Bird Notes

Newsletter of the

Hampton Roads Bird Club (HRBC)

www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org and on Facebook

Vol. 75, No. 2 November-December 2026

Thursday, Nov. 12 Meeting
6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program
Sandy Bottom Nature Park

Bird Perception
By Bryan Barmore

Bryan Barmore has always enjoyed the outdoors, starting early camping with his family and backpacking with Boy Scouts. He became an avid photographer in high school and currently focuses on wildlife and landscape photography. He became a Virginia Master Naturalist in 2014. He focuses his volunteer work on Community Science activities, particularly around birds, butterflies, and habitat restoration. Bryan and his wife have been active birders for over 30 years. He graduated from Ohio University and the College of William and Mary with degrees in Physics. He retired from NASA Langley this year after 25 years working in air traffic management and project management.



Black-billed Cuckoo by Dianne Snyder
Newport News Park, May 15, 2026

Thursday, Dec. 10 Holiday Party
6:30 PM Appetizers
7:00 PM Dinner
Sandy Bottom Nature Park

By Jeannie Atkins
and Brenda Tanner

Our annual Holiday Potluck Dinner is just around the corner. Please put December 10 on your calendar and come celebrate with your fellow birders at Sandy Bottom Nature Park in the conference room. Appetizers will start at 6:30 PM followed by dinner at 7:00 PM. Please be thinking about what dish you would like to bring that will serve 8–10 people. Your dish can be an appetizer, side dish, main dish or dessert. A sign-up sheet will be passed around at our November 12 meeting. If you cannot attend the November meeting, please call or text Jeannie Atkins at 757-287-3985 no later than December 1 so that we can plan the menu and get an accurate count for seating. If you call or text, please mention your name, what dish you'd like to bring, the number in your party, and that you're affiliated with HRBC. Please bring spouses and significant others with you to the dinner. New this year, we will be having a Birding Donation Table headed up by Dianne Snyder and Cindy Schulz for basically any bird related things including books and birding paraphernalia. Please bring your donated items to the December event. Anyone can contribute. A Donation Jar will be available. If you're not coming to the Party, Cindy will collect items at Sunday walks and the November meeting. According to Dianne, we've already received some great things, so make sure to

bring your checkbook or cash to the December meeting. If you bring donated items to the meeting and they are not sold by the end of the evening, please remember you'll need to take them home with you. Finally, we're looking for volunteers to help with setup and cleanup. Please let us know by December 1 if you can help. We look forward to having this time together to catch up with one another and to celebrate the holidays.

HRBC Outdoors

All previously scheduled field trips are presently cancelled, but monitor email for possible rescheduling. Our excellent leader James Abbott unfortunately had to resign for medical reasons and professional demands. Please consider to volunteer as leader by contacting President Shawn Dash drshawntdash@gmail.com
cell 915-491-6227.

Audubon Christmas Bird Count
Saturday, December 19, 2026
New Co-leaders have yet to form teams.
Co-leader: Mark Sopko
mgsopko@gmail.com cell 804-815-2897
Co-leader: William Boeh
phrogdolph@gmail.com cell 757-951-7959

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, when we gather the previous Saturday. Meet at big parking lot behind Ranger Station.
Leader: Jane Frigo birderjane@gmail.com
home 757-873-0721 cell 757-776-7925

Fort Monroe Fourth Friday Bird Walks
8:00 AM on the 4th Friday ("Fort Friday") of all 12 months. Meet at parking lot next to Fort Monroe Visitor and Education Center at 30 Ingalls Road, Fort Monroe.
Leader: Mark Sopko mgsopko@gmail.com
cell 804-815-2897

The President's Perch

By Dr. Shawn T. Dash

As autumn slowly surrenders to winter, our familiar landscapes begin to change. The last stubborn sweetgum leaves cling to their branches, the morning air carries a sharper chill, and the once-vibrant chorus of birds has quieted. There is a certain stillness to the season, as though the natural world has settled in for a long winter's rest. Yet, for those of us inclined to wander through fields, forests, and marshes with binoculars in hand, we know that appearances can be deceiving. Winter is hardly a season of inactivity. Rather, it invites us to slow our pace, look a little closer, and discover what the changing season has to offer.

I have always enjoyed this transformation. With the leaves gone, familiar trails reveal movements hidden during warmer months. Kinglets flit among bare branches, White-throated Sparrows rustle through fallen leaves, and Carolina Wrens seem determined to announce their presence regardless of the temperature. Along the Chesapeake Bay, rafts of ducks gather, loons patrol the open water, and our coastal wetlands welcome an assortment of winter visitors. Even our familiar birding haunts take on a different character, reminding us that nature is never truly still.

Of course, winter birding requires a particular sort of enthusiasm. There is something amusing about otherwise sensible adults voluntarily standing in a cold December wind, debating the identity of a distant brown bird, only to discover that the object of our attention is a stubborn leaf. Yet these small adventures, and the friendships accompanying them, are part of what makes birding so rewarding.

As the year draws to a close, these observations take on additional meaning through community science. Project FeederWatch invites us to observe and count

birds visiting our yards and neighborhoods from November through April. Meanwhile, December brings one of our favorite traditions, the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, when birders venture into woods, marshes, and coastal waters to document the birds sharing our winter landscapes. Whether watching chickadees from a kitchen window or sorting through waterfowl on a blustery shoreline, each observation contributes to a larger understanding of our changing bird populations.

What I find particularly meaningful about these efforts is that nature need not be something distant from our daily lives. It exists beyond our windows, in neighborhood trees, and along the familiar trails we sometimes overlook. All that is required is a little curiosity and a willingness to pay attention.

As we approach the holidays, I thank our members for their enthusiasm, fellowship, and continued contributions to the Hampton Roads Bird Club. I encourage you to embrace the season, participate in our winter counts, and perhaps introduce someone new to the pleasures of birding.

After all, winter does not mark the end of nature's story. It simply invites us to turn the page.

Happy birding, and warm wishes for the holiday season.



From Leclerc, edited by Fiorella Congedo

Fall Photo Contest Winners

By Michael Meyer



Little Blue Heron
Gold by Pete Peterman

Pete: "… photo is a Little Blue Heron that I took at the waterfront in Oyster."



Mourning Warbler
Silver by William McKellar

William: "On the morning of July 30th, I went out to check out the various species at my grandparent's house in Canada. I heard an Alder Flycatcher, Hermit Thrush, and a Common Raven. Shortly after, I decided to go towards the raspberry thicket where I had seen a Mourning Warbler the day earlier. After some pishing the bird popped up for a moment and I was able to get this photo."



Clapper Rail
Bronze by Pete Peterman

Pete: "… taken in Chincoteague during the VSO annual trip there last month."



Yellow-crowned Night Heron
Honorable Mention by Lynn Chandler

Lynn: "This adult Yellow-crowned Night Heron came every afternoon for three months to my back yard and stood at the corner in front of the hedge and just spaced out warming himself up for the longest time. This photo was taken on Monday, July 20th at 3:30 PM. All my Yellow-crowned Night Herons are gone, and I now have four Black-crowned Night Herons so far every day roosting on Salter's Creek."

Here are the photo contest rules: A member may submit up to 2 photos each month taken in the last 60 days. 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.

A Year of Unexpected Visitors

By Shawn Dash

As we approach the final months of 2026, it is worth reflecting on what an extraordinary year it has been for birding across Virginia. From the Red-flanked Bluetail that delighted birders at Great Falls to the Common Ringed Plover along the Eastern Shore, the year has brought more than a few surprises. Perhaps none was stranger than the apparent Baillon's Crake discovered right here in Hampton, a bird whose origins and remarkable journey may forever remain something of a mystery.

These unusual visitors have undoubtedly encouraged a fair amount of what our British friends call *twitching*—the sometimes obsessive pursuit of rare birds. There is something wonderfully absurd about otherwise rational individuals driving several hours, enduring questionable weather, and staring into dense shrubbery for a fleeting glimpse of a bird that, under ordinary circumstances, ought to be on another continent. Yet such pursuits remind us of the extraordinary movements of birds and the unpredictability of the natural world.

Beyond these rarities, winter bird counts have offered their own discoveries, from unexpected western visitors and unusual wintering hummingbirds to remarkable concentrations of cormorants, ibises, and shorebirds. These observations remind us that the story of our birds is not told by rarities alone, but also through the changing abundance and distribution of familiar species.

And while we may be tempted to begin writing the final chapter of 2026, there are

still two months remaining. What other wanderers might arrive along our shores, appear at a backyard feeder, or surprise an unsuspecting birder on a morning walk? Perhaps the next extraordinary discovery awaits just around the corner.

That, I believe, is part of the enduring pleasure of birding. No matter how familiar the landscape or how many years we have wandered through it, nature retains an astonishing capacity to surprise us. And who knows what 2027 may bring?

Women Alarm Birds More Than Do Men

A study in *People and Nature*, a British ecology journal, reports that urban birds react differently to men and women. The scientists don't know why and suggest more research. Flight Initiation Distance (FID) is how close a human observer can approach a bird before it takes off. FID is 1 m larger for women (8.5 m) than for men (7.5 m) from the country average of 2581 observations made in 3 small French cities and 1 city each in the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, and Spain.

In each city a pair of ornithologists, both wearing the same shade of clothing (white, gray, or black), individually walked straight toward a preening or feeding avian. If one of the pair had longer hair, it was covered. The average man was taller and heavier; the paper cited other studies indicating that observer height does not influence FID, but avian height does appear to shorten FID (it's harder for taller birds to takeoff quickly). The smaller FID for men was found across the species.

A word search of the paper's PDF for "makeup" and "cosmetic" was null. The authors referenced other work indicating that primates are generally more friendly to human females than to males, and that some pet dogs are more responsive to men's voices. This study included 37 species.

A web search for "ScienceDaily" followed by entering "birds" in search box on the upper right leads to the Morelli et al., paper below, which ScienceDaily referenced with the words "Birds are more afraid of women…" Click on those words and scroll all the way down to 10.1002/pan3.70226 for the PDF. You can also try https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.70226

Federico Morelli, Yanina Benedetti, Peter Mikula, Daniel T. Blumstein, Mario Díaz, Alicia Page, Piotr Tryjanowski, Marta K. Nowak, Eva Vincze, Gábor L. Lövei, 2025, "Sex matters: European urban birds flee approaching women sooner than approaching men", *People and Nature*, Vol. 8, Issue 2.



Record of HRBC Bird Walks in Newport News Park

By Jane Frigo and Cindy Schulz

This has links to eBird reports for 2026.

Date	eBird report link for NN Park
Sep 6	https://ebird.org/tripreport/572054
Sep 20	https://ebird.org/tripreport/574304
Oct 4	https://ebird.org/tripreport/579680
Oct 18	https://ebird.org/tripreport/586418
Nov 1	https://ebird.org/tripreport/590615

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Board (7/23-6/29)	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, 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;
HRBC is trying to save trees and reduce club expenses by using email.

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