



Bird Notes

Newsletter of the

Hampton Roads Bird Club (HRBC)

www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org and on Facebook

Vol. 73, No. 5

May-June 2025

Thursday, May 8 Meeting
6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program
Sandy Bottom Nature Park

Saturday, June 7 Annual Picnic
12:00 Noon
Sandy Bottom Nature Park

Hummingbirds: Jeweled Pollinators of the Natural World

By Shawn Dash

Join us for a fascinating look into the evolution, morphology, and diversity of hummingbirds. Learn how these tiny birds developed their incredible flight abilities, specialized bills, and brilliant colors. We'll explore their ecological role as pollinators and highlight species you might encounter locally and beyond. Plus, get practical tips for attracting these jeweled wonders to your own yard. Whether you're a seasoned birder or a backyard enthusiast, this talk will deepen your appreciation for these remarkable creatures!

By Brenda Tanner

Mark your calendars for 12:00 PM Saturday, June 7, 2025, at Parker Pavilion in Sandy Bottom Park. Many of you know where Parker Pavilion is but for those who don't, if you are coming in the Big Bethel entrance, go past the Visitor Center and look for a picnic shelter on the right near the lake. If you are coming in the Hampton Roads Center Parkway entrance, the shelter will be on the left about 1/10th of a mile from the entrance. We will have a Hampton Roads Bird Club banner hanging on the shelter. There are parking lots adjacent to, and across the street, from the shelter.

We will pass around a signup sheet for food at the May 8 meeting. Be thinking about what you would like to bring. There is no electricity to plug in a crockpot or anything of that nature so to keep a dish hot so please bring your food in an appropriate container to keep it warm. Tablecloths and drinks will be provided by the club. If you cannot attend the meeting but plan to come to the picnic, please email either Brenda Tanner at brtanner@hotmail.com 757-867-8407 or Jeannie Atkins at jeannie.and.harold@icloud.com 757-287-3985.

There are other things to do at the park if you would like to spend some additional time outdoors after the picnic - many hiking trails, paddle boats at the lake, and a children's playground area - make it an afternoon of fun for the family! We hope to see many of you at the picnic! It will be a good time to chat and catchup with your fellow birders.



Le Rubis-topaze (Ruby-topaz Hummingbird)
by Georges-Louis Leclerc (1707-88).

HRBC Outdoors

Regular Bird Walks in Newport News Park

7:00 AM on 1st and 3rd Sundays of all 12 months but not for the 1st Sunday of March.

Meet at big parking lot behind Ranger Station.

Leader: Jane Frigo birderjane@gmail.com

home 757-873-0721, cell 757-776-7925

HRBC Spring Bird Count

Saturday, May 3, 2025

Coordinator: Bill Boeh phrogdolph@gmail.com

757-951-7959 Bill will be away on May 3. Consult

your sector leader for the start time.

Field Trip to Voice of America Gameland, NC

5:00 AM van departure, Saturday, May 17, 2025

Sign up please.

Leader: James Abbott jaa3469@gmail.com

757-320-9191 (text or phone)

Annual Picnic at Sandy Bottom

12:00 PM Saturday, June 7, 2025

Inform leaders of what dish you'll bring.

Leaders: Brenda Tanner brtanner@hotmail.com

757-867-8407 and

Jeannie Atkins jeannie.and.harold@icloud.com

757-287-3985

Field Trip to Henslow's Sparrows at Voice of America Gameland, NC 5:00 AM van departure, Saturday, May 17, 2025

By James Abbott

This is a brand-new adventure for HRBC: visiting a coastal prairie Henslow's Sparrow breeding site at the Voice of America Gameland, NC.

If you are interested in this trip and have not already contacted me, please email

jaa3469@gmail.com, include your cell-phone number, and state if you are interested in a spot on the van. Van spots will be assigned in the order in which emails are received in my inbox. I will reply with confirmation. My cell number is 757-320-9191.

The Voice of America Gameland is located near Greenville, NC. The site is home to hundreds of Henslow's Sparrows and is the only site near Virginia's Tidewater where this species breeds regularly. The site is now managed by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission to maintain the grasslands and other early succession habitat. As such, there is a variety of other "early succession" bird species to see, beyond the sparrow, in addition to carnivorous plants, butterflies, bees, etc. The site is not developed, so there are no facilities. The site is about 2 and a half hours from our Tidewater; the same as Chincoteague.

We will need to be onsite down in NC between 7:30-8:00 AM for the best bird activity. That will mean a departure from the Tidewater area at **5:00 AM**. To help with this I will be renting a 15-passenger van as an option to ride down and back. We will make a pitstop on the way down. Spots in the van will be first come first serve when you sign up. I will arrange a meet-up location. If you plan on driving yourself, I must have your cell phone number; please carpool as there is very little parking onsite.

It may require some significant walking to find the sparrows (up to one mile out in the grasslands). We may see one right away or we may need to make a longer walk. The area is very open so plan to bring hats, sunscreen, sunglasses if you like, and your favorite snacks and beverage. The walking itself will be flat but potentially full sun and wet so waterproof footwear or a change of footwear is a good idea. My plan is to have some officials from the State of NC there with us to help facilitate.

After birding we will travel about 30 min. further south to Ayden, NC to have lunch at the legendary Skylight Inn BBQ. We will then make our way back with pit stops and hopefully return home by 5:00 PM.

You can view the Voice of America Game Lands bird hotspot at: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L557151>
The approximate address is 10000 Cherry Run Road, Washington, NC 27889 (35.694085, -77.164622).



Carolina Chickadee on the campus of Hampton University (by Shawn Dash)

President's Perch

By Shawn Dash

As we migrate toward the end of another wonderful season — wrapping up with our June picnic and looking ahead to restarting in September — it's a perfect time to congratulate each other for being such active and passionate stewards of nature. The natural world has always been a place of challenges, a "survival of the fittest" landscape, but today it faces more pressures than ever before. Thank you for caring about birds, and by extension, the broader natural world they represent.

I want to personally extend my deep thanks to all who give so tirelessly of their time and energy to keep our club strong. Special thanks to:

- **Mark Sopko**, our Vice President, who has energized our meetings with an outstanding lineup of speakers and educational experiences.
- **Bill Boeh**, our Secretary, who not only records the minutes and maintains the history of our club but also compiles the Christmas and Spring Bird Counts.
- **Tom Charlock**, our Newsletter Editor, for assembling a wonderful collection of articles, bird lists, photos, and book reviews — a true chronicle of our club's birding adventures and knowledge.
- **Wendy and Ellis Maxey**, whose work keeps our website vibrant, welcoming, and up to date.

- **James Abbott**, who organized an excellent series of field trips — offering both new explorations and favorite traditions.
- **Brenda Tanner** and **Jeannine Atkins**, who have kept us well-fed and cheerful at our meetings and special events.
- **Gwen Harris**, always a warm and welcoming presence at our meetings and perfect person for membership.
- **John Adair**, our Treasurer, who ensures our membership and finances are in good order.
- Our dedicated board members — **Dave Youker**, **Dianne Snyder**, **Pete Peterman**, and **Michael Meyer** — who offer wise counsel and help steer our club thoughtfully into the future. Michael also runs the HRBC Photo Contest.
- And of course, a heartfelt thanks to **Jane Frigo**, whose passion and leadership on our Sunday morning walks in Newport News Park help share the magic of birding with others.

As we welcome new members, shift leadership roles, and celebrate the long, proud history of the Hampton Roads Bird Club, let's not forget the simple joys of birding. This summer, while you're out enjoying the birds, I encourage you to invite a friend or two along. Sharing the wonder of birds with others is one of the best ways to grow our community and inspire new stewards of nature.

Wishing everyone a safe and bird-filled summer — see you out in the field!

Birding Bhutan – Land of the Thunder Dragon

By Pete Peterman

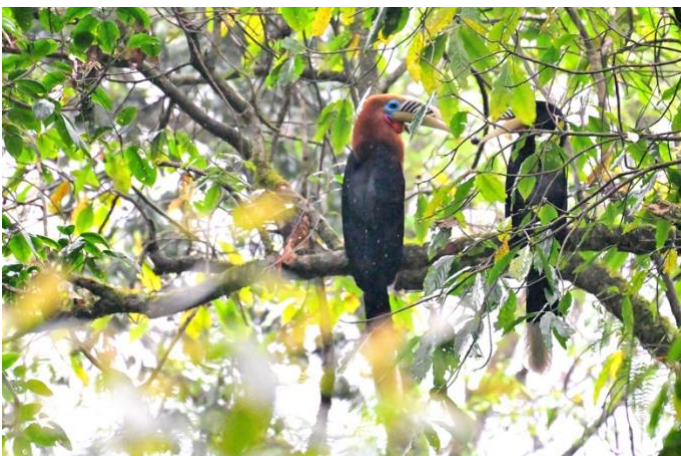
The country is in the eastern Himalayas, between China to the north and India to the south. It has a population of over 700,000 and is roughly the size of the state of South Dakota. It is extremely rugged, with tropical forests to the south and mountains to the north rising above 23,000 feet. The highest unclimbed mountain in the world is in this area as Bhutan does not allow anyone to go to the summit of any mountain as this is where they believe the local deities reside. It is a constitutional monarchy, with the King being the head of state and the Prime

Minister being head of the government and the Je Khenpo head of the state religion Vajrayana Buddhism. The capital is Thimphu where 15% of the population lives.



Blood Pheasant (by Pete Peterman)

Bhutan was never colonized but was a protectorate of the British Empire. Bhutan has very close relations with India and is dependent on its military although it has its own military units. Its main export is hydroelectric power and is basically an agrarian economy. It is the only nation that has a negative carbon dioxide balance, absorbing more CO₂ than emitting as its constitution requires at least 60% of the land be forested. Currently 70% of the land is forest.



Rufous-necked Hornbill (by Pete Peterman)



Himalayan Griffon (by Pete Peterman)

This year, the country restricts tourism to 50,000 individuals and each must pay \$100 a day to obtain a visa. This will change next year to allow up to 300,000 per year and the start of a major project to build a second national highway from Darachu to Gelephu, where it is hoped to upgrade the current regional airport to an international one to establish a major hub for airlines. The King has initiated a mandatory national service for all youth turning 18 or when finishing schooling which includes one year of training. The program is called Gyalsung and is part of the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). The central objective of GNH is to ensure a holistic and sustainable development by balancing the material and the non-material values. The King feels that the only way to maintain sovereignty is to have a unique culture. This is shown partly by the required national dress, support for the arts, and required paintings of traditional Bhutanese art on all newly constructed buildings.

For Birders, seeing the hardwood forests in the south and the coniferous forests in the higher elevations, provide the habitat for up to 700 species of birds. The tour that I was on, covered over 600 miles on roads that many times were only single tracks where passing required moving over to the verge and going thru rockslides and washouts but the scenery was spectacular, the people friendly, and the birding exceptional! Birding was along the roads as the forest came right down to its edge. Food was mainly vegetarian as no animals are killed within Bhutan.

All meat is imported from India. Starting in 1974, trout were allowed to be harvested; a push for fly fishing tourism has begun with the Golden Mahseer, which can grow to nearly six feet, being the main draw, was approved in 2022.



Satyr Tragopan (by Pete Peterman)

Although birding was primary, we did have a local guide for cultural explanations and to visit three Dzongs, fortresses built in the 17th century against the Tibetan invaders. These house local government offices, temples, and schools. At every pass was a Stupa to provide good luck for travelers, and they were also erected at any place that was religiously significant. Prayer flags, providing blessings to all, were erected in the windiest locations to spread their message to the greatest numbers. White flags on large bamboo poles are erected after a death, often in clusters, and are believed to help the deceased's soul on its journey to the next life. Tsa Tsa sculptural offerings are a common sight in Bhutan especially if you are wandering around in the mountains. About 3 inches tall, and in the form of a cylindrical cone, Tsa Tsas are found in caves, or underneath rocks, and in those places sheltered from the elements. Mostly painted white, some can also be seen in gold and red. This nonchalant artifact is in fact a powerful expression of farewell. In Bhutan, Tsa Tsas are molded out of the ash collected from the cremation pyre. Commissioned by the bereaved family, and made by monks over special religious ceremonies, Tsa Tsas serve to memorialize those who have passed on.

In the near future, I hope to provide a presentation showing the birds of Bhutan.



Himalayan Modal (by Pete Peterman)

First-Year Students Investigate Local Woodpecker Trends

By Shawn Dash, Amanda Wood, and Katrina Mason

Amanda Wood and Katrina Mason, both first-year students at Hampton University, have jumped into ornithological research with impressive enthusiasm. Working under the mentorship of Dr. Shawn T. Dash, their project explored long-term population trends of woodpeckers (family Picidae) across the Virginia Peninsula, using over two decades of Hampton Roads Bird Club Spring Count data combined with community science platforms eBird and iNaturalist.



Amanda Wood, Katrina Mason, and Shawn Dash
(by Shawn Dash)

Spring Photo Contest Winners

By Michael Meyer

March

In addition to local survey data, Amanda and Katrina analyzed state-wide community science reports. Using verified observations from eBird and iNaturalist, they found that Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Downy Woodpeckers are by far the most commonly recorded woodpeckers across Virginia, each with hundreds of thousands of observations. Hairy Woodpeckers and Red-headed Woodpeckers had notably fewer reports, suggesting lower abundance or more specialized habitat needs. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, which migrate through the region, were reported mainly during winter months. Observations from the Hampton Roads area specifically mirrored these trends, with Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers again being the most frequently encountered species.

Focusing on long-term regional data, the students found that Red-bellied Woodpeckers consistently dominated observations, thriving in both urban and suburban settings. Downy Woodpeckers remained widely distributed and stable across years, while Pileated Woodpeckers showed steady, though less frequent, sightings, highlighting the continued importance of mature forests. Northern Flickers experienced a curious spike in 2011, likely linked to migration or habitat dynamics.

Less commonly observed were Hairy Woodpeckers, suggesting sensitivity to habitat preference or loss, and Red-headed Woodpeckers, whose low numbers may reflect broader population pressures. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were detected in only two years during this May survey, perhaps representing a minor shift for some migrating birds.

The students' work demonstrates the power of long-term monitoring and community science for tracking changes in local bird communities. Their project not only sheds light on the resilience and vulnerabilities of Virginia's woodpecker species but also shows how emerging scientists can contribute valuable insights to our understanding of regional bird conservation.

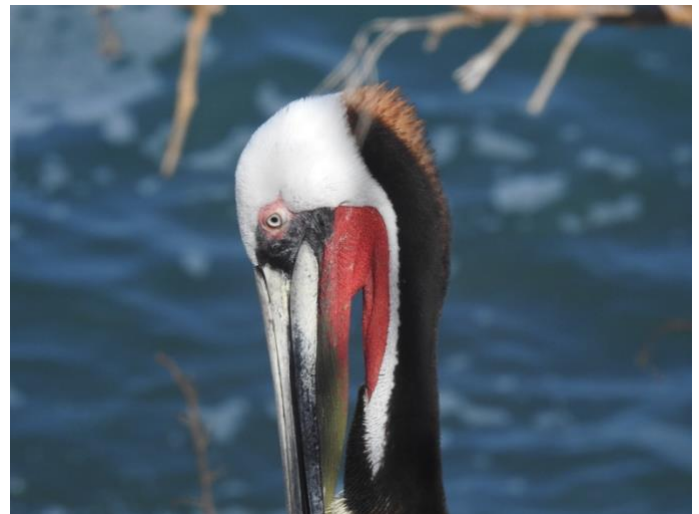
Sadly, the students will be done with their final exams, but Shawn will share their more detailed findings during the May meeting.

We look forward to seeing what these promising young researchers will tackle next!



Least Bittern
Gold by William McKellar

William: "After a good morning of birding in the VB area, we decided to go look for this Least Bittern that was reported on E-bird off of Horned Point Road. We quickly spotted it while driving by, it was fishing in the ditch. What a cool bird!"



Brown Pelican
Silver by Don Brunk

Don: "Many Brown Pelicans perch on the cliffs surrounding La Jolla Cove in San Diego. The sidewalk along the rim has a lot of pedestrian traffic, so these birds are accustomed to a close approach."

April



Purple Sandpiper
Bronze by Pete Peterman

Pete: "The Purple Sandpiper was photographed at the CBBT Island 4 on the HRBC trip, Feb 8."



Burrowing Owls
Gold by Don Brunk

Don: "One of the birds in this pair has been dubbed "Fire Marshal Bill" by an eBirder, as the burrow is situated next to the fire station in Otay Mesa, California. The burrow is only about 20 feet inside a chain link fence, the only barrier between the owls and the tractor trailers that idle noisily while parked along the road."



Hooded Mergansers
Honorable Mention by Lynn Chandler

Lynn: "The male Hooded Mergansers were on Salter's Creek Tuesday, February 11 at 8:24am looking for something good to eat. If they had showed up four days earlier they would have met up a female on Friday the 7th at 4:30pm."



Great Blue Heron
Silver by Lynn Chandler

Lynn: "This day the temperature was a high of 24 degrees on Tuesday, Jan. 21 at 8:20am and the Great Blue Heron had himself all wrapped up keeping very warm while he slept on a floater on Salter's Creek in Downtown Hampton."

Here are the photo contest rules:

1. A member may submit up to 2 photos each month taken in the last 60 days.
2. Please name each file with the photographer and the bird's name (i.e., ShawnDash_Osprey).
3. Submit to Michael Meyer (michael.meyer@cnu.edu) by the 10th of each month.
4. Winners will be contacted by the newsletter editor to provide either a short writeup or a brief phone interview from which a narrative may be composed.



Osprey signals another raptor to stay clear of its latest kill. HRBC walk in NN Park on March 2, 2025
By Shawn Dash

Sunday Walks in Newport News Park

By Bill Boeh

Links to eBird reports for March and April 2025 events are at the column on the right. Each link takes you to the text summary of a HRBC “1st and 3rd” Sunday walk in Newport News Park; and to the associated eBird checklist(s). Checklists often have photos. The same information is at www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org under “Club Activities.”

Date	Location	Report Link
Apr. 6	NN Park	https://ebird.org/tripreport/348547
Mar. 16	NN Park	https://ebird.org/tripreport/341538
Mar.1	NN Park	https://ebird.org/tripreport/336648

Pileated Woodpecker Menaces Rockport, Massachusetts

Who mars a score of vehicle mirrors? “He was described as 18 to 24 inches tall, wearing black and white with a red hat.” Most of us regard his species with delight, but Neil Vigdor’s article in last Sunday’s New York Times tells of a problem male Pileated Woodpecker who takes out car windows, too. Professor Matthew Fuxjager of Brown University blames the testosterone levels of warmer weather.

Commission Vote Favors Industrial Fishing of Menhaden Over Osprey Chicks

By a 6-2 vote Virginia Marine Resource Commission (VMRC) rejected a 5-point petition ably presented by attorney David Reed (Chesapeake Legal Alliance) that called for cutting, to varying degrees, reduction fishing of menhaden in the Virginia waters of the Chesapeake Bay. Cuts to reduction fishing of menhaden in the Bay were advocated to facilitate more sport fishing (i.e., of striped bass which feed on menhaden) and to increase the reproductive success of Osprey (whose chicks are fed with menhaden brought to nests).

Virginia is the only state on the Atlantic seaboard that allows reduction fishing in its waters. The operation by Omega Protein/Ocean Harvesting at Reedville, Virginia, obtains about 30% of its menhaden catch in the Bay (state waters) and the rest from the Atlantic Ocean.

Chesapeake Bay sport fishing has a significant commercial economic signature, and it’s larger than that of the Bay menhaden reduction fishing by Ocean Harvesting. Local sport fishing interests report that in the Maryland waters of the Bay, where reduction fishing of menhaden is not allowed, the

The Colorful Plumage of Urban Birds

catch of striped bass is much superior.

Representatives of Ocean Harvesting were at the meeting in numbers and included the CEO. It was mentioned that striped bass are now overfished in the Bay and limits on amateur catch in the 1990s led to a recovery of the bass population. Prof. Robert Latour of Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences (VIMS) said some simulations show that a moratorium of reduction fishing of menhaden would affect the striped bass population by only 9%.

A recent peer-reviewed publication by Dr. Bryan Watts of William and Mary noted the considerable failure of Osprey chicks to survive in an area of Virginia adjacent to the reduction fishing of menhaden in the Bay. Watts suspects reduction fishing to be the culprit. Public discussion at the meeting floated the idea that the Watts paper had not nailed a direct connection between the reduction fishing and failure of the chicks; most of the birding community present, for example Julie Kacmarcik of Richmond Audubon, argued strongly for a direct connection. The authoritarian VMRC chair exclaimed, "Is Bryan Watts here?" The answer was no. Watts had presented at an earlier VMRC meeting.

12 of the 25 speakers at the meeting supported the petition to restrict reduction fishing of menhaden in the Bay. Both sides were calling for information and research. The issue of funding for a prospective VIMS study (~\$1.622 M), which had been aired at an earlier VMRC meeting, was discussed at this one. Steve Atkinson of the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Association stated that while all appear to say a study is needed, industry lobbyists at the General Assembly have very effectively opposed funding it. A board member made a motion to cut reduction fishing of menhaden in the Bay by half and state that research was needed; this would pressure the General Assembly and/or Ocean Harvesting to fund a VIMS study; VMRC legal counsel was wary of such action; the motion was battered about and dropped. The 6-2 vote followed (April 22, 2025 at the VMRC facility near Fort Monroe).



Blue-face Honeyeater (from Wikipedia)
This bird does well in Australian cities.

Celebrate a gift that you receive daily, dear city birder: A study funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and the Max Planck Society reports that urban birds are more colorful. The abstract from joint first-authors Ibanez-Alamo and Dehey states

“Using a global database, we computed an index of urban success for 1287 bird species and quantified its association with estimates of plumage colour. Our analyses showed that birds that do well in urban environments are more likely to be blue, dark grey and black, and less likely to be brown or yellow... Species with high urban success also exhibit more elaborate colours, but not higher sexual dichromatism.”

Max-Planck-Gesellschaft has good summary at <https://www.mpg.de/24483331/0407-psy-colourful-city-birds-155111-x?c=2249>. Why do the city birds have more color? Cities are warmer than the countryside, so darker plumage is less important. And with fewer predators in town, camouflage is not so critical.

Juan Diego Ibáñez-Álamo, Kaspar Delhey, Lucía Izquierdo, Mihai Valcu, Bart Kempenaers. **Colourful Urban Birds: Bird Species Successful in Urban Environments Have More Elaborate Colours and Less Brown.** *Ecology Letters*, 2025; 28 (4) DOI: [10.1111/ele.70106](https://doi.org/10.1111/ele.70106)

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TO JOIN OR RENEW. If you would like to join the Hampton Roads Bird Club or renew your membership, there are several convenient ways to do so. Dues remain at \$15.00 for individuals and \$20.00 for families. New members, and anyone whose information has changed, please complete the form below and send to John Adair, HRBC Treasurer.

Submit your application and payment as follows:

- 1) Mail to: John Adair, 109 Nansemond Turn, Yorktown, VA 23693, adairjj@gmail.com.
- 2) Drop off at: Wild Wings Nature Store, Glendale Shopping Center in Newport News.
- 3) Pay by PayPal or credit card at: <https://www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org/membership>.

Hampton Roads Bird Club – Membership Form

New Member (F/I) _____ Renewal _____ Date: _____

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: H: _____ C: _____ W: _____

Email(s): _____

- Only check this box if you need the newsletter delivered via the postal system;
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