

**Williamsburg Bird Club**  
**February 26, 2025**

Hybrid meeting: Conducted in-person at Quarterpath Rec Center, Room 2, Quarterpath Rd. Williamsburg  
and via Zoom hosted by Ann Carpenter at 630pm.

**Attendance:** 33 in person; 27 via Zoom

**President's Remarks:** President Nancy Barnhart welcomed everyone present and on Zoom. She announced there'd be a brief business meeting following tonight's presentation.

**Program: Patty Maloney, Vice President Programs,** Patty was absent so Nancy introduced tonight's speaker, Bill Williams, who presented, *The Birds of Virginia's Colonial Historic Triangle – Then and Now*. Very few people have a deeper understanding of the birds in our area than Bill Williams, who has been birding for more than 70 years. As a local boy, he attended James Blair High School and earned a masters in biology at W&M. Bill was a founder of our Williamsburg Bird Club and Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. He retired from teaching in the James City County schools in 2002 and is currently VP of Virginia Society of Ornithology after having been president twice.

Bill began his presentation by acknowledging the people who helped bring his second edition of THE BIRDS OF VIRGINIA'S HISTORIC TRIANGLE to fruition: Jeanette Navia and Gary Carpenter for carefully editing the text; Jim Corliss for coordinating, compiling, and maintaining the data base from our club's winter and spring bird counts; Deborah Humphries for the beautiful cover design and Judy Jones for the photo of our club's mascot, the Red-headed Woodpecker; Judy and Patty Maloney for sorting through many photos to select the best for the book; and Nancy Barnhart for her input and maintaining the Colonial Historic Triangle's bird records in 2020 after Bill Williams relinquished the job he'd performed since 2000. He voiced being grateful to the membership for their observations and support of the club.

The Colonial Historic Triangle includes Williamsburg, James City County, York County, and Hog Island Wildlife Management area. The habitat diversity and the three watersheds of the James, York, and Chickahominy Rivers supports great avian diversity. As of 2024, out of 472 species documented in Virginia, 363 species have been confirmed in the triangle. Two species that were a first-ever in VA observation were just slightly outside the triangle boundaries and have been included. One was the spectacular, North American rarity, the Fork-tailed Flycatcher, in 1988 just across the river on a farm in Charles City County. The flycatcher spent almost the whole summer there attracting birders from all over the country, whereas the second rarity didn't linger and still is the only one ever recorded in VA, the Shiny Cowbird on the south side of James River near Hog Island.

Bill explained how the minute an annotated checklist book is published, new sightings quickly make it outdated. Since his book was published in Sept. 2024, a Lapland Longspur and Tennessee Warbler have been added this winter. Even scientific names have been changed since last September. Until very recently, the Cooper's Hawk was classified in the genus Accipiter, like the Sharp-shinned Hawk, but is now in the genus, Astur.

Various sources for compiling the annotated list were described, including the 1952 VSO publication, A CHECK-LIST of the BIRDS OF VIRGINIA by Joseph James Murray. Murray established the criteria that for a bird to be added to the record requires verification by two other people. Bill also searched through the VSO's publication, The Raven, started in 1930, for evidence of species in the Historic Triangle. The search included a number of 17<sup>th</sup> century diaries written by John Smith, John White, Francis Nicholson, etc. to current conversations with Dr. Joanne Bowen, Curator of Zoology in Archaeological Research for Colonial Williamsburg, who explained how 18<sup>th</sup> century foodways systems, informed by what was found in trash heaps and outhouse pits, changed the early American landscape. Accurate descriptions of Carolina Parakeets at Jamestown were found and, no doubt, Passenger Pigeons

once darkened our local skies. Bill told engaging stories about the valuable contributions to records by many people including Dr. Mitchell Byrd, Ruth Beck, Dr. Bryan Watts, Dr. Dan Cristol, Bill Sheehan, and Brian Taber.

Bill enthusiastically described many firsts in our area including Ruth banding the only Bewick's Warbler and Swainson's Warbler at the banding station on S Henry St. and documenting a Red-cockaded Woodpecker in Yorktown! Tom Armour, a WWII pilot, documented a Magnificent Frigatebird circling over Kingsmill's marina, a Little Gull, the first Long-eared Owl, and Western Kingbird.

On a sad note, Bill discussed birds no longer or almost no longer in our area, along with some reasons: Northern Bobwhite, Ring-necked Pheasant, Common Goldeneye (used to be common on our rivers), Barn Owl (due to absence of barns, used to nest in duck blinds), Marsh Wren, Grasshopper Sparrow, Seaside Sparrow, Kentucky Warbler, Eastern Whip-poor-will, Chuck-will's-widow, Bewick's Warbler, Swainson's Warbler, and Evening Grosbeaks, that had once been so numerous that they cleaned out birdfeeders like Starlings.

Species that are increasing in our area are Brown Pelicans (breeding in VA since late 1980's), American White Pelican (only place in state where they are present year-round), Lesser Black-backed Gull, Heermann's Gull, Rufous and Allen's Hummingbird, House Finch (1<sup>st</sup> observed in 1967), Western Tanager, White-faced Ibis, Brown Booby, and Common Ravens in Newport News Park just outside our boundary.

Species to be on the lookout for locally are Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Limpkin, Mottled Duck, Pacific Loon, Eared Grebe, Rivoli's and Mexican Violetear Hummingbirds, Sandhill Cranes, Roseate Spoonbill, Mississippi Kite (breeding as far north as the Arlington area and in Hampton), Purple Sandpiper, and Crested Caracara. Species you may find at your feeder are Tropical and Couch's Kingbird, Say's Phoebe, Varied Thrush, Bullock's Oriole, Harris Sparrow, Lesser Goldfinch, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Painted Bunting.

Bill concluded by requesting that we keep the data coming via Christmas and Spring Bird Counts, Great Backyard Bird Count, Project Feeder Watch, iNaturalist, and eBird.

Space in this newsletter doesn't allow for all of Bill's useful identifying tips and wonderful bird-related, animated stories. So, please watch the presentation on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKQ6W8QTn3w>

### **Announcements:**

**Bird Walks – Scott Hemler:** Nancy reported that the Feb NQP bird walk started with the temp registering at 23 F and 9 hardy souls. Scott announced the following:

**March 22:** Monthly 2 hour walk at New Quarter Park starting at 8am.

**Field Trips – George Martin:** George reported the following:

**March 15, Saturday:** Machicomoco State Park led by Deborah Humphries at 8am. There will be carpooling at the Colony Square Shopping Center a little after 7 a.m. for departure by 7:15 a.m.

**The Flyer:** Nancy reported that editor, Mary Ellen Hodges, has set a deadline of Friday, 28 as deadline for submission to the newsletter.

**Programs:** Patty Maloney was absent so Nancy announce the following:

**March 19** at 6:30 pm: Andrew Rapp, "Seabirds of Virginia".

**April 16** at 6:30pm: W&M students awarded a WBC Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Ornithology Research Grant give presentations on their research projects.

**May 21** at 6:30 pm: Dixie Summers will give a presentation about birding in Chile.

**End of Meeting:** A free raffle was held and refreshments enjoyed.

Nancy Barnhart adjourned the meeting at 8:13 pm

Respectfully submitted,  
Cathy Millar, Secretary Williamsburg Bird Club,  
March 8, 2025