



# The Flyer

## Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 49 No. 8

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

October 2025



### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

October greetings! Thanks to all who participated in our September meeting either in person or on Zoom. We had a great crowd to enjoy Jamie Wick's gorgeous photos of his trip to the Osa Peninsula and Tarcoles River in Costa

Rica. Thank you, Jamie! We also had an excellent turnout at the Jamestown Beach Event Park for our annual September field trip. Many thanks to Babs Giffin for leading and keeping score. Fall migration provides for fun birding, and we thank George Martin for leading our popular 4th Saturday walk at New Quarter Park. Please read about our upcoming meetings and field trips in this newsletter.

Fall brings about an opportunity to enjoy our own yard birds and contribute to citizen science at the same time. Project Feederwatch ([feederwatch.org](http://feederwatch.org)) is a Cornell Lab of Ornithology project that asks you to count and report the birds that come to your feeder or yard. The program runs from November into April and allows for a flexible schedule. You can report as often as weekly, but if you have travel plans or can't be there every week, you can report whenever it fits into your schedule. You don't even have to have feeders to participate; the birds that take advantage of your yard count, too!

When you sign up for Project Feederwatch you can receive helpful posters of the birds likely to come to your yard as well as all the instructions you will need to get going. There is a modest fee of \$18.00 which helps to cover website and database costs as well as the printing and mailing of materials. You will receive a year-end summary called "Winter Bird Highlights" which contains regional summaries and puts the spotlight on different species. Besides entering bird species and numbers, you can now include any mammals that you see in the area and various behaviors you observe. If you have a species that arrives at your feeder and displaces birds of a different species, you

(Continued on Page 2)

### UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Patty Maloney

**October 15, 6:00 p.m. for light refreshments, followed by the presentation at 6:30 p.m. Dan Cristol will present a preview of his upcoming book, *Life Bird*. Meeting will be held in-person at the Quarterpath Recreation Center and via Zoom.**

Dan Cristol, Chancellor Professor of Biology at William & Mary, is a researcher and teacher, and a life-long birder. Over a recent sabbatical, he wrote a draft for a book entitled, *Life Bird*. The book is a memoir of birds, birding, and bird research. Dan will talk about his not-quite-finished book project and share some excerpts.

**Save the Date:** November 19, James Abbott on birding in New Zealand.

**Don't forget:** Videos of past presentations by guest speakers at our monthly meetings can be viewed on the Williamsburg Bird Club's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@williamsburgbirdclub6284>. 🐦



Dan Cristol, W&M Chancellor Professor of Biology.

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*Purple Finch, December 2018. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.*

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

can make note of that “displacement” behavior, the so-called pecking order. You can report evidence of sickness and even how you feel while you’re doing your observations! Research is showing the positive value of birds and bird watching in terms of happiness and wellness, and you can contribute to that research during your surveys.

The long-term data sets that Project Feederwatch provides help to point out changes in winter bird populations and distribution. The project will help in land management decisions, in understanding “irruption” years, as well as timing and range changes. Besides, it’s fun! I hope you will consider joining the ranks of official “feeder watchers” this year! Happy Birding! 🐦

**The WBC needs you!**

**We are still looking for a 2026 Vice President, Newsletter.**

If interested, please contact one of the members of the Nominating Committee or me. Nominating Committee: Deborah Humphries, [djhinva@gmail.com](mailto:djhinva@gmail.com), Babs Giffin, [Barbara.giffin88@gmail.com](mailto:Barbara.giffin88@gmail.com), Donna Benson, [mid520@me.com](mailto:mid520@me.com). Thanks in advance! Nancy Barnhart, President, [barnhartnt@gmail.com](mailto:barnhartnt@gmail.com).

**WBC MEMBERSHIP**

Please welcome new members Eli Kenyon and Lisa Waller! 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, 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. 🐦

## BIRD WALKS: Next Walk is October 25

By George Martin

The rain may have kept many of the birders indoors for the New Quarter Park bird walk on Saturday, September 27, but the birds still seemed to be out in force. The four participants stayed mostly dry while identifying 34 species. A pair of Red-shouldered Hawks gathered in a tree at the edge of the woods along the access road. Warblers were a little harder to identify against the gray skies, but the group saw several American Redstarts, Black-and-white Warblers, and Northern Parula. Laughing Gulls occupied their usual posts (literally) near the marina. Eastern Bluebirds used parking cones in the overflow field as hunting perches. Here's the link to the eBird checklist for the walk: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S275779187>.

Our next "4<sup>th</sup> Saturday" bird walk will be held on October 25 at New Quarter Park. We'll meet in the parking lot by the park office at 8:00 a.m. 🐦



*The birders on our September 27 walk at New Quarter Park encountered 34 species. Photo by George Martin.*

## FIELD TRIP REPORT: Next Trip is Oct. 18 to the Eastern Shore

By George Martin

### Jamestown Beach Event Park, September 20

On Saturday, September 20, fifteen birders met at Jamestown Beach Event Park for a casual field trip. It was a good occasion to catch up with fellow club members, while also seeing a lot of birds. The Jamestown Ferry dock did not disappoint, with large numbers of Laughing Gulls, Caspian Terns, and Double-crested Cormorants. On land, the group was able to identify all six woodpecker species in the area (still a little early for sapsuckers, I think). We can't forget about the warblers, as Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Northern Parula, and Pine Warbler were also identified. Thanks to Babs Giffin for keeping track of the sightings! Click this [link](#) to see the eBird checklist for the morning.

### Eastern Shore, Saturday, October 18

Mark your calendars for the club's annual field trip to the Eastern Shore on Saturday, October 18. Deborah Humphries will lead us at several sites. First, we'll change the itinerary a little this year. We'll meet in the parking lot of the Visitor Center of the [Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge](#) at 8:30 a.m. The Visitor Center is off Seaside Road, a right turn just past the overlook on the southbound side of US-13. We'll spend some time at the Visitor Center, and likely the Ramp Road site, then head to [Kiptopeke State Park](#) and the hawk watch. The last planned stop will be the [Edward S. Brinkley Nature Preserve](#), which is

on Seaside Road north of the community of Oyster. Of course, if there have been reports of interesting birds in nearby locations, we may adjust the itinerary to try to see them. I expect there will be some hungry birders after several busy hours of birding, so whoever is interested should plan to meet at the [Cape Charles Brewing Company](#) for lunch.

**Carpooling:** If you'd like to carpool, or if you can drive others, please let me know at [grm0803@gmail.com](mailto:grm0803@gmail.com). Those wishing to carpool should meet at the Colony Square Shopping Center a little after 7:00 a.m., for a departure no later than 7:15 a.m.

**State Park Pass:** Please bring your state park pass if you have one. Otherwise, admission to Kiptopeke State Park is \$7 per vehicle.

**Dawn Flight:** Some birders have expressed interest in observing the Dawn Flight, being monitored and chronicled by Baxter Beamer. He is watching and recording the daily morning migration of passerines (and others) from Sunset Beach. You'll need to get there between 6:45 and 7:30 a.m. The flight is variable, so there's no guarantee what the flight will be like on October 18 (as with all birding). The beach is at the end of Wise Point Road, which is the first left turn after the overlook and opposite Seaside Road. Park in a small lot at the end of Wise Point Rd., and walk a few yards through the pine trees to get to the beach. 🐦

## MY GARDENING COMPANION, A BARRED OWL

By Cathy Millar



One mid-afternoon, early this summer, I was weeding my garden when all the birds, not just the easily-triggered Carolina Wrens, started sounding the alarm. Searching for a hawk or black rat snake, I turned around and found myself looking directly into the big, beautiful eyes of a Barred Owl on a low limb of an

old crepe myrtle tree barely five feet away! The owl appeared to be listening/hunting for moles and, for nearly an hour, completely accepted my presence. My suspicion that it was hunting moles in my garden was later confirmed when I found skeletal remains of one in a pellet the owl had spat out from one of its frequented perches.

I've continued to enjoy this Barred Owl's company at close range two to three times a week as it grooms, hunts, and even snoozes at all hours of the daytime. Once, when my shovel hit a rock with a resounding clang, the owl remained unfazed.

On one day, a jolt of alarm surged through me when I saw a big pile of immobile feathers in the middle of our

sunlit lawn. As I approached, up popped the owl's head as if to say: "Whatcha looking at?" It was sunbathing as it stretched back with wings spread wide and chest feathers puffed up. That allows the sunlight to penetrate and clean its feathers of parasites and allows the bird's skin to soak up some rays for vitamin D synthesis.

If only this owl knew the happiness it brings me! 🦉



*Cathy Millar's photos of her gardening companion, a Barred Owl. In the photo above, the owl is sunning itself on the ground.*

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## 2026 NATURE CAMP SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION PERIOD OPENS

By Judy Jones and Lee Schuster

Nature Camp, located in Vesuvius Virginia in the George Washington National Forest has, for many, many years, offered opportunities for nature-loving students to learn about our Virginia environment and strategies for protecting it. This fall, during the month of October, we are accepting applications for scholarships for the Summer 2026 sessions. These scholarships, valued at over \$1000 each, offer unique and exciting environmental opportunities for students in James City County, upper York County, and Williamsburg.

Nature Camp is a two-week, co-educational, academic camp that emphasizes education in natural history and environmental studies. It is intended for those seeking a science/nature experience. Campers will attend class daily, maintain a notebook, complete written projects, and participate in outdoor activities.

If you know of students, presently in grades 5-12, who love nature and would enjoy a two-week session at Nature Camp, please encourage them to go to our website at this link (<https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/about/nature-camp-scholarships/>), download the application, and get it in the mail before October 31.

WBC provided three local students scholarships for Nature Camp's Summer 2025 season. The students wrote the essays printed below describing some of what they learned at camp and the types of activities they engaged in. It's heartwarming to know that our financial support provides our scholarship students such meaningful experiences and is well-appreciated by the recipients.

(Continued on Page 5)

## NATURE CAMP, Continued from Page 4

### Abigail Robertson (7<sup>th</sup> grade, Berkeley Middle School; WBC Bill Williams Scholarship)

During the best 13 days at Nature Camp, I enjoyed many activities, exploring nature, and most of all, learning. I majored in Human Footprint, where I learned about mankind's effect on the natural world. More specifically, we learned about human impacts on Vesuvius, a former booming mining town over one hundred years ago, and how mining and logging impacted camp's valley. We went on a field trip to Virginia Tech's McCormick Farm where we learned about the reaper and the effects it had on the area. We also went to the Blue Ridge Parkway, to which Nature Camp had a road many years ago for logging, I believe. We also learned about the values of National Forests and Parks.

Not only did I enjoy my major class, but I loved my minor classes. I especially enjoyed learning about how to identify ferns by their spores, and that a thin fuzzy layer by the bottom of cinnamon fern stem is a key to its identification. I enjoyed identifying moths and butterflies in entomology and seeing all the imperial and luna moths in the entomology tent, where they keep insects. Ornithology was also very interesting. I learned how to properly use binoculars, and some effective birding strategies. I went on a hike to Table rock, where we slid down this large natural water slide with Big Mary's Creek tumbling down with us. I went to Buttermilk Springs many times looking for salamanders. I was lucky enough to catch a few baby dusky salamanders, which made my day! Early on in the session, I also went on a hike with the sole purpose of finding a rattlesnake. It was lots of fun, but sadly unsuccessful.

This year for our big Sunday hike, I went on the December Ridge hike, which was tons of fun and had a beautiful outlook over the many other mountains and valleys from the peak of McClung Mountain. I participated in the Nature Camp Games, which is a series of outdoor games hosted by our EMT. I played water polo, swam and ran for my team. It was lots of fun. I got to make new friends and catch up with old ones.

During our Closing Ceremony, I was fortunate to receive the Best Notebook Award, which is an award given to a few campers every session who have the most completed projects, and display lots of effort in the composition and information.

One of my favorite things about camp is our evening program. I love singing songs and learning about the varied nature topics presented by our guests. My

favorite evening presentation was given by Jesse Cleary, who talked about marine conservation through geographic mapping. He talked about creating marine parks to let wildlife recover, whale tracking and much more. This was most interesting to me because I would love to study Cetology and conservation.

I enjoyed all presentations because I learned about topics that I would not be as interested in, such as Kenyan ecology or fish movement. This is what I love about Nature Camp. We can pack so much varied learning into two weeks and take home many new interesting facts. I had the best time ever, and I am incredibly thankful to the Williamsburg Bird Club for my opportunity to have been able to experience camp once again.



*Abigail Robertson, one of the recipients of a 2025 Nature Camp scholarship from the WBC.*

### Lydia Rauschenberger (8<sup>th</sup> grade, Queens Lake Middle School; WBC Millin Scholarship)

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to participate in Nature Camp this summer. This was my favorite session of camp yet! I attended with other students going into 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The camp started off excellently because I was given my first choice in major, Limnology. Limnology is the study of water, so I spent a lot of time exploring the beautiful creeks. We learned about different types of fish, water quality and threats to the creek ecosystems. Also, we created our own mini ecosystem in a fish tank.

My favorite memory from camp was celebrating the Fourth of July. First, we went on a "trash hike," in which we picked up litter and created our own parade to show the head counselor what we had collected. Then we had a big competition in the afternoon in which we were split up into teams.

(Continued on Page 6)

## NATURE CAMP, Continued from Page 5

The games included a scavenger hunt, spelling bee, relay race, and sports. At night, we shared scary stories around the campfire.

Like my previous years at camp, I enjoyed the food! I loved the Pesto pasta, sweet potato biscuits, scones, and “trainwreck” pasta, which is pasta with beef and a cream sauce.

Again, thank you for making this possible.

### Isla Tabor (8<sup>th</sup> grade, Queen’s Lake Middle School; WBC Bill Williams Scholarship).

Dear Williamsburg Bird Club, I would like to say thank you for the wonderful opportunity to go and experience the joys of Nature Camp. I had so many fun times over the two weeks that I was there; from the hikes and swimming to the classes. Originally, I was a bit hesitant to go away for two entire weeks, thinking that I would get homesick and lonely, but it was quite the opposite.

I loved taking Mammalogy every other day and getting to know my fellow classmates and counselors, and everyone was so nice and accepting. Even when I wasn’t surrounded by people, for example, during recreational periods, I could always find something fun to do. Most days, counselors hosted hikes to amazing and beautiful places around camp. The best part about that was that these would happen multiple times every day, so we wouldn’t have to pick one thing to do.

One of my favorite places is Buttermilk. It is a gorgeous natural spring that flows directly out of a mountain. The water was so pure that we would find salamanders under rocks and leaves. On one of our hikes, Argo and Willow (counselors) hosted a “decomposition hunt” where we looked for dead or decomposing

things. We ended up finding a massive Rat/ Black Racer snake hybrid, as well as some really cool mushrooms, and even a Destroying Angel mushroom. Every day after the last rec period ended, we would have evening program, where we would gather in the Lillian-Schilling Building, or the LS, and sing songs. Most nights we even had people come in and give some presentations relating to the environment.

We had a diverse range of topics for these presentations, from water and AI, to how the arts can positively impact the environment. One of my biggest worries was about the food, but I then found out that we had counselor cooks who handmade all of the meals and sourced ingredients from local farms. We were fed a wide variety of meals, from tofu and tempura vegetables to a whole Thanksgiving dinner on Sunday Hike Day. All the food was absolutely delicious and nutritious, so another round of applause to Cooper, Zoe, and Charlie (cooks).

On the Fourth of July, we didn’t have classes and instead had a whole day of cool activities to earn points for teams that we were split into after breakfast. After lunch and canteen period, we had a whole marathon where there were a variety of races to compete in. I ended up doing the swimming portion, which was very easy in my opinion. Afterwards, for evening program, we sat on a tarp outside and ate marshmallows and listened to camp tales. After that Mammalogy had a bat hunt where we listened for bat squeaks and got to hear how they used echolocation.

I’ll stop ranting now, but overall camp was amazing in every aspect. I would gladly recommend it to anyone who isn’t afraid to get their hands a bit dirty and go have some fun. I honestly hope that I get the opportunity to go back next year, and this time I will gladly write the application letter. So, again, thank you so much for allowing me to experience the wonderful joys of Nature Camp. 🐦

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## OUR ALASKAN ADVENTURE

By Barbara Houston and Judy Jones

July 2025 in Williamsburg was hot and humid, but in Homer and Seward, Alaska, the air was brisk and refreshing—just the change we needed for a week of photography, birding, and adventure. After a long (very long!) flight through Chicago to Anchorage, we arrived 13 hours later, cameras in hand, ready to explore. Our photo tour wouldn’t begin until the next day, but we weren’t about to waste a moment. We headed straight to a nearby lake and were rewarded with sightings of Arctic Terns, Short-billed Gulls, several

magpies, and a Red-necked Grebe. Except for the magpies, they were all life birds for both of us.

Next, we tried something new—Uber—to reach Potter Marsh. The location was spectacular. Pintails, Ravens, and Violet-green Swallows zipped around us (and no, we didn’t even try to photograph those swallows in flight—impossible!). We spotted Green-winged Teals with their chicks, Sandhill Cranes, Boreal Chickadees—the list kept growing. (Cont. on P. 7)



*Red-necked Grebe. Photo by Judy Jones.*

Back at the hotel, we met the other three members of our group: five birders, photographers, and nature lovers ready to dive into Alaska's wild beauty. Our next stop was Homer and our first real glimpse of Alaska's remote wonders.

In Homer, we spent three days aboard a small boat in Resurrection Bay, with the Iliamna Volcano looming in the distance. Birding here was a jackpot: Tufted and Horned puffins, Arctic Terns, Short-billed Gulls, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Pelagic Cormorants, Pigeon Guillemots, and countless Common Murres. Sea Otters drifted by as we photographed nesting birds at Gull Island, where tiny chicks perched on rocky ledges. The Common Murres stole the show. Rafts of them floated near our boat, and we soon spotted their massive nesting colony, likely 2,000 to 3,000 strong, clinging to cliffs on a mountainous island rising from the sea. It was breathtaking (see photo on next page).



*Tufted Puffin. Photo by Barbara Houston.*



*Horned Puffin. Photo by Barbara Houston.*

Murres, being heavy-bodied, can't carry nesting materials in flight. So, they lay pear-shaped eggs directly on bare rock. These eggs are pointed at one end and roll in a circle if nudged—a clever adaptation. Each egg is uniquely patterned, allowing parents to identify their own in the crowded colony.



*Common Murre. Photo by Judy Jones.*

The next day brought us to Seward, and once again we boarded a small boat, this time into the Gulf of Alaska. Our first stop: the mighty Aialik Glacier, constantly calving and sending ice crashing into the sea, sometimes toppling seals basking on sunlit icebergs. In the gulf, we spotted Rhinoceros Auklets and Parakeet Auklets, puffin cousins with distinctive bills. The Parakeet Auklet sports a thick, circular orange bill, while the Rhinoceros Auklet has a horn-like projection rising from its strong yellow bill. We also glimpsed Kittlitz's and Marbled murrelets—new and thrilling finds for us.

(Continued on Page 8)

**ALASKA, Continued from Page 7**



*Rhinoceros Auklet. Photo by Barbara Houston.*

And then came the whales. A pod of ten to twelve humpbacks appeared, bubble-feeding in unison. Birds forgotten, we watched in awe as these giants performed their underwater ballet.

All too soon, our week came to an end. Standing in the Anchorage airport, camera bags in tow, we faced another long flight but with hearts full and a shared resolve: we'll return to Alaska, just as soon as our families and wallets allow. 🇺🇸



*Humpback Whales bubble-feeding. Photo by Barbara Houston.*



*A nesting colony of Common Murres near Homer, Alaska on an island in Resurrection Bay. Photo by Judy Jones.*

## NEW, PERMANENT HOME PLANNED FOR HRBT SEABIRD COLONY

By Mary Ellen Hodges

According to a September 23, 2025 [news story by WHRO](#), the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) hopes to start construction in 2027 of a new, permanent location for the seabird colony displaced from the South Island of the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel (HRBT) when the ongoing transportation project to expand the HRBT was initiated in 2019. At that time, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources created temporary habitat for the colony at Fort Wool (on Ripraps Island), located immediately adjacent to the South Island. Re-establishment of the colony at Fort Wool was accomplished successfully, but the location provides insufficient habitat for the birds and continues the increased risk of aircraft and vehicular bird strike in the vicinity of the HRBT, endangering humans as well as birds. Also, Fort Wool is a significant historic property, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1969, and a buildup of acidic bird guano on the steel, concrete, and masonry buildings on the site threatens their survival.

Last November, USACE released for public review a [Draft Detailed Project Report and Environmental Assessment](#) which evaluated potential solutions to create safe, permanent, and biologically suitable habitat for the displaced seabird colony using dredged material from federal navigation channels. The preferred alternative identified in the report involves (1) “creation of a 5-acre seabird nesting habitat at Hampton Bar with a 9.7-acre horseshoe footprint on submerged lands with partial stabilization of up to 518,100 yd<sup>3</sup> of dredged material,” and (2) “adaptive management and monitoring of the habitat for up to ten years to meet biological requirements for the colony, ecological benefits for fishery species, and to maintain habitat features.” Hampton Bar is located about a mile south of downtown Hampton on the west side of the HRBT. According to WHRO, the USACE is presently in the process of finalizing its proposal for the \$15.9 million project. You can find out more about the proposed plan on the following USACE website: <https://www.nao.usace.army.mil/About/Projects/HR-Beneficial-Use-of-Dredged-Material/>. 

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## RECENT SIGHTINGS



**George Martin** shared information about a **Limpkin** that was observed feeding at a pond in Ford's Colony in late August. The bird was first sighted by Max Rollfinke on August 24, seen by George and **Nancy Barnhart** (who took the photo above) on the 25<sup>th</sup>, and seen again by George on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The bird is the only Limpkin reported in eBird for Virginia thus far this year.



As of September 21, your editor, **Mary Ellen Hodges**, had eight **Baltimore Orioles** visiting the feeders in her yard: three adult males, one adult female, and four female/immature birds. If she stays, this will be at least the sixth consecutive year the adult female pictured above will have overwintered in my downtown Williamsburg neighborhood. In recent years, she's been the first oriole to arrive in the fall. She had me worried this year because she didn't arrive until September 8, 18 days later than last year and after five other orioles were already present. I was so relieved when I finally learned she had survived through the summer!



**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 in 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://backyardbirderva.com>



**Wild Birds Unlimited** (located in Williamsburg in the Monticello Marketplace Shopping Center [Publix Plaza] next to Hair Cuttery) 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/>