

The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 48 No. 9

www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

November 2024



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

November greetings! It's hard to believe we're winding down the year already. Please read about our remaining events of the year in this newsletter. One of the highlights of the year is still to

come, when we gather on December 22 for the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, always a fun day.

As it gets dark earlier, we have fewer birding hours but more reading hours. If you're like me, you have a stack of books you've been meaning to start. Wondering what to read first? I hope you will reach for the recently published *The Birds of Virginia's Colonial Historic Triangle, An Annotated Checklist* (Second Edition), by Bill Williams.

If you're not familiar with an annotated list (as opposed to a field guide), I think you will be surprised to find all it includes. You will find a complete species account of the birds of the Colonial Historic Triangle including their relative abundance, their status (e.g., resident, transient, etc.), the date ranges when they are found, and peak counts and data on Christmas and Spring bird counts. Also included in the book is an incredible amount of information about the local history, climate, physical description of the varied ecological communities, and the history of ornithology in the area including the history of the Williamsburg Bird Club. The listing of past ornithological meetings in the Colonial Historic Triangle points to the importance of this area relative to the bird life in Virginia and beyond. An example was the meeting of the North American Osprey Research Conference held February 10-12, 1972.

There are records I think you will find quite surprising, such as the high count of "1000" Redheads off Yorktown in January 2022, and some that point to declines. In early February 1952, five hundred Evening Grosbeaks were recorded on Cheatham Annex. They are now considered very rare in the Colonial Historic Triangle. (Continued on Page 2)

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

November 20, refreshments at 6:00 p.m., presentation at 6:30 p.m. (in person in Meeting Room 2 at the Quarterpath Recreation Center and via Zoom): James Abbott, "Belize: Small Country, Big Birding."

Join us at our November 20 meeting as James Abbott takes us to Belize! James provided the following introduction to his presentation: "The location and history of Belize has shaped its habitats and wildlife. The country may be small in size but it plays a big role in providing habitats to many tropical bird species in northern Central America. Belize is home to one of the remaining populations of Scarlet Macaw in the region and the only country in the region with nesting Harpy Eagles. These eagles represent a completely unique ecology for the species which we will explore in this presentation. We will go on to talk about the utilization of agroforestry to blend commercial interests with conservation. Finally, a sample itinerary of birding in Belize will be provided."



James Abbott dwarfed by the tree ferns of Belize.

Save the Date: January 15, 2025, for our joint meeting with the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists. Presenter will be Dr. John Swaddle, Professor of Biology and Faculty Director of the W&M Institute for Integrative Conservation, on "Sparrows as Sentinels: Health study illustrates the interconnectedness of humans and wildlife."

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER, Continued from Page 1

You will also learn some of the people who have been important in the history of the Colonial Historic Triangle birding community. One of my favorite lines in Bill's introduction says "... the stories told by these records are testament to the people who recorded them and the places where the birds were encountered," truly a community effort over decades. To further enhance the volume, a number of our local photographers provided sixty-six photos within the covers. The gorgeous cover photo is by WBC member Judy Jones.

This is a book that stays on my breakfast-room table. I refer to it every day. The WBC provided the funds for printing. It is Bill's generosity and labor of love that allow the WBC to receive the proceeds of all sales. Bill accepts nothing from the sale of this wonderful resource. The Williamsburg Bird Club is happy to make it available for \$20.00, a "real deal" for all it contains. The book is available at The Backyard Birder and Wild Birds Unlimited. Copies will be available at our monthly meetings, field trips, and bird walks. I hope you will enjoy your copy, too! Happy Reading!

WBC MEMBERSHIP

At our November 20 meeting, WBC members will elect the officers who, along with our immediate past president, will constitute our Executive Board for 2025. A Nominating Committee consisting of Deborah Humphries, Patty Maloney, and George Martin has proposed the following slate of nominees for consideration by the membership:

- President: Nancy Barnhart
- Vice-President, Newsletter: Mary Ellen Hodges
- Vice-President, Programs: Patty Maloney
- Secretary: Cathy Millar
- Treasurer: Ann Carpenter
- Members-at-Large: Donna Benson and Deborah Humphries
- Past President: Cheryl Jacobson

Please welcome our new members: Carrie Arnold and family, Abby Jo Helfand-Juraschek, Shannon Slattery, and Kimberly McHugh (returning member)! To join our club or renew your membership for 2025, please go to https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/membership, where you can either complete a membership form and pay your dues using PayPal online or download a form for printing and submitting by mail with a check. Our membership form can also be printed from Page 9 of this newsletter.

BIRD WALKS: Next Walks on Nov. 23 and Dec. 28; Owl Prowl on Nov. 30

By Scott Hemler

We had 19 people come out on a beautiful fall morning October 26 for our monthly bird walk at New Quarter Park! Two members of the park staff joined us as well. We saw 26 species of birds. Many of our winter residents have arrived! We saw over 30 White-throated Sparrows, as well as two Yellow-rumped Warblers, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, a Hermit Thrush, and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. There were around 30 Laughing Gulls down along Queen's Creek. We saw many of our year-round residents, such as Tufted Titmouse and Carolina Chickadee, as well.

Our next two "4th Saturday" bird walks will be held on November 23 and December 28 at New Quarter Park. Meet the group in the parking lot by the park office at 8:00 a.m. New Quarter Park will also be hosting an Owl Prowl on Saturday, November 30 from 6:00-8:00 pm.



Down on Queen's Creek during the October 26 bird walk at New Quarter Park. Photo by Scott Hemler.

BIRDING THE ECUADORIAN ANDES

Summary by Cathy Millar

The program presented by WBC member Rexanne Bruno at our October 23 meeting was a visual and informative treat. Rexanne expertly guided us through her 11-day, March 2024 birding trip in the cloud forest ecosystem of the eastern and western slopes (2,000-13,000 feet in elevation) in the northwestern Andes of Ecuador. Rexanne has been birding for over 50 years, and she has served in the past as a board member and president of the Virginia Society of Ornithology. Currently, she is heavily involved in bringing Virginia's 2nd Breeding Bird Atlas to fruition.

Rexanne was part of a small tour group of five birders, organized by Road Scholar. In all, she recorded 267 species, of which 182 were life birds. She was thrilled to see many species from her two favorite families of birds: hummingbirds and tanagers. A good part of the trip was spent at two lodges, Guango and San Isidro, that catered to birders and photographers. At some locations the birding was made easier by luring in the birds with food provided in hummingbird feeders; logs into which bananas had been discreetly tucked; a back-lit white sheet hung to attract insects that also brought in Black-banded Owls, who savor moths; and offerings of worms to some birds that have been trained to respond to a specific call.

Rexanne spotted 51 species of hummingbirds, including the brilliant Great Sapphirewing that, due to

its large size, has one of the slowest wingbeats, and the shimmering blue-and-green Long-tailed Sylph which, including its splendid forked tail, is 8 inches long. Thirty-three species of tanagers were seen, including the exuberantly multi-colored Paradise Tanager and the stunning, neon-like green Glistening-green Tanager.

Among the other fascinating birds seen was the Longtailed Nightjar, that has to find a roost during the day that will accommodate its 24-inch-long tail. Rexanne was also thrilled to find some target birds she'd hoped to see: the Andean Gull, found on high mountain meadows; the Ecuadorian national bird with an 11-foot wingspan, the Andean Condor, of which only 150 are left in the country; the boldly-patterned black-and-white White-caped Dipper, which like our western American Dipper is seen diving into fast moving water; and the strange-looking Andean Cock-of-the-Rock with a brilliant red, large, fan-like crest that almost hides its bill.

Along with her many photos of spectacular birds, Rexanne shared great identification information as well as descriptions of the habitats in which particular species can be found. It is well worth the time to watch or rewatch the video of her presentation on YouTube: https://youtu.be/kjEVKHkq0P0.

FIELD TRIP REPORT:

Next trip is to Grandview Nature Preserve on Nov. 16

By George Martin

Saturday, October 19 - Eastern Shore

The photo below shows the fifteen participants on the field trip to the Eastern Shore on Saturday, October 19. I took the photo at the overlook, the first stop on the field trip, and it set the tone for what turned out to be a fabulous day. It's hard to pick out highlights because there were so many interesting sightings, but I'll try. A White Ibis flock dotted the trees across the marsh at the Ramp Road kayak launch. There were way too many Yellow-rumped Warblers to count at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, but it was really good to look at as many as possible, because that's how participants found the Northern Parula, the Tennessee Warbler, the Blackpoll Warbler . . . you get the picture. Swamp Sparrows were abundant at the Ned Brinkley Preserve, before the group got to the blind to see the Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned night herons. Deborah Humphries led the trip, and she worked hard keeping track of what the 14 other people saw. Some of her photos from the day can be found on Page 5, and the following link is to her trip report, which lists 73 species: WBC Eastern Shore birding outing - eBird Trip Report. Participants found another 7 species throughout the day, bringing the total to 80 species. And those who stopped for lunch at Cape Charles Brewing Company enjoyed the camaraderie.

<u>Saturday, November 16 – Grandview Nature</u> <u>Preserve</u>

On Saturday, November 16, Nancy Barnhart will lead our group at Grandview Nature Preserve in Hampton. We'll meet at 8:00 a.m. at the entrance to the Preserve, which is at the end of State Park Drive, a left turn off Beach Road. This field trip generally provides views of newly-arrived seabirds wintering on Chesapeake Bay, as well as several species of shorebirds. The walk through the marsh to the beach always has some interesting finds. On last year's field trip, participants identified 59 species.

If you'd like to carpool, or you have room in your car to drive others, please let me know at grm0803@gmail.com. Please let me know by Wednesday, November 14 if you are interested in either riding or driving. While I can usually make last-minute adjustments, I can't this time, because I won't be able to participate (unfortunately).

Saturday, January 18 - Dutch Gap

Mark your calendars for the first field trip of 2025. On Saturday, January 18, we'll visit Dutch Gap outside of Richmond. This is where we see LOTS of ducks. I'll provide more information as the date approaches. Let's hope it's a little warmer than it was in 2024!



Members who attended gave the birding on the October 19 club field trip to the Eastern Shore rave reviews. Photo by George Martin.



A sample of the birds seen during the October 19 club field trip to the Eastern Shore (clockwise from upper left): Peregrine Falcon, White Ibis, Bald Eagle, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Merlin, and Red-breasted Nuthatch. All photos by Deborah Humphries.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR! SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, FOR OUR CLUB'S 48TH CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT By Shirley Devan



Greetings from the WBC's new compiler for our Christmas and Spring bird counts! I've taken on the challenge of organizing the birders and compiling the bird lists for our upcoming Dec 22 Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Last year, 100 folks helped tally over 29,000 birds on our CBC

day—a record-breaking day for some species counts! What will we find this year? Rarities? High counts? Each count provides surprises.

Our CBC has 11 sectors, each with an experienced birder assisted by one or more volunteers. Plus, over half of our contributors are feeder watchers. The boundaries of our count circle are shown in the map that accompanies this article. You can help on December 22 by joining a team in the field, by counting birds at your feeders and yards, or both. If you can help out, please respond to me at shirley_devan@icloud.com to let me know your preference: out in the field, feeder watcher, or hybrid (some time for both).

Every year the count occurs December 14 to January 5. Since 1901, Christmas Bird Counts in the U.S. and around the world have provided scientists and ornithologists with important data and trends on bird populations that can only be determined by LONG-term data. That's why it's so important to continue these studies EVERY YEAR. The CBC is an early-winter bird census. (Continued on Page 6)

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, Cont. from Page 5

Per Jim Corliss, last year's compiler for our club's 2023 CBC, the 100 participants recorded 29,519 birds, producing the longest list of high counts and unusual birds for a Christmas Bird Count in recent memory. 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 been sighted only 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.

If you're unfamiliar with Christmas Bird Counts, check out the extensive information on Audubon's website:

- https://www.audubon.org/communityscience/christmas-bird-count/where-have-allbirds-gone
- https://www.audubon.org/answers-your-topquestions-about-christmas-bird-count.

NEW YEAR'S DAY BIRD AND BIRDER SHOW

By Shirley Devan

Please join birding enthusiasts Wednesday, January 1, 2025, at Chickahominy Riverfront Park for the "New Year's Day Bird and Birder Show." The 2025 gathering will be our club's 19th "almost-annual" event.

We'll convene at the shelter next to the swimming pool between 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. Relax and visit with new and familiar friends at the picnic tables or venture out around the park to find our wintering birds. The Park provides wonderful access to check the river (from the new fishing pier!) and Gordon Creek (from the boat launch) for our wintering waterfowl, plus the woodland edges will yield our winter passerine residents.

The address for Chickahominy Riverfront Park is 1350 John Tyler Hwy, Williamsburg, VA 23185. Note John Tyler Highway is Route 5 West. The park is on the right just before crossing the bridge over the Chickahominy River. You can find directions to the park on its website at:

https://www.jamescitycountyva.gov/Facilities/Facility/Details/Chickahominy-Riverfront-Park-2.

Bring visiting family, friends, and children. Come early, stay late, or just drop by. Remember, every bird is a year bird on New Year's Day! I look forward to welcoming you to celebrate the start of 2025.

eBIRD DATA: MAKING A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

By Donna Benson

I always find it rewarding to come across articles discussing current avian research. A recent piece in the *New York Times*, titled "What Flying in a Wind Tunnel Reveals about Birds," piqued my interest. It explores the extensive migrations undertaken by numerous bird species and highlights how fundamental aspects of these migrations—such as altitude, climate, and diet, and their broader impacts—remain a mystery to scientists. A biologist from the Advanced Facility for Avian Research at the University of Western Ontario has developed a specialized wind tunnel for birds, aiming to unravel some of these intriguing mysteries.

One of the species under investigation is the Western Sandpiper, renowned for its remarkable migratory patterns. This bird breeds in Alaska and Siberia, then travels thousands of miles to winter as far south as coastal Peru. During its migration, the Western Sandpiper relies on vital stopover sites along the Pacific Coast of the United States, particularly in bay and wetland habitats, which are dwindling at an alarming rate. Intrigued by their journey, I searched for information on Western Sandpiper migration and found an insightful article in *The Atlantic*, titled "The Farmers Subletting Their Fields to Birds." The piece highlights how factors such as agriculture, development, and drought have contributed to a staggering decline of over 30% in shorebird populations.

Here's where the narrative takes an encouraging turn. The Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership, a group (Continued on Page 7)

eBIRD DATA, Continued from Page 6

of dedicated conservation organizations, has joined forces with The Nature Conservancy to launch BirdReturns. This inspiring program offers farmers, especially those growing rice, financial support to flood their fields during the off-season, transforming them into "pop-up" habitats for migrating birds. Remarkably, BirdReturns has managed to create 120,000 acres of temporary wetlands in the San Joaquin delta area. What I find most uplifting is that BirdReturns leverages data from eBird to identify potential new areas. It's heartening to realize that the

contributions we make as citizen scientists are leading to positive environmental changes. Check out the following links for further reading:

- https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/11/science/bi
 rds-migration-wind-tunnel.html
- Advanced Facility for Avian Research https://birds.uwo.ca.
- https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/20 24/10/western-sandpiper-migration-habitat-popup/680311/
- Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership https://camigratorybirds.org.

"HOW SCIENTISTS STARTED TO DECODE BIRDSONG"

By Shirley Devan

In an extensive October 21, 2024, piece in the *The New Yorker*, author Rivka Galchen describes a wealth of birdsong studies underway around the world.

Fun fact from the article: The oldest known audio of birdsong is from 1889 when an eight-year-old boy in Frankfurt, Germany recorded the slippery sweet song of his pet White-rumped Shama (a smallish songbird with a dark head and orange body) on his birthday present from his father: an Edison phonograph with wax cylinders.

The author describes in depth the collaboration and the work that eventually led to the development of the Merlin app at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The Merlin app, released in 2021 and that many of us have on our smart phones, is a natural 21st century technological result of the Cornell Lab's Macaulay Library, started in 1929 with recordings of a sparrow, a wren, and a grosbeak.

I encourage you to read the full article to grasp the depth and breadth of birdsong research around the world as well as the ingenious research techniques ornithologists are using to get to what birds are saying: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2024/10/21/ho w-scientists-started-to-decode-birdsong.

GIFTS FOR GIRLS WHO LIKE BIRDS

By Mary Ellen Hodges



If you will be searching for a gift for a young girl in the next several weeks, you might welcome some book recommendations from <u>A Mighty Girl</u>, an aggregator of books (and also toys, movies, and music) "that offer positive messages about girls and honor their diverse capabilities." In June of this year, *A Mighty Girl* posted

a brief biography of Florence Merriam Bailey (1863-1948) on its <u>Facebook page</u>. Bailey, a pioneering ornithologist, has been credited with authoring the first modern bird watching field guide, published in 1889 when she was 26 years old. Prior to that, while still a student at Smith College, she had written a series of

newspaper articles arguing against the then popular style of using bird feathers to decorate women's hats (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence_Merriam_Bailey). Young girls, ages 5-9, can read about Bailey's inspiring life in *She Heard the Birds*, written and beautifully illustrated by Andrea D'Aquino (https://www.amightygirl.com/she-heard-the-birds).

A Mighty Girl also recommends these additional books for girls who like birds: <u>Owl Moon</u>, written by Jane Yolen and illustrated by John Schoenherr, for ages 3 to 8; <u>Who Gives a Hoot?</u>, by Jacqueline Kelly, for ages 6 to 9; <u>Stand on the Sky</u>, by Erin Bow, for ages 9 to 12; and <u>Bird Log Kids</u> (a nature journal), by DeAnna Brandt, for ages 5 to 12.

RECENT SIGHTINGS

Rexanne Bruno visited the Eastville Community Health Center ponds on the Eastern Shore on September 13 to view and photograph a pair of **Black-bellied Whistling Ducks** with young (photo below), found earlier in the day by Andrew Rapp and Audrey Anderson. Rexanne has been told that this is the first evidence of this species breeding in Virginia.



Swainson's Thrush on the back deck on his house in Holly Hills in the late afternoon of October 17 (photo below). We hope the little bird recovered its strength.



The Kiptopeke hawkwatchers really know their stuff! On October 14 they identified a **Black-chinned Hummingbird** near the hawkwatch platform. **Nancy Barnhart** was able to capture a photo (below) of the 24-hour wonder. She says the Black-chinned Hummingbird is the western version of the Rubythroated Hummingbird and a rare visitor for us.



Nancy Barnhart traveled to Waynesboro on October 5 to see a young Kirtland's Warbler (photo below) which spent a day and a half at a small city park. Nancy noted that, according to eBird, "this species is one of the largest and rarest warblers, rarely seen in migration. We were lucky it was very accommodating as it was more interested in eating than in the happy birders watching it!"



Owls near their residences this year. Larry Hose reports a lot of Barred Owl activity in his backyard in the Denbigh area of Newport News lately and shared one of his photos (below). Check out the WBC's Facebook page for Larry's video of this owl calling: https://www.facebook.com/williamsburgbirdclub.





2025 Williamsburg Bird Club Membership Form

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Patron	\$35				
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Williamsburg Bird Club P.O. Box 1085

Williamsburg, VA 23187

Your membership dues and additional contributions are important to the mission of the Williamsburg Bird Club. Thank you!

If you have questions about your membership, contact Membership Chair Jeanette Navia, jnavia@gmail.com

The Williamsburg Bird Club is exempt from federal income tax under 26 U.S.C. Section 501(c)(3) and is a non-profit organization eligible to receive tax deductible donations. A financial statement is available on request from the VA Office of Charitable and Regulatory Programs.



Williamsburg Bird Club PO Box 1085 Williamsburg, VA 23187

ANNUAL DONATIONS FROM OUR LOCALLY-OWNED BIRD STORES

The Williamsburg Bird Club wishes to express our gratitude to our locally-owned Bird Stores, Wild Birds Unlimited and Backyard Birder Seed & Supply, for their generous donations each year to the Club. Their contributions help sustain WBC's annual commitment to provide funds for the Ornithology Research Grants given annually to graduate students at the College of William and Mary as well as support other Club projects and activities.

PLEASE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT OUR LOCALLY-OWNED BIRD STORES & FELLOW WBC MEMBERS





Backyard Birder 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/