



Bird Notes

Newsletter of the

Hampton Roads Bird Club

www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org

Vol. 63, No. 5

May/June 2015

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

June 6th Annual Picnic
Noon Meal 8:00 AM Bird walk
at Newport News Park

Jordan Hogge

By Virginia Boyles

"Human Impacts on Birds in the Western Shore Marshes"

Jordan Hogge is engaged in a school project, under Club President Dave Youker, investigating the saline marshes on the southwest rim of the Chesapeake Bay: the 'Western Shore Marshes' adopted by the Club as an Important Birding Area (IBA). Jordan will address the impact to birds of both direct human influences and future rises in sea level. Dave will follow with related material.

Hosted by Barbara Hudgins, Lana Bennett and Rock Moeslein

HRBC's picnic this year will be held on Saturday, June 6, 2015 at Newport News Park in shelter #4, next to the one we used last year. It is located off the parking lot where we meet for the Sunday walks, and faces the water looking toward the boat rentals. There is a paved path from the parking lot around to the shelter. The shelter has a partial divider and seems to be larger than the one that we had last year, so we may have less sun on the food tables.

We look forward to a bird walk at 8:00 AM led by Meredith and Lee Bell, so we urge you to come early. We hope to eat about noon, and (to assure variety) a sheet will be available at the May meeting to sign up for the dish you wish to bring. The club will provide burgers, hot dogs, the trimmings, and paper products; so appetizers, side dishes, drinks, and desserts will be needed. You might want to bring folding chairs to help with seating. Don't miss this chance to celebrate the end of a fantastic year for the club, before we take the summer off. The installation of officers will follow the meal, so be sure to linger a while.

The helpers will be Gwen Harris, Katrina Dash, Brenda Gervais, and Virginia Boyles. If you have questions, contact Virginia Boyles at (757)867-8857.

HRBC Outdoors May-June

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)

Spring Bird Count on May 2
Contact Nancy Gruttman-Tyler
(gruttmantyler@gmail.com 757-850-3861)

Richmond Field Trip on May 16 (see page 2)
Contact Stuart Sweetman (nnva4x4@aol.com
757-595-1677)

Annual Club Picnic on June 6 (look to right)
Contact Virginia Boyles (757-867-8857)

President's Perch

By Dave Youker

The year has gone by quickly. I'm writing this piece on my back porch listening to a multitude of territorial and mating calls from both resident and

migratory species. This is the best time of year for birders, as the birds are decked-out in their breeding plumage and more easily seen as the trees aren't fully leafed-out yet.

Although we break from formal meetings during the summer, that doesn't mean we break from birding (especially not from the Sunday walks led by Jane Frigo). There are ample opportunities to get out there. There are VSO trips and Breeding Bird Surveys to be conducted. Our 107-box Eastern Bluebird trail needs to be monitored, and there are numerous other birds found while checking these boxes. And don't pass on the opportunity to conduct a survey at one of the locations of our adopted Western Shore Marshes Important Bird Area.

We will vote on the HRBC Board membership at the meeting on Thursday, May 14; nominees are listed below. Over the summer, the HRBC Board will be meeting to outline our events for next season. If you have suggestions regarding field trips, programs, social events or any other aspect of our club, don't hesitate to contact me.

Here's wishing everyone a wonderful summer, and I hope to see you out on one of the trails.

Nominations for 2015-16 HRBC Board Voting at meeting on May 14, 2015

President – Dave Youker
Vice President – Brenda Gervais
Treasurer – John Adair
Secretary – Bill Boeh
Director (2015-18) – Andy Hawkins
Host – Katrina Dash
Programs – Brenda Gervais
Publicity – Jessica Ausura
Newsletter – Tom Charlock
Membership – Gwen Harris
Field Trips – Stuart Sweetman

Outstanding Swampers

Congratulations are due to Nan Larue of HRBC and Jerri Howe. They have both been honored as Outstanding Volunteers by Certified Wildlife Biologist Don Schwab for their work on the

Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) program at the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. Nan and Jerri, who have been involved with the banding station at the Swamp for a dozen years, also supported its recent and well-attended Birding Festival (23-25 April 2015).

Field Trip to Richmond's Belle Isle and James River Park System

Saturday, 7:00 AM, May 16 2015
By Stuart Sweetman

The next field trip for the HRBC will be to the James River Park System in Richmond, Virginia, on May 16. We will visit Reedy Creek/Buttermilk trail. This part of the park system has elevated trails that put you at tree top level for observing migrating warbler species. Belle Isle has great walking trails that overlook the James River as well as a foot bridge that suspends under the highways for great views of the river below as well as a local nesting colony of Cliff Swallows that have been there for the past few years. This is mostly a walking trip once we get the Richmond, so proper shoes are needed as well as long pants in case the bugs are out. Some of the trails are steep, and we've encountered *poison ivy* on them during previous field trips. It generally takes close to 75 minutes to get up to Richmond so we will need to leave our carpool assembly area behind the ranger station at the Newport News Park no later than 7:00 AM to reach the park system by 8:00 AM. The physical address for Reedy Creek/Buttermilk Trail, our first stop, is 4000 Riverside Drive Richmond, Virginia. This address will need to be entered into GPS or smart phone devices for directions. Those who do not use such devices will need to pick up printed out copies of the directions at the May 14th HRBC meeting. This trip has been a growing favorite for those who have attended in the past with great birds and wonderful scenery of Richmond's James River Park System. The sign up sheet for this trip will be again at the May meeting. Questions about the trip can be sent to Stuart Sweetman at NNVA4x4@aol.com or call my number at [757.595.1677](tel:757.595.1677) and leave a message for me.

Results of 3rd Annual Virginia Living Museum Birding Cup

Six teams participated in the Virginia Living Museum's (VLM) Third Annual Birding Cup, a 24-hour contest (this one from 6:30 PM April 10 to 6:30 PM April 11) to observe as many species of wild birds as possible on the Lower Peninsula. Team Thrushnado, a "gang of four" (consisting of two graduate students from the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences, one from William and Mary, and a spouse) won with a whopping count of 118 species. The contest ended at VLM itself and was followed by a dinner. Dan Summers of VLM assures that the Thrushnado moniker will soon be engraved on the very cup. Dan says that next year's Cup will include a special outreach effort toward young birders. HRBC member Rock Moeslein, now retired from VLM, originated the Birding Cup in 2013 as a fund raiser for the Museum.

Report of Field Trip to Craney Island (3 / 21 / 2015)

By Stuart Sweetman

Our group of eighteen lined up in cars and trucks outside of the main gate of the Craney Island Dredged Material Management Area, 4599 River Shore Rd Portsmouth Virginia. The gate opened to the public at 8:00 AM for our group to sign in for accountability purposes and to group up in carpools for less vehicle traffic. We finished the formalities required for the area and preceded to the gravel road that encircles the three active impoundments which are only accessible by foot for those in our group. The weather started out cold but



sunny. The air soon warmed and made enjoying the vast bird life much enjoyable. Inside the impoundments held a combination of mud flats and still pond water. The mud flats held such niceties as American Avocets and a single Stilt Sandpiper was mixed in with Lesser Yellowlegs. The ponds held numerous Northern Shovelers and a few Green-winged Teals. Each impoundment held a great variety of both pond type ducks and shore birds. Along the outside of the gravel road were the James and Elizabeth Rivers which held their fair share of sea going ducks including the treat of a single Male Eurasian

Wigeon with his American cousins. A lone Female Common Merganser was quite out of place there but treated all of us none the less. We all birded the island till around 1PM with a few in the group picking up some great life birds. After checking out at the office a small group of five drove just down the street to Hoffer Creek park to see what woodland birds we could find. The weather turned out almost perfect and we tallied 83 species on this wonderful day. A complete list of participants and bird species to follow.

Island goers were: Stuart Sweetman, Walt Harris, Tom Charlock, Dot Silsby, Katrina and Shawn Dash, Windy and Ellis Maxey, Ned and Becky Rose, Marilyn and John Adair, Anthony Nixon, Marc Nichols, Ernie Miller, Jason Strickland, Andy Hawkins and Jane Frigo.

Species list for HRBC field trip to Craney Island (3/21/2015)

Common Loon	Red-tailed Hawk	Tree Swallow
Red-throated loon	Bald Eagle	Rough-winged Swallow
Horned Grebe	Northern Harrier	Blue Jay
Pied-billed Grebe	Osprey	American Crow
Brown Pelican	American Kestrel	Fish Crow
Northern Gannet	American Avocet	Carolina Chickadee
Double-crested Cormorant	Semipalmated Plover	Tufted Titmouse
Great Blue Heron	Killdeer	Brown Creeper
Great Egret	Black-bellied Plover	Carolina Wren
Tundra Swan	Lesser Yellowlegs	Northern Mockingbird
Canada Goose	Short-billed Dowitcher	Brown Thrasher
Mallard	Sanderling	American Robin
Black Duck	Western Sandpiper	Eastern Bluebird
Gadwall	Least Sandpiper	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Green-winged Teal	Dunlin	European Starling
Eurasian Wigeon	Stilt Sandpiper	Yellow-rumped Warbler
American Wigeon	Great Black-backed Gull	Pine Warbler
Northern Shoveler	Herring Gull	Eastern Meadowlark
Ring-necked Duck	Ring-billed Gull	Red-winged Blackbird
Lesser Scaup	Laughing gull	Common Grackle
Scaup sp.	Rock Dove	Northern Cardinal
Bufflehead	Mourning Dove	House Finch
White-winged Scoter	Pileated Woodpecker	Savannah Sparrow
Surf Scoter	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Dark-eyed Junco
Ruddy Duck	Hairy Woodpecker	White-throated Sparrow
Common Merganser	Downy Woodpecker	Fox Sparrow
Red-breasted Merganser	Eastern Phoebe	Song Sparrow
Turkey Vulture	Horned Lark	

Report of Field Trip to Great Dismal Swamp NWR Suffolk Virginia Jericho Ditch, Railroad Ditch and Lake Drummond (4 / 11 / 2015)

By Stuart Sweetman

The April field trip of the HRBC was to one of our favorite spots in Hampton Roads for observing spring migration of birds to the area. The group of eighteen assembled at the parking area the end of Jericho Ditch



Jane Frigo, Katrina Dash, Wendy Maxey, Virginia Boyles and Peggy Rommen at Jericho Ditch (photo by Dot Silsby)

road shortly before 8:00 AM to chilly temperatures and overcast skies. We began our walk heading down the trail to the left from the parking area. The resident bird that always seems to be present this time of year is the beautiful Prairie Warbler. This species always seems to be the easiest one to see, but White-eyed Vireos were also abundant. We walked down the trail until we almost reached the power lines. We were happy we did because a very vocal Hooded Warbler gave good looks as we walked back. The 11 warbler species we sighted made the trip worthwhile. After Jericho we got in our cars and headed to Railroad Ditch on the way down to Lake Drummond. The gravel road down to the lake was narrow but worth the drive. We stopped a few times along the way

to look and listen. The sun got brighter and the air got warmer but down by the lake was a beautiful place for us to enjoy our lunch. The area around the lake wasn't too birdie but we identified 7 sparrow species by this point. A few in our group had never seen Lake Drummond and were thrilled to see one of the few natural fresh water lakes in the state. Everyone had an enjoyable day, and we ended up with 66 bird species in the Dismal Swamp area. A complete list of participants and bird species are to follow.

Birders were: Stuart Sweetman, Tom Charlock, Dot Silsby, Katrina and Shawn Dash, Rochelle and Harry Colestock, Anthony Nixon, Virginia and George Boyles, Meredith and Lee Bell, Wendy and Ellis Maxey, Jane Frigo, Joyce and Hayes Williams and Peggy Rommen.

Species list for HRBC field trip to Great Dismal Swamp (4/11/2015)

Double-crested Cormorant	Barn Swallow	Yellow-throated Warbler
Wood Duck	Blue Jay	Pine Warbler
Turkey Vulture	Common Crow	Prairie Warbler
Black Vulture	Carolina Chickadee	Palm Warbler
Red-shouldered Hawk	Tufted Titmouse	Ovenbird
Osprey	White-breasted Nuthatch	Common Yellowthroat
American Coot	Carolina Wren	Hooded Warbler
Killdeer	Marsh Wren	Eastern Meadowlark
Wilson's Snipe	Mockingbird	Red-winged Blackbird
Ring-billed Gull	Gray Catbird	Rusty Blackbird
Mourning Dove	Brown Thrasher	Common Grackle
Barred Owl	American Robin	Brown-headed Cowbird
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Hermit Thrush	Northern Cardinal
Belted Kingfisher	Eastern Bluebird	American Goldfinch
Northern Flicker	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Eastern Towhee
Pileated Woodpecker	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Savannah Sparrow
Red-bellied Woodpecker	European Starling	Chipping Sparrow
Downy Woodpecker	White-eyed Vireo	Field Sparrow
Eastern Kingbird	Black and white Warbler	White-throated Sparrow
Great-Crested Flycatcher	Prothonotary Warbler	Fox Sparrow
Tree Swallow	Northern Parula Warbler	Swamp Sparrow
Rough-winged Swallow	Yellow-rumped Warbler	Song Sparrow

A Study in Data

By: Shawn T. Dash, Paris Smith, Ashley Colemon, and Sterling Ridling.

Either with the air so glacial that chickadees stare at the group in chilled disbelief or when warm mornings pervade, wrapping each in a humid haze, birding Newport News Park is always an adventure. Sunday morning walks find Jane Frigo with field glasses around her neck, check list in hand, and enthusiasm evaporating from every pore. Since February 2008 the biweekly birding walk's species tallies have made their way on to the club's webpage, with each walk reporting on the attending members and the species discovered that Sunday. We ask if, while staring high in the trees or across the lake, you have ever wondered: What is the number of bird species seen by the group? What season has the greatest number of species? Are common species spotted every walk? Has the group seen most of the birds present or are there more species to see? In this brief note we will try to answer those questions. What we present to you is a summary and explanation to provide a context and perhaps a better appreciation of the Sunday morning walks. Birds have been referred to as 'surrogates' of biodiversity. In terms of ecological functions (processes that without which the ecosystem would fall apart), birds have a wide array of contributions including: seed dispersal, pollination, creation of soil, prey for other species, blood meals for insect vectors, and population control of invertebrate pests. In addition to these tangible services, birds whisper the changing of the seasons, paint forests with droplets of color and fill our yards with hungry friends. Providing some biological context, birds contain twice as many

taxa (orders and families) and ten times more species than mammals with comparable roles in ecosystems. With such significance environmentally, there is no surprise that one would want to survey and monitor the local bird community. Though the motives of the bird club may have been driven by the pleasure of enjoying the outdoors with the company of others while seeking out winged-delights, an important by-product has emerged: a nearly decade long data set. As part of a course requirement at Hampton University the first author presented a group of curious students (co-authors) with a project focused on discovering any biological patterns discernable in these monthly role-sheets of birds. We addressed a series of questions: 1) What is the typical sample richness, i.e. what is the average number of bird species observed for each walk? 2) Is there a meaningful (significant) difference between months or seasons and furthermore, how variable are walks among seasons? And 3) Has the Hampton Roads Bird Club seen all the species that they could possibly see? By entering all of the Sunday walk checklists into a single file we were able to answer these questions by examining the presence or absence (incidence data) of specific species from February 2008 to March 2015. Incidence data was entered into a statistical biodiversity package called EstimateS and analyzed for 1,000 randomization runs calculating both species diversity and similarity indices. The number of species observed is referred to as species richness, and when we include with richness the parameter of abundance (how many individuals) we have diversity. Having an idea about how rich a birding trip was is important as such data provides details on what birds are present as well as what species were missed or not present to be observed. While denoting the species encountered is great, providing count data will allow for an understanding of biodiversity. This information can inform biologists about community structure, species interactions, proportions of resident to migratory species, the stability of an ecosystem, the relationship of native to exotic species and many more dynamics that greatly influence the habitats in which birds are found.

Please allow us to provide our results and a context for the data. With 171 sampling events, we found a total species richness of 224 species for Newport News Park. The typical Hampton Roads Bird Club's Sunday walk, across all years, finds a richness of 48 species on average per walk.

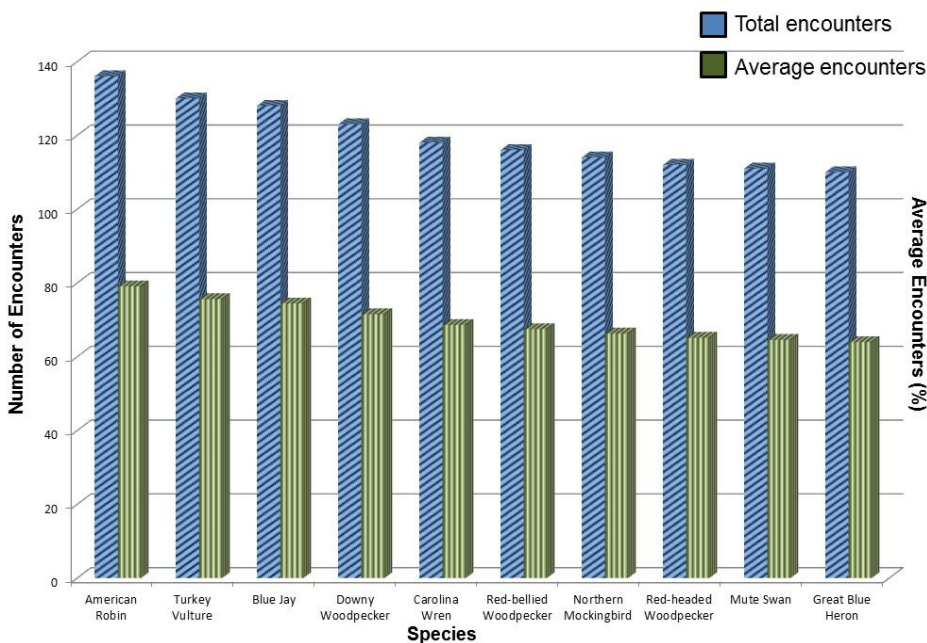


Figure 1. Top Ten Species Observed from 2008 – 2015.

When we segregate the data by season we find Winter (December to February) has the fewest species encountered with an average of only 44 species. Additionally, Fall (September to November) is not significantly different than winter with an average of only 46 species observed. This is odd as one would assume autumn would have relatively high species richness as a result of migration. Spring (March to May) and Summer (June and August) have on average the most species observed with 50 species. These two seasons have the overall highest number of species observed, with 65 for any single walk. Neo-migratory species comprise the increase in taxa for spring and summer seasons. Amongst seasons there are statistically significant differences between pairs of seasons including winter and spring, winter and fall, and summer and fall. This pattern makes biological sense as these seasons are greatly influenced by the movement of migratory birds. Of course, resident species make up the top 27 species encountered (see Figure 1 for the top ten species). Interestingly, these species are consistently seen 75-79% of the time.

As noted previously, biodiversity is important to determine to properly classify and understand a bird community. We can compare diversity across various landscapes and various groups of plants and animals by

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Table 1 . Summary Statistics for Hampton Roads Bird Club Newport News Sunday Walk Data. Presented are diversity indices as well as similarity indices

	Shannon Diversity Index	Simpson Diversity Index	Shared Species	Jacard's Similarity Index	Sørensen Similarity Index	Morisita-Horn Sample Similarity	Bray-Curtis Sample Similarity Index
Average Values	4.7	1.5	18.9	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4
Minimum Values	3.6	0.0	10.0	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2
Maximum Values	4.7	8.4	37.0	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.7

using a diversity index. A diversity index is a mathematical representation of species diversity providing details on species richness, evenness (overlap of species between samples) and abundance. There are many indices that can be calculated which take into account various aspects of data such as species only seen once (singletons) or twice (doubletons), which involved weighing these parameters differently. We used two classic and widely used indices: Simpson's and Shannon's (See Table 1).

The Simpson's and Shannon's values range from 0 onward with higher values indicating more diversity. The most common diversity indices indicate that Newport News Park has a high diversity value (average for Simpson 1.5 and Shannon 4.7 see Table 1). In addition to providing a foundation of the diversity of an area and sample, we can discuss how samples compare by calculating evenness, which suggests how overlapping species-assemblages are, and similarity indices that provide a value for shared species for all samples. If we examine the relationship across all seasons and sample events we find that with various indices (Classic Sørensen incidence-based qualitative sample similarity index, Bray-Curtis sample similarity index, Horn Morisita-Horn sample similarity index, and Classic Jaccard sample similarity index) there is support for overall similarity in the composition of species (See Table 1) with a range of 20% to 80% with an average of 40% overlap of species amongst sample events. These details provide a context for our first and second research questions, and we have determined that Newport News Park is a diverse site with the highest diversity seen in spring and summer. Furthermore, there is a distinct overlap of around 20 species on average between all Sundays, suggesting a distinct resident avian community that is supplemented by breeding birds in spring and summer and to a lesser extent in winter.

A common idea in ecology is a concept known as the species-area relationship, that states as the size of plot of land increases so does species richness until a point at which there are not enough resources to support any more species (more landscape, more niches, or more resources equals more species). Over the sample period,

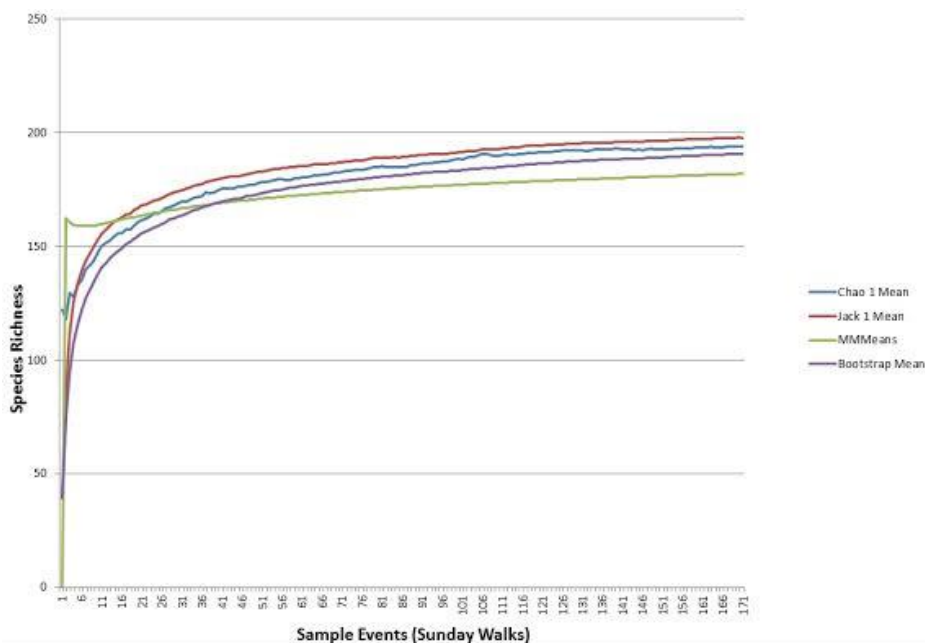


Figure 2. Species Accumulation Curve for Newport News Park with HRBC Data. Using data from 2008 to 2015 with 172 sampling events various statistics lead to slow down and nearing plateau for new species encounters.

roughly the same area has been explored each week so we may conclude that the club has observed all possible species. Equally, of the 224 species seen, 47 species (20%) have been counted less than five times over the last eight years suggesting the possibility that more species are possible. To determine the likelihood of either possibility we generated a species accumulation curve (Figure 2). A species accumulation curve takes the sample events, our Sunday walks, and the species seen to produce a curve that reports on the rate at which new species are seen per sample. The steeper the curve, the more quickly novel species are being encountered. However, at some point there are no new species to see and the curve levels off or plateaus, a point that ecologists call species saturation (meaning the study discovered all species in an area). Our curve (Figure 2) is starting to plateau, suggesting that the group has observed the

majority of species in the area. Using statistical extrapolation based on the data collected we estimate a complete saturation at 238 species. To test this new estimate we supplemented the HRBC data by actively searching eBird for missing species (reported on eBird, but not recorded by the club). We found the following species: Red-breasted Merganser, Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Black-necked Stilt, Worm-eating Warbler, and Black-throated Grey Warbler. These eight species combined with the 224 species recorded by the club, suggest that the 238 total species predicted by the curve may be a relatively accurate estimate of the total richness that is likely to be encountered by the club.

The take home message here is that the park is a great place for birding. The Hampton Roads Bird Club has created a wonderful collection of information by just going out and having a great morning looking at birds. We have information on community composition throughout the year and between seasons with at least a portion being a homogeneous group of species that will be encountered throughout the year. Though not discussed here, we also have data that allows us to report trends between species. For example, Hairy Woodpeckers are observed significantly less frequently (only 46% of the time) than Downy Woodpeckers (seen 70% of the time). We understand there is a distinct and common resident species assemblage that is always going to be seen (or aimed for), which we suggest could be used as representatives of bird community health in the long term. Meaning that with this common resident group if the membership (that is the species that are part of the group) is constant then deviations suggest something different has occurred. This influence may be a change in habitat, drought, maturity of the forest, introduced species, a population boom of brown-headed cowbirds, effects of climate change or any number of other natural phenomena. But it is because of the club that we have this data that allows for the group to be mindful of changes in species assemblages. We also think that the results could be shared with new members and visiting master naturalists to provide a platform of likely species and some basic information about the bird community at Newport News Park. We hope that all of these details make sense and have inspired you to think not only of the birds you have seen on a Sunday but about the context of all birds within the park.



Beat the Fall Rush at the Treasurer's Table

by John Adair

As a result of a recent change in policy, you can now pay dues in advance (including future years) if you like. You can avoid the line at the September/October meetings by paying your dues now. Consider renewing your membership at the upcoming meeting or via the other options described here. The membership roster will reflect the year through which each member has paid to help you (and the treasurer) remember.

You can pay your dues at a club meeting or the following:

1) Mail renewal form (if available) and check to: John Adair, HRBC Treasurer, 109 Nansemond Turn, Yorktown VA 23693, (757) 224-8920;

2) Drop off payment at: Wild Wings Nature Store, 2458C Warwick Blvd., Newport News, VA 23606, (757) 595-3060; or,

3) Drop off payment at: Wild Birds Unlimited, 3120 Kiln Creek Pkwy, Suite A, Yorktown VA 23693, (757) 875-1936.

Renewal forms are available at the stores and in the HRBC newsletters. Dues remain \$15 for single individuals and \$20 for families.



Yellow-throated Warbler (photo by John Adair)

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Board: (7/14-6/17)	Pete Peterman	rwpeterman@verizon.net	(757) 766-8658
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Publicity	Jessica Ausura	birdgirljess@gmail.com	(757) 775-5535

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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