



Bird Notes

Newsletter of the

Hampton Roads Bird Club

www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org

Vol. 63, No. 4

March/April 2015

March 12th Meeting

6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program

at Sandy Bottom Nature Park

Jessica Ruthenberg

**"Creating Habitat at Home for Birds
and Other Wildlife"**

Jessica is the new Watchable Wildlife Biologist for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. She started working with the agency in May 2014

Hosted by Nancy Gruttman-Tyler, Ellis and Wendy Maxey, and Tom Charlock

Speakers for HRBC meetings arranged by Vice President Brenda Gervais.

HRBC Outdoors March-April

Regular Bird Walks in Newport News Park

First and third Sundays of every month 7:00 AM
Meet in large parking lot behind Ranger Station
Walk Leader: Jane Frigo (birderjane@gmail.com
757-873-0721)

Craney Island Field Trip on Mar 21 (see page 2)

Contact Stuart Sweetman (nnva4x4@aol.com
757-595-1677)

Dismal Swamp Field Trip on Apr 11 (see page 2)

Contact Stuart Sweetman (nnva4x4@aol.com
757-595-1677)

April 9th Meeting

6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program

at Sandy Bottom Nature Park

Inge Curtis

**"Trip Photos from Columbia,
South America"**

Inge notes that Columbia is a home for almost 1,900 bird species, some 20% of which are endemic. She will report on her thirteen-day tour of eight of its national parks. Her tale includes a cloud forest paradise of tanagers, hair raising Andean roads "complete with multiple memorials where buses had fallen into the abyss", views of the Bearded Helmetcrest Hummingbird from 14,000 feet, and a Chestnut-crowned Antpitta in a "green cave".

Hosted by Mary Copeland, Rochelle Colestock, Marilyn Adair

President's Perch

(from frosty February 15)

By Dave Youker

Spring is creeping ever closer. Although the temperatures are supposed to drop into the single digits tonight and the wind is howling at 30 mph, I can feel the weather is about to change. Or maybe that feeling is the numbness from scoping the ocean looking for that elusive Dovekie. Either way, it's time to shift gears and start reviewing those warbler songs in anticipation of spring migration.

Also accompanying the weather change will be the start of nesting season. Ensure your nest boxes are cleaned and in good repair for the future residents. It's mid-February, and the chickadees and bluebirds are already vying for the boxes in my backyard.

And speaking of nest boxes, our bluebird trail at Deer Run golf course will be organized by Andy Hawkins this year. Several members have offered to help Andy, and I'm sure he will appreciate assistance by other members.

Finally, if you're like me and always trying to improve your birding skills, participate in a local bird count or other birding event. Both our club and the Williamsburg club conduct spring bird counts. Also, the Virginia Living Museum is again hosting a Birding Cup this spring. You don't have to be an expert birder to participate in any of these events. However you will gain added expertise just in preparing for and participating in these fun events.

Field Trip to Craney Island

Saturday, 8:00 AM, Mar. 21, 2015

By Stuart Sweetman

Our March field trip will be to Craney Island in Portsmouth Va. Due to restrictions, Craney Island is only open to the general public every other Saturday during specific times. I will *cut and paste* a short bit of what I received from assistant project manager Terrie Simmons:

Please show up at the front gate at 4599 River Shore Road between the times of 8-8:15am. At that time, we will open the gates. Park your vehicle and proceed to the office. There each visitor will need to sign the sign-in sheet and a Release of Liability form. It is preferred that visitors drive a truck or SUV on the roads as they are not paved and can have huge ruts in the roads from the large equipment (especially if we've had heavy rains or snow). If someone is riding with someone else, they would just write that person's license plate number by their name. We ask that we be provided with cell# in case of emergency. (On the liability sheet, we also ask for an e-mail. This is in case we need to notify you also. We have regular bird watchers who come often and when we have to shut down due to increment weather, I send e-mails to them to notify of the closing.) We will also hand out a letter to each person with instructions on where to drive and what to do in case of emergency. This government

site has no emergency equipment. FYI-the liability states that you assume all risk and liability for any and all injuries to yourself, your family and to your property.

At approximately 8:30am, one of the employees will escort visitors to the main road. Visitors are required to leave NLT 1:45pm. Most birders start driving towards the office area at 1:30pm to ensure they are ready to sign out and leave by 1:45pm. You can leave the premises at any time; however, there is no access back on. When you do leave, we ask that you sign out at the office. Our employees do make rounds and will escort visitors off the site at 1:45pm.

A sign up sheet will be at the March Meeting and questions answered. Email me (Stuart) at NNVA4x4@aol.com or call (757) 595-1677.

Field Trip to the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge

Saturday, 8:00 AM, Apr.11 2015

By Stuart Sweetman

Our April field trip for the HRBC will be to The Great Dismal Swamp NWR. April is a key month for spring bird migration through our area. What better place to greet the return of spring migrants to our area from their winter haunts, than the lush swamps and wooded trails of the Dismal Swamp?

The group will assemble at the parking area at the end of Jericho Ditch Lane at 7:30 AM. We will start our excursion at 8:00 AM hiking the surrounding ditches adjacent to Jericho Ditch until around 12 noon. At noon we will travel by car down to Railroad Ditch which is off Desert Road heading south. I plan on taking the group down Railroad Ditch to Lake Drummond to bird and enjoy the sights of one of only two fresh water lakes in the state of Virginia. The Habitat of the area surrounding the lake has greatly changed over the past years greatly due to wildfires that ravaged the wooded areas. This will be a unique chance to see how nature regenerates itself from times of tragedy.

Sign up sheets will be available at the March and April business meetings. Questions for this trip can be directed to NNVA4x4@aol.com or call (757) 595-1677.

Save the Date:

Saturday, June 6, 2015

HRBC Annual Picnic

in Newport News Park



Le Rubis by George-Louis Leclerc

HRBC Review of

Peterson Reference Guide to Seawatching: Eastern Waterbirds in Flight

By Ken Behrens and Cameron Cox

Reviewed by Shawn T. and Katrina Dash

Your eyes full of concentration, staring across the Chesapeake Bay with a chill rippling across your cheeks and your eyes watering, scanning for a glimpse of seabirds; you hear another group member

cast off “surf and black scoters with red-breasted mergansers and some buffies mixed in.” Scoping the same group, all the birds appear as flappy black spots - how did she determine the composition of that flock? What is the secret of being a good seawatcher? Classic field guides are not the answer. Authors Ken Behrens and Cameron Cox employ birding by impression techniques to identify migrating seabirds. Such techniques, this text argues, are the only useful method for seawatching since the normal field characters are not visible on distant birds. The guide’s focus is on waterbirds, covering 15 families and 111 species such as terns and gulls, alcids, loons, pelicans, cormorants, petrels, tubenoses, and waterfowl. This text does not, discuss waders or shorebirds (the authors suggest and we will second using *The Shorebird Guide* by Michael O'Brien, Richard Crossley, and Kevin Karlson for this).

Conservation and need for data collection were the inspiration of this guide. The authors’ mission is to build a support system and observation base like there exists for hawk watching. The migration patterns of species covered in this book are easily observable from inland to the coastal regions and with the same enthusiasm shown for hawks, greater details on bird behavior and population components are possible. To encourage seawatching, an entire section on location is included with descriptions of 47 sites for enjoying waterbirds across the eastern United States.

Part of the Peterson Reference Guides series which includes tomes on Gulls, Molting, and Animal Behavior, and an upcoming volume on birding by impression, the *Guide to Seawatching* follows the tone of this series; by having a text that is full of wonderful photographs and full of information that will not only introduce the skills but build the reader’s understanding of the natural world. The *Seawatching* guide is a hefty book with 624 hardbound glossy pages, weighing about 3 pounds and measuring 1.2 x 7.2 x 10.2 inches, so this is a book that needs to be studied at home or kept in the vehicle while in the field.

Shawn’s Thoughts

I will review what I consider pros and cons. Let us look at what I consider to be the cons: to really make use of the guide, fairly extensive birding experience is required. To get the fullest benefit from the guide,

some studying coupled with a firm understanding of bird topology and molt terminology is required. The text is heavy and not easy to lug around in the field. Studying at home is a must or at the very least keeping it in the car while visiting the Bridge Tunnel Islands. On the positive side, the photographs are not only lovely but very useful for learning with silhouettes. The guide also includes a number of backlit images that truly assist in the learning process. The maps are large enough to really study, include updated information, and provide the ability for new migration data or modifications from climate change or other details that would lead to changes in ranges to be made by hand. Though some may argue that this guide is only for the serious birder and not an amateur, I think the guide will be a grand addition to your library and make any birder better. The price is worth the quality of the book.

Overall Recommendation: Especially in this part of Virginia, the Reference Guide to Seawatching is required for anyone determined to learn and understand the waterbirds of the Atlantic coast and southern Chesapeake Bay.

Katrina's Thoughts

The first thing that was evident to me in this book is the enthusiasm that the authors' show for seawatching. It is quickly apparent that they feel that their best bird watching days come from scanning the ocean. That excitement is infectious and after reading just the first few pages, this guide made me want to be out on the water scanning the horizon. That enthusiasm also bleeds into the accuracy and completeness of the information given for each bird. The methods provided for birding by impression make a great deal of conceptual sense, although I still find it difficult to utilize them in the field. I believe this comes from a need to continue to improve my own skills, and the fact that I tend to muddle the extensive amounts of information provided. I wholeheartedly agree that this is a text that will require extensive time spent studying at home before practicing in the field. If given the time it deserves, however, this guide could significantly elevate your birding skills.

Overall Recommendation: I would highly recommend the Reference Guide to Seawatching for birders at all levels, with the caveat that this is a book that needs to be reviewed frequently prior to seawatching rather than serving as a field guide.

Report of Field Trip to Back Bay and False Cape State Park (1/10/2015)

By Andy Hawkins

Twenty two club members braved temperatures in the upper twenties to low thirties to travel by open tram to False Cape State Park in Va. Beach Saturday, January 10th. Even though the temps were low, winds were low also, the sun was out and spirits were high. Highlights were hundreds of tundra swans and ducks, as many northern harriers as most of us had ever seen in one day, and snow geese seen at a distance. Hundreds of tree swallows flying in formation escorted us out of the park and put on quite a show. A coyote was spotted on the way in for a rare viewing. All and all a quality outing to an area not easily accessed. On the way to Little Island Park, Eurasian Collared Doves were spotted, adding life birds for a few members.



Northern Shoveler by Andrew Hawkins

The following birders attended: John Adair, Marilyn Adair, Bill Boeh, George Boyles, Virginia Boyles, Katrina Dash, Bill Ferris, Elisa Enders Flanders, Nick Flanders, Jane Frigo, Geoff Giles, Gwen Harris, Walter Harris, Andy Hawkins, Cheryl Jacobson, Charm Peterson, Pete Peterson, Sandy Robertson, Becky Rose, Ned Rose, Jason Strickland, and Dave Youker

Species list on next page.

Species list from field trip to Back Bay and False Cape (1/10/2015):

Snow Goose	Great Blue Heron	Downy Woodpecker
Canada Goose	Black Vulture	Northern Flicker
Tundra Swan	Turkey Vulture	Blue Jay
Gadwall	Northern Harrier	American Crow
American Wigeon	Sharp-shinned Hawk	Tree Swallow
American Black Duck	Cooper's Hawk	Carolina Chickadee
Mallard	Bald Eagle	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Northern Shoveler	Red-tailed Hawk	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Ring-necked Duck	King Rail	American Robin
Bufflehead	American Coot	Northern Mockingbird
Hooded Merganser	Greater Yellowlegs	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Red-breasted Merganser	Sanderling	Eastern Towhee
Ruddy Duck	Ring-billed Gull	Song Sparrow
Red-throated Loon	Herring Gull	Swamp Sparrow
Common Loon	Great Black-backed Gull	White-throated Sparrow
Pied-billed Grebe	Mourning Dove	Northern Cardinal
Northern Gannet	Belted Kingfisher	Red-winged Blackbird
Double-crested Cormorant	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Eastern Meadowlark
Brown Pelican	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Eurasian Collared Dove

**Report of Field Trip to CBBT Islands,
Willis Wharf and Cape Charles Beach
(2/14/2015)**

By Stuart Sweetman

Our group of fifteen assembled at the south toll plaza of the CBBT at around 7:30 AM to temps in the low 30s. Those of us whom have been on this trip in the past know what is in store when it is cold at the toll plaza. It means drop the air temp by 20 once we get to the open water of the tunnel islands. Our seven cars lined up behind our police escort and started our trip at 8 AM. I guess I didn't communicate clearly with our escort on the order of tunnel stops, because we ended up starting at island #4 and worked our way backward. Regardless which island we started at we were still well rewarded with such highlights as Common Eiders, Purple Sandpipers and unforgettably close views of a group of five Harlequin Ducks in the sun about fifty feet from the railing off of island #3.



Harlequin Ducks (by Ken Lipshy)

All of the Islands were ice covered like Arctic glaciers, but this didn't deter the resident Harbor Seals that have claimed islands three and four as their own. The whole group got an extra treat by an adult Bald Eagle that had been working the islands for the past few weeks feeding on gulls and no doubt a duck or two. Such an awesome sight seeing this majestic bird perched on the ice covered rocks. Three hours we spent at the tunnel islands; then we headed north up route 13 to Willis Wharf. It didn't take us long to find what we made the drive for. A group of fifty to seventy-five Marbled Godwits were working the mud flats seen just behind the post office. Our group birded the wharf area when all of a sudden we were thrilled to see a thousand or more Snow Geese passing over in a dozen or so classic V-formations. We left Willis Wharf and headed back down 13 to Cape Charles Beach to see what was there. The temperature had risen to maybe forty degrees but the wind off the bay kept the air quite brisk. Three paraboarders were having fun on one side of the boardwalk as we watched a couple Bonaparte's Gulls on the other. We ended our stop at the beach and headed for a quick stop at island #1 of the CBBT for a pit stop and some quick birding. We were greeted by Ruddy Turnstones that had discovered public trash cans as easy pickings for a quick meal. A few more Harlequins were hanging out here, but no odd ball gulls could be found among the many that have found refuge (and quick handouts from the tourists). We finished the wonderful day with 67 species, and I think 7 lifers for Bill Boeh. A complete participant and species list to follows.



CBBT Islanders (by Ken Lipshy)

In the front row, we have from left to right Ernie Miller, Jessica Ausura-Rodgers, Bill Boeh, Jane Frigo, and Gwen Harris. The back row has Ken Lipshy, Pete Peterman, Katrina Dash, Shawn Dash, Charm Peterman, Stuart Sweetman, C. L. Tanner, Geoff Giles, Andy Hawkins, and Walt Harris.



Cape Charles Valentine (by Ken Lipshy)

Species list from field trip to CBBT Islands, Willis Wharf, and Cape Charles (2/14/2015):

Snow Goose	Double-crested Cormorant	Great Black-backed Gull
Canada Goose	Great Cormorant	Rock Pigeon
Gadwall	Great Blue Heron	Mourning Dove
American Wigeon	Great Egret	Belted Kingfisher
American Black Duck	Black Vulture	Red-bellied Woodpecker
Mallard	Turkey Vulture	Northern Flicker
Green-winged Teal	Bald Eagle	Pileated Woodpecker
Greater Scaup	Cooper's Hawk	Blue Jay
Common Eider	Red-tailed Hawk	American Crow
Harlequin Duck	American Kestrel	Fish Crow
Surf Scoter	Peregrine Falcon	Eastern Bluebird
White-winged Scoter	Killdeer	American Robin
Black Scoter	American Oystercatcher	Northern Mockingbird
Long-tailed Duck	Willet	European Starling
Bufflehead	Marbled Godwit	Cedar Waxwing
Hooded Merganser	Ruddy Turnstone	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Red-breasted Merganser	Sanderling	White-throated Sparrow
Red-throated Loon	Purple Sandpiper	Dark-eyed Junco
Common Loon	Dunlin	Red-winged Blackbird
Pied-billed Grebe	Short-billed Dowitcher	House Finch
Horned Grebe	Bonaparte's Gull	American Goldfinch
Northern Gannet	Ring-billed Gull	House Sparrow
Brown Pelican	Herring Gull	

End of field trip report.

Short-eared Owl near Winchester, Virginia, photographed and described by Jessica Ausura: "Tight crop on the LCD of the camera. Short-eared Owls were hunting yesterday over snow-covered fields. It was late in the day, in the golden hour, so pictures are grainy. This is a much better representation of these beauties. Magical."



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To join the Hampton Roads Bird Club, please fill out the form below and bring it along with your check (payable to Hampton Roads Bird Club) to the next meeting or mail to: **John Adair, 109 Nansemond Turn, Yorktown, Virginia 23693**. Membership is from September 1st to August 31st. **Dues are \$15.00 for individuals and \$20.00 for families.** NOTE: Membership dues can be paid at Wild Wings Nature Store in the Hidenwood Shopping Center, Newport News, VA, or at Wild Birds in The Pavilion Shops in Kiln Creek. Meetings are held at the Sandy Bottom Nature Park, 1255 Big Bethel Road, Hampton, VA, on the second Thursday of the month, September through May, at 6:30 PM.

Hampton Roads Bird Club – Membership Form

Renewal _____ New Member _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Check this box to receive newsletter via email/website instead of hard copy by mail.

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