



# The Flyer

## Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 49 No. 4

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

April 2025



### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

April greetings! March lived up to its billing for unpredictable weather: sometimes challenging, sometimes glorious and spring-like. Our field trip to Machicomoco State Park was more

on the "challenging" side of the spectrum but we had a great outing anyway. Between members, out-of-town guests, and newcomers we had 25 folks who thoroughly enjoyed the park. Thanks to Deborah Humphries for leading and George Martin for arranging a fun morning.

We were lucky enough to get on Andrew Rapp's busy schedule and watch a wonderful presentation on seabirds, their habitat, their needs, and their identification at our monthly meeting. I'm ready to sign up for the next pelagic trip! Thank you, Andrew!

Thanks also to Scott Hemler for leading our monthly bird walk at New Quarter Park. Fifteen folks assembled on a cool but sunny spring morning and were lucky to hear an early Yellow-throated Warbler and watch our recently arrived Osprey and Laughing Gulls.

This is the beginning of "migration madness" as we start to see a changing of the guard between winter and breeding birds. We look forward to the brief glimpses we get of the neotropic migrants as they breeze through our area. It's always fun to watch our little Yellow-rumped Warblers that we've enjoyed all winter gradually get spiffy in their breeding plumage before they head north. Another pre-departure treat is hearing a Ruby-crowned Kinglet burst into song as it goes into breeding mode and readies to leave.

Some early returnees are already back, soon to be joined by early April arrivals. Be on the lookout for Louisiana Waterthrush, Black-and-white Warbler, (Continued on Page 2)

### UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

**April 16, 6:00 p.m. for light refreshments followed by the presentation at 6:30 p.m.: Research updates by W&M students awarded a WBC Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Ornithology Research Grant. Meeting will be in-person at the Quarterpath Recreation Center and via Zoom.**

Join us as the following W&M students provide updates on their research projects:

- Samuel Arnold – "Waterbird Use of Living Shorelines across the Gradient of Urbanization"
- Sophie Rabinowicz – "The Movement of Mercury from Aquatic Ecosystems to Terrestrial Songbirds"
- Max Rollfinke – "The Lateral Extent of Mercury Contamination in Songbirds and Their Prey".

**Save the Date:** May 21, Dixie Sommers on birding in Chile. 🐦



W&M students (clockwise from lower left) Max Rollfinke, Samuel Arnold, and Sophie Rabinowicz, who will present their research at our April 16 meeting. A big wolf spider, every songbird's favorite food, is pictured at lower right.

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**PRESIDENT'S CORNER, Cont. from Page 1**

Prothonotary Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Ovenbird, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher just to name a few. Purple Martins, Barn Swallows, and Chimney Swifts will appear early as will Eastern Kingbird, and some of the vireos: White-eyed, Yellow-throated, and Red-eyed. Our local eBird hotspots, including Greensprings Interpretive Trail, Bassett Trace Nature Trail, and York River State Park, are great places to find these early birds.

By mid-April we expect some of the flycatchers to arrive. Listen for Great-crested, Acadian, and Eastern Wood-pewee. More of the warblers move in including Worm-eating, American Redstart, and Yellow Warbler, and fingers are crossed for Kentucky Warblers at New Quarter Park. A crowd favorite, the Summer Tanager, a widespread breeder in our area, will start singing its heart out on arrival as will the Wood Thrush.

Mainland Farm often produces early shorebirds, particularly if fields have standing water. Watch for Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Plover, Greater and Lesser yellowlegs and early Pectoral Sandpipers.

A bit later in the month some of the thrushes pass through our area. Swainson's Thrush can be heard singing and the slightly more elusive Gray-cheeked Thrush can be found in places like Freedom Park and York River State Park. Listen for the bubbling song of Bobolinks passing through or their *bink bink* flight call as they fly overhead.

At my house we wait with anticipation and guarded hope to hear the nostalgic nighttime song of the Eastern Whip-poor-will. This bird has been a one-night caller in mid-April in 2022 and 2023. We missed it last year but we will sleep with the windows open hoping to be wakened by its loud and clear *WHIP poor WILL*. These birds are becoming more and more scarce and our expectations are modest.

Along with all our spring birds we have lots to look forward to in April: our monthly bird walk, field trip, gorgeous newsletter, presentations by our research grant recipients, and our Spring Bird Count. I'm looking forward to seeing you all out and about!

Happy Birding! 



## WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome new members Cameron Teller, Pete Altha, James Leech, and Sue Anderson!

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. **Current members are reminded that renewals are due in April of each year.** 🐦

*In early April, Eastern Kingbirds will be returning to our area from their winter grounds. Photo by Nancy Barnhart, 2016.*

## BIRD WALKS: Next Walk is April 26

By Scott Hemler

It was a cool but beautiful morning for our “4th Saturday” bird walk at New Quarter Park on March 22. We had 15 people come out, and we saw 30 species of birds. Some of our summer birds are starting to arrive, as we saw an Osprey and a Yellow-throated Warbler as well as several Laughing Gulls down along Queens Creek. Many of our winter residents, such as the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and White-throated Sparrow, were still in the park. Several of our year-round residents—Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, Bald Eagle, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Eastern Bluebird—were present as well. The weather had warmed up nicely by the end of the walk and everyone seemed pleased with the birds we had seen.

Our next “4<sup>th</sup> Saturday” bird walk will be held on April 26 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. 🐦



*Birders on our March 22 walk noted the spring return of Osprey and Yellow-throated Warbler to New Quarter Park. Photo by Scott Hemler.*

## BIRDING BASSETT TRACE, APRIL 17

By Judy Jones

Great news for birders and for folks who love the Bassett Trace Nature Trail! These two worlds will be combined into the amazing experience of Birding Bassett Trace with Nancy Barnhart, president of the Williamsburg Bird Club! Come join Nancy for a wonderful trail walk and the opportunity to see, hear, and appreciate all the beauty of the birds at Bassett Trace!

The walk is open to any and all folks and will be held on Thursday, April 17, beginning at 8:00 a.m. No RSVP is necessary. Just show up at the Gold Wing of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation’s Griffin Hotel and walk with us.

Click this [link](#) to view the location of the Bassett Trace Nature Trail on Google Maps. Members of the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists serve as volunteers with Colonial Williamsburg to study, interpret, and maintain the trail. 🐦



The WBC field trip to Machicomoco State Park proved very popular. Photo by George Martin.

## FIELD TRIP REPORT: Next trip is to Chippokes State Park, April 19

By George Martin

### Saturday, March 15, 2025 – Machicomoco State Park

Twenty-five birders braved an initially foggy morning to check out Machicomoco State Park. The field at the entrance held lots of Killdeer and Ring-billed Gulls, while a flock of Wild Turkeys foraged near the distant tree line. On the dock near the interpretive center, Bufflehead amused the group with possible “courting” activity, a Pine Warbler flitted among the nearby pines, and several small flocks of Rock Pigeons flew by (a species we don’t usually mention in trip reports). A group of volunteers clearing brush mentioned that they’d seen a Merlin regularly and, almost on cue, it appeared. Field Sparrows were common and singing vigorously. The group identified 45 species over the course of the morning. Here’s the link to the eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S218737801>. Thanks to Deborah Humphries for leading the group!

### Saturday, April 19, 2025 – Chippokes State Park

For the Club’s April field trip, we’ll go to Chippokes State Park in Surry County. Nancy Barnhart will lead the group. Some summer breeders should have arrived, including Ovenbird, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Northern Parula. The park also has a good population of Eastern Meadowlark.



Scanning for birds in all directions at Machicomoco State Park. Photo by Shirley Devan.

The trip from Williamsburg will require a ride on the Jamestown-Scotland ferry. I recommend we arrive at the ferry dock by 7:10 a.m. to catch the 7:20 a.m. departure. If you’d like to consolidate cars, please let me know by email to [grm0803@gmail.com](mailto:grm0803@gmail.com) and plan to meet in the Jamestown Settlement parking lot a little after 7 a.m. If you’re coming from Southside, plan to meet at the park’s main parking lot after the entrance on Chippokes Park Road by 8:00 a.m. If you have a state park pass, bring that. Without a pass, the entry fee is \$7 per vehicle. After birding, I suggest we meet for lunch at Surry Seafood. 🐦

## WBC's SPRING BIRD COUNT, APRIL 27

By Shirley Devan

Spring is officially here, so that means the Williamsburg Bird Club's Spring Bird Count is on the horizon!

Sunday, April 27, 2025 is the date for our Club's 48<sup>th</sup> Spring Bird Count. In some ways, this spring count is easier than the Christmas Bird Count:

- Warmer weather — thank goodness!
- Longer daylight ☺
- Less data to collect! We only want bird species and numbers of individuals. No need to count miles/hours walked or driven. Phew! We do not submit data to the National Audubon Society.
- Different birds! Most of the winter ducks will be gone, and some spring migrants and breeders will be here. Last spring we tallied 19 warbler species and a total of 153 species! WOW!

The 12 sectors are the same as those used in the Christmas Count: Cheatham Annex, College Woods, Fords Colony, Gloucester, Hog Island, Jamestown, Jolly Pond, Kingsmill, Middle Plantation, Skimino, Waller Mill, and Warhill.

If you participated recently (Spring or Christmas counts), we hope you'll join in again in the field or at your feeder! Contact me if you want to participate. I'll try to match you up with a sector if you want to be in the field. And of course, Feeder Watchers are important and needed.



I hope you'll join us for one of the highlights of our bird club's year. Email me ([shirley\\_devan@icloud.com](mailto:shirley_devan@icloud.com)) if you have questions or want to join in for the first time. Thanks for supporting this count! 🐦

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## "SEABIRDS OF VIRGINIA"

By Mary Ellen Hodges

Andrew Rapp, a relatively young individual with ornithological experience and knowledge far exceeding what normally would be expected for his age, spoke at the WBC's March 19 meeting on the subject of "Seabirds of Virginia". Andrew graduated from W&M with a double major in Biology and Environmental Science. He has worked for Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory as a hawk counter and currently is a field zoologist with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Natural Heritage Program. In order to obtain up-close and personal experience with marine wildlife, at one point in his career Andrew worked for several months on a fishing boat out of Hatteras, NC. He also has experience guiding for several companies offering pelagic tours in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Over the course of Andrew's information-packed and absorbing presentation he discussed the definition of

"seabirds"; Virginia seabird habitat (the deepwater canyons that cut into the Continental shelf, the Gulf Stream, and the Labrador Current); factors that influence the presence and absence of seabirds (wind, water temperature, moon cycle, Sargassum, time of day/night); and the biological topic of "species complexes" as it applies to seabirds. While showing excellent photos of a number of seabird species, Andrew offered tips and tricks for their identification and reviewed their flight styles, water preferences, and the time of year each is present off Virginia. Andrew concluded his presentation with some thoughts on how we in Williamsburg are connected to seabirds through how we manage our pollution, trash, and the overall health of our fisheries and how we can make a difference for seabird populations. A video of Andrew's presentation can be viewed on the WBC's YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/-SaxDqBcH8s>. 🐦

*Editor's Note: Cathy Millar's much-appreciated, more detailed summaries of the talks presented at the WBC's monthly meetings will resume in a few months after Cathy takes a well-deserved break.*

## THE EARLY BIRD CATCHES THE FISH

By Cheryl J. Jacobson

Was I ever surprised the last week of February when I went to the Kingsmill Marina area to look for ducks on the James River! I saw a shadow pass overhead, and when I looked up, I saw an Osprey flying by with a fish in his talons. I followed him to a nearby condo where he shared the fish with a female who was waiting in their nest. This nest is monitored by Judy Tucker for Osprey Watch, a project created by the Center for Conservation Biology (CCB), a research unit within W&M. The return of this nesting pair from winter grounds seems to be at least two weeks earlier than the usual Kingsmill spring arrival date for Osprey. To document this event, I asked Martha Moss to bring her camera and join me for a photo shoot.

Researchers at W&M have been monitoring Osprey breeding performance in coastal Virginia since 1970 and found an alarming decline in Osprey reproduction rates when data collected from 1985-1988 in four study areas in the lower Chesapeake Bay was compared to data collected in 2024. The metrics suggest that food stress may be the underlying cause of the documented decline. Click on this [link](#) to read more about this study on the CCB's website. 🐦



*This Osprey pair, photographed by Martha Moss the last week of February, returned earlier than usual to their nest at Kingsmill, which is monitored by Judy Tucker.*

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## EMORY & HENRY PRESENTS DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD TO BILL WILLIAMS

By Mary Ellen Hodges

At Emory & Henry's Charter Day ceremony on March 20, the University's Alumni Association presented WBC member and founding president, Bill Williams, with its Carl and Ruth Looney Humanitarian Award, recognizing Bill's service to others. In presenting the award, Alumni Council President Laura Beth Weaver noted that "As a teacher and administrator in Williamsburg-James City County Schools, and as the education director at the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary, [Bill's] entire career has been devoted to inspiring the next generation of conservationists."



Ms. Weaver also summarized Bill's many other contributions in the area of bird conservation over the years, including his work on diverse programs and projects of the Virginia Society of Ornithology, his service as an international reviewer for eBird, and his efforts monitoring hawk migration and shorebird nesting. Bill has said that he got started as a birder during his student days at Emory & Henry and still remembers seeing his first Yellow Warbler by the campus duck pond. Ms. Weaver concluded her presentation thusly: "Bill Williams is too humble to tell you that his work has ostensibly laid the foundation for a stronger ecosystem and a healthier planet, but it has; and he is living proof that the big work of meaningful conservation can begin with one clear look at the tiniest of warblers." 🐦

*Editor's note: Shirley Devan deserves thanks for bringing this news item to the attention of the editor.*

## THE STATE OF AMERICA'S BIRDS

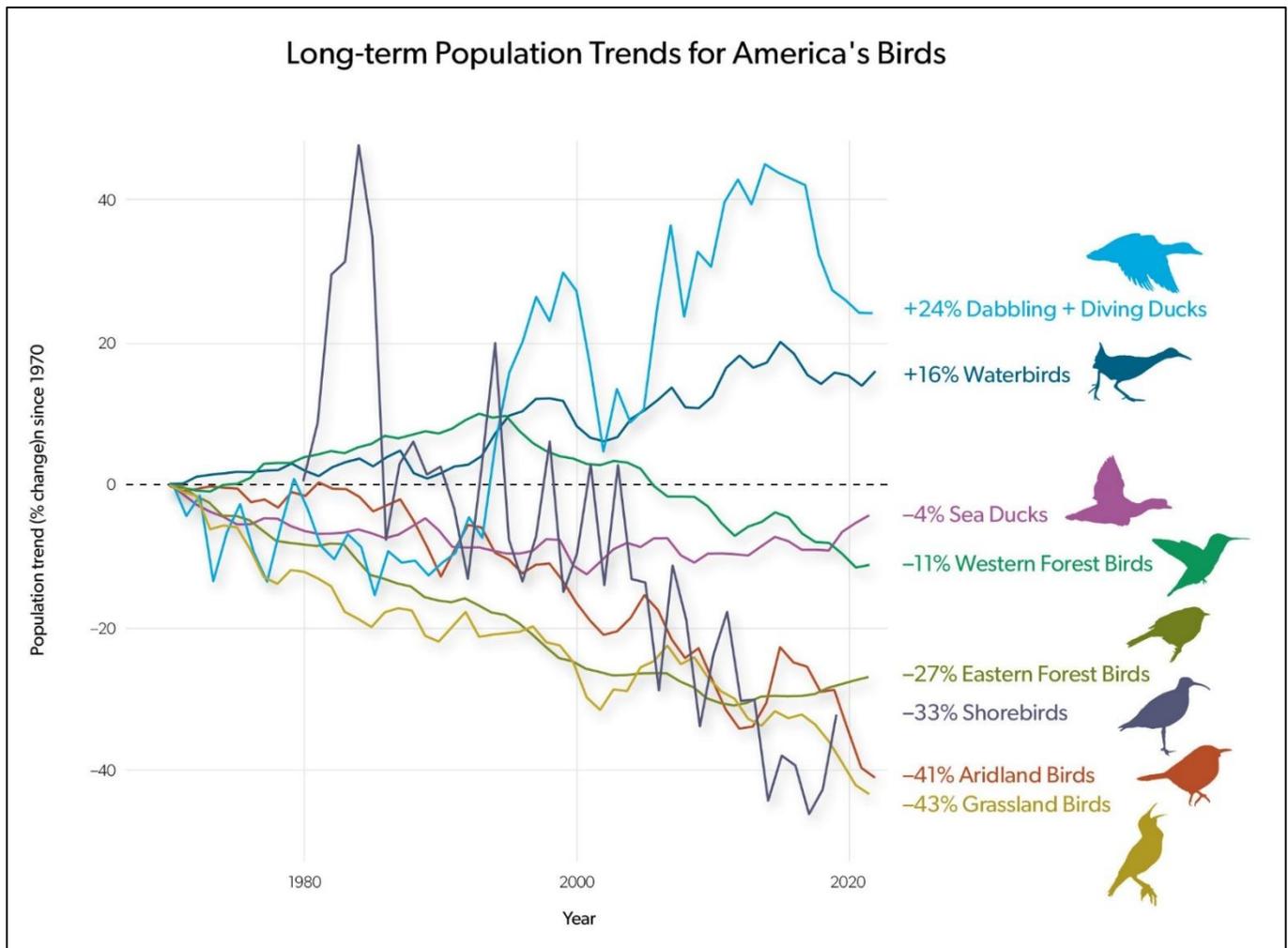
The 2025 edition of the *State of the Birds* report, released on March 13, is a status assessment of the health of the nation's bird populations, produced by the U.S. Committee of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), a coalition of leading conservation and scientific organizations. The report comes five years after the landmark 2019 study that documented the loss of 3 billion birds in North America over 50 years. The 2025 report reveals continued widespread declines in American bird populations across all mainland and marine habitats (see the graph below), with 229 species requiring urgent conservation action.

As described on the web homepage for the 2025 updated assessment:

"The report's Executive Summary highlights three key takeaways that together point the way forward for the conservation of our nation's priceless ecological resources:

- Sobering evidence that **America's birds continue to decline** across the board.
- Despite ample evidence that **conservation can work**, the status quo approach to conservation is not turning bird populations around.
- What's needed now is **policy that implements proven conservation measures** that help birds, habitats, and people."

You can read the report online or download it at this address: <https://www.stateofthebirds.org/2025/>. 🐦



From *State of the Birds 2025*. Long-term population trends. Courtesy of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

## LIVE NEST CAMS IN OUR REGION

**VIMS OspreyCam:** The preceding hyperlink will take you to real-time video of an Osprey family using a nesting platform in the York River immediately in front of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science's campus at Gloucester Point. The video feed can also be watched live on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSCvi2kEIqM>.

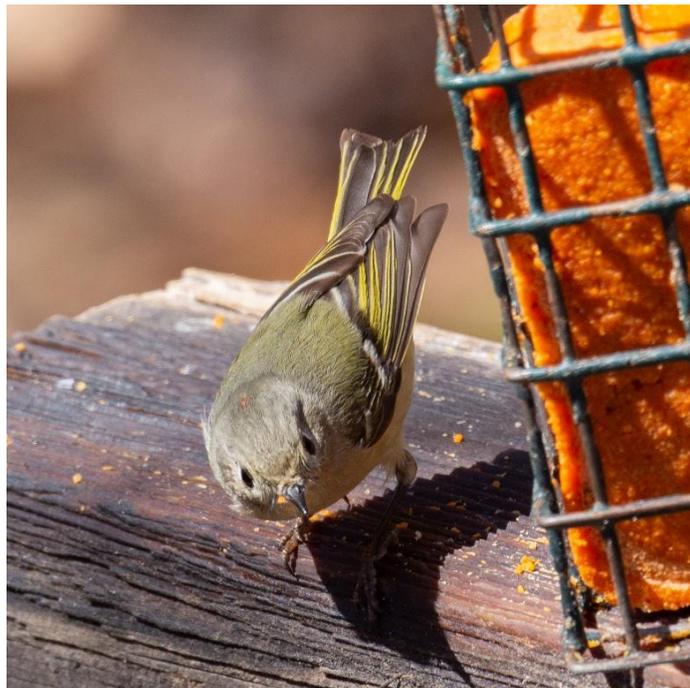
**Richmond Falcon Cam:** The current pair of Peregrine Falcons have used this nest box on a ledge of the West Tower of the Riverfront Plaza building in downtown Richmond since 2021 and have raised four chicks together every year since then. This year, the female laid four eggs between March 18 and 26. <https://dwr.virginia.gov/falcon-cam/>

**W&M Zable Osprey Cam:** This nest cam was installed last year by Professor Randolph Chambers, Director of the W.M. Keck Environmental Field Laboratory, using funds awarded from W&M's Green Fee after a pair of Osprey began building a nest atop one of the light towers surrounding Zable Stadium. While the pair ultimately did not breed last year, the female did enjoy the fish that the male brought back to the nest. A pair of Ospreys have been observed on the nest again this year. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMjmqjiOOMc>. 🐦

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## RECENT SIGHTINGS

**Dan Earnhardt** shared the following: "I have been fortunate enough to have a little **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** visit my suet feeder often. So, I captured a nice photo of him (below) showing, just barely, his ruby crown. One snowy day, when the suet had almost run out and he was waiting his turn to eat (the larger birds insisting on going first), I took what was left of the suet, holding it in my hand, and he came to peck the suet as I held it out!



**Kate Forrest** captured an excellent photo (below) of an **American Woodcock** on January 10 just before dusk in her backyard in the Skipwith Farms neighborhood. Kate said "It was a wonderful surprise to see this bird doing its famous rocking walk through our yard." 🐦





# 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/>