



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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February 2022

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart



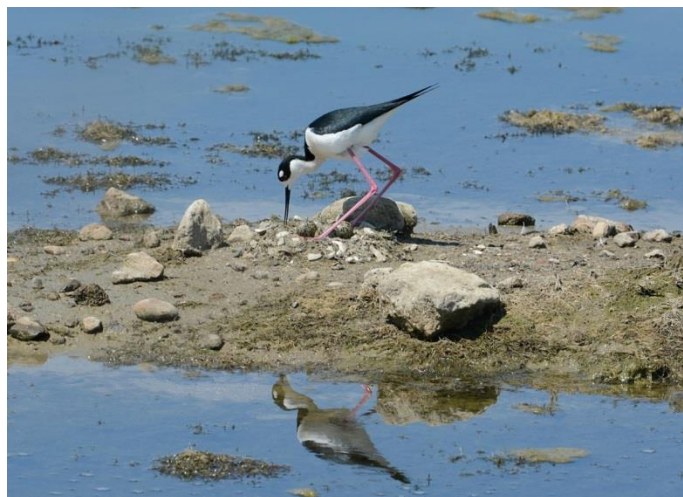
Ah, winter on the Coastal Plain. Clear and cold? Rainy and mild? Snow and ice? We can get it all and probably will. We are lucky to live in a part of the country that provides wintering grounds for a wide variety of birds. Between the Chesapeake Bay, numerous lakes and ponds, over-seeded agricultural fields, our mid-Atlantic coastal forests, and wetlands, we are treated to some great winter birding.

Birds that move into our area for the winter are coming for food and shelter. If you can pay a visit to places like Grandview Nature Preserve or Dutch Gap Conservation Area (see February Field Trip), you will get a visual treat. The scene of hundreds and hundreds of resting and feeding ducks, either the "divers" or "dabblers," is dazzling. Wood Ducks, the "tree ducks," can be seen by the hundreds at Dutch Gap. If you can put a scope on a close American Wigeon or Gadwall or Northern Pintail you can see some intricate plumage patterns that are spectacular. In the surrounding marshes watch for Sedge Wrens, Swamp Sparrows, and Wilson's Snipe. On a still day take in the tranquil scene of hundreds of resting ducks on the York or James rivers.

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Redheads and scaup resting on the York River. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.



Black-necked Stilt tending four eggs in a nest on Craney Island. Photo by Bill Williams.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

February 16, 6:30 p.m. (In-person at the WRL Theater and via Zoom): Bill Williams, "Birdlife of Craney Island."

Join us February 16 as our own Past President, Bill Williams, takes us to Craney Island and the many species of birds documented there over the years. Craney Island Dredged Material Management Area in Portsmouth, VA has been a birding destination since the 1950s. This highly dynamic U.S. Army Corps of Engineers facility changes constantly, sometimes quite dramatically in a single day. Regular bird monitoring surveys of Craney Island began in 2008 and have documented more than 2 million birds of 270 species. Bill's presentation will provide an overview of how the facility functions and its history and highlight some of the many species documented on this unique man-made structure.

The February meeting will be our first hybrid in-person and Zoom meeting, and it will be a joint meeting with the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists. Please note that the meeting will begin promptly at 6:30 p.m. rather than our usual 7:00 p.m. because the library closes at 8:00 p.m. *(Continued on Page 2)*

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Programs, Continued from Page 1

The in-person site will be the Williamsburg Library Theater at 515 Scotland Street. The meeting will also be accessible via Zoom and recorded for those unable to attend. A Zoom link will be sent by email to all WBC members a few days prior to the meeting. No food or drink (other than water) is allowed in the library theater, and masks are required to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

March 16: Shirley Devan, "Prothonotary Warblers in James City County and Beyond." More details to follow in the next newsletter. 🐦

WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome Julia Mackin-McLaughlin, who joined our club in January!

Speaking of January, it's a new year and time to renew your membership. You now have the option of renewing your membership and making donations online with PayPal at this link: <https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/membership/>. If you wish to donate to our club's various programs when you renew, please click the "Continue Shopping" link in the upper right-hand corner of the screen after you are taken to your PayPal shopping cart. You still have the option of renewing your membership by mailing in a check with the renewal form located online and on Page 9 of this newsletter. 🐦

BIRD WALKS

The WBC bird walk scheduled for January 22 at New Quarter Park was cancelled due to snow, but there will be a walk in the park on February 26. Meet near the park office at 8:00 am. 🐦

FEBRUARY 13 BOAT TRIP TO CBBT ISLANDS

By George Martin

Due to inclement weather on our original date in January, the Williamsburg Bird Club's boat trip to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel islands has been rescheduled for Sunday, February 13, 2022, with participation limited by the size of the boat to 40 people. At the time this article is being written, the boat is full, but as yet there is no waiting list. If you would like to get on the waiting list in case someone cancels, or would like additional information, please contact George Martin at grm0803@gmail.com, or by phone at 757-920-5403. 🐦

President's Corner, Continued from Page 1

While these congregations are impressive, it's important to note that many species of ducks are declining, primarily due to loss of breeding habitat. The state of wetlands has an enormous impact on duck populations. Ongoing research into wetland use by waterfowl is focusing on the numbers of wetlands, water levels, extent and duration of open water, species-specific adaptations, and the effects of climate change. The conservation of wetlands, both coastal and inland, is a top priority for the health and success of waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, songbirds, and others.

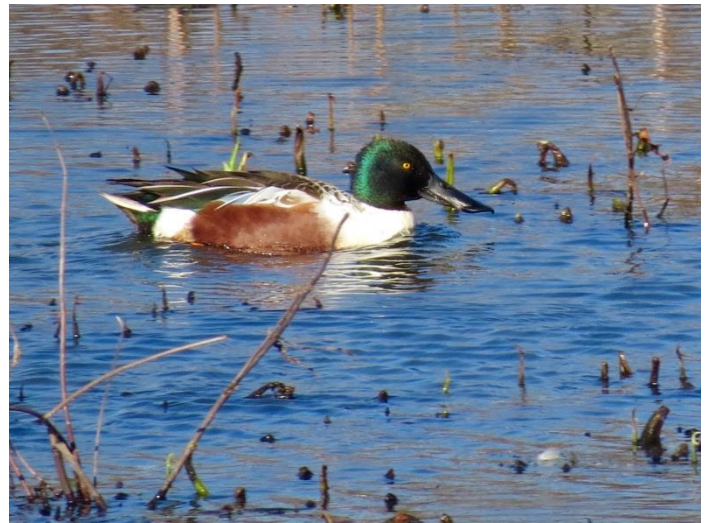
What can we do to help? We can support work being done by the many agencies and organizations working on wildlife management issues on national, regional, and local levels: the National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and their many partnering agencies, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the National Audubon Society, just to name a few. Closer to home are the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Forests for the Bay, the Nature Conservancy, Virginia Society of Ornithology, Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, the Center for Conservation Biology at William & Mary, and our club's own Ruth Beck and Bill Sheehan Ornithology Research Grants Fund.

On a personal level we can document the use of local habitats by entering observations into [eBird](#), one of the most robust and popular citizen science platforms for data collection. Through these observations, trends and changes become apparent. The data is analyzed and used for science-based planning. This information can help in driving legislation aimed at habitat and species protection. It can be presented at zoning hearings, permit and public land management hearings, local park management

meetings, and even home owners associations. We can contribute to science and promote conservation even as we enjoy our favorite pastime.

Back to those ducks. It's really hard to pick a favorite. The elegance of a slender Northern Pintail is matched by the charm of a Long-tailed Duck. The unique bill of a Northern Shoveler, with its tiny projections for straining out food, is equaled by the boldly-patterned stout, spatulate bill of a Surf Scoter, useful for pulling up shellfish. For sheer pizzazz a male Wood Duck is hard to beat but how to outdo a pair of Hooded Mergansers? How can we choose? And why should we? Let's get out there and enjoy winter birding and contribute to conservation even as we do!

Happy Winter Birding! 🐦



Northern Shoveler, photographed by Nancy Barnhart.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

By George Martin

FEBRUARY 19 TRIP TO DUTCH GAP

On Saturday, February 19, Rose Ryan will lead a field trip at [Dutch Gap Conservation Area](#) outside Richmond. In past years, birders at Dutch Gap have seen a wide variety of wintering ducks. So far in 2022, Wood Ducks have been seen in large numbers there. We'll meet at the main parking lot by the visitor's center at 9:00 a.m. There won't be any organized car pools, but interested participants are welcome to arrange their own.

MARCH 19 TRIP TO MACHICOMOCO STATE PARK

For our March field trip on Saturday, March 19, we'll be heading to [Machicomoco State Park](#) in Gloucester County. While this is a new state park, there have already been good reports on bird sightings there. Leader information and logistics for the field trip are still being arranged. If you have a State Park pass, please plan to bring it. Those cars without annual passes will be charged a \$5.00 entry fee. 🐦

25 YEARS of BIRD RESEARCH at W&M

Summary by Cathy Millar

Our club was privileged to have Daniel Cristol deliver our January 19 meeting presentation about his 25 years of ornithology research at William & Mary, where Dr. Cristol is Chancellor Professor of Biology. Dan joined our club when he first arrived at W&M to teach biology and has been a generous friend, advisor, and supporter since then. His research began as basic academic research on the evolution of bird behavior and has shifted over the years to applied research. He's published a hundred scientific articles and mentored over 200 students, including about 40 graduate students whose research has been supported by grants from our club. Dan has also written 240 consecutive monthly columns on birding for the *Virginia Gazette*. He dedicated January's WBC presentation to his father, Allan H. Cristol, not surprisingly a birder, who died in September 2021.

The bird that first inspired Dan's passion for birds was an American Woodcock that he spied in his backyard at age 4. Dan shared that he was home only because he'd been suspended from preschool for a week for "inciting arson" by encouraging two schoolmates to start a fire! Birding is Dan's avocation as well as vocation, and every morning he takes an hour's walk in his neighborhood noting the subtle changes in the bird community. He also enjoys chasing rare birds and had just come back from Maine where he'd seen the stunning Steller's Sea Eagle.

Dan's first six years at W&M involved basic research studying whether evolution was shaping avian prey dropping behavior. His subjects were Herring Gulls that dropped clams onto hard surfaces to open them. He and his students collected data determining the optimum height of the drop (This involved dropping hundreds of clams from a campus building onto the bricks below.) and the best size clam that would provide the greatest yield for the least amount of energy.

The next eight years of research addressed the question of whether golf courses are healthy places for birds despite human disturbance and the use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizer. Working with Eastern Bluebirds, Dan was surprised to find that the number and health of youngsters in nest boxes appeared to be unaffected but found by radio-tracking fledglings that they immediately left the open courses for the surrounding woodlands. This was his first experience in applied research as the results led to articles recommending the importance of designing golf courses with woodlands preserved around them,

in which birds can find safety, versus golf courses surrounded by the open yards of homes.

Other research projects included:

- exploring whether birds that migrate have a larger hippocampus for spatial memory (Migratory juncos are better at solving memory problems than non-migratory ones.);
- assessing whether wetlands created in exchange for wetlands destroyed by developers provide adequate bird habitat (Songbirds are not returning in a comparable manner as the lands are too wet.);
- finding how birds protect themselves from feather-degrading bacillus that are found all over birds and can completely destroy a feather (Two major factors are the antibiotic properties of the protective oil from their preen gland that birds distribute on their feathers and the killing property of ultraviolet radiation when they sunbathe.); and
- investigating the reason for differential bird migration wherein birds within the same species migrate different distances to their wintering grounds depending on their sex or age (Female White-throated Sparrows tend to migrate further south than males, which perhaps stay closer to breeding grounds to reclaim territory.").

Since 2005, most of Dan's research and 50 published papers have been about every aspect of the relationship between the toxic effect of the quadrupled amount of mercury in the food web from what naturally occurs and bird health. His most surprising finding has been that birds exposed to mercury only as babies, but had no further mercury in their diet as adults, had fewer offspring or none at all. His research proving mercury's toxicity to songbirds provided data that was used as part of a lawsuit against DuPont for a \$50 million settlement to create habitat for birds and other wildlife. Since that research, Dan has been involved in providing data for other lawsuits regarding polluted rivers, including one on the Penobscot River that led toward the offending company being required to provide \$187 – 267 million toward improving bird habitat. He currently is participating in the investigation of the effect of PCB's released in the Hudson River by General Electric as part of a \$20.5 million settlement to pay for study. He is also collecting data on another river contaminated by dioxin for which the offending company is being held responsible. He'll be working this coming summer on the Mississippi.

Apart from its scientific and applied benefits, Dan stressed the importance of the life-changing experiences that research gives his students, frequently

W&M Research, Continued from Page 4

leading them into their careers. He noted how helpful the scholarships our club annually provides are to the students' field work and pointed out that any monies donated to the W&M Biology Department's

Ruth Beck Fund or the WBC's Ruth Beck and Bill Sheehan Ornithology Research Grants Fund go directly toward supporting bird research. I hope this report provides a tease for you to view Dan's fascinating presentation in full at <https://youtu.be/avNGi1b1mos>. 🐦

RESULTS FROM THE 2021 WILLIAMSBURG CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Jim Corliss

For the second year in a row we were presented with a wet and cold day for the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). But regardless of the unwelcoming weather, 116 birders turned out on December 19 to tally over 18,000 birds across 103 species. Surprisingly, even though the miserable weather encouraged the birds to hunker down out of sight, we still managed to find record high numbers of the nine species listed below (previous high counts in parentheses). Interestingly, we had high counts for four of these same species in the 2020 CBC. So it's encouraging to see that the populations of some species in our area appear to be doing quite well.

- 69 Wood Ducks (57 in 2020)
- 75 Wild Turkeys (31 in 2020)
- 114 American White Pelicans (21 in 2020)
- 26 Great Egrets (21 in 2004)
- 35 Red-shouldered Hawks (32 in 2018)
- 3 Merlin (2 in 2001 and 2018)
- 10 Gray Catbirds (10 in 2005)
- 335 Chipping Sparrows (324 in 2020)
- 323 Rusty Blackbirds (156 in 2016)



American White Pelicans photographed by Brian Taber on Hog Island during the 2021 CBC.

We didn't experience the thrill of the northern finch "super flight" of the 2020 winter; however, the American White Pelicans at Hog Island outdid themselves with a showing of 114 individuals. The 323 Rusty Blackbirds that were found between the College Woods and Middle Plantation sectors more than doubled the previous high-count set in 2016 for that

species. It's also notable that the record high-count of 10 Gray Catbirds followed the trend set by last year's Spring Bird Count in which we tallied a record 176 catbirds.

The most unusual bird observed on count day was a Nashville Warbler that Nick Flanders found alongside the old Pottery campground in the Skimino sector. This was only the second time a Nashville Warbler has been recorded in the Williamsburg CBC, with the first instance being in 2007. Even though the Nashville Warbler is known to be a late fall migrant, a quick look in eBird revealed there have only been two other December reports of Nashville Warblers in James City County (JCC) over the last ten years. We are much more likely to observe a Nashville Warbler in JCC during fall migration compared to spring migration, however. Like many warblers, this species follows a pattern of "loop migration" in which it takes different routes between its wintering and breeding territories between the spring and fall. An interesting article describing loop migration can be found on the National Audubon Society website by clicking on this [link](#).

The Nashville Warbler is a bird that most of us rarely have the pleasure to encounter. Scottish ornithologist Alexander Wilson named the bird in 1811 after observing it in Nashville, Tennessee. Wilson is the namesake for five North American bird species (e.g., Wilson's Warbler), and he had a habit of naming warblers based on where he first observed them, with Connecticut, Tennessee, and Kentucky Warblers being other examples. These birds are included in Wilson's nine-volume work, *American Ornithology*, which was published from 1808 to 1814. This collection is widely considered to be the most important work on American ornithology before John James Audubon came on the scene, and contains some of the most elaborate color engravings published in America at that time.

Thank you to the 61 observers in the field and the 55 feeder watchers who made our 45th Williamsburg CBC a success. I promise to do my best (which is nothing at all) to improve the weather next year. We'll be announcing the dates for the Spring Bird Count soon. Until then, stay warm and safe, and happy birding. 🐦

WINTER WEBCAM VIEWING

By Shirley Devan

Too cold, snowy, or icy for you lately to get outside into the field? You might enjoy watching these two webcams over the next few months:

- A Bald Eagle Nest Cam in Northern Virginia. This is a 24/7 camera with two camera views. No eggs have been laid yet, but both adults are bringing soft material to line the nest. <https://www.dullesgreenway.com/eagle-cam/>
- A Great Horned Owl Nest Cam in Savannah, GA. The female was incubating one egg as of the end of January. This is a 24/7 nest cam with three camera views. <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/cams/great-horned-owls/>. 🦉



RECENT SIGHTINGS

Send your sightings and photos to the Newsletter Editor, Mary Ellen Hodges, at me.hodges@cox.net.



Gary Carpenter shared that a **Great Horned Owl** was seen and photographed in Colonial Heritage by his neighbor, Marjorie Hilkert, on **January 1**.



January 11 was a [Project FeederWatch](#) day for Shirley Devan: "I had 20 species in the back yard in Colonial Heritage early in the afternoon. In addition to the usual suspects (such as the **Carolina Wren**, pictured above), there were a **Song Sparrow**, **Pine Warbler**, **Brown Thrasher**, and **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**."



Nancy Barnhart reported: "Beginning on **January 8**, Virginia birders got a rare treat. A **Northern Lapwing** (photo bottom left) made a three-day appearance in an agricultural field in Virginia Beach. Found by an out-of-state birder, the alert quickly went out. We mobilized instantly and an hour and a half later were viewing this gorgeous bird with awe and recognition of its rareness. The normal range of this species includes Europe and Asia. Its wintering range can include North Africa, northern India, and China. It can be a very rare visitor to the Atlantic Coast, but typically appears further north than Virginia. This bird was just the second of its species to be seen in the state of Virginia. Through scopes we had great looks at the long head plumes, iridescent green and purple wings, large black breastband, and unique facial markings. An OH WOW moment!"

MORE RECENT SIGHTINGS



Deborah Humphries shared her photographs of two **Eastern Screech Owls** she saw on Jamestown Island on January 14.



Our common **Song Sparrow** was captured beautifully by **Carol Annis** on a snowy January 21 in Toano.



Ivan Munkres saw an overwintering **Blue-headed Vireo** on January 22 behind the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library: "I'd heard they occasionally overwinter, so it was really nice to finally see one!"

Deborah Humphries noted a sign of a **Bald Eagle** (photo bottom right) nest progressing closer to egg laying when on January 25 she witnessed one of the Jamestown Ferry nesting eagles carrying soft grasses that it had picked up from Mainland Field.



Cathy Millar captured a photo in her downtown Williamsburg yard on January 22 of "her" **Red-shouldered Hawk** defending his piece of beef fat from a crow. Said Cathy, "I was fascinated by how the sun was at the right angle to cause the ice crystals beneath the hawk to reflect some of its red feathers."



Cindy Hamilton captured a great photo of a **Snowy Egret** "going out on a limb" in the snow at Pleasure House Point Natural Area in Virginia Beach on January 24.



MORE RECENT SIGHTINGS



Melinda Cousins shared a January 28 photo of an overwintering **Yellow-throated Warbler** which has been visiting her Ford's Colony residence since November.



Bob and Anne Arseneau reported several of the recent visitors to the backyard feeders at their Kingsmill residence: **Northern Flicker**, **Pileated Woodpecker** (photo lower left), **Downy Woodpecker**, **White-breasted Nuthatch** (photo above), **Carolina Wren**, and **Carolina Chickadee**.



Inge Curtis went outside on the morning of January 29 to her pier near the confluence of the James and Chickahominy rivers "to see whether there was an eagle somewhere in the pine tree. Instead I saw a **Brown Pelican** flying in. I was so excited that it was hard to hold my camera still. Unfortunately, my dog was just as excited and instantly ran out to greet the bird on the pier. The pelican was not interested in a meeting but later came back and rested in the grass on my beach. He sat there for a long time."



George Martin submitted the following about his January birding: "Without knowing it, I've been taking the same approach that Dan Cristol mentioned during our January meeting – I've done all my birding in January within Ford's Colony. And the variety of habitats within the community means that many different bird species can be observed. I've recorded 57 species in eBird this month, ranging taxonomically from Canada Goose to Northern Cardinal. While I haven't seen anything rare, I've had quite a few pleasant surprises. Here are some:

- seeing a **Brown Creeper** and a **Hermit Thrush** (while I'm typing this) in my yard;
- watching from my office while **Bald Eagles** fly over the pond;
- observing **Rusty Blackbirds** regularly at a particular spot near Chisel Run Pond; and
- having a **Red-tailed Hawk** (photo above) land twenty feet away from me on the golf course, intent on some prey item in the grass.

OK, I'm not counting the **Rock Pigeons** I see at the Rt. 199 overpass at Monticello Ave. I also haven't entered them in eBird." 🐦





2022 Williamsburg Bird Club Membership Form

Name		
Address		
City	State	Zip
Email	Phone	

Your email will be used for WBC's email mailing list. You will receive announcements of upcoming bird walks, field trips, meetings, other events, and the full color email edition of the newsletter through this mailing list.

_____ Do you also want a b&w paper newsletter sent to your physical address?

Membership: _____ New* _____ Renewing

_____ Individual \$20

_____ Family \$25

_____ Patron \$35

_____ Student \$5

*How did you hear about the Bird Club?

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

\$_____ the Bird Club Conservation Fund

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

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

Your membership dues and additional contributions are important to the mission of the Williamsburg Bird Club. Thank you! If you have questions about your membership, contact Membership Chair Jeanette Navia, jnavia@gmail.com.

The Williamsburg Bird Club is exempt from federal income tax under 26 U.S.C. Section 501(c)(3) and is a non-profit organization eligible to receive tax deductible donations. A financial statement is available on request from the VA Office of Charitable and Regulatory Programs.



Williamsburg Bird Club
PO Box 1085
Williamsburg, VA 23187

ANNUAL DONATIONS FROM OUR LOCALLY-OWNED BIRD STORES

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

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

Backyard Birder



Backyard Birder Seed & Supply (located in Williamsburg at the Quarterpath Shopping Center near the Kingsmill Harris Teeter) supports the WBC through donations and a 10% discount on purchases for WBC members. For your discount in-store, please inform them you are a WBC member during checkout.

<https://www.backyardbirder.org/>



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