



# The Flyer

## Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 49 No. 3

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

March 2025



### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

March greetings, friends!

Finally, we enter the month that brings spring and some of our earliest migrants. February was a challenge but didn't stop the

WBC from having a successful field trip along the Colonial Parkway. Thank you to Rexanne Bruno for leading a nice group on a chilly day. Nine hearty, well-bundled folks participated in our monthly New Quarter Park bird walk on the fourth Saturday, so activities continued despite the "arctic blast"! Please read more about these activities in this newsletter.

Our February monthly meeting featuring Bill Williams was a huge success despite a weather-related postponement. Bill gave us a wonderful history of the birding community of the Historic Triangle and the status of many birds past and present. He ended on a fun note with photos of some of the birds we might expect to see in the future in our area. Personally, I'm hoping for a Vermilion Flycatcher and a Varied Thrush! Thank you, Bill, for a wonderful presentation!

One of my favorite aspects of March is the opportunity to watch our Eastern Bluebirds begin courting and nest box selection. The Historic Triangle has many "bluebird trails" providing nesting opportunities for a great number of these blue beauties. My friend Linda Partee, sister of Jennifer Trevino, is a brilliant, published, and award-winning poet who has kindly allowed me to share one of her gems to get us, the "noisy fan club", ready for the bluebird season.

Please enjoy Linda's poem, "The Comeback Kid", located on the following page! 

### UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

**March 19, 6:00 p.m. for light refreshments followed by the presentation at 6:30 p.m.: Andrew Rapp, "Seabirds of Virginia". Meeting will be in-person at the Quarterpath Recreation Center and via Zoom.**

Andrew Rapp, a lifelong birder, was one of the founding members of the Blue Ridge Young Birders Club in Charlottesville. He later graduated from W&M with a double major in Biology and Environmental Science. He has worked for Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory as a hawkcounter and migratory entomologist and currently is a field zoologist with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Natural Heritage Program. Join us on March 19 for Andrew's presentation as we head offshore and dive into the seabirds of Virginia. He will discuss the seabird scene as well as open the door to the complicated world that is seabird habitat. Andrew will introduce us to seabird identification and the challenges that come with it. He will also address how the wonders of offshore life are connected with Williamsburg. Andrew hopes that after this presentation you will be interested in and prepared to join a Virginia pelagic trip!

**Save the Date:** April 16, W&M students awarded a WBC Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Ornithology Research Grant give presentations on their research projects. 



*A Scopoli's Shearwater photographed by Andrew Rapp.*

**WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB**  
**Executive Board 2024**

**President** 540-454-3014  
Nancy Barnhart [barnhartnt@gmail.com](mailto:barnhartnt@gmail.com)

**Vice-President, Programs** 703-304-7885  
Patty Maloney [maloney3013@aol.com](mailto:maloney3013@aol.com)

**Vice-President, Newsletter Editor** 757-220-0566  
Mary Ellen Hodges [men.hodges@gmail.com](mailto:men.hodges@gmail.com)

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**Secretary** 757-229-1775  
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**Member-at-Large** 703-674-9513  
Deborah Humphries [djhinva@gmail.com](mailto:djhinva@gmail.com)

**Past President** 303-519-0989  
Cheryl J. Jacobson [icheryljoy@aol.com](mailto:icheryljoy@aol.com)

**Committee Chairpersons 2024**

**Membership/Webmaster** 757-707-3345  
Jeanette Navia [jnavia@gmail.com](mailto:jnavia@gmail.com)

**Field Trips** 571-535-7444  
George Martin [grm0803@gmail.com](mailto:grm0803@gmail.com)

**Bird Counts/Liaison to VSO** 757-813-1322  
Shirley Devan [shirley\\_devan@icloud.com](mailto:shirley_devan@icloud.com)

**Bird Walks** 757-243-6759  
Scott Hemler [sahemler@yahoo.com](mailto:sahemler@yahoo.com)

**Library Liaison/Refreshments** 757-879-1997  
Catherine Flanagan [flanagan.catherine@gmail.com](mailto:flanagan.catherine@gmail.com)

**Historian** 703-304-7885  
Patty Maloney [maloney3013@aol.com](mailto:maloney3013@aol.com)

**Records/Liaison to CVWO** 540-454-3014  
Nancy Barnhart [barnhartnt@gmail.com](mailto:barnhartnt@gmail.com)

**Conservation Committee** 303-519-0989  
Cheryl J. Jacobson [icheryljoy@aol.com](mailto:icheryljoy@aol.com)

**Nature Camp Scholarships** 757-565-6148  
Lee Schuster [dlijshuster@cox.net](mailto:dlijshuster@cox.net)

**Liaison to CDR/Assistant Editor** 757-221-6683  
Gary Carpenter [carpent66@cox.net](mailto:carpent66@cox.net)

**The Comeback Kid**

We almost lost the cliff-hanger, little feathered friend,  
As we destroyed your timbered neighborhoods  
And poisoned the sources of your buffet.  
On a wing and a prayer we've made amends for your re-  
turn.

Home-making thousands of boxes perched on single stilts,  
With peekaboo portals for housekeeping chores,  
And reducing toxins so life's circle could keep spinning,  
We caught ourselves turning green.

Your comeback promise is music to our ears.  
"Chur-lee chur chur-lee", wearing your heart on your wing,  
We cheer the swoop of our hero's hooded blue cape  
Worn over rust vest—invisible "S" on your chest.

Have you come-a-courtin' Mr. Bluebird, have ya?  
To build a grassy cup, a soft and tidy nest?  
And to promise you'll bring home the bacon  
To a sweet bit of fluff who winks when you whistle?

You woo the azure jewels from her, little Romeo.  
She leaves her fragile baubles in your wedding bed  
While your benefactors watch this annual ritual,  
Pacing anxiously about to catch a clandestine peek.

We can't help but wonder how many gems in the cup;  
Is your lady friend sitting on her precious blue pearls?  
Have your bashful nestlings come out of their shells yet,  
And who's stark naked and who's that ruffling feathers?

So much your nosey fan club wants to know,  
How prolific and safe they want your comeback to be.  
In a fortnight, your fledglings take flight to rein-in spring  
Like a beach plane trailing a "Coppertone" sign.

Once more in summer, your instinctive urge will rise,  
So wet your whistle and strut your stuff, Mr. Bluebird,  
Pearl-toting ladies know you're a-flirtin' with your chirpin'  
There's more than one way to be the comeback kid.

— Linda Partee  
April 2011

## BIRD WALKS: Next Walk is on March 22

By Nancy Barnhart

Nine intrepid birders braved an outdoor temperature of 23° F on the morning of February 22 to take part in the WBC monthly bird walk at New Quarter Park. It was cold and clear but warmed up while we were out there. Due to snow and ice, we weren't able to get to the floating dock, but we still came up with 29 species. Fun morning!

Our next "4<sup>th</sup> Saturday" bird walk will be held on March 22 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 and open to the public, and kids are welcome. 🐦



*The cheerful group on the February 22 bird walk at New Quarter Park. When was the last time we had snow on the ground for two consecutive 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday bird walks in Williamsburg? Photo by Nancy Barnhart.*

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## WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome new members Terri Cane, Petra Walian, Katie Forrest, and Tyler Davis!

The purpose of the Williamsburg Bird Club is to promote interest in the study of wild birds and in the protection of birds and their habitats. To join our club or **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. 🐦



*Field Sparrow photographed by Virginia Wycoff while on the February 15 field trip along the Colonial Parkway.*

## FIELD TRIP REPORT:

### Next trip is to Machicomoco State Park, March 15

By George Martin

#### Saturday, February 15 – Colonial Parkway / Yorktown

We beat the rain again! On Saturday, February 15, thirteen birders led by Rexanne Bruno spent the morning enjoying the birds visible along the Colonial Parkway from Felgates Creek to Yorktown. The huge raft of Lesser Scaup and Redhead visible from Redoubts 9 and 10 was a highlight of the trip, along with the 18 Bald Eagles seen at several spots. Common Loons were plentiful near the Yorktown Beach, as well as a few Horned Grebes, Surf Scoters, and one Black Scoter. The group didn't ignore the passerines, with Field Sparrows at Indian Fields (see photo on previous page) and Cedar Waxwings at the Yorktown Battlefield. Here's the link to the eBird trip report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/331703>.

#### Saturday, March 15 – Machicomoco State Park

On Saturday, March 15, we'll visit Machicomoco State Park in Gloucester County for a morning of birding.

Deborah Humphries will lead us through the different habitats at the park, with viewing spots along the York River as well as fields and forests. On previous trips we've seen Eastern Meadowlark, Palm Warbler, and many Field Sparrows, and we've had opportunities to see waterfowl and early Ospreys.

We'll meet at the parking lot just past the entrance at 8:00 a.m. The address for the park is 3601 Timberneck Farm Rd, Hayes, VA 23072. If you'd like to carpool, or you are willing to drive others, please let me know at [grm0803@gmail.com](mailto:grm0803@gmail.com). Carpoolers should meet at the Colony Square Shopping Center a little after 7:00 a.m. for departure by 7:15 a.m. If you have a state park pass, bring that. The entrance fee for those without passes is \$5 per vehicle.

#### Saturday, April 19 – Pleasure House Point

Mark your calendars for the club's April field trip to Pleasure House Point in Virginia Beach. More information to come as we approach the date. 🐦



*Birding along the York River length of the Colonial Parkway on the February 15 field trip. From left: Bill Weldon, Sue Mutell, Portia Belden, Dean Shostak, Babs Giffin, George Martin, Ginny Wycoff, Rexanne Bruno, Larry Hose, Lisa Nickel, Ginny Broome, Liz George, Shirley Devan. Photo by Art Wycoff.*

## THE BIRDS OF VIRGINIA'S COLONIAL HISTORIC TRIANGLE – THEN AND NOW

Summary by Cathy Millar

Very few people have a deeper understanding of the birds in our area than Bill Williams, who has been birding for more than 70 years. As a local boy, he attended James Blair High School and earned a master's degree in biology at W&M. Bill was a founder of our Williamsburg Bird Club and Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. He retired from teaching in the James City County schools in 2002 and is currently vice president of the Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO) after having been president twice.

Bill began his presentation at our meeting on February 26 (rescheduled from the 19<sup>th</sup> due to snow) by acknowledging the people who helped bring his recently published, second edition of *The Birds of Virginia's Colonial Historic Triangle* to fruition: Jeanette Navia and Gary Carpenter for carefully editing the text; Jim Corliss for coordinating, compiling, and maintaining the database from our club's winter and spring bird counts; Deborah Humphries for the beautiful cover design and Judy Jones for the cover photo of our club's mascot, the Red-headed Woodpecker; Judy and Patty Maloney for sorting through many photos to select the best for the book; and Nancy Barnhart for her input and maintaining the Colonial Historic Triangle's bird records since 2020 after Bill Williams relinquished the job he'd performed since 2000. Bill voiced his gratitude to the WBC membership for their observations and support of the club.

The Colonial Historic Triangle includes Williamsburg, James City County, York County, and Hog Island Wildlife Management Area. The habitat diversity and the three watersheds of the James, York, and Chickahominy rivers support great avian diversity. As of 2024, out of 472 avian species documented in Virginia, 363 species had been confirmed in the Triangle. Two species that were a first-ever in Virginia observation were just slightly outside the Triangle boundaries and have been included. One was the spectacular, North American rarity, the Fork-tailed Flycatcher, seen in 1988 just across the river on a farm in Charles City County. The flycatcher spent almost the whole summer there attracting birders from all over the country, whereas the second rarity didn't linger and still is the only one ever recorded in Virginia: a Shiny Cowbird, seen on the south side of the James River near Hog Island.

Bill explained how the minute an annotated checklist book is published, new sightings quickly make it outdated. In the time since his book was published in

September 2024, Lapland Longspur and Tennessee Warbler have been added to the checklist. Even scientific names have been changed since last September. Until very recently, the Cooper's Hawk was classified in the genus *Accipiter*, like the Sharp-shinned Hawk, but is now in the genus *Astur*.

Bill described the various sources used for compiling the annotated list, including the 1952 VSO publication, *A Checklist of the Birds of Virginia*, by Joseph James Murray. Murray established the criteria that a bird must be verified by at least two people in order to be added to the official record. Bill also searched through the VSO's journal, *The Raven*, first published in 1930, for evidence of species in the Historic Triangle. His search also covered a number of early historic accounts of our area, such as the one written by Captain John Smith. Bill also had conversations with Dr. Joanne Bowen, curator of zooarchaeology for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, who explained how 18<sup>th</sup>-century foodways systems, reflected in what has been found in trash heaps and outhouse pits, changed the early American landscape. Accurate descriptions of Carolina Parakeets at Jamestown were found and, no doubt, Passenger Pigeons once darkened our local skies. Bill told engaging stories about the valuable contributions to our local records by many people including Dr. Mitchell Byrd, Ruth Beck, Dr. Bryan Watts, Dr. Daniel Cristol, and Bill Sheehan.

Bill enthusiastically described many firsts in our area including Ruth Beck banding the only Bewick's and Swainson's warblers at the banding station on S. Henry St. and documenting a Red-cockaded Woodpecker in Yorktown! Tom Armour, a WWII pilot, documented a Magnificent Frigatebird circling over King-smill's marina, a Little Gull, the first Long-eared Owl, and a Western Kingbird.

On a sad note, Bill discussed several avian species no longer or almost no longer in our area: Northern Bobwhite, Ring-necked Pheasant, Common Golden-eye (used to be common on our rivers), Barn Owl (due to absence of barns; used to nest in duck blinds), Marsh Wren, Grasshopper Sparrow, Seaside Sparrow, Kentucky Warbler, Eastern Whip-poor-will, Chuck-will's-widow, Bewick's Warbler, Swainson's Warbler, and Evening Grosbeak. The latter had once been so numerous that they cleaned out birdfeeders like European Starlings.

(Continued on Page 6)

## COLONIAL HISTORIC TRIANGLE, Cont. from Page 5

Species that are increasing in our area are Brown Pelicans (breeding in Virginia since the late 1980's), American White Pelican (only place in the state where they are present year-round), Lesser Black-backed Gull, Heermann's Gull, Rufous and Allen's hummingbirds, House Finch (first observed in 1967), Western Tanager, White-faced Ibis, Brown Booby, and Common Raven (in Newport News Park just outside our boundary).

Species to be on the lookout for locally are Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Limpkin, Mottled Duck, Pacific Loon, Eared Grebe, Rivoli's and Mexican Violetear hummingbirds, Sandhill Crane, Roseate Spoonbill, Mississippi Kite (breeding as far north as the Arlington

area and in Hampton), Purple Sandpiper, and Crested Caracara. Species you may find at your feeder are Tropical and Couch's kingbirds, Say's Phoebe, Varied Thrush, Bullock's Oriole, Harris Sparrow, Lesser Goldfinch, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Painted Bunting.

Bill concluded by requesting that we keep the data coming via Christmas and Spring bird counts, the Great Backyard Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, iNaturalist, and eBird. Space in this newsletter doesn't allow for all of Bill's useful identifying tips and wonderful bird-related, animated stories. So, please watch the presentation on the WBC's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKQ6W8QTn3w>.



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## COLLEGE CREEK HAWKWATCH SEASON BEGINS

Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory began its 29<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of spring hawkwatching at the College Creek site on the Colonial Parkway on February 18. If you would like to visit, Hawkwatch hours are 9:45 a.m.-1:00 p.m., seven days a week through May 31, weather permitting. The hawkwatch station is located at the second interpretive pull-off on the Colonial Parkway southwest of the bridge over College Creek. Folks should be prepared for cooler temperatures off the river and strong sun the whole time. Sunscreen and a chair are very helpful. Binoculars are a must; a scope is helpful. Some days are incredibly busy; others are very slow.

Deborah Humphries described some of the action she photographed (see below) from the Hawkwatch site on February 25: "The American White Pelican's flew overhead to say hello. This is usually something we hope for, but it doesn't always happen. To have the pelicans come over on my first day out there was a great way to start the season. They did NOT give me a Bronx cheer (as Bill Williams mentioned in his presentation to our club on February 26), as I am from the Bronx, and they know an ally when they see one. Hah." 



*While at the College Creek Hawkwatch site on February 25, Deborah Humphries photographed these three American White Pelicans as they broke away from a large group over Hog island and flew across the James River and up College Creek. Another 17 flew toward Kingsmill an hour later.*

## **LIBRARY PROGRAM MARCH 30: EASTERN BLUEBIRDS AND HOW TO HOST THEM**

If you'd like to learn more about Eastern Bluebirds, please join Judy Jones, a WBC member and a Virginia Master Naturalist, on Sunday, March 30 at 3:00 p.m. in the Kitzinger Room of the James City County Library. Judy's presentation will cover the life cycle of the Eastern Bluebird, including nesting, eggs, chicks, fledglings, and life beyond the nest. Judy's talk will also cover ways to bring bluebirds to your yard, how to build a bluebird house, and how to protect bluebirds from predators. 🐦



*Eastern Bluebirds photographed by Judy Jones.*

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## **A SUCCESS STORY – OSPREY PLATFORMS AT FORT MONROE**

By Judy Jones

Last summer, in early June, Barbara Houston and I went to Fort Monroe with cameras in hand to photograph an Osprey pair and their chicks. It was a gorgeous summer day and the parents were very busily feeding their young in their nest as we watched.

Two weeks later we went back to the same nest and were so saddened to see that a heavy wind storm the week before had damaged the platform and tumbled the nest to the ground. Fortunately, when it happened, some visitors noticed the chicks were on the ground and still too young to survive and called in Julie Wobig of Tidewater Wildlife Rescue. The chicks were rescued and quickly sent to the Wildlife Center of Virginia in Waynesboro. Sadly, only one survived, but that young Osprey did well and was later released.

But the platform was still hanging by a thread . . . all summer long. And then into the fall. Something needed to be done and soon.

Now comes the best part of our story. It's November, and then December, with all the complications and excitement of the season. Time is rapidly passing. Suddenly, it's January. The Osprey will return in March and the platform isn't repaired. And several other platforms need replacement. So, our challenge was to find the funding, get permission from Fort Monroe, buy the materials, build five new platforms, and find someone with a bucket truck willing to install the new platforms—all in a timely manner. It was a formidable task.

The team consisted of Julie Wobig (wildlife rescuer and rehabber), Jean Troutman (another rehabber and

a builder by trade), Jim Leech (volunteer builder and Master Naturalist), Joshua Green (arborist), and me. Julie handled all the permissions and paperwork and coordinated the entire project. Jean gathered materials and, with Jim, built five new platforms. I helped by coordinating the donations from folks in the Williamsburg Bird Club, Colonial Nature Photography Club, and Historic Rivers Master Naturalists to fund the project (total cost of \$1350), and the wonderful and very generous Joshua drove his bucket truck down to Fort Monroe to install the new platforms.

With permission received from Fort Monroe to mount two new platforms and repair one (three new platforms remain in storage for later use), the installation was scheduled for Saturday, February 15. Heavy rain was predicted for that day, but it truly was the only time when the entire installation team was available. The decision was made to give it a try. And Mother Nature cooperated, holding off the rain until the task was done. Joshua and Jean went up in the bucket truck and replaced two platforms. It wasn't easy but they made it happen. And then they went to the third spot, the one with the dangling platform, and discovered that the bucket truck couldn't reach the top of the pole high on the ridge. So, Joshua, just such a dedicated and amazing volunteer, climbed the pole and set the platform to rights.

The weather's window was small, but the team made it work. That day's efforts were exhausting but Joshua, Jean, and Julie were determined to get it done. The project was costly, but your donations made it happen. (Continued on Page 8)

## FORT MONROE OSPREYS, Cont. from Page 7

So, this tale has a happy ending. Many, many thanks to all the folks who banded together to make it happen. When the Osprey return in March, please try to take a moment to drive down to Fort Monroe and see

for yourself the new platforms, the returning Osprey, and the success that can be generated when committed volunteers work together. 🦅



Osprey platforms at Fort Monroe. Left column, top to bottom: An active Osprey nest with parents and chicks in early June 2024 and how it looked two weeks later after it collapsed in a storm, dumping the nest and chicks to the ground (Photos by Judy Jones). Remaining photos: Joshua Green repairing the collapsed nest platform after climbing the pole and Joshua and Jean Troutman replacing another platform from a bucket truck (Photos by Julie Wobig).

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## RECENT SIGHTINGS



**Larry Hose** shared a photo (above left) from his residence in Denbigh on January 31: "This **American Robin** just showed up today. Spring must be coming soon!" **Dan Earnhardt** provided a photo (above right) of a **Yellow rumped Warbler**, eating mealworms in his lap! "With the cold weather and snow, my backyard birds have been especially hungry. So, I took the suet off of the tree, added some mealworms and set up my camera to see if I could entice anyone into landing in my lap to eat. The young warblers went for it!"



# 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/>