



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

January 2024



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

Happy New Year to all! Hard to believe we're already back to January and a whole new year of great activities with the Williamsburg Bird Club! Please read about our upcoming activities, monthly meeting, January field trip, and monthly bird walk further in this newsletter.

We welcome to the 2024 WBC Executive Board Donna Benson and Deborah Humphries, both as Members-at-Large. We look forward to their ideas and insight. Shirley Devan and Gary Carpenter have stepped down from that position but rest assured we're not ready to let them go. Both have agreed to continue on the Board in Committee Chairperson positions. Thank you to all of the returning Board members and welcome Donna and Deborah.

In addition to our meetings, newsletters, field trips, and monthly bird walks, the WBC will continue to support and sponsor up-and-coming naturalists, scientists, and birders by sending students to Nature Camp through our Bill Williams and Millin Nature Camp scholarship funds. We will again provide the Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Research Grants to the graduate students who are the future of avian conservation and an inspiration to us all. We continue to financially support the Virginia Society of Ornithology Breeding Bird Atlas project, the Center for Conservation Biology, Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, the Community Cloud Forest Conservancy, the Historic Virginia Land Conservancy, and the Purple Martin Conservation Association. We will supply birdseed to Child Development Resources and fund recommended book purchases for the Williamsburg Regional Library. Whew! All of those accomplishments are thanks to you, the members of WBC and your dues and contributions!

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UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

January 17, 7:00 p.m. (Zoom Only): Dixie Sommers, "Birding New Zealand."

Join us on the 17th to go birding in New Zealand with Dixie Sommers! New Zealand's geologic and human history have yielded a unique set of birds. The islands are far from other land masses, were created by tectonic and volcanic processes, occupied by humans relatively recently, and are, of course, islands. All these factors encourage evolution of endemic plants and animals, including many endemic birds: five kiwi species, two endemic penguins, the odd-looking Wrybill, the ubiquitous Tūī, the South Island Takahē—the world's largest extant rail—and many more. There are also many migratory seabirds as well as introduced species, including some familiar to Virginia birders.

Dixie will introduce us to New Zealand's birds, its conservation challenges and successes, and its beautiful land and seascapes. She visited in November 2022, exploring the North and South Islands as well as Stewart Island, on a tour with [Field Guides Birding Tours](#), as well as spending a week around Auckland before the tour.

Save the Date: February 21, Bryan Watts, Research Professor, Center for Conservation Biology at William & Mary, will present an update on his Bald Eagle studies. 🦅



A Tūī photographed by Dixie Summers in New Zealand.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER, Continued from Page 1

We are particularly happy to announce that the Williamsburg Bird Club has signed a Deed of Gift to turn the club records over to the Special Collections Research Center of the Swem Library at William & Mary. The library is growing its community archive. WBC collections and data, important to our region, will be cared for to archival standards in a safe environment and available to students, researchers, faculty, and community members during regular library hours. We look forward to future research and reporting from community access to the significant information included in the WBC records. Thanks to Lisa Nickel, Associate Dean of Research and Public Services, for facilitating this exciting step!

As we head into a new year may you all have a happy and healthy 2024, and let's continue to enjoy our great Virginia birds and fellow birders! 🐦



On December 15, 2023, the WBC executed a Deed of Gift transferring ownership of club records to William & Mary's Special Collections Research Center at Swem Library. Pictured, from left to right, are Patty Maloney, WBC Historian; Bill Williams, co-founder and first president of the WBC; Nancy Barnhart, current WBC President; Shirley Devan, Member-at-Large on WBC's Executive Board; and Jay Gaidmore, the Marian and Alan McLeod Director of Special Collections at Swem Library.

BIRD WALKS: UPCOMING OWL PROWL on JAN. 6 and MONTHLY WALK on JAN. 27

By Scott Hemler

The WBC has held two bird walks since publication of our last newsletter. On November 25, Babs Giffin led eight other birders on a walk in New Quarter Park (NQP). Twenty species were represented among the 483 individual birds seen, which included 400 Common Grackles (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S155286766>)! I led the seven people who came out for our last bird walk of the year, held on December 23 at NQP (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S156947391>). It was a beautiful winter morning and we saw 32 species of birds. The park gates were not open, so we all parked our cars in the parking lot by the main entrance gate and walked the paved trail into the park. This is not the usual route we take when birding NQP but there turned out to be quite a lot of birds in that area! Some highlights were seeing Field and Swamp sparrows, and quite a few Ruby-crowned Kinglets and two Golden-crowned Kinglets as well. We also got a

great look at a Red-shouldered Hawk perching on top of a bluebird house! Another highlight was seeing a huge flock of Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds fly over. There must have been 10,000+ birds in that flock and it was quite a sight to see! These highlights were a great way to end the 2023 NQP birding year.

I'm looking forward to our walks in 2024 and seeing what birds we will find in the new year! I am leading an Owl Prowl at NQP on January 6 at 6:00 p.m., weather permitting. We will be meeting in the parking lot at the main entrance gate. Hoping to hear some owls that evening! The WBC's next regular monthly walk at NQP will be held January 27. Meet me 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. 🐦



Participants on the November 25 Bird Walk at New Quarter Park. Front row, left to right: Doreen Oroshnik, David Oroshnik, Shirley Devan. Back row: Jan Lockwood, Babs Giffin, Emily Argo, George Martin, Portia Belden. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

FIELD TRIP REPORT: TRIP to DUTCH GAP on JAN. 20

By George Martin

November 18 – Grandview Nature Preserve

On Saturday, November 18, eighteen birders, led by Michelle Gianvecchio, had a pleasant walk through the marsh and along the breezy beach at Grandview Nature Preserve in Hampton. The seabirds did not disappoint. All three scoter species were present, and the group got good views of a White-winged Scoter close to shore. A Red-throated Loon appeared along with several Common Loons. Northern Gannets foraged offshore. A Ruddy Turnstone amused the group with its antics foraging under washed-up sponges (yes, it did turn them over). On the land, several birders identified a Marsh Wren. A flock of Greater Yellowlegs spiraled toward the wetlands off the trail, with a couple of dowitchers mixed in. The

main checklist (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S154702441>) encompasses 53 species, with different members of the group adding another six.

January 20 – Dutch Gap

The first field trip of 2024 will be to Dutch Gap Conservation Area in Chester, Virginia on Saturday, January 20. Rose Ryan will lead our trip, which usually focuses on wintering waterfowl. We'll meet in the parking lot of the Henricus Historical Park at 9:00 a.m. (time subject to change – stay tuned) and bird through most of the morning. More information to come! FYI, I'm not planning to organize carpooling on this field trip. The address in Google Maps is 251 Henricus Park Road, Chester, VA 23836. 🐦



Those club members who went on the field trip to Grandview Nature Preserve on November 18 enjoyed a sunny morning with 53 avian species sighted. Photo by George Martin.

WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome the following individuals who recently joined our club: Mia Alessi, Joan Mashburn, Russ Dabel, Elbert Cutright, Debra Bodnar, Frauke Carlucci, and Cindy Taylor!

Don't forget that it's time to renew your membership in the WBC for 2024. You can do so online at <https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/renew/> using PayPal or you can download and print a membership

form from that page which you can then mail in with a check. The form can also be printed from Page 9 of this newsletter. Marking the form to indicate that you wish to receive our newsletter only by email saves paper and it also allows the club to save on printing and postage costs and direct more of our income to our programs and projects. 🐦

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS in WILLIAMSBURG, in VIRGINIA, and BEYOND

Summary by Cathy Millar

As a birder for 40 years and a long-time member of our bird club, Rexanne Bruno was the perfect person to energize and prepare WBC members at our November 15 meeting for the 2023 Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Rexanne's impressive profile includes being a past president of the Virginia Society of Ornithology; a member of the steering and final product committees of the Second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas; and current regional editor for all the CBCs of Virginia/DC. She's been participating in CBCs in Virginia since she moved here 25 years ago.

Rexanne reported that the first CBC was organized by Frank Chapman, editor of *Bird-Lore* magazine, on Christmas Day 1900 as an alternative to the tradition of a competitive Christmas Day hunt to see how many birds and animals could be shot. Twenty-seven birders participating at 25 locations from Toronto, Canada to Pacific Grove, CA counted 90 species. Chapman published the results of that count and subsequent annual ones in *Bird-Lore*. In 1934, the National Audubon Society purchased the magazine and began overseeing the CBC, eventually mechanizing the database as it is maintained today. Last year, the 123rd season of CBC, 2,600 CBCs were conducted and over 40 million birds were counted!

CBCs are conducted each year between December 14 and January 5 by birders from around the world but still mostly in the US. Each local CBC is a 24-hour-long census conducted on a designated day within a set 15-mile circle. Participants document all the birds observed and share their checklists with the local CBC compiler, who then submits the data to the on-line National Audubon CBC database. The CBC data is the longest-running database in ornithology and is a totally citizen scientist project.


The first CBC in Virginia was conducted in 1904 by Dr. William Caton who, braving hail and a temperature of 29 degrees, counted 6 species in a total of 45 minutes. Last year in Virginia, there were 56 CBCs; over 1,800 birders participated and over 800,000 birds across a total of 206 species were counted.

The first CBC in Williamsburg was conducted in 1946 by Ray Beasley who, for nine hours, walked 13 miles from W&M to Jamestown and back and counted 36 species and a total of 607 individuals. The next Williamsburg CBC wasn't until Dec. 18, 1977 and was

reported in our bird club newsletter. Thirty birders counted 100 species on that very rainy day. The CBC has been an annual event ever since. Two Williamsburg CBC high counts that are Virginia records were 114 American White Pelicans in 2021 and the first and only sighting in the state of a Western Meadowlark in 2020.

Virginia CBC high counts that made national records were 152,688 Ruddy Ducks in Williamsburg in 1996; 14 Ring-necked Pheasants at Cape Charles in 1981; 20,000 Red-throated Loons in Back Bay NWR in 2015; 759 American Woodcocks at Cape Charles in 2010; 774 Red-bellied Woodpeckers at Fort Belvoir in 2015; and 1,219 Carolina Wrens at Fort Belvoir in 2021.

This year's Williamsburg CBC was held on Sunday, December 17. Our count area is defined by a circle 15 miles in diameter centered on the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center. The circle encompasses a wide variety of habitats and birding hotspots. Participants in the field are divided into teams which Jim Corliss, our local compiler, organizes. Rexanne stressed the importance of feeder watchers who count the birds that come to their feeders and/or yards on that day if their property is in the count circle but not covered by field teams. The first feeder watcher participated in the Williamsburg CBC in 1979 and now an average of 50 local residents participate. Feeder watchers spotted the first Williamsburg CBC of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird in 2017, the first and only Black-chinned Hummingbird in 2019, the first Rufous Hummingbird in 2002, and the only Allen's Hummingbird in 2016. Either Rexanne or Jim Corliss can provide WBC members who would like to participate in the CBC as a feeder watcher a special tally sheet and written instructions for feeder watching that explain, among other things, how to keep track of time spent birding, ensure individual birds are not counted more than once, and use eBird to submit data. Rexanne noted that the CBC is a separate count from Cornell's Project FeederWatch.

For more details and photos of rare and unusual birds seen over the years during Williamsburg CBCs, watch the video of Rexanne Bruno's presentation at <https://youtu.be/laTvNArK6lw>. 



During our November meeting, Cathy Flanagan led members in singing the cumulative verses of “The Twelve Days of Feeder Watch,” a song with new lyrics she had written to the melody of a familiar Christmas carol. “On the twelfth day of Feeder Watch, the birds that I did see: twelve Red-winged Blackbirds, eleven Dark-eyed Juncos, ten Tufted Titmice, nine Northern Cardinals, eight Eastern Bluebirds, seven Song Sparrows singing, six Cedar Waxwings, five Goldeneyes, four Mockingbirds, three House Wrens, two Mourning Doves, and one Carolina Chickadee!” (Base photo by Babs Giffin.)

FILM RECOMMENDATION: ALL THAT BREATHES

By Roger Gosden

I’m not a movie buff, but occasionally something stirs me to make a recommendation. There are many fine documentaries about wildlife, but the award-winning *All That Breathes* (2022; directed by Shaunak Sen) renders with subtitles a story of bird conservation like a visual poem. To a background of slum-dwelling and ethnic tensions in New Delhi, two Muslim brothers are saving Black Kites brought sick or injured to their “hospital” in the world’s most polluted city. After Indian vultures were unintentionally decimated by exposure to a veterinary drug persisting in cattle carcasses, the kites have filled the vacant niche. The scavengers help to eliminate rotting food in mountainous landfills that would otherwise be a human health hazard. Sometimes, twenty or more casualties are brought to the hovel each day where the brothers apply splints and potions, caring for them until they fly again or die. Their dedication is inspiring, more so because they weren’t discouraged by the circumstances of life or lack of training in avian medicine. Their reward was to see birds soaring over the city again in symbolic

meaning for them and service for all in an interconnected world. (Available for streaming with a Max subscription or rented through other providers such as Amazon Prime Video and Apple TV) 🦅



Black Kite. (Source: Photograph by [Rahul Viswanath](#) on [Unsplash](#).)

NEW YEAR'S DAY BIRD and BIRDER SHOW – JANUARY 1, 2024

By Shirley Devan

Thirty-eight birders joined me at New Quarter Park for the 18th “almost annual” get together to celebrate the new year! Great to see so many familiar faces and many new friends, too! Several people took off for bird walks around the park while others chatted and shared with new friends in the fire circle area. New Year’s Day is my favorite holiday, and I am pleased that so many birders came out to celebrate with me. Happy New Year to everyone!



Scenes from the New Year's Day Bird and Birder Show at New Quarter Park, five photos clockwise from top left: 1. Nancy Barnhart (left) and George Martin (photo by Shirley Devan) 2. Group gathering adjacent to the fire circle (photo by Barbara Creel) 3. Left to right, Barbara Creel, Babs Giffin, Rose Ryan, Judy Jones (photo by S. Devan) 4. At the floating dock on Queen Creek, in foreground from left to right, Judy Zwelling, Mary Haines, Adrienne Frank, Gary Driscoll (photo by B. Creel) 5. Left to right, Bruce Glendenning, Sue Mutell, Bill Williams, Frauke Carlucci, Portia Belden (photo by S. Devan).

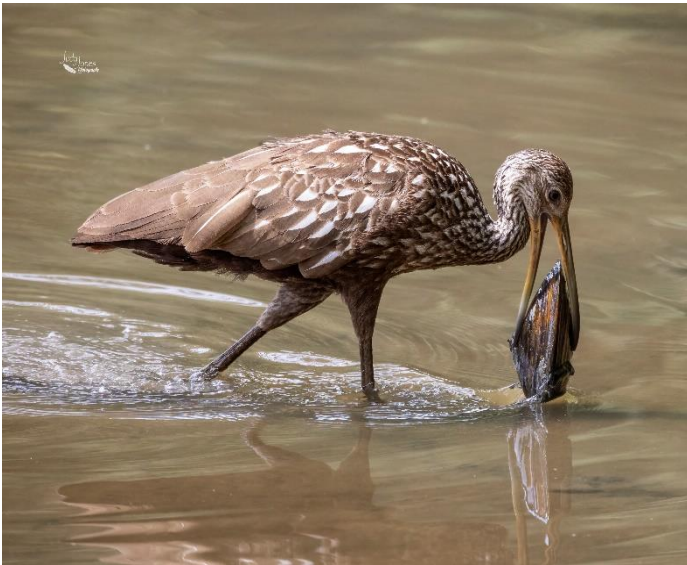
RECENT SIGHTINGS

Bringier McConnell shared this story: “**The Photo that Wasn’t.** My most unusual bird observation of the month was of a very familiar bird, the **Great Blue Heron**. We have on Queens Lake what I call a ‘fishing rodeo’ every December, usually started by chevrons of cormorants steaming up and down the lake, gobbling up small fry. This brings clouds of Ring-billed Gulls, who hover above and then light on the lake to catch any fish stirred up by the cormorants, or more recently, Hooded Mergansers. Bald Eagles usually complete the mix, flying in rings over the gulls, looking for whatever and whoever they can scoop up.

But this year the Great Blue Herons got involved, in a big way. So when I noticed them lined up along the cove behind our house, I saw a good photo in the making. There were ten herons, spaced about ten feet apart, waiting for a flotilla of hoodies to push fish toward them. But as soon as I stepped off the porch, even though I was 40 yards away, the herons took off immediately like a covey of quail. But what a sight to see ten herons launch simultaneously at a precise 45-degree angle like a volley of Tomahawk missiles! So, no photo, but an indelible memory.” (Continued on Page 8)

RECENT SIGHTINGS, Continued from Page 7

The September 2023 issue of *The Flyer* included a photo by Deborah Humphreys of a Limpkin that was observed at Three Lake Park in Henrico County from August 24 through 30. Presumably, it was the same bird that returned to the park on October 28, almost two months later, and was seen there by birders through December 3. As reported by **Judy Jones**, on November 4, she and **Barbara Houston** traveled to Three Lakes Park to find the visiting **Limpkin**: "This tall, long-legged bird loves the marshes and swampy forests of Florida, but the adult in Henrico decided to have a holiday in the park, located just outside the north end of the City of Richmond. Usually, this snail specialist will use its long, curved bill to pry open apple snails, but our visitor chose instead to munch on the freshwater mussels found in the lake [as captured by Judy in the photo below]. Limpkin will also eat frogs, lizards, worms, and insects, but mussels seem to fill its stomach much more quickly. We hope that the Limpkin's absence at Three Lake Park after December 30 means that the lovely critter headed south to warmer days filled with snails and frogs."



Nancy and Ken Barnhart recently returned from a "fantastic" trip to Patagonia where they observed approximately 125 species new to them. A favorite among the birds they saw were the cute **Magellanic Penguins** captured in the photo below by Nancy.



Carol Annis reported a sighting rare for this time of year in our area: "I was so excited to see a **Blue-headed Vireo** twice: on November 30 and again on December 19 (photo below)! Both times at my neighborhood pond near Toano!"





2024 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, jnavia@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 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/>