



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 48 No. 7

www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

September 2024



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

Late summer greetings! I hope you all found ways to keep cool during the long, hot, humid Coastal Plain summer we've had. Our family went out to Shenandoah National Park in

mid-July hoping to escape some of the heat only to find it hotter there than in Williamsburg. It seems there was no avoiding it this year.

As usual, birds saved the day! During some of the hottest days when we retreated to air conditioning and birding became watching out the window, we spent quite a bit of time enjoying all the fledges that parents were bringing to our deck. A pair of Summer Tanagers brought their three big babies to the suet feeder. It was quite entertaining watching them figure out how to land on it. The three lined up and patiently took turns and eventually became quite adept. These young birds leave the nest typically by day nine or ten. They then lay low, hiding in vegetation with the adults feeding them for at least a week. By the time they arrived at the feeder they were well on their way to independence. We were particularly happy to see this family as last year this pair brought their one and only fledge, a Brown-headed Cowbird, to the feeder. Ugh. So kudos to the beautiful pair for a job well done.

Lots of Tufted Titmouse and Carolina Chickadee babies came and went along with three young Red-bellied Woodpecker fledges with their plain, pale, "clueless" faces. Not every bird is a feeder bird. We had a nest of Eastern Phoebes under the porch outside the front door that I enjoyed watching grow. Luckily, I was there to see the moment all five fledged. I applauded the hard-working parents as the five little birds took off into the woods around the house not to be seen again.

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UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

**September 18, 6:30 p.m. (In-person and via Zoom):
Joe Piotrowski, "The Birds of Mexico."**

Join us on Wednesday, September 18 at 6:30 p.m. at the Quarterpath Recreation Center (Meeting Room 2), 202 Quarterpath Road, Williamsburg. Joe Piotrowski and his wife took a three-month RV trip through the entire country of Mexico in January - April 2024. Joe says: "While there I was able to capture images of a wide range of birds but not all that I would have hoped for given this was not specifically a photography trip. However, I think you will be intrigued." Bring a pen or pencil if you can. There will be audience participation!

Save the Date: October 23 (the 4th Wednesday), 6:30 p.m. (In-person and via Zoom): Rexanne Bruno, "Birding in Ecuador." 🦋



Scarlet Macaws in Mexico photographed by Joe Piotrowski.



Young Summer Tanager photographed by Nancy Barnhart.

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A "shimmer" of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER, Continued from Page 1

The real stars of the show at our home this summer have been the Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. Starting with one male and two females that appeared in late spring, our eventual "shimmer" of hummingbirds became 18 countable at one time! These tiny sprites are mesmerizing. They are the only "true" hovering birds with wingbeats fast enough to keep them in place. Hovering is energy intensive so they spend up to 75% of their time perched. Their little feet preclude walking or hopping but they settle in nicely on a feeder. "Ours" did all the usual hovering, maneuvering, and chasing but eventually, surprisingly, settled in together in the ultimate example of sharing.

The heat of summer can make it a challenging time. Watching the extraordinary lives of birds during breeding, nesting, and fledging helps make it bearable. Now we're about to enter the fall migratory period, another time of wonder and amazement. Local birds disperse; the migrants start their long journeys to wintering grounds. For us it's a time to regroup. We come back together for our monthly meetings, field trips, and monthly bird walks. We are especially excited about the impending release of a very special book by our own Bill Williams. Watch for further details coming soon.

I look forward to seeing all of you at our WBC events as well as bumping in to many of you "out and about". The fun of being together and sharing our love of birds and birding is what WBC is all about.

Happy Birding! 🐦

BIRD WALKS: NEXT WALK ON SEPTEMBER 28

By Scott Hemler and Nancy Barnhart

June 22, led by Nancy Barnhart: On a pleasant June day we had 13 participants on our monthly WBC bird walk in New Quarter Park. We tallied 40 species of birds, finding most of the summer residents in the park. The highlight of the morning was actually not a bird. Bill Williams was quick to identify a little toad we found in the path as an Eastern Spadefoot Toad which Bill told us is very rarely seen as it spends almost all of its life underground. You never know what you'll see on a bird club bird walk!

July 27, led by Scott Hemler: We had nine people come out on a beautiful July morning for our bird walk at New Quarter Park. We saw 29 species of birds. The highlight of the day's walk was seeing around 40 Great Egrets down along Queens Creek! We first saw just a few egrets across the creek in the trees; however, it was not long until they started flying around the bend and into view. They kept coming and in the end we saw at least 40! It was quite a sight to see! We saw that the Osprey chick at the nest by the marina had fledged. The woods were kind of quiet with

mostly Acadian Flycatchers, Carolina Wrens, Tufted Titmice, and Eastern Wood Pewees singing. All in all, a great morning for a bird walk!

August 24, led by Scott Hemler: We had 17 people come out on a beautiful, cool, fall-like morning for the August bird walk at New Quarter Park. We saw 31 species of birds. We did not see any unusual birds, but our regulars were fairly abundant, such as over 30 Laughing Gulls down along Queens Creek! We did not see any Ospreys. Maybe they had left to head south for the winter. We saw/heard several Summer Tanagers that were still here or maybe in migration as well. It was a very enjoyable morning, and it was great seeing some new members joining us for the walk.

September 28: Our next "4th Saturday" bird walk at New Quarter Park will be held on September 28. Meet the group in the parking lot by the park office at 8:00 a.m. 🐦



Scenes from our monthly bird walks at New Quarter Park (clockwise from upper left): Participants on the July bird walk (photo by Scott Hemler); June bird walk participants and the Eastern Spadefoot Toad seen by the group (both photos by Nancy Barnhart); A Red-eyed Vireo and Great Blue Heron seen on the August bird walk (both photos by Cindy Sherwood).

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS: SEPT. 21, JAMESTOWN BEACH & OCT. 19, EASTERN SHORE

By George Martin

Saturday, September 21 – Jamestown Beach Event Park

It's a new season for field trips, and we'll start off with a casual re-introduction. On Saturday, September 21, we'll meet at 8:00 a.m. at Jamestown Beach Event Park for a couple hours of birding and socializing. Bring a chair! Bring your coffee! Binoculars might help, too.

The park entrance is a right turn off of SR 31, just before the Jamestown Ferry. The park opens at 8:00 a.m. If you get there a little early, the gates may not be opened yet, but the area around the entrance is usually pretty birdy. We'll congregate on the grassy area above the beach, which is a couple hundred

yards on mostly paved paths from the parking lot. The area is readily accessible for many folks with mobility challenges. Babs Giffin will keep the eBird list and share it with participants. So let Babs know when you see something!

Saturday, October 19 – Eastern Shore

Mark your calendars for our club's annual birding trip to the Eastern Shore on Saturday, October 19. Club members usually identify 50+ species during this field trip, since we're able to take advantage of a variety of habitats during fall migration. The Kiptopeke Hawkwatch is always a highlight. More details to follow. 🐦

SAVE THE DATE! CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, DECEMBER 22

By Shirley Devan

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) occurs around the world between December 14 and January 5 every year. The count is an early winter census of the birds in our area. By mid-December, migration is over, and the winter birds are here for a while. The bird population data collected in our area and around the world the second half of December are valuable to scientists, ornithologists, and ecologists, and, according to the National Audubon Society, have been used in hundreds of peer-reviewed publications and government reports over the decades.

Our CBC is a **BIG** deal with **BIG** numbers. In December 2023, 100 participants found 29,519 individual birds and 122 species! Quite an accomplishment!

Bird club members are accustomed to receiving a "save the date" notice from Jim Corliss. Jim has retired as "Count Compiler" for the Bird Club, and I am trying to fill his shoes for the 2024 CBC. Many thanks to Jim for his dedication over the last few years to our Christmas Bird Count and our Spring Bird Count!

You'll be hearing from me again later in the fall asking for you to contact me to volunteer either in the field or in your yard. If you have questions, please feel free to reach out: Shirley_devan@icloud.com. 🐦



The Williamsburg Bird Club's 2024 Christmas Bird Count will be held on Sunday, December 22, 2024 – our 48th count. All counting happens in our 15-mile-diameter circle centered on the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center (see image). On the day of our count, teams of

3-6 birders fan out to one of our "sectors" (each of which has a leader/"wrangler") to record every bird species they find and the number of each species. We also need feeder watchers—folks who live in the circle and who count the species and their numbers at their feeders and in their yards.

WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome new members Jeff Legg and his grandson, Donovan Garcia; Charles and Dianne Bailey and their daughter, Eleza; and David and Deb Herota!

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 to pay our annual dues or by printing a membership form from that page which you can then mail in with a check. 🐦

IF IT'S NOT BLUE, IS IT A BLUEBIRD?

By Judy Jones

Eastern Bluebirds seem to be a favorite of most of our Master Naturalists in the Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) here in Williamsburg and with WBC members. With 21 bluebird nest box trails stretching from York River State Park down to the Poquoson Learning Gardens, we have many opportunities to watch bluebird eggs hatch, chicks grow, and fledglings head out into the world. But, in mid-June this year, an unusual chick caught the eyes of two HRC monitors of the Chickahominy Riverfront Trail in Williamsburg. Both Barb Bucklin and Emily Argo noticed immediately that one of the chicks in a bluebird box was cream-colored rather than the traditional blue. With questions fluttering in their minds, they sent a note to the trail leader, Judy Jones, who went out the next day to investigate. And yes, the chick was noticeably different in color, but not in any other way. Size, development, feathering, and bill shape were the same among all the chicks.



The Eastern Bluebird brood with one unusual cream-colored chick. Photo by Judy Jones.

Further investigation was definitely called for. A photo of the chicks was sent to Valerie Gaffney, president of the Virginia Bluebird Society. Her response was much like ours, "Wow! That's one on me. I'm looping in Christine Boran, former VBS director and LONG-TIME bluebirder for her opinion. I imagine Chris will set us straight!" And so, Christine Boran was pulled into the investigation. As a County Coordinator for the Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS), a Certified Virginia Master Naturalist with the Southwestern Piedmont Chapter, and a Certified Naturalist with the Conservation Management Institute at Virginia Tech, Christine brought credentials and knowledge to the discussion that were definitely needed.

Christine began her research by determining that the cream-colored chick was a bluebird and not a cowbird. Once that was ensured, she asked a variety of questions, including, "On the last nest check prior to this one, was the color difference obvious in the one nestling?" and "Were all the eggs the normal blue?" Our answers were as specific as possible: Yes, all the eggs were the same color blue, and no, there was not a noticeable difference in color in the chicks on the prior nest check. Because the chicks had been very young, only three or four days old at that time, the feathers weren't developed enough to indicate a noticeable difference in coloration.

So, Christine sent the monitoring team back for more photos, hoping for pictures that might show the anatomy and feathers in detail. But there was a very real concern that we were treading on a 'Day 13' deadline and that we wouldn't be able to open the box much longer. It was imperative to get back out as soon as possible. So, the next day—the last day the team could safely peek into the box without a high risk of causing the chicks to jump out before they were sufficiently mature to fly—out came the phone cameras and several photos were carefully taken and sent off. The next day, thanks to Christine's diligence and her ties to other experts, the mystery was solved. Christine summarized her findings as follows:

Here is final outcome on this beige-colored bluebird with the other two normal bluebird nestlings. I've checked around with some other experts, including Bet Zimmerman Smith, who manages the Sialis.org site, and it is confirmed, as some originally thought, that this is NOT a cowbird nestling but indeed is a bluebird with a pigment gene mutation called a "brown phenotype". A study was done on other bluebirds showing this color titled, "Genomic data reveal unexpected relatedness between a brown female Eastern Bluebird and her brood" by the Department of Biological Sciences, Arkansas State University, State University, Arkansas. In the study, they did state: "These birds with this aberrant plumage should have fewer mating opportunities and thus lower reproductive output."

The Chickahominy Riverfront HRC monitors are so grateful for Christine's determination to solve this mystery and are pleased to know that the information and the photos will be added to the Sialis.org site. Most of all, we sincerely hope that the little chick fledges and that, despite its unusual color, it is able to have a long and productive life. 🐦

SUPPORT NEEDED FOR SEPT. 28 COASTAL VIRGINIA BIRDATHON

By Shirley Devan

The Coastal Virginia Birdathon (CVB) is hosted annually by the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory ([CVWO](#)). Grab your birding buddies and binoculars and join the day's fun! This year's event is Saturday, September 28, 2024.

In this fun and friendly team birding competition, teams compete to identify the greatest number of bird species in a single day. The primary goals of the CVB are to raise funds for CVWO and to raise awareness of fall bird migration along the coastal plain of Virginia. The CVB occurs each year during peak migration when birds sing very little, and many have molted out of their breeding plumages. Add in hatch-year birds, and you'll see why the competition is a challenge!

The event is open to anyone. Participants can form their own team, or a single individual can request to be placed with an existing team. There are four categories in which one can compete: 24-Hour, 3-Hour, Youth (age 18 & younger), and Special Venue (a smaller area such as wildlife refuge, park, or yard). The geographic count area includes the land, rivers, ocean, and bay areas of the entire coastal plain of Virginia (the area east of the Fall Zone or roughly the area east of Interstate 95).

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

bird clubs, and businesses. All funds raised are used to support CVWO's field research and environmental education programs. You can donate to any or all teams. So far, four teams are registered:

- [Gulls Gone Wild](#) – Shirley Devan, Nancy Barnhart, Sue Mutell, Joyce Lowry, and Babs Giffin. Make check payable to CVWO and mail to 6227 Tucker Landing, Williamsburg, VA 23188. Note "Gulls Gone Wild" on the check. Alternatively, you can donate electronically at the link provided below.
- [The Islanders](#) – Brian Taber, Terri Cuthriell, and Michelle Gianvecchio. Make check payable to CVWO and mail to 103 Exeter Court, Williamsburg, VA 23185. Note "Islanders" on the check or use the link below.
- [Wandering Wagtails](#) – Sarah O'Reilly, Carolyn Morgan, and Caitlin Kufahl. Make check payable to CVWO and mail to 2615 Brownstone Circle, Williamsburg VA 23185. Note "Wandering Wagtails" on the check or use the link below.
- [Laughing Falcons](#). Use the link below to donate.
- [Machicomoco Meadowlarks](#). Use the link below to donate.

Click this link to donate and to see an updated list of the teams: <https://vawildliferesearch.org/coastal-va-birdathon>. CVWO is grateful for your support! 🐦



WBC SUPPORTS LOCAL BIOBLITZ

The Williamsburg Bird Club was one of several local conservation organizations to participate in the first BioBlitz in our area, hosted on July 20 at New Quarter Park by the Colonial Soil and Water Conservation District (CSWCD). A "BioBlitz" is a communal citizen-science effort to record as many species within a designated location and time period as possible. According to CSWCD, the data compiled during the New Quarter Park BioBlitz will help "to create a better understanding of the park's biodiversity, identify important species and habitats, and inform future management and conservation strategies." Babs Giffin (far left) and Nancy Barnhart were two of the WBC members on hand to assist participants in the recordation of avian species in the park (Photo by Shirley Devan). 🐦

WBC MEMBERS HONORED BY SELECTION FOR DWR'S 2024 PHOTOGRAPHY SHOWCASE

Each summer nature lovers across Virginia look forward to the publication of the delightful July/August issue of *Virginia Wildlife* containing the magazine's Annual Photography Showcase. The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources offers the [Photography Showcase](#) each year "as a way to recognize the rich heritage of Virginia's wildlife and natural resources and pay tribute to [the agency's] mission." None await the Showcase issue of *Virginia Wildlife* with more anticipation than the photographers who submitted images to the competition earlier in the year. They learn whether one of their photographs was selected for inclusion in the Showcase only when they receive their copy of the magazine in the mail, just like every other subscriber.

This year 360 Virginia photographers submitted a total of 1,180 photos to the Showcase for consideration and only 143 photos were selected for publication.

The Williamsburg Bird Club is pleased to recognize each of the seven members of our club who were honored to have one or more photos selected for the 2024 Showcase: Carol Annis (two photos), Donnie Goodrich, Craig Hill, Barbara Houston, Deborah Humphries, Judy Jones (two photos), and Cindy Walker (two photos). The degree of observational awareness and appreciation of the natural world and the technical photographic skills displayed in each of our member's selected photos is remarkable.

The six WBC members who submitted images of birds selected for the 2024 Photography Showcase kindly agreed to allow their photos to be republished here. Single copies of the 2024 Photography Showcase issue of *Virginia Wildlife* can be purchased by clicking this [link](#), while a 12-month subscription to the magazine can be purchased [here](#).



Craig Hill: Two female Ruby-throated Hummingbirds fighting. "It's always an honor to have one of your images selected for the magazine. Hummingbirds are difficult to photograph, thus providing a real challenge."



Barbara Houston: Common Loon eating a hogchoker at Fort Monroe in April. "This is a true story. Really. Judy Jones and I were out on one of the piers looking for Razorbills when this Common Loon popped up in front of us—really close. I had the 800mm lens on my camera and it was up close and personal. The light was perfect and I was happy with the pic. I said to Judy: 'It would be cool if the loon came up with a flounder. I have only seen that once and the pics I got were in crappy light.' I swear to you, I did say that. And the next time he came up he had flounder #1, and then he did it two more times with two other flounders! It was amazing to see and even more amazing to be able to photograph. After looking at the pics, the first fish proved to be another kind of flatfish, not a flounder, but close enough! When the photo gods are with you, life is GOOD!"



Cindy Walker: Female Mallard in Williamsburg. “It was a special morning when I captured a very common Mallard Duck at such a beautiful moment. To have my photo included in the Virginia Wildlife Magazine is truly an honor.”




Carol Annis: Osprey. “My bird image was an Osprey shaking after coming out of the water at my neighborhood pond. Bird and wildlife photography is my passion and I especially love photographing what I find at home. It is such an honor to have images selected for publication in the photography issue! I would encourage anyone to submit their photos for consideration! Submitting photos gives me feelings of intimidation, anticipation, and enjoyment, plus it's a confidence builder! It's fun to spot your own image in the magazine and enjoy all the other wonderful images in the Showcase issue.”



Judy Jones: Wild Turkey, Chincoteague. “The turkey was a cutie, hanging around the wildlife loop at Chincoteague. I was with Barbara Houston. She was driving and I happened to have my camera in my lap. So, when three turkeys walked out in front of us and did the ‘look around for stranger danger’ thing, I was ready. They weren’t in the area very long and, like the field of dreams, disappeared as soon as they reached the grasses and trees. Each year I submit photos to *Virginia Wildlife* and each year I wait for the Showcase issue, hoping that one of my photos might be included. This year I was thrilled to have two. It’s always such an honor as the magazine chooses only the best, and I am so grateful to be included in that group.”



Deborah Humphries: Ruby-throated Hummingbird. “I planted the honeysuckle vine in my yard specifically for hummingbirds.” 

RECENT SIGHTINGS

In the June issue of *The Flyer*, Jim Corliss noted that the WBC's 2024 Spring Bird Count tallied a new high count for Barred Owls (20). Sightings submitted to this section of the newsletter suggest our members have continued to see a lot of Barred Owls locally this year. **Tony Picardi** shared a photo of a **Barred Owl** (below, left) from May 24 at Williamsburg Landing "looking in my window wondering what I'm typing on the computer." **Cindy Sherwood** lives in the same downtown Williamsburg neighborhood as your editor, who was happy to hear that Cindy confirmed that our neighborhood **Barred Owls** successfully fledged at least one youngster this year. Cindy related: "I took photos of the owls around noon on July 6. I wasn't birding at the time. I was reading on our patio when I looked up and then straight ahead across the creek into the woods behind our house. And there was the first owl, an adult, staring at me. He/she never budged for the next 15 minutes or so. A bit later there was movement in the trees and I saw two more owls: another adult and a juvenile (below, right)!"



Rexanne Bruno captured a charming photo (below) of two **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** on July 7 in the pond at Riverside Doctors' Hospital. The rare ducks for our area were first spotted earlier in the day by Robert Steele.



Gary Carpenter shared photos from Colonial Heritage of an immature **Red-tailed Hawk** (below left) and one of its parents (below right) that was keeping a distant watch over the youngster.



On June 10, just after 7 p.m., **Laura Mae** (photo below) received an eBird notification of a **Loggerhead Shrike** having been photographed in Suffolk at noon. Said Laura: "An hour later I was at the Suffolk location—beside the shrike!"



Earlier this summer, **Nancy Barnhart** (photo below) and Babs Giffin watched four new **Eastern Phoebe** fledges on the Greensprings Interpretive Trail for over an hour as they started to learn the art of fly catching.





Williamsburg Bird Club
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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/>