



# The Flyer

## Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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

May 2024



### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

Spring greetings! May, along with October are my favorite months of the year. We're in the height of spring migration, blooms are everywhere, it hasn't gotten too hot yet, and, so far, annoying insects haven't found me (but beware the tick, always looking for a victim).

April featured a highlight of the year with the W&M Ornithology Research Grant recipients presenting on their research. This year's meeting didn't disappoint as we learned from the wonderful, bright, enthusiastic students—Julianne Abenoja, Alina Grossweiner, and Cara Hall—about their fascinating research on terrestrial diets of songbirds and the effects of mercury pollution, the problems with birds colliding with solar panels, and environmental toxins, specifically lead and its effects on songbirds. It's important to hear about not just the challenges facing the natural world, but more significantly, the potential solutions to these problems. We hear plenty of negativity so it makes us hopeful for the future to know the work being done to solve these problems. It will be fun to follow these young scientists wherever their careers take them.

We had a slightly damp but fun field trip to Newport News Park. Thank you, Jason Strickland, for leading us. As I write this, we still have our annual Spring Bird Count coming up. More will be written about that in the next newsletter. Please read about our upcoming activities in the following pages of this newsletter.

As migration is happening in the skies overhead every night that weather is conducive, it's more important than ever to do what we can to help birds along the way. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is promoting seven simple actions to help birds that we can utilize and share with friends and neighbors: <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/seven-simple-actions-to-help-birds/>. (Continued on Page 2)

### UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

**May 15, 6:30 p.m. for light refreshments followed by the presentation at 7:00 p.m.: Nancy Barnhart, "Birding in India, Lots of 'Firsts' ". Meeting will be in-person at the Quarterpath Recreation Center and via Zoom.**

Join us as our own WBC President, Nancy Barnhart, shares with us her amazing birding adventure in India. What made her trek to that part of our world? Nancy provided the following: "Ken and I spent three weeks in January birding in India with a small group of eight adventuresome birders led by our friend Steve Dougill, a former CVWO Kiptopeke hawkwatcher. For the two of us, it was the first time in India, actually our first time in Asia. When Steve sent me the proposed itinerary, we jumped right in. While anxious to learn about the birds in India, we were even more excited to visit a new continent, a completely unfamiliar country, and learn about a multilingual, multiethnic, and diverse culture. Four hundred thirty-four new 'life birds' was a bonus!"

**Save the Date:** June 26, 6:00 p.m. for our annual outdoor social and update on the Purple Martin Project by Cheryl Jacobson at the Chickahominy Riverfront Park's Picnic Pavilion. 🐦



*Rose-ringed Parakeets photographed by Nancy Barnhart during her recent trip to India.*

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*Green Bee-eater in India. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.*

**PRESIDENT'S CORNER, Continued from Page 1**

One of these actions is to make windows safer. As we heard Dr. Dan Cristol in our March meeting describe the fatalities resulting from window strike, he pointed out that this problem is not just in urban settings with high rise buildings. Window strike in our own homes kills or injures hundreds of thousands of birds, and not just during migration. Studies show that the small decals we put on windows are usually not adequate, not placed densely enough, to prevent birds from flying into the glass. There are several products that are available that can greatly reduce window strike by effectively breaking up reflections. Three recommended by the American Bird Conservancy are Acopian BirdSavers, Feather Friendly adhesives, and ABC Bird Tape. I have just ordered Feather Friendly tape and glass markers to use on top priority windows at my house. I will report back on their effectiveness and ease of use once they're installed (by a much younger person than me!).

Let's continue to do all we can for birds in our own personal lives and space. We know how much they matter in our lives, for biodiversity, and for a healthy planet as a whole.

Happy Birding! 🐦

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**WBC MEMBERSHIP**

Please welcome new members Dennis and Kathleen Hickey to our club! 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. If you, too, would like to join our club, you can do so online at <https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/join/> either using PayPal or by printing 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. 🐦



Spring migration drew a crowd to our April 27 bird walk at New Quarter Park. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

## BIRD WALKS: NEXT WALK ON MAY 25

Our monthly bird walk on April 27 was attended by 25 people from as far away as Mathews and Gloucester counties and Newport News and included some new faces. Nancy Barnhart led the walk with Barbara (Babs) Giffen kindly assisting with the large group. Everyone was happy to see a Veery, which was a life

bird for at least one participant. Fifty species in total were observed (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S170545425>). Our next walk at New Quarter Park will be on Saturday, May 25. Meet the group in the parking lot by the park office at 8:00 a.m. 🐦



The enthusiastic birders who attended our field trip to Newport News Park on April 20. From left, Jason Strickland, John Kent, Nancy Barnhart, Marc Thibault, Sue Mutell, Babs Giffen, Rexanne Bruno, Bruce Glendenning. Photo by George Martin.

## FIELD TRIP REPORT: JOIN US AT CHIPPOKES STATE PARK ON MAY 18

By George Martin

### Saturday, April 20 – Newport News Park

Jason Strickland led seven Williamsburg Bird Club members at Newport News Park on Saturday, April 20. The group had to move its starting point from the Ranger Station parking lot to the campground due to a park event planned for later in the morning. But Jason was quite familiar with that section of the park, and the birds were present. New arrivals Summer Tanager and Common Yellowthroat frequented the area near the power lines, along with Field Sparrows and Swamp Sparrows. A Wood Thrush flushed into the low branches of trees near the campground parking lot. A Great Crested Flycatcher surveyed its surroundings from the top of a pine. And right when the group circled back to the parking lot, a rain shower told the group “Yeah, the walk’s over.” In all, the group found 31 species (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S169452646>).

### Saturday, May 18 – Chippokes State Park

On Saturday, May 18, we’ll take our last field trip of the season to Chippokes State Park in Surry County. Nancy Barnhart will lead our group. The extensive fields at the park provide good habitat for Grasshopper Sparrows and Eastern Meadowlarks. The woods shelter Ovenbirds, Summer Tanagers, and Northern Parula, and Blue Grosbeaks and Indigo Buntings like the edges.

Those interested in participating should plan to catch the 7:20 a.m. ferry from Jamestown. If you wish to carpool, I suggest meeting at the Jamestown Settlement parking area at 7:00 a.m. in order to consolidate before getting in line. Please let me know if you wish to carpool! And, after birding, I suggest we meet at Surry Seafood for a good lunch. We’ll need to stop birding around 11:30 a.m. so we can arrive before the lunch rush, but I’m sure we’ll be hungry after a morning of hiking. 🐦

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## THOUGHT PROVOKING RESEARCH BY OUR ORNITHOLOGY GRANT RECIPIENTS

Summary by Cathy Millar

The three students who were awarded our club’s 2023 Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Ornithology Research Grants spoke at our monthly meeting on April 17. Before Dan Cristol, W&M Chancellor Professor of Biology, introduced the students, he expressed gratitude for the over 45-year-old relationship between our club and the W&M Biology Department. He noted how important our club’s grants of \$599 to each recipient are to these budding scientists conducting research projects on a slim budget.

The first student, Julianne Abenoja, is an undergraduate sophomore from Alabama studying neuroscience and on a premed track. Julianne’s research project is titled, “Pinpointing the source of avian mercury contamination in the Shenandoah River watershed: Songbirds, spiders, and toxicology”. Between the 1920’s and 1950’s, a DuPont factory in Waynesboro, Virginia poured mercury into the South River, a tributary of the Shenandoah River. The contamination spread deep into the surrounding flood plains. In 2016, DuPont, as a result of a law suit, agreed to pay \$50 million toward cleaning up the mercury they’d dumped. The songbirds in the area show high blood levels of mercury which decreases their survival and reproductive abilities, delays brain development, affects bill coloration (important for

attracting mates), and changes singing behavior. Julianne’s focus of research was whether the birds get mercury mostly from the river or from the flood plains, which would indicate which source should be cleaned first. The birds’ diets consist mostly of wolf spiders, which are non-web-building predators that hunt by foot (cursorial) and get their mercury contamination from eating insects. Are the insects they are eating semiaquatic that spend most of their lives in the water and, like May flies, leave the water to mate and then die on the ground, or are the spiders eating terrestrial insects that live in the flood plain where the plants are saturated with mercury? To determine what the spiders are eating, Julianne grinds up wolf spider guts from the contaminated area, and, via DNA metabarcoding, can extract the DNA of the different insects eaten. Using local cursorial spiders fed on mealworms, she’s also determined how long after feeding the DNA of mealworms can still be found in their guts. DNA identification is done in a California lab, and she is awaiting results which could impact where financial resources should be focused.


The next student, Alina Grossweiner, who is a 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduate student from Chicago, described her research in “All that glitters is not water: Exploring (Continued on Page 5)

## STUDENT RESEARCH, Cont. from Page 4)

polarized light-based attraction to solar panels in birds". Collisions are the second leading cause of bird fatalities after cats and are associated with upwards of 1 billion bird deaths per year. One source of collisions is solar panels. It is poorly understood how many birds are dying each year after colliding with solar panels, if all bird species are affected equally, and why birds are attracted to the panels in the first place. One of the main hypotheses is that birds are mistaking solar panels for water. In nature, water is the greatest producer of polarized light. Solar panels produce even higher levels. Humans can't see polarized light but birds do. Migratory species use vertical polarization to help orient themselves. It is possible that birds associate horizontal polarization with water, but this has not been tested under a controlled setting. Alina is researching how much birds use polarized light to help them identify water as well as whether higher polarization is preferred by birds searching for water. She described how she conducts tests at the W&M lab with 12 Zebra Finches in specialized boxes built with the help of our funding. Controlling the amount of polarization with filters, she's testing the finches to determine whether they prefer high versus low polarized water. It is too soon to identify results but, to date, goals are being met and the research looks promising. Results may help lead to solar panels being designed that attract birds less.

Cara Hall, a junior undergraduate and also from Chicago, was the last student to describe her research: "How environmental toxins affect bird

behavior: Investigating the effects of experimental lead exposure on movement activity in House Sparrows". Cara initiated her project working with previous graduate student, Joey Di Liberto, who spoke to our club last year about his research on the effect of lead pollution in House Sparrows. Lead was banned in paint in 1978 and in pipes in new plumbing 10 years later, but mining and degradation of lead has dispersed "legacy" lead into the soil, air, and water, and the element remains in the environment to varying degrees. Cara's research involved testing the effect of varying degrees of lead in House Sparrows. The tests were done on three groups of sparrows: those with no lead exposure; lead exposure equivalent to that in Flint, Michigan; and high lead exposure found in Broken Hill, Australia. Cara placed the birds in a novel activity box where their reaction was documented. The sparrows were also placed in a box that forced them to fly upwards and out. Sparrows exposed to lead ions put in their drinking water demonstrated lessened activity and lesser take off force. There was no difference documented between the two groups representing different levels of lead exposure, but there was a big difference between the birds exposed to lead and those with no lead exposure. These results provide important documentation of the negative impact of lead on birds.

It was so inspiring to hear the enthusiasm with which the students shared their research. They are so grateful for our sponsorship. It is well worth watching the entire presentation, which can be found on the WBC's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vV3oKsY3AQ>. 

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## LATEST PETITION TO REDUCE OMEGA PROTEIN'S MENHADEN CATCH LIMIT IS REJECTED

By Charlie Paullin

*Editor's Note: In [April 2022](#) our club had the opportunity to hear Michael Academia, then a W&M graduate student, report on [research](#) he conducted which demonstrated that reproduction rates among Osprey in the lower Chesapeake Bay are now low and unsustainable and suggested that an insufficient number of Atlantic menhaden are available in the area to support the birds. The following article, originally published on April 24, 2024 by the [Virginia Mercury](#) at this [link](#), reports on recent efforts to revise Virginia regulations governing the menhaden fishing industry and secure funding in the state budget to initiate a comprehensive study of the menhaden population in the Bay.*

Another attempt to impose tighter regulations on the menhaden fishery in Virginia was defeated Tuesday [April 23, 2024] and interested parties again called for the state to study the menhaden population. The Virginia Marine Resources Commission [VMRC] voted 5-3 to deny a petition from the Chesapeake Legal Alliance that sought to limit the catch of Omega Protein, the lone menhaden reduction fishery in the Chesapeake Bay.

Recreational fishing groups and other supporters of a cap have argued that overfishing menhaden, a tiny, yet nutrient rich fish, is causing the decline of the Bay's striped bass population. "I just don't see the direct link," said VMRC member Lynn Kellum, who made the motion to deny the petition. Shanna Madsen, VMRC deputy chief of the fisheries management division, pointed to misrepresentations of research in the petition that had been criticized by (Continued on Page 6)

## MENHADEN, Cont. from Page 5

peer researchers. The harm to the striped bass, which depends on more than just menhaden, is coming from overfishing, Madsen said.

Regulating the menhaden catch has long been a contentious point in state government with oversight transferred from the General Assembly to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission in 2020. The 42-page petition was one of the more robust of recent requests to produce stricter regulations on Reedville-based Omega Protein, which catches the menhaden and reduces them to fishmeal and oil. The petition received 1,774 comments in support, of which 718 were from the National Audubon Society, and 158 comments against it during a comment period at the beginning of this year.

Virginia law on fishery management plans, “requires this type of analysis, but it also requires more than the absolute [harvest] maximum the federal commission sets,” said David Reed, an attorney with the Chesapeake Legal Alliance, which filed the petition on behalf of the Southern Maryland Recreational Anglers Association. “For those reasons, we respectfully request the commissioner consider greater restrictions than simply defaulting to the maximum harvest.” The Maryland group is also suing VMRC in Richmond City Circuit Court for not using a conservation analysis, as the group claims the Virginia’s regulation determining Omega’s catch requires, when it adjusted the state’s menhaden catch allocation for Omega Protein to meet limits set by the Atlantic States Marine and Fisheries Commission, which oversees fisheries along the East Coasts.

The petition, which included measures such as putting a moratorium on the fishery in the Bay and creating a one-mile no fishing buffer around the entirety of the Bay, was intended, in part, to provide a blueprint for VMRC to craft a regulation using conservation measures in the event a Richmond City Circuit Court judge ordered VMRC to revisit the limits. “[VMRC is] relying on a federal commission that’s not in the business of exploring the nuances of the Bay,” Reed told the Mercury in a phone interview Tuesday. “They’re in the business of exploring the coast.”

Madsen, the deputy chief of the fisheries management division, said more science is needed to understand menhaden in the Bay. “I would love to sit up here and say this is the number, this is the scientifically supported Bay cap, and I can’t and it’s incredibly frustrating to me,” said Madsen, [who]

added the current bay cap of 51,000 metric tons isn’t based on any scientific finding but is based on historic landings, or catches. “We don’t know if the Bay cap should be significantly lowered, we don’t know if the Bay cap could be increased. We don’t know if the Bay cap needs to exist at all.”

The Legislature was considering a bill to fund a three-year study during the session that just ended, but the [effort never made it out of the House of Delegates Rules Committee](#). Steve Atkinson, president of the Virginia Saltwater Sportfishing Association, told VMRC Tuesday, “it appears, by all accounts, that the industry helped lobby against the study.” After the meeting, Atkinson told the Mercury, Omega Protein, “can’t have it both ways,” by saying science is needed to show they aren’t harming the menhaden population in the Bay and then work to block the needed science.

Monty Diehl, CEO of Ocean Harvesters, which catches the menhaden for Omega Protein, on Tuesday denied that the company lobbied against the study. Omega Protein spokesperson Ben Landry told the Mercury after the meeting a concern they have with the study that they’ve shared before is its shortened time period, compared to a five-year effort ASMFC proposed in 2021. “We all want the same thing,” Landry said, “A sound survey to determine what is the baseline abundance.” Instead of lobbying against the study, Landry said the company pushed for a bill this past session from Del. Hillary Pugh-Kent, R-Richmond County, that created penalties for people who harass commercial fishermen. The measure was signed into law by Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

The VMRC Tuesday had considered taking up specific measures in the petition to codify the one-mile no fishing buffer around the Chesapeake Bay shorelines and increase oversight of the vessels, as well as a request from VMRC member Patrick Hand to determine if Omega’s fishing days in the Bay could be reduced. Those also failed to advance with members of the commission suggesting the Menhaden Management Advisory Committee look into them. “It’s incredibly frustrating that we do not have the regional information that we need and that the efforts to acquire that information or develop that information were halted this year,” said VMRC member Heather Lusk, adding maybe some new regulations on the fishery could incentivize cooperation for the study. “It is incredibly frustrating and frankly disappointing.” 🐦

## ANNUAL NATIVE PLANT SALE

The John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society will hold its annual sale of native plants on Saturday, May 4, 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., at the Williamsburg Community Building at 401 N. Boundary Street. A portion of the proceeds from the sale will fund Nature Camp scholarships for school-age children from our community as well as the development of native plant gardens in our area. Don't miss this opportunity to learn about and purchase Virginia native plants that can improve the habitat on your property for the benefit of local wildlife, including birds! 🐦

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## RECENT SIGHTINGS



**Cathy Flanagan** shared the photo above and some feelings we all can relate to at this time of year: "It's a happy day when I can sit quietly on the deck with a camera nearby. On most days I will easily see 15 species. I especially love listening to all the songs and calls from the woods and then watching how the birds move ever so cautiously closer to the feeders. One of my favorite songs is the **White-throated Sparrow's** "Oh Canada". I will miss them!"



**Bringier McConnell** contributed this photo of his "newest feathered neighbors," a **Great Horned Owl** and its owlet. Bringier continued: "Mama Owl moved into an old Red-tailed Hawk's nest at the top of big pine tree down by the lake in our yard here in Queen's Lake. Because our house is elevated above the lake, we can see into the nest while the leaves are still coming in. The owlet arrived a week ago [around May 8], but we have yet to see any siblings. Nor have we seen the male owl bringing food, but we assume he does that under cover of darkness."



**Laura Mae** described the action she captured at this **Osprey** nest in Chesapeake on April 6 as follows: "This nesting pair of Ospreys had a visitor. Reese Lukei taught me that patterned neck feathers, vs. all white, are typically indicative of a female bird. Without hesitation, the pair let her know she was NOT welcome!" (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S167380804>)

## MORE RECENT SIGHTINGS



**Laura Mae** also captured this photo of two **Yellow-crowned Night Herons** allopeening (grooming the skin or feathers of another bird) on a nest on March 29. She noted: "So far this year, this Norfolk location has three nests. I expect more. In 2021, I counted 14 nests here." (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S166411382>).



**Jim Corliss** reported that this pair of **Barred Owls** recently has been spending a lot of time in his yard in St. Georges Hundred. They've even used his bird bath, but he keeps missing that photo opportunity! He was pleased though with this shot of the pair roosting in their favorite spot on April 29.





# 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 a full color email edition of the newsletter through this mailing list.

**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](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/>