



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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March 2023



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

March greetings! Our club has been off to a terrific start in 2023. At our January meeting we had Pete Myers with his dazzling photos of Sanderlings in every possible position and posture, and his outstanding knowledge of them and their behavior. Then, in February, we were inspired by the dedication and passion of AWARE rehabilitators Deb Woodward, Julie Wobig, and Colleen Harlow and their commitment to healing some of the unlucky victims in our natural world. What a treat to see the Mississippi Kite and American Kestrel up close and personal! Wonderful work Deb, Julie, and Colleen!

Our field trips and monthly bird walks continue to be popular and so far we've lucked out with the weather. Thank you Scott Hemler and George Martin for all your efforts with these, and thanks to Rose Ryan and Rexanne Bruno, our January and February trip leaders.

The past weekend reminded me of the importance of all of you, fellow birders. My "enabler" and I spent President's Weekend in Maine in hopes of seeing the rare Steller's Sea Eagle, a species found in Russia, Korea, Japan, China, and Taiwan that is extremely vulnerable with only 4000 individuals in the wild. This particular bird is believed to have been wandering on the northeast coast of the U.S. and Canada for over a year. Within two hours of landing in Portland, Ken and I were out with fellow birders all hoping for a sighting of the majestic eagle that has been gracing this particular area of Maine for two weeks. Everyone fanned out to scour the known haunts of this spectacular bird. We particularly enjoyed hiking around the Flying Point Preserve, a Nature Conservancy property. From 1:00 p.m. Friday to 9:00 a.m. Monday we met folks from 19 states and Canada. We all had fingers crossed for a serendipitous moment of watching the "Steller's" fly by. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful. Despite not seeing the bird it was a fabulous weekend of camaraderie and a shared passion with dozens of "new friends." (Continued on Page 2)

UPCOMING PROGRAM

By Patty Maloney

March 15: 6:00 p.m. (in person at the Williamsburg Library and via Zoom): Chance Hines, "Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in Virginia."

Join us to hear Chance Hines, research biologist with The Center for Conservation Biology (CCB), give a presentation about Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in Virginia. This presentation will detail how populations of this species once occurred throughout the state but precipitously fell to as few as two breeding pairs at a single site in the early 2000s. Following hard work and dedication from state, federal, and NGO partners, the number of birds is now in the triple digits and continues growing steadily. This presentation will include intimate looks at Red-cockaded Woodpecker life as well as the work that goes on behind the scenes managing habitat and monitoring the population.



Banded Red-cockaded Woodpecker nestlings. Photo courtesy of Chance Hines, CCB.

WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Executive Board 2023

President 540-454-3014
Nancy Barnhart barnhartnt@gmail.com

Vice-President, Programs 703-304-7885
Patty Maloney maloney3013@aol.com

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

Treasurer 757-221-6683
Ann Carpenter carpenter17d@cox.net

Secretary 757-229-1775
Cathy Millar millar.cathy@gmail.com

Member-at-Large/Assistant Editor 757-221-6683
Gary Carpenter carpent66@cox.net

Member-at-Large 757-813-1322
Shirley Devan shirley_devan@icloud.com

Past President 303-519-0989
Cheryl J. Jacobson jcheryljoy@aol.com

Committee Chairpersons 2023

Membership/Webmaster 757-707-3345
Jeanette Navia jnavia@gmail.com

Field Trips 757-920-5403
George Martin grm0803@gmail.com

Bird Counts/Bird Walks 757-565-0536
Jim Corliss jcorliss240@cox.net

Library Liaison 757-879-1997
Catherine Flanagan flanagan.catherine@gmail.com

Refreshments 757-879-1997
Catherine Flanagan flanagan.catherine@gmail.com

Historian 703-304-7885
Patty Maloney maloney3013@aol.com

Records/Liaison to CVWO 540-454-3014
Nancy Barnhart barnhartnt@gmail.com

Conservation Committee 303-519-0989
Cheryl J. Jacobson jcheryljoy@aol.com

Nature Camp Scholarships 757-565-6148
Lee Schuster dlijschuster@cox.net

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We had a GroupMe text group to stay in touch in case of a sighting. We also enjoyed the local scene where we were staying in Bath. We found a reliably good, small restaurant where we were welcomed by the locals who reported the huge boost in business from all the birders — close to 3800 on the GroupMe text alone. Great to know this bird successfully has stimulated the local economy. While unsuccessful in a sighting of the “Steller’s,” the quest was an unforgettable and rewarding adventure.

Meanwhile, back home, the groundhog may have seen his shadow on February 2 predicting six more weeks of winter, but it didn’t sound like it today. Walking out on the deck this morning to fill the feeders, I was amazed at the amount of bird song. In my neighborhood, Pine Warblers have been singing since the first week in February. The calendar says spring won’t be here until March 20th. As much as I would like an early spring, I can’t help but wonder about climate-related shifts in the annual cycle of flora and fauna. Will earlier arrival of migratory birds coincide with adequate food sources? Successful breeding can be all-in-the-timing. To understand climate-related changes it’s essential we keep tabs on bird activity and document our sightings. Lucky for us we have eBird to do just that. Great job with all your sightings during the Great Backyard Bird Count and beyond! 🐦

WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome new member Elizabeth George! If you still need to renew your own membership for 2023, you can do so online at <https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/membership>. While our online payment system is powered by PayPal, you do not need a PayPal account to pay by debit or credit card. Alternatively, you can download and print a membership form from the same web page which you can then mail in with a check. The form can also be printed from Page 9 of this newsletter. Marking the membership form to indicate that you wish to receive our newsletter only by email saves paper and allows the club to save on printing and postage costs and direct more of our income to our programs and projects. If you wish to donate to our club's various programs when you renew online, please click the "Continue Shopping" link in the upper right-hand corner of the screen after you are taken to your shopping cart. 🐦

MONTHLY BIRD WALKS — NEXT WALK on MARCH 25 at WARHILL SPORTS COMPLEX

By Scott Hemler

We had a crisp but nice morning for our monthly bird walk at New Quarter Park (NQP) on February 25. The rain held off until the walk was over! Around 18 people attended. It was great having several members of the Cape Henry Audubon Society join us. We saw 47 species of birds (see full checklist at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S129621109>)! Among the highlights were a pair of Greater Yellowlegs in the marsh by the dock, several Common Goldeneye

ducks, and every species of woodpecker normally found in our area this time of year!

Our next monthly bird walk, on March 25, will be at the Warhill Sports Complex because there is another event at NQP that day. We'll meet at the trail head on Stadium Road for the [Warhill Multiuse Trail](#) at 8:00 a.m. 🐦



Members of the Williamsburg Bird Club and the Cape Henry Audubon Society at the New Quarter Park fire circle during the WBC's monthly bird walk on February 25. Photo by Shirley Devan.



Club members during our February field trip along the York River portion of the Colonial Parkway. Photo by George Martin.

FIELD TRIPS

By George Martin

FIELD TRIP ALONG COLONIAL PARKWAY / YORK RIVER, FEBRUARY 18

On Saturday, February 18, Rexanne Bruno led 12 other birders at stops along the Colonial Parkway while viewing the York River. The chilly start to the morning shows up in the accompanying group photo (see Page 3), but it didn't hinder the waterfowl activity. The group was treated to sights of Tundra Swans, Common Loons, Northern Gannets, Brown Pelicans, and Bald Eagles. On land at the Yorktown Battlefield, the group got looks at an American Kestrel and a few Eastern Meadowlarks. In all, the group identified 44 species, with the complete list available in the eBird trip report via the following link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/108505>.



Buffleheads photographed by Sherry Hancock during the February field trip.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS, MARCH 18 and APRIL 15

On Saturday, March 18, Dave Youker will lead us at [Machicomoco State Park](#) in Gloucester County. Last year, the group was able to see Osprey carrying nesting material, lots of Field Sparrows, and several warblers, in addition to waterfowl on the north side of the York River. We'll plan to meet at the parking lot just inside the park's pay station at 8 a.m., so bring your state park pass if you have one! If you'd like to car pool, we'll meet at the Colony Square Shopping Center at 7:15 a.m. Please let me know (grm0803@gmail.com) if you'd like to car pool and also if you're available/willing to drive carpool riders.

Save the date! On Saturday, April 15, we'll visit Newport News Park. Stay tuned for more information. 🐦



A clear sky, open water, and the Coleman Bridge form the backdrop for February field trip birders. Photo by Lisa Nickel.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WILDLIFE REHABILITATION

Summary by Cathy Millar

At our February 15 meeting, three rehabilitators from The Alliance of Wild Animal Rehabilitators and Educators (AWARE) kept us enthralled with stories and photos/videos of daring rescues and dedicated care in a presentation titled "Behind the Scenes of Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation and What You Need to Know About Rescuing Wildlife." The presenters were Julie Wobig (Tidewater Wildlife Rescue and AWARE), Deb Woodward (AWARE), and Colleen Harlow (AWARE).

These highly-trained volunteers are licensed by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. Their service is important because without a license it is illegal to keep or care for orphaned, sick, or injured wildlife. Among her tales of amazing rescues, Julie

described running through backyards and leaping fences as she chased after an injured fleet-footed Black Vulture and sliding down a bank of prickly vines in order to capture a feisty Bald Eagle with lead poisoning. Hence, her van is equipped with bolt cutters, tree trimmer, and a variety of nets and cages so she is ready for anything at a moment's notice. Julie stressed that it is important to stay with the animal that you've reported so you can show the rescuer where it is. She also noted that she often rescues rabbits, snakes, and many species of birds that have become entangled in plastic garden netting, and she begged that instead we use metal wire barriers to protect vegetation. She also described rescuing a Great-horned Owl who was starving because of (Continued on Page 5)

WILDLIFE REHAB, Continued from Page 4

being unable to hunt due to four hooks of a fishing lure embedded in his skin and immobilizing a wing. Another Great-horned Owl required surgery to remove a fishing hook embedded deep in its foot. Julie noted that many birds die slow, agonizing deaths wrapped in abandoned fishing line. She asked that anglers not cut and leave fishing line or tackle behind and requested that we enlighten anyone we observe doing that about the potential consequences of their actions.



Deb Woodward treats a Great Horned Owl. Photo courtesy of AWARE.

Deb receives an average of 250 animals per year and described what happens when a patient arrives at her home for rehabilitation. She starts with careful observation to identify the problem with the animal and then initiates treatment for conditions such as broken bones, parasites, head trauma, dehydration, and emaciation. Deb asked that folks not use mouse/insect sticky traps, and she showed us the difficulty of removing a Carolina Wren from one. Orphan animals are kept warm and fed and not released until they can fend for themselves. When an animal is ready for release, the person who found it is invited to attend the release. If the animal is not migratory, in most cases every attempt is made to return the rehabilitated animal to the familiar territory where it was rescued, which can sometimes be many miles away. [AWARE](#) is always in need of volunteer drivers for animal transport, and the non-profit organization welcomes financial support.

Over the course of AWARE's presentation we were treated to a cuteness overload by means of many photos and videos depicting scenes such as a wet, wide-eyed, and bedraggled Great-horned Owl wrapped in a towel after receiving a deskunking shampoo; orphaned bunnies, squirrels, and opossums; and a wide variety of birds being fed custom

formulas in 'nests' knitted by volunteers. Deb once had 43 baby birds at the same time that required feeding every 20 minutes! Her experiences raising Chimney Swifts were particularly interesting. The hungry babies, sounding a lot like little dinosaurs, had to be fed from below their nests as their parents would in a chimney and, when fledged, taught how to catch food on the wing by holding mealworms in tweezer clamps held overhead. Deb noted that injured raptors (hawks, eagles, falcons, owls, and osprey) have to be initially force-fed because they don't recognize the pieces of meat/fish as food. We also learned that infant opossums need to be initially tube fed because they never learn to suckle since their mother constantly drips milk into their mouths when they latch onto her nipples. A video showed adorable young opossums finally learning how to lap formula from a dish that they were standing in. Deb emphasized that her patients are wild animals and she doesn't snuggle or talk to them. She requested that when we find and bring in wildlife in need of care that we do the same, as talking and unnecessary touching them really stresses wild animals.

Colleen, who has been a rehabilitator for 30 years, shared two of AWARE's ambassador animals: Kenny Kite (pictured at right in a screenshot from the presentation video) and Anita Kestrel. Each bird is non-releasable due to a physical condition that



prevents it from being able to survive in the wild. The Mississippi Kite is a migratory species that breeds in the Southeast U.S. but is not commonly seen in Virginia. Kenny had a broken wing surgically repaired but was still unable to fly. As the one-year-old kite comfortably preened himself on Colleen's arm, we learned that kites may build their nest next to a wasp nest, which probably protects the chicks from climbing predators. The eight-year-old American Kestrel had been rescued as a baby. She has an issue with her beak that requires constant care. Colleen explained that a mammal or bird that is going to be kept as an ambassador animal is first evaluated by a veterinarian and then a comprehensive plan of care is sent to appropriate government agencies before a required permit is granted. A rehab facility holding ambassador animals is also subject to unscheduled inspections by these agencies. The dedicated commitment and hard work at all times of the day involved in being a wildlife rehabilitator is really impressive! Here is the link to watch the entire program on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/VgzAmvYtB00>. 🐦

ACTIVITIES and EVENTS of INTEREST

HAWKWATCH

By Nancy Barnhart

The College Creek Hawkwatch opens for the 2023 season on March 1 and runs through May 31. This hawkwatch is sponsored by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (CVWO) and conducted by CVWO Board members, advisors, and volunteers. The location is on the Colonial Parkway, at the smaller of the two College Creek parking lots, on the James River side of the Parkway. We are there most days that weather is conducive to migrating raptors, i.e. not raining or super windy. We begin around 9:00 a.m. and usually stay until 1:00 p.m. but have been known to stay until 2:30-3:00 p.m. if there is a good flight.

We love visitors, spotters, and interested folks. Folding chairs are a good idea as is water, snacks, lunch, binoculars, and cameras if available. We hope to see you there!

HOG ISLAND MARSH CAM

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) recently launched a livestreaming wildlife camera that can be viewed directly from the DWR website. The Marsh Cam is located in Surry County, on the southern end of Hog Island Wildlife Management Area, centered between a tidal marsh and two managed impoundments. It operates 24/7, every day of the year, which means that night or day, no matter

the season, there is always something to see. For example, on the evening of February 16, a viewer captured a screen shot (saved to iNaturalist) from the web cam video showing three American mink. The livestream can be reached at the following link: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/marsh-cam/>.

NATIVE PLANT SALE

The John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society will hold its annual native plant sale on April 29 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Williamsburg Community Building, located at 401 N. Boundary Street. This sale will provide a great opportunity to purchase native plants that provide food for birds, butterflies, and other pollinators and attract them to your yard. Plants for sun or shade, moist or dry locations will be available, and chapter members will be present to provide expert advice. More information can be found here: <https://vnps.org/johnclayton/>.

GREAT DISMAL SWAMP BIRDING FESTIVAL

The Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is hosting a Birding Festival on April 28 and 29. All events are free, but pre-registration is required for guided walks, talks, and bus tours. A preview of festival events and activities and on-line registration are available here: <https://www.fws.gov/event/great-dismal-swamp-birding-festival>. 🐦

RECENT SIGHTINGS

Sherry Hancock had a **Purple Finch** visit the feeders at her residence at Sycamore Landing on February 17, the first day of the Great Backyard Bird Count.



Purple Finch. Photo by Sherry Hancock.

Nancy Barnhart wrote in to say that her favorite Great Backyard Bird Count bird was a **Black Guillemot** she saw at Five Islands, Georgetown, Maine. With good humor, Nancy added: "My favorite would have been the Steller's Sea Eagle if Ken and I had seen it!"



Black Guillemot. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

RECENT SIGHTINGS, Continued from Page 6

Laura Mae shared photos of two special birds she saw on the Eastern Shore on February 11: a **Snow Bunting** at Kiptopeke and a **Merlin**.



Snow Bunting. Photo by Laura Mae.



Merlin. Photo by Laura Mae.

The adult male **Baltimore Oriole** pictured at right was arguably the most closely watched bird in all of downtown Williamsburg during the week of February 6. Over the course of five days that week **Dan Cristol**, W&M Chancellor Professor of Biology, brought a total of 68 students to **Mary Ellen Hodges's** residence to view eight Baltimore Orioles that are overwintering in Mary Ellen's neighborhood and visiting her feeders daily. Forty-five of the students are enrolled in Dan's Ornithology class and 10 in an experimental class, "Birding and Medicine," that he is teaching this year for pre-med students. The remaining 13 students were members of the Bird Club of William & Mary. This is the seventh year in a row that a number of orioles have overwintered in Mary Ellen's neighborhood and the seventh year that Dan

has brought students by to see them. Given the proximity of Mary Ellen's residence to the W&M campus, it works well for Dan to bring his new ornithology students by early in the semester to teach them how to watch a variety of common backyard birds; but Dan declares often that the Baltimore Oriole is his "favorite bird," and it's clear he enjoys sharing it with his students. In Dan's world, a visit to the orioles doesn't count unless each student sees a brilliantly-colored adult male. This year the overwintering orioles include only one adult male. By end of the second week of February, all but six of Dan's students had seen the adult male during their originally scheduled visit. Dan returned with those six students two weeks later to ensure they, too, would see that brilliant bird. Kudos to Dan for the enthusiasm and energy he brings to his teaching. It's no wonder that interest in birds and birding appears to be booming among the students at W&M. 🐦



Some of Dan Cristol's students as they watched for the male Baltimore Oriole pictured below. Top photo by Dan Cristol. Bottom photo by Mary Ellen Hodges.



THE CONSERVATION FUND ACQUIRES 1,000-ACRE FONES CLIFFS PROPERTY AT AUCTION

By Evan Visconti

Editor's Note: The acquisition of the 1,000-acre parcel at [Fones Cliffs](#) described below—added to 252 acres nearby conserved by the [Conservation Fund](#) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2019 and 465 acres donated to the Rappahannock Tribe by the [Chesapeake Conservancy](#) in spring 2022—is an important conservation success story for those who care about birds. In a January 2016 essay on The Center for Conservation Biology's [website](#), Bryan Watts described the significance of the area as follows: "Fones Cliffs represents the core of a site that holds continental significance for bald eagles. In addition to supporting one of the highest breeding densities throughout the species' range, Fones Cliffs is one of the few places in the region that supports high numbers of nonbreeding eagles during both the summer and winter seasons. Thousands of eagles utilize the site on an annual basis, migrating from as far north as Labrador and as far south as Florida. It is the convergence of eagles from multiple populations rather than the local breeding population that elevates the conservation value of the site." (The following article was originally published on December 9, 2022 by the [Virginia Mercury](#), where it can be found at this [link](#). The article is used with the permission of the Virginia Mercury under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 and, consistent with the Virginia Mercury's republishing guidelines, has been shortened to fit this space.)

The Conservation Fund announced Friday [December 9, 2022] it has acquired nearly 1,000 acres along the Rappahannock River in Richmond County to protect the largest remaining unconserved portion of Fones Cliffs.

"These are iconic, 80- to 100-foot-tall cliffs in some places," said Bryan Hofmann, deputy director of Friends of the Rappahannock, a regional nonprofit conservation group. "Folks like to say as John Smith sailed up the Rappahannock, those cliffs probably looked awfully similar to the way they do now. It's not easy to put a tangible dollar value on that when you get out there to kayak, canoe and fish."

The Conservation Fund did just that when the national nonprofit submitted a winning bid of \$8.1 million for the property in November during an auction that was part of a three-year bankruptcy proceeding involving landowner Virginia True Corporation.

The land will be placed under conservation easement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and then transferred to the Rappahannock Tribe during the latter half of 2023 to "further their efforts to return to the river," said Heather Richards, the Conservation Fund's mid-Atlantic regional director.

The land adjoins the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge and another 400 acres acquired by the Rappahannock Tribe in April. It will mark the tribe's second major land acquisition along the Rappahannock River.

"When you have large tracts of land permanently protected for habitat, fish and wildlife, scenic nature and conservation, it adds value to any new conserved adjacent lands," said Hofmann. "The larger that connectivity gets, the higher the value of all of

the conserved lands becomes, just from a purely habitat value."

A second bidder listed in court documents was Fones Cliffs Development, LLC, with a final bid of \$8,075,000. Virginia True Corporation's shareholders, Benito R. Fernandez and Howard Kleinhendler, are also minority members in Fones Cliffs Development.

Virginia True Corporation had [planned to develop](#) a hotel, luxury condos and federally funded housing on the property. Prior to that, it had [planned to construct](#) an 18-hole golf course and a large resort subdivision.

Conservationists and Indigenous leaders strongly opposed the development of an area that is "from a cultural ecological standpoint just such an amazing place," said Richards. Fones Cliffs provides habitat for one of the highest breeding densities of bald eagles throughout their native range, drawing in thousands of eagles on an annual basis, according to the Center for Conservation Biology. Wetlands and inlets on the property will now be preserved for waterfowl habitat, while a large upland area will "provide excellent migratory songbird habitat, as well as habitat for other terrestrial animals," said Richards.

Fones Cliffs holds significant cultural and historical value to the Rappahannock Tribe, which has called the region home for thousands of years. Capt. John Smith mapped three historic Rappahannock villages along the cliffs during a voyage in the summer of 1608. The property has been closed to the public under private ownership, so allowing the tribe "to go back and connect with the property and better understand what had been there is a really huge opportunity that we have now," said Richards. 🐦



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
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/>