



# The Flyer

## Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 48 No. 2

[www.williamsburgbirdclub.org](http://www.williamsburgbirdclub.org)

February 2024



### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

February greetings! I think it's safe to say we're halfway through winter. Thanks so much to Patty Maloney and Ann Carpenter for covering for me in the January meeting with Dixie Sommers and the Birds of New Zealand. I've watched the recording and it was sensational! The field trip to Dutch Gap sounds like a cold but successful outing for some hardy folks! Thank you, Rose Ryan, for leading. And thanks to Scott Hemler for leading a cold Owl Prowl at New Quarter Park which attracted a good crowd of 25! Even though owls were a no-show everyone enjoyed the evening. Later in this newsletter you will find information about our upcoming bird walk, field trip, and meeting. Lots to look forward to!

In my recent travels I was turned on to a new app for mobile phones called "GoBird". It was written by an individual, Tony Gentilcore, who wants to "promote bird watching and interest in birds and ecology." It's free and a great tool for when you're traveling or when you just want to know more about what has been seen in whatever location you are in. It would be a nice introduction to what to expect for newer birders or young up-and-coming potential birders and those not completely familiar with eBird.

Just about everyone has a mobile phone so the app is always handy. The information included in GoBird is based on eBird sightings but simplifies the process of finding birds for newer birders. It has photos of the birds that have been reported in the last 14 days and where they were seen. One of my favorite features is how it groups birds by families, allowing you to get to know birds and their "relatives". Using GPS, the app picks up your location. You can set the filter for whatever distance you want from your current location, e.g. 5 miles, 10 miles, up to 30 miles. Sitting in my breakfast room I used 10 miles in the filter. Checking "ducks, geese & waterfowl" as an example, (Continued on Page 2)

### UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

**February 21, 7:00 p.m. (in person at the Quarterpath Recreation Center and via Zoom): Bryan Watts, "Eagles of the Chesapeake."**

Join us on Wednesday, February 21, at 7:00 p.m. at the Quarterpath Recreation Center, Meeting Room 2, 202 Quarterpath Road, Williamsburg or via Zoom. Our presenter will be Bryan Watts, Research Professor, Center for Conservation Biology at William & Mary, on the "Eagles of the Chesapeake."

Bryan provided the following synopsis of his presentation: "The Chesapeake Bay Bald Eagle breeding population has recovered from fewer than 80 breeding pairs during the early 1970s to more than 3,000 breeding pairs today. We monitored the Virginia portion of the population for more than 60 years. Information from the survey and many associated projects has painted a magnificent ecological portrait of this iconic species. I will talk about the unique character of the Chesapeake Bay, the recovery of the Bald Eagle population, and how the ecology of the population has shifted over time."

**Save the Date:** March 20, 7:00 p.m. Dan Cristol, Chancellor Professor of Biology, W&M, presents "How Does the Superfund Law Protect Birds?"



Bryan Watts with a small, third-year male Bald Eagle.

## WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB Executive Board 2024

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## PRESIDENT'S CORNER, Continued from Page 1

I could see where 18 species have been reported, how long ago, and where. You can also see rare sightings and hotspots—a great “introductory” tool.

Along with Merlin, the mobile eBird app and others, GoBird is one more way to learn and find birds around you wherever you are. I'm going to try it with my 10-year-old grandson. I'll let you know how it goes!

Happy Birding! 🐦

## WBC MEMBERSHIP



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. Newsletter printing and postage costs continue to rise, and choosing to receive our newsletter only by email when you pay your dues allows our club to direct more of our income to our programs and projects.

Please extend a warm welcome to our new members: Victoria and Thomas E. West, Natalie Reid, Kevin Ernst, and Louise Callahan! 🐦



Click this [link](#) to learn how to partipate in the GBBC.



## BIRD WALKS: NEXT MONTHLY WALK on FEB. 24

By Scott Hemler

Wind and rain caused us to reschedule from January 6, but we had around 25 people come out to New Quarter Park on a clear but cold evening for an Owl Prowl on January 20! Dan and Julia from the park staff also joined us for the walk. I gave a short presentation on owls and then we walked into the park. Unfortunately, we did not see or hear any owls, and we did not see or hear any other night critters. However, everyone enjoyed looking at all the stars as they are easy to see in the park at night with no lights to interfere. Even though we did not hear any owls, everyone seemed to enjoy the walk in the park at night!

The morning of Saturday, January 27 was beautiful, and we had 18 people show up for our monthly bird

walk at New Quarter Park. We saw 36 species of birds (see the [eBird checklist](#))! Some of the birds we saw were a Northern Harrier, an immature Bald Eagle, Redhead and Bufflehead ducks on Queens Creek, two Hermit Thrushes, and a flyby of around 200 Common Grackles! We saw two Great Blue Herons across the creek that were ready for the mating season to begin! The springlike weather may have had something to do with it.

Our next walk at New Quarter Park will be on Saturday, February 24. Meet me in the parking lot by the park office at 8:00 a.m. 🐦



*Bundled up against the cold during the Owl Prowl on the evening of January 20 at New Quarter Park.*



*A great turnout for the monthly bird walk at New Quarter Park on January 27. Photo by Scott Hemler.*

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## FIELD TRIPS: BIRD THE COLONIAL PARKWAY ON FEB. 17

By George Martin

### Saturday, January 20 – Dutch Gap

The forecasts were ominous prior to the January 20 field trip to Dutch Gap. For days, news reports predicted frigid temperatures. TV weathermen had features on keeping pipes from freezing. But when the six birders arrived, they found the marsh was not completely frozen over. A few hundred ducks concentrated in the areas of open water, providing good looks at nine different duck species. Geese and a couple of American Coots completed the waterfowl roster. And there were a few raptors checking out the flocks, with a Northern Harrier seen soaring down the access road and a few Bald Eagles keeping watch. Sparrows were plentiful in the brush along the road. In all, the group identified 41 species. Click this link to

see the checklist for the day: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S159375240>.

### Saturday, February 17 – Colonial Parkway

The next field trip will be to view birds along the Colonial Parkway. Rexanne Bruno will lead us at several stops, from King Creek to Yorktown. There should be opportunities to view several waterfowl species on the York River and its tributaries, plus land birds at the Yorktown Battlefield. We'll meet at the parking lot of the Target at Marquis Plaza (200 Marquis Parkway, Williamsburg, VA 23185) at 8:00 a.m. There, we can consolidate cars as needed for the trip. I expect we'll be birding for most of the morning. And those who get hungry can stop for lunch at the Yorktown Diner, right on the beach. 🐦



*George Martin was brave enough to expose his shutter finger to the cold and capture this photo of the five other club members who participated in the field trip to Dutch Gap on January 20. Pictured from left to right: Joyce Lowry, Rose Ryan, Babs Giffin, Caroline Bertrand, and Jan Lockwood.*

## **BIRDING in NEW ZEALAND**

Summary by Cathy Millar

On the cold night of January 17, it was a treat to go birding vicariously with Dixie Sommer in New Zealand. Dixie, who lives in Alexandria, VA, became a serious birder in 2006 when she retired from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics and started counting birds instead. She is a board member of the Virginia Society of Ornithology and a member of the Northern VA Bird Club and the Audubon Society of Northern VA.

Dixie's presentation, "Exploring the Birds and Islands of New Zealand," was full of wonderful photos and videos of many birds found nowhere else in the world. In 2022, Dixie toured New Zealand from November 15 to December 1 with Field Guides Birding Tours and explored the country's North and South islands as well as Stewart Island. Before the tour, she spent a week around Auckland. Her observations were also made via six birding and pelagic boat rides and nine ferry rides to and from a few of New Zealand's many islands. Besides the two major islands, the North and South islands, New Zealand encompasses 700+ smaller islands, of which Dixie visited three. By the end of the trip, in a country slightly smaller than

Colorado, Dixie had observed 135 species at 113 locations in a variety of habitats: marine, coastal, estuary, alpine, forest, and wetlands.

On New Zealand's two big islands, the North and South islands, 53 of the species are endemic and another 9 species breed only in New Zealand but migrate elsewhere. The presence of so many endemic birds is primarily due to New Zealand being so far from other land masses and being exposed to human contact only relatively recently. New Zealand was the last Pacific area reached by Polynesian migration when the Māori arrived around 1200 AD. Over the following 100 years, the nine flightless Moa species (the largest was 12 feet in height with neck outstretched and weighed about 510 pounds) became extinct. The Māori had brought rats and dogs to New Zealand. Until then, the only mammals were two native species of bats. With subsequent European contact and settlement, sheep, pigs, rabbits, mice, cows, stoats, etc. were introduced to New Zealand. These new species, along with habitat destruction and  
(Continued on Page 5)



## BIRDING NEW ZEALAND, Cont. from Page 4

hunting, have caused the endangerment and extinction of many endemic fauna and flora. More than 40 of New Zealand's endemic birds are now extinct, but there is an active and extensive program to eradicate invasives and prevent further extinctions.

The iconic and national bird of New Zealand is the flightless Kiwi with little vestigial wings. There are five species, of which Dixie saw one, the Southern Brown Kiwi, on Stewart Island. She reported that you can hear this bird snuffling as it forages because its nostrils are at the end of its long beak, which it uses to probe the ground for grubs, etc.

Dixie saw all three species of penguins, and showed us a short video of adorable Fiordland Penguins leaping on rocks. She photographed her 3,000<sup>th</sup> life bird, a Weka Rail, in a parking lot! She also saw the world's largest rail, the South Island Takahē, weighing 6 pounds and 25 inches long. On a pelagic boat trip, she saw a variety of albatrosses including one of the world's largest flying birds, the Northern Royal Albatross with a wingspan of 9-10 feet and length of 45 inches. While she showed us a wide variety of petrels, we learned that their name 'petrel' is derived from their tendency to patter their feet on water while foraging, which reminded folks of Saint Peter walking on water.

Dixie shared so many wonderful photos and descriptions of birds. Some, like the Wrybill, Tūī,

Stitchbird, and Kea, have intriguing names. Some are endemic species from families familiar to us in Virginia: for example, the South Island Wren with its tiny stub of a tail and four species of shag which are members of the cormorant family. You'll really enjoy seeing these birds on the recorded presentation: <https://youtu.be/11iwOnA8BAI>. Dixie concluded her presentation with photos of the many different habitats of New Zealand including the Southern Alps, a mountain range resulting from New Zealand sitting on top of a tectonic plate with active volcanoes. 🇳🇿



*A Wrybill photographed by Dixie Sommers in New Zealand in November 2022.*

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## 2023 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT SUMMARY

By Jim Corliss

We approached the December 17 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) with trepidation due to a storm bearing down on Hampton Roads. When would the rain arrive, would the birds go into hiding, would we spend the day cold, wet, and shivering with little reward? These were the questions on my mind, and the minds of many other counters, as we rolled out of bed that morning. Fortunately, the rain held off until the afternoon, and the birds were active in the morning anticipating the approaching storm. The result was 100 participants who tallied 29,519 birds producing the longest list of high counts and unusual birds for a Christmas Bird Count in recent memory. A table of the complete results can be found on Page 8 of this newsletter. The high-count highlights were (with previous high counts in parentheses):

- 3 Ross's Geese (1 in 2015)
- 6 Surf Scoters (First Williamsburg CBC Record)
- 3 Black Scoters (First Williamsburg CBC Record)
- 1 White-winged Scoter (1 in 2022)
- 6 Lesser Black-backed Gulls (3 in 2015 and 2022)
- 11 Barred Owls (11 in 2019)
- 47 Red-shouldered Hawks (37 in 2022)
- 29 Hairy Woodpeckers (25 in 2010 and 2020)
- 53 Pileated Woodpeckers (52 in 2012)
- 1 Ash-throated Flycatcher (1 in 1989)
- 14 Gray Catbirds (10 in 2005 and 2021)
- 37 Brown Thrashers (35 in 2010)
- 88 Hermit Thrushes (62 in 2014)
- 1 Lark Sparrow (1 in 2003)

*(Continued on Page 6)*

## 2023 CBC SUMMARY, Continued from Page 5

The 29,519 total number of individual birds counted was higher than our 47-year median value, and the Surf Scoters and Black Scoters reported by the Hog Island team were the first recorded for our Williamsburg CBC. Other nice surprises included an Ash-throated Flycatcher near Jamestown Island and a Lark Sparrow in the College Woods sector. Both of these species had only been sighted one other time in our CBC count circle's history. Red-shouldered Hawks, Gray Catbirds, and Hermit Thrushes also made an impressive showing by significantly eclipsing their previous high counts.

Many thanks to all of the feeder watchers and field teams who braved the impending storm and made our 47th Williamsburg CBC a huge success. We're only a

few months away from our Spring Bird Count, to be held on Sunday, April 28. Mark your calendars! 🐦



*The Lark Sparrow found and photographed by Bill Williams on the W&M campus during the 2023 WBC CBC.*

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## VSO FIELD TRIP TO SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

By Shirley Devan

Expand your birding horizons and your year list with a spring bird field trip to Southwest Virginia!

The Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO) is sponsoring this field trip to Southwest Virginia June 7 – 9, 2024. You'll have the opportunity to bird, learn about, and explore two very special state parks, Grayson-Highlands and Hungry Mother, along with other hot spots in this beautiful part of the Commonwealth. Field trips will be offered all day Friday, all day Saturday, and Sunday morning.

Led by area birders, groups can expect to find many species that nest only in higher elevations, such as Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Veery, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Dark-eyed Junco, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Blue-headed Vireo. Warblers we're

likely to encounter include Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Canada, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, and Hooded.

Learn more about the weekend and the host hotel on the VSO's web site. You'll be able to register at a link on the web site: <https://www.virginiabirds.org/vso-events/swva-2024>

VSO field trips are open to VSO members only. No worry – you can easily join the VSO for as little as \$20 (individual) or \$35 (family) at the VSO web site: <https://www.virginiabirds.org/join-renew>

Questions: Contact Meredith Bell, VSO's Co-Chair of Field Trips: [merandlee@gmail.com](mailto:merandlee@gmail.com) or phone: (804) 824-4958. 🐦

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## RECENT SIGHTINGS

**Laura Mae** shared her photo (right) of what she believes is Suffolk's first eBird record of a **Western Tanager**. She and **Cindy Hamilton** found the bird on January 2 while on the Nansemond River Christmas Bird Count. It was feeding in a cedar tree with House Finches and Eastern Bluebirds. Laura and Cindy watched the tanager for about 40 minutes. When they drove back by 90 minutes later, it was still there!

(Continued on Page 7)





## RECENT SIGHTINGS, Cont. from Page 6

**Claudia McMurray** recently captured photos of three magnificent large birds she's observed in Kingsmill. She saw the **Barred Owl** (first below) near the Woods Golf Course on December 14. Claudia says that she has seen the **Bald Eagle** pair (second below), here photographed on January 12, working on a nest.



**Nancy Barnhart** spent much of the month of January on a birding tour in India, visiting locations in southern India and the Himalayan foothills in the north. Nancy's three photos of the (right column, from top to bottom) **Himalayan Black-lored Tit**, **Red-billed Leiothrix**, and **Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl** depict only a tiny sample of the roughly 450 species seen by her and the other birders on the trip. 🐦

**124th Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count  
Williamsburg Results: December 17, 2023**

Species	Total	Species	Total	Species	Total
Snow Goose	3	Great Black-backed Gull	19	Red-breasted Nuthatch	2
Ross's Goose	3	Lesser Black-backed Gull	6	Brown Creeper	19
Canada Goose	1,770	Royal Tern	1	House Wren	6
Tundra Swan	10	Forster's Tern	45	Winter Wren	14
Wood Duck	27	Red-throated Loon	---	Marsh Wren	2
Gadwall	151	Common Loon	14	Carolina Wren	308
American Wigeon	25	Double-crested Cormorant	1,248	European Starling	1,350
Mallard	399	American White Pelican	18	Gray Catbird	14
Mallard (Domestic Type)	1	Brown Pelican	---	Brown Thrasher	37
American Black Duck	75	Great Egret	---	Northern Mockingbird	82
Mallard x American Black Duck	2	Great Blue Heron	101	Eastern Bluebird	253
Northern Pintail	3	Black Vulture	108	Hermit Thrush	88
Green-winged Teal	12	Turkey Vulture	102	American Robin	2,362
Canvasback	3	Northern Harrier	3	Cedar Waxwing	565
Redhead	5	Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	House Sparrow	82
Ring-necked Duck	389	Cooper's Hawk	5	American Pipit	1
Lesser Scaup	2	Cooper's/Sharp-shin Hawk	---	House Finch	269
Surf Scoter	6	Bald Eagle	63	Purple Finch	9
Black Scoter	3	Golden Eagle	CW	Pine Siskin	3
White-winged Scoter	1	Red-shouldered Hawk	47	American Goldfinch	183
Bufflehead	123	Red-tailed Hawk	11	Chipping Sparrow	172
Common Goldeneye	3	Eastern Screech-Owl	3	Field Sparrow	28
Hooded Merganser	253	Great Horned Owl	10	Fox Sparrow	11
Common Merganser	2	Barred Owl	11	Lark Sparrow	1
Red-breasted Merganser	11	Belted Kingfisher	38	Dark-eyed Junco	481
Ruddy Duck	749	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	73	White-throated Sparrow	1,089
Northern Bobwhite	---	Red-headed Woodpecker	6	Savannah Sparrow	37
Wild Turkey	12	Red-bellied Woodpecker	140	Song Sparrow	203
Pied-billed Grebe	21	Downy Woodpecker	119	Swamp Sparrow	56
Horned Grebe	54	Hairy Woodpecker	29	Eastern Towhee	84
Rock Pigeon	211	Pileated Woodpecker	53	Eastern Meadowlark	11
Mourning Dove	114	Northern Flicker	109	Baltimore Oriole	13
Clapper Rail	2	American Kestrel	1	Common Yellowthroat	2
Virginia Rail	5	Eastern Phoebe	12	Red-winged Blackbird	4,015
Sora	1	Ash-throated Flycatcher	1	Brown-headed Cowbird	287
American Coot	1	Blue Jay	185	Rusty Blackbird	42
Killdeer	109	American Crow	409	Common Grackle	7,018
American Woodcock	3	Fish Crow	4	Palm Warbler	6
Wilson's Snipe	10	Crow sp.	5	Pine Warbler	19
Greater Yellowlegs	8	Carolina Chickadee	328	Yellow-rumped Warbler	402
Lesser Yellowlegs	1	Tufted Titmouse	318	Northern Cardinal	
Dunlin	---	Horned Lark	15		
Bonaparte's Gull	127	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	96		
Laughing Gull	19	Golden-crowned Kinglet	45		
Ring-billed Gull	529	White-breasted Nuthatch	137	<b>Total Number of Individual Birds Counted</b>	<b>29,519</b>
Herring Gull	46	Brown-headed Nuthatch	28		

Williamsburg CBC High Count

CW = Count Week Sighting





## 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?

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### 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](mailto: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/>