



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 46 No. 8

www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

October 2022

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart



Following our summer break, WBC is off to a great fall start! Thanks to George Martin for arranging our first "big sit" at Jamestown Beach Event Park. It was a fun and successful event that attracted 23 folks including a few new members. We were entertained by a nice Palm Warbler

(Western) that spent a good part of the morning on the nearby fence (photo on Page 2). We hope to have more accessible activities in the future to suit the needs and interests of all.

Our first monthly meeting of the fall (attended by 20 members in person at the library and 21 by Zoom) gave us Jim Easton's brilliant photography. (Made me want to throw away my camera!) Thanks to Jim for all the great pointers about how to achieve effective wildlife photography. He makes it look a lot easier than it is!

Our monthly New Quarter Park bird walks continue to be popular with Bird Club members as well as park visitors and out-of-towners. Thanks to Scott Hemler for leading our September bird walk.

Special thanks to our Vice-President for Programs, Patty Maloney, who will be conducting our October meeting in my absence. Dr. Shawn Dash will be the speaker.

That little "Western" Palm Warbler we watched hopping along the fence most likely nested west and far north of Ontario. Southeast Virginia is part of its wintering range, so it could very well be here for the winter. At Jamestown Beach Event Park this bird should be able to find all the food and cover it needs to be ready to make that journey back north when the time comes.

Those far northern breeding grounds are seriously threatened by climate change. As global temperatures rise, there have been shifts in the ranges of (Continued on Page 2)

UPCOMING PROGRAM

By Patty Maloney

October 19, 6 p.m. (In-person at the Williamsburg Regional Library Theater and via Zoom): Dr. Shawn Dash, "Corvids of the United States."

Just in time for Halloween, join us as Dr. Shawn Dash, Associate Professor in Hampton University's Department of Biological Sciences, will provide insights on Corvids (birds in the Corvidae family) and their unique behaviors and intelligence. His presentation will include information on our local species as well some other spectacular Corvid species. Discussions will include the ecosystem engineering of the Clark's Nutcracker, the mythos of ravens, and the crows at the local dump.



Common Raven, Grand Canyon. Photo by Shawn Dash.

WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Executive Board 2022

President Nancy Barnhart	540-454-3014 barnhartnt@gmail.com
Vice-President, Programs Patty Maloney	703-304-7885 maloney3013@aol.com
Vice-President, Editor (<i>The Flyer</i>) Mary Ellen Hodges	757-220-0566 me.hodges@cox.net
Treasurer Ann Carpenter	757-221-6683 carpenter17d@cox.net
Secretary Cathy Millar	757-229-1775 millar.cathy@gmail.com
Member-at-Large/Assistant Editor Gary Carpenter	757-221-6683 carpent66@cox.net
Member-at-Large Shirley Devan	757-813-1322 shirley_devan@me.com
Past President Cheryl J. Jacobson	303-519-0989 icheryljoy@aol.com

Committee Chairpersons 2022

Membership/Webmaster Jeanette Navia	757-707-3345 jnavia@gmail.com
Field Trips George Martin	757-920-5403 grm0803@gmail.com
Bird Counts/Bird Walks Jim Corliss	757-565-0536 jcorliss240@blue.net
Library Liaison Lee Schuster	757-565-6148 dljschuster@cox.net
Refreshments Catherine Flanagan	757-879-1997 flanagan.catherine@gmail.com
Historian Patty Maloney	703-304-7885 maloney3013@aol.com
Records/Liaison to CVWO Nancy Barnhart	540-454-3014 barnhartnt@gmail.com
Conservation Committee Cheryl J. Jacobson	303-519-0989 icheryljoy@aol.com



Palm Warbler. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

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some plant and animal species that have the ability to adapt. For the boreal forests and the Arctic tundra there is no more room to move north. The area suitable for the spruce, fir, pine, tamarack, balsam, and quaking aspen forests is shrinking. Also shrinking is the preferred habitat for the 300+ bird species that breed in the boreal forests. Sometimes called "North America's Bird Nursery", these forests are the preferred breeding ground for 80% of North American waterfowl, 85% of Rusty Blackbirds, and a whopping 98% of Palm Warblers among others according to the [Boreal Songbird Initiative](#). These forests are also the home to indigenous peoples whose way of life depends on them. There are a number of international organizations and research centers working to protect the Arctic tundra and boreal forests. A quick Internet search of "protecting the Arctic Tundra" will provide unlimited reading and resources, as well as ways to contribute to the effort.

In addition to that little Palm Warbler, we will soon have Yellow-rumped Warblers arrive for the winter. In the meantime, there are quite a few species that are migrating through our area. Our parks are eBird "hotspots" and great places to go to find these little temperate and neotropical migrants. I hope you can get out to enjoy the beautiful autumn weather and the magic of fall migration. Happy Birding! 🐦

WBC'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Since September 2021, the WBC has posted video recordings of the presentations delivered at our monthly meetings on our own YouTube Channel, that you can reach at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpNw3WJbMyvAHDsMAhXcfNA>. The direct address for Jim Easton's September 21 presentation, "Nature Photography with a Focus on Birds," is <https://youtu.be/dX39IAS4oHs>. 🐦

MONTHLY BIRD WALK

By Scott Hemler

We had 14 people come out for our monthly bird walk at New Quarter Park on Saturday, September 24. It was a beautiful cool fall morning for the walk. We saw 38 species of birds! Several migrants were fueling up in the trees for their flight south, such as Summer Tanager, Swainson's Thrush, and three Cape May Warblers! A list of all species we observed can be reviewed on eBird at this link: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S119331684>.

Our next bird walk at the park will be on October 22. We'll meet near the park office at 8:00 a.m. 🐦



Participants on the September bird walk. Photo by Scott Hemler.

OCTOBER 15 TRIP TO THE EASTERN SHORE

By George Martin, Field Trip Committee Chairperson



On Saturday, October 15, the Club will once again visit the Eastern Shore. Ivan Munkres, a graduate student in the Biology Department at William & Mary, will lead our group. We'll make at least three planned birding stops:

- The Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel Scenic Overview
- Eastern Shore of Virginia (ESVA) National Wildlife Refuge
- Kiptopeke State Park (starting at the Hawk-watch)

For those interested (and hungry) birders, we'll stop for lunch at Cape Charles Brewing Company.

If some interesting birds have been reported elsewhere in the area, we may add another stop.

We'll meet at the Scenic Overview between 8:30 and 8:45 a.m., spend a few minutes there, and then make the short drive to the ESVA National Wildlife Refuge. Times are somewhat fluid after that, depending on how many birds we see.

Carpooling is definitely in order, so please let me know if you want to carpool. Those interested in carpooling should arrive at the Colony Square Shop-

ping Center on Jamestown Road by 7:15 a.m., for departure no later than 7:20 a.m. We'll make sure drivers who want to stay for lunch are paired with passengers wanting the same. Carpoolers who stay for lunch should expect to return to Williamsburg between 3 and 4 p.m.

If you have a state park annual pass, please bring it. Those vehicles without an annual pass will pay a daily admission fee of \$7. 🐦



Photo credits. Upper left: A Merlin consuming a dragonfly (on the fly) photographed by Deborah Humphries at Kiptopeke September 9. Above: A kettle of 65 Broad-winged Hawks photographed over Kiptopeke by Nancy Barnhart on September 24.

SEPTEMBER'S "SIT" AT JAMESTOWN BEACH EVENT PARK

By George Martin, Field Trip Committee Chairperson

I heard all the participants enjoyed the "sit" we held on Saturday, September 17 at Jamestown Beach Event Park. Twenty-three people showed up on a beautiful late summer morning. No, we didn't follow the official guidelines for a "Big Sit", but the birders stayed pretty much in one area. The birding was more casual than on many of our field trips, providing participants plenty of time to catch up with fellow club members while also seeing some good birds. A Palm

Warbler put on a good show as it was foraging along the fence line (see Nancy Barnhart's photo on Page 2). The ferry dock served as a roosting spot for both Caspian Terns and Royal Terns. A Bald Eagle appeared to be refurbishing its nest, as it carried a fairly long evergreen branch across the park. Here's the link to the eBird checklist, with 37 species identified in total: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S118907685>. 🐦



View of the "sit" at Jamestown Beach Event Park (with everyone standing!). Photo by Deborah Humphries.

WBC MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Please welcome new member Jenny DeVasher, who joined our club early last month!

Election in November

Election of the WBC's Executive Board for 2023 will be held in November at our last meeting of the year. The Nominating Committee (Shirley Devan, Patty Maloney, and Barbara Giffin) has proposed the following slate of officers:

- President - Nancy Barnhart
- Vice-President, Programs - Patty Maloney
- Vice-President, Editor - Mary Ellen Hodges
- Treasurer - Ann Carpenter
- Secretary - Cathy Millar
- Member-at-Large/Asst. Editor - Gary Carpenter
- Member-at-Large - Shirley Devan.

Club Mission and How to Join Us

The purpose of the Williamsburg Bird Club is to promote interest in the study of wild birds, protect birds and their habitats, and share the joy of birding with others. If you would like to join our club, you can do so online at <https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/membership/> using PayPal or you can mail 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. 🐦

END OF 2022 SEASON PURPLE MARTIN COLONY REPORT

By Cheryl Jacobson (Project Lead) and Shan Gill (Project Assistant Lead)

Currently, the Purple Martin Project consists of five colony locations with support to an additional long-established colony. The five locations are Chickahominy Riverfront Park with two poles, New Quarter Park with one pole, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) with one pole, York River State Park with one pole, and Ford's Colony with one pole and a second pole soon to be installed. Support is provided to the Sunoco Gas Station (7107 Merrimac Trail) that now has seven metal houses, three of which have been donated by WBC. Data for all locations is provided below.

Chickahominy Riverfront Park (CRP): This location has been the most successful with the fledgling of approximately 53 Purple Martin chicks. Gourd checks were done on June 9 and July 1 with eggs and chicks counted. Thirty-nine chicks were counted in twelve active gourds with more eggs to hatch. Also, there were an estimated 35+ Purple Martins around the colony, which at the time consisted of one pole. Therefore, a second pole was installed and Purple Martins immediately entered the seven new gourds. Challenges at this location have been Tree Swallows, which were successfully kept out of the gourds by constant monitoring, and wasps, which were killed and nests removed.



Newly hatched chicks in a gourd at the CRP colony. Purple Martins usually line their nests with green leaves. Photo by Judy Jones.

VIMS: Initially in May, three martins were seen entering gourds with four more later seen flying overhead. In mid-May the weather became very cold and the martins were not seen at this location; however, a colony about a mile away continued to have martins.

A gourd check in August showed the beginnings of two Purple Martin nests so it is expected that this colony will be successful next season.

New Quarter Park (NQP) and York River State Park (YRSP): Neither of these colonies has been successful although Purple Martins have been seen flying overhead at New Quarter Park. The monitors at both locations have been very conscientious in monitoring and keeping Eastern Bluebirds and a pair of Tree Swallows out of the gourds.

I have been very impressed with the patience and perseverance of these monitors. The author of an article on the website [Wild Bird Watching](#) has written: "When it comes to attracting Purple Martins, one has to be willing to never give up. Some get them in a year or two and others may take twenty or more years. You'll have to decide how much patience you have. It took me four years to attract Purple Martins and 2022 will be my 16th year hosting Purple Martins."

Of course, we hope for much sooner. A good insect supply is critical, and now that York River State Park has installed a large native plant garden near the colony there seem to be many more insects. Of concern is the frequency of mowing by county staff at New Quarter Park, although the river is very close and is a source for some insects.

Ford's Colony: This is also a successful colony which has consisted of a metal house and one pole with fifteen gourds. At this location the gourds were not checked during nesting season so the number of hatchlings can only be estimated, with a possible 25. When the gourds were checked in August there were a possible seven nests removed. A problem to be solved is that four of the gourds that contained nests were very wet inside. Although there had been heavy rains at all the locations, this is the only location with soaked nests. It is apparent that it will be important to do gourd checks at least twice in order to determine number of eggs and chicks and to check for wetness. The metal house was predated by a Cooper's Hawk which broke the outer rail and forced its head into the house compartments. The hawk was seen at the house repeatedly, but it is unknown if it was able to predate the hatchlings or if they were all able to enter inner compartments. There were six nests in the house when it was taken down in August to be replaced soon by a pole and gourds which cannot be predated so easily. (Continued on Page 6)

PURPLE MARTIN REPORT, Continued from Page 5

Sunoco Gas Station: Although this is not officially one of our project colonies, we have now donated three metal houses to add to the station's other four. Station staff have the equipment to weld and repair the houses and are there all hours of the day to prevent predation. This season they estimate that they had 200+ martins at their colony.

The current project monitors are:

- YRSP - Sherry and Bill Hancock
- NQP - Mary Ellen Hodges, Anne Nordin, Nancy Barnhart
- CRP and Ford's Colony - Bill Vanzetta, Trish and Bob Stahlhut
- VIMS - Judy Jones, Janet Harper

2023 Nesting Season Plans:

1. Collect more exact data by doing gourd checks around June 9th and July 1st at any location with nesting martins.

2. Support and maintain existing colonies: The Northern Virginia Purple Martin Project lead advised that we will probably see the number of nesting martins at our two colonies double. The two pole systems we have at these locations will facilitate the hanging of numerous more gourds. I estimate that we will need about 40 more gourds for these two locations. Our Purple Martin Project is supported by the Williamsburg Bird Club, Coastal Virginia Wildlife

Observatory. and the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists.

3. As project lead, Cheryl Jacobson will continue to assist and support the monitors at the five locations and will recruit and train new monitors as needed.



Monitors checking the gourds at the CRP colony in June to count eggs and chicks and ensure that the gourds haven't been invaded by wasps. Pictured, from left to right, are Bob Stahlhut, Bill Vanzetta, Trish Stahlhut, and Cheryl Jacobson. Photo by Judy Jones.

PROJECT FEEDERWATCH:

CONTRIBUTE TO A CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECT FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR HOME

By George Martin

It's January 24, 2023. You've thought about going birding at the nearby park this morning. But after the cold front came through yesterday evening, it's 26 degrees outside with a 15-mph wind. And you discovered a hole in your warm gloves. Wait a minute – I haven't had a FeederWatch period for over a week. That's it! I can sit at my table, sipping hot coffee while I watch and count the birds coming to my feeders. Brilliant!

Yeah, it's that easy. Project FeederWatch is a Citizen Science effort run jointly by Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology and Birds Canada. Started in the winter of 1987-88, the project has evolved over time and now has over 20,000 participants.

Many of you are familiar with Project FeederWatch. For those who aren't, here's some encouragement to participate.

What You Do

Participation is straightforward. The project website, feederwatch.org, has detailed information, but here's a quick summary:

- First, define your site. It should be an area you can observe easily from one spot. It can include bird feeders and/or plantings which attract birds. I've defined mine as the area in my backyard which I can see from my kitchen table.

- Second, select your count days. Each FeederWatch period covers two days, with a gap of at least five days between count periods. When I was working, my count days were the weekends. Now that I'm retired, well, I'm still mostly counting on
(Continued on Page 7)

PROJECT FEEDERWATCH, Continued from Page 6

weekends — rather than being at the office during the week, I'm on the golf course, but that's another article.

- Third, count the birds! While that sounds simple, there is a protocol. Record the highest number seen of a species at one time. If you see three cardinals on Saturday morning, two males and a female, and then four cardinals on Sunday afternoon, three females and a male, how many cardinals do you report? FOUR. That's the highest number seen at one time, and gender doesn't matter.

But you can count birds which are in the vicinity of your feeder, ostensibly attracted by other birds. So if a Brown Creeper is walking up a tree near your feeder while a Downy Woodpecker feasts on a suet block, count the creeper! But don't count birds which are merely flying over your site. That flock of Tundra Swans migrating south during a November count period? Nope, they don't go on your report. And you shouldn't report birds seen outside your two-day count period. That Golden-crowned Kinglet you saw on Thursday in your backyard pine tree? If your count period starts on Friday, the GCKI doesn't go into the report.

Personal Observations

I've participated in FeederWatch for 27 seasons in three different locations. I started in 1994 when I was living in northern New Jersey. Since then, I moved first to Northern Virginia, and then to Williamsburg. Across all three locations, I've recorded 57 species of birds. There have been a lot of species in common across all three sites, but some surprising differences as well. For example, I never recorded a Brown Thrasher during my time in Fairfax, while they are regular feeder visitors here in Williamsburg. Eastern Towhees were rare treats in both New Jersey and Fairfax, but they're quite common here. Song Sparrows were regular visitors in Fairfax, but I see them only intermittently at my feeders here.

I've also noted some interesting changes in feeder visitation patterns over the years and, of course, we all like those rare occasions when we see something unusual. Here are some of those types of observations from my 27 years of FeederWatching:

- In New Jersey, a Ring-necked Pheasant walked through my yard on a count day. Sure, it might have been somebody's escaped pet, but FeederWatch accepted it. Common Redpolls were

infrequent visitors to my feeder, but when they came, they came in large numbers. And Sharp-shinned Hawks were often hanging around, watching those little birds!

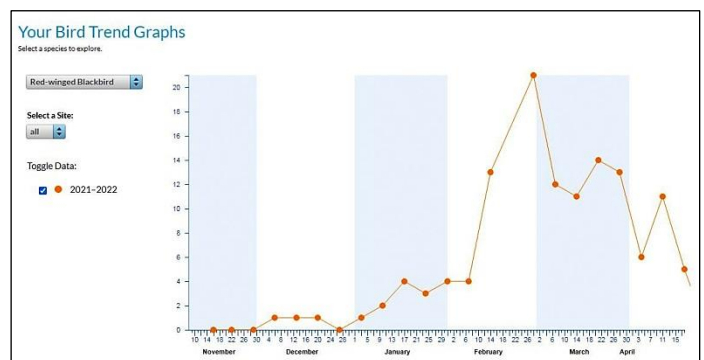
- In Fairfax, Eastern Bluebirds were absent for the first several years I lived there, but they then became regulars. Eastern Phoebe would occasionally show up in the yard early in spring. And one season, a Barred Owl made several appearances during daylight.

- In Williamsburg, Yellow-rumped Warblers have been present on almost every count — quite different from the once or twice a season frequency I saw in Fairfax. FeederWatch also questioned the Fish Crow camped one time under a feeder, along with the lone Rusty Blackbird which showed up early one season.

- For many years, FeederWatch's count season started in early November and lasted until early April. In 2020, the project managers decided to extend the count season to the end of April. Because they didn't change the filters on the input right away, when I reported a Ruby-throated Hummingbird and a Gray Catbird in an April count period, the entry program questioned the input. The filter was "fixed" for the 2021 season.

Sign Up!

The upcoming FeederWatch season starts November 1, 2022, and extends until April 30, 2023. There is a fee of \$18 per year, which provides support for data analysis, reporting, and site maintenance. Once you sign up, it takes a few weeks for your account to become active, so sign up today to be ready for the new season. Happy FeederWatching! 🐦



It's easy to analyze your own sightings on the Project Feederwatch website. One click produced this graph showing how the number (ranging from 0 to 21) of Red-winged Blackbirds visiting a feeder site at a residence in downtown Williamsburg changed between November 2021 and April 2022.

NEW LIBRARY BOOKS!

By Lee Schuster

The Williamsburg Regional Library purchased the following new books for its collection this year using funds donated by the WBC:

- *Around the World in 80 Birds* by Mike Unwin
- *Avian Illuminations* by Boria Sax
- *A-Z of Bird Portraits* by Andrew Forkner
- *Bird: The Definitive Visual Guide* by DK Publishing
- *Birds* by Tim Flach
- *Drawn to Birds* by Jenny Defouw Geuder
- *Everyday Birdwatching Stories* by Birds and Blooms
- *The Field Guide to Dumb Birds of the Whole Stupid World* by Matt Kracht
- *The Hawk's Way* by Sy Montgomery
- *Papa Goose* by Michael Quetting
- *The Private Lives of Public Birds* by Jack Gedney
- *The Swan* by Stephen Moss 🦢

RECENT SIGHTINGS

We want to know what you're seeing in your yard and in the field. Please share with other club members by sending your sightings and photos to the Newsletter Editor at me.hodges@cox.net.

Cathy Millar was pleased to report that many youngsters successfully fledged from all six **Purple Martin** families that nested in her bird house on S. Henry Street in Williamsburg this summer. She installed a bench nearby for the sole purpose of observing and sharing with family and friends the endlessly interesting and entertaining behavior of individuals and family dynamics. Cathy has been hosting Purple Martins since 1980, and she's eager for their return in April 2023.

While kayaking on Powhatan Creek on August 18, **Jeanette Navia** captured a stunning view of a **Tricolored Heron** taking flight.



Tricolored Heron. Photo by Jeanette Navia.

Carol Annis spotted a **Hooded Warbler**, partially hidden behind a leaf, at her neighborhood pond in Toano on September 12 and on the 16th saw a **Yellow Warbler** at York River State Park. (Cont. Page 9)



Hooded Warbler. Photo by Carol Annis.



Yellow Warbler. Photo by Carol Annis.

RECENT SIGHTINGS, Continued from Page 8

Deborah Humphries was at York River State Park on September 18 and found a **Cape May Warbler** in a bayberry shrub loaded with blue-gray fruit.



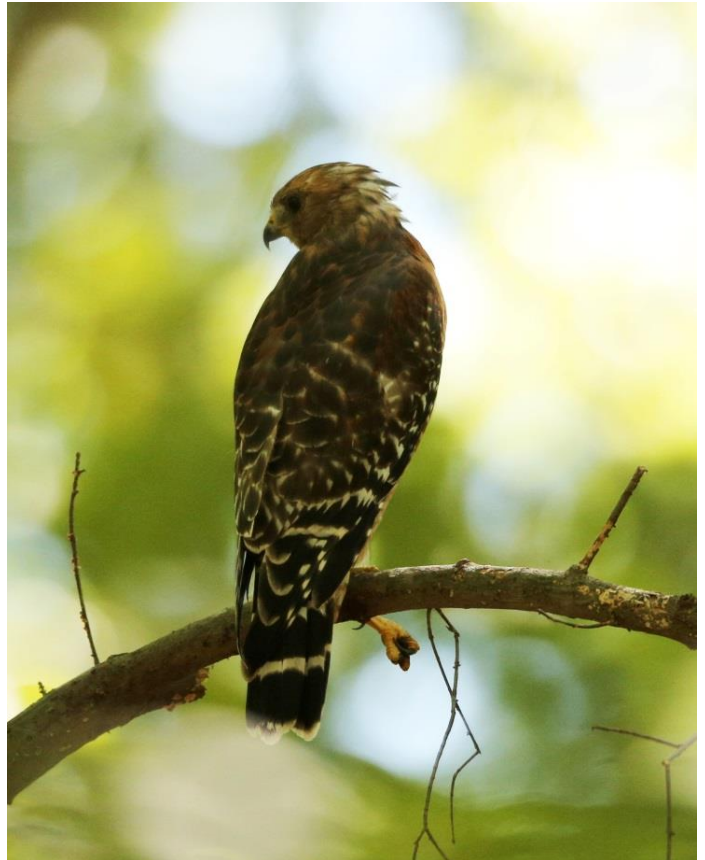
Cape May Warbler. Photo by Deborah Humphries.

When **Cindy Walker** was at York River State Park on September 21 she spied a female **Prairie Warbler**: "I watched her deep in a bush and, only for a second, she perched in the open long enough for me to get a shot."

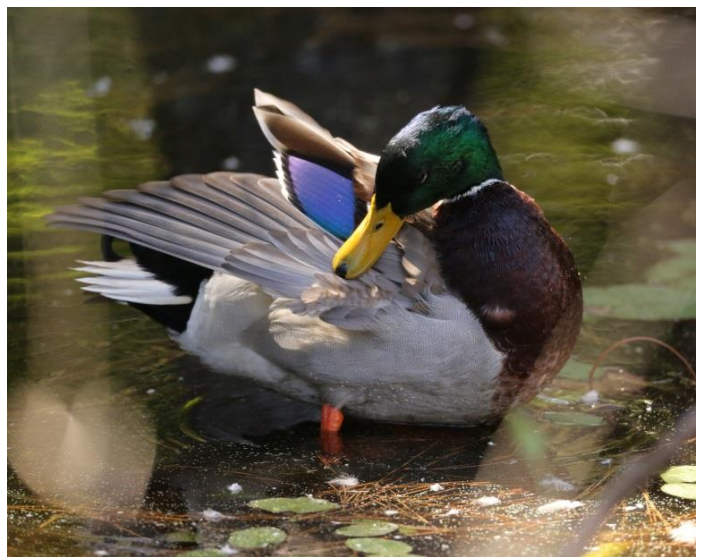


Prairie Warbler. Photo by Cindy Walker.

While birding the Greensprings Trail on September 24, **Dan Earnhardt** encountered a **Red-shouldered Hawk**, perched with one "fist" clenched. Dan's photo of a preening **Mallard** that day beautifully captured the male duck's blue wing feathers highlighted in close proximity to his dark green head and bright yellow bill. 🦅



Red-shouldered Hawk. Photo by Dan Earnhardt.



Mallard. Photo by Dan Earnhardt.



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/>