



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

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September 2026



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Nancy Barnhart

Welcome back after a long hot summer! I hope you found ways to stay cool! Heading into the fall we have some great meetings, bird walks, and field trips coming up. Watch for details in this newsletter and future emails.

We're not quite done with summer weather yet but we ARE in a great birding time of year. Shorebird migration is in full swing. These long-distance migrants face many challenges and rely on stopovers to refuel on their long journeys. Luckily, we have good shorebird viewing at places like the Jamestown Island Causeway, Grandview Nature Preserve, Hog Island Wildlife Management Area, Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and Bethel Beach Natural Area Preserve, all eBird hotspots, to name a few.

For some, the very mention of "shorebird" brings groans. As a group shorebirds do present identification challenges. If you can spend a little time watching them, you can begin to sort them out. You can use your everyday field guides or one that covers shorebirds specifically. I like *The Shorebird Guide* by Michael O'Brien, Richard Crossley, and Kevin Karlson. It is packed with photos and individual species accounts. A very instructive part of the book is the inside back cover. Spread over two pages, there are silhouettes of almost 50 shorebirds. It took quite a while for me to realize that memorizing all the different plumages of these birds is a daunting challenge. Boil it down to silhouettes and you've greatly simplified the process. Relative size, bill length and shape, posture, and leg length are a few of the diagnostic characteristics that can be seen in silhouette. Add in the foraging movement and style that you can observe in the field, and you can quickly narrow down ID to just a couple of choices. For example, very long bills, short legs, and "sewing machine" probing action point you to the

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UPCOMING PROGRAMS

By Rexanne Bruno

September 16, 2026: Join us at 6:00 p.m. for light refreshments followed by the program at 6:30 p.m. The meeting will be held both in-person at the Quartermaster Recreation Center and online via Zoom.

Sarah Karpanty, a Professor in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech, will share insights on "Colonial Waterbird Conservation in the Hampton Roads". Join us to learn about the collaborative research and monitoring work conducted since 2018 related to the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel seabird conservation effort. Sarah will share a brief recap of the events that led to the temporary relocation of Virginia's largest seabird colony in 2020; updates on how the colony has been faring since 2020 in terms of bird counts, reproduction, and survival; and a look ahead towards the construction of a new bird island in the region for these colonial seabirds.

Save the Date: Our next meeting, on October 21, 2026 at 6:30 p.m., will be held exclusively online via Zoom. Laura Greenleaf has been leading the Virginia chapter of DarkSky International since 2013. She will speak on "Lighting Matters: An Introduction to Light Pollution and Responsible Outdoor Lighting". 🐦



American Avocets at the Jamestown Causeway, 8/9/26.
Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB
Executive Board 2026

President 540-454-3014
Nancy Barnhart barnhartnt@gmail.com

Vice-President, Programs 434-944-2730
Rexanne Bruno rexannebruno@gmail.com

Vice-President, Newsletter Editor 757-220-0566
Mary Ellen Hodges men.hodges@gmail.com

Treasurer 757-221-6683
Ann Carpenter carpenter17d@cox.net

Secretary 757-229-1775
Cathy Millar millar.cathy@gmail.com

Member-at-Large 703-870-8034
Donna Benson mid520@me.com

Member-at-Large 703-674-9513
Deborah Humphries djhinva@gmail.com

Past President 303-519-0989
Cheryl J. Jacobson icheryljoy@aol.com

Committee Chairpersons 2026

Membership/Webmaster 757-707-3345
Jeanette Navia jnavia@gmail.com

Field Trips 571-535-7444
George Martin grm0803@gmail.com

Bird Counts/Liaison to VSO 757-813-1322
Shirley Devan shirley_devan@icloud.com

Bird Walks 757-243-6759
Scott Hemler sahemler@yahoo.com

Library Liaison/Refreshments 757-879-1997
Catherine Flanagan flanagan.catherine@gmail.com

Historian 703-304-7885
Patty Maloney maloney3013@aol.com

Records/Liaison to CVWO 540-454-3014
Nancy Barnhart barnhartnt@gmail.com

Conservation Committee 303-519-0989
Cheryl J. Jacobson icheryljoy@aol.com

Nature Camp Scholarships 703-304-7885
Patty Maloney maloney3013@aol.com

Liaison to CDR/Assistant Editor 757-221-6683
Gary Carpenter carpent66@cox.net

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dowitchers. And if you can snap a quick photo of the bird, we now have Merlin, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's free app which can help identify these tricky birds.

I hope you can take some time to visit a shorebird stopover this fall. It can be very rewarding to observe these impressive long-distance migrants on their annual trip south.

Happy Birding! 🐦



Solitary Sandpiper in Charles City County, 8/16/26. Photo by Nancy Barnhart.

Editor's Note: For further help learning the relative sizes of shorebirds, download the Cornell Lab's free guide, the [Shorebird Yardstick](#).

WBC MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome new members Mark Stephens, Ryan Goodman and Kristin Giordano, Joanne Benecki, and Emily Landicho!

The purpose of the Williamsburg Bird Club is to promote interest in the study of wild birds, protect birds and their habitat, and share the joy of birding with others. To join our club, please go to <https://williamsburg-birdclub.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. 🐦

BIRD WALKS: Next Walk is on September 26

By Scott Hemler

June 27: We had 11 people come out on a muggy, but pleasant morning for our June bird walk at New Quarter Park. We saw 29 species with a good mix of both our year-round and summer resident birds. Several Red-eyed Vireos were singing up in the trees, three Ospreys were down along Queens Creek, and a Bald Eagle was watching us from across the creek at the dock. We heard three Clapper Rails in the marsh grass across from the dock. All in all it was an enjoyable morning for a bird walk even though the weather was a little sticky and the birding a little slow.



June 27 bird walk. Photo by Scott Hemler.

July 25: Despite the fact it was a rainy Saturday morning, we had nine people come out for our July bird walk at New Quarter Park. Luckily the rain had stopped before the walk began. The birds showed up, too, as we saw 41 species! Not bad for July. Some highlights were five Great Egrets and two Clapper Rails down in the marsh along Queens Creek. We saw three Bald Eagles down there as well. We also saw a Red-headed Woodpecker—the first we had seen in a while. Despite the threat of more rain, it was a nice morning for a bird walk with an impressive number of species of birds!



July 25 bird walk. Photo by Scott Hemler.

August 22: It was a cloudy morning that threatened rain, but that did not stop 22 people from coming out to our August bird walk at New Quarter Park. We had many new attendees as well! We saw 23 species of birds. We did not see anything unusual or unexpected, but we did see a good representation of the park's year-round avian residents, such as Tufted Titmouse, Northern Cardinal, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Downy Woodpecker. We also saw or heard several summer residents that were still here, such as Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Acadian Flycatcher, and several vocal Eastern Wood-Pewees. We got a good look at a Great Egret down at the dock along Queens Creek and also heard several Clapper Rails there as well. Despite the uncertain weather, we had a good turnout of both people and birds!

The next scheduled bird walk at New Quarter Park is on Saturday, September 26. 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. 🐦



August 22 bird walk. Photo by John Swaddle.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIP: Virginia's Eastern Shore, Saturday, September 19

By George Martin

Our club's annual field trip to the Eastern Shore will be in September this year, one month earlier than we've traveled there in previous years. This field trip frequently results in the highest species count of all our field trips due to the time of year and the wide diversity of habitat. In 2025, the group identified 70 species.

On Saturday, September 19, we'll meet at the Visitor's Center of the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge (ESVNWR) at 8:00 a.m. Deborah Humphries will lead us around the Visitor's Center as well as the trail behind it, then move to three other stops: Ramp Road, also within ESVNWR; the Hawk Watch at Kiptopeke State Park; and the Edward Brinkley Nature Preserve. We are planning to leave Ramp Road no later than 10:15 a.m. so that we have plenty of time at the Hawk Watch.

We also want to work in lunch at Cape Charles Brewing Company after a morning of birding. If we leave Kiptopeke a little late, some may decide to go to the Edward Brinkley Preserve after lunch. In any event, bring a snack or two and plenty of water!

If you are interested in carpooling, or you are willing to drive others, please let me know. The carpool meeting

spot is the Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Road. Carpoolers should plan to depart by 6:30 a.m. I expect we'll return to Williamsburg around 4 p.m. If you have a state park pass, please bring it. Admission for cars without an annual pass is \$7.

Again this year, Baxter Beamer is monitoring the morning flight at Sunset Beach. Members are invited to view the morning flight. You'll need to arrive at the site between 6:30 and 7:00 a.m. I understand another group will be observing the morning flight that day, so Mr. Beamer may be busy.

Here are Google Maps addresses for the sites we'll visit:

- Visitor's Center, ESVNWR—32205 Seaside Road, Cape Charles, VA 23310
- Kiptopeke State Park—3540 Kiptopeke Drive, Cape Charles, VA 23310
- Edward S. Brinkley Nature Preserve—20199 Seaside Road, Cape Charles, VA 23310
- Cape Charles Brewing Company—2198 Stone Road, Cape Charles, VA 23310
- Sunset Beach Morning Flight—End of Wise Point Lane (across Rt. 13 from Seaside Road entrance to ESVNWR). 

JUNE OUTDOOR GATHERING AT THE PARK

By Donna Benson

On June 17, the Williamsburg Bird Club hosted its annual outdoor gathering under the picnic shelter at Chickahominy Riverfront Park. We were fortunate to have a beautiful and—uncommonly for summer in Virginia—cool evening. It was wonderful to see so many members come out to enjoy the festivities.

The evening began with some social time, giving everyone a chance to catch up and fill their plates with delicious sandwiches, chips, fruit, and other goodies before settling in for our guest speaker. In recognition of our country's 250th anniversary, WBC member Marc Thibault gave a fascinating presentation on Mark Catesby, the noted English naturalist and explorer of the Colonial era. Catesby is best known for *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*, published between 1731 and 1743 and considered the first comprehensive illustrated account of the flora and fauna of southeastern North America. His work also has an interesting local

connection: portions were written at the home of his sister, Elizabeth, who lived in Williamsburg. Marc brought along samples of Catesby's remarkably beautiful illustrations, giving us a glimpse of how the natural world of early America was documented nearly 300 years ago.

Following Marc's talk, Nancy Barnhart emceed a lively—and surprisingly competitive—trivia game. Members divided into smaller teams to tackle a host of questions about birds and birding. One question managed to stump every team: "What bird has the largest population in the world?" Apparently, even a group of dedicated birders can forget that chickens are birds!

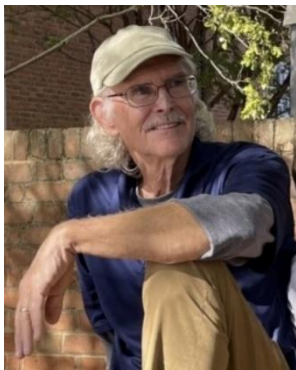
It was a wonderful evening of good food, good company, a little history, and, of course, plenty of birds. Many thanks to Marc and Nancy for providing the evening's entertainment, to everyone who helped organize the gathering and provide the refreshments, and to all the members who came out to join us. We couldn't have asked for a better way to spend a cool June evening with our fellow bird lovers. 



Playing trivia during the June gathering at Chickahominy Riverfront Park. Photo by Marc Thibault.

IN MEMORIAM: BRIAN JAMES TABER (1950-2026)

By Nancy Barnhart



Brian Taber.

This past July, the Williamsburg Bird Club and the greater Williamsburg area lost Brian Taber, an original WBC member and President of Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (CVWO), who died after a brave battle with mesothelioma. Brian's passing is a tremendous organizational loss for CVWO and a huge personal loss for many.

Brian was a gentle spirit, a beautiful soul, and a strong supporter of conservation, especially of birds, butterflies and other pollinators, and the habitats on which they depend.

Outside of his professional life as Social Services Supervisor in James City County, Brian was an avid and active birder for over 50 years, highly respected in the statewide birding community for his knowledge and keen eye. He was the author of *Riding the Wind: A Birder's Ups and Downs*, a collection of essays, some of which were published in several magazines.

As the President of CVWO for over 20 years, Brian

was passionate about conservation education and research and participated in studies of raptors, songbirds, waterbirds, and butterflies. Brian was an inspiration and mentor to many young students and birders and readily shared his vast knowledge while remaining modest and humble. He was instrumental in starting and sustaining CVWO's two long-running Hawk-watches: one at Kiptopeke State Park and one on College Creek in James City County.

Brian's love of nature led him to establish pollinator gardens at Kiptopeke State Park and the Jamestown Marina. He helped produce annotated butterfly lists and established two official North American Butterfly Association counts. Besides his beloved CVWO, Brian was a strong supporter and contributor to many other conservation organizations including the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas, the Center for Conservation Biology, and the Hawk Migration Association among others. His influence was profound and will live on.

Brian was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, brother, and friend, and his family mattered more to him than anything. He quietly instilled in them his love of nature. (Continued on Page 6)

IN MEMORIAM, Continued from Page 5

On a personal note, as Vice-President of CVWO to Brian's Presidency, I worked closely with Brian. We were birding buddies. We spent many hours together at Hawkwatchers, both at Kiptopeke and at College Creek, and on many birding adventures. I will miss working with him, birding with him, and the hours of

talking with him about everything from birds to books to music to *Saturday Night Live*. We made hours go by quickly.

Brian was a gem and our hearts go out to his wife Deb, his children John and Amelia and their beautiful families, and his sister Mary Ann. We will miss him. 🐦

NATURE CAMP SCHOLARSHIPS

By Patty Maloney

Thanks to your generous donations to our Nature Camp scholarships, the Williamsburg Bird Club sent three students this year to Vesuvius, Virginia for two amazing weeks at camp. These three campers experienced diverse educational classes, field hikes, speakers, and life-changing opportunities to explore and learn about our natural world. Their brief, but sincere thank you notes are below:

Natalie Tuggle: "I am so grateful for this amazing opportunity to attend Nature Camp. Without your generosity, I never would have discovered this place. I had a wonderful time at camp. I went birding, seining, swimming and hiking. I studied rock formations, spider guilds, fungi phyla, and bat physiology. I helped plan a research survey at a farm lake to document tadpoles and even participated in a 5K to support the rainforest. Thank you once again for making this experience possible! I learned so much and made great friends! I look forward to attending again!"

Maksymilian Sekula: "Thank you so much for the awesome opportunity to attend Nature Camp! I have definitely enjoyed every second of time that I have spent here at camp. I took limnology, the study of fresh water ecosystems, and saw some rare brook trout. The two coolest things that I learned about are the history of how the Monacan tribe treated the streams around them, and the biochemistry of Antarctica. I even laughed through the hard moments like being stuck on a mountain in the rain. I hope to take what I have

learned here into my daily life. Thank you again for such an awesome opportunity!"

Lydia Rauschenberger: "Thank you so much for funding my time at Nature Camp and allowing me to have the opportunity of coming here. I took ornithology this year. I learned how to identify birds just by sound. I also know all the native birds in the area. I am so excited to apply all this knowledge when I get home. Every year I look forward to Nature Camp and because of you guys, I can. You've allowed me to hike December Ridge on Sunday hikes, try to run up to 3rd Lookout, and go up to 1st Lookout to see the wildfires. Many more memories I hold dearly in my heart is all because of you guys. Thank you so much!"

Scholarship applications for the 2027 Nature Camp season will be available on our website on October 1, 2026 and must be returned or post-marked by October 31, 2026. All local students entering 6th-12th grades in the fall of 2027 are eligible to apply.

If you want to experience a little bit of Nature Camp for yourself, the 17th Almost Annual Fall Hike Day at Nature Camp is scheduled for Saturday, October 17, 2026. Cost is \$20 for adults and \$10 for youth and is limited to 100 people. To register and for more information, go to <https://www.naturecampfoundation.org/fall-hike-days/>. 🐦

PHASE TWO OF THE ATLAS WEBSITE HAS LAUNCHED

By Sergio Harding

Editor's Note: This announcement was posted August 5, 2026 on the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources [website](#).

A major expansion of the [Atlas website](#) has launched on Wednesday, August 5, 2026, rounding out [Phase One](#) of the site, which went live in October 2025.

Phase Two features **ten new pages of content** covering additional results, methodology and, importantly, conservation.

- Among the many things that makes the Atlas valuable is what it tells us about the status of Virginia's (Continued on Page 7)

BIRD ATLAS, Cont. from Page 6

breeding birds. The [Results](#) page has been updated to identify the species that have undergone major expansions and contractions of their footprint on the Virginia landscape over the 30-year period since the First Atlas. Look also for content on Virginia population estimates for breeding bird species, both on the Results page and as a [standalone table](#). A separate [phenology table](#) provides date ranges for the different phases of the breeding cycle for nearly 200 species.

- The [Contributions to Conservation](#) page comprehensively details how the Atlas can and will continue to be harnessed to work for the conservation of many of our declining bird species. The page is complemented by a [Research](#) page that invites researchers to analyze raw data from the Atlas to further heighten its conservation impact. Finally, action-minded Virginians can refer to the [How You Can Support Birds](#) page to learn what they can do to benefit the Commonwealth's breeding birds.

- Using the [Education](#) page, K-12 educators can learn how the Atlas website can support their work in the classroom, including fulfilling the requirements of Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOLs).

- The [Virginia Habitats](#) page provides information on the status of different habitats in Virginia and the threats that they face. Along with the [Virginia](#)

[Geography and Climate](#) page, it highlights representative bird species of different habitats and geographic regions of the Commonwealth.

- The [Coverage](#) page summarizes survey effort and block completion, and is a testament to the enormous effort that both volunteers and field technicians devoted to collecting data for the Atlas.

- Head to the [Analytical Methods](#) page for insight into how the distribution and abundance maps in the [Species Accounts](#) were produced, and how changes in species distributions between Atlases were identified.

- Notes from the Field, on the website's [homepage](#), features curated articles from VDW that are relevant to bird conservation. It also links to past Atlas articles and will be used for new Atlas-related announcements.

With Phase Two of the Atlas now online, the website is complete. As a living publication, however, it may see future revisions. These could include taxonomic updates reflecting changes in the common and scientific names of individual species, as well as expanded content for individual Species Accounts.

We invite you to explore this new edition of the [Atlas website](#), and, as always, to provide us with feedback via the [Contact Us](#) page. 🐦

A SECRET HIDEOUT

By Virginia Wyckoff



Young Green Heron. Photo by Virginia Wyckoff.

I was shocked. Twice.

We live at least a half mile from the nearest pond, but just after sunrise on May 21, I saw a Green Heron land high up in a native Black Cherry tree on our property. Although they are routinely seen at our community pond during the summer, I never imagined we would see one on our quarter-acre property. What a treat! Of course, I whipped out my phone and reported it on eBird.

I didn't think much about this special visitor in the ensuing weeks. That is, not until July 5, when a neighbor

called to say a "crane or heron" was seen in the community's common area abutting our property. Despite my thorough search, I could not locate anything larger than a Brown Thrasher.

Four days later, in the midst of my early morning bird feeding routine, I froze in my tracks when the call of a Green Heron erupted. The bird called repeatedly from high in the same cherry tree it had been in seven weeks earlier. A few minutes later, it flew off in the direction of the nearest pond. And then, to my amazement, a second Green Heron appeared and flew off in the same direction.

But the excitement wasn't over. Five minutes later, there was a commotion in some low bushes. Two more Green Herons appeared! Unbeknownst to me for these many weeks, the herons must have nested in the bushes.

Who knew these two juvenile herons would become the talk of the neighborhood? I was pleasantly
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SECRET HIDEOUT, Cont. from Page 7

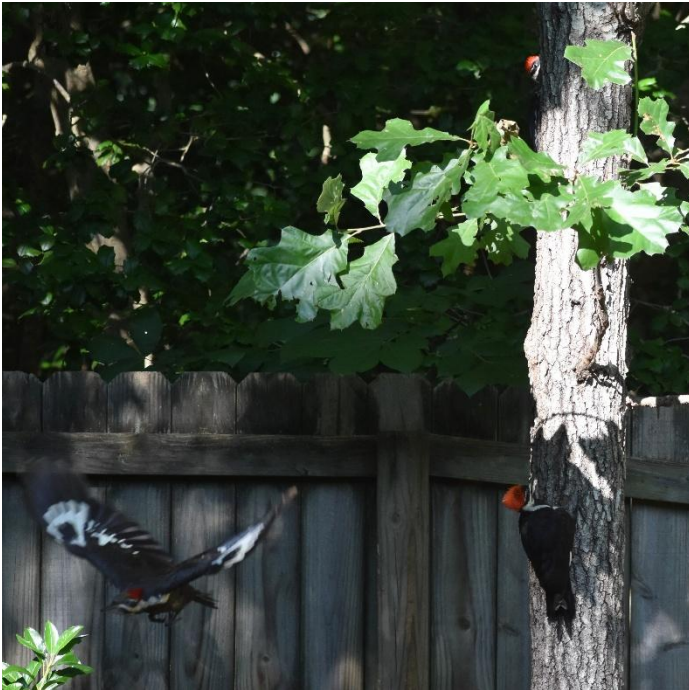
surprised to see them garner so much attention. The birds were seen scurrying around, dodging for cover to avoid the many dog-walkers.

A few days later, the sole remaining juvenile was within a few feet of us, walking around a water feature

we installed in 2020 when COVID quashed our travel plans. Was the sound of the water what brought the herons to nest in the nearby bushes?

Now that the herons have departed, we are left to wonder if they will return next year to nest again. We are anxious to see if there is another chapter in this story. 🐦

RECENT SIGHTINGS



From **Katie Forrest**: "For years, we've enjoyed fleeting visits from a **Pileated Woodpecker**. Occasionally, we'd be lucky enough to have a pair. Starting in June, we got to play host to a family of three. I only managed a few snapshots of the parents and juvenile in the same frame, but it has made bird watching from our deck extra special this summer."



Bruce Glendening's Birdfy feeder camera caught these two young **Chipping Sparrows** on 8/21/26.



When **Bart Singer** submitted this photo of his backyard bird bath, taken during mid-June, he said: "Nothing special here, but it's nice to see the birds apparently enjoying themselves." We agree with the latter half of your statement, Bart!

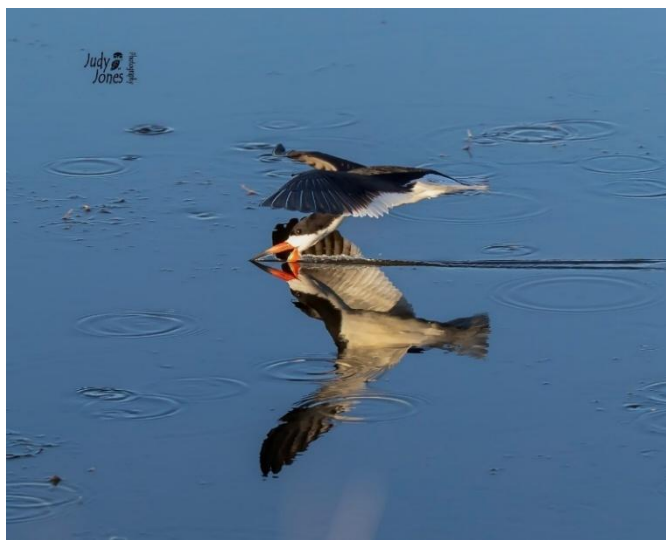


Two hungry and demanding young **Barn Swallows** photographed by **Nancy Barnhart** on Jamestown Island, 7/12/26.

(See more Recent Findings on the next page,)



Judy Jones caught this photo of **American Herring Gull** chicks on 6/21/26 on Smith Island.



A classic photo of the **Black Skimmer's** feeding form captured by **Judy Jones** in Chincoteague on 6/21/26.



Judy Jones captured this scene on the Greensprings Trail on 6/25/26, just before the **Prothonotary Warbler** chicks in this nest fledged.



A **Black-necked Stilt** photographed by **Barbara Houston** on 6/21/26 on the Eastern Shore.



Barbara Houston photographed this juvenile **Black-crowned Night Heron** on the Eastern Shore on 6/20/26.



A **Glossy Ibis** on the Eastern Shore, photographed by **Barbara Houston** on 6/20/26.



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/>