



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 49 No. 5

www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

May 2025



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

"It's May, the lusty month of May!" I'm dating myself by quoting the lyrics from *Camelot*, a favorite musical, but lyricist Alan Jay Lerner got it right. For bird

lovers it doesn't get much better than May. Definitions of "lusty" include vigorous, hearty, robust, enthusiastic, and rousing—exactly the nature of spring migration!

We kicked off spring with the excellent presentations by the three William & Mary student research grant recipients. It was such a treat to hear these bright young minds and the work they are doing. We look forward to hearing their final results later in the year. Thank you to Dr. Dan Cristol for inspiring, teaching, guiding, and arranging to have the students come to speak to us.

Our field trip to Chippokes State Park included participants of all ages and some very obliging warblers at near eye level. Thanks to George Martin for great planning including getting us all together for an early ferry. Thanks also to Scott Hemler for leading our monthly New Quarter Park bird walk on a perfect spring morning.

Back to celebrating May and "part two" of spring migration. Many of our earlier arrivals are busy defining and defending territories and choosing mates, and some are already producing young. Among the next wave of birds passing through our area are the late warblers, crowd favorites. Blue-winged, Cape May, Magnolia, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Nashville, and a personal favorite, the Bay-breasted Warbler. All give us a brief period to enjoy their brilliance on the way to nesting grounds. As a group they are more challenging to find, often busily foraging for the next stage of their journey. Since they're not yet on their breeding territory they often tend to be quiet; there is no need to sing yet for a mate. They take patience and perseverance to find but are worth the effort.

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UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

May 21, 6:00 p.m. for light refreshments followed by the presentation at 6:30 p.m.: Dixie Sommers, "Birding in Chile". Meeting will be in-person at the Quarterpath Recreation Center and via Zoom.

Dixie Sommers joined the WINGS Birding Tour trip to Chile in November 2023. The tour ranged from the far south and sea level Tierra del Fuego to the far north and high altitude Atacama desert. The group counted 258 species ranging from penguins to flamingos to tapaculos to furnariids (ovenbirds).



Save the Date: June 18, 6:00 p.m. for our annual outdoor meeting at the Chickahominy Riverfront Park with light refreshments and updates on our Purple Martin project by Cheryl Jacobson and the team. 🐦



A Magellanic Penguin (upper photo) and a view of Volcan Parinacota and Lago Chungará (lower photo). Both photos taken by Dixie Sommers on her trip to Chile in November 2023.

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Bay-breasted Warbler. Photo by Keith Kennedy.

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We have several great "hotspots" where we can hope to find these birds. Three of my favorite and most successful warbler locations are York River State Park, Bassett Trace Nature Trail, and Cumberland Marsh Natural Area Preserve. At York River State Park, 12-14 species of warbler are standard in May. If you have some time and energy, the Taskinas Creek Trail, with its slightly higher elevations, is a top spot. But if you prefer a less vigorous outing, the edges of the parking lot are a good bet. Bassett Trace Nature Trail in Williamsburg is a real gem for birding. Walk the trail or relax on a bench and see what you can find. On any given day in May, 14-15 species of warbler is possible. If you are up for a short ride to New Kent County, Cumberland Marsh Natural Area Preserve has been extremely productive for warblers. On more than one occasion in May, 17 or 18 species of warbler have been recorded along the edge of the field and on the hiking trail that goes into a nice mixed deciduous/evergreen forest.

All of our local parks have their share of great birding and you really can't go wrong with any of them. While we look for these brilliant warblers, we can't forget all the other great birds that are out there: Yellow-billed Cuckoos, grosbeaks, tanagers, flycatchers, orioles, and the list goes on and on.

Whatever your favorite location, I hope you will have a wonderful time enjoying birds during this beautiful, exciting, lusty month of May! Happy Birding! 🐦

GOING, GOING, . . . !

If you haven't yet purchased *The Birds of Virginia's Colonial Historic Triangle, An Annotated Checklist, Second Edition*, by Bill Williams, there is still time to get your copy. We have sold many but still have a limited supply.

You can find the book at The Backyard Birder and Wild Birds Unlimited stores as well as at all of the WBC events. WBC President Nancy Barnhart also has them in her car at all times, so flag her down if you see her out and about! Price is \$20.00 and it's a book you will want to own! 🐦

BIRD WALKS: Next Walk is May 24

By Scott Hemler

We had 17 people come out on a beautiful morning for our monthly bird walk at New Quarter Park on April 26. Several members of the Middle Peninsula Bird Club joined us as well. We saw 47 species of birds (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S229731505>)! Many of our summer residents had arrived and some of our winter residents were still here. Red-eyed Vireos were singing away for us in the trees. We also heard or saw Great Crested Flycatchers, Ovenbirds, and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird at the feeder by the park office. The White-throated Sparrows and Yellow-rumped Warblers were still here. Down at the dock we saw lots

WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome new members Marian Newcomb and Gayle Duncan!

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. 🐦

of Great Blue Herons and three Bald Eagles. There was no sign of a nest being built or any nesting activity at the Osprey platform out on Queens Creek, so it does not look like there will be any Osprey chicks there this year. It is an exciting time of year for a bird walk and the birds did not disappoint on Saturday!

Our next "4th Saturday" bird walk will be held on May 24 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. 🐦



The group of birders on our April 26 walk at New Quarter Park saw 47 species of birds.



April 19 proved a bright and beautiful day for a ferry ride and our field trip to Chippokes State Park in Surry County. Photo by George Martin.

FIELD TRIP REPORT: Next Trip is to Ford's Colony, May 17

By George Martin

Saturday, April 19, 2025 – Chippokes State Park

Good weather and good company made for good birding at Chippokes State Park on Saturday, April 19. Nancy Barnhart's eyes and ears helped the group of 22 birders identify 63 species: 62 at the park and another on the ferry ride across the James River. Highlights included watching a pair of Yellow-throated Warblers chasing each other around some pines, succeeding in spotting a vocal Prothonotary Warbler (You think it would be easy finding a bright yellow bird in a wetland!), finding an Eastern Meadowlark perched obligingly on a power line, and having a Northern Parula land right over our heads. After birding, half the group enjoyed lunch on the patio at Surry Seafood. Here are the links to the eBird checklists: Chippokes State Park: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S227101339>; Ferry: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S227105928>.

Saturday, May 17, 2025 – Ford's Colony

For the May field trip, on Saturday, May 17, we'll have a small group birding at Ford's Colony, my own neighborhood. Ford's Colony has diverse habitat, resulting in a pretty wide variety of birds visible in the community. Over the past several years, I've been able to see more than 100 species annually. The species counts on recent bird walks have averaged over 40. Come see the Purple Martins! And we should have Green

Hérons, White-eyed Vireos, Acadian and Great Crested flycatchers, and maybe a Prothonotary Warbler or two. Guests will need passes to enter Ford's Colony, so **the group will be limited to the first twelve who respond**. We'll meet at the Westbury parking lot at 7:30 a.m. that morning. I'll send specific directions to attendees closer to the date. If you would like to bird at Ford's Colony, please email me at grm0803@gmail.com. 🐦



An Eastern Meadowlark photographed by Martha B. Moss at Chippokes State Park during our April 19 field trip.

EARLY OBSERVATIONS (AND PHOTOS) FROM THE SPRING BIRD COUNT

by Shirley Devan, Count Compiler

On such a beautiful day, about 85 volunteers turned out to count birds for the Williamsburg Bird Club's 48th Spring Bird Count, held on Sunday, April 27. The Club has conducted this count every year since its fledging in 1977.

Numbers are still coming in for birds and birders. I can more easily estimate the number of birders than I can the number of species. From the sector totals I've received, my sense is that the birds put on a good show! Five sectors had more than 80 species:

- The "winning team" was the Jamestown Sector with Dan Cristol and current and former students who tallied 99 species even without access to the full Wildlife Loop Road.
- Cheatham Annex reported 90 species.
- Jolly Pond sector tallied 88 species. This number included 60 species tallied in Colonial Heritage.
- Waller Mill tallied 80 species.
- College Woods had almost 80 species.

Look for more precise (and final) numbers in the June newsletter! Many thanks to the dozens of volunteers who counted birds for science on Sunday. It's more important now than ever to stand up for science. 🐦



Face-off between a turtle and a Wood Duck captured by Nancy Barnhart at Cheatham Annex.



Five Solitary Sandpipers were seen on a single property in the Jolly Pond sector. Photo by Deborah Humphries.



Jeanette Navia shot this photo of fellow team members at Waller Mill Park: from left, Keith Navia, Liz George, Rose Ryan (leader), Christine McKinnon, and Les Lawrence.



Cheryl Jacobson, Judy Jones, Tory Gussman (left to right) and Barbara Creel (photographer) counted in Kingsmill.



Gary Carpenter photographed this Green Heron while counting birds in Colonial Heritage.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH A JAMAICAN ENDEMIC

By Bill Williams

Jamaica is a home to 28 endemic bird species and, therefore, ranks high among birding destinations. An early March 2025 excursion there with Field Guides-Birding Tours notched all of those island must-see species plus a host of additional captivating Caribbean flora and fauna.

Among the island's endemics is the delightful Jamaican Tody (*Todus todus*), one of only 5 tody species in the world, all confined to the West Indies. The other four include two species on Hispaniola, one in Puerto Rico, and one in Cuba.

One afternoon, just after a roadside lunch in the mountain village of Stewart Town, our group became mesmerized by a territorial male Jamaican Tody excavating a nest cavity into the edge of a small embankment. Yes! These tiny insectivores nest in a burrow of their own construction! The little gentleman would perch on a hanging vine, utter his most ardent nasal beep and throat rattle, then fly to the potential nest cavity about a meter away. We did not see any probable mates, but one must have been close at hand given this bird's insistent wing-rattling displays and multiple trips to the burrow. Nearby were Jamaican Crows; Blue Mountain, Jamaican, and Black-whiskered vireos; and mixed flocks of neotropical migrant warblers, likely staging for their northbound journeys "home" to North America.

Some of Jamaica's endemics are relatively easy to find; others, such as Jamaican Blackbird and Crested Quail-Dove, are best encountered with a local guide who knows these species' remote habitat locations and, most importantly, vocalizations.

The country is quite poor away from the tourist areas of Negril, Ocho Rios, Kingston, and Montego Bay. Most days were warm to hot and humid. Everyone with whom we interacted was very friendly and showed much pride in their island nation. 🐦



Male Jamaican Tody excavating a nest cavity (above) and perched nearby (below). Photos by Bill Williams, 3/14/2025.

CARDINAL IN THE ROSE BUSH

By Shirley Devan

On April 1 an email from Club President Nancy Barnhart landed in my inbox with this request from W&M Biology Professor Dan Cristol:

WBC members can help contribute to science by finding nests of northern cardinals and northern mockingbirds. Both of these species exhibit the unusual behavior of singing while sitting on the nest, and W&M Biology professor Michelle Moyer is interested in recording these unexplained songs and observing the nests . . . If you have a mockingbird or cardinal nesting in your yard or neighborhood

and suspect what bush it is in, please let Michelle know at mjmoyer@wm.edu.

In mid-April, I found a Northern Cardinal nest in my next-door neighbor's rose bush (facing my house). With approval of my neighbor, Barb Neis, I contacted Michelle Moyer, Ph.D., Visiting Assistant Teaching Professor in W&M's Department of Biology.

Michelle arrived April 16 to install a GoPro camera focused on the cardinal nest in the rose bush. The (Continued on Page 7)

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camera is connected to a battery pack that lasts about two days. Since then, either Michelle or her undergraduate student, Bennett Low, has arrived with a new battery pack and camera card to swap out.



Dr. Michelle Moyer points to the cardinal nest in the rose bush with a rope around it. Photo by Shirley Devan.

On April 17, I observed one cardinal egg in the nest. On April 20—three eggs! From a photo, Michelle identified one as a Brown-headed Cowbird egg. Boo hiss!

So, what's this project all about? Michelle Moyer describes the project this way:

Elaborate advertisement behaviors like bird song have often been thought to evolve mainly in males because of sexual selection. This focus on males has biased the way we understand many behaviors. But more and more research suggests that singing probably evolved in both males and females, and that female birds sing much more often than scientists used to think. In temperate species, female song is less common compared to tropical species and has actually been lost or reduced in several species.

Bird song is a conspicuous behavior, and female birds may experience direct costs as a result of singing. For example, female song has been found to increase predation risk when females sing from the nest, potentially alerting predators to their location, which could lead to reduced fitness and cause female song to be lost over time. In Northern Cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), both sexes are known to sing. Female cardinals sing on the nest, and increased female song from the nest has been shown to improve the coordination between the parents caring for their young. However, the costs of female song in this species have not yet been explored. Predation is the leading cause of nest failure for cardinals, and they are also frequent

targets of brood parasitism from Brown-headed Cowbirds, so investigating the context of song on the nest may provide valuable insight into how song may impact the nesting success and fitness for cardinals and other temperate songbirds.

I've been checking the nest from my driveway with my binoculars and only looking in the nest when the female cardinal is away. She apparently likes the suburbs—lawn mowers, cars in and out of garages, mail delivery trucks, trips to the trash can right next door to the nest. I'm sure she eats sunflower seeds at my feeder but so do about five other cardinals!

As it turned out, hatching at the nest began about when I had anticipated; a check on the morning of May 1 revealed one little cardinal nestling. I hope the other eggs hatch: another cardinal and one cowbird. 

Editor's Note: Dr. Moyer is also monitoring a cardinal's nest (with no cowbird eggs!) that Cathy Millar found hidden in crossvine foliage in her yard.



The placement of the GoPro camera at the cardinal nest (above) and a view of the nest on May 1 (below) with one hatched cardinal chick and (top to bottom) one cardinal and one Brown-headed Cowbird egg. Photos by Shirley Devan.

RECENT SIGHTINGS



Joanne Andrews shared that a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** visited a feeder in her yard in Queens Lake on April 24 and 25. Both Joanne and **Lois Bridger** (photo above) were able to capture photos of the bird.



Craig Hill captured this photo of a **Royal Tern** on April 21 as it flew along the Hampton River, not far from where the former Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel Royal Tern colony, now relocated to Fort Wool, is approaching full activity.



Cindy Sherwood's favorite photo she took this month is of a **Prothonotary Warbler** (above) she saw in the College Woods/Lake Matoaka. Cindy said: "He posed and sang for me for about 15 minutes. I felt the joy of spring as I watched and listened. I especially loved seeing his little tongue!"



Also on April 21, **Craig Hill** photographed these two **Yellow-crowned Night Herons** on a nest at Fort Monroe, where night herons have had a rookery for several years.



Craig Hill shared several photos he took recently in Hampton. The photo above, from April 17, is of an **American Oystercatcher** nest with at least two eggs located on an abandoned pier at Fort Monroe. Craig says a pair of oystercatchers have nested on this pier for at least three years, raising several young.



Ann and Gary (photographer) Carpenter were delighted to have a **Red-headed Woodpecker** visit a feeder at their home in Colonial Heritage on April 30.



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

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Make your check payable to the Williamsburg Bird Club and mail to:

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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.



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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/>