



Bird Notes

Newsletter of the

Hampton Roads Bird Club (HRBC)

www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org and on Facebook

Vol. 74, No. 4

March-April 2026

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

"Results from HRBC Bird Counts"
Bill Boeh

Thursday, April 9 Zoom Meeting
7:00 PM Program
Not at Sandy Bottom!

"Fort Monroe and Nature"
Speaker TBD

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, 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

Pelagic Trip from Rudee Inlet or Hatteras
March 2026?

Club will decide on location; cost ~ \$220
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)



Eastern Meadowlark by Dianne Snyder

Field Trip to Back Bay NWR

Saturday, April 25, 2026

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

Spring Bird Count (see page 8)

Saturday, May 2, 2026

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

Field Trip to western Virginia mountains

Late May 2026

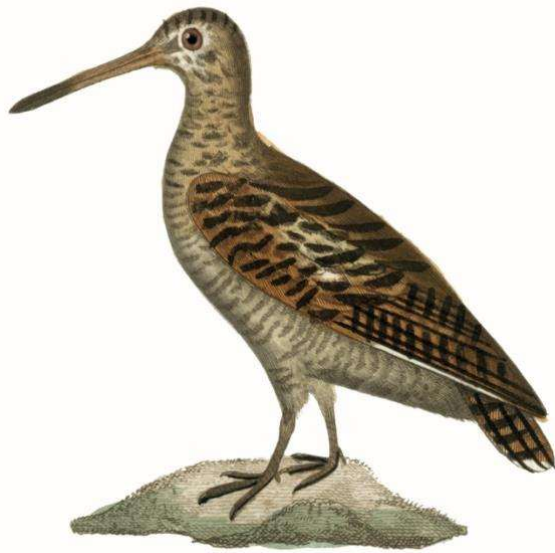
Leader: James Abbott jaa3469@gmail.com
757-320-9191 (text or phone)

**President's Perch:
Timberdoodles, Tabletop Birds,
and the Gentle Art of Making
More Birders**

By Shawn Dash

There are two kinds of people in the world: those who hear a strange nasal "peent" at dusk and think, *Huh, what on earth is that?* ...and those who hear it and immediately begin rearranging their entire

evening schedule around the possibility of an American Woodcock. I've been living in the second category lately. This time of year, when winter is still hanging around like an uninvited guest who keeps saying they're "about to head out," the birding is still solid. I'll be finishing up work in the evening and, right on cue, the yard offers up that sound. The woodcock doesn't sing so much as announce itself, as if it has stepped onto a tiny stage in a field and is now conducting a very serious business meeting with the sky: *peent... peent... peent...*



Woodcock *Perdis rustica*

Compte de Buffon

And if you've never seen what comes next, let me assure you: the American Woodcock is proof that nature has a sense of humor and is not afraid to use it. Because after the "peenting" comes the performance. The timberdoodle, round-bodied, long-billed, built like a walking feathered pear launches upward into the twilight and transforms into something almost impossible to describe without sounding like you're making it up. It climbs, wings whistling, then spirals and tumbles back down in a dramatic aerial display that feels half romantic gesture and half physics experiment. It is equal parts

ridiculous and magnificent. It looks like a bird trying to draw a cursive signature across the night.

Oddly enough, this backyard timberdoodle obsession has been tangled up with something else I've been thinking about: *how we make more birders*. Not by recruiting. Not by lecturing. By sparking.

Birders love the phrase "spark bird," and for good reason. Most of us can remember the moment we crossed the invisible line from "birds are nice" to "I require binoculars and will now have strong opinions about gulls." That spark might have been a brilliant warbler, a backyard hawk, an owl heard at the perfect moment, or the first time someone handed you a field guide and said, "Here, this is the one you just saw."

What I've realized recently is that spark birds don't always arrive in the field. Sometimes they show up in unexpected places, like a classroom. This semester, I've been using the board game *Wingspan* with students, which may sound like a whimsical digression from serious science until you sit down and realize the game is a platform to engage in ecology, wrapped in art so beautiful you cannot help but start to like birds. It's not "a bird game" so much as a sneaky, charming system that smuggles big ideas into the brain while everyone thinks they're just trying to build a good engine. Students start by choosing birds because they're pretty or because they recognize a name, and then—almost without warning—they're asking real ecological questions. Why do some species thrive in one habitat but not another? What does it mean to invest in reproduction versus survival? What does a healthy ecosystem *require*? Even better, they start looking at birds differently. Not like decorations in a landscape, but like living solutions to environmental problems. Like moving pieces in a dynamic system. Like characters with strategies and constraints and stories. You can practically watch the shift happen: curiosity becomes attention, and attention becomes a desire to

see the real thing. The only issue is that I don't have enough copies of the game.

Still, the experience has been worth it, because it's made me reflect on what our bird club does at its best. We don't just identify birds; we build birders. We keep the door open. We make the hobby welcoming enough that someone can show up knowing nothing and leave feeling like they belong. We help people grow from "I saw a little brown bird" to "I saw a little brown bird, and I have two possibilities...where is Jane." That growth is not automatic. It takes community. It takes patience. It takes birders who remember what it felt like to be new, to be overwhelmed by calls, intimidated by jargon, and mildly convinced that everyone else can identify sparrows by telepathy.

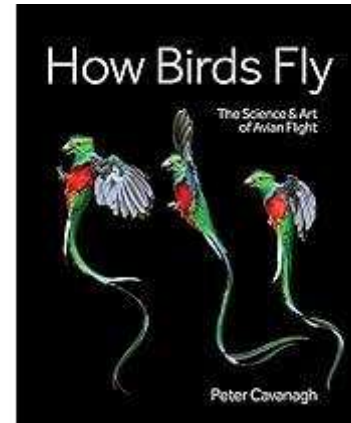
Late winter into early spring in coastal Virginia is full of these moments if you let it be. The year is turning. The landscape is shifting. Waterfowl still linger, but the first hints of movement are building, and the air itself starts to feel like it's preparing for a change in tempo. You can sense the season stacking up its instruments: early song in the edges, restless flocks, the subtle return of activity to places that felt quiet in January.

That's why this time of year makes me think about "new beginnings," not as a slogan but as a real, practical invitation. It's a great time to plan adventures small ones, close ones, even backyard ones. Not every birding story has to be a rare chase or a dramatic trip. Sometimes it's simply noticing what is already happening right outside the door, and letting yourself be delighted by it.

So if you find yourself out one evening soon, wrapping up the day, feeling winter's last drag on your patience, listen for that sound. The timberdoodle is calling. Spring is practicing its entrance. And somewhere in that small, ridiculous, glorious performance is a reminder of why we do this in the first place: because wonder is real, and it's contagious, and it grows best when shared.

Review of Peter Cavanagh's "How Birds Fly: The Science and Art of Avian Flight"

By Pete Peterman



This book is visually stunning in its explanation of the physics, evolution, and mechanics of bird flight through impressive photography and easily understood text. Peter Cavanagh is the perfect author for this task having a doctorate in anatomy and biomechanics from the Royal Free Medical School of the University of London and is an award-winning photographer, specializing in birds, and is also an instrument-rated private pilot. Once he answers why birds fly, which is logically understood to be the compelling need to escape from predators, improve hunting performance, extend foraging range, find a mate, defend territory, and enable migration, he explores the evolution, anatomy (bones, muscles, feathers), aerodynamics, and maneuvers of bird flight, covering takeoff, landing, soaring, and hovering.

Cavanagh uses hundreds of high-speed photographs and illustrations to explain the science. He has taken more than 800,000 images of birds across the world and came to realize that thru these images and the research of others, the secrets of bird flight could be revealed. He covers the energy-saving movements of many of our small birds who use "flap-bounding," tucking the

wings close to the body after flapping, before again flapping, and “flap-gliding,” where the wings remain extended after flapping, as well as “powered-gliding,” where alternating descents and climbs, taking advantage of orthographic lifting, has helped species such as the Bar-headed Geese in their annual migration. He also covers flight specialists such as the hummingbird and the silent movement of owls due to their specialized feathers. He also includes “From the Lab” sections that delve into published research and covers stories of flight pioneers, such as Da Vinci and the Wright Brothers, and their connections to aircraft design.

I highly recommend this book. The photography is truly impressive, and he covers subjects in such a way that he makes complex concepts understandable for both bird lovers and scientists.

Perch and Learn: Bird Science

By Shawn Dash

Over nearly three decades, a repeat survey of tidal salt marshes in Virginia’s lower Chesapeake Bay delivers a clear and sobering message for birders: breeding marsh birds are far less abundant today than they were in the early 1990s. Using the same network of fixed survey points first established in 1992 and resampled in 2021, a study by Watts (2025) found an overall decline of roughly two-thirds in marsh-nesting bird detections. That number is alarming on its own, but the deeper story is how the marsh bird community has “simplified” over time—fewer species, fewer occupied sites, and more of the remaining birds concentrated into smaller pockets of suitable habitat.

A major strength of this work is that it is a true before-and-after comparison. Watts revisited the same set of marsh points across the same region, with repeated visits during the breeding season and methods designed

to detect secretive marsh birds (including call-playback). This design helps separate long-term change from the normal ups and downs that can make marsh birding feel unpredictable year to year.

One of the most striking patterns is a shift in who is left. By 2021, the community was dominated even more strongly by the birds most tightly tied to salt marsh habitat. In other words, true salt-marsh specialists now make up a larger proportion of detections than they did in 1992. This does *not* necessarily mean those specialists are flourishing; instead, it often reflects that many marsh-edge and “generalist” wetland birds have declined even more steeply, dropping out of places where they were once regular breeders.

There are a few relative success stories—or at least species that appear more resilient. The clearest example is the Clapper Rail, which showed little to no decline in this comparison. The Seaside Sparrow remains the single most frequently detected breeding songbird in these marshes and, together with Clapper Rail, accounts for a very large share of modern detections. Some marsh-associated birds such as Red-winged Blackbird also persist, although the study suggests their nesting habitat use may be shifting (including greater association with dense Phragmites stands in recent surveys).



Red-winged Blackbird by Dianne Snyder

The bad news, however, is substantial and widespread. Several birds that many coastal Virginia birders think of as part of the “marsh soundscape” have dropped dramatically. Willet showed a major decline. Seaside Sparrow also declined significantly, and its distribution appears more “clumped”—found at fewer points overall, but sometimes in higher density where it still holds on. Even more severe are the collapses among other marsh-dependent or marsh-edge breeders. Virginia Rail declined to near-absence in the resurvey. Sedge Wren, present in the earlier surveys, was not detected in 2021. The study also reports sharp losses for Song Sparrow in these marsh landscapes, along with steep declines for Eastern Meadowlark and Boat-tailed Grackle.

Watts, B. D. (2025). Decline of salt marsh-nesting birds within the lower Chesapeake Bay (1992–2021). *Plos one*, 20(6), e0323254.

A Setback for Birders from the State Legislature on the Menhaden/Osprey Issue

There is a controversy over the reduction fishing of Menhaden, a bait fish, by Omega Protein in Reedville, Virginia. Osprey feed the species to their chicks, and so many are removed out by Omega Protein as to cause reports of serious failure of Osprey reproduction in our area. Research is needed to resolve the issue.

At a statewide Sierra Club Zoom meeting on February 18, word was passed that the bill to promote appropriate research failed to make the critical "crossover", the exchange between the Senate and the House of Delegates in the Virginia legislature. York River Sierra Club president Tyla Matterson said that lobbyists for the union representing Omega Protein fishermen nixed the study. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation has background information at <http://savemenhaden.org>.

Photo Contest Winners January-February

By Michael Meyer

January



Short-eared Owl
Gold by William McKellar

William: “On the last day of 2025, I went looking for Snowy Owls in the fields of Prescott and Russell, Ontario. Unfortunately, I did not find any Snowy Owls that day, but as the light faded, I spotted something in the corner of my eye: a Short-eared Owl was flying over the frozen landscape and eventually landed on a utility pole!”



Senegalese fishing falcon
Compte de Buffon



Snow Bunting
Silver by Pete Peterman

Pete: "... the Snow Bunting was during the Christmas Bird Count at Grandview Island on Dec 20."



Northern Mockingbird
Honorable Mention by Lynn Chandler

Lynn: "Taken Saturday, January 24, 2026, at 10:25am. He is drinking out of my heated birdbath and sharing it with a House Sparrow in the background. I have had this heated birdbath for years and it brings so many more birds to my deck and feeders as well being very important for their winter survival."

February



Carolina Wren
Bronze by Rand Milam

Rand: "Nature's Beauty".



Harlequin Duck
Gold by Pete Peterman

Pete: "The photos were taken at Barnegat Light State Park in NJ on Dec 24, 2025. You have to climb on the rocks that form a barrier to the swift moving water, but it is along this shore that you get to see the Harlequin Ducks and Long-tailed Ducks [see Pete's Bronze win on page 7] in the winter. There were also many Purple Sandpipers which I also photographed."



LeConte's Sparrow
Silver by William McKellar

William: "Shortly after I heard about this rare LeConte's Sparrow seen at Machicomoco State Park, I went to look for it, but it proved to be a challenging bird to locate. It didn't make a sound and was very well hidden in the deep vegetation. Despite this, on my 3rd attempt, I managed to locate the secretive sparrow feeding on some seeds slightly off the ground."



Black-crowned Night-Heron
Honorable Mention by Lynn Chandler

Lynn: "Taken Wednesday, December 10, 2025 at 8:05am. He was sitting across Salter's Creek in the large old white pine tree sunning himself trying to keep warm. After 28 years of watching them each season I never get tired of looking at them."

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.



Long-tailed Duck
Bronze by Pete Peterman

Pete: "...taken at Barnegat Light State Park in NJ on Dec 24, 2025."

HRBC 2026 Spring Bird Count Saturday, May 2, 2026

By Bill Boeh

The HRBC has been conducting the Spring Bird Count (SBC) since 1995. Please join us in being part of this citizen science effort to support bird conservation. It's great fun and a great way to help conserve the birds--and for new members, a great way to be introduced to some of the best birding sites in our region.

The count will be conducted in the same manner as the Christmas Bird Count, within the Newport News circle (see map at tinyurl.com/zhamzse4). The circle is divided into 13 sectors on the lower Peninsula; each sector will have its own team of observers. The typical count spans most of the day, but some counts only go for a few hours. Don't hesitate to participate because you don't feel you're proficient enough at identifying birds--sector counts are led by our more experienced birders. You can contribute by adding more eyes and ears to help detect the birds for identification (and counting). You'll be building your identification skills as well. If you can't participate in a field count, feeder-watching is another way you can support this effort.

Please note a special appreciation for past count leaders Meredith and Lee Bell. Meredith and Lee have moved out of the area and will no longer be participating in local counts. They will be sorely missed! The Bells have participated in the Christmas Bird Count in the Newport News sector since 2001. Meredith has served as the sector leader for the Harwood's Mill sector for both the Christmas and spring bird counts since at least 2017 (I don't have records of who sector leaders were prior to that).

And a new HRBC Christmas and spring count compiler is coming. It has been my

privilege to be the HRBC Christmas and spring count compiler since 2017. But as most of you know, Anne and I will be moving out of the local area this spring. Fortunately, James Abbott has graciously volunteered to serve as the new count compiler. Consider this as an upgrade! James' birding knowledge and skills far outshine mine; his science education background renders him an ideal fit for this role. Please let James know if you are interested in participating by email at jaa3469@gmail.com.

2025 Christmas Bird Count Results

By Bill Boeh

This is a capsule summary of the club's participation in the Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC), conducted December 20, 2025. The count was a source of bird abundance and diversity data for scientific investigations - and a lot of fun! 116 total species and 16,750 individual birds were observed. In addition to reporting the data to Audubon, all observations were submitted to eBird (including 97 separate checklists). Display of count data is facilitated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird application feature called "Trip Reports" which collates the data from all checklists submitted over a specified period. The Trip Report for the 2025 Newport News Circle CBC is at ebird.org/tripreport/451987. You don't need to have an eBird account to view the report - just click on the link! There you'll find the list of species and number of individuals seen by species; and many more details about the count such as rare and uncommon birds; notably high and low species counts, and other observations. You can also "drill down" to see the specific checklists on which each bird was reported, which can include a map of the observer's route, the observer's comments, and any photos posted.

Let me express my gratitude to all who participated in CBC events. Without them, there is no count! Below is the list of the 2025 participants. The 13 sectors are marked in bold font. The first name after each sector lists its respective leader. First time participants have an asterisk.

Sectors, Leaders and Participants

Airport

Walt Harris
Gwen Harris
Mary Lynch

Chesapeake Bay

Ellis Maxey
Wendy Maxey
Donna McAdams

Ft. Monroe

Bryan Barmore
Sharon Burton

Grandview

Nick Flanders
Pete Peterman

Hampton

Dave Brown
Sara Saville
Heidi Young

Harpersville

Jane Frigo
Marc Nichols
Mickey Simonds*
Jacques van Montfrans
Elizabeth Wilkins

Harwoods Mill

Beth Alberth
John Adair
Jean Cowan
Jennifer Maurer

Langley

William Boeh
Mark Sopko
Tom Crockett
Christy Gardner
Courtney Sian
Matt Wendell*

Mariner's Museum

Elisa Flanders
Ken Aydlott
Charlotte Boudreau
Peggy Rommen
Tina White

Mercury North

Dave Youker
Tracy Tate

Newport News

Michael Meyer
Cindy Schulz

Poquoson

Holly Horton
Susan Crockett
Betsy Garrett

Tabb

Stuart Sweetman
Robert Gomez*
Margaret Gomez*

Feeder Watchers

Barb Abraham
Marilyn Adair
Ken Aydlott
Tom Charlock
Ryan Walsh*
Tina White

Owler: Dave Youker

Appreciation for long-serving count participants: As I end my term as count compiler, I'd like to give special appreciation to the most frequent and longest serving participants of my tenure. Below are those who have participated in 12 or more Christmas and/or spring counts since 2017. The first digit after each name stands for the number of counts by the participant. Names and digits in bold here mark a history of leadership.

Long-term Participants

Jane Frigo 17

Sharon Burton 14

Betsy Garrett 17

Ellis Maxey 14

Meredith Bell 16

Marc Nichols 14

John Adair 16

Dave Youker 14

Nick Flanders 16

Elisa Flanders 13

Pete Peterman 16

Walt Harris 13

Stuart Sweetman 16

Wendy Maxey 13

Marilyn Adair 15

Peggy Rommen 13

Dave Brown 15

Barb Abraham 12

Mark Sopko 15

Tom Charlock 12

Tracy Tate 15

Bryan Barmore 14

Record of HRBC Bird Walks in Newport News Park

By Jane Frigo and Bill Boeh

This has links to eBird reports for 2026 events.

Date	Location	eBird Report Link
Jan 4	NN Park	https://ebird.org/tripreport/460618
Jan 18	NN Park	https://ebird.org/tripreport/466551
Feb 1	No Show	https://ebird.org/tripreport/473157
Feb 15	NN Park	https://ebird.org/tripreport/479710

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Treasurer	John Adair	adairji@gmail.com	757-224-8920
Board (7/22-6/28)	Michael Meyer	michael.meyer@cnu.edu	757-303-4790
Board (7/23-6/26)	Pete Peterman.	wpeterman@verizon.net	757-766-8658
Board (7/24-6/27)	Dianne Snyder.	dianne5657@cox.net	757-872-6747
Board (former Pres.)	Dave Youker	youkerd@aol.com	757-344-9385
Field Trip Coordinator	James Abbott	jaa3469@gmail.com	757-320-9191
Sunday Walk Leader	Jane Frigo	birderjane@gmail.com	757-776-7925
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Membership	Gwen Harris	gwenkharris65@gmail.com	757-898-8649

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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