



Bird Notes

Newsletter of the

Hampton Roads Bird Club (HRBC)

www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org and on Facebook

Vol. 66, No. 3

January/February 2018

January 11 Meeting

6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program

at Sandy Bottom Nature Park

Feathers and Flight

Presenter: John Spahr

Birds are the only group of extant animals with feathers that clothe, protect and adorn them. This program delves into some detail about the structure and utility of feathers, as well as some of the fascinating and unique adaptations of feathers and plumages in birds. Feathers also facilitate flight, the primary mode of locomotion for most birds. The program concludes with a brief exploration of flight, which can vary dramatically from that of a soaring condor to a hovering hummingbird. High quality images are used throughout the program to illustrate the various points.

John Spahr is a long-time member of the Augusta Bird Club and has served as field trip leader and program chair for many years. John is also involved with the Virginia Society of Ornithology, having served as president, as a member of the Virginia Avian Records Committee, and currently as a member of the conservation committee. He is a regional reviewer for eBird and coordinator for region 3 for the current Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas project.

John has traveled extensively abroad to see and learn more about birds. He has visited many countries in Central and South America, several locales in the Caribbean (including Cuba), Southern Africa, Ethiopia, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea, Borneo, Bhutan, Thailand, India, Antarctica, China, Tibet, Madagascar, and most recently Guiana.

In 2010 John tagged along with Bob Ake for a birding “Big Year”, logging in over 90,000 miles by plane, car, boat and on foot in a quest to see as many birds as possible in North America. He was fortunate to tally over 700 species during this adventure.

John resides in Staunton, Virginia, with his wife Nancy. They also have a place in Highland County, where they spend considerable time, and where John has an ongoing project studying Eastern Screech Owls.

Information/scheduling from Pete Peterman.

Hosts: Bill McCullough, Samantha Askin, Bill Boeh



Resplendent Quetzal

February 8 Meeting
6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program
at Sandy Bottom Nature Park

Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW)
at the Great Dismal Swamp
Presenter: Jennifer Wright

Jennifer Wright, Wildlife Biologist at the Great Dismal Swamp, will present the status of the program to reintroduce the species. She will give an overview of the RCW species, background on its reintroduction to the refuge, where the program is now, and the path forward. The overall goal is to establish 5 breeding groups by 2020, which will help prevent extirpation of the species in Virginia, and promote recovery of RCW nationwide.

Jenn is an experienced manager of natural resources and environmental programs having spent 20 years with the Navy in this field. She has been the Great Dismal Swamp Wildlife Biologist for the past year. She manages the RCW introduction program as well as serving as the refuge expert in wetland ecology. She earned a Bachelor's in biology from St. Cloud State in Minnesota and a Master's degree from ODU in wetland ecology. She has been an avid birder since she was 9 years old and has conducted surveys in Europe and America.

Information/scheduling from Pete Peterman.

Hosts: Dianne Snyder, Rochelle Colestock, Tom Charlock



Red-cockaded Woodpecker (from web)

HRBC Outdoors Jan./Feb.

Regular bird walks to Newport News Park

First and third Sundays *almost* (see ** below) every Month 7:00 AM. Meet in big parking lot behind Ranger Station.

Jance Frigo birderjane@gmail.com 757-873-0721

Field Trip to Back Bay Refuge (see page 3)

Saturday, 9:00 AM, January 13, 2018

Andy Hawkins

andrewcurtishawkins@gmail.com cell 757-870-9641

Newport News Park Bird Count (see page 3)

Sunday, 7:00 AM, January 28, 2018

Jane Frigo birderjane@gmail.com 757-873-0721

**** Change in March 4, 2018 ****
Regular Park Walk

Because of the All City Marathon scheduled for Sunday, March 4, 2018 and beginning at Newport News Park at 7:00 AM, the regular bird walk is being canceled and moved to Saturday, March 3, 2018. In doing so we can still maintain a relatively consistent inventory of the park. If you have any questions call Jane Frigo [757-873-0721](tel:757-873-0721).

President's Perch

by Shawn Dash

The New Year is received with its promise of renewal and things to come. Though, regarding nature, we do not think of this time of year as being full of rejuvenation, great-horned owls are ready to nest if not already breeding, as are bald eagles. The New Year invites many to reflect on the year's passing and consider the potentials of another cycle of the planet.

As you look back over the last year you no doubt think of all the hard work of the board and active members of the Hampton Roads Bird Club. Tom giving us news updates and reports on field trips and books reviews. Andy and Jason encouraging us to travel afield to seek out birds and nature. Jane

always leading us on cold Sunday Mornings. Pete bringing wonderful speakers to the club. You all do so much, and I want to thank you personally. This club is a celebration of nature and community and is also a celebration of you. In the past, I have asked members for names of those who should be given a tip of the hat and a moment of recognition. While I have received a few names, they have been unduly limited. Also, since I am still “newish” to the club, I ask as you submit names, you briefly state how they have influenced the club and yourself; I want to give credit to those parties, and my ignorance will not do them justice.

Looking back over the last year we also find many changes and developments. Of particular concern to all should be the shape of the environment and its protection. Which over the last year, I am sad to report, has not improved but continues to decline and suffer. We are a club of various affiliations but united through the love of birds. I am confident you are aware that we cannot love any bird without too loving the caterpillar, and for that matter the weeds that sustained life for that tiny eating machine. Nature is all connected from death to rejuvenation to our enjoyment, we are all connected. As you look back over the last year and towards the future consider your part in this cycle. I ask you to be active and a force of change; after all the greatest influences come from bands of persons—such as yourself. Recall the HRBC has partnered with the Williamsburg club to tackle the grand task of targeted breeding bird atlas blocks. We hold in our trust important bird areas of conservation, the duty to inform the public about our interest with shared experiences in bird walks, and to give what few moments we must impact the natural world positively. Even if you find the idea of New Year’s resolutions silly, make one for the future, make one for the birds, and make one for yourself. Resolve to be a better steward of the natural world in whatever small way you can, but step up your stewardship. If you are feeding the birds with feeders, this spring plant some natural food plants. If you love enjoying nature give your time to lead a walk or program. It only takes the passing of a minute to change the course of life, and you have 1,440 every day (well minus a few for sleep) or 525,600 chances to make a difference every year.

This club has had a wonderful start of our year with wonderful speakers, field trips, Sunday walks, an updated website, and the dedication of wonderful

members. Members who I want to see more of on the field trips and Sunday walks. One of my own resolutions is to break the manacle that holds me to my computer and work and explore more nature that framed my career choice in the first place. So, I hope to see and learn from you more in the coming year.

Field Trip to Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge

Saturday, 9:00 AM, Jan. 13, 2018

By Andy Hawkins

We have chartered the Blue Goose Tram at Back Bay Saturday Jan.13th from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. During this season Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge is closed to all traffic including walking except on the beach. This is a great way to start the year off with many ducks, geese, ibis, harriers and shore birds. The trip is 8 dollars a person, but *please bring cash*. The tram is open so dress appropriately.

The tram holds 24, and at this writing, it is filled (an earlier form of this notice was distributed by email in December). If you wish to attend, contact me and check for slots that may have opened due to cancellations. HRBC members will be given preference during the first week of January. Email me at andrewcurtishawkins@gmail.com. My phone is [757-870-9641](tel:757-870-9641).

Newport News Park Winter Count

Sunday, 7:00 AM, Jan. 28, 2018

by Jane Frigo

The 2nd Annual Winter Bird Count at Newport News Park is planned for Sunday, January 28, 2018. This is the fourth Sunday in January and should not conflict with the regular Sunday walks. As was done last year, there will be five sections roughly covering the usual park walk route. At least two people are needed for each sector. The count will begin at 7:00 AM at the

Ranger Station where count sheets will be passed out. The count will end at 10:00 AM at the Discovery Center with coffee and donuts. Tally sheets will be turned in then.

Sign-up sheets will be available at the January meeting; or you can call or email Jane Frigo [757-873-0721](tel:757-873-0721), birderjane@gmail.com. The sections are:

- Section 1: Campground
- Section 2: W. of Constitution Ave. (Ranger Station Lakeside)
- Section 3: E. of Constitution Ave. (Arboretum/Discovery Center)
- Section 4: White Oak Trail (Swamp Bridge to Spawning Pond)
- Section 5: Golf Courses/Bluebird Trail



Dot Silsby stays focused despite park ranger Marc Nichol's attempt to distract her with a parlor trick.

A Christmas Dinner Thank You

By Jane Frigo



Ready to welcome us (by Dianne Snyder)

Appreciation is extended to everyone who helped make our holiday cover dish dinner on a success. We are grateful to Phyllis Roth for providing the inspiration, materials and design for the table decorations and Dianne Snyder for her help in setting the tables and managing the food. Paul Roth, Marc Nichols, Pete Peterman and Keith and Blake Frigo set up all the tables and chairs according to Charm Peterman's carefully planned floor scheme.



Charm Peterman and Walt Harris enjoy a laugh with Andy and Marilee Hawkins



Jane Frigo, Shawn Dash and Beverly Robinson before the offerings of the silent auction

Business Brief on the Silent Auction

By Charm Peterman

It's hard to avoid gushing about the results of the silent auction held at the HRBC holiday party on December 14, 2017: 51 donated items were sold, yielding a total income of \$1,123.

The auction was an initial fund-raiser request by the HRBC Board. I volunteered to chair the event, hoping to raise sufficient funds to purchase a portable sound system (like Bob Schamerhorn has) for our monthly meetings, benefiting our members and guests – especially those who are hearing-challenged - and for use at outdoor events, such as the HRBC summer picnic. The auction committee included Barb Conley, Jane Frigo, Phyllis Roth, Beverly Robinson, Ann Nicklin, and Pete Peterman.

I began by checking with local vendors for donations. Most referred me to corporate offices, which I did not pursue. Kristin Millslagle at Wild Birds Unlimited was very generous and happy to donate the feeder system. Our October and November speakers offered sizeable contributions. Fresh Market willingly donated a large food basket. Our grateful appreciation is extended to donors, members who made purchases, and the auction committee. **Thank you!**

The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill by Mark Bittner

Reviewed by Nancy Gruttman-Tyler

This is a charming book about a flock of wild parrots living in San Francisco. They were observed by the author, Mark Bittner, for several years during a time in his life when he was searching to “find himself” and settle into his life’s purpose. Like *Redtails in Love* (a book about hawks in New York City), this book gives us a close look at the nature of bird life in a densely urban setting. Bittner earns the trust of the flock and hand feeds several of them on a regular basis. The flock ranges in size from a dozen to 85. He comes to know them each individually and gives them names to match their personalities. Most of his story is about the birds and their challenges to survive on a daily and seasonal basis...while avoiding raptors and cats and overcoming diseases. Probably the biggest surprise is his depiction of the relationships between the birds in the flock. Although Bittner is concerned about criticism that he is “anthropomorphizing” the birds, he brings us closer to understanding them by describing their behavior in human terms related to emotions such as anger, fear, jealousy, and love. The companionship and rivalry within the flock is intense and sometimes difficult to witness, but Bittner’s insight into their private lives leads us to empathize with the parrots and understand their struggles. Throughout the story, Bittner deals with some personal issues that are unique to his situation and personality, but this doesn’t detract from the basic, tender story about the birds. If you have compassion for wild birds in urban environments, this book may well appeal to you.



Snow bunting from CBC 2017 (by Pete Peterman)

Birding 101: Lesson 1

Waterfowl in the New Year

By Shawn Dash

As you may be aware I am an evolutionary biologist who researches insects, particularly ants. However, my interest in nature is not so narrowly defined, and at the start of my academic career I wanted to be an ornithologist. I have maintained my broad love of nature, in particular, my affair with birds for over two decades now. Perhaps it is the excitement of still learning something every time I go into the field or talk with fellow birders. This bond continues year to year, growing in strength with the passing of each year and with each new thing I learn.

With the coming of the New Year, I feel inspired by the chance to have a defined date that will stimulate change. Each year I make a handful of resolutions, most of which include far less ice cream, more time walking in nature, or less time working, and most of which I do not keep. But, I always follow through with learning more about something in the coming year, maybe a new genus of ants, a period of history, a cuisine (hence not doing so well on weight loss), an author, etc. I want you to join me in this resolution and learn more about birding over the coming year. The HRBC will offer to its member's: workshops, time in the field, and resources to become better birders and more informed natural historians. There will be areas located on our club's webpage devoted to this program as well as special walks and field trips.

To start this year of learning I thought I would try and energize you about Waterfowl. Winter is an excellent time to not only enjoy these birds but study them. I find that winter is a really great time for learning about nature. Spending a few hours afield but with short days and cold temperatures, a retreat to the warmth of the home and to books allows for a balance of educational methods.

You need not go far afield to study our waterfowl as many species have adapted well to human-modified habitats such as Mallards and Canada Geese, but too Wood Ducks and Gadwalls can be found even on small urban lakes. Yet, there is some excitement to be had when you do travel, so spend time engaged in either method. You should take some time to spend a few hours really looking at the birds. This is not an exercise in counting or checking a list. Yes, you know it is a mallard, but do you know what it is to

BE a mallard? Better birding is gained with a better understanding; better understanding is gained with time and experience. So, experience a bird. Do not look and move on. Do not fall into the "look but do not see" type of naturalist. I ask you to really look at the bird, to consider the bird: How big is it? What is its shape? What is its behavior, its ecology (what is it feeding on, what type of habitat does it live in, who is it associated with)? While these ideas can be memorized from features in a book, the pleasure of self-discovery and gaining understanding is not only thrilling but rewarding.

If you would like to seek out waterfowl in our area, you will need (currently) some warm clothes, a good pair of binoculars and a spotting scope or a buddy with a spotting scope. While a spotting scope is not required it does make distant open water searching easier and dismisses some of the frustration of not being able to see the birds. Notice I said some frustration... far too many birds are too far to be seen well and most not in great detail, but even these dark duck-shaped blobs having learning value. For nearby areas of study, I suggest Sandy Bottom Nature Park in Hampton as an area to explore as well as Newport News Park, in Newport News. Both have varied wetlands and offer the potential for the close study of a variety of species. Other areas that are a must to visit are Fort Monroe in Hampton to search out loons, diving ducks, and the potential for some arctic visitors such as eiders as well as Pleasure House Point in Virginia Beach, which is a rather reliable place for buffleheads as well as brants. If you are game for some adventure, then a visit to the oceanfront in Virginia Beach or along the coast at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge is worth the trek. Please note that to ensure birds experience limited stress, Back Bay NWR is closed to foot traffic at this time of year, though they do hold tram tours. In fact, our club will have one this January. One other area to immerse yourself in waterfowl study is the eastern shore of Virginia in particular Chincoteague NWR where you can make your study in the warmth of your car on the auto tour and with roadside ocean access points and bays. Of course, I would be remiss if I did not mention two areas that were very influential in my development as a birder, those being Blackwater NWR (near Cambridge, Maryland) and Bombay Hook NWR (near Smyrna, Delaware). Both spots added the majority of my waterfowl to my life list and opened my eyes to the interesting and often comical feeding behaviors of

waterfowl. If you hunt for waterfowl or know hunters, this is another resource to tap into. While in the field watch the birds, take notes (a method was suggested in a previous president's perch from the fall), draw and take pictures of what you observe. Time spent in the field is never wasted and while you may not see a rarity, add any species to your life list, or stay toasty warm, you will gain knowledge and familiarity; two key aspects of growing as a birder. But with these encounters, there is often a need for context. To gain perspective on identification as well as biology and accompanying natural history that is easily had with a bit of reading. Note that being a good natural historian or better birder is understanding that learning is a marriage between books and real-life experiences, each in a dance that informs the other. I have found enormous joy in observing a behavior and later finding it given a name and explanation in some text, or perhaps more substantial is reading of a behavior or aspect of ecology and armed with this knowledge quickly recognizing it in the field.

I will suggest a few books (as there are so many it is easily overwhelming to the mind and wallet) to help in your studies and provide a brief review.

Waterfowl Identification: The LeMaster Method by Richard LeMaster. I used this small book when I was taking my wildlife management courses, and while there is a slight bias towards hunters, the information contained on its pages is immense.

Peterson Reference Guide to Seawatching: Eastern Waterbirds in Flight by K. Behrens and C. Cox. I presented a review of this book a year or so ago in the club's newsletter. A wonderful resource that is a bit much to carry in the field but in a car or nearby while scanning open waters the weight is of little concern. Full of needed ID details that focus on birding by impression and helping with understanding distant birds that lack in typical field guide details.

Why Ducks Do That, by Chuck Petrie. A very informative book written by a waterfowl biologist with the amateur in mind. A bit basic but has some wonderful details that are captivatingly presented.

Ducks, Geese, and Swans of North America: 2-vol. set by Guy Baldassarre. A hefty set of tomes that is meant for those really invested in learning

more about waterfowl. A very well-done text with original artwork as well as magnificent photographs bringing to life each species in vivid detail; with a synthesis of the expansive biology that is easy to digest and pull meaning from.

The Crossley ID Guide: Waterfowl by R. Crossley, P. Baicich, J. Barry. I just got this book for the holidays, and I am very pleased with it. I am a big fan of the Crossley ID guides and this one does not disappoint. Although I will say that the insertion of various animals into the background and for that matter some of the waterfowl do not appear as seamless as the plates in earlier guides. Much like the raptor volume, this text has built-in quizzes and chances to learn and test your identification, a feature I really enjoy. This book is well done and is not too weighty to be taken into the field. My volume came with a pocket fold-out guide, though this guide had only species names and pictures. Even though no ID details were present, it is a great quick reference for that species on the edge of your tongue. This pocket guide would be improved with just a few words on ID and page references back to the text proper. What I also enjoy in this text, is the duality of the text. Easy to use for beginners but with enough details for those who want to learn more about waterfowl ID (and honestly a lot of biology is also in this book). An informative treatment of plumage and molts as well as a feature on aging and sexing waterfowl. Another feature that should have wild appeal and marketability is the in-hand section that is useful to hunters and wildlife managers. Of course, the overall plates are wonderful showing all the needed details to make identification across seasons, sexes, and plumages. But the species accounts provide a wealth of information from a year in the life of each species, sounds, diet and feeding behavior, nesting, to details on hunting and conservation statuses. This is really a great book to start your journey to better understanding waterfowl.

I hope these hints about going forth in the field and taking time to warm yourself with a useful book, have excited you about taking on learning waterfowl a bit more attentively for the next few months. Please check out my blog and postings in January on the club's webpage to supplement this write-up regarding Waterfowl and expand this discussion focused learning about them. I would also like to ask you to submit your own photos for a special slideshow (for the website) of your waterfowl photos.

President	Shawn Dash	drshawntdash@gmail.com	(915)-471-1287
Vice President	Pete Peterman	rwpeterman@verizon.net	(757) 766-8658
Secretary	William Boeh	dolphrog1@yahoo.com	(757) 766-2144
Treasurer	John Adair	adairjj@bunt.com	(757) 224-8920
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
Board: (7/17-6/20)	Walter Harris	walterandgwenharris@cox.net	(757) 898-8649
Field Trip Coordinator	Jason Strickland	jmstrickland228@gmail.com	(757) 739-6939
Web Editor	Wendy Maxey	emaxey@verizon.net	(757) 483-3003
Web Editor	Ellis Maxey	emaxey@verizon.net	(757) 483-3003
Hospitality	Jane Frigo	birderjane@gmail.com	(757) 873-0721
Hospitality	Dianne Snyder	dianne5657@cox.net	(757) 872-6747
Newsletter Editor	Thomas Charlock	TomCharlock@gmail.com	(757) 599-3418
Publicity	Katrina Dash	kmdash4@gmail.com	(915)-471-1287
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 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.

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

