



# The Flyer

## Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 49 No. 1

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

January 2025



### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

Happy New Year, Birding Friends! January starts cold and clear, a fresh beginning to a year full of possibilities, hope, good friends, and, of course, birds! 2025 will bring us together for

great presentations, bird walks, and field trips and informative reading with Mary Ellen's beautiful newsletters. Look for more details in this issue. Thank you to our hard-working Board, all of whom agreed to serve another year. Please take a look at the list of Board members in this newsletter to see the behind-the-scenes folks who keep us running smoothly.

Every month has its pros and cons (except maybe the perfect month of May!). While winter can often be colder than we prefer, it offers us some great birding opportunities. Let's embrace winter birding and hope to see some of the species with which we get only a short time.

At York River State Park, we can see species like Common Goldeneyes, a particularly handsome diving duck that stands out from the large rafts of Ruddy Ducks, Buffleheads, and Canvasbacks, all old friends and welcome returnees. For great looks at many of the dabblers we head to Dutch Gap, our January field trip destination. Closer to home we find some of these dabbling ducks—Gadwall, Ring-necked, and American Wigeon, among others—at Greensprings Interpretive Trail, Little Creek Reservoir, and other protected bodies of water. Any chance to see what's on the Chesapeake Bay is always a highlight. Grandview Nature Preserve is on the top of my list as the closest to home.

In addition to the wide array of winter waterfowl, I look forward to watching the incredible mixed flocks of blackbirds, starlings, and even cowbirds that at times darken the skies as they gather in the tens of thousands. Chippokes State Park is a favorite destination (Continued on Page 2)

### UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

**January 15, 6:00 p.m. for light refreshments followed by the presentation at 6:30 p.m.: John Swaddle, "Sparrows as Sentinels." Meeting will be in-person at the Quarterpath Recreation Center and via Zoom.**

Please join us on 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 William & Mary Institute for Integrative Conservation, on "Sparrows as Sentinels: Health study illustrates the interconnectedness of humans and wildlife."

**Save the Date:** February 19. Bill Williams will talk about the recently published *Birds of Virginia's Colonial Historic Triangle, an Annotated Checklist (Second Edition)*. 🐦

### WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome our new members: Hope Cook (student), Kris and Barbara Shekitka (returning members), Ann Harper and family, Sharon Foley and family, and Lynn Ellis!



**Out with 2024! In with 2025!**

**To renew your WBC 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. 🐦

**WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB**  
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*Flocking blackbirds photographed by Nancy Barnhart on November 10, 2024 in Surry County.*

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

to look for this incredible phenomenon. And, of course, feeder-watching is a wonderful way to bird in the coldest months.

Observing birds in winter is an opportunity to see their hardy, resilient nature. Despite the changes to their world, many of them manmade, birds do their best to persevere. They need our help. The young minds that Williamsburg Bird Club supports with our Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Ornithological Research Grants and scholarships to Nature Camp represent the future. This is perhaps our most important work: supporting these young people who will lead the work of conservation and cooperation heading into the future. It's thanks to all of you, our wonderful club members, for providing the funding through your dues and contributions to keep this important work alive. As we start 2025, I want to thank you all for the support you give to WBC, the camaraderie, the joy, the awe and wonder, and our mutual love of birds. 🐦



*Long-billed Curlew, photographed by Nancy Barnhart on December 20 at Box Tree Marsh in Northampton County in a high tide roost. All About Birds identifies the species as the largest North American shorebird. It breeds in the grasslands of the Great Plains and Great Basin, wintering primarily in California and Mexico, but has been seen occasionally in Virginia in small numbers during the non-breeding months, primarily on the Eastern Shore.*

## BIRD WALKS: Next Walk on Jan. 25

By Scott Hemler and Nancy Barnhart

We had nine people come out on a chilly morning for our November 23, 2024 bird walk at New Quarter Park, led by Scott Hemler. It was a fairly quiet morning as we saw 20 species of birds. Maybe the chilly weather kept the birds out of sight in the trees! We did see a large number of Black and Turkey vultures flying around overhead down at the dock along Queens Creek. There was also a large murder of Crows in the trees across the creek. They were making quite a ruckus over there! We spotted a Hermit Thrush and several White-throated Sparrows, which were the only winter resident birds we found. Despite the fairly low bird count, everyone enjoyed the beautiful fall morning and seeing the birds we encountered!

Nancy Barnhart led the 14 folks who came to New Quarter Park on December 28 for our last bird walk of 2024. It was a quiet morning. We had 38 species. The highlight of the walk was watching a Northern Harrier work the marsh for an extended period.

Our next “4<sup>th</sup> Saturday” bird walk will be held on January 25 at New Quarter Park. Meet the group in the parking lot by the park office at 8:00 a.m. Bring binoculars if you have them, or borrow some from the office. The walk is free, open to the public, and kids are welcome. 🐦



Some of the group on the November 23 bird walk. Photo by Scott Hemler.



Scene from the December 28 bird walk. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

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## FIELD TRIP REPORT:

### Next trip is to Dutch Gap on Jan. 18

By George Martin

#### Saturday, November 16, 2024 – Grandview Nature Preserve

Ten intrepid birders braved the ominous weather forecast for the field trip to Grandview Nature Preserve in Hampton on Saturday, November 16. When they arrived, they found conditions to be not that bad! Nancy Barnhart led the group through the marsh and along the beach, identifying 56 species over the course of the morning. A wide variety of birds were present, as the group identified six raptor species, five gull species, four shorebird species, three scoter species, and two loon species—but no partridge in a pear tree. You can view the eBird checklist for the outing at this link: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S202681723>.

(Continued on Page 4)



Field Trip participants at Grandview Nature Preserve, November 16. From left: Joyce Lowry, Babs Giffin, Ginny Wycoff, Hugh Beard, Marc Thibault, Bruce Glendening, Dennis Hickey, Deborah Humphries, Bringier McConnell, Nancy Barnhart (photographer).

**Saturday, January 18, 2025 – Dutch Gap**

On Saturday, January 18, we'll visit Dutch Gap outside of Richmond. We'll meet in the parking lot of Henricus Historical Park at 9:00 a.m. Rose Ryan will lead us along the impoundment where we usually see large numbers of wintering waterfowl. Checklists from mid-December have recorded eleven species of ducks, plus coots. But it's more than just the ducks—they attract raptors as well, and the brushy area along the impoundment provides good habitat for sparrows, wrens, kinglets, and other passerines. The address for the park is 251 Henricus Park Road, Chester, VA 23836. I won't be arranging carpools for this trip.

**Saturday, February 15, 2025 – Colonial Parkway / Yorktown**

Mark your calendars for our club's February field trip to sites along the Colonial Parkway, the Yorktown Battlefield, and the Yorktown Beach. Rexanne Bruno will lead us at the several stops. Due to construction on the Parkway, the logistics will be more complicated than in previous years. We'll have to enter the Parkway near Yorktown, bird the sites along the Parkway from the east to Felgates Creek, then turn around and return to Yorktown to the Battlefield and Beach. Those who get hungry can meet for lunch at the Yorktown Diner after birding. I'll provide more details as we get closer to the date for the field trip. 🐦

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**THE HARPY EAGLES OF BELIZE**

Summary by Cathy Millar

Our November 20, 2024 program, "Belize: Small Country, Big Birding," was presented by James Abbott, senior environmental educator at the James River Association's Lower James River Center. His presentation focused on the comeback of the Harpy Eagle and referred to his experiences leading expeditions of undergraduates to study the food webs of the upper Bladen River in the Bladen Nature Preserve (BNR) in Belize on the Yucatan Peninsula. The preserve is the crown jewel of the Maya Mountain Massif, which includes 16 protected areas covering almost 2 million acres of roadless continuous tropical forest. The Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education (BFREE) was founded in 1995 with the primary purpose of implementing a conservation program for the BNR. To achieve this goal, BFREE leased a 1,153-acre, privately-protected area and established a biological field station strategically located in the foothills of the Maya. The area is an incredible hotspot for biodiversity where tapirs, howler monkeys, jaguars, and Harpy Eagles are often spotted, and it is the last stronghold for many endangered species.

The field station provides housing and logistical support for researchers and conservation workers. The only access is via a 6-mile, unpaved road and requires a research permit issued by Belize. In 2007/2008, as an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, James had done the data processing for the first Harpy Eagle found in Belize, which had previously been considered too far north for the species. As a graduate student, he led field trips to collect more data about the critically-endangered Harpy Eagle, the second-largest eagle in the world by weight, with a wingspan of up to 79 inches. The bird has massive

talons that can measure 3-5 inches, a size comparable to the claws of a grizzly bear! Harpy pairs reproduce every 2-3 years and lay 1-2 eggs in a nest described as being much bigger than that of a Bald Eagle. Like our Bald Eagles, they nest in the crown of the tallest tree near the edge of an open area.

A major focus of the group's research was on the unique ecosystem in Belize for Harpy Eagles. In Southern Central and South America, where Harpy Eagles are usually found, 90% of their diet is sloths. Sloths move so slowly that algae grows on their fur, which helps them blend into the rainforest canopy. A Harpy Eagle hunts by perching on a branch high in the canopy for hours at a time using its fine-tuned hearing to identify its prey. Once it spots its unlucky target, the eagle dives from the branch to snare its meal with its talons. But there are no sloths in Belize. James's research group sought to determine whether the Harpy Eagle's hunting strategy in Belize was a complete break from its traditional strategy of hunting passive, predator-avoidance prey (sloths) or whether they had modified their strategy to hunt active prey like monkeys. Harpy Eagles don't soar like most raptors but sit silently on a branch, making them very hard for researchers to find to study. James found that the food web was driven by the limestone-rich geology in the area that supports a huge diversity of land snails that consequently support a rich food web including monkeys, peccaries, and coatimundis. The eagle's preferred prey were the coatimundis, grabbing them while they were still hanging around their tree-top nests before they left for the forest floor. The research team's findings proved this unique food web allows the 15-20 Harpy Eagles in Belize to survive that far north. To view James's lively account of his adventures, go to: <https://youtu.be/2sGDSM5uaco>. 🐦

## NEW YEAR'S DAY BIRD AND BIRDER SHOW

By Shirley Devan

Thirty-nine people gathered at Chickahominy Riverfront Park on January 1 to celebrate the start of 2025. Warm sunshine — and breezes — welcomed birding enthusiasts for the traditional “New Year’s Day Bird and Birder Show.” Alice Kopinitz and Cathy Flanagan surprised us with sweet treats, and Nancy Barnhart led 30 of the attendees on a bird walk around the park where they discovered a rare winter visitor—a Northern Parula—a wonderful bird to grace anyone’s New Year’s Day! Bald Eagles, vultures, and a Red-tailed Hawk circled above us in the clear blue skies. All in all, it was a warm, cheery, and birdy afternoon to start 2025! 🐦



*New Year’s Day Bird and Birder Show gathering at Chickahominy Riverfront Park. Clockwise from upper right: group photo taken by Judy Kinshaw-Ellis; Northern Parula, photo by Deborah Humphries; young Bald Eagle, photo by D. Humphries; Red-tailed Hawk and Turkey and Black vultures, photo by D. Humphries; Golden-crowned Kinglet, photo by D. Humphries.*

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## BIRD SAFE HAMPTON ROADS

By Patricia Scanlon and Rogard Ross, Cape Henry Audubon Society, Norfolk

Editor’s Note: At its April 15, 2024 meeting, the WBC Executive Board unanimously agreed to support Bird Safe Hampton Roads, a partnership with multiple other organizations, led by the Cape Henry Audubon Society, to make Hampton Roads safer for the birds that live in our area or pass through during the annual spring and fall migrations. Thanks are extended to the authors for readily agreeing to write this article about this important program.

Hampton Roads lies directly along the Atlantic Flyway, and the Chesapeake Bay is a major stopover point for tens of millions of birds during their migration. Many millions more birds call our region home throughout the year. However, our urban and suburban environments present birds with many dangers. Across North America, estimates are that 1 billion birds die every year colliding with high-rise and low-rise buildings, single family homes, power lines, wind

turbines, and cell towers. This staggering number is eclipsed only by the estimated 2.4 billion birds killed by cats every year.

Hampton Roads, like all urban areas, is also saturated with artificial light at night which has a devastating impact on birds. Up to 80% of Neotropical birds migrate at night when conditions are more favorable with (Continued on Page 6)

## BIRD SAFE / LIGHTS OUT, Continued from Page 5

calmer winds and cooler temperatures and predators are few. The night sky also provides a celestial map that birds are genetically programmed to follow. For reasons not fully understood, birds are attracted to bright light at night. Flocks are disoriented and drawn off course into the cityscape where they are exposed to deadly hazards. They may crash into buildings or exhaust themselves flying around the lights. As the sun rises, birds see the reflections of trees on huge storefront windows or think they can fly through an atrium and crash into the glass, breaking their necks or causing other severe injuries. There is a strong correlation between the streets that have trees and a greater number of bird strikes.



*Some of the over 300 birds, killed in building strikes, that the Cape Henry Audubon Society has collected from the streets of downtown Norfolk since initiating a monitoring program in February 2024.*

In an effort to reduce these types of threats to birds, the Cape Henry Audubon Society (CHAS) initiated a Lights Out program in Norfolk. Similar programs have been implemented by many localities across the U.S. Our goal is to have the City of Norfolk and the facility managers who control the lights in high-rise and low-rise buildings in the city cooperate voluntarily in turning off or dimming their lights from the close of business to sunrise during spring and fall migration. A second goal is to identify high-risk buildings with the highest mortality rates due to birds crashing into windows. Both of these issues are critical to the success of a Lights Out program.

Another approach we have taken in Norfolk is to reach out to as many architects as possible that have building designs in the works for new construction or major renovations. The City's Architectural Review Board (ARB) must approve a design before a project may move forward. As these ARB meetings are public, we attend and take the opportunity to comment on the

design and ask for bird-safe building design and glass to be a consideration or condition for the City's approval. For example, a casino is presently in the planning stages for downtown Norfolk. We have been collecting bird mortality data in downtown and we have knowledge of the circumstances, building types, and locations where collisions have occurred in our city as well as others. Thus, our goal has been to convince the ARB that the design presented by the casino will have a very significant number of bird strikes year-round. Fortunately, many of the ARB members are knowledgeable of the issue and are sympathetic and appreciative of our efforts. It has yet to be seen if the casino will incorporate any bird-safe glass in the design, as the ARB has asked them to do, since the building code doesn't require it. Therein lies the next step in our initiative: revising the city code to require that all new construction and renovations of 50% or more of a building use bird-safe glass. This has been done successfully in other localities, New York City being the best example.

Paying attention to what is on the agendas for Norfolk's Planning Commission and City Council is paramount to the success of our efforts. By the time the public is informed, usually by an article in the paper, most projects already have been approved and are in the works. Since most buildings will remain on the landscape for 50 plus years, it's critical to be on the front end of the project where we can make a difference. In the long view, this is the most effective use of our time. If all new construction, or at least the largest projects, use bird-safe glass, the mortality rate will decrease or at least stabilize as the city grows.

For existing structures, we suggest retrofitting or modifying the windows and advocate for "DarkSky Approved" lights. Practical solutions are available that can reduce the unacceptably high number of bird deaths in Norfolk and elsewhere. Our recommendations to building managers are to turn off lights, close blinds to trap lights that are left on, and use motion-activated lights and dimmers. Decorative lights outside, especially those facing skyward, should be turned off.

While the hazards of tall buildings and urban lighting can pose a severe risk to migrating birds, over 250 million birds die every year around residential homes, including one-story structures, due to window strikes. Solutions to make windows safer and reduce bird strikes depend on the size of the building and number of windows identified as strike zones. Large scale solutions include installing Acopian BirdSavers made from parachute cord, or striped films such as those by Solyx® and Solar Gard. (Continued on Page 7)

## BIRD SAFE / LIGHTS OUT, Continued from Page 6

For storefronts and residential buildings, dot pattern decals are best. They are easy to apply and relatively inexpensive. Feather Friendly makes an adhesive dot pattern. CollidEscape tapes can be cut and applied in your own custom pattern. Another good solution is to draw images on windows with white or colored removable paint. Schools, theaters, bakeries, or bars—all can paint images on their windows that depict what they sell or do. If the pattern is sufficiently dense, it will create enough contrast to be seen by birds. All of these products need to be applied on the outside of the window to be effective in reducing the reflected vegetation or sky. The use of bug screens on windows is also effective for homeowners.

We also encourage architects to choose bird-friendly glass when designing a new build or renovation or to incorporate design elements that will deter birds. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) credits are available for bird-safe buildings. Bird-safe glass is made by glass companies worldwide. Patterns are acid-etched, printed, frosted to be opaque, or the glass is treated with chemicals that create an ultraviolet pattern that some birds can see although only when exposed to full sun. While there is a growing trend in the industry to build bird-safe, all-glass buildings are in vogue and advocating for bird-safe buildings is critical for the survival of our birds. For more information, please see the Bird Safe Hampton Roads website at <http://www.birdsafehr.org>. 🐦



Images from the Christmas Bird Count, December 22, 2024.

Clockwise from upper right: The Jolly Pond sector team at Cranston Mill Pond (7:30 a.m., 25° F), photographed by Shirley Devan (from left: Alex Minarik, Lee Schuster, Donna Benson, Deborah Humphries, Barbara Creel, Hope Cook.); Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird, photo by Nancy Barnhart; Fox Sparrow, photo by Barbara Creel; Cheatham sector team at New Quarter Park, photographed by Nancy Barnhart (from left: Babs Giffin, Jan Lockwood, Rowan Lockwood [behind], Laura Bowles [visiting her parents], Portia Belden, Sue Mutell, Gail Peterson, hidden behind everyone is Joyce Lowry); Northern Cardinal, photo by Cathy Flanagan; Savannah Sparrow, photo by Barbara Creel.

## 2024 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Shirley Devan

Our Christmas Bird Count this year, held on Sunday, December 22, 2024, was a cold one with temperatures in the mid-20s as the sun came up, rising to highs only in the mid-30s in the afternoon. Still, 132 people participated in the WBC's 48<sup>th</sup> count: 76 watchers braving the cold in the field and 56 feeder watchers. I am still reviewing the tallies for the day before submitting final results to the National Audubon Society, but below are some preliminary results of interest.

Species Count: 114 (2023 count was 125)

Individual Birds Counted: 32,579 (2023 count was 29,519)

Notable Species: Hummingbird sp., Peregrine Falcon (2), Greater White-fronted Goose, and Night Heron sp. The hummingbird is currently listed as Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird. It is planned that once the weather warms the hummingbird will be banded and its species confirmed.

New High Counts:

- Hooded Merganser: 610 (471 in 2017)
- Bald Eagle: 122 (107 in 2017)
- Red-shouldered Hawk: 49 (37 in 2022)
- Downy Woodpecker: 154 (141 in 2022)
- Hairy Woodpecker: 30 (25 in 2020, 2010)
- Eastern Phoebe: 36 (24 in 2012)
- Tufted Titmouse: 493 (425 in 2013)
- Hermit Thrush: 86 (62 in 2014)
- Baltimore Oriole: 23 (15 in 1980) 🐦

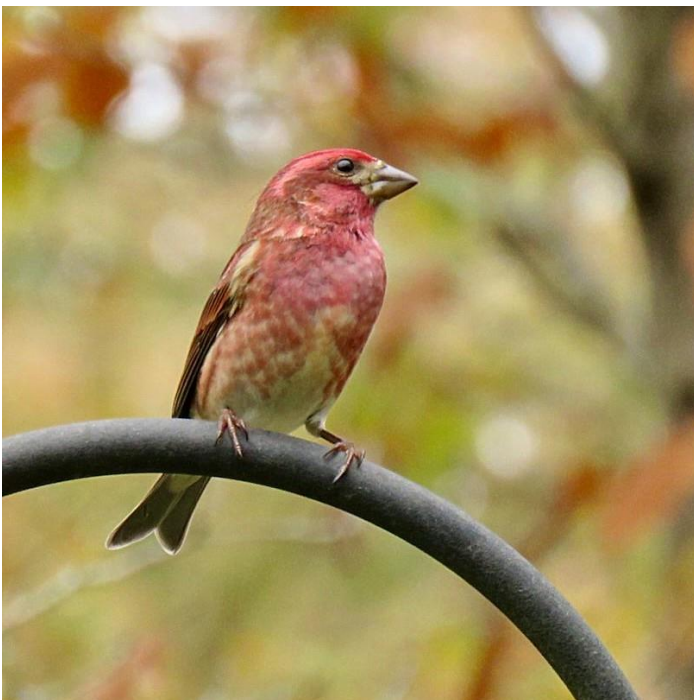
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## RECENT SIGHTINGS

**Bringier McConnell** shared this description of his experience on the Maine Audubon Society's annual pelagic trip out of Bar Harbor in mid-September 2024: "It was a remarkably warm and calm day and we ended up going out 60 miles, and into Canadian waters before the day was over. Highlights were seeing all three of the **jaegers (Pomarine, Parasitic and Long-Tailed)**—all new to me—and the crowd favorite, the **South Polar Skua**. Our boat was a whale-watching catamaran with enough speed that we could cruise alongside the skua for half a mile. But the grand finale was spectacular, and my personal favorite of sightings

for the day. We paused over a seamount where fish were concentrated and found ourselves surrounded by humpback, pilot, and minke whales all feasting on what was in the water. Meanwhile, scores of **Northern Gannets** were knifing into the water from great heights, and in the mix was a **Greater Shearwater**, my first shearwater ever."

**Shirley Devan** captured the great photos below of two **Purple Finches** (male on the left, female on the right) at her backyard feeders on November 20. 🐦







# 2025 Williamsburg Bird Club Membership Form

Name		
Address		
City	State	Zip
Email	Phone	

Your email will be used for WBC's email mailing list. You will receive announcements of upcoming bird walks, field trips, meetings, other events, and the full color email edition of the newsletter through this mailing list.

May-September please pay half price

**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/>