



Bird Notes

Newsletter of the

Hampton Roads Bird Club

www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org

Vol. 64, No. 3

January/February 2016

January 14th Meeting
6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program
at Sandy Bottom Nature Park

February 11th Meeting
6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program
at Sandy Bottom Nature Park

"Wildlife of the US Virgin Islands"

By Ned Rose

Ned Rose will present photos from a recent trip to the Virgin Islands, ordering habitat type in terms of elevation. Among the identification aces in HRBC, Ned is known for quick, naked-eye-only calls – and subsequent confirmation with his own hand-held digital photography.

Hosted by Wendy and Ellis Maxey and ????

Hosted by Gwen Harris and ????

At press time, we lack a speaker for the February meeting. For an update, check the Club webpage (www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org).

Additional hosts (providers of light refreshments) are needed for the January 14 and February 11 meetings at Sandy Bottom in Hampton. If you'd like to volunteer, please contact Katrina Dash (kweber427@gmail.com, 915-471-1287).

HRBC Outdoors January-February

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 Back Bay & False Cape, Jan. 16

(see page 2) Contact Stuart Sweetman
(nnva4x4@aol.com 757-595-1677)

Field Trip to CBBT Islands & Eastern Shore, Feb. 13

(see page 2) Contact Stuart Sweetman
(nnva4x4@aol.com 757-595-1677)



President's Perch

By Dave Youker

Happy New Year! Hope you have set your New Year's resolutions. Yes, I believe in New Year's resolutions. Everyone needs a starting point, if they want to affect a change or undertake a new action. So the beginning of the New Year is a logical place to initiate a change, whether it's for weight loss, more exercise or some other activity or involvement. From a birding perspective, many people initiate their yearly list. Others might want to increase their involvement to enhance their birding enjoyment. This year we have focused more on conservation activities, so there are some great areas to become more of an active participant.

The weather has been unusually mild this winter, but rest assured there are some colder days ahead of us. Birding in colder weather presents some challenges, but it also affords some great birding opportunities. Take advantage of our upcoming field trips like the

(continuation of President's Perch)

annual trek to the CBBT Islands. Before we know it, winter will be leaving us along with those winter species.

Finally, we'll soon need to pull together a nominating committee to select next year's officers. If you would like to serve on this committee, please get in contact with me (Youkerd@aol.com 757 344-9385).



Le bean Canard huppe (Georges-Louis Leclerc)

**Field Trip to Chesapeake Bay Bridge
Tunnel Islands
and Eastern Shore of Virginia**

Saturday, 8:00 AM, Feb. 13, 2016

By Stuart Sweetman

Our February field trip for the HRBC will be to the Islands of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT) and the middle part of the Eastern Shore of Virginia. *As normal this trip is a permission based trip including a \$10.00 fee and a written permission slip (a Homeland Security matter) made out to the CBBT.* Permission slips will be made available at up-coming meetings. There is a limit of 15 slots available with HRBC members to fill the slots first. Members and non-members wishing to go can also be put on a standby list.

The group will meet at the south toll plaza at 7:30 AM and form carpool groups. Carpooling for this trip is essential to keep the number of cars being escorted to a minimum. This means if you have only two people in your car, plan to ride with someone else or have others ride with you. We start our trip at 8:00 AM and visit the restricted CBBT Islands 2, 3 and 4 with our escort. We will finish the Tunnel Island portion of our trip around 11:00-11:30 AM.

The group will then drive north and park at the rest area for a pit stop - and to decide who continues on, who leaves, or possibly joins the group later. Those of us heading on will head north up Route 13 to Willis Wharf to grab a bite to eat and observe the shore birds that work the mud flats (numerous Marbled Godwits seem to call that area home). Willis Wharf is located at the end of east Willis Wharf road off of Highway 13 in the town of Exmore. After birding the wharf, we will head back south to Brownsville Seaside Farm which is located

**Field Trip to Back Bay
National Wildlife Refuge
and False Cape State Park**

Saturday, 9:00 AM, Jan. 16, 2016

By Stuart Sweetman

The January 2016 field trip for the HRBC will be to Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and False Cape State Park in Virginia Beach, VA. During the winter months Back Bay is accessible for group field trips by tram. The tram is a large open air bus type vehicle that holds up to 24 people. Since the tram is open to the elements, warm clothing is highly recommended, as well as any snacks you might want to bring. The tram starts at 9:00 AM and runs through 1:00 PM, driving on the impoundment roads of the refuge and ending up at False Cape for a pit stop before making the return trip. There is a small fee of \$8.00 per person that will be collected prior to boarding the tram. The group will assemble at Little Island Park which is located at 3820 Sandpiper Road in Virginia Beach at 8:45 AM. Carpooling from your favorite spots can be arranged before the trip or just meet at Little Island Park. I am hoping this year will not be as cold as last year's trip, so as the abundant water filled impoundments and lakes are not frozen over, enabling the group close viewing of the vast amounts of waterfowl that inhabit the refuge in winter. The sign-up sheet will be at the next business meeting with over half of the seats still available. For any questions, or if unable to attend if already signed up please contact me at: nva4x4@aol.com or my cell [757-660-6590](tel:757-660-6590).

on Brownsville road/Route 608 off Seaside road/Route 600. Brownsville Farm is the headquarters of The Nature Conservancy's facilities on Virginia's Eastern Shore. This area offers diverse habitats for year round birding, including forests, grasslands and thickets, as well as tidal creeks; and a boardwalk over the tidal salt marshes offering great views of the area.

The group will then head to the town of Cape Charles. At Cape Charles we will visit and bird the public beach with its nice boardwalk and seawall offering beautiful views of the Chesapeake Bay, as well as seabirds and ducks that might be in the area. If time permits, we will visit Island 1 of the CBBT for a pit stop and a little birding on our way back home.

The obligatory sign-ups and CBBT permission slips will be at the January and February meetings. Bring your photo ID (Virginia driver's license) on the trip itself. Please make sure that you include your cell number when signing up, so we can keep in contact if we happen to get separated. I will be collecting money prior to the trip and at the meetings. Any questions regarding this trip will be answered at the meetings or drop me an email at nnva4x4@aol.com or call my cell at [757-660-6590](tel:757-660-6590).

On December 10th, 58 birders gathered to ring in the holiday season with food, games, and holiday merriment. The party started early for the many fabulous helpers that planned and set-up for the festivities. A huge amount of gratitude is extended to Gwen Harris, Donna Buchanan, and Mildred Bales for their assistance in planning, decorating, and organizing the celebration. A special thank you also goes out to John and Marilyn Adair for their assistance with setting up, and all of the members that were willing to supply the delicious dishes and help with our clean-up efforts. In addition to good food and great conversation, the night featured a bird identification game led by Shawn Dash. The winning team was, impressively, able to identify over 80 different bird species from diverse habitats... with a couple of mammals and reptiles thrown in for good measure. We also had an extremely successful raffle of amazing items donated by our very own members.

A Flock of Fun at the Holiday Party

By Katrina Dash



Rick Moeslein, Andy and Marilee Hawkins, and Geoff Giles



Barbara and Richard Hudgins with Phyllis Roth

Thank you to everyone that donated items for the raffle, and a special thanks to Wild Birds Unlimited for their donation of a gift basket valued at over \$40. Because of everyone's generosity we were able to raise \$120 for the club! We all had so much fun that we forgot to keep track of the time, and ended up cleaning up in a bit of a rush. In all the commotion, a teal winter jacket was left behind and the owner has not yet been located. Although we have not had much use for jackets recently, it seems that winter is finally arriving so please contact Katrina Dash at 915-471-1287 or kweber427@gmail.com if this jacket belongs to you. Hopefully this delightful party served as foreshadowing for a wonderful holiday season, and an even better 2016!

Nature at Newport News City Farm: for None, All, or just a Few?

Newport News City Farm consists of some 50 acres of grandly scenic waterfront stretching for half a mile on the James River and Deep Creek. City Farm was long used as a low security detention facility. While the detention role is over now, the public, while owns the land, is still not allowed to enter. During last month's Audubon Christmas Count, our Bill Ferris (leader for the Airport Sector) found the edges of City Farm to be fertile ground for flocks of Cedar Waxwings and Chipping Sparrows. City Farm has superb grounds for the enjoyment of nature. It's well placed in a population center, just adjacent to widely used Riverview Farm Park, which itself has minimal access to water.

Theresa Clift (with Mark St. John Erikson) of the Daily Press (Dec. 30, 2015) reported in a front-page article that "debate over whether to develop the property or convert it to a waterfront park has been going on for years". It is the likely site of Warwick Town, an 17th century English settlement. Newport News plans to spend \$300,000 for an archaeological survey at City Farm. A dig in 1992 found evidence for "a courthouse, jail, tavern, tobacco warehouse and houses", as well as earlier artifacts from Archaic and Woodland Indians.

An on line petition campaign, "**Don't let the City Farm fall in the hands of developers**", initiated by HRBC Secretary Bill Boeh has to date obtained 125 signatures.

HRBC member John Dawson is a founder of Citizens for Riverview Farm Park

<https://www.facebook.com/riverviewparkcitizens/>

which will meet on Wednesday, January 6 from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM at Main Street Library in Newport News, to address the City Farm issue.



Bits of Bird Science

By Jack Daw

Half a century ago, naturalist Jane Goodall discovered the use of tools by chimpanzees. This overturned a notion, held by some, of tool use as a uniquely human characteristic. Now we know that some birds use tools, too. In the Royal Society's Biology Letters (2015), Jolyon Troscianko (University of Birmingham) and Christian Rutz (University of Oxford) note that "New Caledonian crows *Corvus moneduloides* use a range of tool types to extract embedded prey and are the only non-human animals known to manufacture hooked tools in the wild."



New Caledonia crow with long tool in beak extending slightly upward to right. Troscianko photo from BBC World Service website.

While earlier researchers were able to observe crow tool use, most of their quantitative results were confined to field-and laboratory studies with some degree of artificiality (for example, only a restricted choice of tool materials being available to the birds). Troscianko and Rutz were able to count tool use among free-ranging animals. They trapped 19 crows, attached miniature video cameras with timed recorders, and let them loose. Data collection began only after waiting a full day, allowing the birds to habituate. After several days, natural ultraviolet radiation degraded the rubber tubes securing the recorders, and they fell off. The recording devices were then recovered by means of their VHF radio tags. They yielded 10 hours of footage from 10

loggers. Just a few percent of the video footage shows the crows making or using tools.

New Caledonian crows are hard to observe. They often forage about paperbark trees for ants, insect larvae, and cicadas. Troscianko and Rutz reported crows “foraging for, feeding on, or carrying around pieces of carrion, fruit and candlenuts... and one subject fed portions of a small frog to a begging juvenile.” Most of the tool use on video was on paperbark trees. One bird “spent 179 s crafting a tool from a live paperbark twig” and then probed into paperbark with it. A second, which fashioned a tool from a different species of tree in just under a minute, then used it for several minutes “moving through paperbark trees and probing in crevices and under bark, before probing in deadwood and leaf litter on the ground. This sequence also includes an instance where the bird dropped the tool onto the ground and promptly recovered it.”

ScienceDaily and BBC World Service drew attention to this topic. The paper is available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2015.0777> or <http://rsbl.royalsocietypublishing.org>



Report of Field Trip (11/14/15) to Cumberland Marsh Preserve, Glenns Rappahannock Campus, and Naxera/Bryan Bay Site

By Stuart Sweetman

For the November field trip we tried something new by visiting what seemed to be promising spots of the Upper Peninsula. The group met behind the ranger station at the Newport News Park at around 7 AM. We formed carpools and headed up I-64 for the 45 minute drive to our first stop up in New Kent county. We arrived at The Nature Conservancy's Cumberland Marsh Preserve around 8 AM. 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. The water off the board walk yielded a few winter ducks such as Gadwall and Green-winged Teal. A pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers and low and close flyby of a Northern Harrier gave us all a thrill. We walked the wood line a short bit, and it revealed a few Kinglets and Titmice.

We next headed towards the town of West Point with its twin bridges that cross over the Pamunkey and Mattoponi Rivers . We stopped at a public boat landing that has a pier which overlooks the Mattoponi. We were hoping to get wintering ducks and Grebes from this spot, but only a few Ruddy Ducks were seen. Too early in the year maybe for the ducks.

We then drove 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). A few more Kinglets and a seemingly tame White-breasted Nuthatch walked head first down an oak tree to grab acorns off the ground right in front of us. We proceeded down the walking trail to the pond where we observed an adult Bald Eagle eating a fish in a pine tree on the edge of the pond. Not much happening in the woods so we walked back up to the parking lot where we decided to eat our lunch at the picnic tables the campus provides.

Our fourth stop was 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. While another “another perfect spot” for observing birds on the open water they just weren't there. We did watch an enjoyable yet strange sight of a Bald Eagle and Black Vulture. The Eagle was playing/harassing the Vulture when all of a sudden the Eagle and Vulture locked talons and did the spinning maneuver that a breeding pair of eagles do during courtship. The Vulture broke loose and high tailed it in the opposite direction wondering what just happened. We left here and headed back towards route 17 and we were able to spot an American

Kestrel on a power line where it was perched while hunting prey in the open fields.



George Boyles, Gwen Harris, Bill Boeh, Marilyn Adair, Mike Lowry, Harry Colestock, Nick Flanders, Rochelle Colestock, Tom Charlock, Maise Flanders (below), Pete Peterman, Katrina Dash, Elisa Flanders (below), Stuart Sweetman, Shawn Dash, Virginia Boyles, Lorraine Austin, Walt Harris, and John Adair

(photo by John Adair)

While on our way down Route 17 heading back to Newport News we decided to stop at Gloucester Point Park that is basically under the Coleman Bridge. This park has a nice beach and a large fishing pier that extends out into the York River. This stop was actually the most productive stop of the day. Diving ducks, Horned Grebe and a cooperative Common Loon were there as well as Brown Pelican and Northern Gannet were working the river. Our biggest thrill at this spot was from a pair of Peregrine Falcons that were hunting the Rock Pigeons that were roosting under the bridge. One Falcon did a fly over literally twenty feet over our heads as he headed back to the bridge for another try at the pigeons.

Over all, it was a beautiful day to be out and we had a great time, but we all felt it might of been a little too early in the year for the winter ducks that all the water spots this trip has. We did manage 58 species for the day with 18 participants. A complete list of participants and species follows.

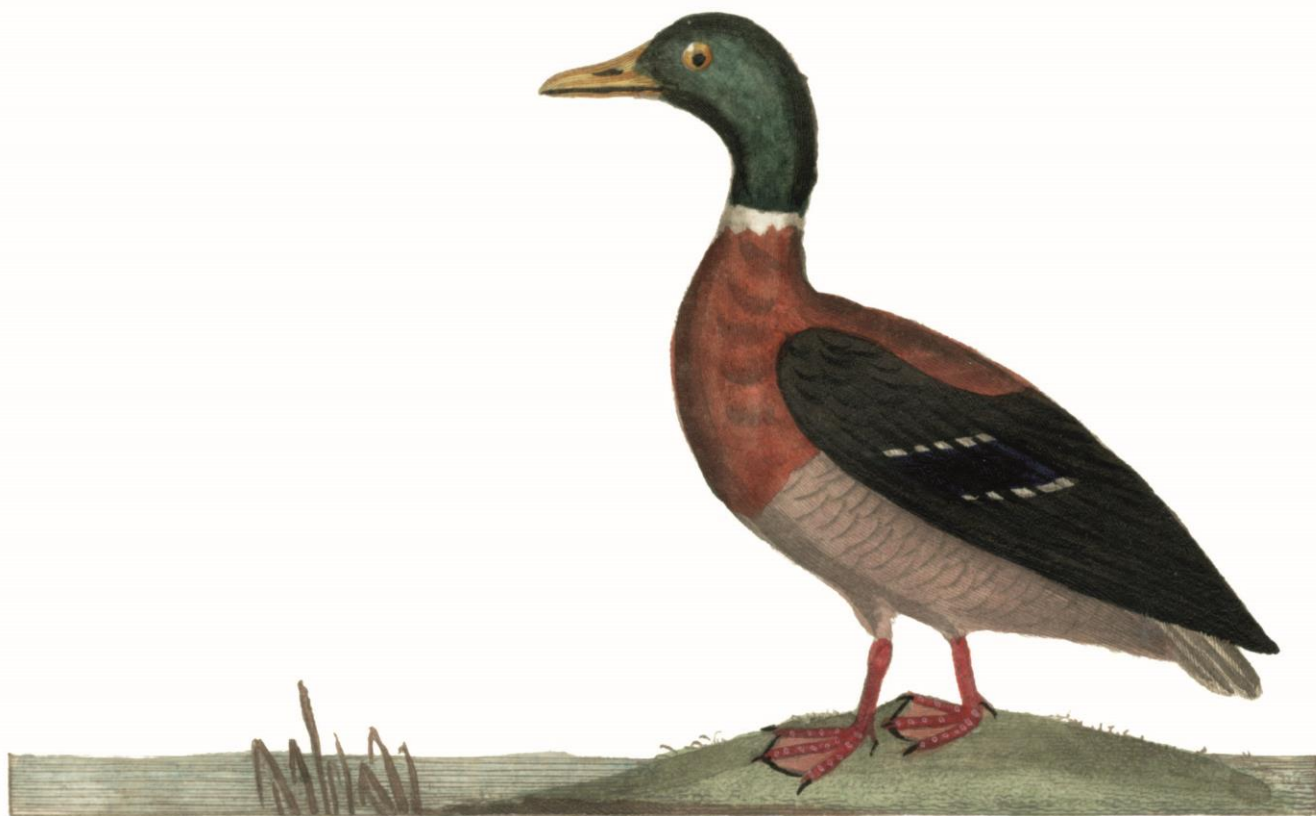
Participants: Stuart Sweetman, Tom Charlock, John and Marilyn Adair, Pete Peterman, Lorraine Austin, George and Virginia Boyles, Mike Lowry, Bill Boeh, Walter and Gwen Harris, Harry and Rochelle Colestock and Nick, Elisa, and Masie Flanders.

Species list for 11/14/15 field trip:

Canada Goose
Gadwall
Mallard
Green-winged Teal
Bufflehead
Hooded Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Common Loon
Pied-billed Grebe
Horned Grebe
Northern Gannet
Brown Pelican
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Red-tailed Hawk

American Kestrel
Peregrine Falcon
Killdeer
Ruddy Turnstone
Laughing Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Royal Tern
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Belted Kingfisher
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Hairy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
Blue Jay

American Crow
Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Carolina Wren
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird
Hermit Thrush
American Robin
European Starling
American Pipit
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Song Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Northern Cardinal
Red-winged Blackbird
Common Grackle
Pine Siskin



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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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