meeting

## WBC EXECUTIVE BOARD 2021

**President** 303-519-0989  
Cheryl Jacobson [icheryljoy@aol.com](mailto:icheryljoy@aol.com)

**Co-Vice-President, Programs** 757-880-4697  
Dean Shostak [deanshostak@icloud.com](mailto:deanshostak@icloud.com)

**Co-Vice-President, Programs** 757-897-3502  
Tory Gussman [vgussman@gmail.com](mailto:vgussman@gmail.com)

**Vice-President, Editor (*The Flyer*)** 757-220-0566  
Mary Ellen Hodges [me.hodges@cox.net](mailto:me.hodges@cox.net)

**Treasurer** 757-221-6683  
Ann Carpenter [carpenter17d@cox.net](mailto:carpenter17d@cox.net)

**Secretary** 757-229-1775  
Cathy Millar [millar.cathy@gmail.com](mailto:millar.cathy@gmail.com)

**Member-at-Large/Assistant Editor** 757-221-6683  
Gary Carpenter [carpent66@cox.net](mailto:carpent66@cox.net)

**Member-at-Large** 757-813-1322  
Shirley Devan [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net)

**Past President** 757-229-1124  
Bill Williams [billwilliams154@gmail.com](mailto:billwilliams154@gmail.com)

## COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS 2021

**Membership/Webmaster** 757-707-3345  
Jeanette Navia [jnavia@gmail.com](mailto:jnavia@gmail.com)

**Field Trips** 757-920-5403  
George Martin [grm0803@gmail.com](mailto:grm0803@gmail.com)

**Bird Counts/Bird Walks** 757-565-0536  
Jim Corliss [jcorliss240@cox.net](mailto:jcorliss240@cox.net)

**Library Liaison** 757-565-6148  
Lee Schuster [dljschuster@cox.net](mailto:dljschuster@cox.net)

**Refreshments** 757-879-1997  
Catherine Flanagan [flanagan.catherine@gmail.com](mailto:flanagan.catherine@gmail.com)

**Historian** 703-304-7885  
Patty Maloney [maloney3013@aol.com](mailto:maloney3013@aol.com)

**Records/Liaison to CVWO** 540-454-3014  
Nancy Barnhart [barnhartnt@gmail.com](mailto:barnhartnt@gmail.com)



*April Bird Walk participants on the dock on Queen's Creek in New Quarter Park. Photo by Scott Hemler.*

## APRIL BIRD WALK AT NEW QUARTER PARK

*By Scott Hemler*

We had a very nice bird walk on Saturday morning, April 24, at New Quarter Park! It was a beautiful but cool morning. Seven people attended the walk, and we saw (or heard) 29 species of birds! Some of the highlights were Red-eyed Vireos singing away, as well as Yellow-throated Warblers, and Great Crested Flycatchers singing, too. We saw three Great Egrets as well. The mother Osprey is sitting on the nest by the marina! Hopefully there will be chicks soon. 🦅



*Pair of Wood Ducks. Photographed in mid-March by Keith Kennedy at Dutch Gap.*



## President's Corner, Continued from Page 1

Spring storms can bring rare birds to our area, such as the White Wagtail (White-faced) seen recently at Ft. Monroe and described on Page 6 of this newsletter by those who first reported the find in eBird (including Carolyn Morgan, a member of our club). With technology and social media, we all have the opportunity to learn of such sightings. You can see additional photos and videos of the wagtail on the Facebook page [VA Notable Bird Sightings & Discussion Group](#). This page is designed as a place to post information related to sightings of rare or unusual birds in Virginia. Another way to learn of rare birds is to use a function in eBird. The [eBird Alert webpage](#) allows you to subscribe to either daily or hourly email alerts for rare birds in a particular geographic region that you specify, such as state or county. According to eBird, nearly 200 of us were able to see and perhaps photograph the wagtail. Although this species has been recorded in North Carolina, it has never before been reported on eBird in Virginia (more information at the end of this Corner).

It is always exciting when a WBC member sees a new species, rare or otherwise. During our last field trip, to Newport News Park, one of our new members saw a Prothonotary Warbler for the first time and was absolutely thrilled at the amazing color. For all of us, it was like seeing the bird for the first time, too.

People often ask me what my favorite bird is. To me, each species is unique and breathtaking in its beauty. All birds represent wings of possibilities and the freedom of flight, even our common backyard bird, the Northern Cardinal (see photo this page). The cardinal is a creature commonly associated with an exuberance for life, delight, and good cheer. Indeed, even its song of *Cheer, cheer, cheer* sounds as if the bird is urging you to find happiness.

### **Upcoming Happenings**

WBC usually doesn't meet in the summer, but this year we will take a short respite in June and July and meet again in August. However, your Board will meet in June. I have asked board members to consider establishing a new committee for Conservation of Birds and Habitats to begin in 2022. It would be charged with many of the tasks I have focused on the past several years, much like the Virginia Society of Ornithology's Conservation Committee. I would like to be the chair of the committee and step down from the President position after serving four years as President and four years as Vice President for Programs. Be sure to watch for emails from the WBC listserve to stay up to date on summer happenings.



*Male Northern Cardinal. Photographed by Angier Brock in April.*

On March 18, 2021, the Board of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources passed the [regulation to minimize and prevent incidental take of migratory birds](#) requested by Governor Northam in February 2020, when he also announced a comprehensive plan to provide new habitat for the largest seabird colony in the mid-Atlantic region here in Hampton Roads. The Federal government recently approved that studies for the new island habitat for the seabird colony should move forward to determine the best location to build the island. These are phenomenal achievements for birds in Virginia!

At the federal level, the move by the Trump Administration to dramatically weaken the century-old Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) is on hold, and wildlife advocates are optimistic that renewed protections for birds are on the way. The National Audubon Society is among the groups fighting the Trump rule in court. Erik Schneider, Audubon policy manager, has stated: "The MBTA and its protections are the floor, not the ceiling, of bird conservation. . . . The previous administration essentially stripped out the floorboards with its attack on the MBTA and other laws, so getting those protections back is critical, but I think we need to build off of that and quickly expand our conservation efforts if we're really going to secure our bird populations."

### **Wagtail Species**

There are over a dozen species of wagtails, most of which breed in Africa, Europe, and Asia, some of which are fully or partially migratory. Two species that I have seen in Alaska and which breed there are the White Wagtail (White-faced) and the Eastern Yellow Wagtail. From Wikipedia I learned that among their most conspicuous behaviors is a near constant  
(Continued on Page 4)

## President's Corner, Continued from Page 3

tail wagging, a trait that has given the birds their common name. In spite of the ubiquity of the behavior and observations of it, the reasons for it are poorly understood. It has been suggested that the wagging tail may flush up prey, or that it may signal submissiveness to other wagtails. Recent studies have suggested instead that it is a signal of vigilance that may aid to deter potential predators.

Spring is the season of HOPE, so ENJOY! 🐦



*Peregrine Falcon. Photographed from VIMS in April by David Malmquist as the bird hunted beneath the Coleman Bridge over the York River.*

## NEWPORT NEWS PARK FIELD TRIP, APRIL 17

*By George Martin*

Field trips have resumed! On Saturday, April 17, Dave Youker led 15 members of the Williamsburg Bird Club on a walk at Newport News Park. The cool, sunny conditions led to excellent birding, as the group spotted 51 species. Highlights among the birds were good looks at several Prothonotary Warblers, an obliging Northern Parula, Royal Terns over the reservoir, and Eastern Phoebe's emphatically advertising their presence. On the non-avian side, two water moccasins were seen lolling in the marsh next to the Swamp Bridge. 🐦



*April Field Trip to Newport News Park. Photo by George Martin.*



*Northern Parula. Photographed by Deborah Humphries during the April Field Trip.*



*Prothonotary Warbler. Photographed by Cindy Hamilton during the April Field Trip.*



## RESEARCH REPORTS BY OUR 2020 ORNITHOLOGY GRANT RECIPIENTS

*Summary by Cathy Millar*

It is always inspiring each year to hear details of the latest W&M student research that our membership-supported ornithology grants help fund. For the grant recipients, the presentations are also an opportunity for these budding scientists to practice engaging the understanding of the public in their work. Professor Dan Cristol noted that, usually within a year or two, the students' research is published for access by other scientists. The studies presented to us this year, during the WBC's monthly meeting on April 21, built upon the research of previous students from Dr. John Swaddle's team exploring how to prevent birds from striking man-made structures and Dr. Cristol's team studying the effects of mercury poisoning in birds. All four experiments were conducted using Zebra Finches, which are native to Australia, in W&M's aviary and flight tunnel. Dan complimented the students for finishing their studies in a timely manner despite the handicap of a tremendous amount of coordination required to avoid in-person contact due to COVID-19 precautions.

Our first presenter, graduate student Robin Thady, began by stating that every year as many as one billion birds die from striking manmade structures. Most birds are vulnerable: Due to their eyes being widely spaced on the sides of their heads, they are looking down and to the side when flying in a normal horizontal position. This leaves a big blind spot directly in front of them. Also, man-made structures are only a tiny part of their long evolutionary history, resulting in a lack of wariness. Investigating how birds perceive sound, Robin's research aimed to identify which sound attributes make the most effective warning signals to avoid collisions. She tested two different frequency levels and two different oscillation patterns on 19 Zebra Finches, recording hundreds of hours of videos in which she was able to identify each bird's velocity, how close it came to an obstacle, and when it changed course. She found that higher frequency sounds that oscillate in pitch were the most easily detectable from background noise, and that specifically a 4-6 kilohertz oscillating signal most consistently elicited avoidance behavior. She concluded her presentation by noting that although human innovation has been a source of conflict with wildlife, it can also be used to devise solutions.

Graduate student Lauren Emerson explored a different aspect of the same problem: bird-window collisions and daytime lighting conditions as a risk factor.

She noted that warblers, thrushes, and sparrows are especially susceptible to window strikes. Her research focused on two window treatments—one reflective and the other with reflectiveness dulled—and studied how these were perceived by the finches in morning and afternoon light conditions. Mist nets were set in front of the windows to prevent actual injury. In the morning light, the finches collided more often with the reflective window, but to Lauren's surprise, they clearly collided more often with the nonreflective window in the afternoon. This result may reflect the ability of birds to see the ultraviolet portion of the spectrum or be related to polarization of light. There is no clear reason for this result, and it will need further investigation. Not much is known about bird vision. Lauren concluded by listing what we can do to avoid window strikes: (1) Put interior home lights on in the morning and off in the afternoon; (2) Apply window films; (3) Move bird feeders close to windows (about 3 feet away) so that the birds see and learn that there is a window, and if startled, won't fly at the window at full speed; (4) Put a dazed victim in a shoebox and, when recovered, release it away from windows, or if more injured take to a wildlife rehabilitator; and (5) Spread the word about the severity of this threat to birds.

Graduate student Casey McLaughlin studied what happened to finches that were fed a nonlethal dose of mercury and then exposed to an additional environmental stress to see how mercury affected the birds' ability to respond. A lot is understood about how birds associated with a mercury-polluted aquatic environment are impacted, but recently it's been found that songbirds which are not directly linked to the aquatic system are also being impacted. Sustained nonlethal levels of mercury have been found in a wide range of songbirds including Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Carolina Wrens, and Rusty Blackbirds. Casey divided the finches into four groups: (1) a control group that was not manipulated in any form; (2) a group that was given food at unpredictable times, which mimicked the stress birds might experience in finding food in winter; (3) a group fed a level of mercury that was not enough to cause visual impairment and mimicked the level found in wild populations; and (4) a group that was fed the mercury diet and submitted to chronic food insecurity. The group that was submitted to both mercury and food stress showed significantly higher  
*(Continued on Page 6)*

## Student Research Grants, Continued from Page 5

levels of stress hormone in their blood than the group that was exposed to only mercury. The latter group, in turn, showed more stress hormone than the group exposed only to food limitations. There was also evidence that the response to immediate danger might have been suppressed within the group of finches exposed to both stresses, but further study is needed. Casey related the challenge of collecting blood samples for stress hormone baseline studies. The process required netting a free-flight bird, getting the needle, and taking the sample within three minutes of entering the enclosure! She also noted that the finches had distinct personalities: some were more compliant and others stubborn and escape artists.

Undergraduate student Jasmine Whelan, who is a junior, addressed a question that arose from Casey's work: the effect of mercury on feather quality. The feathers on the same four groups of finches in Casey's experiment were studied. Jasmine sampled

112 feathers by plucking the first primary on each wing and then the regrown feather 25 days later. She examined the color, wherein lower brightness might indicate the feather being less structurally sound, making flight more difficult, and the growth rate. A lower growth rate could imply lower ability to deal with stress. The feathers of the finches that endured both food and mercury stress were significantly less bright than those of the control group, but Casey found no significant differences in feather growth rate among the four groups.

All four students and Dan Cristol were effusive in expressing their gratitude for our club's continued interest and support. The sophistication of the student research is impressive and this summary provides only an outline. For more details, the full program is available for viewing until our May meeting using the Passcode HCMe=u\$9 at the following link:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/isOF1LPHvIng534gOI738I5RwlBow2Uquuh-jBK7V5m3jdJ0yzSMXrJwT2x03EeT.aGx4gxhbY1q4xx\\_I](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/isOF1LPHvIng534gOI738I5RwlBow2Uquuh-jBK7V5m3jdJ0yzSMXrJwT2x03EeT.aGx4gxhbY1q4xx_I) 🐦

---

## WHITE WAGTAIL, FORT MONROE, HAMPTON, VA, APRIL 12, 2021

By Carolyn Morgan, Caitlin Kufahl, and Sarah O'Reilly



White Wagtail. Photo by Sarah O'Reilly, April 12, 2021.

During a visit to Fort Monroe in front of the old Chamberlin Hotel, a gray, white, and black bird flew in from the northwest landing on the rocks in front of the seawall. We noticed that the bird was nothing like many of the birds that we commonly see, but we needed to make an identification. The bird was black, grey and white. Chickadee? No. Some sort of nuthatch? No. Black and White Warbler? No again! Some quick photos, a trip to the Merlin App, and corroboration with more experienced birders and we decided the bird was a White Wagtail (*Motacilla al-*

*ba*). A post to the VA Notable Bird Sightings and Discussion Facebook group confirmed our identification of a species never before recorded in Virginia nor the mid-Atlantic region! Many determined this particular wagtail most likely to have been blown in from Iceland or Greenland due to strong winds over the North Atlantic. It was determined that this bird is of the white-faced sub-species. Soon after, birding enthusiasts began making their way to Hampton to add this lifer to their list.

The Robin-sized Wagtail was hopping and foraging among the rocks for the duration of our visit. It was bobbing its long, charcoal tail up and down and was very social. The plumage was mostly grey with white on the outer wings with striking black cap, nape, breast, and throat that contrasted with a white belly. It had a pointed black bill with black eyes and legs.

Seeing a bird this rare was truly an amazing observation and one we will never forget!

(Editor's Note: According to eBird records, the wagtail continued at Fort Monroe through at least April 19.) 🐦



## RECENT SIGHTINGS

**Keith Kennedy** emailed the following: "I went to Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, in Richmond, on April 8 to enjoy the spring day. Fortunately, I went armed with my birding camera. I lucked into a small group of people that were taking pictures of something—but not the plants. I didn't hesitate to inquire about what they were seeing. A **Barred Owl** (photo below) was sleeping in some dense but small trees. It was no more than 25 feet from me and maybe only 20 feet off the ground. I got a pretty good 'portrait' of this owl. He wakened at one point and silently took wing to a taller tree very close by and resumed his nap. I got him eye-to-eye just before that."



*Barred Owl. Photo by Keith Kennedy.*

On April 14, **Gary and Ann Carpenter** had a small flock of **Cedar Waxwings** visit their backyard magnolia tree, and on April 22 they had a pair of **Pine Siskins** at their feeders.



*Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Photo by Jan Lockwood.*

**Jan Lockwood** reported seeing the following spring migrants during the month of April: **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**, Lockwood yard (photo bottom left). **Eastern Kingbird**, Queens Lake, and; **Ovenbird**, New Quarter Park (photo immediately below).



*Ovenbird. Photo by Jan Lockwood.*


**Mary Ellen Hodges** marked spring in her yard by the absence of two species. April 10 was the last day she saw the **Hermit Thrush** who had been in her yard every day since November 13. When the bird first arrived in the fall it was eating mostly beautyberry and pokeweed berries near Mary Ellen's feeder area. It soon learned it could find dried mealworms on the ground below a feeder, and by early January was routinely eating from a suet feeder. April 15 was the last day Mary Ellen saw any of the four **Baltimore Orioles** (photo below) that had routinely visited her yard feeders through the winter since arriving in mid-September through early November. April 12 was the last day all four were present. 🐦



*Baltimore Oriole. Photo by Mary Ellen Hodges, 4/11/2021.*

## CHECK IT OUT

**Richmond Falcon Cam:** The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) has an online, live video feed focused on a pair of Peregrine Falcons using a nest box on the Riverfront Plaza Building in downtown Richmond. The female laid her first egg of the season sometime overnight March 27/28, and laid her fourth and final egg in the evening on April 4. If everything goes well, the first hatch is expected sometime between May 5 and May 7. You can view the life stream and periodic updates at this link: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/falcon-cam/>

**Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel Seabird Colony:** DWR will be doing a monthly blog post this year to keep followers up to date about what is happening with the seabird colony formerly located on the South Island of the HRBT. The monthly blog post will be published in DWR's *Wildlife Notes from the Field* emails which go out on the third Thursday of each month. If interested, you can subscribe at the link, <https://dwr.virginia.gov/the-outdoor-report/>, but make sure you check the box for Wildlife Updates to receive the once-a-month communication. The current update for April can be found at this link: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/blog/hrbt-update-tale-two-islands/> 



Cooper's Hawk. Photographed at Gloucester Point by David Malmquist.



Great Blue Heron. Photographed by Deborah Humphries during the WBC's April Field Trip at Newport News Park.



Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Photographed by Cindy Walker in her yard in Toano, 4/30/2021.





## 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/>