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September 2023

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart



Welcome back after a long hot summer! I hope you found ways to stay cool! Heading into the fall we have some great meetings, bird walks, and field trips coming up. Watch for details in this newsletter and future emails.

We're not quite done with summer weather yet but we ARE in a great birding time of year. Shorebird migration is in full swing. These long-distance migrants face many challenges and rely on stopovers to refuel on their long journeys. Luckily, we have good shorebird viewing at places like the Jamestown Island Causeway, Grandview Nature Preserve, Pleasure House Point, Hog Island WMA, Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Bethel Beach Natural Area Preserve, and Riverside Turf Farm, all eBird hotspots, to name a few.

For some, the very mention of "shorebird" brings groans. As a group they do present ID challenges. But if you can spend a little time watching them you can begin to sort them out. You can use your everyday field guides or one that covers shorebirds specifically. I like The Shorebird Guide by Michael O'Brien, Richard Crossley, and Kevin Karlson. It is packed with photos and individual species accounts. A very instructive part of the book is the inside back cover. Over two pages, there are silhouettes of almost 50 shorebirds. It took quite a while for me to realize that memorizing all the different plumages of these birds is a daunting challenge. Boil it down to silhouettes and you've greatly simplified the process. Relative size, bill length and shape, posture, and leg length are a few of the diagnostic characteristics that can be seen in silhouette. Add in the foraging movement and style that you can observe in the field and you can quickly narrow down ID to just a couple of choices. For example, very long bill, short legs, and "sewing machine" probing action points you to the dowitchers. (Continued on Page 2)

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

September 20: 6:00 p.m. in person at the Quarterpath Recreation Center (see below) and Presentation by James Abbott, via Zoom: "Birding the James River Watershed."

We will be meeting at a new location in September. Join us on Wednesday, September 20, at 6:00 p.m. at the Quarterpath Recreation Center (Meeting Room 2; 202 Quarterpath Road, Williamsburg), as James Abbott, Senior Environmental Educator and Master Captain for the James River Association, shares with us his tips for birding within the James River watershed. The James River watershed is the largest in Virginia, covering about a guarter of the state. It stretches from northwest of Roanoke at the West Virginia border to Highland County and runs east through Charlottesville, Richmond, and into the Hampton Roads area. This presentation will highlight the best birding in the watershed through the seasons.

Save the Date: October 18, 6:00 p.m., Barbara Houston, award-winning photographer and birder, presents "Close to Home — 10 Places for Birding and Photography." >



James Abbott leads a birding group at Pleasure House Point, Virginia Beach.

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Relatively long bill, long legs, and steady walking while picking food from the surface points you to the yellowlegs.

Whether at the shore or at inland marsh locations, distance and thermal distortion will add to the challenge. Sometimes you won't be able to identify birds to species. It's common to have an eBird list that has "shorebird sp." or "peep sp.", meaning you narrowed it down but couldn't quite make the positive species ID. The so-called "peeps"—the Least, Semipalmated, and Western sandpipers—can be found in mixed flocks with hundreds, even thousands of birds. Don't be surprised to see a wide range in plumages within just one species. Age, sex, and timing can produce a wide range of color and markings. But returning to those "structural" elements—bill, legs, posture, and movement—will simplify the challenge.



My personal favorite shorebird is the Buff-breasted Sandpiper (photo left). An uncommon bird, it is my target species every fall. Loss of grassland habitat has resulted in serious decline in this and many other grassland species. It is unusual in the world of sandpipers as it

prefers grassy areas rather than mudflats. This small-headed, upright, and head-bobbing bird has a very plain but sweet face. In migration the elegant, near-threatened, warm-toned bird prefers dry habitats such as sod farms. We get a small window of time to see this bird on its way to South America. Fingers are crossed one will appear again this year at a turf farm or on Hog Island.

I hope you can take some time to visit a shorebird stopover this fall. It can be demanding but very worthwhile and rewarding to observe these impressive long-distance migrants on their annual trip south. Happy birding!

Editor's Note: The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Bird Academy offers a self-paced, <u>online course</u>, "Be a Better Birder: Shorebird Identification," that consists of guided video tutorials with specific ID strategies for all 47 shorebird species found in the U.S. and Canada. You can preview a <u>sample lesson</u> on the Spotted Sandpiper from the course for free.

BIRD WALKS: NEXT WALK IS ON SEPT. 23 AT NEW QUARTER PARK

By Scott Hemler and Nancy Barnhart

Our club hosted three monthly bird walks at New Quarter Park since publication of the last issue of *The Flyer*. Nancy Barnhart led the walk held on Saturday, **June 24**. The 12 birders who participated saw a whopping 100 individual birds representing 40 species in just over two hours. The eBird checklist for the June walk can be found at: https://ebird.org/checklist/S142560445.

Scott Hemler was joined by 13 other birders when he led the walk held on Saturday, **July 22**. It was a pleasant summer morning for bird watching and the group saw 32 species (https://ebird.org/checklist/S145283826). One of the highlights of the walk was seeing 12+ Great Egrets roosting on the side of Queens Creek opposite the park, in the trees by the dock! The group also witnessed an Osprey catching a rather large fish! They also saw a Northern Diamond-backed Terrapin sunning itself on the opposite shore of Queens Creek. This was a very cool turtle to see as in Virginia they are listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need. A member of the New Quarter Park staff joined the walk and she seemed to enjoy it very much!

Thirteen birders, including park staff member Brian Murray, participated in the walk on Saturday, **August 26**, which was led by Nancy Barnhart. A highlight of the walk was seeing a Great Blue Heron with two nestlings. This was a very unexpected sight and probably a record-setting late date for that species to nest in the area. Overall, it was a quiet day with not quite 30 species (https://ebird.org/checklist/S148155487), but the Great Blue Heron nest was exciting as was an interaction seen between an Osprey and a Bald Eagle. A good time was had by all!

Our next walk will be on **September 23** at New Quarter Park. 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.



"It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a bird!!" Participants on the July 22 bird walk at New Quarter Park. Photo by park staff.



Some of the birders who joined the August 26 walk at New Quarter Park. Photo by Brian Murray.



The Great Blue Heron nest seen at New Quarter Park during the August 26 bird walk. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

WBC MEMBERSHIP: Please extend a warm welcome to our newest members: Annemarie and Ted Iacobuzio, Karen Wilson, Amore Gray, and David Oroshnik. 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://williamsburgbirdclub.org/90-2/.

FIELD TRIPS IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER

By George Martin

<u>Saturday, September 16 – Jamestown Beach</u> Event Park



With the summer almost over, the birds are getting more visible, so it's time to resume our field trips. The next one will be on Saturday, September 16. We'll meet at Jamestown Beach Event Park at 8:00 a.m., where we'll stay pretty

much in one place just above the beach to see what birds are around. And you don't have to arrive at 8 a.m. First, this is casual birding. Second, since we'll be pretty much in one location, you'll find the group even if you arrive at 9 a.m. The location is easily accessible via a paved trail from the parking lot. This event gives participants an opportunity to reconnect with other club members while also birding as much as you like. Bring your chair and your coffee mug! I expect we'll be birding for a couple hours, but people can come and go as they please. Rexanne Bruno will be keeping the eBird list and sharing it with participants. Thanks, Rexanne!

Please Note: Those arriving early may have to wait at the entrance gate until park staff opens it. Last year, the entrance gate was actually a pretty birdy spot.

Saturday, October 21 - Eastern Shore

Saturday, October 21, will be the day we return to the Eastern Shore. Deborah Humphries will lead our

group that day, with several stops and usually a great variety of birds. Expected stops are:

- The overlook at the north side of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel
- Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge (ESVANWR)
- Kiptopeke State Park, both the Hawkwatch site and a trail

We'll gather at the overlook, our first stop, around 8:30 a.m. That's usually a pretty quick stop, depending on how many gulls and cormorants we have to count. But we should be at the ESVANWR Visitor Center by 9:00 a.m. or a little after. Times after that depend on how good the birding is. And, if a rarity has been reported on the southern Eastern Shore, we may add a stop to look for that bird. All that birding will make a lot of us hungry, so lunch at the Cape Charles Brewing Company should be the final stop. Those eating lunch can expect to return to Williamsburg in the range of 3:30-4:00~p.m.

Those interested in carpooling should let me know they'd like to carpool, and meet at the Colony Square Shopping Center shortly after 7:00 a.m. Departure from there is at 7:15 a.m. Also, let me know if you want to stay for lunch!

If you have a State Park Annual Pass, please bring that with you. Without a pass, the entry fee for Kiptopeke is \$7 per vehicle.

J. DREW LANHAM, AUTHOR OF THE HOME PLACE, TO SPEAK AT VCU SEPT. 28

Ornithologist and wildlife ecology professor at Clemson University J. Drew Lanham will deliver Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries' 2023 Social Justice Lecture. His topic will be "Coloring the Conservation Conversation." The talk, which is free and open to the public, will take place September 28 at 7:00 p.m. in-person at the James Branch Cabell Lecture Hall and remotely via Zoom.

As described in a VCU press release, "Lanham writes and speaks powerfully on the implicit and overt racism people of color often face when engaging with their natural surroundings. He bridges the arts and sciences to create a new model of conservation and care for nature that includes space for diverse perspectives." In his talk, "Lanham will examine how conservation must be a rigorous science and evocative art, inviting diversity and race to play active roles in celebrating our natural world." Lanham's 2016 book, The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature, received the 2017 Southern Book Prize and the Reed Award from the Southern Environmental Law Center and was named a "Best Scholarly Book of the Decade" by The Chronicle of Higher Education. You can find more information about Lanham's work and register for his VCU lecture at this link.



Club members at the Purple Martin Summer Social in June. Photo by Judy Jones.

PURPLE MARTIN SUMMER SOCIAL

By Catharine Flanagan, Refreshments Chair, and Cheryl Jacobson, Purple Martin Project Lead

The WBC's last meeting before our summer hiatus this year was held during the early evening of June 8 at Chickahominy Riverfront Park. The location was the perfect venue for celebrating and seeing the physical manifestations of the success of the club's Purple Martin Project while socializing and sharing refreshments with fellow members. After briefly gathering at the picnic shelter near the park's pool, the roughly 20 attendees walked to the Purple Martin colony established in recent years at the park. All 23 of the gourds in this colony were used for nesting this year. As club members watched from a short distance while martins flew into and around the colony, everyone enjoyed the wonderful musical sounds of the nesting birds. Purple Martins make up to ten different vocalizations. Males are the primary singers. although females sing many birdsongs full of chortles, rattles, chirps, and croaks.

After our return to the picnic shelter, members of the Purple Martin Project team were pleased to present a program about the species and the success of the Project. Purple Martins have been designated a Watch List species of special concern by the American Bird Conservancy due to declining numbers.

Sherry Hancock began the presentation by talking about how to select a colony site, how to keep other species from taking over the colony, and the need for patience. Sherry and her husband, Bill, monitor the colony at York River State Park (YRSP). At the time of Shirley's presentation, after nearly three years of

weekly monitoring, no martins were present at YRSP. But only a few days after our meeting, the Hancocks' patience paid off and martins began using the colony, ultimately fledging five chicks this summer. Next spring should bring many more birds.

Shan Gill spoke next and explained the process of installing a Purple Martin colony. He was followed by Nancy Barnhart who provided guidance on identifying Purple Martins and distinguishing them from other swallows. Judy Jones discussed migration and the migration application, and Cheryl Jacobson finished with information about the recommended use of artificial gourds for nest houses, number of eggs laid, and the time frames for incubation and fledging. Other members of the 2023 Purple Martin Project team have included Bill Vanzetta, Mary Ellen Hodges, Janet Harper, and Trish and Bob Stahlhut. Donna Benson. Patti Ziegler, and Jim Corliss have joined the team since the June meeting.

Following the presentations, everyone turned their attention to the refreshments table, which was decorated in the color purple—in honor of the martins, of course! There was a purple and gold tablecloth, purple statice flowers in a mason jar, freshly baked red velvet cupcakes with purple buttercream frosting, and a sprinkling of the hard-to-get and very special purple M&M'S. In the middle of each cupcake was a hand-colored Purple Martin topper (It was actually a swallow.). There was blackberry sparkling water as well as other flavors and additional snacks (not all purple). (*Continued on Page 6*)



Purple Martin cupcake. Created and photographed by Catherine Flanagan.

SUMMER SOCIAL, Cont. from Page 5

It was fun for our members to get together in the fresh air and be able to chat in person again. When it was time to go, two of the cupcake martins were adopted by Purple Martin landlady Cathy Millar, who provided a new forever home among her orchids!

Postscript: In the time since our meeting, at least 125 chicks fledged from the three active Purple Martin colonies among the five monitored by the Purple Martin Project team. Most of the martins had left our area by mid-August and the team

began planning for winterizing the colonies by cleaning out each gourd for reuse next spring. At the end of the breeding season, Purple Martins gather for migration from as early as July to as late as October. Birds further north generally leave sooner, with some exceptions. Martins form colossal flocks in late summer—some are so large that they appear on weather sensors! Such a flock used to gather in Richmond to stage their fall migration to South America but, unfortunately, now has moved elsewhere and the location is currently unknown. A large flock of approximately 150,000 currently gathers in the heart of downtown Nashville, where the need to

resolve potential conflicts between humans and the birds led the local conservation community to seek Nashville's designation as a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service <u>Urban Bird Treaty</u> city and develop a <u>Bird Agenda</u> to be implemented by various stakeholders in support of not just the Purple Marins but all native birds in Nashville.



Decorative Purple Martins, photographed by Cathy Millar in their new home among her orchids. Cathy wrote about the martin colony she maintains at her home in the <u>June and August 2020</u> issues of The Flyer.



CVWO NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE 2023 COASTAL VIRGINIA BIRDATHON! By Shirley Devan

The Coastal Virginia Birdathon (CVB) is hosted annually by the Coastal Virginia Wildlife

Observatory (CVWO) and has gone by a few different names over the years (most recently "Kiptopeke Challenge"). Grab your best birding buddies and binoculars and join the day's fun for a chance to win awesome awards! This year's event is Saturday, September 23, 2023.

In this fun and friendly team birding competition, teams compete to identify the greatest number of bird species in a single day. The primary goals of the CVB are to raise funds for CVWO and to raise awareness of fall bird migration along the coastal plain of Virginia.

The CVB occurs each year during peak migration when birds sing very little, and many have molted out of their breeding plumages. Add in hatch-year birds, and you'll see why the competition is a challenge! The event is open to anyone. Participants can form their own team, or a single individual can request to be placed with an existing team. There are four categories in which one can compete: 24-Hour, 3-Hour, Youth (age 18 & younger), and Special Venue (a smaller area such as wildlife refuge, park, or yard).

There is no fee to participate, however, all teams are encouraged to secure sponsors for donations, such as per species or flat-rate pledges from individuals, (Continued on Page 7)

CVWO BIRDATHON, Cont. from Page 6

bird clubs, and businesses. All funds raised are used to support CVWO's field research and environmental education programs. The geographic count area includes the land, rivers, ocean, and bay areas of the entire coastal plain of Virginia (the area east of the Fall Zone or roughly the area east of Interstate 95).

You can donate to any or all teams. So far, four teams are registered:

Gulls Gone Wild - Shirley Devan, Nancy Barnhart, Jan Lockwood, Sue Mutell, and Joyce Lowry! Make check payable to CVWO and mail to 6227 Tucker Landing, Williamsburg, VA 23188. Note "Gulls Gone Wild" on the check. Alternatively, you may make payment electronically at the link provided below.

- The Islanders Brian Taber, Terri Cuthriell, and Michelle Gianvecchio. Make check payable to CVWO and mail to 103 Exeter Court, Williamsburg, VA 23185. Note "Islanders" on the check or use the link below.
- Wandering Wagtails Sarah O'Reilly, Carolyn Morgan, and Caitlin Kufahl. Make check payable to CVWO and mail to 2615 Brownstone Circle, Williamsburg VA 23185. Note "Wandering Wagtails" on the check or use the link below.
- Machicomoco Meadowlarks Susan Crockett and other Meadowlarks! Make check payable to CVWO and mail to 5619 Dogwood Forest Drive, Gloucester 23061. Note "Machicomoco Meadowlarks" on the check or use the link below.

Check this link for an updated list of the teams that are participating and to donate:

https://vawildliferesearch.org.

YOUR MEMBERSHIP DOLLARS PRODUCE RESULTS: COMMUNITY CLOUD FOREST CONSERVATION

By Cheryl Jacobson, Conservation Committee Chair

Each year the WBC Board allocates membership donations to various programs, one of which is Community Cloud Forest Conservation (CCFC) in Guatemala. You can learn more about all of CCFC's including Women in Agroecology programs, Leadership for Conservation (WALC), Kids & Birds, and Reforestation/Energy Woods, on their website.

In a recent update CCGC reported that all of their programs continue full steam ahead. Their Kids & Birds program has been proven to be effective by a study from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and the program has grown and improved. They just hosted the children from the village of Sasarb in the Kids & Birds program. CCFC Director Rob Cahill wrote: "What is exciting to me is that we just recently discovered two really important species in the area of that village, both owl species: the Unspotted Sawwhet Owl in the village of Sasarb and the Bearded Screech-Owl on the finca Saramicho. The Unspotted Saw-whet Owl was a first record for Alta Verapaz and the Bearded Screech-Owl location is just one of five locations in the whole country where this species of Screech-Owl can be found."

CCFC's Women in Agroecology Leadership for Conservation program had a huge enrollment last fall. They were hoping to get 153 young women in the program and were thrilled to end up with 166 participants! Other big news is that CCFC has purchased the land under their buildings. CCFC's campus is now composed of a wildlife sanctuary of 389 acres and growing.

It seems that your dollars are well spent and this is one small step in assuring that our backyard birds that we love to watch, such as Scarlet Tanagers, Eastern Kingbirds, Bobolinks, Chimney Swifts, and Rosebreasted Grosbeaks, will continue to return to us after their long migration in the winter.



Bearded Screech-Owl. Photo by Carlos Echeverría from Macauley Library.

IN MEMORIAM



Dorothy Whitfield, a long-time member of the Williamsburg Bird Club, passed away on July 7, 2023, at age 103. A short remembrance by Helen Hamilton and more photos of Dorothy can be found on the WBC website. Dorothy's obituary can be found on the website of Bucktrout of Williamsburg.



Dorothy Whitfield (front row, left) on a 2007 bird walk.

RECENT SIGHTINGS



Laura Mae first discovered a Great Egret rookery in the Oceanview section of Norfolk in 2017 and has counted nests there every year since. In April 2021 the rookery extended across at least 22 trees with more than 100 nests! Laura took this photo at the rookery on May 18 of this year.



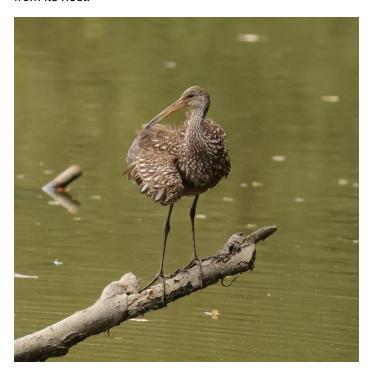


Jan Lockwood photographed this Tri-colored Heron at the Queens Lake Marina on July 21. Jan reported that the bird was there for only one day, "no doubt traveling on/dispersing from its nesting ground."

Laura Mae photographed this Green Heron nest (photo left) at Lakeside Park in Chesapeake on May 29. On the same day Laura also found a single Black-bellied Whistling Duck at the same location, far out of its normal range. Laura noted that eBird records indicate that three of these ducks were seen in Smithfield by another birder the next day.



This young **Osprey**, photographed by **Jan Lockwood** at the Queens Lake Marina on July 23, was the sole fledge from its nest.



Numerous birders visited Three Lakes Park and Nature Center in Henrico County in recent days to view a **Limpkin** that was first observed there on August 24. **Deborah Humphries** took this photo of the bird on the 25th, and the bird was still being sighted through August 30. Deborah reported that the bird "is very obliging, stays close to shore and doesn't mind the company of birders. The Limpkin is found mostly in wetlands in warm parts of the Americas, from Florida to northern Argentina, but has been spotted as far north as Wisconsin. He's easily 750+ miles if not much, much more from home."



Laura Mae encountered up to six Mississippi Kites at a time in the same location in the Greenbrier section of Chesapeake on August 6 and 9. Both adult and immature birds were represented, and she observed some of the birds eating cicadas. Laura noted that eBird records show this is the third consecutive summer this species has been reported in this part of Chesapeake.



Keith Kennedy photographed this Yellow-throated Warbler at his home on August 21. Keith said: "This one landed just below a hopper feeder. He maintained this pose—with very little movement—for several minutes. No other birds approached the feeder during this time. I first thought he was injured, but a binocular inspection showed nothing amiss. He quickly left when a finch appeared at the feeder. My conclusion? A hawk was in the area, and he was not about to reveal his position."



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 5% 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/