



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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June 2023



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

June greetings. We have had a fun and active spring with great bird walks at New Quarter Park and the Warhill Sports Complex, excellent monthly meeting presentations, beautiful newsletters, and very successful field trips. The visit to the Piney Grove Preserve and the Red-cockaded Woodpecker breeding territory was a huge success with the group seeing eight RCW's, as they're affectionately known. Still upcoming is our June 8 gathering at Chickahominy Riverfront Park to see and learn more about Purple Martins.

We're about to head into summer when some of us take a bit of a break from the usual routine. Some have travel plans, some prefer "staycations," and for some it's actually business as usual. If you find yourself looking for "beach reading," something for long plane rides, or needing to live vicariously as others travel, here are some suggestions to keep you entertained with birding outside of the Historic Triangle.

One of my favorite "travel bird books" is *Birding Without Borders: An Obsession, a Quest, and the Biggest Year in the World*, by Noah Stryker. This may be a familiar title to many but if you haven't had a chance to read it, I highly recommend it. Birds, travel, natural history, loads of adventure—it is a very entertaining, well-written account of Stryker's travels around the globe as he attempts to see half of the species of the birds in the world in 365 days. His total of 6042 species was at the time, 2015, the largest birding year on record. Stryker's stories about the sometimes far-flung places he visits and the cast of characters he encounters along the way reinforce why we love birding. It's not just for the birds! The book lives up to its billing: ". . . Noah ventures deep into a world of chronic sleep deprivation, airline snafus, breakdowns, mudslides, floods, war zones, ecological devastation, conservation triumphs, common and iconic species, and scores of passionate bird lovers" (Book jacket).
(Continued on Page 2)

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

June 8 (Second Thursday): 6:00 p.m., an in-person outdoor gathering at the Chickahominy Riverfront Park: Presentation by WBC Purple Martin Team followed by refreshments.

Join us on June 8 (Second Thursday) for our outdoor gathering at the Chickahominy Riverfront Park, 1350 John Tyler Highway, Williamsburg. We will meet at the picnic shelter by the pool at 6 p.m. and take a short walk to visit the Purple Martin colony. After the walk, WBC Purple Martin team members will educate us on: site selections (Sherry Hancock); the installation process (Shan Gill); swallow identification (Nancy Barnhart); migration (Judy Jones); and population decline (Cheryl Jacobson). Refreshments will be available after the presentation. There will be no programs in July and August. 🐦



Purple Martin breeding pairs resting on their nest porches before the frenzy of raising chicks begins. Photo by Cathy Millar of her colony earlier this year.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER, Continued from Page 1

Another great read is *Owls of the Eastern Ice: A Quest to Find and Save the World's Largest Owl*, by Jonathan C. Slaght. Part scientific research, part travel, and always thrilling adventure, it is the story of the author's efforts to find and study the extremely elusive Blakiston's Fish Owl in Russia's Far East. Slaght spent years studying this endangered species and working on a plan for its conservation. You will find yourself rooting for the success of this impressive species as you learn about its ability to survive in a harsh climate and diminishing habitat.

And for the fascinating story of an environmental battle in Belize, *The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw: One Woman's Fight to Save the World's Most Beautiful Bird*, by Bruce Barcott, is a page-turner. It is the story of wildlife defender Sharon Matola and her fight against corruption, greed, and the construction of a dam that would devastate the breeding grounds of the only Scarlet Macaws in Belize. As reviewed in *The New York Times Book Review* it is "thrilling . . . [with] Barcott . . . mashing up adventure, nature writing and biography in a steamy climate of corruption and intrigue." It is a story of the dilemma of balancing conservation and human development.

Please think about sharing some favorite titles that you find during the summer months. Our next newsletter will be in September and Mary Ellen Hodges would love to receive your book reviews or recommendations, photos, travel stories, or recent sightings.

Best wishes for a happy, healthy, and birdy summer to all. 🐦

WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please extend a warm welcome to our newest member, Michelle Gianvecchio!

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. To join our club or renew your membership, please go to <https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/membership>, where you can either complete a membership form online or download a form for printing and submitting by mail. Scheduled club activities can always be found on our calendar at <https://williamsburg-birdclub.org/90-2/>. 🐦

MONTHLY BIRD WALKS — NEXT WALKS ON JUNE 24, JULY 22, AUGUST 26

By Scott Hemler

It was a cool breezy morning at New Quarter Park for our May bird walk on the 27th. We had ten people come out and we saw 36 species of birds (see eBird checklist at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S139490159>). A big highlight was watching two Ospreys successfully catch a fish. Everyone applauded when they caught that fish! Other highlights were watching a mother Osprey tend to her nest (although we did not see any chicks) and watching a Great Blue Heron swallow a crab whole! We heard several Acadian Flycatchers, two Summer Tanagers, two Great Crested Flycatchers, and several Yellow-throated Warblers. Our summer residents are here! We also saw two Bald Eagles and a Cooper's Hawk fly by down at the dock. Despite the cool and breezy weather, it was a very successful morning of bird watching!

We'll continue to hold bird walks at New Quarter Park on the 4th Saturday of the month throughout the summer: June 24, July 22, and August 26. As usual, 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. 🐦



Some of the birders who participated in our May walk at New Quarter Park. Photo by Scott Hemler.

MAY FIELD TRIP TO PINEY GROVE PRESERVE

By George Martin

On Saturday, May 13, Chance Hines from William & Mary led fifteen bird club members to Piney Grove Preserve in Sussex County to see Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (RCWO). The trip started before sunrise as carpools formed at the Jamestown Settlement parking lot ahead of the 5:20 a.m. ferry departure. But once we arrived at the Preserve shortly after sunrise, the search for RCWO was very successful! Several members obtained excellent photographs of the birds (see Page 4). The first cluster Chance took us to was somewhat in the direction of the rising sun. We saw RCWO there, but the photography was a little difficult. Meanwhile, the group was still enjoying the area, because we were seeing and hearing many other interesting species. A Red-headed Woodpecker flew over the group; Prairie Warblers were prominent; and Yellow-throated Vireos were common. Then, Chance took us to a second cluster. On the way, a Summer Tanager was calling, as was a Black-and-white Warbler, and an Eastern Wood-Pewee decided to perch over the trail. At the site of the second cluster, the nest cavity was facing the trail and the sun was at our

backs. Cameras were active! The RCWO were flying from the nest cavity near the group to the other side of the trail, where foraging must have been good, since they returned to the nest cavity every few minutes. But while the RCWO were foraging, Common Yellowthroats were calling, and a pair of American Redstarts visited the shrubs on the side of the trail opposite the nest cavity. In all, the group identified 33 species at the Preserve. The following link to the eBird checklist has several of the RCWO photographs appended: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S137499190>.

After the visit to the Preserve ended, many participants met at the Virginia Diner in Wakefield for coffee and breakfast (It was only 9 a.m.!). On the return trip on the ferry across the James River, a pair of Bonaparte's Gulls were seen near the Jamestown terminus along with Laughing Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls.

This is our last field trip for the spring. Field trips will resume in September. Stay tuned! 🐦

The Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists will offer Basic Training beginning September 5, 2023 and continuing through February with graduation in March. Applications for the program will be available June 1 at <https://www.historicrivers.org/become-a-virginia-master-naturalist/>. If you are interested in more information, please contact Shirley Devan, Co-Chair, Basic Training Committee at shirley_devan@icloud.com.



Piney Grove Preserve Field Trip. Red-cockaded Woodpeckers photographed (clockwise from upper left) by Dan Earnhardt, Cindy Hamilton, and Deborah Humphries. Photo of trip participants by George Martin: Front row, from left – Cindy DePuy, Cindy Hamilton, Jeanette Weinberg, Joyce Lowry, Cheryl Jacobson. Back row, from left —Jan Lockwood, Dan Earnhardt, Bruce Glendening, Deborah Humphries, Rexanne Bruno, Nancy Barnhart, Keith Kennedy, Eric Christenson, Babs Giffen, Chance Hines (leader). Photo by George Martin.

THE BEST OF KENYA

Summary by Cathy Millar

At the WBC's meeting on May 24, Patty Maloney, Vice President, Programs, introduced the evening's speaker, club member Jan Lockwood, who treated us to a narrated photo presentation of her trip to Kenya. Born in New Zealand, Jan has a lovely soft accent. She has also lived in Canada and worked most of her life in Parks and Recreation. Being an avid birder, upon retiring to Williamsburg Jan joined our bird club. She also became a Master Naturalist and has volunteered in many citizen science projects. In her presentation, "The Best of Kenya," Jan shared with us her fulfillment of a life-long dream to witness African wildlife. On the very first day of their 13-day safari starting in Nairobi in August of 2022, she and her husband saw an amazing variety of birds, including Kenya's national bird, the Lilac-breasted Roller, so named because of the aerial acrobatics it performs during courtship or territorial flights. Kenya boasts over 1000 species of birds, and Jan showed us photos of an incredible variety, including some European/African migrants, and shared interesting information about each

one. Included was the world's highest-flying bird, the critically endangered Ruppell's Griffon Vulture; the smallest bird of prey in Africa, the African Pygmy Falcon; the partly diurnal, little African Barred Owlet; and many other iconic African birds, like weavers, two species of ostriches, and the Secretarybird.



Secretarybird photographed by Jan Lockwood in Kenya.

(Continued on Page 5)

BEST OF KENYA, Continued from Page 4

Kenya has over 40 national parks and wildlife reserves, which comprise 8% of the country. Hunting has been banned in Kenya since 1977, and wildlife corridors allow elephants to move between secure habitats. Animals are generally much less fearful. Jan's travels covered a wide variety of habitats. As well as seeing the "big five" animals (lion, leopard, white and black rhino, elephant, and African buffalo), Jan saw and photographed two giraffe species, cheetah, hippos, zebra, a variety of different antelopes, warthogs, monkeys, tree hyrax, leopard, hyena, mongoose, and migrating wildebeest. In one area with dense thorny undergrowth, it was strange to see male lions without big manes, who have evolved without them in order to avoid getting tangled in the thorn bushes. We learned that acacia trees covered in fierce spines do not deter giraffes from browsing on them. But acacias have formed a mutualistic relationship with some species of ants who, in exchange for shelter in bulbous spines and nectar secretions, will

defend the tree when they sense the vibrations caused by giraffes pulling on the branches. Giraffes do not tolerate the ants' sharp stings.

The landscape looked parched, as a result of a four-decade-long drought, which led to conflict between humans and elephants as the elephants sought food and water in communities and farmers' fields. Jan reported that devices that generate the sound of buzzing bees are being used successfully and safely to keep elephants away. Elephants are fearful of the aggressive African honeybee stinging them around the eyes and mouth.

Jan described the star-studded night sky in Kenya as breathtaking. Her adventure, organized by Field Guides, a company which provides knowledgeable bird-tour guides, no doubt inspired several of us to move a trip to Kenya to the top of our bucket list! A video of Jan's full presentation is available on the WBC's YouTube channel at the following link: <https://youtu.be/CEuOI6Hb3-I>. 🐦

SPRING BIRD COUNT IN THE JOLLY POND SECTOR

By Shirley Devan

By the time our field team of four arrived at the Hornsby Middle School parking lot at 6:45 a.m. on May 7, early bird Alex Minarik had tallied nine species! Alex, Deborah Humphries, and I then piled into Lee Schuster's SUV to head to the next spot: Cranston Mill Pond. About the same time, Gary and Ann Carpenter, the second field team for our Jolly Pond sector, were out the door, too, scouring Colonial Heritage neighborhoods, feeders, ponds, fields, and golf course edges. Gary was also in charge of rounding up feeder watchers and received data from five residents at the end of the day. The Jolly Pond Sector is just one of the sectors in the circle of the Williamsburg Bird Club's Christmas and Spring Counts. Jolly Pond is the area west of Centerville Road between Richmond Road and Monticello Avenue.

At Cranston Mill Pond we tallied 39 species in just over an hour. The owner gives us access each spring and winter for our bird club counts. In 2022, he welcomed the WBC in for a field trip, so many members know what a "birdy" spot this is. We found nine species of warblers at Cranston Mill Pond: Hooded Warbler singing early and often, Protonotary Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Northern Parula, Black-and-white Warbler, Pine Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Louisiana Waterthrush. We would love to linger at this spot, but the birds call us—

to Freedom Park!

Freedom Park is HUGE with varied habitats including the Botanical Garden, Colby Swamp (plus the path down to the swamp), and the Free Settlement. Ovenbirds are abundant at Freedom Park—we heard nine but are confident that many more are nesting there. How many did we see? Zero! Zip! That was the case for many birds during the day. Alex, Lee, and Deborah have bionic ears and know the songs—me, not so much. So, I kept tally as they called out birds they were hearing. Other highlights at the park: Wood Thrush, Blue Grosbeak, House Wren, Veery, Common Yellowthroat, Scarlet Tanager, American Redstart. Species total was 44 over three hours.

After those two "hot spots" to start our day, we bounced around to our less glamorous sites. First, half of Jolly Pond Road, since it's closed at the dam. In about 30 minutes we had 20 species, many heard from the car with the windows open.

The BP Station on Centerville Road is one of our favorite stops for a bathroom break and the opportunity to forage for junk food. In about 20 minutes we tallied 15 species including a reliable Brown Thrasher in the shrubbery behind the station. This is our guaranteed stop for House Sparrows, Common Grackles, Brown-
(Continued on Page 6)



Deborah Humphries, Alex Minarik, Lee Schuster and Shirley Devan (left to right) pause for a selfie during the Spring Bird Count in the Jolly Pond Sector.

SPRING BIRD COUNT, Continued from Page 5

headed Cowbirds, and European Starlings. We usually get these species at other spots, but they are sure bets here. We have been stopping at the station twice a year for many years. The toddler we used to see in the playpen behind the counter is now at James Madison University. To help with tuition payments, we made a second stop there before the day was over.

Matoaka Elementary School is one of three schools in our sector. Twenty-one species included two Osprey nests on light poles at the sports field—each with an incubating female. And one male perched nearby. The Rough-winged Swallows continue to puzzle us. Each spring we see them flying in and out of the tailpipe of one of the school buses parked there. How do they survive with the bus out on its regular rounds each weekday?

A very quick stop for us is the “Pet Resort” on Monticello near the Greensprings West neighborhood. We just pull off the road and park for a few minutes to scan the skies. The potential is high here despite the changing habitat—something different planted in the fields every year. It did not disappoint because we picked up Purple Martins, Chimney Swifts, a Red-tailed Hawk, and two Bald Eagles.

We spent about an hour in the Greensprings West Neighborhood. WBC member Jennifer Trevino fills her feeders the day before and invites us to bird her feeder station and lunch on the patio while she is counting on another team! Two Eastern Towhees, male and female, emerged from somewhere and scuffled their way across the front of her feeder area. Jennifer says she never has seen two at the same time. How lucky were we? We hit the jackpot with Canada

Geese on the golf course—over 40 including some goslings.

Those who have birded with Deborah Humphries know that she is hardly ever without her camera and large lens. On this day, Deborah spotted and photographed eight large, high-flying birds over the Greensprings West neighborhood. Now the puzzle began. What in the world were they? We had to wait for Deborah to enlarge and enhance the blurry image on her computer screen at home and then send the image around to several birders for ID. A couple of days later all agreed that the birds were Sandhill Cranes! A first for the Williamsburg counts. Great job, Deborah!

This year we again received permission to bird around the Sweethaven Lavender Farm even if it was closed to the public. In just over an hour, we counted 27 species including the first-of-the-day Killdeer: adults and darned-cute downy young.

Our final stop of the day was the school complex where we started at 6:30 in the morning: Blayton and Hornsby schools on Jolly Pond Road. In about 45 minutes we counted 22 species and added a new species to the list: Solitary Sandpiper!

Phew! We were tired and suffering sensory overload. We jumped in our cars to head home for refreshments (adult beverages?!) and showers. Since I live in Colonial Heritage, I headed home to watch my feeders and yard for the Colonial Heritage count. In 45 minutes, I tallied 18 species including a Ruby-throated Hummingbird which we had not seen on our trek all day.

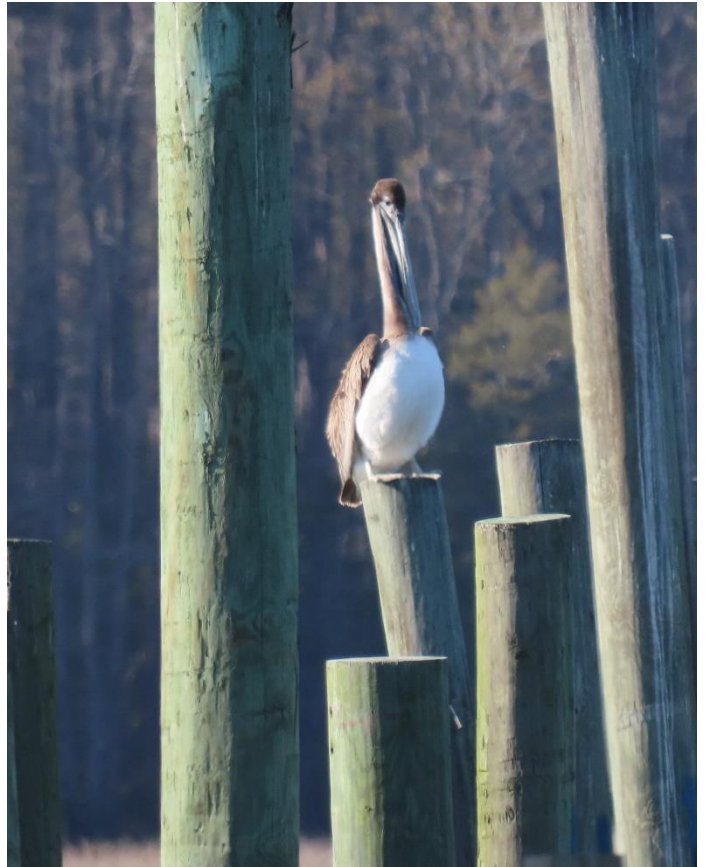
Meanwhile, Gary Carpenter was sorting through the lists from feeder watchers in Colonial Heritage. His total list settled down to 57 species and 785 individuals. Birds seen in Colonial Heritage that added to our species list: Sharp-shinned Hawk, Ruby-throated Hummingbird (total of 6), Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Song Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Bobolinks (10). They also tallied 153 American Robins.

Our Jolly Pond Sector’s spots range from the “birdiest” to the “trash birdiest” but we ended up with 84 species, an improvement over last year’s 79 species. The bird stars of the day were definitely the Bobolinks and the Sandhill Cranes! We bemoaned the continual conversion of woodland and farm habitat to new houses we’ve witnessed over the years. We bemoaned our individual progressive loss of the ability to hear the high/low pitched bird songs we were able to hear a few years ago. But we again celebrated another great day in the field with fellow birders and delightful sightings! Thanks to all who made the day a success. 🐦

RECENT SIGHTINGS



While at York River State Park on May 5, **Deborah Humphries** (photo) and **Michelle Gianvecchio** were down on the damn watching the Great Blue Heron heronry when "Along came a new heron, settling on a hay bale island. But it wasn't a resident heron; it was a migrating **Little Blue Heron** in full breeding plumage!"



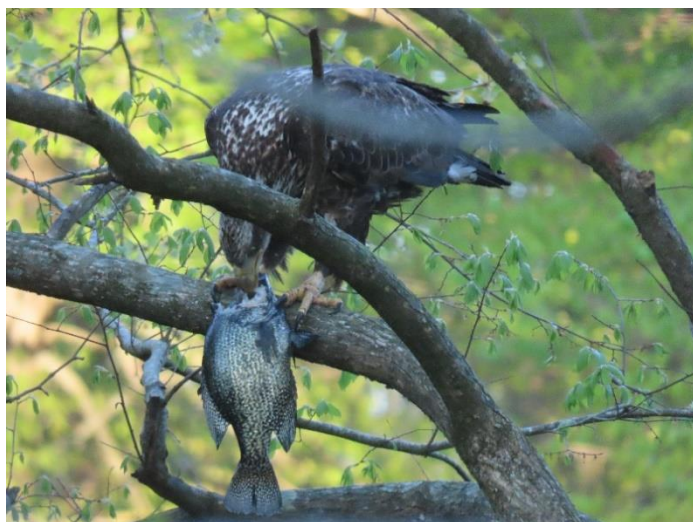
Jan Lockwood spotted a juvenile **Brown Pelican** roosting on a pole at the Queens Lake Marina on March 30. Jan says this was the first time she'd seen the species on Queen's Creek.



On May 1, **Bruce Glendenning** sighted a **Great Horned Owl** (above left) 50 ft. up in a loblolly pine during the late afternoon in Holly Hills. Bruce was "ecstatic" to have four **Eastern Bluebirds** (above right) fledge from his backyard nest box May 4.



Sally McGee recently took a trip to the Yorkshire area of England where she captured a photo of a **Common Chaffinch**.



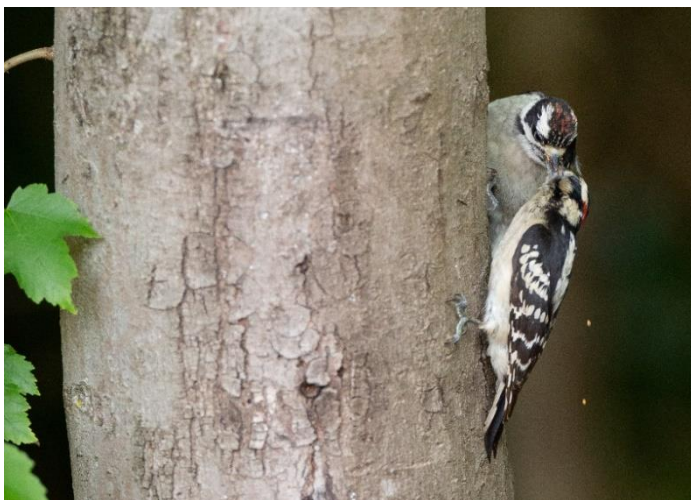
Jan Lockwood had a new species for her yard in Queens Lake on April 11: an immature **Bald Eagle** eating a freshly caught breakfast!



Each year in the spring **Alex Minarik** puts out dog hair on her lawn in Windsor Forest and regularly has chickadees and titmice come gather it. This year, on May 5, was the first time Alex has seen a **Yellow-throated Warbler** gathering the hair for its nest.



While birding at College Landing Park on May 1, **Ivan Munkres** saw “three small sparrows in the grass: two Chipping, and one that struck me as odd. It flew into a nearby bush and gave amazing looks in the sunlight—a **Clay-colored Sparrow**! It was wonderful to see it in its distinct breeding plumage.” Ivan’s sighting was a first for the City of Williamsburg. Nancy Barnhart captured this photo of the bird on May 3.



On May 17, **Dan Earnhardt** captured this heartwarming scene of a male **Downy Woodpecker** feeding a fledgling.



There is always so much bird breeding activity at **Inge Curtis's** property on the Chickahominy River! Soon after the Tufted Titmice fledged young from this nest box these **Great Crested Flycatchers** began to move in.



Jan Lockwood reports that three of the four nests in the new heronry she found last year on Queens Lakes are occupied this year. Jan captured this photo of a young **Great Blue Heron** chick on May 9.



Carol Annis was happy to spot a **Red-eyed Vireo** on May 10 at a pond near Toano. Like many of us, Carol admits: "I usually hear them but can't see them."



In 2020, as a result of a WBC meeting that featured Katie Fallon discussing the decline of the **Cerulean Warbler**, **Keith Kennedy** adopted the species as his personal symbol of habitat preservation. He even changed his coffee brand (Birds and Beans Coffee)! On May 10, Keith travelled to the Warbler Road Trail near the Peaks of Otter and was rewarded for all of his efforts with a great photo of his first "Cerulean Blue."



Deborah Humphries was searching for thrushes in the woods behind her home off Jamestown Road on May 8 when she came upon a **Gray-cheeked Thrush**, a lifer for her.



Sherry Hancock has had a new visitor at her Sycamore Landing home since May 6: a **Blue Grosbeak**.



As a bonus to **Keith Kennedy's** May 10 search for the Cerulean Warbler along Warbler Road he was able to add yet another species to his life list: the **Kentucky Warbler**.



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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/>