



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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March 2026



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

March greetings! I was sorry to miss the February meeting as I was in the air over the Atlantic Ocean at meeting time. Happily, I was able to listen to the recording of Sergio Harding's outstanding

presentation about the Virginia Bird Atlas. What a brilliant resource it is! Thank you to Rexanne and her helpers for leading the meeting in my absence.

Thanks also to Rexanne for leading the February field trip along the Colonial Parkway. We had a great turnout and fun birds. Please read more about it in this newsletter.

I'm going to use my three-week trip to Africa as an excuse to take the easy route and repeat a former column this month. Back by popular demand, please enjoy the essay on Page 2 by guest columnist and my personal "birder enabler" Ken Barnhart. 🐦

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Rexanne Bruno

March 18, 2026. Jeff Wright will present "**Birds, Climate Change, and Citizen Science**". The meeting will be held in-person at the Quarterpath Recreation Center and via Zoom. Arrive at 6:00 p.m. for light refreshments at the recreation center followed by the program and meeting at 6:30 p.m.

The Commonwealth of Virginia is a key place in the world for birds. From our barrier islands in the Atlantic to our mountains, we offer habitats, climates, and food chains attractive to a wide range of birds. We are on the Atlantic Flyway which, in many cases, defines the exceptional number of birds transiting Virginia during migration. However, across the globe and in Virginia, birds in many cases are in decline. Further changes are already occurring that will also adversely impact the avian world. Foremost among these is arguably

climate change. A key question is do we have the means and the will to mitigate climate change? Are efforts already underway making a difference and if so, how?

Jeff Wright will discuss and examine how, through individual and community efforts, we can make a difference toward slowing the decline of bird life. He will discuss threats to birds, citizen and community science projects related to birds, and that birders and bird clubs are part of the solution. Photography and excerpts from studies of birds are used to tell this story. The presentation will emphasize birds in Virginia of concern, species at a tipping point, and birds and their habitat that need our support. Yes, there are a variety of birds in Virginia that are proverbial "canaries in a coal mine." The phrase is an idiom that means an advanced warning of potential trouble not just to the birds.



March speaker Jeff Wright. Photo by Kyle LaFerriere for The Nature Conservancy.

Save the Date: April 15, 2026. Talks by the recipients of the WBC's Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Ornithology Research Grants. Plan to attend to hear these W&M student presentations: Justin Biggerstaff on "Space Use by Barred Owls In and Around Williamsburg" and Jay Riney on "Prevention of Bird Deaths at Solar Farms". 🐦

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THE BIRDER ENABLER

By Ken Barnhart

Here we are, the sun setting on a Central Virginia field, an hour and a half from home, near an old clapboard barn hoping to catch sight of a Short-eared Owl before it's too dark to see. My birder and I are emerging from one of the coldest weeks in years and as the sun is setting behind the tree tops, the chill is setting in and no owl. We started out mid-morning with three targets. First, a White-fronted Goose at "The Pocket" in the Pamunkey Reservation; then, a Common Merganser at Lake Monticello, a restricted area for which we needed an entry pass; and a Short-eared Owl. The Pocket was beautiful and rich in ducks and geese at a great distance but no White-fronted Goose. Lake Monticello was a new venue and after just a couple of location moves we, or more accurately, my birder found the Common Merganser across the lake with a scope and a good camera. Check! On to the big prize, the Short-eared Owl.

Now it's getting pretty cold. My birder and I were entertained by some Northern Harriers hunting in the fields but no owl. Suddenly, there it was, bolting out of the grass and gliding across the field right in front of us. For five minutes it swooped across the fields hunting for prey, giving us quite a show. As darkness closed in, the owl dove below the hill and was swallowed by the darkness. There we were, grinning over our success, hungry, and an hour and a half from home. Welcome to the life of a birder enabler.

The birder enabler's job is to see to it that his or her birder has the best chance to find the target species of the day. Equipment is important. Get a decent pair of binoculars. I have a pair of "Smart Binoculars" previously owned by my birder with more experience than I have. I also have a scope previously owned by Bill Williams that is uncanny in its educated ability to find birds. A birding day begins by determining the target species we'll pursue, and deciding on where best to find them checking time, temperature, winds, and tides. I do all the driving, giving my birder a free hand to search eBird lists, navigate to hot spots, accept rare bird alerts on her phone, and of course scan for birds. When a subject is spotted, I can stop the car in the road so she can check it out while I watch the road for approaching vehicles. One important tip: bring food. When addicted birders are on the hunt they can go all day without stopping to eat. To keep up your strength and theirs, bring sandwiches and snacks. Another important note: Patience is truly a virtue in this endeavor. (Continued on Page 3)

THE BIRDER ENABLER, Continued from Page 2

Often when approaching a target location, the big tip-off is a string of cars and a group of birders with scopes. It's very likely some in this group are the top birders in the state if not the world. Be cool. Don't embarrass your birder by yacking up what you recently saw or shout "Kestrel!!" while pointing to a Mourning Dove passing overhead. Actually, most of the crowd is really nice and helpful, but birding etiquette is serious stuff. If you have been focusing on a location waiting to find your target bird to show and one of these experienced birders sidles up to you and asks "Seen anything interesting yet?", a good answer is "Just the usual subjects so far." This tips them off that you are a serious birder without demonstrating how little you know.

There are many days when we are unable to find the species we are hunting, but the hunt is still fun and the locations are worth the trips. When we do make a long trip to find a rarity and are successful it is always a thrill. The best experience for the enabler is to be the one in the group to actually spot, identify, and point out the target species the group has been hunting. This will earn you "Enabler First Class". Having finished up 2022 with a LeConte's Sparrow, a Lark Sparrow, a Common Merganser, and a Short-eared Owl, and started 2023 with three Sand Hill Cranes, I am graduating from the ranks of enablers to join the ranks of birders. See you all out there. 🐦

WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome our new members Karen Creef, Edward and Vicki Keens, Kate Tanzola, and Melissa Williams!

To join our club or renew your membership for 2026, please go to <https://williamsburgbirdclub.org/join-the-wbc/>, 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.

LAST CALL! Renewals for the new year were due by January 31, 2026. In accordance with the WBC's Bylaws, membership is automatically terminated if annual dues remain unpaid by April 1. 🐦

BIRD WALKS: Next Walk is March 28 at New Quarter Park

Babs Griffin led a group of 13 during the club's February 28 bird walk at New Quarter Park on a sunny, cool morning. The group counted 32 species and all were treated to a sighting of two Horned Grebes on Queens Creek. They also spotted a variety of the usual winter local birds, and everyone is looking forward to spring migration. The full checklist for the walk can be found

at this link: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S304576886>.

The next scheduled bird walk at New Quarter Park is on Saturday, March 28. We'll meet in the parking lot by the park office at 8:00 a.m. The walk is free and open to the public; kids are welcome. Binoculars are available for check-out at the park office. 🐦

FIELD TRIP REPORT: Next trip is March 21 to Machicomoco State Park

By George Martin

Colonial Parkway, February 21

The weather cooperated for the field trip on Saturday, February 21, when Rexanne Bruno led 16 other birders at several sites along the Colonial Parkway and the York River. The birds cooperated as well! The group started at Felgates Creek, where several Tundra Swan were easy to see immediately. At Indian Field Creek, a few Brown Pelicans lumbered into view. That site also provided good looks at the large

number of Ruddy Ducks and Bufflehead on the York. Redoubts 9 and 10 featured a flock of Cedar Waxwings, just as members of the group were returning to their cars for a short trip to the Moore House. The Moore House had a wide variety of species present: Common Goldeneye and Bonaparte's Gull on the river, and seven sparrow species on land. We ended the trip at Yorktown Beach, where Common Loons were plentiful. Seven hungry birders then had a hearty lunch at the Yorktown Pub. (Continued on Page 4)

FIELD TRIP REPORT, Cont. from Page 3

The group identified 58 species over the course of the field trip. The trip report at the following link shows 57 species—two birders added a Red-throated Loon to the Felgates Creek checklist: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/480139>.

Machicomoco State Park, Saturday, March 21

For the March field trip on Saturday, March 21, we'll visit Machicomoco State Park in Gloucester County. Deborah Humphries will lead the group that day. The park usually provides a good mix of waterfowl and

land birds, and the timing corresponds with the arrival of some returning migrants, especially Osprey. Last year, the group identified 45 species.

We'll meet at the parking lot just inside the pay station at 8:00 a.m. The park is located at 3601 Timberneck Farm Road, Hayes, VA 23072. If you have a state park pass, please bring it. Vehicles without a state park pass will pay a \$5 fee. If you'd like to carpool, or you are willing to drive others, please let me know at 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. 🐦



February 21 field trip participants at the confluence of Indian Field Creek and the York River on the Colonial Parkway. Photo by Rexanne Bruno, who led the outing, which was organized by George Martin (standing at left end).

WHAT IS A BREEDING BIRD ATLAS?

Summary by Cathy Millar

The Virginia Bird Atlas ("Atlas") (<https://vabirdatlas.org/>) is a one-stop birding website available to the public for free that covers comprehensive information of 203 species that breed in Virginia. The Atlas was the subject of the speaker at the WBC's February 18 meeting, Sergio Harding. Sergio received a master's degree in biology studying endangered Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in North Carolina. Since 2005, he has worked as a nongame bird conservation biologist with the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), where he oversees various avian projects. The Atlas represents one of Virginia's largest citizen science efforts and is the result of collaboration between DWR, the Virginia Society of Ornithology, and Virginia Tech's Management Institute. Roughly 1,500

volunteers contributed over 80,000 hours of field observations to map breeding evidence across the state. Sergio thanked those members of our club who contributed observations and thanked the club as a whole for the funds we donated to support analysis and online publication of data. He applauded club members Bill Williams, who chaired the project's steering committee; Shirley Devan, who led the VSO fundraising campaign; and Rexanne Bruno, who served on every Atlas committee from beginning to end!

The Atlas presents the results of analysis of data collected under the Second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas surveys conducted from 2016 – 2020. The data is also (Continued on Page 5)

VA BIRD ATLAS, Continued from Page 4

compared to the results of the First Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas project, conducted from 1985 – 1989. The comparison revealed new breeding species in Virginia since the First Atlas: Anhinga, Common Merganser, Mississippi Kite, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Black-necked Stilt, Trumpeter Swan, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Painted Bunting, and Merlin. The breeding species “lost” (might not have been spotted) since the First Atlas are: Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, Upland Sandpiper, Bewick’s Wren, Sedge Wren, Bachman’s Sparrow, and Ring-necked Pheasant. The data indicates when birds are establishing territories, building nests, laying eggs, fledging chicks, as well as their distribution in different habitats throughout Virginia.

Sergio gave us a tour of the online Atlas, scrolling through the ribbon banner that appears at the top of each page of the website that highlights and allows easy navigation among the four main information

categories: About, Species Accounts, Methods and Results, and Conservation. A dropdown menu under each category reveals more data-rich information that includes beautiful photos, species information, interactive maps, and analysis of changes in breeding status. The Atlas continues to be developed to include further information such as tables showing the timing of breeding behavior across species and a Research and Education Page.

With an estimated 2.9 billion birds lost from North America since 1970, understanding where birds breed and how their populations are changing in response to climate change and other anthropogenic causes has never been more important. The Atlas provides critical information for habitat management, land acquisition, education and outreach, research and monitoring, and conservation planning. Check out this valuable tool at <https://vabirdatlas.org/> and click on the following link to watch this wonderful presentation: <https://youtu.be/TD2UGIZINcY>. 🐦

HUNTINGTON BEACH STATE PARK

By Judy Jones

Last year I had the pleasure of visiting Huntington Beach State Park in Murrell’s Inlet, South Carolina—a true gem for fall birding. October is an especially rewarding time to explore the park, as it hosts a variety of birds rarely seen in Williamsburg.

One of the most striking sights was the Wood Stork, with its imposing size, vulture-like head, and that elegant, almost Victorian ruffled collar. Just as captivating were the Roseate Spoonbills, wading gracefully through the mudflats at low tide. Their soft pink plumage never fails to stir the heart.



Black-crowned Night Heron. Photo by Judy Jones.

The park was teeming with life—alligators basking in the sun, egrets of every kind, stately herons, avocets, and even the elusive Black-crowned Night Heron. The diversity and abundance of wildlife made every step along the trail feel like a discovery.

If you’re seeking a fall birding destination that offers both beauty and surprise, Huntington Beach State Park deserves a spot at the top of your list. 🐦



Roseate Spoonbill. Photo by Judy Jones. See more of Judy’s photos from Murrell’s Inlet, SC on the next page.



Wood Stork. Photo by Judy Jones. Murrell's Inlet, SC.



American Avocet. Photo by Judy Jones. Murrell's Inlet, SC.

MURPHY'S (AND CARPENTER'S) LAWS OF BIRDING

By Gary Carpenter

Over the years, a number of humorous "Murphy's Laws" of birding have occurred to me. These are not original and I am certain most of these have been seen, encountered, overheard, and expressed by all birders. But I thought it might be fun to codify these "Laws" and see if others in our club could add some of their own or improve upon these. So, here are thirteen to get us started. If you think of others, send them on, and I will compile the list and perhaps get them published every year or so.

1. Target bird was present X time ago. The target bird was here at your present location at some previous time.

In order to have seen whatever specific bird you are looking for, you needed to have been here at some earlier time. Be it last year, last season, last month, last week, yesterday, a minute ago, or a second ago, the bird was here then . . . and it isn't now. This law expands to birding in general, as in, the birding here was better X time ago.

2. BVD is a constant.

BVD = Better View Desired. No matter how good your view, no matter how close you are, no matter how good your optics, birders always perceive that there is some better view of the subject bird.

3. Birding while driving equals poor outcomes for both. But all birders do it.

You cannot find birds well when you drive and you cannot drive well while looking for birds. Yet all birders do it, to some greater or lesser degree, all the time. There is a bicycling corollary.

4. Abundance and consistency equal disinterest and complacency.

When you see a species numerous times over in a matter of days you become increasingly complacent and uninterested. I had never seen a Green Jay in my life, but by the fourth day of seeing them in south Texas this gorgeous emerald green bird was relegated to "Just a . . ." phraseology, as in, "Oh, that's just another Green Jay."

5. The positives of a spotting scope in the field are offset by the negatives of carrying it around.

Spotting scopes are a positive. Carrying them around is a negative. The Very Best Spotting Scope is the one somebody else carries and lets you use. Telescopic camera lens corollary: no one EVER lets you use their camera or lenses.

6. Beneficial habitats for birds equal noxious habitats for human beings.

Garbage dumps. Swamps. Water and sewage treatment facilities. Birds love these habitats and would compare them to heaven. Humans hate these habitats and would compare them to hell . . . especially on really hot and humid days. (Continued on Page 7)

LAWS OF BIRDING, Continued from Page 6

7. The birding is always better someplace else. Or the “grass is always greener” birding corollary.

No matter where you are, the birding is (was) better where you are not. With the possible exception of when you are in Costa Rica, in which case Law #1 will apply.

8. Descriptions for spotting target birds are generally unhelpful and/or inadequate. (And pointing does not help and scares the bird away.)

This law is best described by illustration:

“Oh, I have a *Blue Grosbeak!*”

“Where?”

“*In that tree.*” (In your field of view there are two hundred trees.)

“Which tree?”

“*In that big thingee over there.*” (In those trees are one hundred “thingees” that are bigger than the others.)

“Um...which big thingee?”

“*Oh . . . uhm . . . in that . . . uh . . . I think it is a pine!*” (Assumes that both the spotter and you know the difference between a pine, and a spruce, and a yew, and a hemlock, and a . . .)

And if the correct tree is identified, then begins the routine of determining where in the tree the bird is located. And then . . . see Law #1.

9. The odds of correctly identifying birds from field guide illustrations varies depending on size, and location. The ability to correctly identify big birds from little birds is generally higher than 50-50. The

odds of correctly identifying little passerines from one another through field guide illustrations drops to approximately 20-80. The odds of correctly identifying little seaside peeps from one another through field guide illustrations drops to approximately 5-95.

Or, as put by that famous American sage, Ogden Nash:

*“ . . . But a bird in the open never looks
Like the picture in the birdie books . . . ”*

10. Any distantly seen hawk of any size at all is a Red-tailed Hawk . . . until proven otherwise. It just is . . . Jeff Swinebroad.

11. Any flock of LBJs (“Little Brown Jobs”) flying over an agricultural field and seen from a moving vehicle are Horned Larks . . . until proven otherwise. They just are . . . Craig Turner.

12. The Parking Lot Pareto Principal applies to birding.

80% of the birds seen at any designated “good birding location” will be seen from within 20% of the location’s total area . . . and it is usually comprised of the location’s parking lot and its immediate perimeter.

13. Any day spent birding equals a good day.

Time spent birding is good time. No matter the number of species spotted, a bad day of birding is better than a good day at work. Or (with a nod to a French general), “A good day of birding is wonderful, a poor day of birding is still pretty good.” 🐦

RECENT SIGHTINGS



Deborah Humphries shared two photos she took on February 11: “The **American Bittern** showed up for a day or so at Greensprings Interpretive Trail. It’s always fun to see one. His feathers are stunning, particularly when the sun hits them. And his bright green legs are always a bit of a shock.”



Kathi Mestayer submitted this photo of her mailbox post with holes drilled most likely by a **Pileated Woodpecker** sometime in the past 6-12 months. She pondered, somewhat tongue in cheek: “Were the birds practicing? Is it possible that there was actual food in there?” Kathi also reported that on February 25 she saw a leucistic female **Red-winged Blackbird** at her feeder which she identified through an online search. Kathi said the bird “was unusually visible and way less skittish than the other female redwings, so I got to watch her for a while.”



How did you deal with the aftermath of the snow/ice storm in late January? **Bart Singer** had an interesting approach: “No extraordinary birds here, just part of a flock of **blackbirds** that I convinced to work for their food. After our ice storm, these birds were willing to peck at the black-oil sunflower seeds that I scattered on the driveway, chipping bits of ice in the process. Their pecking probably helped roughen the ice a bit, although I’m not sure if it was worth the amount of seed I threw out for them ☺.”



Deborah Humphries captured the photo to the left of a **Red-necked Grebe** at Diascund Reservoir on February 10. Although the species is a relative rarity for our area, numerous sightings have been made this year in various locations across Virginia since late January. Deborah provided the following context: “The Red-necked Grebe breeds on northerly lakes and winters mainly along (northerly) ocean coastlines, usually singly but sometimes in small groups. The feeling is that with the northern lakes frozen (the Great Lakes), many ducks and other waterfowl are finding their way south in larger numbers than we usually see. Which is great for those of us who can count this one as a lifer.”

Clearly impressed with Deborah’s photo (which she had shared to eBird and the Macaulay Library), the Cornell Lab of Ornithology used it as the basis of their weekly bird quiz on [Facebook](#) on February 24. Here’s how Cornell explained the identification: “This week’s quiz bird—a mostly brown waterbird with a daggerlike bill—might suggest a loon or a female merganser. During the winter months, both Red-throated and Common Loons are much whiter on the chin, throat, and upper breast, and they both have a grayish bill. (Common’s bill is noticeably heftier, while Red-throated consistently holds

its bill upward.) Female Common and Red-breasted Mergansers both have orange bills with slight hooks at the tip, as well as grayish bodies, reddish-brown heads, and shaggy crests. That leaves a sometimes-overlooked group of waterbirds—the grebes—to consider. Virginia is home to three grebes during the winter months: Pied-billed, Horned, and Red-necked. Pied-billed Grebe can instantly be ruled out due to its short, stubby bill. Nonbreeding Horned Grebe is strikingly colored in black and white, with a brilliant red eye, and a short, dark bill. This week’s mystery bird—with its yellow spear-like bill, dark eye, blackish head bordered by a whitish crescent, and brown body—is a RED-NECKED GREBE.” Of course, we all already knew all of that. Didn’t we?



2026 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.

Renewals are due January 31, 2026

If joining May-Aug—please pay half price. Sept-Dec—no dues initially. Please just fill out contact info above.

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.

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
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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/>