



Bird Notes

Newsletter of the

Hampton Roads Bird Club (HRBC)

www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org and on Facebook

Vol. 74, No. 2

November-December 2025

Thursday, Nov. 13 Meeting
6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program
Sandy Bottom Nature Park

**Binoculars/Scopes 101 - What to
look for in optics for birding**

By Mark Sopko

Ever wondered what is inside your binoculars or scope? November's meeting will delve into the optics we use for birding. *Bring your binoculars.* We will focus on magnification, objective lens diameter and how the specs align with our intended use. Key features also include prisms, lens coatings, field of view and comfort-related factors like eye relief. It will be a lab like presentation, allowing members to see the difference between poro and roof prisms as well as testing our ability to align our binoculars and see how our optics are affected by different light conditions. This tutorial is intended to help you understand what you are looking through when we bird as well as assist in future optical purchases.



American Redstart by Dianne Snyder
in Ohio last May

Thursday, December 11 Party
6:30 PM Holiday Dinner
and Silent Auction
Sandy Bottom Nature Park

Led by Brenda Tanner and Jeannie
Atkins

Bring auction items to Nov. 13 meeting.

Our annual Holiday Potluck Dinner is just around the corner. Please put it on your calendar and if you can attend, be thinking about what dish you would like to bring that will serve 8-10 people. This can be an appetizer, meat, potato, vegetable or dessert. We will pass around a signup sheet at the November meeting for those planning to attend and what you would like to bring. If you cannot attend the November meeting but plan to attend the dinner, please call Jeannie Atkins at 757-287-3985 or email her at jeannie.and.harold@icloud.com by December 1 so we can plan the menu and have an accurate count for seating. This year in addition to the usual potluck dinner, we will be having a silent auction headed up by Jane Frigo, Jeannie Atkins and Brenda Tanner. If you plan to donate any items for the auction, please bring it to the November meeting so we can process it and have everything organized ahead of time. We will not be able to accept donations at the December dinner. Donated items do not have to be bird related and anyone can contribute. Just make sure the item is in good condition and operational. Crafts and works of art are also welcomed. We've both collected some items at the October meeting but need additional items to make

the auction a success. We look forward to seeing everyone and to a great holiday celebration.

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

Field Trip to Hoffer Creek Wildlife Preserve

Saturday, November 22, 2025

Leader: James Abbott jaa3469@gmail.com
757-320-9191 (text or phone)

Fourth Friday Fort Monroe Bird Walk

8:00 AM Friday, November 28, 2025
(no walk on Friday, December 26, 2025)
30 Ingalls Road, Fort Monroe

Leader: Mark Sopko mgsopko@gmail.com
804-815-2897

Field Trip to Mackay Island NWR (maybe)

Sunday, December 14, 2025

Leader: James Abbott jaa3469@gmail.com
757-320-9191 (text or phone)

HRBC Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 20, 2025

Coordinator: Bill Boeh see page 3
phrogdolph@gmail.com 757-951-7959

Field Trip to Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel

Saturday, January 24, 2026

Leader: James Abbott jaa3469@gmail.com
757-320-9191 (text or phone)

Pelagic Trip from Rudee Inlet or Hatteras

February or March 2026?

Club will decide on location; cost ~ \$220

Leader: James Abbott jaa3469@gmail.com
757-320-9191 (text or phone)

Field Trip to Grandview Beach

Saturday, February 7? if no other for month

Leader: James Abbott jaa3469@gmail.com
757-320-9191 (text or phone)

Field Trip destination TBD

Sunday, March 15 or 22?, 2026

Leader: James Abbott jaa3469@gmail.com
757-320-9191 (text or phone)

Field Trip to Back Bay NWR

Saturday, April 25, 2026

Leader: James Abbott jaa3469@gmail.com
757-320-9191 (text or phone)

Field Trip to western Virginia mountains

Late May 2026

Leader: James Abbott jaa3469@gmail.com
757-320-9191 (text or phone)

*If you see an unusual number of dead birds,
read the VA Dept. of Wildlife Resources link
below:*

<https://dwr.virginia.gov/media/press-release/dwr-asking-public-to-report-after-increase-in-suspected-cases-of-avian-influenza/>

President's Perch -- Migration

By Shawn Dash

October along the Tidewater means crisp dawns and a sky quietly on the move. Overnight migrants—sparrows, kinglets, thrushes, and the season's first waterfowl—thread the dark above our neighborhoods, then drop into hedgerows, marsh edges, and park thickets at first light. If you're out early, listen for seep notes and thin high "tsip" calls over the Hampton River; by mid-morning, watch for fresh arrivals working wax myrtle and seaside goldenrod.

Tonight's radar, tomorrow's birds. A BirdCast snapshot for Monday, October 20 showed roughly four million birds over Virginia by 7:40 PM, moving SSE around 17 mph near 1,800 ft, with ~114,000 already crossed since 7:30 PM. That points to a lively dawn—check wind-sheltered hedgerows, coastal scrub, and marsh edges at Grandview, Sandy Bottom, and Newport News Park. Add BirdCast to your toolbox: a quick evening check-in can guide where you explore the next morning.

Raptors on the move. Our Sunday Walk chatter was a good reminder to visit HawkCount.org. It provides live and recent tallies from staffed watch sites across North America—including Kiptopeke Hawk Watch on the Eastern Shore—plus timing, weather notes, and long-term trends. Peek before a trip to set expectations, and compare after to sharpen your ID and contribute to the bigger picture.

Join the science. As migration wanes, two easy ways to help: the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) and Project FeederWatch. CBC sign-ups are open—contact Bill Boeh if you'd like to be placed on a team; all skill levels are welcome and every role matters (extra eyes/ears, tally sheets, data entry). Project FeederWatch kicked off November 1; if you haven't registered, there's still time. It's a simple, at-home way to track winter yard birds, and your standardized counts feed regional population and range analyses.

As we dance through fall's activity and head toward winter, there's room for everyone—whether you're on the Blue Ridge, along the Eastern Shore, walking Newport News Park, or sipping coffee at the feeders. Join in, enjoy the birds, and turn your observations into science.

Audubon Christmas Bird Count (HRBC on December 20, 2025)

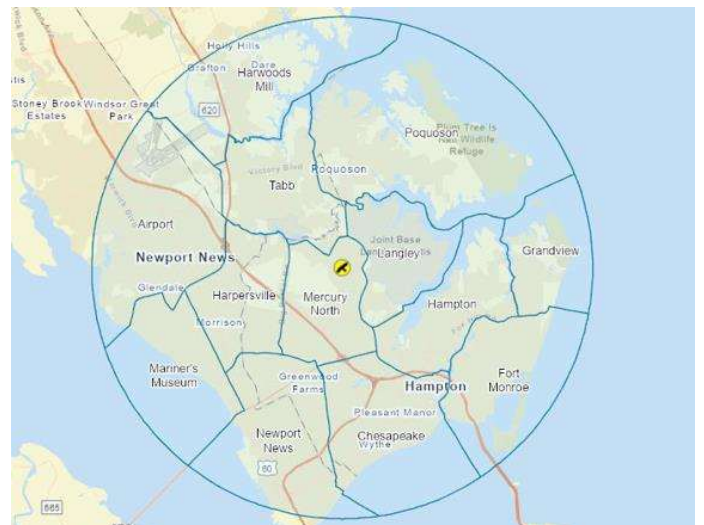
By Bill Boeh

Please allow me to inform you regarding an opportunity to support an important bird conservation effort. Anyone can participate—even those who have mobility issues. That opportunity is the Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC).

For those who are not familiar, the CBC is a bird census that has been conducted by the National Audubon Society since 1900. It is held annually from December 14 to January 5 within 15-mile diameter geographic “circles” in the U.S., Canada, and other countries in the Western Hemisphere. Each circle has a compiler who manages the count in their assigned circle (for more information visit the Audubon's CBC web page at

<http://www.audubon.org/conservation/join-christmas-bird-count>).

As it has since 1952, the Hampton Roads Bird Club will be sponsoring the 2025 CBC. **Our count will take place on Saturday, December 20, 2025** (rain, snow or shine) within the Newport News Circle (depicted below). The circle is divided into 13 sectors, each headed by a sector leader who coordinates the counted their sector.





There are two ways you can participate - by observing in the field or by feeder-watching. Field observers count birds in the field as part of a sector team (this can include “owling” as well as observing during daytime). Feeder watchers record observations at a feeder.

By participating, you act as a “citizen-scientist” by collecting data that is vital for bird conservation. According to the Audubon website, the data collected by observers over the past century has allowed Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys, such as the Virginia Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years. This long-term perspective is vital for conservationists. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat, and it helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well.

Why is this important? Birds are not doing well. According to Cornell’s [All About Birds website](#), wild bird populations in the continental U.S. and Canada have dropped by almost 30% between 1970 and 2020 — a 2.9 billion decline in bird populations in the continental U.S. and Canada. Unfortunately, per the [State of the Birds 2025 report](#), “America’s birds continue to decline across the board.”

Finally, please be aware that you may be able to participate in multiple counts. Other circles nearby conduct their counts on various dates:

Williamsburg (City of Williamsburg, James City County, York County, Gloucester County)

Sunday December 14

Contact: Shirley Devan

shirley_devan@icloud.com

Dragon Run (Middlesex, King & Queen, Essex Counties)

Sunday December 14

Contact: Jeff Wright pec11908@mac.com

Northumberland-Lancaster

(Northumberland and Lancaster Counties)

Tuesday December 16

Contact: Jeff Wright pec11908@mac.com

George Washington’s Birthplace (Essex, Richmond, Westmoreland, King George Counties)

Saturday December 20

Contact: Bill Portlock

portlock@bealenet.com or Jeff Wright

pec11908@mac.com

Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (Suffolk area)

Unavailable at this time due to the gov’t shutdown. Email the contact or visit the CBC map to obtain the date after the shutdown ends.

Contact: Susan Stanley

susan_stanley@fws.gov

Middle Peninsula (Gloucester, Middlesex, King & Queen Counties)

Saturday December 27

Contact: Susan Crockett scrocket@cox.net

Nansemond River (Portsmouth, Suffolk, Chesapeake)

Friday January 2, 2026

Contact: Dave Youker youkerd@aol.com

Mathews (Mathews County, Gloucester County)

Saturday January 3, 2026

Contact: Mark Sopko mgsoepko@gmail.com



An ebullient Debra Swinford at the Edward Brinkley Preserve, Eastern Shore on October 25, 2025. From the left, Donna McAdams, Peggy Rommen, Heidi Young, John Adair, Melissa DeHart, Jane Frigo, Marilyn Adair, trip leader James Abbott, Don Brunk's binoculars, Kevin Roback, Mark Sopko, Debra, Laurie Brunk, and Danny Smith

Stakeout for Swainson's Hawk on HRBC Eastern Shore Trip of 10/25/2025

By Mark Sopko

James Abbott led us to several fruitful locations during this excursion on October 25, 2025, and it included two stakeouts for a rare Swainson's Hawk at Seaside Road on the Eastern Shore. Four of us departed the second stakeout early. As we left, above an open field just south along Seaside, we observed a uniform dark buteo with dark chest, and dark flight feathers soaring above to the East. At first, we mistook it for an immature Bald Eagle. But its back showed dark brown with black primaries. No white mottling. Four notched primaries "fingers" were distinctive when the soaring bird turned. A photo by Kevin Roback and URLs for the eBird report and more images and counts from the field trip are in the table on the right column.

HRBC Walks in Newport News Park, Fort Monroe, and Field Trips

By Jane Frigo, Bill Boeh, Mark Sopko, Kevin Roback, Shawn Dash and Stuart Sweetman

Links to eBird reports for Fall 2025 events.

Date	Location	eBird Report Link
Sep 7	NN Park	https://ebird.org/tripreport/410293
Sep 21	NN Park	https://ebird.org/tripreport/415039
Sep 26	Fort Monroe	https://ebird.org/tripreport/415249
Sep 27	Lone Star Lakes	https://ebird.org/tripreport/419221
Oct 5	NN Park	https://ebird.org/tripreport/419219
Oct 24	Fort Monroe	https://ebird.org/tripreport/425914
Oct 25	Eastern Shore	https://ebird.org/checklist/S281368300 https://ebird.org/checklist/S281223464 https://ebird.org/checklist/S281282603 https://ebird.org/checklist/S281345618 https://ebird.org/checklist/S281345640 https://ebird.org/checklist/S281415460 https://ebird.org/checklist/S281415479



Swainson's Hawk stakeout photo

By Kevin Roback

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S281368300>

has 5 of Kevin's mages of this bird

Fall Photo Contest Winners

By Michael Meyer



Salt Marsh Sparrow
Gold by William McKellar

William: "While birding on Maryus Road in Guinea, I spotted a sparrow fly from the road into the marsh. I got suspicious and started pishing and surprise! As soon as I saw the markings on its chest, I was shocked to realize it was a Saltmarsh Sparrow — one of the most secretive marsh sparrows of them all!"



Immature Cooper's Hawk
Silver. By Lynn Chandler

Lynn: ""This first year juvenile Cooper's Hawk was in my neighbor's tree on Friday August 29th at 5:30pm looking for his dinner in my back yard among all my songbirds but he had no luck that night. He has made my area his new home and I see him quite often flying back and forth across Salter's Creek in downtown Hampton."





Wilson's Warbler
Bronze by Pete Peterman

Pete: "...taken at the NN Park on the Sunday Bird Walk on Sep 21... Here's ..., a Wilson's Warbler."



Great Blue Heron
Honorable Mention by William McKellar

William: "On an August evening, I was out for a walk in Yorktown when I spotted a Great blue Heron fly over my head. It landed nearby, so I watched it for a while...it caught this puffer fish. It was interesting experience to watch and photograph."

Here are the photo contest rules:

A member may submit up to 2 photos each month taken in the last 60 days.

Please name each file with the photographer and the bird's name (i.e., ShawnDash_Osprey).

Submit to Michael Meyer (michael.meyer@cnu.edu) by the 10th of each month.

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.

Perch & Learn: Bird Science

By Shawn T. Dash

The following summary is from a recent (2025) paper entitled: Mass Mortality in Migrating American Robins (*Turdus migratorius*) in Virginia, USA: Data Beyond a Diagnosis.

What happened. In February–March 2022, a cluster of American Robin deaths occurred on the Radford University campus in southwest Virginia, centered around several heavily fruited American holly trees. Researchers salvaged birds, checked age/sex, looked for parasites, examined stomach contents, and sent a subset for full necropsy and avian-flu testing.

What they found. Holly was the dominant food item at the time of death: 90% of intact stomachs contained holly seeds/pulp, and many birds still had whole berries in the mouth or esophagus—evidence of active feeding. Parasites (ticks, lice, mites externally; worms internally) were common but within expected ranges for wild robins. Necropsies ruled out avian influenza; the proximate cause was trauma from falling, consistent with birds losing coordination. Taken together, the most likely explanation

is ethanol toxicosis from fermented holly berries following freeze–thaw weather.

Why it matters to birders. After repeated freeze–thaw spells, holly and other fruits can ferment; flocks may feed heavily and show “tipsy” behavior—poor perching, short flights, and the odd fall. If you see this, note time/location and report clusters of dead or grounded birds to your state wildlife agency or a wildlife disease hotline. Because intoxicated birds are more collision-prone, reduce nearby hazards around fruiting trees: close blinds at night and add temporary window-safe patterns. Remember that parasites (ticks, lice, gut worms) are common in wild songbirds and, at the levels documented in this event, were not the cause. Finally, treat these episodes as natural-history opportunities: they provide rare baseline data on flock age/sex structure, diet, and parasite communities that help track how weather and habitat shape winter ecology over time.

Powers, K. E., Olsen-Hodges, E. H., O’Brien, S., Smith, S. A., Lau, J. K., Dailey, L. G., ... & Wheeler, K. E. (2025). Mass Mortality in Migrating American Robins (*Turdus migratorius*) in Virginia, USA: Data Beyond a Diagnosis. *Journal of Wildlife Diseases*.

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An Island for Seabird Nesting in Hampton Roads

Katherine Hafner of WHRO reported on September 22 that “the federal Army Corps of Engineers is finalizing its proposal for a \$15.9 million project to build an island” of 10 acres on Hampton Flats, just off Chesapeake Avenue. At last. And hope for funding. Birds would be lured to the island with speakers and decoys.

For a few years, Royal terns, Laughing Gulls, Black Skimmers and other seabirds have been nesting on purpose-built grounds at Fort Wool and on adjacent barges at a cost of about \$3 million per year. They’d

earlier been fortuitously nesting on the embankment of HRBT, having fled Chesapeake Bay shorelines because of decades of development. The Fort Wool and barge arrangement was a gift to the birds (and really us) because of the ongoing expansion of HRBT at cost of over \$4 billion. Construction dictated that the nesting had to go. Continued use of the barges would be an annual expensive – and risky because of hurricanes. The Navy had expressed an interest in ridding seabirds from the area around HRBT and Fort Wool because of aviation safety. The transfer of the birds from Fort Wool would make it possible for tours of the historic facility, which engaged the Merrimack during the Civil War, to return.

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Board (7/23-6/26)	Pete Peterman.	rwpeterman@verizon.net	757-766-8658
Board (7/24-6/27)	Dianne Snyder.	dianne5657@cox.net	757-872-6747
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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, adairji@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;
 HRBC is trying to save trees and reduce club expenses by using email.

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