



# Bird Notes

Newsletter of the

**Hampton Roads Bird Club (HRBC)**

[www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org](http://www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org) and on Facebook

Vol. 65, No. 2

Nov/Dec 2016

**November 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting**  
**6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program**  
at Sandy Bottom Nature Park

**"What do birds eat?  
Help us find out!"**

**By Ashley Kennedy**

Granivorous, nectarivorous, frugivorous, or folivorous? *Your* citizen-science photographs are sought to find out. PhD student Ashley Kennedy will brief us on a new program centered at the University of Delaware. Background material is on page 4.

**Hosted by** Phyllis Roth, Rochelle Colestock and Dot Silsby

Additional hosts (providers of light refreshments) are needed for Jan. 12, Mar. 9, Apr. 13, and May 11 meetings. Please contact Wendy Maxey ([emaxey@verizon.net](mailto:emaxey@verizon.net) or [757-483-3003](tel:757-483-3003)) or Jane Frigo ([birderjane@gmail.com](mailto:birderjane@gmail.com) or [757-873-0721](tel:757-873-0721)).

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## HRBC Outdoors Nov. and Dec.

**Regular bird walks in Newport News Park**  
First and third Sundays of *every* month 7:00 AM.  
Meet in big parking lot behind the ranger station.  
Jane Frigo [birderjane@gmail.com](mailto:birderjane@gmail.com) 757-873-0721

**Field Trip to Bethel Beach** (see page 4)  
Saturday, 6:45 AM, November 19, 2016  
Andy Hawkins [andrewcurtishawkins@gmail.com](mailto:andrewcurtishawkins@gmail.com)  
Jason Strickland [757-739-6939](tel:757-739-6939)

**Audubon Christmas Bird Count** (see page 4)  
Saturday, 7:00 AM, December 17, 2016  
Bill Boeh ([757-766-2144](tel:757-766-2144), [dolphrog1@yahoo.com](mailto:dolphrog1@yahoo.com))

**December 8th Meeting**  
**6:30 PM Holiday Dinner Party**  
at Sandy Bottom Nature Park

by Charm Peterman

It's almost time for our annual December Potluck Dinner! There are many opportunities for you to not only share a wonderful meal and time together, but also contribute in a variety of ways to the festivities! Perhaps you could help by bringing a dish to share: appetizers, sides, desserts; or by volunteering to cook the traditional ham or turkey, or, should you desire to add something creative, perhaps prepare an international course to the buffet table. All efforts are welcome! We also need those with table-decorating talents, and set-up/take-down.

Please sign up at the November meeting, contact Wendy Maxey ([emaxey@verizon.net](mailto:emaxey@verizon.net), [757-483-3003](tel:757-483-3003)), or Jane Frigo ([birderjane@gmail.com](mailto:birderjane@gmail.com), [757-873-0721](tel:757-873-0721)) **no later than 1 DECEMBER.**

Last year's attendance exceeded the sign-up which affected the amount of food on the buffet table, so please sign up. And if you would like to come but need a ride, please reply and we shall do what we can to help you come join the festivities!

**Holiday Planning Committee:** Wendy Maxey, Jane Frigo, and Charm Peterman



"Size-by-side" comparison of Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Carolina Wren (Virginia Boyles)

## President's Perch

By Shawn Dash

This year is nearly over, and seems like it has just begun. The HRBC has had some wonderful field trips, delightful speakers, and entertaining Sunday walks. I want to encourage you all to stay very active this time of year, fill up your feeders, keep an eye to the sky for migrating birds, and welcome back our winter friends. I have already had a White-throated Sparrow hanging around my home and even saw a Dark-eyed Junco on campus at Hampton University. Please come and join us each month as our meeting this November will be of interest to those with both photography and birding hobbies. We will, of course, follow the great tradition of having our December meeting become a holiday gathering with food and a bird/nature raffle. Please also remember to dress warmly for our Sunday walks and field trips in the final months of 2016.

I do not know why, but autumn has always been my favorite season. I have reflected on this for many years, and thought maybe it was the candy at All Hallows' Eve or maybe the harvest at Thanksgiving but still I am not quite sure. I do know that my affection grows throughout the season with the smell of decomposing leaves, the distant call of Canada Geese on moonlit nights, and the romance songs of "friendly" crickets. We must also take into account that my life has always revolved around a school year, so perhaps it is for me that fall represents a new beginning. For whatever reason, this time of year is a great occasion to be out-and-about in nature... exploring. Autumn is a busy time with many mammals provisioning for the winter ahead, plants giving one last chance for mating and seed setting, and for numerous birds - travel.

I cannot help but examine birds at this time of year with the eye of zoologist. How can they do it? Consider the following: a Sharp-shinned Hawk can travel 1,243 miles in just thirty days, Ruddy Turnstones fly some 2,892 miles in only four days, and there is even a report of a White-crowned Sparrow traveling 311 miles in just 12 hours! I would like you to also reflect on Ospreys who (on average) travel at 24.9 miles per hour for the majority of the day during migration. How are such figures even possible? Are these lies of science,

misrepresentations of biology or is it in fact that biology is just that cool?

How strong must these birds be to fly so fast, what kind of stamina must they have to go so far, and how do they deal with all the stress on their bodies? As you are aware, flight for birds is all about trade-offs, cost-benefit analysis, and living on the edge of what is possible. For example, though not greatly migratory, when I see a Carolina Chickadee I think of how the song center of the brain of these birds shrinks to reduce weight and conserve energy during winter movements. For great feats of migration, a bird requires a lot of calories but it can't really store food because food weighs you down (and a bird does not have pockets). Birds can store some fat but again there is a balance. A lot of fat does indeed mean more energy, but more weight, more effort, and more burned calories really means less energy. Also consider how much our own muscles burn with fatigue after heavy exertion. This is a result your muscle cells being starved of oxygen; a molecule they need to create cellular energy. How do birds deliver enough oxygen to their own cells? How can they accomplish oxygen delivery while flying at altitudes of 20,000 to 22,000 feet (some species of eagles and vultures) or even at 11,000-13,000 feet above sea level (most songbirds)? If we standardize some of the physics of gases and assume 100% oxygen availability at sea level then a bird migrating at 20,000 feet only has 44% of the oxygen available to power its muscles.

Migration is also rough because many species as young do not know the route and increased movement opens up a higher potential for predators. Longer periods of stress increase the chances of disease and infections; never mind the cost of getting lost (though as birders we delight in these misguided fellows). Maintaining the high energy demands, the correct timing of molt, and geospatial navigation must all evolve to be varied and plastic. Consider too, that behaviors are going to be very different across the distinctive habitats for summer and winter home ranges. In short, a bird is a singular animal. Seriously now, think about those ideas for a few minutes. Really get up, walk around, and think about it. You leave your home, traveling at great risk to you and your body for hundreds if not thousands of miles, with no certainty that you will make it or what the area will be like when you arrive. You find a nesting site, pair-bond, and set yourself to raising young; providing food, protection, and shelter for

your offspring that a literal (genetic) part of you. Then you leave, trusting your offspring to use their instinct for survival to guide them on their own journey. If you are not thinking WOW at this point, then you are not thinking. All that effort to go north, start a family, leave, and hope your offspring can do the same. Would it not be easier to stay where you are and build a nest, find a mate, raise young, and live out your life in an area you know? At this point, you may have asked yourself the same questions I have pondered:

- How do birds deal with such physiological stress?
- Why migrate in the first place?

Both questions can be answered in the context of ecology and evolution. There are many types of movements in birds. We have daily ones, which include to and from roosting or foraging sites. Nomadic wanderings are seen in irregular irruptions due to food, such as those performed by Crossbills or Evening Grosbeaks. And finally, there are regular seasonal movements, which we describe as migration. All three types of movements are linked to the idea of movement as a response to changes in the environment or dispersal as a means to reduce competition for resources.

We know that unpredictable resources such as food (typically seeds and fruit) predispose birds who use such items to move about more frequently. Additionally, the use of separate areas for different life activities bestows some level of success and fitness in a world of patchy environments (a place to eat, a place to sleep, a place to hang out). Even a factor such as photoperiod (how long there is light/dark) is notable because the lengthening and shortening of daylight conveys some information about future food and weather.

So, we know in this case that it is common behavior for birds to move about, and such movements are frequently linked to resources and conditions of habitats. But, again, why migrate? What is the driver – is it simply food and competition? One could argue that the tropics would have plenty to eat, in fact if the tropics did not have plenty to eat then why would so many migrate back to them? As with all of natural history, life is not that simple. If we plot the proportion of breeding bird species that nest from southern Canada up into the Arctic Circle, we find

that 50-80% of all breeding birds in those areas migrate south for the winter. So again why migrate north?

Biologists have presented a few suggestions. These behaviors are an outcome of the last glaciation and evolved to help secure better climate for breeding birds. Also, by alternating and exploiting two different habitats, birds are more able to exist and be successful in breeding. Furthermore, in the far north there are longer summer daylight hours that can be used for provisioning a bird's young. Also, in the north there are notably fewer parasites and infectious diseases that could impact breeding success. Finally, if a lot of birds are breeding in the same area in a short period of time it reduces predation by a process known as predator oversaturation. You see this with Wildebeest on the Serengeti plains. One cow dropping a calf every few weeks would result in predators easily keeping pace and hunting down each offspring. To combat that, all the Wildebeest (hundreds of thousands) give birth together over two to three weeks. The predators are overwhelmed and, although some calves fall as prey, the majority are able to survive to maturity.

For the New World there are two explanations related to bird migration that encompass the previously presented ideas: the northern home theory and the southern home theory. In the northern home theory, bird populations responded to ice age events and after glaciation the birds returned as far north as possible each summer. The southern home theory proposes that competition in the tropics selected for species that could move north, where they found rich resources, extra time to exploit them, and limited competition.

So why migrate? Perhaps the answer is more food, more time, more resources with less competition, less predators, and less disease. Or perhaps it is just another reason for us to enjoy the fall so much. While you are enjoying the beauty of fall warblers, the impressive feats of migrating shorebirds, and the awesome liberty of southbound birds of prey, I encourage you to consider the biology that makes migration possible and reflect upon how such behaviors evolved.

I hope you have enjoyed my musings and while you are looking up, consider just for a few seconds the wonderment of migration of our feather friends. GOOD BIRDING.

## **Field Trip to Bethel Beach on the Middle Peninsula**

**Saturday, 6:45 AM, Nov. 19, 2016**

By Andy Hawkins

On November 19<sup>th</sup>, Jason Strickland will be leading a field trip to Bethel Beach Natural Area Preserve in Mathews County and Hughlett Point Natural Area Preserve on the Northern Neck. Bethel Beach is a sandy spit where 185 species of birds have been identified along with 25 species of shore birds. Hughlett Point contains both tidal and non-tidal wetlands which are an important wintering area for both waterfowl and songbirds. We will meet at the Food Lion on George Washington Highway and Ft. Eustis Blvd. at 6:45am and be pulling out by 7:00. Jason's number is [757-739-6939](tel:757-739-6939) if you want to meet him there. Please email me at [andrewcurtishawkins@gmail.com](mailto:andrewcurtishawkins@gmail.com) if you plan to attend or sign up at the November Meeting. I will not be along on this one so be sure to copy Jason's number.

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## **Audubon's 117<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Count**

**Saturday, 7:00 AM, Dec. 17, 2016**

By Bill Boeh

The designated date for the Hampton Road's Bird Club's participation the Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is Saturday, December 17, 2016. Please join us and support this important citizen science effort in bird conservation. You don't have to be an experienced birder to participate - just lend us your ears - and eyes!

The CBC is conducted in established 15-mile wide diameter "circles." Last year there were 2462 active circles in North, Central, and South America, with 1888 in the United States (a map depicting the circles can be found at Audubon's website (<http://tinyurl.com/nhervk2>)). Our Club's circle is centered at the intersection of Commander Shepard Blvd and Magruder Blvd in Hampton, and is subdivided into 13 sectors (our sectors are depicted on a

map at the site: <http://tinyurl.com/jd5a8nd>). Groups of Club members, led by an experienced leader, conduct a count in each sector. Most participants count from 7:00 AM to 4:30 PM.

So, please sign up at the November Club meeting, or contact Bill Boeh (757-766-2144 or [dolphrog1@yahoo.com](mailto:dolphrog1@yahoo.com)). It's great fun and a great way to help conserve the birds!

For more information about the CBC, visit Audubon's CBC web page: <http://www.audubon.org/conservation/join-christmas-bird-count>.

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*Details on the presentation for 7:00 PM on November 10, 2016 at Sandy Bottom follow. This material is copied from the Sep-Oct 2016 edition of BirdNotes.*

## **"What do birds eat? Help us find out!"**

By Ashley Kennedy

Every good birder knows that birds eat fruits, nuts, and insects, but many underestimate the importance of the latter. Even birds that are described as primarily granivorous, nectarivorous, frugivorous, and folivorous rely on insect protein during the breeding season and will dramatically change their foraging patterns during that time. Field guides and other references, however, rarely provide details as to which kinds of insects are the most important in birds' diets. Most studies to date only provide order-level identification of prey (e.g., "beetles", "caterpillars"), but this broad categorization implies that all beetles or all caterpillars are equally important to birds. Would a chickadee rather eat a smooth, green inchworm, or a toxic monarch caterpillar— or a densely hairy "woolly bear"? Intuitively, we would guess the inchworm, but until we have the data to back it up, this is just speculation.

To answer questions like this about birds' feeding preferences, and ultimately to help us make better-informed decisions about bird habitat management, Doug Tallamy's lab at the University of Delaware is undertaking a long-term research project— but we

need help from citizen scientists to make it work! We are compiling a database of bird-insect interactions based on photos contributed from all over North America. Anytime you see a bird with an insect (or other arthropod: spider, millipede, centipede, etc.) in its bill, snap a photo and submit it on our website at <http://www.whatdobirdseat.com> or on our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/WhatDoBirdsEat>. Our team will then identify the arthropod prey and add it to our database.



By Ashley Kennedy

Ultimately, we will be able to answer questions like “Do house wrens in Montana prefer the same types of insects as house wrens in Pennsylvania?” or “Do eastern bluebirds feed their second brood the same insects as the first?” Eventually, with enough photo contributions, we will be able to make recommendations to land managers about what types of plants they should grow to aid specific bird species. Many insects are host specialists, depending on a particular plant for survival; once we know which insects the birds prefer in their diets, we will be able to encourage the planting of those insects’ host plants to promote avian conservation. Until we have a better understanding of what birds eat, we can’t create or maintain ideal bird habitat. Please consider helping us out by sending us your photos!

*Ashley Kennedy is a PhD student at the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware. She is a Virginia native.*

## **Barbara Willoughby Hudgins**

Barbara Willoughby Hudgins passed away on September 4, 2016 at the age of 78. She was a much beloved member of the Hampton Roads Bird Club. Her incredibly unflappable positive attitude and ever lively wit brightened many of our outings and meetings.



Barbara is survived by her husband Richard (formerly our Treasurer), sons Scott and Jesse, her brother, and nieces and nephews. A graduate of William and Mary, she was a visual artist, a lover of classical music and history, and she travelled the world for culture and birding. Her passing was marked by a ceremony at Lion’s Bridge near home, and by a gathering of Virginia Society of Ornithology and Club friends on the shore at Assateague Island.

## **Dues Reminder from the Treasurer**

by John Adair

Many thanks to the members who have paid your dues for this club year that began September 1st. Dues for the 2016-17 year remain \$15/singles and \$20/families. Our club charter requires that members not renewed by January be removed from the active membership roster. So, now is the time for action. How does one pay? Simply scroll to the last page (end paper/address sheet) of this edition of BirdNotes for instructions.

Willow Ptarmigan? I had no idea there was such a thing. But our Treasurer, John Adair, apprehended five of them below. Despite their attempt to hide from the obligation to pay dues to HRBC, they've been duly nabbed. John photographed them in Churchill near Hudson's Bay. Upon receipt of \$15 from each, he was merciful.



*John Adair*

## **Report of Field Trip to Hog Island (09/10/16)**

by Andy Hawkins



Left to right; Harry Colestock, Jacques van Montfrans, Elizabeth Wilkins, Jason Strickland, Rochelle Colestock, Dave Youker, Matt Echaniz, Gwen Harris, Stuart Sweetman, Jane Frigo, Tom Charlock, Bill McCullough, Brian Barmore, Ernie Miller, (Photographer Andy Hawkins)

Taking a five-mile hike with temperatures in the upper eighties and with high humidity is a tough way to see birds, but that is what most of the group did at Hog Island September the tenth. We spent the morning mostly on the main road, but the interior held the promise of shore birds so off the group went. Bobolinks, turkeys and blue grosbeaks in the corn field, bobwhites calling, which is a sound sadly rarely heard in Virginia much anymore. Many egrets and herons, nine species of warblers, sandpipers, dowitchers and eagles made the trip

more than worthwhile. Sixty-seven species were seen in all and a morning well spent with dedicated birders and good friends.



*by Andrew Hawkins*

Species list for Hog Island field trip (09/10/16)

Canada Geese	Caspian Tern	Eastern Bluebird
Mallard	Forster's Tern	American Robin
Northern Bobwhite	Royal Tern Gray	Gray Catbird
Wild Turkey	Mourning Dove	Northern Mockingbird
Pie-billed Grebe	Chimney Swift	Northern Waterthrush
Double Crested Cormorant	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Black and White Warbler
Great Blue Heron	Belted Kingfisher	Common Yellowthroat
Great Egret	Red-Headed Woodpecker	Hooded Warbler
Snowy Egret	Downey Woodpecker	American Redstart
Tricolored Heron	American Kestrel	Yellow Warbler
White Ibis	Eastern Wood-Pewee	Palm Warbler
Turkey Vulture	Great Crested Flycatcher	Pine Warbler
Osprey	Eastern Kingbird	Prairie Warbler
Bald Eagle	White-eyed Vireo	Song Sparrow
Least Sandpiper	Red-eyed Vireo	Eastern Towhee
Semipalmated Sandpiper	American Crow	Summer Tanager
Short-billed Dowitcher	Tree Swallow	Northern Cardinal
Spotted Sandpiper	Barn Swallow	Blue Grosbeak
Lesser Yellowlegs	Carolina Chickadee	Bobolink
Greater/Lesser Yellowlegs	Brown-Headed Nuthatch	Red-winged Blackbird
Laughing Gull	Carolina Wren	Common Grackle
Ring-billed Gull	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	American Goldfinch
	White-breasted Nuthatch	House Finch

## **Report of Field trip to the Eastern Shore (10/15/16)**

By Andy Hawkins

Saturday, October 15 dawned as a beautiful early fall morning, mostly sunny with a light northeast wind. We met at the south toll gate and proceeded to the 1st Island. Not a lot there, so we hurried to The Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge, Ramp Road, hoping to catch the morning warblers. We were not disappointed, except there were so many small birds it was difficult to identify them. Jason got word of a rare sighting, so off we went just north of Kiptopeke to find a sandhill crane feeding in a cut corn field, truly one of the highlights of the day. Next we headed to The Magothy Bay Natural Area Preserve, then Kiptopeke State Park for lunch and a stop at the Hawk Watch Station. We ran into the Williamsburg Bird Club there, and Bill Williams told us of a gallinule at the landfill. We found the common gallinule and more, then headed to Oyster, and finished the day at Savage Neck Dunes. All told, we counted eighty-eight species and had a very full day of birding. Attending were Jason Strickland, Mark Nichols, Stuart Sweetman, Pete and Charm Peterson, Bill Boeh, Phyllis Roth, Felicity Rask and John Ericson, James Abbott and Andy Hawkins.



*Sandhill Crane (Andy Hawkins)*



Species list for field trip of Hampton Roads Bird Club to Eastern Shore on (10/15/16)

Canada Goose American Black Duck Ruddy Duck Double-crested Cormorant Brown Pelican Great Blue Heron Great Egret Snowy Egret Little Blue Heron Tricolored Heron Black-crowned Night Heron Yellow-crowned Night Heron White Ibis Black Vulture Turkey Vulture Osprey Northern Harrier Sharp-shinned Hawk Cooper's Hawk Bald Eagle Red-tailed Hawk Clapper Rail Common Gallinule American Coot Sandhill Crane Killdeer Ruddy Turnstone Sanderling Wilson's Snipe	Spotted Sandpiper Greater Yellowlegs Willett Lesser Yellowlegs Laughing Gull Ring-billed Gull Herring Gull Great Black-backed Gull Rock Pigeon Mourning Dove Belted Kingfisher Red-bellied Woodpecker Downy Woodpecker Northern Flicker Pileated Woodpecker American Kestrel Peregrine Falcon Eastern Phoebe Blue-headed Vireo Blue Jay American Crow Fish Crow Tree Swallow Carolina Chickadee Tufted Titmouse Red-breasted Nuthatch Brown-headed Nuthatch Brown Creeper House Wren	Marsh Wren Carolina Wren Golden-crowned Kinglet Ruby-crowned Kinglet Eastern Bluebird Swainson's Thrush Gray Catbird Northern Mockingbird European Starling Common Yellowthroat Northern Parula Magnolia Warbler Palm Warbler Pine Warbler Yellow-rumped Warbler Nelson's Sparrow Seaside Sparrow Chipping Sparrow Field Sparrow Dark-eyed Sparrow White-throated Sparrow Song Sparrow Swamp Sparrow Northern Cardinal Red-winged Blackbird Common Grackle Boat-tailed Grackle Brown-headed Cowbird House Finch
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President	Shawn Dash	drshawntdash@gmail.com	(915)-471-1287
Vice President	Brenda Gervais	bgervais02@gmail.com	(757) 788-8716
Secretary	William Boeh	dolphrog1@yahoo.com	(757) 766-2144
Treasurer	John Adair	adairjj@bunt.com	(757) 224-8920
Board: (7/14-6/17)	Pete Peterman	rwpeterman@verizon.net	(757) 766-8658
Board (7/15-6/18)	Andy Hawkins	andrewcurtishawkins@gmail.com	(757) 833-0371
Board: (7/16-6/19)	Dave Youker	Youkerd@aol.com	(757) 344-9385
Field Trip Coordinator	Jason Strickland	jmstrickland228@gmail.com	(757) 739-6939
Web Editor	Meredith Bell	merandlee@gmail.com	(804) 824-4958
Hospitality	Jane Frigo	birderjane@gmail.com	(757) 873-0721
Hospitality	Wendy Maxey	emaxey@verizon.net	(757) 483-3003
Newsletter Editor	Thomas Charlock	TomCharlock@gmail.com	(757) 599-3418
Publicity	Jessica Ausura	birdgirljess@gmail.com	(757) 775-5535
Membership	Gwen Harris	walterandgwenharris@cox.net	(757) 898-8649

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 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>. **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.

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**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.

*Editor (T. Charlock)*  
*Hampton Roads Bird Club*  
*22 Executive Drive*  
*Newport News, Virginia 23606-2225*

