

The Flyer Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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April 2023



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

Spring greetings! April and early migration make this an exciting month for birders and hopefully a successful one for birds. How many species of warbler will we hear and

see at prime locations like York River State Park, Greensprings Interpretive Trail, or New Quarter Park? Will we see changes from past years? Additions or notable absences?

If you haven't had a chance to check out the new "Trends" tool on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website, this is a great time to take a look (science.ebird.org/en/status-and-trends). High quality graphics display "cumulative change . . . from 2007-2021" of approximately 500 species of birds. You can find the list on the eBird website, type in a name, and see where the species is increasing and decreasing in detection. These trend maps point out where conservation efforts are most needed, and also where they have been the most effective. A species such as Wood Thrush, in decline for decades, is actually showing increases across much of its range. Fingers crossed that the trend continues. The Yellow-billed Cuckoo is an example of a species showing a decrease in the southern half of its range but an increase in the northern parts. Could that change be climate related? There are many factors affecting these trends and all of our conservation efforts are critical. We saw that firsthand in the outstanding presentation Chance Hines gave at our last meeting about the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. (See Cathy Millar's excellent summary later in this newsletter.) Bluebird lovers will be interested in the trend map for Eastern Bluebird which shows increases along the East Coast population centers and decreases in the middle of the country. The popularity of "bluebird trails" providing nest boxes has had a positive impact on this species.

Some trends are predictable based on the extensive coverage of declines in the avian world over the last several decades. We know that many of our migrating songbirds have been decreasing for years as (*Continued on Page 2*)

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

April 19: 6:00 p.m. (in person at the Williamsburg Library and via Zoom): Presentations by W&M students awarded a Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Ornithology Research Grant by the WBC.



Join us on Wednesday, April 19, at 6:00 p.m. for an exciting evening to hear firsthand the research results from our 2022-2023 College of William & Mary grant recipients. This will be a hybrid meeting (inperson and via Zoom) at the Williamsburg Library theater on Scotland Street. Three students will give presentations:

Joseph Di Liberto holds a House Sparrow in Australia.

- Elizabeth Elliott, "Heat-induced Calling Affects Embryonic Vibrations: Scrambled Eggs or Genuine Feedback?"
- Joseph Di Liberto, "Full Metal Sparrow: Examining the Effects of Sublethal Lead on Ecologicallyimportant Behaviors in a Commensal Songbird."
- Moira Meehan, "Novel Approach to the Detection of Avian Window Collisions."

Save the Dates:

May 24 (Fourth Wednesday): Jan Lockwood will give a presentation on her amazing birding trip to Kenya.

June 8 (Second Thursday): We will have an outdoor event at the Chickahominy Riverfront Park pavilion including an update on our Purple Martin Project from Cheryl Jacobson and Judy Jones.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER, Continued from Page 1

they battle such threats as habitat loss and fragmentation and the perils of migration. Declines in some of our "locals" might come as more of a surprise. We've become accustomed to seeing our "neighborhood birds" at our feeders and in our yards. Carolina Chickadee, a little sprite that seems to be everywhere, is actually declining across almost all of its range, with some areas down 20-30%. American Goldfinch shows a similar trend. Studies have shown that many of our backyard birds are declining due to lack of adequate food. To a large degree, these shortages can be attributed to the lack of native plants, those that host the necessary food supply. According to a study conducted by the Smithsonian Institution, "...the only yards that were able to produce enough chickadees to sustain a stable population were those with a plant composition made up of more than 70 percent of native plants."

Much has been written about the need for native plants for birds and pollinators, bats and other mammals. While we enjoy the birding opportunities of spring, hopefully we can also enjoy the opportunities to plant, manage, promote, or just appreciate the many native plants that occur in the coastal plain. This spring I'll be working on my new goal of 100% natives in my yard in hopes of keeping those little chickadees happy and well fed.

Happy Birding! 📐

WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome new members Jeanette Weinberg, Pamela Young, and Chris and Karen Griffin!

If you still need to renew your own membership for 2023, you can do so online at https://williamsburg birdclub.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

By Scott Hemler

We had seventeen people come out on a cool foggy morning to the Warhill Sports Complex for our March 25 bird walk. We saw 42 species of birds! The Ospreys are back and starting to build a nest on the light poles overlooking a soccer field. Other spring migrants are starting to arrive as we heard a Yellowthroated Warbler and a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher! Many of our winter visitors were still here as we saw a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, several Dark-eyed Juncos, and Yellow-rumped Warblers and heard a Pine Siskin. Many of our permanent residents also made an appearance. We saw quite a few Northern Mockingbirds that were singing away. It ended up being a great morning for the walk and quite a few birds were seen and heard. You can find the entire list at https://ebird.org/checklist/S131893999.

Our next walk will be on April 22 at New Quarter Park. We'll meet in the parking lot by the park office at 8:00 a.m. Binoculars are available for checkout at the park office should anyone need them.

MARCH FIELD TRIP TO MACHICOMOCO STATE PARK By George Martin

On Saturday, March 18, Nancy Barnhart led nine other birders at Machicomoco State Park. The overnight rain sputtered to a stop soon after the group arrived at the park. Habitat in the park is varied, as there are grassy fields, woods, and marshes along the open York River, and the bird life is varied as a result. The group spotted several Horned Grebes on the river, with one just starting to molt into breeding plumage. The expected Field Sparrows didn't disappoint, and our group saw several at close range performing "full-body singing." The parking lot was particularly productive, with a Palm Warbler mixed in with a large flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers and Chipping Sparrows. Killdeer walked on the adjacent field, while Bald Eagles flew along its edges. A treat was a flock of American Pipits, which stayed low in the grass a few hundred feet from the parking lot – sometimes you have to work to see the birds! In all, the group identified 51 species, with the complete list available via the following link: <u>https://ebird.org/ checklist/S131204186</u>.



Photos from the Machicomoco State Park field trip. Clockwise from upper left: Palm Warbler (photo by Martha Moss); Chipping Sparrow (Keith Kennedy); Horned Grebe beginning to molt into breeding plumage (Keith Kennedy); Eastern Bluebird (Martha Moss); Field Sparrow (Martha Moss); Birding from the productive parking lot (Shirley Devan).

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

By George Martin

SATURDAY, APRIL 15 – NEWPORT NEWS PARK

On Saturday, April 15, Jason Strickland will lead us at <u>Newport News Park</u>, located at 13560 Jefferson Avenue. The park usually provides a first look at several newly-arrived migrants, such as Prothonotary Warblers, Eastern Kingbirds, and Great Crested Flycatchers. There should also be lingering winter residents, such as Yellow-rumped Warblers, which will be molting into their breeding plumage. We'll plan to meet at the parking lot by the ranger station at 8:00 a.m. No carpooling on this one—the park is a pretty short drive from Williamsburg.

SATURDAY, MAY 13 – PINEY GROVE PRESERVE

The Club has been granted access for 15 members (maximum!) to visit Piney Grove Preserve on Saturday, May 13. This preserve in Sussex County is the home of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, which Chance Hines described at our March meeting. Chance will be leading us around the preserve. It will be EARLY—Chance recommends we take the **5:20 a.m.** ferry to Surry. We will also need carpools because space for cars is very limited in the preserve. Signups will be announced separately and will be on a first-come, first-served basis.

SPRING BIRD COUNT ON MAY 7

The Williamsburg Bird Club will conduct our annual Spring Bird Count this year on Sunday, May 7. The Spring Bird Count is similar to the Christmas Bird Count, in which field teams and feeder watchers tally all of the birds they observe within our 15-mile diameter circle over a 24-hour period. More information

RED-COCKADED WOODPECKERS

Summary by Cathy Millar

Chance Hines, a research biologist with The Center for Conservation Biology (CCB) at W&M, oversees monitoring the northern-most population of Redcockaded Woodpeckers (RCW) at The Nature Conservancy's 3,200-acre Piney Grove Preserve in Sussex, VA. Chance's presentation at our March 15 meeting, "Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in Virginia," gave us a behind-the-scenes look at the hard work involved in managing the habitat and monitoring the RCW population. The Red-cockaded Woodpecker is a small woodpecker, similar in size to a Downy, with a black and white ladder striped back and a sizeable white cheek. It gets its name from the tiny, nearly invisible, red streak seen only in males on both sides at the upper border of the white cheek that is chiefly noticeable only when flashed in agitation. The red marking is reminiscent of rosettes made of ribbon, and called a "cockade," that adorned hats in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The RCW evolved in old-growth, open-understory longleaf pine forests that were once extensive throughout the Southeast U.S. but nearly disappeared due to extensive logging in the 20th century. Piney Grove contains one of the few remaining stands of mature longleaf pine, as well as loblolly about participating in the Spring Bird Count will be forthcoming as the count day approaches. For now, please consider saving the date and contact Jim Corliss (<u>jcorliss240@cox.net</u>) if you have any questions about how to participate.

and shortleaf pines, which RCW's favor for nesting. For safety, the species chooses old pines with very little understory. Historically, that open understory was created by lightning-caused fires, but modern forest fire prevention practices unwittingly added to the loss of that special habitat. So now, a major RCW conservation measure is conducting controlled fires about every three years at Piney Grove.

Most woodpecker species choose dead trees for their nest cavities, but RCWs choose living pine trees in which the heartwood has been softened by red heart fungus. Choosing a site that is usually 30-40 feet high (at times 80 ft.) and below the first branch, RCWs drill through the pine's live wood to reach the softened diseased wood, which is easier to excavate; but it can still take up to 2-10 years to create a cavity. When finished, the birds drill holes beneath the nest entrance to release sticky pine resin that discourages predators like black rat snakes and other cavity-using species like flying squirrels and other birds. Streaks of this resin are a hallmark for identifying an RCW's nest cavity. Because it takes so long to create a nest cavity, another major method of (Continued on Page 5)

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Chance Hines extracting RCW chicks from a nest. Photo courtesy of The Cen-

facilitating RCW breeding is biologists cutting an appropriate space in a preferred pine and inserting an artificial nest cavity with the right size nest hole. The biologists even spray paint white stripes beneath the artificial cavity to simulate the look of sap flow to attract the RCW's attention! Another conservation measure is using metal plates to restrict the opening in the nest box to the preferred 2-3 inches and, thus, preventing them ter for Conservation Biology. from being widened by squirrels or other species of woodpeckers.

An unusual behavioral feature of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker is that it is a cooperative breeder: it lives in small family groups of one breeding pair (the dominant male and female) and several helpers. The helpers (which may include related and nonrelated birds) assist in incubation and feeding even after fledglings leave the nest. RCWs like to excavate several cavities in pine trees spaced in clusters in their territory and use them year-round for roosting as well as breeding. Except for the breeding season, RCWs roost alone in separate cavities. The breeding male roosts in the best cavity, usually the one he's most recently created and that has the heaviest sap flow. During breeding season, he turns the cavity over to the female to lay eggs. When the youngsters have fledged at 24-27 days old, he reclaims the cavi-

AN INNOCENT PURSUIT

By Mary Haines

It began as an innocent pursuit. I knew nothing about the shy fellow except that he shunned the company of other birds. At the slightest skitter of a cardinal over the flower bed, he'd dash under the abelia bush or nearest clump of daffodils. No wonder he's called a Hermit Thrush. His limited appearance increased my longing to see him, to get another glimpse, for that was all he ever offered: only a few seconds flitting over the mulch. And then he was gone. He became another "elusive bird" and his absence became an obsession.

The elusive quality of the bird piqued my interest yet caused concern. Was he a statistic, one in a declinty for roosting. The biologists band the birds at age 5 to 10 days old.

RCWs are the only woodpecker classified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an endangered species. By 2002, Piney Grove Preserve held the only two breeding pairs in all of Virginia. RCWs from other states were translocated to Piney Grove for genetic diversity. There are currently 20 potential breeding pairs.

An effort to reestablish RCWs in the Great Dismal Swamp in an area of naturally open habitat with shortleaf and pond pines was begun in 2015. Artificial nest cavities were installed and RCWs translocated from Piney Grove and Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge. Over the years, 50 birds have been translocated to the Great Dismal Swamp and there are currently 10-15 RCWs. You really need to watch the video in Chance's presentation to see the stealth maneuvers required to translocate RCWs, monitor the nest cavities with a "peeper cam," and retrieve the babies for banding-all accomplished at a height of 30-80 ft. up on a skinny ladder! Acrophobics need not apply!

Creating a life line for RCWs has been a collaborative effort of state, nonprofit, university, and federal partners. The biologists at Piney Grove are also working with the state to protect additional habitat at Big Woods State Forest and Big Woods Wildlife Management Area that border Piney Grove and create a combined conservation area giving these woodpeckers more than 7,500 acres within which to roam. The future for RCWs is looking brighter. Here is a link to watch Chance's entire presentation on

ing number of many species? And why so coy? As a ground feeder, he rarely visited the hanging cylinder or hopper feeder. Yet, while counting birds for the Cornell Lab's Project FeederWatch, I continued to imagine that one day he might turn adventurous and leave the shelter of the ground for a quick (Continued on Page 6)



Hermit Thrush photographed by Mary Haines.

HERMIT THRUSH, Continued from Page 5

snack with titmice and finches. I'd lift my binoculars one more time in the hope of catching sight of his bright, black eyes. I'd end many bird-counting days with a blank next to the Hermit Thrush entry, and sigh: "Maybe tomorrow." When he did show up, darting in and out of the Stella d'Oro daylily foliage, his appearance was high-speed and brief. I consoled myself with the cliché, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Like a prima donna, he stepped out from the flower bed, as if to say, "Here I am, but not for long." It was almost a taunt: "Catch me if you can with your camera. Or better yet, come outdoors and get a closer look."

Another bird watching day, and I find myself again waiting for my Hermit Thrush. I picture him popping up from the leaf litter in the ravine to make his appearance one more time. Outlined in moon-white, his black eyes remain an indelible image on my mind. His brown feathers are not striking, but his russetcolored tail that he quickly raises and slowly lowers sets him apart. True, he can't compare to the colorful bluebird or cardinal; but his white, speckled breast signals my handsome bird is back. As for his reclusive habit and abrupt exits, I believe he's trying to escape, or avoid the company of other birds. After all, he's living up to his name.

ALOHA FROM THE BIRDS OF HAWAII

By Cheryl J. Jacobson

Aloha is the Hawaiian word for love, affection, peace, compassion, and mercy. The word is commonly used as a simple greeting but it has a deeper cultural and spiritual significance to native Hawaiians, for whom the term is used to define a force that holds together existence. I love this definition as it expresses my feelings for the birds of Hawaii: they are a force that holds together existence.

I traveled to Hawaii in late February for a 12-day birding adventure. Although the ten-hour flight to the state is tedious, once on the ground, bird life is truly amazing. In my time there I saw 54 species of birds I had never seen before.

A highlight of the trip was the day spent at the Hakalau Forest Nature Reserve, which was established in 1985 to protect and manage endangered forest birds—such as the Hawai'i 'Ākepa, 'Akiapōlā'au, and 'I'iwi—and their rainforest habitat. The reserve is a challenging destination due to both remoteness and protective restrictions on visitor access, requiring the services of a permitted guide. The eastern slope of the dormant volcano Mauna Kea is among the wetOne promising day, a quick flash of brown and a distinct flicking of wings alerted me: my Hermit Thrush was back. This time he hopped and froze, hopped and froze in his inimitable fashion, long enough for me to reach for my camera and capture him. Perhaps I had invaded his privacy; but recording his image gave me a sense of happiness, the way a photo of a loved one brings joy.

Alas, when my Hermit Thrush was AWOL last week, I began thinking about his origin and decided to learn more about my elusive friend. The thrush's name *Catharus guttatus* comes from the Greek *catharus* meaning "pure", and the Latin *guttatus*, "spotted". He's never sung a note for me, but he's known for his melodic, "ethereal" song that has earned him the title, American Nightingale. Comforting is the knowledge that his population is stable, even increasing. When I lift my binoculars, scanning the yard and ravine, I have good reason to expect my Hermit Thrush (or one of his relatives) to return one day. I've grown accustomed to his elusive ways.

Author's Note: For anyone likewise smitten by the Hermit Thrush, check out the <u>Oneida Indian Nation's</u> <u>legend of the Hermit Thrush</u>, a story sure to delight.

test places in the U.S., as we discovered. When we arrived, it was raining lightly and as the day progressed, so did the rain: a true rain forest. After several hours we abandoned our efforts to take photos. The accessible portion of the refuge is around 6,000-6,500 ft. in elevation, and we arrived to a temperature of 39° F. However, we endured, as the beauty of the birds and forest was phenomenal. We got good looks at the rare 'Akiapōlā'au, but due to the rain, were unable to take photos.

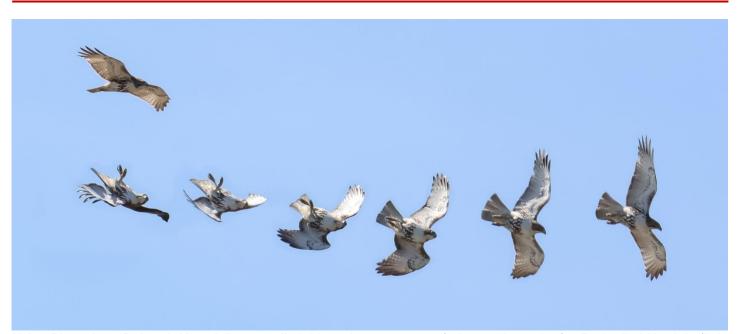
I recently sent an email out to all the members of our club with a link to a <u>National Audubon Society article</u> on birds and native plants. The article explains the importance of the restricted Hakalau Forest Nature Reserve as many of the honeycreeper populations have been severely depleted by avian malaria. Honeycreepers rely on nectar from lobed flowers, like the sunny yellow māmane flowers featured in a photo in the article. 'Ōhi'a were a major food source for many Hawai'i natives, but a fungal disease known as rapid 'ōhi'a death kills the tree within as little as a few days of infection, threatening the survival of the tree and wildlife dependents. (*Continued on Page 7*)

BIRDS OF HAWAII, Continued from Page 6

Over the course of my trip, we traveled around three islands—Oahu, Kauai, and the Big Island—and had too many wonderful bird experiences to begin to highlight in this short article. I especially loved seeing nesting Laysan Albatross in a residential area. Seeing a Red-tailed Tropicbird on her nest on a rocky shoreline was exciting. And more commonly, two cardinal species—Red-crested Cardinal and Yellowbilled Cardinal—were abundant. On a long drive along Keanakolu Road, open country birds we observed that are generally present included: Hawaiian Goose, California Quail, Wild Turkey, Erckel's Francolin, Common and Kalij pheasants, Hawaiian Hawk, Hawaiian Short-eared Owl, and Eurasian Skylark. Less expected but observed were Black and Gray francolins. My trip to Hawaii was truly memorable.



Bird species seen by Cheryl Jacobson on her recent trip to Hawaii. From left to right, top to bottom: Laysan Albatross parent and chick in nest (photo by Cheryl Jacobson); 'Akiapōlā'au (photo by Many Talpas); Red-tailed Tropicbird on nest (Cheryl Jacobson); and Red-crested Cardinal (Cheryl Jacobson).



Using Photoshop, Deborah Humphries compiled this action sequence of photos she took of a Red-tailed Hawk in flight. She described the scene as follows: "On March 9, a group of us at the Hawkwatch at College Creek had our binoculars trained on this hawk flying fast across the James River heading north. We saw it do something "funny" but weren't sure what exactly. I pulled the photos up and found that the hawk had done a "barrel-roll" in flight! It dropped, rolled upsidedown, and righted itself in a fraction of a second." It's unclear what caused the hawk to roll. It may have thought it was about to be attacked from above or it may have hit some strong air turbulence.

RECENT SIGHTINGS

On Saturday, March 4, **Laura Mae** found Virginia's first-of-the-year **Anhinga** across from Greenbrier Mall in Chesapeake! She found what was presumably the same bird March 5-12 about a half mile away from its original location. Laura noted that there are no eBird records of this species in Chesapeake in January or February in any years, so her March 4 sighting also appears to be earliest in the year ever in Chesapeake.



Anhinga in Chesapeake photographed by Laura Mae on March 5.

Laura Mae also reported that a teacher at Hickory High School in Chesapeake alerted her to a pair of Killdeer nesting in the school's front yard. As Laura put it: "Here is the thing—it was February!!" Laura was able to visit the nest site on March 4 on what she thinks was the eleventh day of incubation.

Deborah Humphries captured a great view of a subset of a group of over 60 **American White Peli-**

VSO FIELD TRIPS

The Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO) is sponsoring the following two field trips. Registration for the trips is free for VSO members, but of course joining the VSO is an easy thing to do: go to https://www.virginiabirds.org/join-renew to sign up.

Gloucester County, June 2-4, 2023

The VSO will hold its first-ever field trip in this location to showcase the new Machicomoco State Park (opened April 2021). Holiday Inn Express Hotel is the headquarters for the event, which will run Friday afternoon through Sunday morning. <u>https://www.</u> virginiabirds.org/vso-events/gloucester-2023. **cans** seen at the Hawkwatch at College Creek on March 5 as the birds migrated north through James City County.



Killdeer on nest. Photo by Laura Mae.



American White Pelicans. Photo by Deborah Humphries.

Chincoteague, September 8-10, 2023

The Refuge Inn in Chincoteague has been reserved for the VSO group this weekend. Registration for this field trip will open later this spring.

RVA FALCON CAM

The RVA Falcon Cam is up and running for the 2023 breeding season. The downtown Richmond nest is occupied and as of March 31 the female Peregrine Falcon had laid a clutch of four eggs. You can watch the action at https://dwr.virginia.gov/falcon-cam/.



2023 Williamsburg Bird Club Membership Form

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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?

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I wish to make a contribution to:

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- \$_____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, <u>ina-via@gmail.com</u>.

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 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. <u>https://williamsburg.wbu.com/</u>