



Bird Notes

Newsletter of the

Hampton Roads Bird Club

www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org

Vol. 64, No. 2

November/December 2015

November 12th Meeting
6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program
at Sandy Bottom Nature Park

December 10th Meeting
6:30 PM Holiday Dinner Party
at Sandy Bottom Nature Park

"Catering to Backyard Birds"

By Jessica Ausura

Jessica Ausura will talk about catering to the common birds of the backyard, as well as to the ones who visit during migration. A regular Newport News Daily Press columnist ("The Bird Nerd"), she'll show our members what she also does in the broader community, representing HRBC in presentations to civic groups, clubs, schools and organizations.

Hosted by Rochelle Colestock, Gwen Harris, and Kellie Judge.

Belated thanks are due to Jane Frigo, Charm Peterman, and Marilyn Adair, who catered the October HRBC Meeting. And shame on the Bird Notes jackdaw, which then feasted on their offerings but did not mention their contributions in print.

HRBC Outdoors November-December

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)

Field Trip to 3 Inland Wet Spots on Nov. 14
(see page 3) Contact Stuart Sweetman
(nnva4x4@aol.com 757-595-1677)

By Katrina Dash

Your planning committee is hard at work preparing for the Holiday Dinner Party on December 10th at 6:30 at Sandy Bottom Nature Park. This event is a potluck so members are asked to bring appetizers, sides, and desserts. We also need volunteers that can assist with cooking the ham and turkey, setting up, and cleaning up. A sign-up sheet will be available at the November 12th meeting, and you can also RSVP or volunteer by contacting Katrina Dash at kweber427@gmail.com or 915-471-1287. Please **sign up no later than Dec. 1st** so we know how many members to expect and what food will be provided. We look forward to ringing in the holiday season with good friends and good food!

Holiday Planning Committee: Gwen Harris, Donna Buchanan, Mildred Bales, and Nancy Gruttman-Tyler.



Le Chipeau ou Ridenne (Gadwall)

President's Perch

By Dave Youker

Back in August a survey was sent to all club members soliciting their feedback on any improvements or changes desired. A synopsis of these survey results can be found elsewhere in this newsletter. If you didn't get the chance to participate in that survey or had additional ideas, please pass your inputs to me.

I get a lot of questions about the timing of migration. For fall migration, we know that the big push for warblers generally occurs the end of September or early October. However, much depends on weather conditions. This fall was a perfect case in point. During the Kiptopeke Challenge on 19 September, warblers were difficult to find. Following Hurricane Joaquin, the winds were out of the North and pushed large numbers of warblers and other birds down the Eastern Shore. One week later during the Eastern Shore Birding Festival from 9-11 October, large numbers of warblers were again hard to find.

Migrating birds look for weather fronts with strong winds to help push them southward with the least expenditure of energy. The lesson here is you need to watch the weather patterns as migration season approaches in order to find those large flocks of warblers. But remember, migration is a continuous process and there are still smaller numbers of migrants out there just waiting for us to find them.

And the Survey Says!

By Dave Youker

Back in August a 5-question survey was sent to all members. Here are the results.

Question 1: What programs/speakers would you like?

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Slideshow from Excursions Abroad | 12% |
| Research-based programs | 37% |
| Info on general birding topics | 51% |

Question 2: Timeframe for meeting?

Just right 93%

Question 3: Suggestions for community/conservation outreach?

Many good suggestions fit into three categories:

Partner with other organizations
(e.g., Master Naturalist)
Western Shore Marshes IBA
Trail Maintenance (e.g., Matteson Trail)

Question 4: Importance of these 6 events?
Below rankings based on weighted average.

Meetings (winner)
Field Trips (runner up)
Sunday Walks
Summer Picnic \ tie
Christmas Party / tie
Overnight Trips (least important)

Question 5: Location for future field trips? The responses can again be grouped into 3 categories

Tidal Areas (i.e., Eastern Shore, Back Bay
Craney Island)
Inland Areas (i.e., Dismal Swamp, Dutch Gap
Beaverdam)
Distant Locations (e.g., Warbler Road)



Le Rale a long bec (Clapper rail)

Field Trip to 3 Inland Wet Spots:

Cumberland Marsh Preserve, Glenns Rappahannock Campus, and the Naxera/Bryan Bay Site

Saturday, 8:00 AM, Nov. 14, 2015

By Stuart Sweetman

Our November HRBC field trip will hit three locations – all of them more or less inland but wet - on the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) Mattaponi and Gloucester Loops for touring. The first stop will be The Nature Conservancy's Cumberland Marsh Preserve. This area is a freshwater tidal marsh and forest that buffers the wetlands of Holt's Creek, which is part of the Pamunkey River. It has a small boardwalk that leads down to a viewing area that reveals the water and marsh. On a recent visit, white throats and a catbird were along the boardwalk, and an adult and juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker worked the skags across the marsh. A walking trail that parallels the wood line and corn field facilitates the observation of woodland birds.

We will then drive to our second objective, Glenns Campus of Rappahannock Community College. Behind the college, there is a very nice wooded walking trail that leads to a secluded pond offering more opportunities for viewing woodland birds (and possibly ducks on the water).

Our third stop will be the Naxera/Bryan, Bay Site in Gloucester County. It's a small state owned watercraft launch site, just up river from the mouth of the Severn River, which in turn is a small tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. The location is prime for wintering ducks as well as possible loons and grebes.

We will meet for this trip behind the Ranger Station of the Newport News Park at between 6:45 AM and 7:00 AM. I want to leave the Park by 7:15 AM at the latest to get to our first stop by 8:00 AM. I am hoping to be back at the park by 2:00 PM, so pack a lunch and snacks. As the whole trip covers at least 100 miles, car pooling is encouraged. I will provide maps and directions for this trip at the November HRBC meeting. If you wish to attend this field trip,

please sign up at the meeting or contact Stuart Sweetman (nnva4x4@aol.com or 757 595-1677). For details on all three destinations of this field trip, do a web search for "Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail" and then select "Coastal Trail". The Mattaponi Loop has information on the Nature Conservancy's Cumberland Marsh Preserve and on the Glenns Campus, Rappahannock Community College. The Gloucester Loop covers the Naxera/Bryan Bay Site.



Le Heron (common heron)

116th Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 19, 2015

Nancy Grutman-Tyler coordinates the Newport News/Hampton portion of this, the longest-running citizen science survey in the world. Your eyes and ears are needed, and you don't have to be an experienced birder to participate. The area is divided into 13 sectors, with an experienced leader for each. Most sectors count from 7:00 AM to 4:30 PM. Sign up at the November 12th meeting or contact Nancy (850-3861 or gruttmantyler@gmail.com) to see which sectors need coverage.

Bill Boeh, who has worked the Langley sector of these counts, is transitioning to a leadership role for the other sectors, as well. Nancy is approaching retirement from the task. Her long and faithful service to this HRBC contribution to scientific birding is much appreciated.

Newport News City Farm: What's Happening?

The September/October edition of HRBC Bird Notes drew attention to a local issue, the fate of Newport News City Farm. The 58-acre, publicly-owned City Farm sits on bird rich, scenic land directly overlooking the James River and Deep Creek harbor. For nearly a century, it was used as a low-security detention facility; that role of City Farm ended forever a few months ago. Many Newport News residents have long expected that in these circumstances, City Farm would become a public park. But City Farm is still marked “no trespassing.”

Bird Notes has queried several Newport News officials, requesting access to the City Farm grounds for wildlife watching, etc. On September 9, Vice Mayor Rob Coleman telephoned with the most comprehensive reply to date. Speaking in a positive, enthusiastic tone, Coleman said that he would “take our concerns on the City Farm into consideration”. For the short term, he said that we cannot expect even limited public access to City Farm proper; the grounds are now being used as an impound yard for canines. Coleman said that public meetings would be held about the future of the City Farm land; and that the land could end up as a public park, be sold for private development, or some combination of public and private. He said that public meetings are to be announced in the Daily Press and on the city’s web site and Facebook page. Perhaps as the election season fades, those public meetings will be called.

Correspondence has been sent to several nature-oriented civic organizations. They’ve been asked to support an appeal to the Newport News City Council, seeking public access to the grounds of City Farm. Geoff Giles, President of the Williamsburg Bird Club (WBC), stated “WBC fully supports the proposal to grant public access”. Tony Wood, President of the Cape Henry Audubon Society, posted the City Farm issue on their Facebook page.

HRBC Secretary Bill Boeh has been the hero of the effort to obtain free access to City Farm grounds for wildlife viewing; and especially to keep public ownership. Bill has developed an online petition that has garnered almost a hundred signatures to date. He has addressed the Peninsula Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists (VMN) on the issue. It’s

curious that the members of the various VMN chapters are considered to be volunteer state employees; as such, they are free to identify themselves as individuals promoting causes like the push for public access to City Farm, but not so as representatives of their chapters (hope that I’ve gotten it right, Big Brother).

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To read and consider signing the online City Farm petition, do a web search for

“Don’t let the City Farm fall into the hands of developers!”
.....



La Linotte (Linnet)

Angie Herring has recently informed of an effort by Mr. Adrian Whitcomb of Riverview Park Citizens to campaign for public access to City Farm grounds. Their contact is RiverviewParkCitizens@gmail.com.

A somewhat related issue in current public discourse is the proposed placement of a new Dominion Virginia Power line across the James River at Skiffe’s Creek. Dominion has presented arguments that new sources of power are needed for a developing Peninsula. A new line of tall transmission towers would indeed mar the natural view of the River from Jamestown Island. But rest a bit easier, Gentle Reader, as the proposed Skiffe’s Creek distraction (and the James River Bridge and the “Ghost Fleet”) would *not* be visible from City Farm. All that we need is permission for you take a place at City Farm, so you and other naturalists can then bask in the prospect. Contact Bill Boeh or Tom Charlock, if you’d like to join the effort.

Report of Field Trip to Hog Island Wildlife Management Area (WMA) (9/19/2015)

By Stuart Sweetman

The first part of our group met at Huntington Beach around 7 AM to form carpools for our trip to Hog Island Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Surry County, Va., for the September 2015 field trip of the HRBC. We arrived at the Surry nuclear power plant check point for the routine inspection of people and vehicles before gaining access to the island. The process usually takes about 20 minutes or so. We proceeded to the island to join with other trip participants who had decided to drive there independently. Our group of 18 assembled at a pull off for the first body of water; Hog Island is a cluster of many such impoundments. We did our customary meet and greet with a little birding thrown in before continuing down the gravel road. The majority of the pull offs are on the landward side, looking over the impoundment lakes; but a couple look over the James River, where the group enjoyed views of soaring Bald Eagles and Palm Warblers working the shrub grass along the beach. Great and Snowy Egrets were seen in numerous places, and intermittent calls of Sora Rails were heard.



*Elements of HRBC and WBC in some rare, beloved shade on Hog Island
(photo by John Adair)*

We continued down the road to have our lunch and to take a break; then came the three mile walk along a dirt road through the woods and around Homewood Creek. The White Pelicans were not in this year. But a few hundred Caspian Terns were still using the exposed shoreline of the creek and its ample food sources as their staging area before heading south for the winter. A Tricolored Heron or two were seen from the backside of the creek, as well as an abundance of ducks and shorebirds that had made their way into the area.

We made our way back to the cars after an enjoyable day of birding the exclusive and unique area of Hog Island WMA. Our group managed 63 species for the day with everyone hot, tired and ready for a nap. The complete list of participants and bird species are to follow.

Participants: Stuart Sweetman, Tom Charlock, Harry and Rochelle Colestock, Pete and Charm Peterman, John and Marilyn Adair, Jaques Van Montfrans, Elizabeth Wilkins, Jane Frigo, Geoff Giles, Mary Lynch, Andy Hawkins, Cheryl Jacobson, Inge Curtis, Lieve Keeney and Cathy Millar.

Species list for Hog Island WMA (9/19/2015):

| | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Double-crested Cormorant | Semipalmated Sandpiper | Mockingbird |
| Great Blue Heron | Pectoral Sandpiper | Gray Catbird |
| Great Egret | Ring-billed Gull | Brown Thrasher |
| Snowy Egret | Laughing Gull | American Robin |
| Tricolored Heron | Royal Tern | European Starling |
| Canada Goose | Caspian Tern | Black and white Warbler |
| Mallard | Mourning Dove | Pine Warbler |
| Black Duck | Belted Kingfisher | Prairie Warbler |
| Blue-winged Teal | Pileated Woodpecker | Common Yellowthroat |
| Northern Shoveler | Red-bellied Woodpecker | Bobolink |
| Ruddy Duck | Red-headed Woodpecker | Red-winged Blackbird |
| Turkey Vulture | Hairy Woodpecker | Common Grackle |
| Bald Eagle | Downy Woodpecker | Summer Tanager |
| Osprey | Eastern Phoebe | Northern Cardinal |
| Bobwhite | Eastern Wood Pewee | Blue Grosbeak |
| Clapper Rail | Blue Jay | Indigo Bunting |
| Sora | American Crow | House Finch |
| Semipalmated Plover | Carolina Chickadee | American Goldfinch |
| Greater Yellowlegs | Tufted Titmouse | Eastern Towhee |
| Spotted Sandpiper | Brown-headed Nuthatch | Grasshopper Sparrow |
| Short-billed Dowitcher | Carolina Wren | |

Report of Field Trip to Eastern Shore, Kiptopeke and Surrounding Area (10/17/2015)

By Stuart Sweetman

The October 2015 field trip of the HRBC was to the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge (ESVNR), Kiptopeke State Park, and the surrounding areas of the lower Eastern Shore. Our group of 14 participants assembled at the south toll plaza of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT) at 7:00 AM. It was a little chilly at the beginning, but the sun warmed things quite nicely as the day went on. Our first stop was the walking trail of the refuge that leads down to the swamp overlook. We were able to spot a couple different Herons as well as Yellowlegs working the shore at low tide. We then headed over to the ESVNR visitor's center where the Yellow Rumps were thick. The giant Lantana bush just behind the center was a treat, holding numerous Monarch Butterflies basking in the sun and obtaining needed energy for the migration south. Next was Ramp Rd. and the public boat landing, again at ESVNR. The open skies of this area allowed us to see several raptor species (we had a total of 12 for the day). White Ibis were making flyovers as well as feeding in the pond alongside Snowy Egret. A Tricolored Heron was working the marsh down at the boat slip.

Our group then assembled and headed down to the end Magotha Road, where we could survey Magotha Bay and the surrounding marsh. Forster's Terns were out over the water as well as a lone Common Loon.

Next was the public dump and waste transfer site which is located up Seaside Rd. in the town of Oyster. It is kinda sad to say, but this yucky location seemed to hold the greatest number of birds, and the most diversity of bird species, of any of our stops. We got some early arrival winter ducks on the pond located on the site, as well as the normal gull and vulture ruffians that call a dump their home; there must've been 25 Black Vultures within a stone's throw. The highlights here were the Herons. Adult and Juvenile Little Blue Herons and many adult and juvie. Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night herons. The adults stayed in the trees as the youngsters hung out together on the opposite side of the pond.

The excitement of the dump had to end as we headed over to Kiptopeke State Park for lunch at the picnic tables. Most of the group ate and rested up preparing for their departure home as the four diehards visited the hawk watching station and walked the wooded trails ending up at the old ferry landing, which is now a boat landing and boardwalk with a fishing pier that looks out over the Chesapeake Bay. Many Gulls and Pelicans were in this area as well as the invasion of Yellow-rumped Warblers that have returned for the winter. The four lone adventurers left Kiptopeke for our drive back home.

We could not end the day without stopping at the First Island of the CBBT that is open to the public. We added the resident Ruddy Turnstones and a wayward Flicker that must've needed a pit stop before continuing to the mainland. The group seemed to have a very enjoyable day, and we ended up with 86 bird species for the total. A complete list of participants and species follows.

Participants: Stuart Sweetman, Harry and Rochelle Colestock, Tom Charlock, Bill Boeh, Ellis and Wendy Maxey, Nancy Gruttman-Tyler, Dave Youker, Peggy Rommen, Felicity Rask, John Ericson, and Anthony Nixon.

Species list for Eastern Shore, Kiptopeke, and surrounding area (10/17/2015):

| | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Common Loon | Clapper Rail | Tufted Titmouse |
| Brown Pelican | American Coot | Winter Wren |
| Double-crested Cormorant | American Oystercatcher | Carolina Wren |
| Great Blue Heron | Greater Yellowlegs | Marsh Wren |
| Little Blue Heron | Lesser Yellowlegs | Northern Mockingbird |
| Great Egret | Ruddy Turnstones | Gray Catbird |
| Snowy Egret | Short-billed Dowitcher | Brown Thrasher |
| Tricolored Heron | Sanderling | American Robin |
| Black-crowned Night Heron | Great Black-backed Gull | Eastern Bluebird |
| Yellow-crowned Night Heron | Herring Gull | Golden-crowned Kinglet |
| White Ibis | Laughing Gull | Cedar Waxwing |
| Canada Goose | Forester's Tern | European Starling |
| Mallard | Royal Tern | Black-throated Blue Warbler |
| Black Duck | Rock Pigeon | Yellow-rumped Warbler |
| Gadwall | Mourning Dove | Pine Warbler |
| Green-winged Teal | Belted Kingfisher | Common Yellowthroat |
| Ruddy Duck | Northern Flicker | Eastern Meadowlark |
| Turkey Vulture | Pileated Woodpecker | Red-winged Blackbird |
| Black Vulture | Red-bellied Woodpecker | Common Grackle |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | Brown-headed Cowbird |
| Cooper's Hawk | Hairy Woodpecker | Northern Cardinal |
| Red-tailed Hawk | Downy Woodpecker | House Finch |
| Broad-winged Hawk | Eastern Phoebe | American Goldfinch |
| Bald Eagle | Tree Swallow | Eastern Towhee |
| Northern Harrier | Blue Jay | Savannah Sparrow |
| Osprey | American Crow | Dark-eyed Junco |
| Peregrine Falcon | Fish Crow | Swamp Sparrow |
| Merlin | Carolina Chickadee | Song Sparrow |
| American Kestrel | | |

| | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|--|----------------|
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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 Glendale Shopping Center in Newport News, or at Wild Birds on Kiln Creek Parkway in Yorktown. 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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