



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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June 2024



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

Early summer greetings! With spring migration winding down, it's time to relax a little and enjoy the local birds as they nest and bring their fledglings around to the yard and feeders. As I write this, we have four Eastern Phoebe babies in a nest outside the front door about to fly the coop any day. Such fun to watch!

Heading into summer, the reports of extreme weather events continue as Miami had record heat in May and the Midwest suffers with the seemingly constant threat of severe weather. It will be interesting and somewhat unnerving to watch the weather as July and August unfold. On the Coastal Plain we'll be watching news about hurricanes, extreme tides, record temperatures, and flooding. Hopefully we will escape the worst of the extreme heat and storms.

Summer is a good time to take advantage of some other birding activities. When hot weather forces you inside this summer there are ways to continue to enjoy birds and birding. If you haven't already checked out the Cornell Lab Bird Academy (academy.allaboutbirds.org), a hot summer indoor day would be the perfect time to take a look. The Bird Academy offers a comprehensive list of courses that you can read about in the course catalog. The free "eBird Essentials" course would be a good way to start. Beyond that there are many courses covering everything from "How to Paint Birds" to "Bird Song Basics: Getting Started with Birding By Ear," a good course if you want to beat Merlin to the punch! Others include such topics as birdwatching basics, focus on different families, and shorebird ID (groan) just to name a few. Other than the "eBird Essentials" free class, there is a cost for these courses but they are often on sale. They vary from \$19.99 to \$239.99 for the university level course "Ornithology: Comprehensive Bird Biology." I took this comprehensive course about 50 years ago (!) before the Internet. Can you imagine? I received printed
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UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

June 26, 6:00 p.m.: Outdoor meeting at Chickahominy Riverfront Park with an update on the Purple Martin Project.

Join us on Wednesday, June 26 at 6:00 p.m. for an outdoor get-together at the Chickahominy Riverfront Park Playground Picnic Pavilion (near the swimming pool). Cheryl Jacobson, Shan Gill, and the Purple Martin Project volunteers will take us to view Purple Martins in action at the colony our club installed in the park and provide an update on the project as a whole.

Our next monthly program meeting will be in September. 🐦



Purple Martin nestlings in one of the gourds at the Chickahominy Riverfront Park colony in early July 2023. The green leaves lining the nest bowl are characteristic of Purple Martin nest building behavior. Photo by Cheryl Jacobson.

WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB
Executive Board 2024

President Nancy Barnhart	540-454-3014 barnhartnt@gmail.com
Vice-President, Programs Patty Maloney	703-304-7885 maloney3013@aol.com
Vice-President, Editor (<i>The Flyer</i>) Mary Ellen Hodges	757-220-0566 men.hodges@gmail.com
Treasurer Ann Carpenter	757-221-6683 carpenter17d@cox.net
Secretary Cathy Millar	757-229-1775 millar.cathy@gmail.com
Member-at-Large Donna Benson	703-870-8034 mid520@me.com
Member-at-Large Deborah Humphries	703-674-9513 djhinv@aol.com
Past President Cheryl J. Jacobson	303-519-0989 icheryljoy@aol.com

Committee Chairpersons 2024

Membership/Webmaster Jeanette Navia	757-707-3345 jnavia@gmail.com
Field Trips George Martin	757-920-5403 grm0803@gmail.com
Bird Counts/Bird Walks Jim Corliss	757-565-0536 jcorliss240@cox.net
Library Liaison/Refreshments Catherine Flanagan	757-879-1997 flanagan.catherine@gmail.com
Historian Patty Maloney	703-304-7885 maloney3013@aol.com
Records/Liaison to CVWO Nancy Barnhart	540-454-3014 barnhartnt@gmail.com
Conservation Committee Cheryl J. Jacobson	303-519-0989 icheryljoy@aol.com
Nature Camp Scholarships Lee Schuster	757-565-6148 dlijschuster@cox.net
Liaison to CDR/Assistant Editor Gary Carpenter	757-221-6683 carpent66@cox.net
Liaison to VSO Shirley Devan	757-813-1322 shirley_devan@icloud.com



Red-bellied Woodpecker feeding its fledgling. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER, Continued from Page 1

lessons in the mail and returned worksheets and tests, also in the mail. It was a wonderful course and fun to have handwritten comments from the instructor. I'm sure 50 years later it would be that much greater and with tons of new knowledge. I'm actually tempted to try "How to Paint Birds," although a straight line is a challenge for me without a ruler.

We'd love to hear from anyone who takes one or more of these classes. Perhaps a short course review would be helpful for others. They would be most welcome for inclusion in the September newsletter.

I hope to see many of you at Chickahominy Riverfront Park on June 26 for a chance to socialize and see the wonderful Purple Martin colony there. That will be our last official gathering until our September monthly meeting.

Best wishes for a happy, healthy, fun summer! 🐦

WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome new members David and Jessica Eldridge 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. 🐦

BIRD WALKS: NEXT WALK ON JUNE 22

By Scott Hemler



We had 22 people come out on a foggy morning on May 25 for our “4th Saturday” bird walk at New Quarter Park. We saw 37 species of birds (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S177064202>)! Some highlights of the walk included seeing a Tufted Titmouse eating a

cicada it had caught (presumably a periodical cicada from Brood XIX, which has a 13-year cycle, that lately has emerged in our area) and an Osprey finally catching a fish on its third or fourth try! The Ospreys on the platform by the Queens Lake marina have at least one chick as we saw its head pop up from inside the nest. We heard two Clapper Rails and got a good look at a Green Heron that landed on the duck blind on the other side of Queens Creek. Our summer resident birds are here and settling in for the breeding season as we heard several Ovenbirds, Acadian Flycatchers, and Summer Tanagers. Late in the morning the fog and clouds started to lift and break up and it turned into a beautiful summer-like day!

Our “4th Saturday” bird walks at New Quarter Park will continue through the summer. The dates will be June 22, July 27, and August 24. Meet the group in the parking lot by the park office at 8:00 a.m. 🐦



May 25 walk participants birding from the floating dock on Queens Creek and posing near the fire pit in New Quarter Park. Both photos by Shirley Devan.

BIRDING IN INDIA

Summary by Cathy Millar

Imagine the thrill of seeing 434 life birds in three weeks! WBC president Nancy Barnhart's excitement was still palpable during her presentation at our club's May 15 meeting as she relived with us her January 2024 tour in India accompanied by her husband, Ken, and a small group of other birders. The birds were so incredibly colorful, but Nancy and her husband agreed that they were most enchanted by getting to know the country of India: its gracious, welcoming people; countryside; culture; and delicious food.

Due to the great variation in regional climate, topography, vegetation, and elevation, India is in the top 10 countries in the world for number of species of birds, with 81 of the 1377 species being endemic. India is the 7th largest country by area and, as of 2023, the most populous in the world. Because of the resulting habitat loss and pollution from burning wood and dung for heat and cooking, as well as from farmers burning their fields after harvesting to prepare for the next planting, many of India's birds are near-threatened, endangered, or seriously endangered. Raptors are in the most trouble from forests being cut down and the continued use of DDT. The two areas of India's greatest biodiversity in flora and fauna are the southwestern part of the country around a mountain range called the Western Ghats and the foothills of the Himalayas to the north. Most of Nancy's tour was divided between these two areas.

Nancy stated that she could give separate presentations on just the great variety of woodpeckers and owls they saw during their trip. Even Indian doves (Red-collared), pigeons (Orange-breasted Green), and starlings (Malabar) are so colorful! We got to hear a recording of the call of the Asian Koel cuckoo that was often the tour group's wakeup call at 4 a.m. Nancy described their thrill at seeing a crested male Indian Paradise Flycatcher gliding through the jungle with its stunning white and 12-inch-long central tailfeathers trailing behind. They were also delighted to see the Indian Pitta, a small bird with a short tail whose Indian name means nine colors. One is never far from water in India, so there are a lot of shore birds and wading birds. The group saw the Sarus Crane that at 6 feet is the tallest of all flying birds and, also, the Collared Falconet that at 5½ inches (sparrow-size) is one of the smallest raptors in the world. Nancy was

particularly excited to see a bird that had been on her wish list for years: the Bar-headed Goose that migrates across the Himalayas. She showed us an amazing variety of kingfishers including the White-throated, Crested, funny-looking Stork-billed, and the rare Blue-eared. She even discovered that there is a real-life leaf-bird: the Golden-fronted Leafbird!



Bar-headed Geese, known for the extreme altitudes the species reaches when migrating across the Himalayas ([Wikipedia](#)). Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

The group's vehicles often traveled at 10 to 25 mph due to poor roads or cows blocking the way. The sacred cow rules and they were frequently encountered lying on sidewalks and holding up traffic even in big cities like Delhi. A tiger safari was included the group's tour. Although they saw only lots of tiger tracks, they did see Indian grey mongooses, Indian elephants, jackals, wild pigs, fruit bats, a wide variety of monkeys on their travels, and the critically endangered gharial, one of the longest crocodiles, distinguished by its very long and narrow snout. Nancy concluded her presentation with a photo of India's national bird, the Indian Peafowl, a.k.a. the "peacock", *Pavo cristatus*.

My overall impression from Nancy's talk was delight in the large number of birds in India that come in such an incredible rainbow of colors. So please do yourself a favor and watch the whole presentation at <https://youtu.be/VmiMlitFzg8>. 🐦

MEET YOUR BOARD MEMBERS

Editor's Note: Continuing a tradition started by Cheryl Jacobson when she served as WBC president, I recently asked Donna Benson and Deborah Humphries, each of whom was elected to serve on the WBC Executive Board as Members-at-Large for 2024, to write brief autobiographical essays to introduce themselves to our members.

Donna Benson

In 2021, I read a book that changed my life. That sounds very dramatic and you may be rolling your eyes, but after reading Doug Tallamy's book, *Bringing Nature Home*, I knew I had found a focus for my life since retiring from active parenting. While researching different nature-related programs, I discovered the Virginia Master Naturalists and immediately applied. Luckily, I was able to join Cohort XVI of the Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) in the fall of 2022. After completing the program in spring of 2023, it was great to officially become a nature nerd!

I've always been appreciative of birds but prior to reading Dr. Tallamy's book and becoming a master naturalist, I wasn't very knowledgeable about them. Boy did that change! I began my bird education by attending Nancy Barnhart's wildlife mapping days at Jamestown Island. I wanted to learn more, so I joined Judy Jones on the Chickahominy Bluebird Trail. And then I was able to join Shirley Devan's Prothonotary Warbler monitoring team. Monitoring and banding those amazingly beautiful birds on the Northwest and Chickahominy rivers and in Powhatan Creek has become a bit of an obsession.

With all this exposure to birds and birders, I just had to join the Williamsburg Bird Club. While I still consider myself a new birder, I've been so grateful for all the experienced birders I've met through the HRC and the WBC who have been such knowledgeable and patient teachers.

When I'm not birding, you can usually find me in a garden somewhere. I've been a gardener all my life. Since coming to Williamsburg, I've become a Master Gardener and joined the Virginia Native Plant Society. My latest project has been working with Judy

Kinshaw-Ellis on a native plant garden and meadow at the Brickyard Landing in Toano. With the support of the James City County Parks Department, this project welcomes volunteers from the Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, and Tree Stewards. Our hope is that reintroducing native plants to a barren landscape will provide beneficial habitat for our local bird, butterfly, and moth populations.

It's an honor to be asked to join the Williamsburg Bird Club Board as a Member-at-Large. I look forward to participating in more field trips this fall. Hopefully, I'll meet everyone out on the trails!



Donna Benson (right) monitoring Prothonotary Warbler nest boxes with Shirley Devan on Powhatan Creek. Photo by Deborah Humphries.

Deborah Humphries

It wasn't until high school that I purchased my first 35mm camera with my summer earnings at 47th Street Photo in New York City. That experience is etched into my memory. The camera was a Canon AE-1, the first 35mm camera with an automatic light sensor, meaning that photos could be taken more

quickly, with less fuss and fewer calculations. I was all in. I photographed friends, architecture, landscapes, still lifes, night photography, black-and-white and color, moving from one to the next, hoping to find THE "subject" that truly spoke to my heart.

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MEET YOUR BOARD, Continued from Page 5

Fast forward a couple of decades and a small digital camera accompanied me everywhere to document the family travels, architecture, and art. It still wasn't my time for photography though. After 30 years of moving around Europe and the U.S., we made the decision to "retire" to Williamsburg. I felt like I could finally indulge my photography passion. I had just spent a winter in Tucson (2019-2020 early covid time) and had really discovered the joys of studying birds up close. The yard of the house I had rented in the Catalina Foothills above Tucson was open and WILD. It was thrilling. Each morning a pair of Cooper's Hawks would screech their greetings just outside my bedroom window. I would race to the patio with a cup of coffee and camera in hand to greet them and then watch their forays from the snag in the yard. Large ravens in the trees beyond croaked and gathered, terrifying in their dark immensity. Other hawks hunted the yard for the squirrels and small creatures. Nighthawks sailed the wash next to me. Coyotes, bobcats and javelina came through for the shade and water. I realized that I had chanced up a natural "neighborhood". I discovered the ebb and flow of their days and documented the stories of their interactions. The wildness of nature there fascinated me due to its complexity and unexpected structure! My days were reordered by nature so completely—from sunrise to sunset—and I watched and I photographed it all. THIS right here was my subject. I found it. Back in Williamsburg I discovered the bird neighborhood around my house and realized that while it is not as wild as out west, it is just as interesting. The bird life and behavior I see here excites me just as much.

I so enjoy meeting other birders and photographers in our bird club and other organizations. Going out to bird on local trails; driving out to find rarities in other parts of Virginia or in other states; working bird counts and the hawkwatch in the spring and winter; exchanging notes on behavior; doing a dance for a life bird ("Bird is the word!")—all of these elements add to the wonderful experiences of birding in this area. I'm so very happy to be able to capture these important moments in time for myself and to be able to share them with you. 🐦



Deborah Humphries in her element: outdoors and with her camera. Photo by Catherine Humphries.

2024 SPRING BIRD COUNT SUMMARY

By Jim Corliss

We had a beautiful spring day for our 47th Spring Bird Count (SBC) on April 28. An impressive showing of 88 participants took to the field and their feeders to tally 153 species and 10,371 individual birds (see table on Page 9). While the numbers of species and birds were both near our 47-year averages, many people reported that the birds were very active during the count day and we tallied SBC high counts for American White Pelicans, Barred Owls, Chipping Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, and Pine Warblers. We also found good numbers of Purple Martins (111), Prothonotary Warblers (25), and Eastern Bluebirds (279). Even though the numbers for these three species weren't SBC high counts, it's encouraging to know that these populations are doing *(Continued on Page 7)*



In over 30 years, Jim Corliss had never seen a Kentucky Warbler in his yard until this one visited his bird bath on Spring Bird Count day this year. Photo by Jim Corliss.



Prairie Warbler photographed by Deborah Humphries at Cheatham Annex during the Spring Bird Count.

SPRING BIRD COUNT, Continued from Page 6

well in our area, no doubt in response to the efforts of members from our club and the Virginia Master Naturalists to maintain and monitor nesting boxes and gourds for the species.

One of the challenging aspects of interpreting Spring Bird Count data is recognizing that the count is conducted during spring migration and how the timing of the count day affects the numbers of particular species. Unlike the Christmas Bird Count, which is timed after fall migration is complete and birds have settled in for the winter, many species of birds are simply passing through our area or haven't even arrived yet when we conduct the Spring Bird Count. Some species of warblers are well known for arriving here early in migration (Yellow-throated Warbler) while others typically arrive late (Blackpoll Warbler). This year we observed no Blackpoll Warblers during the April 28 count compared to last year's 21 Blackpoll Warblers tallied on May 7. Purple Martins are another good example. In late April the Purple Martins are still in the process of returning to their nesting locations here in Williamsburg. If we conducted the Spring Bird Count now in late May, we would undoubtedly find more than the 111 martins that were observed on April 28.

The most unusual find of the count day was a Common Raven observed by Dan Cristol and the Jamestown team. This was the first recording of a Common Raven in our Williamsburg count circle for either the Spring or the Christmas Bird Count. While this species is more prevalent in Richmond and parts west along the Blue Ridge, there are only a handful of



Yellow Warbler at Cheatham Annex sighted during the Spring Bird Count. Photo by Deborah Humphries.

sightings recorded in eBird for the coastal plain here in Williamsburg. It will be interesting to see if ravens are reported more often in our area now that we know to keep a sharper eye out for them. Some of the key identifying features of the Common Raven compared to American and Fish crows are the raven's larger size, longer tail that is wedge-shaped instead of fan-shaped, and hoarser croaking call.

Looking ahead to this year's Christmas Bird Count, Shirley Devan will be taking the reins as the compiler for the Williamsburg bird count circle. So, when we head into late autumn, be on the lookout for information from Shirley on the schedule for the count and how to participate either in the field or as a feeder watcher. Our club members and Virginia Master Naturalists have been very dedicated in supporting the bird counts and let's keep that momentum going for Shirley as she takes over this winter. Thank you for everyone's dedication and support for the years that I've been compiling the count data. I hope to see everyone in the field someday spying on interesting birds.

Happy counting! 🐦

Editor's Note: The members of the WBC recognize and thank Jim for his many years of work organizing and compiling the results of our club's Christmas and Spring bird counts. We are deeply appreciative of his efforts.



Three Eastern Kingbirds battling for territory as captured in a photograph Deborah Humphries took while birding Cheatham Annex with Nancy Barnhart and Sue Mutell for the Spring Bird Count.

RECENT SIGHTINGS



Spring on the "other" coast: While visiting her parents in Davis, California in late April, **Cindy Sherwood** photographed "the sweetest **Bushtit** babies" (left) and a mother **Mallard** and her nine ducklings (right).

Williamsburg Bird Club
47th Spring Bird Count, April 28, 2024

Species	Total	Species	Total	Species	Total
Canada Goose	336	Osprey	127	Hermit Thrush	2
Mute Swan	1	Cooper's Hawk	6	Wood Thrush	18
Wood Duck	20	Bald Eagle	77	American Robin	315
Blue-winged Teal	1	Red-shouldered Hawk	32	Cedar Waxwing	240
Mallard	109	Red-tailed Hawk	12	House Sparrow	73
Mallard x American Black Duck	1	Eastern Screech Owl	1	American Pipit	1
Red-breasted Merganser	1	Great Horned Owl	3	House Finch	289
Ruddy Duck	45	Barred Owl	20 (17)	Pine Siskin	2
Northern Bobwhite	4	Belted Kingfisher	5	American Goldfinch	267
Wild Turkey	6	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	Chipping Sparrow	365 (329)
Horned Grebe	1	Red-headed Woodpecker	30	Field Sparrow	8
Rock Pigeon	69	Red-bellied Woodpecker	141	White-throated Sparrow	284 (279)
Mourning Dove	171	Downy Woodpecker	55	Savannah Sparrow	5
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	2	Hairy Woodpecker	15	Grasshopper Sparrow	3
Chimney Swift	81	Pileated Woodpecker	41	Song Sparrow	58
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	34	Northern Flicker	8	Swamp Sparrow	8
Clapper Rail	1	Eastern Wood-Pewee	6	Dark-eyed Junco	1
Black-bellied Plover	2	Acadian Flycatcher	11	Eastern Towhee	84
American Golden Plover	1	Eastern Phoebe	32	Yellow-breasted Chat	1
Semipalmated Plover	2	Great Crested Flycatcher	189	Bobolink	1
Killdeer	26	Eastern Kingbird	31	Eastern Meadowlark	14
Wilson's Snipe	2	White-eyed Vireo	112	Orchard Oriole	23
Spotted Sandpiper	2	Yellow-throated Vireo	20	Baltimore Oriole	7
Solitary Sandpiper	3	Warbling Vireo	2	Red-winged Blackbird	278
Lesser Yellowlegs	22	Blue-headed Vireo	5	Brown-headed Cowbird	175
Greater Yellowlegs	9	Red-eyed Vireo	158	Common Grackle	191
Dunlin	3	Blue Jay	92	Ovenbird	59
Least Sandpiper	51	Common Raven	1	Worm-eating Warbler	5
Semipalmated Sandpiper	5	American Crow	209	Louisiana Waterthrush	10
Pectoral Sandpiper	1	Fish Crow	78	Northern Waterthrush	2
Bonaparte's Gull	21	Carolina Chickadee	197	Blue-winged Warbler	1
Laughing Gull	109	Tufted Titmouse	302	Black-and-white Warbler	39
Ring-billed Gull	63	Horned Lark	1	Prothonotary Warbler	25
Herring Gull	5	Tree Swallow	211	Kentucky Warbler	1
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	Purple Martin	111	Common Yellowthroat	43
Great Black-backed Gull	1	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	65	Hooded Warbler	19
Least Tern	21	Barn Swallow	131	American Redstart	8
Caspian Tern	19	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	9	Northern Parula	114
Forster's Tern	1	White-breasted Nuthatch	83	Yellow Warbler	14
Royal Tern	27	Brown-headed Nuthatch	32	Black-throated Blue Warbler	16
Double-crested Cormorant	403	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	206	Palm Warbler	2
American White Pelican	37 (24)	House Wren	25	Pine Warbler	118 (105)
Brown Pelican	3	Marsh Wren	5	Yellow-rumped Warbler	178
Least Bittern	1	Carolina Wren	284	Yellow-throated Warbler	110
Snowy Egret	1	European Starling	241	Prairie Warbler	10
Great Egret	3	Gray Catbird	107	Summer Tanager	66
Great Blue Heron	92	Brown Thrasher	66	Scarlet Tanager	2
Green Heron	7	Northern Mockingbird	133	Northern Cardinal	563
Glossy Ibis	5	Eastern Bluebird	279	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	5
Black Vulture	86	Veery	2	Blue Grosbeak	45
Turkey Vulture	207	Swainson's Thrush	2	Indigo Bunting	48

Indicates High Count for Williamsburg SBC - Value in () is Previous High Count
 Indicates New Species for the Williamsburg SBC



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/>