



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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April 2022

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart



The dawn chorus of spring has to be one of the highlights of nature's annual cycles. Leaving cold winter mornings behind, we wake to the early-morning, energetic voices of our local breeders, soon to be joined by seasonal arrivals. Whether it's the well-known whistles of a

Northern Cardinal or the first *whichity-whichity-whichity* of a Common Yellowthroat, it is a joy to hear, a salve during stressful times. And, occasionally, we're treated to the last word from wintering birds just before they head north. The gorgeous flute-like song of a Hermit Thrush or the almost comically fun twitter and trill of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet are winter's final goodbye. After watching Shirley Devan's gorgeous presentation on Prothonotary Warblers, who isn't ready for the *sweet-sweet-sweet-sweet* loud, clear song of those dazzlers? Whether advertising for a mate, defending a territory, or socially interacting, birds use a complex language allowing us into their world. Learning bird song can be daunting but another very rewarding aspect of birding. We're fortunate to have access to many aides to help learn their voices. The "old fashioned" way was listening to CD's, still very useful. Now there are a number of apps we can carry in our pockets to help us know what we're hearing. Repetition can be key and fortunately spring dawns offer us plenty of opportunity for that. (Continued on Page 2)



Common Yellowthroat. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS


By Patty Maloney

April 20, 6:30 p.m., via Zoom only: Research by W&M graduate students supported by WBC grants.

Join us on April 20 via Zoom at 6:30 p.m. (No in-person meeting) for research presentations by William & Mary graduate students and WBC grant recipients. A Zoom link will be sent by email to members in advance of the meeting. The presenters are:

- Grace Phillips, "The Impact of Deer Overpopulation on Songbird Abundance, Diversity, and Health"
- Michael Academia, "Ospreys and Fish Shortages: Food Addition Study Increases Nesting Success in Mobjack Bay"
- Moira Meehan, "Using Science to Save Birds from Collisions: Can Sound Make Bird-safe Windows Even Safer?"
- Emma Noyelle, "Is Mercury Really a Widespread Problem for Songbirds: the Definitive Review"

May 25: Meagan Thomas, "History of the Richmond Falcon Cam and the Rebound of Virginia's Peregrine Falcons."

Our May in-person and Zoom meeting will be on May 25, the 4th Wednesday in May, because the Williamsburg Regional Library theater is not available on our normal date. Our presenter will be Meagan Thomas, Watchable Wildlife Biologist / Certified Wildlife Biologist with the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR). Meagan's talk will center on the DWR's Richmond Falcon Cam, including a history of the numerous birds seen on camera throughout the years as well as a brief look into the natural history, decline, and conservation of Peregrine Falcons across the Commonwealth. You can watch the Richmond nest cam live at <https://dwr.virginia.gov/falcon-cam/>. 

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER, Continued from Page 1

Our April meeting will continue our look into the research of local experts. The avian world faces many threats and obstacles. It would be easy to feel overwhelmed and discouraged by all the bad news. Learning about the research and field work being conducted to solve conservation issues offers real hope. Science driven research, data collection, and field work are essential for knowing how and where to put time, attention, and resources. From there comes action. In March we learned about Shirley's Prothonotary Warbler banding research. In April we will feature the research of the four William & Mary student recipients of the WBC ornithology grants. Supporting these students with grants has been a priority and hallmark of the WBC. First awarded in 1982, they have evolved into the Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Ornithology Research Grants that they are today. The work and dedication of these young researchers are the future of conservation. Please mark your calendars for April 20 and be ready for some fascinating reports.

And while you have your calendars out, please save May 15 for the Spring Bird Count. It's a fun and important day to track our local bird populations and all are welcome to participate. Details to follow.

Happy Spring! 🐦

WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome Barb Creel and Kelsey Vita as new members of the WBC!

If you, too, would like to join the WBC, or if you already are a member and still need to renew your membership for 2022, you can do so online at <https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/membership/> or by mailing in a check with a membership form that can be downloaded and printed from our website at https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/wp-content/uploads/2022_WBC_Membership_Form.pdf. Payment online is with PayPal. If you wish to donate to our club's various programs when you join or 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. 🐦

BIRD WALKS

By Scott Hemler

We had 26 people come out to Freedom Park on the morning of March 26 for our monthly WBC bird walk! We saw 30 species of birds! Many were our permanent residents, such as Chipping Sparrows, Northern Cardinals, and American Robins in good numbers. Some of our winter visitors were still here as we saw some Dark-eyed Juncos and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Our summer visitors had started to arrive as we saw a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher as well as a Yellow-throated Warbler! We also visited the Williamsburg Botanical Garden and observed House Finches and American Goldfinches eating at the feeders. We had beautiful weather for an early spring bird walk, though it got breezy towards the end! The complete eBird checklist for the March walk can be found at this link: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S10562937>.

Our next bird walk will be on April 23, 8:00 a.m., at New Quarter Park. 🐦

INAUGURAL NEWSLETTER TRIVIA GAME

By Cathy Flanagan

If you enjoy opportunities to test your bird smarts and compete for prizes, you should like a new, regular feature we are adding to the newsletter. Each issue of *The Flyer* will contain a trivia question derived from the contents of the issue published two months earlier. For example, the answer to the trivia question in this April issue of *The Flyer* can be found in the February issue. (Newsletters from the current year can always be found on the WBC website at this link: <https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/the-flyer/>.) The first WBC member to email Cathy Flanagan (cflanagan802@gmail.com) the correct answer to the trivia question will receive a \$5 gift certificate to one of our local bird stores. Ready to give it a try? Here's this month's question:

Q: *What kind of migration pattern does the Nashville Warbler follow?* 🐦

MARCH FIELD TRIP TO MACHICOMOCO STATE PARK

By George Martin

On Saturday, March 19, Dave Youker led our Club's field trip to Machicomoco State Park in Gloucester County, the newest park in our state's system. The 21 birders in the group observed over 50 species of birds in the park. The variety of habitat (York River, fields, forests) meant a wide variety of birds as well. Field Sparrows were numerous and singing. An Eastern Meadowlark posed at the top of a tree. Brown Pelicans were flying over a ship docked at Naval Weapons Station Yorktown across the river. Ospreys were carrying nesting material. The eBird checklist for the trip can be viewed at this link: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S105235687>. 🐦



Club members at Machicomoco State Park on March 19. Photo by George Martin.



Field Sparrow photographed by Laura Mae during the field trip.



Eastern Meadowlark. Photo by Laura Mae from the field trip.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

By George Martin

April Field Trip to Newport News Park

For our April field trip, on Saturday, April 16, we'll be heading to familiar grounds at Newport News Park. We'll meet in the parking lot past the ranger station at 8 a.m. George Martin will lead the trip. There won't be any organized carpooling. The birding should last most of the morning. Migration should be well underway at that point!

May Field Trip to Cranston's Mill Pond

Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 21, when the Club will visit Cranston's Mill Pond. WBC members have birded this private property for Christmas Bird Counts, with permission of the owner, and the owner has granted permission for this club field trip. There may be a limit on the number of people who may enter the property; stay tuned for signup information. 🐦

IN MEMORIAM: GLENDA WHITE

By Rick Brown



It has been almost two months since our friend Glenda White sadly passed away. Glenda and I met when we both joined Cohort XII to train as Master Naturalists with the Historic Rivers Chapter. In the process of our training we both joined the Williamsburg

Bird Club. Glenda had a keen interest in birds and worked to become a better birder. She had retired recently from the staff at William & Mary and was wringing every last drop out of her newfound extra-curricular activities. She went on bird walks; monitored bluebird boxes on two trails; headed up the Historic Rivers Chapter's Big Tree project; and accepted the position as Chapter treasurer. Glenda worked hard at enjoying life. She was bright and enjoyed learning and being around people who were also keen to learn. She and her husband, Lynn Un-

derwood, recently built their dream cabin in the mountains. They spent a lot of time there exploring and looked forward to the peace and quiet that the trips to their woods brought.

Glenda was so curious. She left us too soon. I remember now bits of conversations we had during the three years we spent counting bluebird eggs. Nothing important, just wonder at the things we were learning. And then I remember her.

When you meet your friend on the roadside or in the market place, let the spirit in you move your lips and direct your tongue.

Let the voice within your voice speak to the ear of his ear;

For her soul will keep the truth of your heart as the taste of the wine is remembered

When the colour is forgotten and the vessel is no more.

From *The Prophet*, by Kahil Gibran. 🐦

PROTHONOTARY WARBLERS IN JAMES CITY COUNTY AND BEYOND

Reported by Cathy Millar

At our second hybrid in-person/Zoom meeting, on March 16, we learned a lot about the beautiful Prothonotary Warbler (PROW) from Shirley Devan, who's been monitoring their nest boxes in our part of Virginia for the last ten years. Among her many activities, Shirley has served as a past president of WBC for six years and past president of Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists, which she helped found in 2006. Currently she is membership secretary of Virginia Society of Ornithology and secretary of Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory.

Shirley noted that the long name of these little birds with a brilliant yellow head and chest refers to the bright yellow robes once worn by clerks known as prothonotaries in the Catholic Church. She was delighted to report that we have a robust population of the species in our area. PROWs are most numerous in the Southeast, and they nest almost always over standing water, not far from the shoreline or in low-lying, easily-flooded swamps. They winter in Central and northern South America. Prothonotaries are the only warbler east of the Mississippi River that nests
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Prothonotary Warbler. Photo by Jim Easton.

in small natural or artificial cavities. The males arrive on the breeding grounds a few days before the females and establish their territory by placing moss in nest cavities and singing. The female chooses the nest cavity and male she 'likes' and finishes the nest cup with a lining of rootlets, plant down, grasses, and bark strips.

The eggs are laid one per day for a total of 3-7 eggs, most often five in the first clutch and four in the second clutch. Incubation starts when the last egg is laid and all of the eggs hatch on the same day. Amazingly, the nestlings are in the box for only ten days. For them to grow and fledge in such an incredibly short time requires being fed by both parents. On Day 10, the fledglings either fly or swim to the shoreline. Shirley has witnessed many fledglings drop from the box into the water below and, using their wings, breaststroke about six feet to the shore where the parents are waiting and quickly lead them into the understory for protection. The parents continue to feed the nestlings for up to five weeks. A pair of PROWs will normally raise two broods per season.

PROWs have been studied in Virginia since 1987. Gathering data is important because their population has fallen over 30% over the last 50 years, primarily due to loss of breeding grounds of forested wetlands and wintering grounds of mangroves. Shirley has federal and state licenses to band birds and started banding PROWs on the Northwest River in Chesapeake in 2011. PROWs are also being monitored at Newport News Reservoir, the Dragon Run in King and Queen and Middlesex counties, and in James City County. She stressed that no harm comes to birds that are being caught and banded. Shirley has documented several cases of nest fidelity by recognizing banded adults returning year after year to the same nest box or one nearby. It was estimated that

one female had made six round trips to Panama and back to the same nest box in Northwest River Park.

In James City County, along with CVWO President Brian Taber and other volunteers, Shirley has been monitoring seven bird boxes installed on Powhatan Creek Trail from which a total of 41 nestlings have fledged; eleven bird boxes installed in 2017 on Chickahominy Riverfront Park from which 74 nestlings have fledged; and, with members of the WINGS Bird Club at Ford's Colony, five installed in 2019 on the Ford's Colony Nature Trail from which three nestlings have fledged to date.

Banding PROWs in the nest box is risky business that involves climbing ladders in swamplands or balancing in a canoe. Shirley showed us the hand net she uses that has been cobbled together from an 18-inch section of fishing pole to which is attached a 3-inch embroidery hoop on which netting has been hand sewn. She described that catching the female by placing the net over the nest box hole while she is incubating and capturing her when she flies out is relatively easy. But the male usually just sits at the entrance to the box and leans forward to feed the youngsters. Shirley's only hope of catching a male is to employ super stealth mode and just wait for an opportunity! The youngsters are banded when they are about five days old, when their legs are stiff enough to hold the band and their feet are big enough that the band doesn't slide off. Shirley explained that bird bands are sized according to the weight and size of the bird species. These nestlings and adults receive a tiny band size 0 which will stay on them for the rest of their lives.

Shirley concluded by naming and thanking the volunteers that have helped her in James City County, Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (that is the sponsor for this project), as well as other organizations that have provided funding. For more details about this fascinating project and lovely photos of a really beautiful interesting bird, watch the video of Shirley's presentation on our club YouTube channel at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cq2-REPWfxE>.



LIKE WORDLE? TRY BRDL!

Are you a fan of Wordle, the popular vocabulary game in which a player has six tries to deduce a word of the day? WBC member Rexanne Bruno recently discovered a Wordle spinoff called "BRDL," developed by Alex Tomlinson, a graphic designer

with the National Audubon Society. BRDL is played like Wordle but instead of trying to guess a five-letter mystery word the goal of BRDL is to guess a daily four-letter bird banding code used as a shorthand for a species name. You can play BRDL (and learn more about banding codes) on the Audubon website at this link: <https://www.audubon.org/news/love-hit-game-wordle-try-brdl-bird-inspired-spinoff>. 🐦

BIRDING ARIZONA: WE DID IT AGAIN!

By Gary Carpenter

As a couple, my wife, Ann, and I began our birding careers in Florida. Ann's parents lived there during their retirement years and, naturally, we visited them often. We first picked up a bird field guide in Florida in the late 1980s and have visited dozens of places there during our birding careers. Every now and then we were pleased to spot one or two Sandhill Cranes. We have also enjoyed birding in Arizona a number of times. So, imagine our surprise and delight when, on an outing with the Naturalist Journeys tour company this year in south central Arizona, we spotted 20,000 Sandhill Cranes within the space of just minutes. That was not a typo: We saw an estimated 20,000 (give or take a thousand) within minutes!

So let me back up and fill in some details. On our first birding foray into Arizona, in 2005, Ann and I stayed at a wonderful bed and breakfast called The Casa de San Pedro. It is located in a very small and dusty town called Hereford, located 12 miles south of Sierra Vista and Fort Huachuca, which in turn are about 90 miles southeast of Tucson. This region is our favorite birding destination in the country and this year's trip was our fifth visit. While on that first visit we met a young woman named Peg Abbott who was a local birding guide. She was guiding some gentlemen who were staying at "The Casa". Out of the kindness of her heart and without charge, Peg spent some time with us describing good local birding spots, and she even drew us a map (on the back of a paper napkin) of how to get to one of them. Peg Abbott is now the head of Naturalist Journeys. When we found out that her company was sponsoring a birding tour of the area in 2022 and would be basing the tour out of The Casa de San Pedro we jumped at the opportunity.

Our "Arizona Sweetheart Birding" tour began on February 12 when our excellent guide, Bryan Calk, picked up our group of seven from various hotels around the Tucson airport. We drove south on a beautiful day towards the town of Patagonia where, after lunch, we visited what is now called the Tucson Audubon's Paton Center for Hummingbirds. This location used to be named simply "Paton's Feeders" and was and is nationally known as a birding hotspot. While not the height of hummingbird season in Arizona (which is August) we spotted Anna's and Broadbill hummers, Ladderback and Gila woodpeckers, Gambel's Quail, Curved-billed Thrashers, Lesser Goldfinch, a Greater Roadrunner, Red-shafted Flicker, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and a Lazuli Bunting among many other species. After a scenic drive through the grasslands around the Huachuca Mountains we arrived at The Casa de San Pedro where

we had a warm welcome from Carl and Patrick (Owner/Operators) and from Peg Abbott. It was good to see them all once again. There followed the first of many delicious evening meals.

The next morning (as did every morning) began with a pre-breakfast walk in the vicinity of The Casa. On this particular day we spotted a few birds of interest including Lawrence's Goldfinch, a "prairie" Merlin, and Eastern Meadowlarks. Then, after warming up with the first of The Casa's spectacular breakfasts, we were off to White Water Draw in search of our target bird of the tour: the Sandhill Crane.



Snow Geese (foreground) and Sandhill Cranes. Photo by Bryan Calk.

About one-half mile from the entrance to White Water Draw we spotted around 100 cranes feeding in an agricultural field. While we watched, a number of them took off and joined what turned out to be literally thousands of Sandhills as they flew towards the wetlands of the draw. As we drove into the parking area we could see the sky filling with black ribbons of Sandhills as they circled and settled into the shallow ponds for their morning rest. The noise they made was overwhelming. The sight and sound of these thousands of birds flying in and milling about was an experience that I will forever remember. We took the walks around the grounds of Whitewater Draw and also spotted Black-throated, Vesper, and Brewer's sparrows, Loggerhead Shrikes, Snow Geese (in the hundreds), Ross's Geese, a Vermillion Flycatcher, a Bendire's Thrasher, Cactus Wren, Lark Bunting, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and a large variety of ducks including Northern Shovelers, Green-winged Teal, American Widgeons, and Northern Pintails. In driving around the area of the draw during mid-day Bryan was able to find a truly stunning dark morph of a Ferruginous Hawk as it circled lazily above us—my favorite bird of this trip. (Continued on Page 7)



Ferruginous Hawk (dark morph). Photo by Bryan Calk.

BIRDING ARIZONA, Continued from Page 6

On the way back to The Casa that evening a very accommodating Great Horned Owl posed for us atop a telephone pole.

On Monday, Valentine's Day, our destination birding spots were the San Pedro river basin in the vicinity of the Hereford bridge and the Ramsey Canyon Preserve of the Nature Conservancy. Among the birds seen this day were: Abert's and Green-tailed towhees, Pyrrhuloxia, Bewick's Wren, Bridled Titmice, Hutton's Vireo, Arizona and Acorn woodpeckers, an American Kestrel, and a Rivoli's Hummingbird. This last bird used to be called the Magnificent Hummingbird. Ann and I had also seen a Magnificent in Costa Rica but our guide, Bryan, told us that since then the "powers-that-be" have decided that these are actually two different species and the Costa Rican hummer is now called the Talamanca Hummingbird—and so we got to add a Life bird while doing nothing. Upon our return to The Casa de San Pedro we were treated to a wonderful Valentine's surf and turf dinner of broiled lobster tail and tenderloin medallions with wines and cheesecake.

Our last full day of birding took us to another well-known birding spot in the Huachuca Mountains: the SABO (Southeastern Arizona Birding Observatory) Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary. Unfortunately, the day was quite windy and cool so our sightings were somewhat limited. We saw Mexican Jays, an Orange-crowned Warbler, Pine Siskins, a Harris Hawk, and Yellow-rumped Warblers. The temperature dropped and the wind picked up as the day progressed and birding became extremely difficult and unproductive. Abandoning birding, we filled the afternoon with an interesting exploration of the historical copper mining town of Bisbee. This was the end of the birding tour but because we had decided to stay on at The Casa for another couple of days, we returned to Ash Canyon the next day. Conditions were only slightly improved over the previous day, but we were able to add Spotted and Canyon towhees, a Bushtit, and a Verdin.

Ann and I continued to bird in Arizona while visiting relatives in the Phoenix area. We birded the White Tank Mountains, Lake Pleasant, and the Riparian Reserve at the Water Ranch in Gilbert. At this manmade wetland in the middle of the Sonoran desert we spotted not only the usual desert species but also Ring-billed Gulls, Black-chinned Hummingbirds, American Coots, Muscovy Ducks, Green-winged Teal, Neotropic Cormorants, American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Black-crowned Night Herons, Great Blue Herons, Long-billed Dowitchers, and to our immense surprise ... a Roseate Spoonbill.

As you can tell from this and previous accounts of our birding forays in Arizona, this is a favorite destination for Ann and me. If anyone has an interest and would like more information we would be delighted to provide details about The Casa de San Pedro, Naturalist Journeys, the Huachuca Mountains, and the many other birding opportunities within the state. 🐦

RECENT SIGHTINGS

Please send your sightings to the Newsletter Editor, Mary Ellen Hodges, at me.hodges@cox.net.

Breeding season now is well underway among the resident birds in our area, and several club members have documented nesting activity observed over the past month. **Keith Kennedy** shared a photo from March 7 of an **Eastern Bluebird** with plant materials in its beak entering a nest box located just 25 ft. from the backdoor of Keith's residence in New Kent County. On March 14 Keith was able to see a **Red-shouldered Hawk** on a nest at a friend's house in rural Mechanicsville in Hanover County. Over the

last few days of March, **Inge Curtis** was watching a **Tufted Titmouse** pair on her property near the mouth of the Chickahominy River prepare a nest in a box Inge intended for bluebirds. **Jan Lockwood** shared some exciting news about her Queens Lake neighborhood. Early in March, Jan first observed some **Great Blue Herons** perching unsteadily on some pines. By the end of the month she had discovered at least four nests. As Jan put it: "All of the nests may not be successful this year, but it's excit-

ing to think that we could be witnessing the beginnings of a small herony along Queens Creek." The frequent appearance of two **Cooper's Hawks** in **Claudia McMurray's** side yard in Kingsmill during March has Claudia strongly suspecting the two are nesting nearby but she's still searching for the exact location. Claudia notes that she saw Cooper's Hawks in the same place at the same time last year.



Eastern Bluebird. Photo by Keith Kennedy.



Red-shouldered Hawk on Nest. Photo by Keith Kennedy.



Tufted Titmouse. Photo by Inge Curtis.



Great Blue Heron on nest. Photo by Jan Lockwood.



Cooper's Hawk with prey. Photo by Claudia McMurray.

In other sightings this past month, **Bill Williams** reported **American White Pelicans** near the mouth of College Creek on March 14. Bill said: "Neat to have this species in James City County, albeit briefly!"



American White Pelicans. Photo by Bill Williams.

Carol Annis observed a **Pied-billed Grebe** in her Toano neighborhood on March 16.



Pied-billed Grebe. Photo by Carol Annis.

Paula Perdoni was birding College Landing Park on March 21 when, as she said, "I did a double take when I heard what I thought was the song of the **Yellow-throated Warbler**. A true sign of spring!"

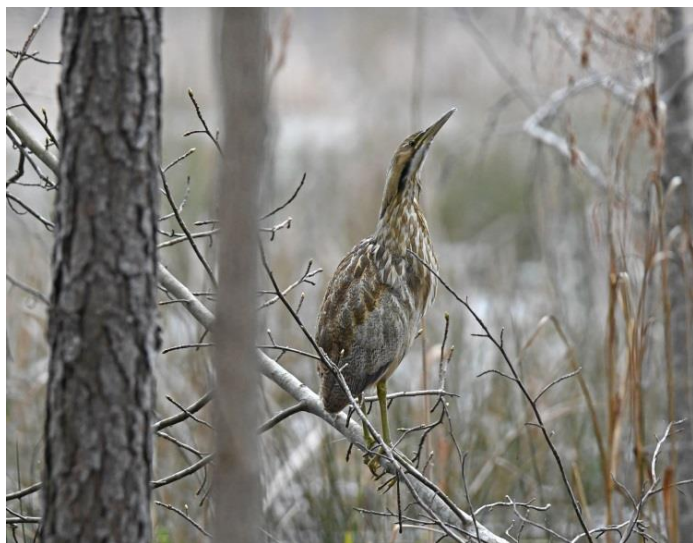


Yellow-throated Warbler. Photo by Paula Perdoni.

Bill Williams saw not one, but two **American Bitterns** on March 23 within 20 meters of each other along the Greensprings Interpretive Trail.

Sherry Hancock was at Croaker Landing on March 23, watching **Ruddy Ducks** and **Canvasbacks**, when a **Great Blue Heron** flew in and started fishing nearby. Sherry captured the action in photos and a poem:

*The Great Blue Heron
Watches intently a fish
Strike, Splash but misses*



American Bittern. Photo by Bill Williams.

While monitoring nests for Osprey Watch on the James River at Kingsmill on March 26, **Cheryl Jacobson** spotted a **Horned Grebe**. 🐦



Horned Grebe. Photo by Cheryl Jacobson.



Great Blue Heron, after its "miss." Photo by Sherry Hancock.



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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/>