



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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January 2023

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart



Greetings friends and a very Happy New Year! We have a lot to look forward to as we start 2023. Thank you to our Board members and Committee chairs who have agreed to continue in their positions. They are listed on Page 2. Please take a

look at the hard-working team who keep us running smoothly. All of us welcome your questions, suggestions, and comments on anything we can do to help provide the best opportunities, activities, and experiences for everyone. Most of all, thanks to all of you, our engaged and dedicated membership who make the Williamsburg Bird Club the great group it is as we head into a new year.

I'm writing this before the New Year's Day gathering at New Quarter Park, one of my favorite events of the year. Thank you to Shirley Devan for creating and continuing this grand tradition. What better way to start the new year than with friends and "year birds"! Is there a particular bird or birding location high on your radar for 2023?

We look forward to our popular monthly bird walks at New Quarter Park and this month there's a new twist with an added evening Owl Prowl on January 21. Scott Hemler does a great job as our regular leader and he will be our "owl whisperer" for that outing. Another addition this year will be a "joint bird club walk" teaming up with the Middle Peninsula Bird Club from Gloucester probably in spring for migration. Watch for details in the spring.

We plan to repeat a couple of successful and popular activities featuring outdoor gatherings beyond our regular walks. Last year we met at Chickahominy Riverfront Park on a June evening to visit and see the Purple Martin colony, guided by Conservation Chair Cheryl Jacobson. In September we held our first ever "Big Sit", another popular activity which we will repeat at some point.

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UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

January 18: 7:00 p.m. (Zoom only): Pete Myers, "Bird Bedlam on the Beach."

Join us on January 18, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom for Pete Myers' presentation, "Bird Bedlam on the Beach." Pete is a biologist, author, and photographer living near White Hall, VA. He has photographed birds for over four decades and spent thousands of hours on the beaches of northern California, including on Point Reyes.

To set the stage for his presentation, Pete provided this short synopsis: "[My] images reveal details of bird bedlam on sandy beaches few casual observers will ever see. Georgia O'Keefe taught us not just to look, but to see the beauty of nature in its intimate details. She worked with subjects, often flowers, that at best move very slowly, but mostly not at all. Birds, in contrast, move rapidly, often faster than our eyes can track. With modern photographic equipment, I try to emulate O'Keefe: to capture intimate moments in birds' lives on sandy beaches—feeding, fighting, flying, and dying—and with these images share those moments with you. Each one has a rich story behind it."

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Sanderling grabbing a sand crab. Photo by Pete Myers.

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PROGRAMS, Continued from Page 1

Save the Date! AWARE Wildlife Rehabilitators returns for our February 15 meeting with a behind-the-scenes look at wildlife rehabilitation and their popular "ambassador animals." 6:00 pm in person at the Williamsburg Library and on Zoom. 🐦

PRESIDENT'S CORNER, Continued from Page 1

Patty Maloney has lined up our monthly meeting presentations. What great programs we had in 2022! January 2023 will feature a presentation on shorebirds—those challenging, sometimes-hard-to-identify, but beautiful and impressive migrants.

The gorgeous newsletters that Mary Ellen Hodges and Gary Carpenter create are just one of the great benefits to being a member of the WBC. They would be reason enough to join! Please consider contributing to the newsletter in 2023 with stories, photos, book reviews, bird sightings, and observations.

George Martin continues to arrange outstanding field trips for us. January is the ever-popular trip to Dutch Gap where close-up looks at wintering ducks are the feature. See more details in this newsletter.

Two of our most important projects are the support of Nature Camp Scholarships and William & Mary Student Research. Williamsburg Bird Club recognizes the critical importance of engaging our youth and young scholars as the future of conservation and science. A highlight of our monthly meetings are the ones with presentations from the recipients of these two projects—always impressive!

High on my wish list for 2023 is the continuation of conservation success stories. From the work of the Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve on the barrier islands of Virginia's Eastern Shore to the management of habitat that brought a pair of [Golden-winged Warblers](#) to the Highland Wildlife Management Area in western Virginia, many efforts are being made to preserve and restore critical habitat across the state. We have many folks and organizations to thank for these efforts including The Nature Conservancy, the Virginia Society of Ornithology, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, and our own bird club, just to name a few.

So here's to a year of health, birds, friendships, and conservation success stories. I wish you all a happy, healthy, and birdy 2023! 🐦

MONTHLY BIRD WALKS & JANUARY 21 OWL PROWL

By Scott Hemler

We had twelve people for the November 26 bird walk at New Quarter Park. We saw 32 species of birds (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S123116066>)! Most of our woodpeckers made an appearance as we saw seven species. Our winter ducks were starting to arrive and we saw two Buffleheads and three Hooded Mergansers. We all also had a good look at a very cooperative Hermit Thrush. It was a beautiful late fall morning for a walk! Our next monthly walk will be at New Quarter Park on Saturday, January 28. We will meet

in the parking lot by the park office at 8:00 a.m. Binoculars are available for check out at the park office if anyone needs them.

This month, on the evening of Saturday, January 21, we'll also be holding a special bird walk at New Quarter Park: an Owl Prowl! Meet me at 6:00 p.m. in the parking lot near the park office. We'll bird for owls until 8:00 pm. 🦉



Participants on the November bird walk. Photo by Shirley Devan.



Hairy Woodpecker photographed by Tom Crocket on the November bird walk.

FIELD TRIPS

By George Martin

On Saturday, November 19, 2022, Nancy Barnhart led 15 birders on a walk at Grandview Nature Preserve in Hampton (see photo on Page 4). This was the first opportunity this season for many to view seabirds. While a lot of the birds were far offshore, plenty were visible close to the beach and several interesting land birds were identified on the walk to the beach. Highlights from the trip included a group of Black-crowned Night Herons flying over the assembled group at the start of the walk; Fox Sparrows in a cluster of vines along the trail to the beach; a large flock of Brant flying high over the bay; Ruddy Turnstones on the rock formation just off the shore; and loons readily visible. In all, the members of the group identified 61 species, with the complete list

available via the following link: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S122679535>.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS ON JAN. 21 AND FEB. 18

On Saturday, January 21, Rose Ryan will lead a field trip at the Henricus Park/Dutch Gap Conservation Area outside Richmond. We'll meet in the parking lot for Henricus Park at 9:00 a.m. In previous years, this site has provided good views of many wintering ducks, plus an occasional rarity like a Common Gallinule. Look for emails in early January with more details.

Save the date! On Saturday, February 18, we'll bird sites along the Colonial Parkway toward Yorktown to see waterbirds on the York River and nearby shorelines. More information to come! 🦉

WBC MEMBERSHIP: TIME TO PAY 2023 DUES

Please welcome new members Howard and Lois Bridger, Kelly Brown, Martha Moss, Darce Patterson, Joe Piotrowski, and Jay Rada, and don't forget to renew your own membership for 2023. Renew either online at <https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/membership> or by mailing in the form on Page 9 of this newsletter. 🦉



A large group enjoyed birding Grandview Nature Preserve on our November 19 field trip. Photo by George Martin.

HOW A CRITICAL HABITAT FOR BIRDS IN VIRGINIA IS BEING SAVED

Summary by Cathy Millar

Our November 16, 2022 meeting featured speaker Alex Wilke, coastal scientist at The Nature Conservancy's Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve (VVCR) on Virginia's Eastern Shore. Alex pursued her wildlife conservation studies at W&M's Center for Conservation Biology and earned her master's degree in biology under advisor Ruth Beck. She was also one of our club's ornithology research grant recipients. Alex's presentation, "Connections Across the Hemispheres," highlighted the position of Virginia's Eastern Shore as being one of the most important places for shorebirds in the Western Hemisphere.

Headquartered at Nassawadox at the Brownsville Preserve, the Virginia Coast Reserve has 13 full time staff and several seasonal staff to protect 38,000 acres including 14 barrier islands and marsh properties and the mainland Brownsville preserve. The VVCR is part of 130,000 acres of conserved land, including federal and state-owned protected land, on the Eastern Shore barrier lagoon system, making it a coastal wilderness unmatched elsewhere on the East Coast. This area was about to be developed in the late 1960s and early 70s during the commercial development rush on other barrier islands along the Atlantic coast when The Nature Conservancy began buying land, starting around Smith Island. These wild barrier islands not only are great habitat for birds; they also protect the coastal bays behind them that support aquaculture and nature-based tourism.

Alex described the VVCR's five functions: (1) land protection including up to 70 miles of barrier island coastline which is at the heart of The Nature Conservancy; (2) migratory bird conservation; (3) resto-

ration of marine habitats, particularly in eel grass beds and oyster reefs; (4) coastal resilience programs, which work with local communities to plan how they can best prepare and adapt for climate change and sea level rise; and (5) education and outreach programs to keep these communities informed about what VVCR does and accommodate visitor use by posting interpretive kiosks, brochures, and posters at marine access points with information about how the public can enjoy the area with minimal impact to the birdlife and abide by seasonal closures of important nesting sites.

Barrier island breeding birds and migratory shorebirds have been one of VVCR's primary conservation targets since the beginning, just over 50 years ago. One of the highlights of Alex's presentation of particular interest to our club was an old photo of a volunteer group that she fondly referred to as the "Williams *et al.* Team" featuring Bill Williams, Bill Akers, Ruth and Michael Beck, and Jerry Via. She credited the team with initially surveying these barrier islands for decades and collecting information about colonial waterbirds that set the stage for everything that VVCR does today.

The Eastern Shore is a critical sanctuary in the middle of the Atlantic Flyway and twice a year hosts millions of shorebirds, waterbirds, seabirds, raptors, and passerines. During the breeding season, the area is critical habitat to over 50% of all of Virginia's colonial nesting waterbirds, including 14% of Atlantic Coast Piping Plovers and 30% of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts' American Oystercatchers. As such, the area

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CRITICAL HABITAT, Continued from Page 4

has been designated an Audubon area of regional importance and a Western Shorebird Reserve Network of international importance.

The Migratory Bird Program of VVCR maintains long-term monitoring of certain species to inform their management and it exports the data for use in regional conservation initiatives. Management involves working with USDA Wildlife Services to control predators such as foxes and raccoons. Data collected by the Williams *et al.* Team from 1975 to 2003 showed a decline in nesting Gull-billed Terns, Common Terns, Least Terns, and Black Skimmers that corresponded to a sharp rise in distribution of mammalian predators on the islands. In the last 20 years since predator control was initiated, there has been a 97% increase in American Oystercatchers, with the islands now hosting over 500 pairs of nesting AMOY, but there has been a decrease of productivity since 2016. Alex's graduate work was on AMOY and she is now working with Virginia Tech to determine why chicks are hatching but not surviving. Tracking chicks with radio tags, they've identified ghost crabs and avian predators such as kestrels as having been responsible for some losses. There was a similar increase in Piping Plovers until 2016 when for un-

known reasons (not mammalian predators) their numbers began dropping.

The Migratory Bird Program also entails managing visitor disturbance and planning to mitigate the impacts of sea level rise and the potential impacts of offshore energy development to migratory birds. Virginia's Eastern Shore is an important staging area for at least 15,000 migrating Whimbrels. Dominion Energy has plans to build 176 wind turbines 245 meters tall (almost as tall as the Eiffel Tower!) covering an area of 458 sq.km. located 43 km. off Virginia's coastline. Previous tracking data on Whimbrels does not show the altitude at which they fly through and around this area. Dominion Energy is funding a program that VVCR is working on with W&M's Center for Conservation Biology to fit 30 Whimbrels with GPS transmitter that will provide this data critical to evaluating the potential risk to Whimbrels.

The stewardship component of VVCR provides many opportunities for volunteers that they train to help monitor this remote area and interest visitors in protecting birds. Alex concluded by inviting folks to join VVCR staff for the Whimbrel Watch in May 2023 and shared these links to further info: nature.org/vvcr, exploreourseaside.org, and birdingeasternshore.org. Please visit https://youtu.be/6k74FwfE_NY to view Alex's full presentation. 🐦

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.



Keith Kennedy shared a photo (left) of a **Cooper's Hawk** seen in his yard on December 21. Keith wrote: "This bird is a juvenile, and though I thought he was cleverly concealed by branches, all the birds who feed off my feeders and ground remained scarce. After 25 minutes of preening and waiting, the Cooper's flew away."

Deborah Humphries reported what she called "a lifer for the end of the year," seen on December 30 at Jamestown Beach Event Park. Here's her story: "I have been watching/waiting/hoping for a **Lincoln's Sparrow** for about two years now. I was near certain I had seen one a half-dozen times, only to realize it was a young Swamp or Song sparrow instead. Even-

tually I was told I would know it without a doubt when I saw one. (Thank you Paula Perdoni, who has seen many in Minnesota.) As sparrows are so challenging to identify in the field, I didn't think that day would actually come. (Continued on Page 6)



Lincoln Sparrow photographed by Deborah Humphries on December 30, 2022 at Jamestown Beach Event Park.

RECENT SIGHTINGS, Continued from Page 5

"While watching the sparrows at the Jamestown Beach Event Park, in an area lately dubbed 'The Sparrow Field,' I knew I was catching sight of something different: different behavior, slightly smaller size, and not showing itself as willingly as others. At least a Song Sparrow will climb to the top of a reed and check on me before diving off into the low brush. This unknown sparrow stayed low and would peek out from the edges. It was not chipping like the Song Sparrow either. And once I saw the delicate features and lack of strong stripes, I knew it was a contender. I fired off its image from the back of my camera to our club president, Nancy Barnhart (without a word, just the image). She answered back 'Oh my!! Looks

really good! I'm heading to JI. Where exactly?' and then 'I'll get there.' Thankfully she saw the bird as well for confirmation, although, as others had said, you WILL know it. And they were right.

"The [Audubon Field Guide](#) states: 'Generally a skulker in dense low cover, [the Lincoln Sparrow] often goes unnoticed during migration and winter—especially in the East, where it is quite uncommon.' I asked Nancy for records: 'Lincoln's have been reported in the Historic Triangle on Feb 20, and in the spring various sightings from Mar 22-May 30, in the fall from Sept 29-Nov 9. This is the 1st December sighting.' " 🐦

WBC WELCOMES THE NEW YEAR AT ANNUAL EVENT

By Shirley Devan

Twenty-two birders joined me at New Quarter Park for the January 1 New Year's Day Bird and Birder Show. Our Club's mascot bird, the Red-headed Woodpecker, put on quite a "show" for us in the dead snags around the fire circle, and most folks enjoyed good looks. A couple of Bald Eagles soared overhead and a snake — a Racer — put in an appearance near the wood pile just to confirm what we already knew: temperatures in the 60's for New Year's Day bring out quite a few feathered, scaly, and human creatures. Frankly, the group of birders enjoyed visiting and chatting with friends we haven't seen for a while, and we were not as diligent in tallying the birds as we should have been. Many thanks to NQP staff, Lynn and Bob, who worked tirelessly to get a fire started in the fire pit. The smell of the wood fire was delicious even on a warm day. Thanks to all who came out to share part of their New Year's Day with the birders and the birds. Let's do it again next year! 🐦



Celebrating New Year's Day at New Quarter Park: Photos clockwise from upper left: Park staff prepare the bonfire (photo by Shirley Devan); From left: Nancy Barnhart, Sue Mutell, and George Martin (photo by Shirley Devan); From left: Keith Navia, Rose Ryan, Shirley Devan, Paula Perdoni, Joe Piotrowski, Nancy Barnhart, George Martin, Jan Lockwood, Adrienne Frank, and Gary Driscoll (photo by Jeanette Navia); From left, Paula Perdoni, Deborah Humphries, and Bill Williams (photo by Shirley Devan).

WBC's 2022 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

As was noted in our November 2022 newsletter by Jim Corliss, WBC's Bird Count Chair, the Christmas Bird Count is the longest-running community science bird project in the United States. Initiated by the National Audubon Society in 1900, the annual CBC has subsequently generated a 123-year-long record of bird population trends across the Western Hemisphere. The CBC is conducted by establishing "count circles" that are 15 miles in diameter, and the Williamsburg Bird Club is the steward of the Williamsburg Count Circle, centered in Colonial Williamsburg and extending out to cover Jamestown Island to the west, Hog Island to the south, and a small portion of Gloucester to the east. On Sunday, December 18, 2022, the WBC conducted its 46th CBC. Judging from the following informal reports and photos that club members shared at the end of this year's count, the 2022 CBC fulfilled its promise as described by Audubon CBC director Geoff LeBaron: a fun and meaningful way to spend a winter day.

Jamestown Sector Report, submitted by Dan Cristol

:

The birds were very cooperative—85 species in all, which is slightly below normal—but great weather and company. Highlights included 3 Palm Warblers in two locations, likely a first for the territory. Eight Wilson's Snipe, in three locations, was certainly a high for the territory. Gulls were cooperative, with 6 laughers, 3 beautiful adult Lesser Black-backed, and 75 Bonaparte's following the ferry. Ducks were scarce, as has been the case for several years, but Greg Davis pulled 16 Ring-necked Ducks off of the Williamsburg Winery's lake and we had a small flock of scaup fly by Black Point with at least two greaters. Woodies, hoodies, blacks, Mallards, Buffleheads, Gadwalls and some very distant Red-breasted Mergansers also cooperated. A hunter proudly showed us a Wood Duck, a wild-type hen Mallard, and an obese domestic Pekin Duck (domestic Mallard) that he told us was a hybrid Mallard x Black Duck. I have trouble believing he shot it in flight. Two Red-breasted Nuthatches at the Winery were a reminder that we still get a little bit of winter here. A juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker at the Gospel Spreading Farm was a first for that area and was busy storing acorns, so perhaps will establish a new colony. Matthias Leu found three Virginia Rails and a Marsh Wren for us at Jamestown, and three Clapper Rails were a welcome surprise for Christina Sabochick and Dan Cristol at the end of the airport runway. Ivan Munkres and Joey Di Liberto found a Gray Catbird lingering at the College Creek hawk watch. Our


worst misses were Brown-headed Cowbird and Killdeer. In all a great day of local birding.

Birding from a B&B, submitted by Cathy Millar

I've delighted in participating in our club's CBC for years, but because it is held on a Sunday, my B&B is always full and I am limited to reporting the birds seen only on my property. Our B&B sits on a bird-friendly half acre within the count circle and sports a large variety of trees and long hedgerows. Because my B&B guests and birds both wake up hungry, I start my count peering out my kitchen window while making breakfast. When the guests gather in the dining room, I explain the importance of this longest-running citizen science project and ask them to please excuse my often stopping to look out the windows to check my five feeders for visitors. The guests are not only interested but eager to hear what I'm seeing. Some stay after breakfast to watch our local Red-shouldered Hawk swoop in to grab leftover egg-rich waffles or pancakes. It's also fun to watch the "stackers" (a.k.a., American Crows) carefully stacking as many pieces of pancake as possible before flying off with their haul. On a sunny morning, we can usually count on seeing two Carolina Wrens hopping through the opening vent of my greenhouse to provide me their friendly insect control services within. This year, I concluded the count with 25 species and a total of 106 individuals which included a flock of 31 visiting Dark-eyed Juncos.

Kingsmill Sector Report, submitted by Cheryl Jacobson.

I have been the sector leader for Kingsmill for seven years and consider myself very lucky to have Jim Corliss, Bird Count Chair, on my team. Over the seven years we have seen significant changes to the habitat in this sector, especially in the large area south from James River Elementary School to the reservoir. There has been significant industrial development with access to many areas now restricted. Open areas have become very overgrown and not habitable for birds. Many on my team have been consistent, and our secondary goal is to have fun! We always stop at my house for hot beverages and treats. This year we enjoyed a stop at a new Latin restaurant south of the school and joined in the enthusiasm of the patrons who were watching the Argentina soccer team beat France in the World Cup. Thank you, Kingsmill team!

See a few photos from the day on Page 8. 



2022 CBC Photos, clockwise from upper left: The Jolly Pond sector team at the Williamsburg Botanical Garden (from left: Lee Schuster, Alex Minarik, Shirley Devan, and Deborah Humphries); Sharp-shinned Hawk with Red-winged Blackbird prey at Cheatham Annex (photo by Nancy Barnhart); Kingsmill sector team members (from left: Patty Maloney, Alice Kopinitz, and Cheryl Jacobson) (photo by Tory Gussman); Kingsmill sector team members Patty Maloney and Jim Corliss (photo by Tory Gussman); Fox Sparrow (photo by Deborah Humphries); Dark-eyed Junco (photo by Deborah Humphries); Waterfowl line-up (from left: Mallards, Canada Goose, and Hooded Merganser) (photo by Deborah Humphries).



2023 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, ina-via@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
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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/>