



# Bird Notes

Newsletter of the

**Hampton Roads Bird Club**

[www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org](http://www.hamptonroadsbirdclub.org)

Vol. 62, No. 4

March/April 2014

**March 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting**  
**6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program**  
at Sandy Bottom Nature Park–

**Randy Thrasher**

## **"Birding the Southwest U.S."**

Randy has spoken to our club a number of times so we will be enjoying the company of an old friend. Randy and his wife Sue have had many opportunities to go to far-away places to bird and he enjoys giving programs on both in and out of the U.S. Smaller birds are not often seen on nature television because of the difficulties with taping them; this is Randy's greatest interest. This month's "Birding the Southwest United States"(Grand Canyon, Las Vegas, and San Diego) will provide great looks at 50 western birds including the California condor. Come, relax and enjoy!

Notice by Phyllis Roth

Hosted by Lynn Chandler, Bill Ferris, Bill Boeh

## **Bird Watching Excursions**

### **Regular Bird Walks in Newport News Park**

The first and third Sunday of each month 7:00 AM  
Meet in large parking lot behind Ranger Station  
Trip Leader: Jane Frigo (757-873-0721)

### **Monthly Field Trips** (September through May)

Contact [TomCharlock@gmail.com](mailto:TomCharlock@gmail.com) (757-599-3418)

March 15 (Saturday) 7:00 AM – 3:00PM  
Dutch Gap and Malvern Hill (See page 2)

April 12 (Saturday) 8:00 AM – 3:00PM  
Great Dismal Swamp (See page 2)

**April 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting–**  
**6:30 PM Social 7:00 PM Program**  
at Sandy Bottom Nature Park

**Marilyn Adair**

## **"Skills for Spotting Warblers"**

Club Board Member Marilyn Adair will take us through a DVD-assisted teach-in and beef up our abilities to identify warblers. She will concentrate on the songs and field marks of 39 species of wood warblers.

Hosted by Pete Peterman, Dot Silsby, and Rochelle Colestock

## **The President's Perch**

By Dave Youker

The joy of birding comes with the uniqueness of each passing season. This winter we have enjoyed special sightings such as Snowy Owls, King Eiders, Black-headed Gulls, and larger than normal numbers of Red-necked Grebes and White-winged Scoters. These unusual appearances often can be attributed to variations of food supplies or changes in habitat. It's these changes that keep us looking forward to the next season. If there weren't any variation in bird movements, our birding experiences wouldn't be as exciting. What will this spring migration bring to our area? I'm looking forward to seeing what turns up during our walks, field trips, and at my own backyard feeders.

### ***And recall that your club needs you:***

This spring several positions within the club will need to be filled. Virtually every position from Vice President to Field Trips to Publicity is available to interested club members. These positions don't require significant amounts of work, but they do

need to be performed for our club to continue functioning. The nominating Committee will soon be putting together the slate of candidates for the upcoming year. Contact Dave Youker (344-9385), if you're interested in helping with any position within the club.

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### **Field Trip to Dutch Gap Conservation Area and Malvern Hill Battlefield Saturday, 7:00 AM, Mar. 15, 2014**

The car pools for our Saturday, March 15 field trip to Dutch Gap Conservation Area in Chester, Virginia will form at 7:00 AM in the parking lot behind the Ranger Station in Newport News Park. The drive to Dutch Gap takes about 75 minutes and includes rural VA-106 S. Dutch Gap Conservation Area is an odd artifact of humanity: The Yankees dug the Gap during the Civil War to divert the James River, intending to bypass Rebel batteries and threaten nearby Richmond; the diversion was later extended; century-old quarrying and Dominion Virginia Power (still very much active) have also made conspicuous footprints. But extensive efforts at environmental mitigation have panned out and left us with a 4.5 mile trail, a tidal lagoon, wooded islands, and viewpoints along the (original) James with good birding. We'll park at the Visitors Center for Henricus Historical Park, which as has restrooms. After Dutch Gap, we'll work our way homeward and stop at Malvern Hill, the best preserved of the Civil War battlefields in the Richmond area. Malvern Hill has huge fields, scrub, and woods; it does not have restrooms. The approach to Malvern Hill and return to the Peninsula uses pleasant VA-5 E. This trip will run until midafternoon, so bring your lunch.

Directions to Dutch Gap Conservation Area:  
(google for "Henricus Historical Park")

Take I-64 W and scoot at Exit 211  
Left (after Exit 211) to VA-106 S/VA-609  
S/Emmaus Church Rd  
(19.5 miles, rural, bridge over James R, road ends at  
T intersection)  
Right onto VA-10 W/VA-106 S/VA-156 S/James  
River Dr  
Hack odometer and track mileage for next steps.  
(11.2 miles, rural/industrial/town, crosses  
Appomattox River )

Right at Old Stage Road, which has major traffic  
light  
(2.0 miles, pass power tower, don't cross RR tracks)  
Right at Coxendale Road  
(0.7 miles, views of belching power station)  
Right at 251 Henricus Park Road, blue sign for  
"Henricus Historical Park"  
(1.3 miles, some with wetlands/old river channel)  
Meet by Visitors Center looking like Jamestown

Directions for side trip to Malvern Hill Battlefield:

Return to Old Stage Road  
Left to VA-10 E/W Hundred Rd (2.2 miles)  
Left to State Rte 618/Rivers Bend Blvd (1.5 miles)  
Left to I-295 N (5.2 miles)  
Exit 22A to VA-5 E/New Market Rd (4.7 miles)  
Left fork from VA-5 E onto Willis Church Rd/Route  
156 (1.4 miles)  
Left onto Carters Mill Rd (0.1 mile)  
Malvern Hill Battlefield Trail on left

If you wish to attend this event, contact Tom  
Charlock by email (TomCharlock@gmail.com),  
phone (757-599-3418), or sign up at the Club  
meeting.

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### **Field Trip to Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Saturday, 8:00 AM, Apr. 12, 2014.**

We'll meet on Jericho Lane to bird the northwest  
portion of the Swamp along Jericho Ditch; just keep  
driving on the dirt road until you reach the parking  
lot with "vault" restrooms (no flushable toilets in the  
Swamp) and picnic tables. Later we'll shift about 5  
miles south and check out the Dismal Town  
Boardwalk Trail and Washington Ditch. Bring good-  
sized lunches, as this trip will easily last until mid-  
afternoon. Visitors to the Swamp are expected to  
remain on trails. The National Wildlife Refuge states  
"Animal playback and other recording devices are  
not allowed as they interfere with the normal  
behavior of birds." Use of your own vocal chords,  
however, for the imitation of birds is not a violation  
of the rules (if we are lucky, someone with Bob  
Ake's skill will be along to call in a half dozen  
Barred Owls - this has happened). Please encourage  
your fellow birders to use caution while stopping to  
park (i.e., "Brake, I just saw an Ivory-billed...")

along White Marsh Road from Jericho Ditch to Washington Ditch. White Marsh Road is a narrow rural speedway, and parking along it should be done only with great care.

**Car pools will form at 7:00 AM** in the Huntington Beach parking lot (the last turn to the right from Mercury Blvd, just before the James River Bridge). If you have not driven into the Great Dismal Swamp previously, you should accompany the car pool.

Directions to the 8:00 AM meeting on Jericho Lane, Great Dismal Swamp:

Take US 17 South (Mercury Blvd) to James River Bridge (then go 13 miles).  
Turn right onto Bennetts Pasture Road (State Route 627) and go 4.8 miles.  
Turn right onto Nansemond Parkway (route 337) and go another 4.8 miles.  
Continue onto East Washington Street and go 2.4 miles.  
Very sharp left onto White Marsh Road (route 642) and go 0.8 miles.  
Turn left (power lines overhead) onto Jericho Lane and drive into Swamp on dirt road.

If you wish to attend this event, contact Tom Charlock by email (TomCharlock@gmail.com), phone (757-599-3418), or sign up at the Club meeting.

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## Results of 2013 Christmas Bird Count

Nancy Gruttman-Tyler organized our 13-team contribution to the 114<sup>th</sup> Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count on December 14, 2013. While Nancy referred to that day's weather as "icky", she reports a total of 19265 birds and 134 species. The Chesapeake sector had the most slender count (32 species and 505 total birds), and Tab had the greatest (76 species and 2481 total). 23 Bald Eagles were sited. The Double-crested Cormorant, seen in 12 of the 13 sectors, had the highest total (2321). Counts also exceeded 1000 for Canada Goose, European Starling and Ring-billed Gull, all of which were observed in every sector.

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Photo by George Boyles

You're right, a Great Black-backed Gull. Another avian wants a snack, too. But don't forget birders and their appetites, especially during meetings of the Hampton Roads Bird Club. Please contact Hospitality Coordinator Virginia Boyles (757-867-8857 or email [v.w.boyles@verizon.net](mailto:v.w.boyles@verizon.net)) to volunteer and provide your favorite refreshment for a monthly Club meeting. That poor fish? He or she is now ashes and dust, right down V. Putin's %^=#\* throat in the Black Sea. But if you sign up with Virginia to provide a snack, you will be properly immortalized in Bird Notes, as can be seen with a careful read of page 1.

## Club Picnic on June 14

Appetites, again. Virginia also asks members to "reserve the day", Saturday June 14, for the club picnic in Newport News Park at shelter #3. A bird walk starts at 8:00 AM. We'll deal with less serious matters (hamburgers, hotdogs, etc.) at about 12:30 PM.



## March 2014 Rusty Blackbird Blitz Observers Wanted

If you are an “e-birder” and would like to participate in a large scientific survey which targets a species (*Euphagus carolinus*) experiencing both chronic long-term and acute short-term population declines, consider the March Rusty Blackbird Blitz. Rusties, which winter in our area and typically head north during late March or early April, are reduced by 85-95% from the mid-1900s. The reduction may be due to the loss of wooded wetlands in the southeast; there are several other hypotheses. Contact HRBC President Dave Youker ([Youkerd@aol.com](mailto:Youkerd@aol.com)) or Virginia coordinator Bob Ake ([rake@cox.net](mailto:rake@cox.net)) if you’d like to join the local search. The International Rusty Blackbird Working Group conducts this in partnership with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies. Our area will have follow-up campaigns in March of 2015 and 2016.

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### Report of Field Trip to CBBT Islands and Cape Charles (1/11/14)

Our party of 15 drove northward along the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT) with the required paid police escort shortly after 8 AM on Saturday, January 11, 2014. It was solidly cloudy, but the temperature was in the 50s, and quite an improvement from last year’s frigid expedition to the same non-public CBBT islands. On this our most recent visit, Norfolk set a record of 1.27 inches for rainfall as a cold front approached; southwesterly winds peaked at 47 mph by the airport; mini-fronts of fog swept over the Bay waters, alternately obscuring and then opening our visibility. But we still netted 61 species for the day. Alternating sessions of observing on the CBBT islands with sheltering from wind and spray by the walls of tunnel blockhouses, we saw “all three” Scoters, both Greater and Lesser Scaup, Long-tailed duck, and Black-capped Petrel. At one point, a subset of no more than 4 birders could be coaxed out to pose for a photo. While formations of Northern Gannet did not mind the weather, several of us reported that all of the action appeared to reduce the physical size of these large birds; quite an illusion. Harbor seals on the rocks easily masqueraded as the same. One large seal repeatedly surfaced and stared at Geoff Giles, perhaps in sympathy for the responsibilities he will face while leading the Williamsburg Club this year.



Island birding in wind and mist: Geoff Giles, Gwen Harris, Jane Frigo, and Walt Harris

After 3 hours in island world, we took a breather by the visitor's center at the tip of the DelMaVa peninsula. Some of us sissies headed straight to Sting Ray's Restaurant; the brave continued at Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge and were rewarded with the sound of a Clapper Rail. Most reconvened at the Cape Charles beach to enjoy Bufflehead and Red-breasted Merganser. There the long pier also provided a fine mammalian, rather than avian, sight: a school of dolphins at close range herding fish towards the inner harbor. Washington Avenue was a worthwhile stop. Mike Lowry's car reported Ring-necked Ducks and Redheads at Lack Foster by Fig Street on the way to King's Creek Marina, where a Northern Mockingbird put on an especially good act. The Marina has a long dock which is open to the public, and the swampy grounds behind its restaurant provided some boot wearing members a chance for more birding. As it warmed to the low 70s with ominous clouds in view to the southwest, Adam Bollinger advised us of an official Tornado Watch, and the remaining group headed towards home.

People list: Mike Lowry, Nancy Gruttman-Tyler, Jane Frigo, Rosemarie Harris, George Harris, Geoff Giles, Adam Bollinger, Gwen Harris, Walt Harris, Stuart Sweetman, Hayes Williams, Joyce Williams, Dot Silsby, Jason Strickland, and Tom Charlock.

Species list for field trip to CBBT Islands and Cape Charles (1/11/14)

Canada Goose	Double-crested Cormorant	Herring Gull
Gadwall	Great Cormorant	Lesser Black-backed Gull
American Black Duck	Brown Pelican	Great Black-backed Gull
Mallard	Great Blue Heron	Rock Pigeon
Green-winged Teal	Great Egret	Mourning Dove
Redhead	Black Vulture	Belted Kingfisher
Ring-necked Duck	Turkey Vulture	Eastern Kingbird
Greater Scaup	Bald Eagle	Blue Jay
Lesser Scaup	Northern Harrier	Carolina Chickadee
Surf Scoter	Cooper's Hawk	Carolina Wren
White-winged Scoter	Red-tailed Hawk	Gray Catbird
Black Scoter	American Kestrel	Northern Mockingbird
Long-tailed Duck	Clapper Rail	Cedar Waxwing
Bufflehead	American Coot	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Red-breasted Merganser	Semipalmated Plover	Song Sparrow
Ruddy Duck	Greater Yellowlegs	Swamp Sparrow
Red-throated Loon	Ruddy Turnstone	White-throated Sparrow
Common Loon	Sanderling	Dark-eyed Junco
Pied-billed Grebe	Purple Sandpiper	Northern Cardinal
Black-capped Petrel	Bonaparte's Gull	
Northern Gannet	Ring-billed Gull	

## Report of Field Trip to Fisherman's Island and Kiptopeke State Park (2/15/14)

A skeleton crew of 3 HRBC members (Gwen and Walt Harris, Tom Charlock) and 2 guests (Tracy Tate and Rexanne Bruno) drove northwards on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT) for an 8:30 AM meeting at the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge (ESNWR) with Ranger Jennie Lewis and volunteer naturalist guides Jack and Judy Humphreys. We had arranged for special access to Fisherman's Island at the northern terminus of CBBT; and the official National Weather Service (NWS) forecast called for a special greeting of steady precipitation that morning. At the bridge to Fisherman's Island a different greeting appeared: A stout Peregrine Falcon on the railing, feathers puffed out to deal with the stiff breeze of a cloudy day in the 30s. And there was no rain at first. Few birds could be seen in the large swamp on the northwest portion of the Island; the same for shore birds on the southern beach (it was near high tide). But Fisherman's Island presented us with the morning of the Bald Eagle, both mature and immature; it was they who observed us, as we walked eastwards along the shore. Walt photographed an adult near the base of the bridge. The shy bird flew as we approached, even though we were quite distant. Closer examination revealed the carcass of a White Winged Scoter (with stomach intact) which the Eagle had been eating. At about noon, just as we departed the Island, the rains finally arrived. Gwen and Walt left.



*Photo by Walter Harris*

Tracy and Rexanne (who lives here but still writes a newsletter for the Lynchburg Bird Club) are skilled and intrepid birders. "Onward and upward." And so it was for a total of 60 species. We saw a Common Goldeneye near the boat ramp of ESNWR – and numerous flitting Yellow-rumped Warblers (plumage as varied as ever) on the road nearby. A stop at the Kiptopeke waterfront provided the party with good doses of cold wind and rain in the face. Optics or no optics, it was hard to confidently identify, in such conditions, the rafts of hundreds sea ducks that so enjoyed this weather; the rascals kept their distance. On Route 600, the sky did provide some short intervals of surprisingly good lighting; one was just right for a ground-perched Red-shouldered Hawk, lifting its wings slightly and displaying more color than found in Sibley's. A Willet was seen at Oyster. The day's birding ended a little after 3:36 PM on CBBT Island 1, where the instruments recorded gusts to 46 mph. That's just 1 mph below Beaufort Scale 9, a strong gale, which can blow over small trees – but not Island 1's Purple Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones.

Specied list on following page.

Species list for field trip to Fisherman's Island and Kiptopeke State Park (2/15/14)

Snow Goose	Double-crested Cormorant	Mourning Dove
Canada Goose	Great Cormorant	Red-bellied Woodpecker
Tundra Swan	Great Blue Heron	Blue Jay
Gadwall	Black Vulture	American Crow
American Widgeon	Turkey Vulture	Horned Lark
American Black Duck	Bald Eagle	Tree Swallow
Northern Shoveler	Northern Harrier	Carolina Wren
Green-winged Teal	Sharp-shinned Hawk	American Robin
Greater Scaup	Red-shouldered Hawk	Gray Catbird
Surf Scoter	Red-tailed Hawk	Northern Mockingbird
White-winged Scoter	American Kestrel	Brown Thrasher
Black Scoter	Peregrine Falcon	European Starling
Long-tailed Duck	American Oystercatcher	Cedar Waxwing
Bufflehead	Willet	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Common Goldeneye	Ruddy Turnstone	Chipping Sparrow
Hooded Merganser	Purple Sandpiper	Song Sparrow
Red-breasted Merganser	Ring-billed Gull	White-throated Sparrow
Ruddy Duck	Herring Gull	Northern Cardinal
Common Loon	Great Black-backed Gull	Red-winged Blackbird
Northern Gannet	Rock Pigeon	Common Grackle

President	David Youker	<a href="mailto:Youkerd@aol.com">Youkerd@aol.com</a>	(757) 344-9385
Vice President	Phyllis Roth	<a href="mailto:pjssr@cox.net">pjssr@cox.net</a>	(757) 898-7354
Secretary	Libby Carmines	<a href="mailto:Carmy5@aol.com">Carmy5@aol.com</a>	(757) 591-9174
Treasurer	John Adair	<a href="mailto:adairjj@bunt.com">adairjj@bunt.com</a>	(757) 224-8920
Board: (7/13-6/16)	Elisa Enders	<a href="mailto:elisaenders@hotmail.com">elisaenders@hotmail.com</a>	(757) 879-1034
Board: (7/11-6/14)	Marilyn Adair	<a href="mailto:adairmc@cox.net">adairmc@cox.net</a>	(757) 224-8920
Board: (7/12-6/15)	Stuart Sweetman	<a href="mailto:nnva4x4@aol.com">nnva4x4@aol.com</a>	(757) 595-1677
Web Editor	Meredith Bell	<a href="mailto:merandlee@gmail.com">merandlee@gmail.com</a>	(804) 642-2197
Hospitality	Virginia Boyles	<a href="mailto:v.w.boyles@verizon.net">v.w.boyles@verizon.net</a>	(757) 867-8857
Field Trip Coordinator & Newsletter Editor	Thomas Charlock	<a href="mailto:TomCharlock@gmail.com">TomCharlock@gmail.com</a>	(757) 599-3418

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 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>. **Dues are \$15.00 for individuals and \$20.00 for families.** NOTE: Membership dues can be paid at Wild Wings Nature Store in the Hidenwood Shopping Center, Newport News, VA, or at Wild Birds in The Pavilion Shops in Kiln Creek.

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.

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### 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*

