



VIRGINIA BIRDS

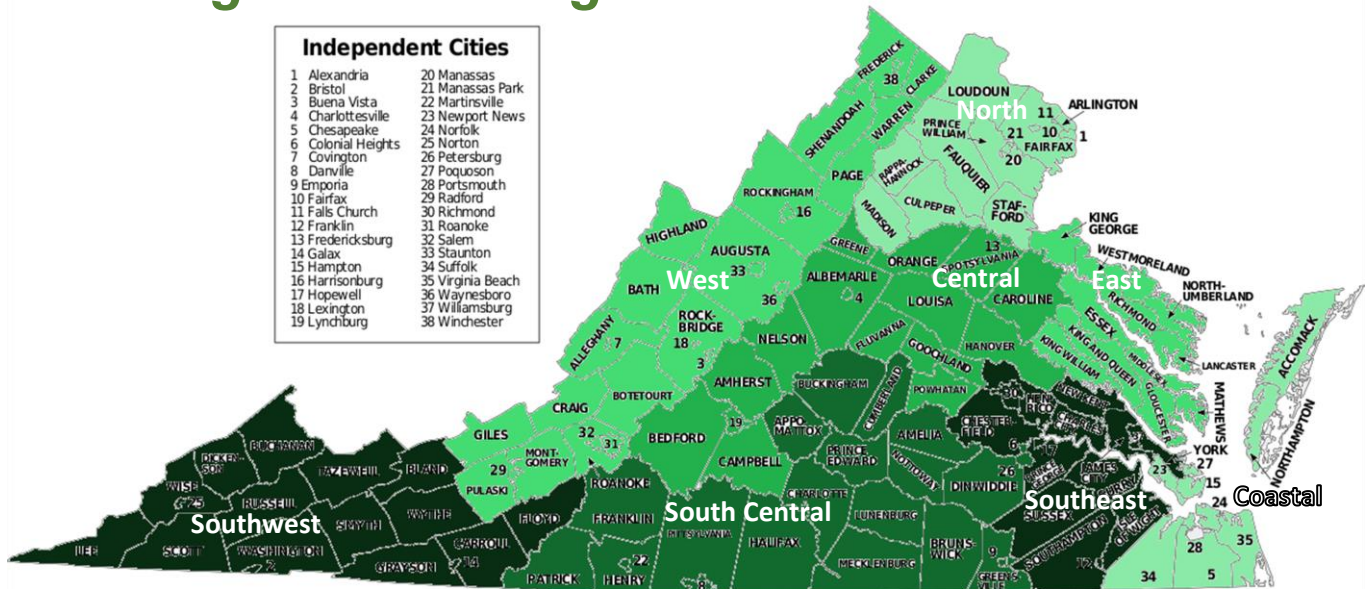
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Virginia Birds Regions



Virginia Birds

Editor

Matt Anthony
mhanthony2@gmail.com

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Send reports and photographs to the appropriate Regional Editors. Photographs should be the highest electronic quality possible. Articles for consideration can be sent to mhanthony2@gmail.com.

Season reports due to Regional Editors:

Winter (Dec – Feb): 15 Mar Spring (Mar – May): 15 Jun
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Terms and Abbreviations

Species names appear in **bold** the first time mentioned, species on the Virginia Avian Records Committee (VARCOM) review list in **BOLD CAPS**, and county/independent city names in *italics*.

Abbreviations

ad. (ads.)	adult(s)
a. r.	audio recording
BBS	Breeding Bird Survey
CBC	Christmas Bird Count
Cr.	Creek
et al.	and others
f.	female
<i>fide</i>	vouched by
FOS	First of Season
Ft.	Fort
Gold Book	<i>Virginia's Birdlife: An Annotated Checklist</i> . Virginia Avifauna No. 7, 4 th Ed. (2007).
Hwy.	Highway
Is.	Island(s), Isle(s)
imm. (imms.)	immature(s)
junc.	junction
juv. (juvs.)	juvenile(s)
L.	Lake
Ln.	Lane
MAPS	Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship
m.	male
m. obs.	multiple observers
Mt.	Mountain, Mount
NAP	Natural Area Preserve
NF	National Forest
NHP	National Historical Park
NP	National Park
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge
ph.	photograph
Pk.	Park
Pt.	Point
R.	River
Rd.	Road
Res.	Reservoir
RP	Regional Park
Rte.	Route
SF	State Forest
SP	State Park
SR	State Road, State Route
VARCOM	Virginia Avian Records Committee
VDWR	Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
v. r.	video recording
VSO	Virginia Society of Ornithology
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
*	specimen collected

On the cover: Adam D'Onofrio's photo of Virginia's first Buff-bellied Hummingbird, 31 Jan 2021

Editor's Corner

For Virginia birders on the cusp of the winter of 2020-21, it surely must have seemed as though no more excitement could possibly be in store. Indeed, this winter came on the heels of what was doubtless one of the most momentous seasons ever seen here or anywhere – the fall of 2020 was the stuff of legends, a time of unparalleled excitement unlikely to have been seen before or to be repeated hence. In just a few short months, Virginia notched five (possibly six) state firsts. The hits just kept coming! Yet for all the excitement, fall 2020 was also a frustrating time to be birding in the Commonwealth. With each new report of a tantalizing rarity, it seemed disappointment loomed. A European Storm-Petrel on an offshore trip, seen by only a lucky few who happened to be on the right side of the boat. A Virginia's Warbler, posing in the open for a magazine-worthy photograph, then disappearing into the brush never to be seen again despite hours of diligent searching. A Masked Booby, photographed on the beach at First Landing SP by a visiting tourist but not identified or announced until long after the bird was gone. A Gray Heron, a rarity of continental proportions, spotted in Northampton and not recognized in time for anyone to chase but later retroactively identified from photos taken over a week prior a Chincoteague. The one bright spot, the state's first Couch's Kingbird was cooperative for many, but was nearly lost when regularly-scheduled eBird server maintenance delayed the circulation of alerts by precious days. And in the waning days of November, a mystery *Myiarchus* checking many of the boxes for a Brown-crested Flycatcher, yet never seen after the initial encounter – and with photographs at just the wrong angle to show the definitive undertail pattern! If Virginia seemed to be building its list at a rate heretofore unprecedented, few Virginia birders were reaping the benefits.

Yet, beneath the frustration and fruitless chases was surely an undeniable sense of camaraderie. "Lesser" chases such as the state's second Black-

whiskered Vireo – which would have been a banner bird any time but Fall 2020 – brought old friends together to share in the excitement of a truly special rarity. Even failed chases served as impromptu reunions and allowed friends to share their disappointment. Those who submitted their votes for the then-recently published *Virginia's Next Dozen* report could at least watch with glee as they ticked species off the scorecard. Surely the one prescient birder who picked Gray Heron as a longshot felt some acclaim (or perhaps wished she had played the lottery!). Perhaps most importantly, the events of the fall provided some much-needed excitement and fellowship after the dreary months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indeed, perhaps COVID holds some responsibility for the glut of phenomenal avian happenings in the fall of 2020. Homebound birders, wary of travel and seeking outlets against the backdrop of pandemic-era restrictions, threw themselves into the hobby with a new gusto. With travel restricted by law, even birders with wanderlust redirected their impulses into hard-hitting patch birding. New folks who took up binoculars during the months of isolation contributed their sightings. For all the horrors COVID wrought on most sectors of the world, much has been made of the boon it brought to hobbies like birding – in an eye-catching headline from May 2020, *New York Times* columnist Jacey Fortin noted that "the birds are not on lockdown, and more people are watching them." Whatever the reasons, one impact of COVID was more people out watching; the Cornell Lab's spring 2020 Global Big Day recorded a record number of participants, while eBird checklist submissions, Macauley Library contributions, and Merlin downloads all showed measurable increases.

So, it was against this new backdrop that a fall of change, isolation, despair, excitement, novelty, community, upheaval, and more gave way to a winter that certainly might have seemed as if it

could bring no more that might shock or surprise. And with seven state-firsts already notched by the end of November, surely the final month of the year had to be pedestrian by comparison. Any notions that the winter might be one of birding normalcy, of course, were shattered when reports of the state's long-sought first Pink-footed Goose trickled out on the evening of December 11. A gaggle of chasers repeated the now-familiar pattern: congregate at the site, mill around for hours, and leave empty-handed. Diligent searching over subsequent days yielded nothing, and so Virginia's birders added insult to injury in what can only be described as a confounding year.

When Brian Taber's photograph of what clearly seemed a state-first Western Meadowlark came across my email, I must confess to feeling more chagrined than anything. Coming as it did nearly a week after a literal wild goose chase, my first thought was – "here we go again." Another long car trip, another frustrating day of birding, another duty-bound chase with no hope of payoff. Surely after the events of the previous months, our hope for a chaseable rarity wouldn't be met by an inconspicuous bird with a challenging ID, that preferred to hang in the company of dozens of nearly-identical relatives in knee-high corn stubble. Of courses, things have a funny way of working out sometimes. Brian's bird, a long-overdue record that finally put Virginia in the company of nearly every other state in the union, stayed for a full month. Though it required some patience, it proved to be an eminently gettable bird and nearly every active lister in the state had a chance to see it. This was a bird that exemplified so much of the community and camaraderie of the past year – found by a dedicated birder in the course of diligently checking his patch; identified at least in part as a result of the added scrutiny inspired by our collective musings in the *Next Dozen*; and (mostly) cooperative for dozens of happy birders to chase and enjoy as remuneration for the wasted chases that came before. If a bird deserves to be representative of the ups and

downs of 2020, perhaps this Western Meadowlark was it!

And lest we birders close the book on the Fall of Firsts (by now extended to winter, of course) too soon, Virginia had one more curveball to throw. A mere week into the new year, the state's first Buff-bellied Hummingbird serendipitously came to light through a post by a curious homeowner on Next Door. A handful of birders descended on the site hoping to glimpse a sought-after rarity, only to leave empty-handed. Yet when all seemed lost, the bird reappeared for this editor on the following Monday and was subsequently seen by dozens of birders. In a strange twist, it ultimately became the last in the long cavalcade of state first in 2020 – only after it came to light that a different homeowner had documented the bird at the end of December!

Though mega rarities stole the show, they were far from the only things waiting for birders with the inclination to look. As you read on for these accounts of Winter 2020-21 and Spring 2021, you'll hear about an irruption of Evening Grosbeaks and other winter finches the likes of which has not seen in Virginia in over 20 years. A so-called superflight, this event brought Purple Finches and Pine Siskins to nearly every corner of the state, and Evening Grosbeaks to dozens of counties. Though hardly a bird to raise alarm bells in the Tidewater, Painted Buntings are quite a rarity elsewhere in the state – yet Northern Virginia experienced an invasion of sorts that saw multiple show up in Prince William and Fairfax (to the delight of greater Washington birders). Another species the experienced a surprising mini-invasion was Bullock's Oriole; normally a major rarity anywhere in Virginia, this winter there were three – two individuals in Virginia Beach, and a third across the state in Harrisonburg. A mild winter made for excellent conditions to keep lingering passerines, and bush-beating birders turned up an astounding 18 species of warblers this winter including a state-rare Townsend's and a bonkers winter record of Blackburnian. The excitement over state firsts obscured the many other "lesser" finds that were

nonetheless banner birds – Cinnamon Teal, Calliope Hummingbird, Allen’s Hummingbird, Common Murre, Say’s Phoebe, Harris’s Sparrow, and Green-tailed Towhee, to name a few.

If that’s not enough for you, dear reader, let’s turn our attention to the Spring of 2021. The pace of first-state-records died down a bit, though a very unexpected White Wagtail at Ft. Monroe was a delight to scores of birders and fodder for any number of friendly debates about the merits of ship-assisted birds. Dovekie were clearly undergoing a major movement, as evidenced by the numerous from-shore reports in the winter, including some as far up the Bay as Hampton. A spring pelagic in March revealed the extent of this, with a record-shattering single-day count of over 1000 – truly remarkable for a species that sometimes escapes detection at all, even offshore. Atlantic Puffins were also present in good

numbers, while between the winter and spring both species of murre put in an appearance. A bit of a grail bird for most birders, Yellow Rail was another star of the show this spring. With perfect habitat in ample abundance at the Chincoteague Wildlife Loop, birders were treated to the clickety-clack of at least 4 of these elusive marsh sprites. Heck, the initial detection occurred when a bird began spontaneously calling in the middle of the afternoon in high winds! Though not a state-first, a truly stunning third-cycle Heermann’s Gull at Virginia Beach was doubtless a bird not on anyone’s 2021 bingo card – surely most expected the 2002 record to stand the test of time as the state’s only.

So, read on to hear the accounts of what will surely be remembered as an exciting time in the annals of Virginia birding history. The present volume is lengthy, cramming two seasons between its covers, but it is well worth the read!

Editorial: The 2020-21 Boreal Finch Irruption in Virginia

The winter of 2020-21 was marked by a “superflight” of boreal finch species that saw widespread, coinciding southward movements of nearly all irruptive species – Pine Grosbeak, Evening Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin, and Purple Finch along with a non-*Fringillidae* irruptive, Red-breasted Nuthatch. While the most significant influxes occurred to the north, Virginians nonetheless witnessed a substantial winter finch invasion marked by widespread reports of Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, and Red-breasted Nuthatches. The most significant event associated with the superflight in Virginia, however, was the largest movement of Evening Grosbeaks into the state in at least 20 years. Grosbeaks were geographically widespread and often present in substantial numbers, with some locations recording flocks numbering in the dozens. Red Crossbills were also on the move, though reports were substantially less widespread and largely confined to the Mountains & Valleys (where some birds may have been wandering local breeders). The hoped-for Common Redpoll invasion never materialized, with only a handful of reports, while White-winged Crossbills were nearly absent and Pine Grosbeaks entirely so.

Though no systematic efforts were undertaken to survey this movement, as at Kiptopeke in the 2012 finch invasion (Kolbe & Brinkley), reports to eBird provide a window into the extent of this movement. As a publicly-accessible citizen science project, eBird tapped into reports from users not strongly connected to birding or ornithological communities – a useful attribute when documenting species as apt to show up at feeders in residential settings as at birding destinations. What follows is not a systematic or scientific analysis of this irruption, but merely a journalistic attempt to recount the 2020-21 finch invasion in Virginia and chart its geographic breadth and other particulars.

Pine Siskin

This species accounted for one of the most noticeable movements associated with the 2020-21 finch invasion. Though siskins are typically present in Virginia in low densities every winter, they moved into the Commonwealth in such numbers as to be nearly ubiquitous. During the period from 1 Sep 2020 – 31 May 2021, there were over 13,500 eBird checklists reporting Pine Siskins. Though this number is inflated somewhat by shared checklists, it nonetheless shows how nearly omnipresent this species was. Movements did not seem to begin in earnest until the fourth week of September; from 1 – 21 Sep there were only three eBird reports in the state. Beginning on 21 Sep, Pine Siskins were reported more consistently to the point that by the end of the month, multiple checklists each day reported them. The peak movement occurred in October, during which time many lists reported several dozen individuals and it was not uncommon to see reports of flocks numbering in the hundreds. Reports of large flocks seemed to largely die down by early November; although Pine Siskins were reported regularly throughout the winter and spring, few large flocks were reported during this period and most checklists contained a few dozen or less birds. After 13 Nov, flocks of over 100 birds were only reported on seven occasions: 125 in *Prince William* 25 Nov; 102 in *James City* 7 Dec; 204 in *Rappahannock* 19 Dec; 114 in *Augusta* 3 Jan; 147 in *Montgomery* 8 Jan; 109 in *Bedford* 12 Feb; and 100 in *James City* 12 Feb. Two notable high counts of over 1000 individuals were reported by the CVWO hawkcounter at Kiptopeke State Park: 2081 on 28 Oct and 1362 on 5 Nov. The former count appears to represent the highest count in the state since the turn of the 21st century – the Gold Book reports only two that are higher: 2222 in *Augusta* and surrounding locales, 14 Feb 1988; and 10,000 at Dismal Swamp, 21 Jan 1970.

Apart from astonishing counts, Pine Siskins were also present across an impressive geographical swath of the state. Reports were submitted to eBird from all but six counties and independent

cities. The only jurisdictions without a report between Sep 2020 and May 2021 were *Brunswick*, *Caroline*, *Greensville*, and *Southampton* Counties and the Cities of *Emporia* and *Petersburg*. The absence of records in these jurisdictions is almost certainly a reflection of birding practice, particularly in the Southside counties and cities, which are some of the least-birded in the state. As of Oct 2022, *Greensville* was the least-birded proper county in the state with only 766 checklists ever submitted; among all 133 counties/cities, it ranked 124 for number of submitted checklists. *Brunswick* and *Southampton* hardly fared better, ranking 115 and 116, respectively. The cities of *Petersburg* and *Emporia* are even less-birded, with respective checklist rankings of 126 and 129.

Also of note were several reports of the enigmatic “green morph” Pine Siskin. All reports of this color morph in eBird date from the 2020-21 finch invasion; the Gold Book only references two previous occurrences, both from the Eastern Shore during irruptions. In 2020-21, all four reports were from the Piedmont, and all of single birds: *Nelson* 8 Dec; *Rappahannock* 19 Dec; *Madison* 18 Jan; and *Charlottesville* 7 Mar. Doubtless the dearth of reports is partially due to the fact that this form is poorly-known by birders, and the identification is subtle. Whether or not the “green morph” constitutes a valid taxon is a subject of some debate; Mandelbaum and Young suggest that further study is needed to determine if this form represents a legitimate color morph or merely individual variation. Sibley goes further in questioning the validity of the morph, arguing that the color variation is clinal and simply most field-recognizable (as well as rarest) in those individuals at the extreme end of the spectrum of variation.

Purple Finch

Along with Pine Siskin, this species was the most ubiquitous of the finches irrupting into Virginia in 2020-21; as with siskins, Purple Finches were reported on over 13,500 eBird checklists during Virginia Birds

the period between 1 Sep 2020 and 31 May 2021. Reports in early September were few and geographically scattered, but this species seemed to arrive in force slightly earlier than siskins – by 12 Sep, Purple Finches were being reported daily on multiple eBird checklists across the state. Unlike siskins, Purple Finches did not seem to show a clear peak in movements, instead remaining a consistent but low-density presence through the fall, winter, and spring. Most checklists reported fewer than 10 individuals, with occasional sightings of flocks containing anywhere between 20 and 50 birds. Larger flocks were scarce, with only three reports of over 100 individuals: 108 in *Rockingham* 17 Oct; 178 in *Rockingham* 18 Oct; 112 in *Albemarle* 18 Oct; 118 in *Rockingham* 28 Oct; and 148 in *Nelson* 10 Apr.

Like Pine Siskins, Purple Finches were also in evidence across nearly the entire state. During the period between 1 Sep 2020 and 31 May 2021, Purple Finches were reported from all but five of the counties and independent cities in Virginia. The absence of reports from the Southside counties/cities of *Southampton*, *Greensville*, *Emporia*, and *Brunswick* is likely explainable by the paucity of data in this region of the state. The other two jurisdictions with no reports were the cities of *Norton* and *Covington*; again, this seems attributable to a lack of coverage, as both cities of infrequently birded and Purple Finches were reported from all surrounding areas.

Evening Grosbeak

This stunning larger finch was easily the most anticipated species associated with the 2020-21 flight; early-season predictions of large-scale Evening Grosbeak movements did not disappoint. Indeed, this species made perhaps its strongest showing in Virginia in 20 years or more. Once a fairly regular, if sporadic, winter visitor, in recent years Evening Grosbeaks have been largely or entirely absent. Though grosbeaks were reported from fewer jurisdictions than Purple Finches or Pine Siskins, they were still

remarkably widespread in the state this winter. During the period from 1 Sep 2020 through 31 May 2021, Evening Grosbeaks were reported to eBird from 88 counties and cities. These reports were spread across over 1700 eBird checklists during the same period.

As in the 2012-13 irruption, Evening Grosbeaks arrived in Virginia later than the smaller finches, with the first report coming on 13 Oct and regular reports not coming until the very end of the month. Unlike in 2012-13, when Evening Grosbeak numbers seemed to peak in mid- to late-Nov, in 2020-21 this species was present through the winter and into the spring. Numbers were highly variable; while many observers reported only singles or small flocks, there were also many reports of flocks numbering several dozen birds or more. The only report of 100 birds was a flock observed at Shirley Plantation, *Charles City* 2 Jan. By April and May numbers had thinned out considerably, though there were still a few late reports of flocks of 30-40 birds.

Though grosbeaks were reported over a very wide geographic breadth of the state, the number of counties and cities with reports belies the fact that Evening Grosbeaks were still quite sporadic and sparsely distributed. While some locations reliably hosted good numbers throughout the season, many jurisdictions notched only one or two records. Of the 88 jurisdictions with records, 33 had fewer than 3 reports from Sep 2020 through May 2021. Grosbeaks were also absent, or at least unreported, from several regions in the state. Detection gaps in the Southwest and Southside were expected and likely due to lack of birder coverage, but some well-birded areas also failed to turn up any. One of the most surprising misses was *Loudoun County*, which turned in zero reports despite being the sixth most-birded county/city (per cumulative number of eBird checklists) and despite ample reports from surrounding regions. In the Hampton Roads area, likewise a heavily-birded region, the dearth of reports seemed to represent a genuine absence, with no detections in *Williamsburg*, *Newport News*, *Hampton*, *Poquoson*, *Norfolk*, *Portsmouth*,

or *Chesapeake* and only 3 reports from *Virginia Beach*.

While the vast majority of eBird reports were not identified to type, all those that were constituted Type 3 (the expected type in the east).

Red Crossbill

Large-scale movements of Red Crossbills did not materialize in Virginia in 2020-21, though there were at least some roving birds. Assessing this species' movements is somewhat complicated by the fact that Red Crossbills are nomadic year-round residents in some parts of the state. Though there were reports from 25 counties and independent cities, nearly all of them were counties along the Ridge where there is at least a possibility of locally-resident birds. A few reports surely did not pertain to locals though, including Piedmont records from *Fauquier*, *Albemarle*, and *Nelson* as well as coastal reports from *Accomack*, *Northampton*, and *Suffolk*.

Red Crossbills certainly seemed to move much later than other finches, with no detections in the state prior to 3 Dec. Reports from the mountains are complicated by the presence of breeders, but the final coastal report from *Accomack* 10 May shows that at least some irruptive birds remained in the state into the spring. Overall, crossbills were reported far fewer than any of the other species that irrupted into Virginia in 2020-21, with only 369 checklists reporting them between 1 Sep 2020 and 31 May 2021. Many of these checklists can be accounted for by a few locations with long-staying flocks, including Chincoteague NWR, *Accomack*; Briery Branch Gap, *Rockingham*; Elkwallow Wayside/Picnic Area, *Page/Rappahannock*; and Jefferson NF—Caldwell Fields, *Montgomery*.

Though most reports did not identify crossbills to type, there were confirmed reports of three types in Virginia this winter. Fourteen eBird checklists reported Type 1 (Appalachian), with reports from *Augusta*, *Highland*, *Madison*, *Montgomery*, and *Rockingham*. A single report of Type 3 (Western

Hemlock) was verified via recording from *Montgomery*. Twenty eBird checklists reported Type 10 (Sitka Spruce), with reports from *Accomack, Albemarle, Frederick, Montgomery, Northampton, Page, Rappahannock, and Rockingham*.

Other Species

No other northern finches irrupted into Virginia in significant numbers, but two others were reported: **Common Redpoll** and **White-winged Crossbill**.

Earlier hopes of a redpoll movement to match other finches proved unfounded, but 2020-21 was still a good winter for a species that is often rare or absent in the state. All told, there were 9 reports of Common Redpolls from as many jurisdictions (in order of occurrence): *Montgomery, Clarke, Fauquier, Henrico, Botetourt, Isle of Wight, Loudoun, Highland, and James City*. While almost all reports were clustered in late Jan through mid-Feb, there were two Nov reports (*Montgomery* and *Clarke*) and one early Dec (*Fauquier*), as well as one Mar (*James City*). Most reports this winter were one-time feeder visitors, though two individuals lingered long enough for birders to chase: one sporadically visiting a feeder in *Henrico* with reports on 31 Jan, 5 Feb, 14 Feb, and 18 Feb; and one at the Gala Wetlands, *Botetourt* 6-7 Feb.

Most disappointing for birders was the near-complete absence of White-winged Crossbills. There were only two reports, both from Nov: an imm. m. photographed at a private residence in

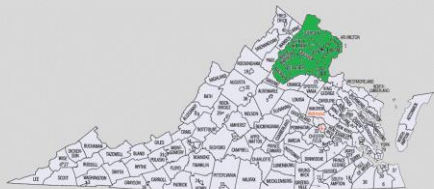
Loudoun 14 Nov; and a female-type flyover at the Kiptopeke hawkwatch 28 Nov.

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Regional Reports

NORTH



Editors:

Michael Lott
1729 Jefferson Davis Hwy.
P.O. Box 339
Stafford, VA 22554
michael.lott@dcr.virginia.gov

Mary Ann Good
18280 Lincoln Rd.
Purcellville, VA 20132
magood1@verizon.net

Arlington, Culpeper, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, Madison, Prince William, Rappahannock, and Stafford counties; the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax City, Falls Church, Manassas, and Manassas Park

WINTER 2020-21

Rainfall was above average through the winter season. Temperatures were at or above average for the period, except for a wintry spell in late January through early February. There were numerous highlights this season, including a Barnacle Goose in *Arlington*, a long-staying Eurasian Green-winged Teal in *Loudoun*; an Allen's Hummingbird in far w. *Rappahannock*, the Clapper Rail's continued presence in *Fairfax*'s Coastal Plain, an Ash-throated Flycatcher in *Stafford*'s Coastal Plain, a Green-tailed Towhee's extended visit at Sky Meadows SP in *Fauquier*, a Yellow-headed Blackbird in *Fauquier*, and numerous reports of Painted Buntings.

Abbreviations: Aquia Landing (Aquia Landing Pk., *Stafford*); Belle Haven (Belle Haven Pk., *Fairfax*); Dyke Marsh (Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, *Fairfax*); Huntley Meadows (Huntley Meadows Pk., *Fairfax*); Occoquan Bay NWR (Occoquan Bay NWR, *Prince William*); Pohick Bay RP (Pohick Bay RP, *Fairfax*); Prince William County Landfill (Prince William County Landfill, *Prince William*); Woodbridge Veterans Memorial Pk. (Woodbridge Veterans Memorial Pk., *Prince William*)

Christmas Bird Counts: BCBC (Brooke, 15 Dec), DCCBC (Washington DC, 19 Dec),

TPCBC (The Plains, 20 Dec), FBCBC (Ft. Belvoir, 2 Jan)

WATERFOWL — CRANES

Observations of **Ross's Goose**, a rare winter visitor in the state, especially the Piedmont, included up to 3 along Locust Dale Rd., *Culpeper* 1–6 Jan (ph. TS), with a single (possibly one of the 3) seen 1–2 mi. e. at Hartland College, *Madison* 2–3 Jan (WB); another single was at Sleeter L., *Loudoun* 20 Feb (ph. DCar, NH). Sightings of **Greater White-fronted Goose**, formerly a rare winter visitor in the Region, included singles along Blantyre Rd. s. of The Plains, *Fauquier* 19 Dec (ph. FA) and Gap Run Rd. pond, *Fauquier* 10 & 16 Jan (ph. EM), and 2



Barnacle Goose ph. on Mt. Vernon Trail, *Arlington* by Allison Gallo, 11 Dec 2020.

well-ph. flying over Morven Pk., *Loudoun* 12 Feb (ph. DCaz). A **Barnacle Goose** first seen across the Potomac R. 10 Dec made appearances on or over Virginia soil in *Arlington* 11–13 Dec (ph. m.

obs.). This was only the fourth record in the Region, one of which was a prolonged stay in the same area in Jan–Feb 2002. **Cackling Geese** have become more frequent winter visitors in the Region; among numerous reports of ones and twos was a sighting of “dozens” at Woodbridge Veterans Memorial Pk. on the FBCBC. Reports of **Blue-winged Teal**, rare in winter in the Region, included a single at Occoquan Bay NWR 12 Dec (ph. TH) and again 28 Jan (EW) and 25–27 Feb (EH, MSa); possibly the same individual ~1 mi. away at Woodbridge Veterans Memorial Pk. 18 & 25 Dec (ph. LC, AJ); and 1–4 at Huntley Meadows 25–27 Feb (AA, ph. PM). A **Eurasian Green-winged Teal**, the first recorded in the Virginia Piedmont and only the second in the Region, was found at Middlesex Dr. pond in South Riding, Loudoun 18 Jan (SP), where it lingered through the period (ph. m. obs.). Some speculated that it may have been there for some



Eurasian Green-winged Teal ph. at Middlesex Dr., Loudoun by Phil Kenny, 21 Feb 2021.

time earlier, overlooked as an ordinary Green-winged Teal. There were numerous reports of **Greater Scaup**, typically a rare winter visitor in the Piedmont, including a high count of 8 at Airlie Res., Fauquier 20 Dec (ph. PS). A **White-winged Scoter**, a rare winter visitor inland, was seen at Pohick Bay RP 31 Jan (QE). Reports of **Long-tailed Ducks**, also a rare winter visitor inland, included a f. at L. Audubon, Fairfax 17–30 Jan (ph. JL) and again 12 Feb at companion L. Thoreau (ph. DCo); 2 m. at Pohick Bay RP 21 Jan (DLed); 2 m. and 2 f. at Beaverdam Res., Loudoun 11 Feb (AD); 2 at Burke L. Pk., Fairfax 11 Feb (FA, ph. DLeb); and singles along Fort Valley Rd. in Sperryville, Rappahannock 14 Feb (ph. PL) and at the Upper Occoquan Service

Authority (UOSA), Fairfax 17 Feb (ph. JC, SJ, DLed). Also at the UOSA, and fairly rare in the Piedmont away from larger reservoirs, were an impressive 400-odd **Common Mergansers** 24 Jan (SJ). A **Horned Grebe**, a rare winter visitor in the Piedmont, was seen at Innovation Pond on Discovery Blvd., Prince William 14 Feb (DLa). A f. **Rufous Hummingbird**, a rare but increasing early winter visitor in the Region, was seen at



Rufous Hummingbird ph. at Green Spring Gardens Pk. by Jane Gamble, 15 Dec 2020.

Green Spring Gardens Pk., Fairfax 6 Dec (ph. JM), where it lingered through the period. Another was observed along Thornton Gap Church Rd. near Sperryville, Rappahannock 8 Dec (ph. IT) and again 15 Dec, when it was banded. An **ALLEN’S HUMMINGBIRD**, only the 7th state record, was likewise seen along Thornton Gap Church Rd. near Sperryville, Rappahannock 8 Dec (ph. IT), where it lingered through 15 Dec and was banded. The **CLAPPER RAIL** at Huntley Meadows, first observed 26 Oct, continued through the end of the period and beyond (ph. m. obs.); its extended presence away from salt marsh is exceedingly rare. Reports of **Sora**, fairly rare in winter in the Coastal Plain, included singles at Aquia Landing 4 Dec (KG) and Huntley Meadows 5 Dec (JamS), both of which continued through the end of the period (a few reports at the latter included 2 birds); 5 were also observed by boat at Pohick Bay RP 2 Jan (FBCBC). KG, the FBCBC compiler, observed, “there was an incredible showing of rails across the circle. In addition to the Clapper Rail [and Sora] at Huntley Meadows, a boat trip into the

marshes of Pohick Cr. produced multiple King Rail [fairly rare in winter this far n. in the Coastal Plain], Virginia Rail [uncommon], and Sora reports. Two Virginia Rails were found in the Jackson Abbott marshes and one off the Neabsco Cr. marsh boardwalk. The King Rail at Occoquan Bay NWR was also recorded.” The perennially wintering pair of **Sandhill Cranes** that returned 26 Nov to the area around the Algonkian Nature Preserve, Loudoun were occasionally seen with a third; 4 flew over 9 Jan (JDen, ph. MSc). Additional reports included 3 at the Chopawamsic Cr. Watchable Wildlife Area, Prince William 8 Dec (ph. RSt); 3 flying over Thoroughfare Rd. near Gainesville, Prince William 20 Dec (TPCBC); 2 flying over the Prince William County Landfill 4 Jan (SS); one along Rokeby Rd. near Upperville, Fauquier 16 & 17 Jan (TMD, ph. IT); 3 flying over the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project, Loudoun 24 Jan (AG, BHe, ph. MM); and one at Great Falls Pk., Fairfax (CG, KL, JanS).

GULLS — MIMIDS

There were several reports of **Bonaparte’s Gulls**, a fairly rare winter visitor in the Region, including 7 at Occoquan Bay NWR 6 Dec (FA) with one seen again 2–7 Jan (ER); 2 at Beaverdam Res., Loudoun 1 Jan (BHe); one at Neabsco Cr. Inlet, Prince William 22 Jan (MSa); one at Huntley Meadows 24 Jan (LS); and 2 at Pohick Bay RP 24 Jan (SS). **Laughing Gulls**, generally only present inland in small numbers past Dec, lingered this winter: the flock at the Prince William County Landfill increased from 80 on 2 Jan (ph. LC, AJ) to 180 on 3 Jan (ph. BB, MN), with just 9 there the next day. A flock of 75 at Crow’s Nest NAP, Stafford 2 Jan (MLot) remained in numbers until 6 Jan, with one seen there again 23 Feb (KG, SS). Further inland was a single along the Stockton Pkwy. in Fort Hunt, Fairfax 4 & 5 Feb (CK). A rare but regular winter visitor at the Prince William County Landfill, an **Iceland Gull** was observed 2–3 Jan (ph. TH, DLa). Reports of **American Bitterns**, a fairly rare winter visitor in the Coastal Plain, included

one heard at Aquia Landing 11 Dec (KG) and another observed at Mason Neck NWR, Fairfax 25 Feb (AH, AN). Single **Great Egrets**, rare in winter in the Region, were observed at Pohick Bay RP 7 Dec (EP); Jackson Miles Abbott Wetlands Refuge, Fairfax 10 & 12 Dec (ph. KG); and along Melbourne Ave. in Woodbridge, Prince William 25 Jan (FL). An apparent, well-described ad. **Little Blue Heron** was observed at a pond near Bealeton, Fauquier 2 Dec (MLoy); there is only one other winter record in the Region for this species, whose typical late date is late Sep. A **Green Heron**, a rare early winter visitor in the Region, was seen at Ben Brenman Pk., Alexandria 27 Dec–10 Jan (ph. WE, ph. FK). A pair of **Black-crowned Night-Herons** again spent the winter at Ben Brenman Pk., Alexandria (ph. m. obs.), a favored wintering spot for at least the past 10 winters; this species is fairly rare inland in winter. There were about ten reports this period of **Northern Red-tailed Hawks** (*Buteo jamaicensis abieticola*), a fairly distinctive but not uniformly recognized subspecies; all except one (Prince William County Landfill) were within the w. Piedmont and all except one (19–22 Feb) in Dec–Jan. Reports of **Rough-legged Hawks**, a rare winter visitor in the Region,



Rough-legged Hawk ph. near Remington, Fauquier by Bill Reister, 5 Feb 2021.

included one that lingered at the Prince William County Landfill 27 Dec–15 Feb (ph. TH, LM, ph. EM); 1–2 seen several times along Grassdale Road se. of Remington, Fauquier 1–11 Feb (ph. TMD); and one at Manassas Nat. Battlefield Pk., Prince William, seen on a day (14 Feb) (ph. JanS) when not reported at the previously mentioned

Prince William County Landfill, about 15 mi. distant. Presumed to be a rare winter visitor to the Region, a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was heard at Leesylvania SP, *Prince William* on the FBCBC. A rare find in the Piedmont in winter, a **Merlin** was seen at Kent Gardens Pk., *Fairfax* 1 Dec (PF). There were many reports in each month of the period of **Peregrine Falcons**, previously a rare transient and winter visitor in the Piedmont. An **ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER**, only the second record in the Region, was observed at Chatham Manor, *Stafford* 6–7 Dec (ph. RSt). A **Blue-headed Vireo**, a species that makes rare but occasional winter visits to the Region, was observed in the Franklin Farm area of Herndon, *Fairfax* 20 Dec (ph. MB). There were several reports of early **Tree Swallows** (Coastal Plain early date of 20 Mar), including 8 at Mason Neck NWR, *Fairfax* 25 Feb (AH, AN); one at Huntley Meadows 26 Feb (EE); 2 at Hallowing Pt. Association Pk., *Fairfax* 27 Feb (KG); and one at Woodbridge Veterans Memorial Pk. 27 Feb (KG). There were numerous confirmed reports of **Black-capped Chickadees**, typically a rare and irregular visitor in the n. Piedmont near the Blue Ridge, including: one near Ruth, *Madison* 4 Dec–4 Jan (IT); one along Thornton Gap Rd. near Sperryville, *Rappahannock* 8 Dec (IT); one at the private Jones Nature Preserve, *Rappahannock* 19 & 29 Dec (BB, IT); 1–2 along Fort Valley Rd. near Sperryville, *Rappahannock* 29 Dec–15 Feb (PL); and 2 along Little Church Ln. near Madison, *Madison* 12 Feb (LF). Observations of **House Wrens**, a rare winter visitor in the Piedmont, included 2 at the Fairfax County Landfill, *Fairfax* 15 Dec (KG), with sightings of one there in early Jan and again 10 Feb; one along Old Morgan Town Rd. near Marshall, *Fauquier* 20 Dec (ph., TPCBC); one at the Prince William County Landfill 13 & 18 Jan (GG, ph. DN); one at Riverbend Pk., *Fairfax* 15 Jan (RH, KL); and one at the Laurel Hill Equestrian Center, *Fairfax* 20 Jan (NN). A **Sedge Wren**, a rare visitor inland, was observed at Occoquan Bay NWR 13 Dec (KG), with one seen there again 20 Feb (EP). A **Marsh Wren**, a rare winter visitor in the Piedmont, continued from the late fall at

Leopold's Preserve, *Prince William* 3 Dec (FA); the Piedmont late date is 20 Oct. There were many reports of **Gray Catbird** and **Brown Thrasher**, both typically rare but increasing winter visitors, throughout the Region. A Brown Thrasher lingered at Aquia Landing for most of Jan, seen again 22 & 23 Feb (m. obs.); 2 individuals found at Occoquan Bay NWR 2 Jan (PK) were seen sporadically through the end of the period.

GROSBEAKS — BUNTINGS

There continued to be numerous reports of **Evening Grosbeaks**, making an unusually strong southward irruption this fall/winter, throughout the Region and period in groups of up to 14; none seemed to linger at one spot for long, except for a lone bird that remained for 2 weeks in early Jan near Ruth, *Madison* (IT). A **Common Redpoll**, one of a handful of records in the state in this irruption year, was seen at a residence along the Blue Ridge Mtns. w. of Bluemont, *Loudoun* 13 Feb (JSw). Similarly rare outside of irruptions were 17 **Red Crossbills** seen at Elkswallow, *Rappahannock* 3 Dec (a. r. IT) and 13 again 5 Dec. The irruption of **Pine Siskins** continued this period, with numerous observations across the Region, including so-called “green-morph” individuals (whose records in the state consist of 2 others this winter along the Blue Ridge Mtns. s. of the Region and only 2 in earlier years, both on the Eastern Shore) seen at the private Jones Nature Preserve, *Rappahannock* 19 Dec (BB, ph. IT) and near Ruth, *Madison* 18 Jan (IT). There were several reports of **Lapland Longspurs**, whose rare winter visits to the Piedmont are mainly in the extreme n., but all of these were more s.: 2–5 were at various locations around Remington (*Fauquier*, as well as *Culpeper*) in early Feb, with 2 first found at Woodward Turf Farm, *Fauquier* 1–2 Feb (TMD, ph. m. obs.); a remarkable 72 were seen along Freemans Ford Rd. near Marshall, *Fauquier* 3 Feb (ph. BB, ph. DLeb, NN). More distant reports of Lapland Longspurs included one along Hebron Church Rd., *Madison* 1 Feb (IT) and 2 along Dumfries

Rd. ne. of Catlett, *Fauquier* 14 Feb (ph. KG, v. r. BHo, SS). Observations of **Grasshopper Sparrows**, a species with only four known winter records in the Piedmont, included one well-ph. 11 Dec (TH) at Discovery Blvd. pond, *Prince William*, where one had also been seen 20 Nov, and along Grassdale Rd. se. of Remington, *Fauquier* 12 Feb (ph. SH), where it was seen again 21 Feb. A **Clay-colored Sparrow** was seen along Locust Dale Rd. nw. of Rapidan, *Culpeper*



Harris's Sparrow ph. near Rapidan, *Culpeper* by Jan Kool, 19 Jan 2021.

31 Dec (JStr). A **HARRIS'S SPARROW**, only the fifth record in the entire Piedmont as well as fifth in the Region, was seen along Locust Dale Rd. just n. of Rapidan, *Culpeper* 26 Dec (ph. AR), where it was seen by m. obs. through 26 Jan. Continuing the end-of-year rare sparrow blitz along Locust Dale Rd. n./nw. of Rapidan, *Culpeper* was a report of a **Vesper Sparrow**, a



Green-tailed Towhee ph. at Sky Meadows SP by Mike Sciortino, 13 Jan 2021.

rare winter visitor in the Region, 26 Dec (TMD). One was also found along Grassdale Rd. se. of Remington, *Fauquier* 1 Feb (TMD), with up to 5 seen and ph. by m. obs. through 21 Feb; 2 were along Hebron Church Rd. near Madison,

Madison 2 Feb (BB); and one was at a residence s. of Hood, *Madison* 12 Feb (HB). A **GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE**, only the sixth state record and the first in the Region, was found at Sky Meadows SP, *Fauquier* 26 Dec (ph. CF), where it was seen and ph. by many through 30 Jan. A **Yellow-headed Blackbird**, just the fifth Regional record and fourth in the entire Piedmont, was seen at the Home Depot in Warrenton, *Fauquier* 13 Dec (TMD). Reports of **Baltimore Orioles**, fairly rare in the inland Coastal Plain and rare in the Piedmont in winter, included, among others, 1–2 that lingered in the Dyke Marsh/Belle Haven area 10 Dec–12 Jan (ph. KG); 2 along Indian Pt. Rd., *Stafford* 15 Dec (ph., BCBC); and singles that lingered at residences in Vienna, *Fairfax* 1 Jan–26 Feb (ph. BC); Purcellville, *Loudoun* 5 Jan–2 Feb (ph. JY); and Leesburg, *Loudoun* 31 Jan through the end of the period (ph. JP). An impressive 335 **Rusty Blackbirds**, a declining species in the East, were seen in a wetland along Thoms Rd., *Culpeper* 22 Jan (ph. TMD). An **Ovenbird**, apparently only the second winter record in the entire Piedmont, was clearly ph. along Taylor St., Arlington 18–24 Jan (AM). A **Black-and-white Warbler**, a species with just one winter record in the Region in eBird, was seen at a residence in *Alexandria* 2 Feb (ph. PH). An **Orange-crowned Warbler**, rare inland in winter, was seen at Jones Pt. Pk., *Alexandria* 6 Jan (DLed). There were several sightings of **Common Yellowthroats**, typically a fairly rare winter visitor or resident, a couple of which lingered well into mid-winter. A **Northern Parula**, a species with only one previous winter record in the Region, spent 2 weeks at Dyke Marsh and nearby Belle Haven, first seen 28 Nov and last 11 Dec (ph. m. obs.), then it apparently moved to Jones Pt. Pk., *Alexandria*, less than 2 mi. n., where it was first seen and ph. 19 Dec (DCCBC) and lingered through Jan. A second bird was found at Sully Woodlands, *Fairfax* 18 Jan (JC). There were many reports of **Palm Warblers**, previously a rare early winter visitor inland, expanding their stays throughout the winter. Similarly, winter reports of **Pine Warblers** are no longer overly rare; there were

many in each month including singles that lingered at residences in Lake Ridge, *Prince William* 14 Dec–14 Feb (LC, AJ) and Purcellville, *Loudoun* 25 Jan–14 Feb (JY). A **Yellow-throated Warbler**, a species with just 2 winter records in the Region (including one that spent last winter at the same location), was seen and ph. by many at Dyke Marsh from mid-fall through 18 Dec (ph. EE) and again 1 Feb (SS), and probably the same bird nearby at Hunting Cr. Bridge, *Fairfax* 27 Jan (KG). **Painted Buntings** made remarkable incursions into the Region, with scattered reports of likely several different birds. This is especially notable since the past 50 years have seen only five other records in the Region (three of which were in the past 2 years), all of them except one in winter. Reports included several sightings along Davis Ford Rd. se. of Manassas, *Prince William* 17 Dec–26 Feb (ph. MZ); at a residence near Springfield, *Fairfax* 24–26 Jan (VM); in the Braemar neighborhood,



Painted Bunting ph. at Villa Lee Pk., *Fairfax* by Mike Sciortino, 8 Feb 2021.

Prince William 27 Jan–1 Feb (ph. CM); and Villa Lee Pk., *Fairfax* 31 Jan (ph. CN), seen in the park and nearby nearly daily through 27 Feb.

Contributors: Alice Andors, Fred Atwood, Heather Baliko, Baxter Beamer, Matthew Bender, Will Burgogyne, Daniel Carrier (DCar), David Cazenias (DCaz), Linda Chittum, Jeff Clark, Donald Coram (DCo), Beth Czaban, Todd M. Day (TMD), John Denice, Art Drauglis, William Eckel, Ed Eder, Quinn Emmering, Chris Fafard, Linda Farnham, Peter Frechtel, Allison Gallo, Kurt Gaskill, Glen Gerada, Colt Gregory, Tobin Hardwick, Bryan Henson (BHe), Pam Herbert, Steve Hersey, Erica Hill, fBill Hohenstein (BHo), Amiel Hopkins, Robin Huff, Noah Hunter, Steve Johnson, Ada Jones, Phil Kenny, Frank Klotz, Claire Kluskens, Patty Lane, John Lankau, Kristine Lansing, Dave Larsen (DLa), Daniel Lebbin (DLeb), David Ledwith (DLed), Frank Lenik, Michael Lott (MLot), Misty Loy (MLoy), Vee Mb, Larry Meade, Allison Miller, Philip Mitchell, Ciro Monaco, Jr., Elton Morel, JP Mullen, Michael Myers, Adit N, Diane Nastase, Cynthia Nickerson, Martina Nordstrand, Nathaniel Nye, Evan Pannkuk, Scott Patterson, Jessie Pickard, Andrew Rapp, Evan Romito, Paul Salaman, Modesto Santiago (MSa), Lynn Scarlett, Michael Sciortino (MSc), Rob Shapiro (RSh), Ty Smith, Robert Stamps (RSt), James Stone (JamS), Janis Stone (JanS), Jason Strickland (JStr), Sherman Suter, Joseph Swartz (JSw), Ian Topolsky, Erik Wilkins, Jane Yocom, Mary Zambrano.

SPRING 2021

Temperatures were about 4° above average in March at both Dulles Int'l and Reagan Nat. Airports while the remainder of the period was near average. Rainfall was below average for the period, particularly in the Piedmont. The highlights this season included the continuing Clapper Rail at Huntley Meadows, a Little Gull at Burke L., an impressive flock of 158 American White Pelicans in Belmont Bay, and a Bullock's Oriole in the *Fairfax* Piedmont.

Abbreviations: Algonkian RP (Algonkian RP, *Loudoun*); Beaverdam Res. (Beaverdam Res., *Loudoun*); Belmont Bay Marina (Belmont Bay Marina, *Prince William*); Bles Pk. (Bles Pk., *Loudoun*); Bristoe Station (Bristoe Station Battlefield Pk., *Prince William*); Burke L. (Burke L. Pk., *Fairfax*); Cub Run Stream Valley Pk. (Cub Run Stream Valley Pk., *Fairfax*); Huntley Meadows (Huntley Meadows Pk., *Fairfax*); Middlesex Dr. Pond (Middlesex Dr. Pond in Chantilly, *Loudoun*); Monticello Pk. (Monticello Pk., *Alexandria*); Occoquan Bay (Occoquan Bay NWR, *Prince William*); Turquoise Trail (Turquoise Trail in Reston, *Fairfax*); Warrenton Res. (Warrenton Res., *Fauquier*)

WATERFOWL — RAILS

Six **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** were closely encountered at Four Mile Run Pk.,



Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks ph. at Four Mile Run Pk., *Alexandria* by Todd Kiraly, 26 May 2021.

Alexandria 26 May (ph. TK)—just the sixth record in the Region. Reports of late **Cackling**

Geese (the Piedmont late date is 5 Mar) included 6 at Daniels Run Pk., *Fairfax City* 3 Mar (ph. P&JW); a single at Roaches Run Waterfowl Sanctuary, *Arlington* 7 Mar (ph. ME); and 4 in Ruth, *Madison* 16 Mar (IT); the species is a fairly rare winter visitor in the Region. A **Blue-winged Teal** continued at Bles Pk. through the end of the period (ph. m. obs.), well past the species' 30 Apr Piedmont late date. A **Northern Pintail** at Occoquan Bay 25 Apr (GH) and a **Redhead** at Aquia Landing Beach Pk., *Stafford* 15 May (KG) were both well past the species' Coastal Plain late date of 15 Apr, as were sightings of **Ring-necked Duck** including 2 at Clifton Institute, *Fauquier* 1 May (JBo) and a single at the nearby Belvoir Pond, *Fauquier* 11 & 17 May (TMD). For the latter, the Gold Book confirms that small numbers often linger through May. There were numerous reports of **Greater Scaup** in the Piedmont, where the species is a rare transient and winter visitor, including some well past the 6 Mar extreme late date. They included 8 at Victory Lakes, *Prince William* 1 Mar (TH); 26 at Warrenton Res. 3 Mar (PSa); 4 at Belvoir Pond, *Fauquier* 5 Mar (TMD); singles at Beaverdam Res. 6 Mar (ph. MMy), Burke L. 19 Mar & 3 Apr (KG), and the Fairfax Co. Landfill 23 Mar (ph. KG, ph. SSu); and an extremely late pair at the ponds at the Rt. 28/234 interchange, *Manassas* 31 May (ph. SKe). Reports of **Long-tailed Ducks**, a rare transient in the Region, included 2–4 at Beaverdam Res. 12 & 15 Mar (CB) and a single at L. Fairfax Pk., *Fairfax* 31 Mar (AM). There were several May reports of **Bufflehead**, whose typical regional late date is 10 Apr; they included 2 at L. Thoreau, *Fairfax* 2 May (anon.); 2 at Warrenton Res. 8 May (PSa); and singles at Mason Neck SP, *Fairfax* 22 May (ph. EPa) and Burke L. 24 & 26 May (FA, ph. JM). Still a very rare but perhaps increasing breeder in the Region, there was a single report of **Common Merganser** with young away from the Potomac R., where the few reports of families, in Maryland waters, may or may not have been from nests on the Virginia side: a f. with 5 young was ph. at the W&OD trail crossing of Difficult Run in *Fairfax* 25 May (ph. JDo). There were a few reports of **Red-breasted**

Mergansers remaining through the end of the period, well past the species' usual regional late date of 30 Apr; the Gold Book confirmed that small numbers do linger into late May. These reports included singles at Algonkian RP (ph. m. obs.) and Occoquan RP, *Fairfax* 31 May (MFe), perhaps the same individual that spent most of May 2.5 mi. se. at Occoquan Bay NWR and that continued here into the summer. A **Ruddy Duck** seen at the Dulles Int'l Airport pond, *Loudoun* 21 May (MR, ph. JE) was well past the species' Piedmont late date of 30 Apr, although small numbers do linger into late May per the Gold Book. **Pied-billed Grebes** observed well past the Piedmont late date of 30 Apr included singles at Waples Mill Meadow Pk., *Fairfax* 19 May (ph. JC); the pond at Ashburn Village condos, *Loudoun* 23 & 28 May (NM, TT); Bles Pk. 31 May (FA); and Warrenton Res. 31 May (GB, GJ, SLar, PSa); the species is a rare summer resident in the Piedmont. Single **Red-necked Grebes**, a rare transient on upper tidal waters most years, were seen at Belmont Bay Marina 1 Mar (ph. JAl) and Occoquan Bay 18 Apr (KG, ph. SB). Reports of **Black-billed Cuckoos**, a rare transient in the Coastal Plain, especially in spring, came from Huntley Meadows 6–13 May (MMa, ph. m.obs.); Monticello Pk. 11 May (WH) with additional reports 18 & 22 May; and the Historic Port of Falmouth, *Stafford* 15 May (FA). The **Rufous Hummingbird** first observed 6 Dec at Green Spring Garden Pk., *Fairfax* lingered through 28 Mar (ph. m. obs.). Another was seen along Thornton Gap Church Rd. in Sperryville, *Rappahannock* 4 Apr (MAAn, IT). A **Chuck-will's-widow**, rare n. of the James R., was heard calling along Snake Castle Rd., *Fauquier* 28 Apr (TMD); another was a.r. in Prince William Forest Pk., *Prince William* 21–22 May (AH, AN). An **Eastern Whip-poor-will**, no longer a "common to uncommon" summer resident (beginning 5 Apr) in the Region as per the Gold Book, was heard at Huntley Meadows 13 Apr (KG). A **CLAPPER RAIL**, first seen at Huntley Meadows in Fall 2020, amazingly lingered through at least 13 Apr (ph. AB, SB, m. obs.). A **King Rail**, a rare transient in the Piedmont, was

seen at Elizabeth Mills Riverfront Pk., *Loudoun* 7 Mar (EC). The **Sora** that unexpectedly spent the winter at Huntley Meadows continued through 12 Apr (m. obs.). There were several reports of **Common Gallinules**, a rare transient in the Region, including singles at Huntley Meadows 25 Apr–2 May (ph. EPa); Bles Pk. 15 May (CB, ph. MMy, MSc); in a pond 6 mi. w. of Hume, *Fauquier* 15–24 May (ph. EL); and Middlesex Dr. Pond 15–20 May (ph. EC, ph. DLed).

CRANES — IBISES

The pair of **Sandhill Cranes** that spent most of the winter at Algonkian RP and nearby areas was seen and ph. by m. obs. through 21 Mar. Additional reports of Sandhill Cranes included 6 flying and calling over Beagle Institute Farm near Aldie, *Loudoun* 3 Mar (RJ); 22 circling and calling for an extended time over Merrifield Garden Center in Fair Oaks, *Fairfax* 7 Mar (v. r. MFa); 4 flying over Rolling Valley W. Pk., *Fairfax* 19 Apr (NNy); a single in a field along Crest Hill Rd., *Fauquier* 7 May (ph. PSa); 14 in flight over Turkeycock Run Stream Valley Pk., *Fairfax* 15 May (BHo); and a single flying north along Bull Run Post Office Rd., *Fairfax* 31 May (KG, DLed, SSu). A **Dunlin**, a rare transient in the Piedmont, was seen at Middlesex Dr. Pond 7 Apr (ph. SJ). A **Willet**, rare outside the e. Coastal Plain, was seen at Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, *Fairfax* 1 May (ph. DLed). Two **Red-necked Phalaropes**, a rare transient with only three prior



Red-necked Phalaropes ph. at Middlesex Dr., *Loudoun* by Jim Emery, 21 May 2021.

spring records in our part of the Piedmont, were seen at Middlesex Dr. Pond 21 May (ph. FA).

Reports of late **Bonaparte's Gulls**, with a Regional late date of 30 Apr, included 12 at Aquia Landing Beach Pk. *Stafford* 15 May (NVBC), with 8 there 18 May (JG), and singles at Algonkian RP 15 May (MSc) and L. Audubon, *Fairfax* 26 May (PH). A **LITTLE GULL**, a species with only a handful of inland records in the state, was seen at Burke L. 31 Mar & 1 Apr (FA, ph. m. obs.). A **Laughing Gull**, a rare spring transient in the Piedmont, was seen at Beaverdam Res. 14 Mar (DLA, CL); the Piedmont extreme early date is 26 Mar. A fairly rare transient in the Piedmont, a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was seen at Beaverdam Res. 3 Mar (FA). Reports of **Caspian Terns** in the Piedmont, where the species is a rare transient, included singles at L. Fairfax Pk., *Fairfax* 17 Apr (ph. AM), with 3 present 20 Apr (RMi, SR); Warrenton Res. 19 Apr (PSa); and Vienna Res., *Fairfax* 24 Apr (ph. JS); 2 at Dulles Int'l Airport, *Loudoun* 26 Apr (SLau); 3 at Burke L. 30 Apr (CF); and one at Broadlands Wetlands Nature Preserve, *Loudoun* 9 May (ER). Reports of early **Forster's Terns** in the Coastal Plain (early date 10 Apr) included one at Pohick Bay RP, *Fairfax* 16 Mar (KG), with up to 5 there through 29 Mar (EPa); 4 at Mason Neck NWR, *Fairfax* 22 Mar (ph. AH, AN); and 3 at Occoquan Bay 30 Mar (JAl). Reports of Forster's Terns in the Piedmont, where they are fairly rare transients, included singles at Algonkian RP 11 Apr (BHe) and L. Accotink, *Fairfax* 18 Apr (BL); 3 at L. Pelham, *Culpeper* 7 May (ph. KK), with 15 there 10 May (ph. KK); and one at L. Audubon, *Fairfax* 11 May (JP), the latter outside of the extreme dates of 5 Apr–9 May. Reports of **Royal Terns**, rare upriver in spring, included a single at Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, *Fairfax* 10 Apr (EPo, GP) and 2 at Occoquan Bay 18 Apr (KG, ph. AB). An impressively large flock of 158 **American White Pelicans**, a species with few records in the Region, was seen from Belmont Bay Marina 30 Mar (ph. LC, AJ), with dwindling groups seen as far as 7 mi. away through 18 Apr, when 8 were seen (MG, TTy). An **American Bittern**, a fairly rare transient in the Piedmont, was first seen at Bles Pk. 29 Apr (ph. NH) where it continued through 3 May. A **Great Egret** seen

at Aquia Harbor, *Stafford* 11–14 Mar (AG) was well ahead of the species' 25 Mar Coastal Plain early date; the species is a rare winter resident away from the coast. **Green Herons** ahead of the Piedmont early date of 10 Apr were seen at the Reston Nat. Golf Course, *Fairfax* 28 Mar (GI) and Northern Fauquier Community Pk., *Fauquier* 31 Mar (HAb, MAb). A **Snowy Egret**, a rare transient in the Piedmont, was seen along Janes Ln. in Marshall, *Fauquier* 16 May (LHo). There were at least 10 reports of **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** in the Piedmont, where they are typically a rare and local transient and summer resident; these included one first seen 28 Mar at The Cove, *Fairfax* (AC), which continued through the end of the period; one first seen 18 Apr at Vienna Res., *Fairfax* (ph. JAs, DLed), which also continued through the end of the period; and a pair observed regularly through at least the first half of May at a drainage pond along Cub Run Stream Valley Pk. Trail (AW). A rare transient in most of the Region, 10 **Glossy Ibises** made an appearance at the Lowes Is. ponds, *Loudoun* 2 May (DCz); a single was at the Middlesex Drive Pond 12 May (SJ).

RAPTORS — GNATCATCHERS

At the end of May, there were at least 20 sightings of **Osprey** in the Piedmont, where the usual late date is 15 May; the species is a rare summer resident in the Piedmont. Late **Northern Harriers** included 2 at Morven Pk., *Loudoun* 10 May (HAi) and singles in Purcellville, *Loudoun* 11 May (SH); near Upperville, *Fauquier* 11 May (IT, AV); Clifton Institute, *Fauquier* 12 May (BHa); and along Grassdale Rd., *Fauquier* 18 May (TMD, IT). A **Golden Eagle** was observed in flight s. of Stony Man Trail in Shenandoah NP, *Madison* 11 Apr (JH). **Mississippi Kites** were reported returning to established and new breeding locations in May, continuing the trend of recent years, and one early-returning bird seen in se. *Loudoun* 29 Apr (GN) preceded the Piedmont extreme early date of 2 May. There were at least 20 confirmed reports of both **Merlin**

and **Peregrine Falcon** in the Piedmont, where both are typically rare transients. A single report of Peregrine Falcon came from the Mountain/Valley sector, where it is also a rare transient: along the Stony Man Trail in Shenandoah NP, *Madison* 23 May (SM); this bird was present well past the usual late date of 10 May. Reports of **Olive-sided Flycatchers**, typically a rare transient in the Region, especially in spring, were numerous this season. They included sightings at Huntley Meadows 8 May (ph. EPa); Walker Nature Center, *Fairfax* 8 May (ph. JDa); Long Branch Nature Preserve, *Arlington* 10 May (EM); Julie J. Metz Wetland Bank, *Prince William* 12 May (ph. JAl); Silver L. RP, *Prince William* 13 May (ph. TH, PSi); a residence near Lake Ridge, *Prince William* 15 May (ph. LC, AJ); the Woods of Warrenton, *Fauquier* 19 May (GS, SSl); ne. Syria, *Madison* 25 May (SM); and the Turquoise Trail 30–31 May (ph. PH). Likewise a rare transient in the Region, more so in the spring and away from the n. and the Blue Ridge, a **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** was seen at Poplar Ford Pk., *Fairfax* 31 May (ph. DLeb). Reports of **Alder Flycatchers**, another rare transient in spring in the Region, included singles at Mason Neck NWR, *Fairfax* 9 May (v. r. AN) and the Woods at Warrenton Trail, *Fauquier* 15 May (v. r. TMD, NNe); 2 at Bristoe Station 21 May (ph. TH) with one seen again 29 May (EW); and one at Widewater SP, *Stafford* 23 May (JAl). A **White-eyed Vireo** seen at Daniels Run Pk., *Fairfax City* 3 Apr (ph. DCh, TC) preceded the Piedmont extreme early date of 5 Apr. **Blue-headed Vireos** both preceded and overstayed the species' Piedmont and Coastal Plain early and late dates of 10 Apr–10 May: birds were seen at a residence in Groveton, *Fairfax* 17 Mar (QE); Mountain Run L., *Culpeper* 21 Mar (JW); a residence in Gainesville, *Prince William* 19 May (SKi); Leesylvania SP, *Prince William* 21 May (ph. JAl); and Bessie Bell Farm near Castleton, *Rappahannock* 21 May (BB, AD). A **Philadelphia Vireo**, a rare transient in the Region in spring, was seen at Keene Mill Elementary School, *Fairfax* 9 May (P&JW). A

probable **Bank Swallow** was seen at Burke L. 1–2 Apr (KG), preceding the species' Piedmont extreme early date of 5 Apr. Although noted only as an uncommon summer resident in the Piedmont, **Cliff Swallow** has only a handful of nesting reports each spring/summer, which to date have included a bird collecting mud at Woodglen L., *Fairfax* 29 Apr (P&JW), where they have reportedly nested for the past 1–2 years; and 5 birds attending 3–5 nests under the bridge at Bull Run Marina RP, *Fairfax* 25 May (ph. KG, SSu). **Brown Creepers** seen at Riverbend Pk., *Fairfax* 11 May (anon.) and at a residence near Lake Ridge, *Prince William* 22 May (VH) were present well past the species' late date of 25 Apr for the Piedmont, where they are a rare summer visitor. Seen well before the 10 Apr regional early date were **House Wrens** at Fort C.F. Smith Pk., *Arlington* 13 Mar (KW) and Huntley Meadows 31 May (CP, FR). **Sedge Wrens**, a rare transient w. of the Chesapeake Bay, were seen at Leopold's Preserve, *Prince William* 15 Apr (TH) (30 Apr is the Piedmont early date) and Huntley Meadows 9 May (BJ). **Winter Wrens** seen at several locations within Shenandoah NP up to and beyond mid-May (usual Mountain/Valley late date is 25 Apr) are likely fairly rare summer residents. A **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** was seen near Hylbrook Pk., *Prince William* 9 Mar (MSa), well before the species' Regional early date of 30 Mar.



Bullock's Oriole ph. in Fairfax Station, *Fairfax* by Gerry Hawkins, 1 Apr 2021.

MIMIDS — DICKCISSEL

Gray Catbirds seen on White's Mill Trail, *Fauquier* 10 Mar (JBo); in Sperryville, *Rappahannock* 11 Mar (LHa); at the Fauquier Education Farm, *Fauquier* 21 Mar (GS, SSI); White Oaks Pk., *Alexandria* 26 Mar (BJ); and Sky Meadows SP, *Fauquier* 27 Mar (SJ, LR) were far earlier than the Coastal Plain and Piedmont early dates of 20 and 25 Apr, respectively; the species is a rare but regular winter visitor. There continued to be scattered reports of **Evening Grosbeaks** throughout the Region into early May; the latest was a bird 14 May in *Arlington* (LY). The irruption of **Purple Finches** and **Pine Siskins** continued this period, with numerous observations across the Region. Two **Red Crossbills**, a rare and irregular transient in the Region, made an appearance near Ruth, *Madison* 8 Apr (IT). An early **Vesper Sparrow** was seen at Silver L. RP, *Prince William* 2 Mar (anon.), prior to the 15 Mar early date for the Piedmont, where the species can be a rare winter resident. A late **Savannah Sparrow** was observed at Fort Belvoir, *Fairfax* 28 May (NNy), well past the Coastal Plain late date of 10 May. A **BULLOCK'S ORIOLE** paid a highly unusual visit to a yard in Fairfax Station, *Fairfax* 13 Mar (ph. CF), remaining in the neighborhood to the delight of many through 18 Apr. The f. **Baltimore Oriole** that spent Jan and Feb at a residence in Vienna, *Fairfax* (BC) continued through 14 Apr with a notable absence of a couple weeks in mid-late Mar (the early Piedmont date is 25 Apr). **Golden-winged Warbler**, a species with increasing rarity away from the n. and the Blue Ridge, made two appearances: at Frying Pan Farm Pk., *Fairfax* 11 May (CS) and along the Turquoise Trail 13 May (MB); these are both past the Piedmont extreme late date of 10 May. The period also saw three sightings of **Brewster's Warblers**, rare in the Region especially outside of the Mountain/Valley sector: at Cub Run Stream Valley Pk. 29 Apr (EK); Huntley Meadows 1 May (ph. TK); and Goose Cr. Bridge Historic Pk., *Loudoun* 10 May (ph. WJ). **Blue-winged Warblers** made two late appearances at

Huntley Meadows: 16 May (JBe) and 31 May (BJ); 12 May is the extreme late date in the Coastal Plain where this species is a fairly rare transient. There were numerous reports of **Tennessee Warblers** in the portion of the Piedmont away from the n. and the Blue Ridge; the species is a rare spring transient in this part of the Region. Confirmed sightings included at residences in Clifton, *Fairfax* 5, 9, & 25 May (EK); Annandale, *Fairfax* 7 May (PB); *Fairfax City* 8 May (P&JW); Herndon, *Fairfax* 10 May (B&DB); Vienna, *Fairfax* 12 May (JT); Falls Church, *Fairfax* 12 May (WT); at Ranger Road Pk., *Fairfax City* 12 May (P&JW); near the W&OD Trail in Dunn Loring, *Fairfax* 13 May (MC); and on the Turquoise Trail 13 May (PH). **Mourning Warblers**, usually an even rarer transient in the Region, especially in spring, had even more confirmed sightings – certainly more than a usual spring. They included (deep breath): Broad Run, *Fauquier* 9 May (FA); Great Falls Pk., *Fairfax* 12 May (RH); Reston, *Fairfax* 12 May (PH); Monticello Pk. 14 May (DW); Frying Pan Farm Pk., *Fairfax* 15 May (CS); Cub Run Stream Valley Pk. 15 May (PM, ph. RM, ES); Oakton, *Fairfax* 19 May (FA); White Oaks Pk., *Fairfax* 20 May (BJ); Difficult Run Stream Valley Pk., *Fairfax* 21 May (JBe); Clifton, *Fairfax* 25 May (ph. KG, a.r. SSu); Four Mile Run Pk., *Alexandria* 28 & 30 May (a.r. TK); and Poplar Ford Pk., *Fairfax* 31 May (m. obs.). Sightings of early (or possibly overwintering) **Common Yellowthroats** included one at Hylbrook Pk., *Prince William* 20 Mar (MSa) and 2 at nearby Occoquan Bay 21 Mar (MSa); the Coastal Plain early date is 10 Apr. A probable early **Hooded Warbler** was heard singing at Crow's Nest NAP, *Stafford* 27 Mar (BG) in an area of the preserve where they are known breeders; the Coastal Plain extreme early date is 29 Mar. Interestingly, the spring saw more reports of **Cerulean Warblers** in the Coastal Plain, where rarer, than in the Piedmont (where just fairly rare away from the extreme nw.): a f. at Monticello Pk. 28 Apr (TA); Beverley Pk., *Alexandria* 30 Apr (ph. GF, DH); Occoquan Bay 3 May (LC, AJ); a m. at Monticello Pk. 4 May

(CC, ph. TK); Cub Run Stream Valley Pk. 5 May (AH); Ivy Hill Cemetery, *Alexandria* 6 May (DLed); and Huntley Meadows 8 May (KG), seen by m. obs. through 13 May. A lingering **Bay-breasted Warbler** was spotted at a residence in Reston, *Fairfax* 30 May (CO); the Piedmont late date is May 20. Two late **Palm Warblers** were at Occoquan Bay 16 May (MG); the Coastal Plain late date is 5 May. Although the Gold Book says “rare and very local [in the Piedmont] n. of *Albemarle* and *Louisa*,” there were at least 3 dozen confirmed reports of **Yellow-throated Warblers** in our part of the Piedmont in eBird during the period. A late **Black-throated Green Warbler** was seen at a residence in Vienna, *Fairfax* 29 May (DLeb); the Piedmont late date is 15 May. The **Painted Bunting** that was present throughout Jan and Feb at Villa Lee Pk., *Fairfax* was seen again 6 & 13 Mar (GP, EPo, DLeb). A **Dickcissel** showed up a month before the Piedmont early date of 25 Apr and was well-ph. at the Auburn Middle School wetland in Warrenton, *Fauquier* 25 Mar (JBo); the species is a rare winter visitor. Singles of this rare transient in the Region were also reported at the Thoms Rd. wetland near Remington, *Culpeper* 5–7 May (a. r. KK) and Bristoe Station 24–25 May (ph. TH).

Contributors: Heidi Aboutaj (HAb), Mariam Aboutaj (MAb), Helen Aikman (HAi), Tom Albright, John Aleknavege (JAl), Matt Anthony (MAAn), J. Ashe (JAs), Fred Atwood, Matthew Bender, Josh Berman (JBe), Anne Bielamawicz, Steve Bielamawicz, Christine Boeckel, Jennifer Bowman (JBo), P.W. Boyd, Gwen Brewer, Bill & Delia Brown, Bob Butterworth, Drew Chaney (DCh), Tim Chaney, Linda Chittum, Edward Clark, Jeff Clark, Ashley Coates, Mich Coker,

Charlie Coddington, Beth Czaban, Dave Czaplak (DCz), Jeff Davis (JDa), Todd M. Day (TMD), Johnny Doley (JDo), Art Drauglis, Maria Elkin, Jim Emery, Quinn Emmering, Michael Fahey (MFa), Chuck Feerick, Matt Felperin (MFe), Guy Foulks, Kurt Gaskill, Mark Gionet, Jim Goehring, Blake Gostelow, Alan Green, Nicole H., Deborah Hahn, Jacob Hall, Toby Hardwick, Bert Harris (BHa), Scott Harris, Lydia Hastings (LHa), Gerry Hawkins, Bryan Henson (BHe), Vicki Herrmann, William Higgins, Lucinda Hodges (LHo), Bill Hohenstein (BHo), Amiel Hopkins, Robin Huff, Pete Huffer, Graham Ishaq, Ben Jesup, George Jett, Stephen Johnson, Will Johnson, Ada Jones, Robert Justin, Seth Kellogg (SKe), Eric Kershner, Sheila Kinderman (SKi), Todd Kiraly, Kelly Krechmer, Sara Lara (SLar), David Larsen (DLa), Scott Laudermilch (SLau), Daniel Lebbin (DLeb), David Ledwith (DLed), Edmund LeGrand, Barbara Liechti, Candice Lowther, Joan Mashburn, Michael Mayer (MMA), Nathaniel Miller, Alan Mitchnick, Robbie Mitchell (RMi), Paul Mocko, Robert Mocko, Elton Morel, Shane Murphy, Michael Myers (MMY), Adit Nehra, Nick Newberry (NNe), Northern Virginia Bird Club (NVBC), Greg Nussbaum, Nathaniel Nye (NNy), Cynthia O’Connell, Julie Pangelinan, Evan Pannkuk (EPa), Eric Pourchot (EPo), Georgeta Pourchot, Coetzee Pretorius, Lynn Rafferty, Frances Raskin, Svein Ronning, Evan Romito, Marisa Rositol, Paul Salaman (PSa), Carlos Sanchez, Modesto Santiago (MSa), Michael Sciortino (MSc), Phil Silas (PSi), Greg Slader, Sarah Slader (SSl), Joshua Stafford, Erin Stocksclaeder, Sherman Suter (SSu), Jean Tatalias, Tracy Thompson, Ian Topolsky, Will Turner, Tish Tyson (TTy), Amy Venclik, Ed Wallace, Alex West, Jere Willis, Paul & Joan Woodward, Davey Wright, Katherine Wychulis, Laurie Young.

WEST



Editor: James Fox
75 Aspen Ln.
Front Royal, VA 22630
jmsfox11@gmail.com

Allegheny, Augusta, Bath, Botetourt, Clarke, Craig, Frederick, Giles, Highland, Montgomery, Page, Pulaski, Roanoke, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Shenandoah, and Warren counties; the cities of Buena Vista, Covington, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Radford, Roanoke, Salem, Staunton, Waynesboro, and Winchester.

WINTER 2020-21

Most of this winter was warmer than average, with little snow until February. The warmer temperatures probably contributed to the generally lackluster waterfowl showing. The irruption of winter finches that began last fall continued through the period, and the snows in February did bring some Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings into the roads. The mild weather also allowed several of the fall hummingbirds to linger into the winter.

Abbreviations: Blandy (Blandy Experimental Farm, *Clarke*); Broadway WTP (Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant, *Rockingham*); Roanoke STP (Roanoke Sewage Treatment Plant, *Roanoke City*); Stuarts Draft WTP (Stuarts Draft Wastewater Treatment Plant, *Augusta*); NRV Fairgrounds (New River Valley Fairgrounds, *Pulaski*).

WATERFOWL — CRANES

Three **Ross's Geese** were at the Foggy Branch Farm Ponds, *Montgomery* 7 Feb (ph. m. obs.). The only other report was one at the Broadway WTP 15 Feb (CT). As usual, **Greater White-fronted Geese** were most frequently reported in *Rockingham* and *Augusta*, with a high count of 34 in Swoope 28 Jan (ph. VL) which was a new high count for *Augusta*. Elsewhere up to 16 were at the NRV Fairgrounds Feb 15–25 (ph. PL, m. obs.). For the second straight winter a **Trumpeter**

Swan spent the winter at the Ivy St. Ponds, *Waynesboro* Dec 17–Feb 28 (m. obs.) Other sightings were two at Borden's Spring, *Clarke* 8 Feb (ph. DB) and one at Springhouse Farm, *Frederick* 17 Feb (ph. CJ). Single **Surf Scoters** were at Sunset View L., *Augusta* 7 Dec (AL) and Bells Ln., *Staunton* 15 Feb. (AL). Two **White-winged Scoters** were at Claytor L., *Pulaski* 17–27 Feb (m. obs.); two were also on the New R. near Parrott in *Montgomery* and *Pulaski* (12–18 Feb). A **Black Scoter** was at Claytor L., *Pulaski* 5 Dec (ph. JG). Two **HARLEQUIN DUCKS** were at the base of the Claytor L. Dam, *Puaski* 14–18 Feb (ph. DW, m. obs). This was the third record for the Mountains and Valleys, with all three records coming from the New R. An **Eared Grebe** was at the Broadway WTP 12–28 Feb (WL, m. obs). A number of **Rufous Hummingbirds** lingered well into the winter this year. One was at Decatur Rd., *Rockbridge* 19 Dec (JP); one was at Rainbow Trail, *Rockingham* through 2 Jan (ph. VB); and 2 were at Morris Mill Rd., *Augusta* through 14 Jan (AL). The **CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD** that appeared last fall continued at Purple Cow Rd., *Augusta* through the entire period. It was banded on 19 Jan and confirmed as a second-year male (*vide* JF). Single **Virginia Rails** were found on CBCs: one at Old Farm Rd. Pond, *Rockbridge* 19 Dec (DR) and one at Abrams Cr. Wetlands Preserve, *Frederick* 19–23 Dec (JF, JL, BL). A **Sandhill Crane** was at McCune's Pond, *Augusta* 22–24 Feb (ph. AL, m. obs), while possibly the same bird was at Cattleman Rd., *Augusta* 23 Feb (ph. MK).

SHOREBIRDS — OWLS

A very early (or late?) **Least Sandpiper** was at the Mt. Solon Pond, *Augusta* 7–8 Feb (IL, VL), providing the second winter record for *Augusta*. A **Great Black-backed Gull** was at L. Holiday, *Frederick* 25 Feb (GR). At least one **Rough-legged Hawk** was seen throughout the period in *Highland* and there were a few other reports from *Augusta* along I-81 on 21 Dec (AR) and 6 Jan (DGr, KG). Another was at Bells Ln., *Staunton* 3 Dec (DH). The **Long-eared Owl** at Blandy reappeared on 30 Dec and continued through the end of the period (ph. m. obs). Another was at Short Mt., *Shenandoah* 12 Feb (ph. KW) and yet another was in *Augusta* 27 Dec (RW). Single **Northern Saw-whet Owls** were recorded at the Highland Retreat, *Rockingham* 18 Jan (MG); Rawley Springs, *Rockingham* 20 Feb (LB); and Harpine Hwy., *Rockingham* 30 Jan (MG).

FLYCATCHERS — WARBLERS

A **SAY'S PHOEBE** was in Swoope, *Augusta* 28 Jan (ph. VL). This was the first record for *Augusta* and is the 320th species recorded in the county. **Black-capped Chickadees** appeared in small numbers at lower elevations throughout the Region. As in the fall, the number of **Evening Grosbeak** records was impressive; the high count was 60 on Spring Creek Rd., *Rockingham* 29 Jan (JT, TM). A **Common Redpoll** was at the Gala Wetlands, *Botetourt* 6–7 Feb (ph. PD, m. obs.). It

was a good winter for **Lapland Longspurs**, with records coming from *Clarke*, *Frederick*, *Rockingham*, *Augusta*, *Roanoke* and *Montgomery*. Most records came from the end of Jan and early Feb, thanks to the snow at that time. The high count was 6 at Guthrie Rd., *Augusta* 18 Dec (ph. BB, TB). Up to three **Snow Buntings** were in the Clearbrook, *Frederick* area Feb 19–20 (ph. GR, DG, JF). An **Orange-crowned Warbler** was at Blandy 3 Dec (DB).

Contributors: Logan Anderson, Baxter Beamer, Tucker Beamer, Dave Boltz, Lakota Bondurant, Will Burgoyne, Dave Carr, Drew Chaney (DCh), Sage Church, Chris Crowe, Kent Davis, Tom Davis, Annie Downing, Paul Droubay, Bob Epperson, Conor Farrell, Matt Felperin, James Fox, Kirk Gardner, David Gertsen (DGe), Matt Gingerich, Joe Girgente, Xavier Gitre, Jim Goehring, Doug & Eric Graham, Dick Grubb (DGr), Diane Holsinger, Derek Hudgens, Clark Jeschke, Harold Jones, Barry Kinzie, Mark Kosieweski, Allen Lerner, Vic Laubach, Phil Lehman, William Leigh, Ira Lianez, Jon and BJ Little, Stauffer Miller, Taylor Mizzi, Elton Morel, James Morgan, Greg Moyers (GMo), Mark Mullins, Herb Myers, Max Nootbaar, Peter Norment, John Pancake, Bill Parkin, Ashley Peele, Andrew Rapp, Gabe Ricketts, Eileen Rowan, Sarah Sullivan, Cory Taylor, John Todd, K. W. (Anonymous eBirder), Doug Weidemann, Rich Wood.

SPRING 2021

Abbreviations: Blandy (Blandy Experimental Farm, *Clarke*); Broadway WTP (Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant, *Rockingham*); Roanoke STP (Roanoke Sewage Treatment Plant, *Roanoke City*); Stuarts Draft WTP (Stuarts Draft Wastewater Treatment Plant, *Augusta*); NRV Fairgrounds (New River Valley Fairgrounds, *Pulaski*)

WATERFOWL — CRANES

Two **Black-bellied Whistling Ducks** were at Willow L., *Rockbridge* 31 May (ph. DR, m. obs.).



Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks ph. at Willow L., *Rockbridge* by Dick Rowe, 31 May 2021.

A **Ross's Goose** was at Lake Frederick, *Frederick* 7 May (ph. DB, BP). A young blue morph **Snow Goose** lingered at Broadway WTP until 19 May (ph. m.obs.), and what appeared to be the same bird was seen on a pond near Mt. Jackson, *Shenandoah* 27 May (ph. KA). A high count of **Tundra Swans** was a flock of 215 at L. Holiday, *Frederick* 7 Mar (GR). A **White-winged Scoter** lingered at Claytor L., *Pulaski* 1 Mar (ph. MM); earlier in the year, 2 were also on the New R. near Parrott in *Montgomery* and *Pulaski* 12–18 Feb (ph. LA, m. obs.). A **Black Scoter** was at Broadway WTP 24–27 Apr (DH, ph. MG, m. obs.). The **Eared Grebe** continued at the Broadway WTP from the beginning of the period until 10 May (m. obs.); another was seen at Switzer L., *Rockingham* 20 Mar (ph. WL). The **Rufous Hummingbird** in *Roanoke City* continued until 12 Mar (ph. m. obs.). The **CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD** that appeared

last fall continued at Purple Cow Rd., *Augusta* until 11 Apr (ph. RW, m. obs); by the time it left it had mostly molted into full ad. m. breeding



Calliope Hummingbird ph. on Purple Cow Rd., *Augusta* by Rich Wood, 11 Apr 2021.

plumage. A **KING RAIL** was found near Augusta Springs, *Augusta* 13 May (CH). A **Common Gallinule** was recorded flying over L. Holiday, *Frederick* the night of 24 April (a. r. GR); another was at Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve, *Frederick* 4 May (GR).

SHOREBIRDS — OWLS

A **Black-bellied Plover** was at the NRV Fairgrounds 18–25 May (MM, m. obs.). Three **Upland Sandpipers** were at Wenger's Mill, *Rockingham* 25 Apr (MG). Two **White-rumped Sandpipers** were at the Oakwood Dr. Pond, *Rockingham* 8–9 May (GM, MG); another was near Churchville, *Augusta* 12 May (ph. GMA, VL); one was at the NRV Fairgrounds May 23–25 (ph. MM, m. obs.); and one was at the Target Distribution Center Pond, *Augusta* 30 May (AL). A **Wilson's Phalarope** was at the Broadway WTP 26–27 May (ph. MG, m. obs.). More numerous were **Red-necked Phalaropes**, which seemed to experience a bit of a fallout in the Region in late May. Up to 6 were at Broadway WTP 18–26 May (m. obs.); 4 were at the Virginia Safari Pk., *Rockbridge* 21 May (ST); one was near Bridgewater, *Rockingham* 22 May (JL); and one was at the Target Distribution Center Pond, *Augusta* 25 May (ph. BB, m. obs.). A single **Caspian Tern** was at Bells Ln., *Staunton* 9 Apr (AL); 2 were at Broadway WTP 24–25 May (DH); 2 were at Silver L., *Rockingham* 25 Apr

(ph. JG1); and singles were at L. Frederick, *Frederick* 21 Apr and 5 May (DB, BP). The only **Black Tern** reported was one at Silver L., *Rockingham* 29 May (ph. MG, m. obs.). A **PACIFIC LOON** was found at L. Holiday, *Frederick* on 24 May (ph. GR, m. obs) and surprisingly lingered through the end of the period. This is the first record for the West Region and the second for the Mountains and Valleys. A **Least Bittern** was at the Shenandoah Wetlands Bank, *Augusta* 6 and 11 May (KGa, et al.). A **Snowy Egret** was at the Virginia Tech Vet School Pond, *Montgomery* 21 May (ph. DW). A **GLOSSY IBIS** flew over Shenandoah River SP, *Warren* 19 April (DB, BP). The **Long-eared Owl** that overwintered at Blandy remained until 25 Mar (ph. DC, m. obs.); another 2 were at Laurel Fork Rd., *Highland* 6 and 11 May (KGa, et al.). Single **Northern Saw-whet Owls** were reported at Bramble Hill and Laurel Fork, *Highland* 6 May (KGa et al.); 2 were reported at Laurel Fork 15 May (BH) as well.

FLYCATCHERS — WARBLERS

Single **Olive-sided Flycatchers** were near the Caldwell Fields Campground, *Montgomery* 10 May (ph. KG); at Mill Mt., *Roanoke City* 13 May (ph. KD, KG); and at Troxel Gap, *Augusta* 17 May (PW). The only **Loggerhead Shrike** reported during the period was a single bird on Summerdean Rd., *Augusta* 16 Mar (ph. VL). The **Brown-headed Nuthatches** continued along Flatwoods Rd., *Montgomery* through 6 Apr (KD,

JD). It was a good spring for **Red Crossbills** with many reports throughout the region. Most notable were two confirmed records of Type 10 or Sitka Spruce Crossbill: 8 reported at Jefferson NF–Caldwell Falls, *Montgomery* 23 Mar (ph., a. r. JG, DW, HW) and 14 at L. Holiday, *Frederick* 18 May (a. r. GR). **Evening Grosbeaks** continued throughout the region from the major irruption this past winter; the high count was 55 at the Spring Creek Pull-off, *Rockingham* 16 Apr (DH). A **Dickcissel** was along Humbert Rd., 13 May (GMa).

Contributors: Logan Anderson, Baxter Beamer, Tucker Beamer, Dave Boltz, Lakota Bondurant, Will Burgoyne, Dave Carr, Drew Chaney (DCh), Sage Church, Chris Crowe, Kent Davis, Jason Davis, Annie Downing, Bob Epperson, Conor Farrell, Matt Felperin, James Fox, Kirk Gaskill (KGa), Kirk Gardner, David Gertsen (DGe), Matt Gingerich, Joe Girgente, Xavier Gitre, Joe Glick(JG1), Jim Goehring, Doug and Eric Graham, Dick Grubb (DGu), Chance Hines, Bill Hohenstein, Diane Holsinger, Derek Hudgens, Harold Jones, Barry Kinzie, Mark Kosiewski, Allen Lerner, Vic Laubach, Phil Lehman, William Leigh, Ira Lianez, Jon and BJ Little, Gabriel Mapel (GMa), Greg Moyers, Mark Mullins, Herb Myers, Max Nootbaar, Jonathan Lee, John Pancake, Bill Parkin, Gabe Ricketts, Eileen Rowan, Sarah Sullivan, Cory Taylor, Shelby Turner, Doug Weidemann, Rich Wood.

SOUTHWEST



Editor: Logan Anderson
400 VES Rd.
Lynchburg, VA 24503
Landerson14@vt.edu

Bland, Buchanan, Carroll, Dickenson, Floyd, Grayson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe counties; the cities of Bristol, Galax, and Norton.

WINTER 2020-21

Temperatures and precipitation were higher than average across the region this winter, sticking with the apparent trend of warmer, wetter winters. This may explain why warmer weather species were recorded in higher numbers this winter than most. If there were a throughline for checklists across Southwest Virginia for the timeframe it would be “diverse.” Waterfowl, raptors, finches, and longspurs had amazing irruptions across the Eastern U.S., and Southwest Virginia, despite its lack of birders, got in on the action.

Abbreviations: Burkes Garden (Burkes Garden, *Tazewell*); Saltville (Saltville Well Fields, *Smyth*).

WATERFOWL — GREBES

Waterfowl in mountain counties typically don't reach their peak in diversity and abundance until late winter, and this was especially true this winter. Though it took until mid-Feb for decent waterfowl to arrive in the Region, this winter's waterfowl push was a big one. The first **Snow Goose** of the period was seen in Burkes Garden 22 Dec (MH, GK), with additional reports from the Exit 14 ramp, *Washington* 3 Jan (ph. CL) and Green Springs Rd., *Washington* 18 Feb (ph. CC). Five were seen at Rural Retreat L., *Wythe* 27 Jan (AB), along with two **Ross's Geese**. Burkes Garden hosted 2 **Cackling Geese** 22–29 Dec (ph.

CD, DS) and a single bird was seen at the ever-producing goose spot, Rural Retreat L., *Wythe* 15 Feb (AB). A large movement of diving ducks swept the Region in Feb, the highlight of which was **Canvasbacks** that were seen in *Smyth*, *Tazewell*, *Washington*, and *Wythe*. Notable duck counts included 22 **Redheads** at Saltville 18 Feb (VF, MH); 81 **Ring-necked Ducks** Falls Mill L., *Tazewell* 1 Dec (CD); 70 **Lesser Scaup** at Saltville 27 Feb (AB, MP); and 25 **Common Mergansers** at Saltville 17 Feb (AB). **Common Goldeneye** were seen across the region, with one at Burkes Garden 18 Feb (ph. DS, CD, DO) and 3 in Saltville from 20–28 Feb (ph. KC). **Red-breasted Mergansers** were recorded four times in the Region this winter, with a high count of 12 in Burkes Garden 13 Feb (ph. CD). A high count of 6 **Horned Grebes** was found at Cavitts Creek Pk., *Tazewell* 21 Feb (CD), and *Tazewell* was the only county to record the species over the period.

RAILS — FALCONS

Some **Virginia Rails** stuck around this winter or returned early, with records from Saltville 21–27 Feb (AB, MP) and Burkes Garden 23 Feb (ph. DS). Both locations are known to host potential, if not confirmed, breeding rails in the spring and summer. A single **American Woodcock** was reported at the Laurel Fork Trailhead, *Grayson* 20 Dec (CC). The only **Herring Gull** came from Claypool Hill, *Tazewell* 13 Feb (CD). One **Common Loon** was found at Rural Retreat L., *Wythe* 25 Feb (ph. AB) and continued at the location past the period. Clear Creek L., *Bristol*

had a single record of an ad. **Black-crowned Night-Heron** on 30 Jan (ph. CC). **Rough-legged Hawks** have had a terrific winter across the East and Midwest, and Burkes Garden pulled through with a single juv. seen from 15–22 Dec (NR, DM, LO, MH, ph. GK). **Golden Eagles** were found at Burkes Garden 15–29 Dec (NR, m. obs.); one off of I-77 near Rocky Gap, *Bland* (JB, CW); a single bird on Bishop Rd., *Washington* 20 Dec (CC); and one on Cove Rd., *Wythe* 27 Dec (JHB) and 20 Feb (MR). Two **Barn Owls** were found in a silo at Burkes Garden, with sightings from 22 Dec to 13 Feb (DS, CD), and another bird was also seen in a silo in Meadowview, *Washington* 29 Dec (ph. AN). **Short-eared Owls** also had an exceptional year in sw. Virginia with records from Burkes Garden 22 Dec (DS) and a few hunting the slopes of Southern Gap, *Buchanan* 8–14 Jan (DR, ph. DO). There were two records of **Peregrine Falcon** for the region: one from Cumberland Gap Historic Pk., *Lee* 10 Jan (ph. PG) and another in *Galax* 12 Jan (ph. DK).

SHRIKES — WARBLERS

A **Loggerhead Shrike** was spotted on Chestnut Ridge in Burkes Garden 23 Dec (DS), and another was found off Cross Rds., *Russell* 30 Dec (AN) – lending further proof that *Russell* may host one of the most robust shrike populations in the state. The first **Tree Swallow** report of the season came from Burkes Garden 24 Feb (DS). **Black-capped Chickadees** irrupted across the valley and ridge region and may have been present throughout sw. Virginia, but the only verified records came from Burkes Garden 20 Dec–2 Feb (m. obs.). The **Brown-headed Nuthatches** at South Holsten L., *Washington* continued at their usual hangout spot this winter, with a report 27 Dec (RL, MR). A single **House Wren** was reported off Red Stone Rd., *Washington* 20 Dec (CC). **Evening Grosbeaks**

seemed to be few and far between compared to Nov., with the only records coming from Compton Mt., *Buchanan* 1 Dec (ph. RM) and Meadowview, *Washington* 11 Dec (ph. MH). Our other irruptive winter finches, **Purple Finch** and **Pine Siskin**, were present at feeders in nearly every county within the region. **Red Crossbill** flocks were found on a couple of occasions, most likely due in no small part to the irruption of Type 10 (Sitka Spruce) birds out of the north. A single crossbill was reported from outside of Castlewood, *Russell* 14 Jan (AN), and a large flock of 16 was observed at Washington County Pk., *Washington* 20 Feb (ph. MR). A juv. **Lapland Longspur** was seen at Southern Gap, *Buchanan* 13–14 Jan (DR, ph. DO), and an ad. m. was spotted at the same location 21 Feb (ph. DO). Lapland Longspur wasn't the only thing Southern Gap produced this winter, as a month before the first longspur report there was an **American Tree Sparrow** seen 18 Dec (ph. DR). **Rusty Blackbirds** were reported from *Buchanan* 3 Dec (RM); *Wythe* 27 Dec (ph. ER); and a high count of 8 out of Clintwood, *Dickenson* 1 Dec (SW). A single **Palm Warbler** was seen near Clinchport, *Scott* 15 Dec (NR), but if you wanted winter Palm Warbler in sw. Virginia, *Washington* was the place to be with six records in Dec.

Contributors: Jay Huila Balvin (JHB), Lisa Benish, Jessie Berry, Allen Boynton, Heather Bunch, Cade Campbell, Katie Cordle, Clancey Deel, Vicky Frye, Kevin Graff, Callie Hietala, Monica Hoel, Matthew Hosmer, David Kennedy, Garland Kitts, Chrissy Lay, Jeff Lemons, Richard Lewis, Dwayne Martin, Roger Mayhorn, Adrianna Nelson, Lori Owenby, Daryl Owens, Marsha Pate, Jeff Phillips, David Raines, Nick Ramsey, Emily Reasor, Mike Resch, David Schlabach, Susan Wilder, Chris Wood.

SPRING 2021

The average temperatures across the Region trended higher than usual. The season was characterized by several cold spells, making for an interesting spring temperature-wise. Highlights for the Region over the period came from Evening Grosbeaks and numerous shorebirds.

WATERFOWL — SHOREBIRDS

Common Mergansers have certainly made themselves at home on the stony creeks of sw. Virginia. Many individuals were observed across the Region, with one breeding record from Breaks Interstate Pk. of 2 females with 15 ducklings in *Buchanan* 3 May (DR). **Northern Bobwhites** persist in the Region across a smattering of locations with at least 2 at Southern Gap, *Buchanan* 9 & 15 May (DO, DR) and a second eBird record for *Wise* 19 May (LR). **Eurasian Collared-Doves** are being found in more locations across the I-81 corridor. A new location for this species was found in the town of Wytheville, *Wythe* 31 May (EA, MA). Only one **Black-billed Cuckoo** was observed for the entire period, and it was seen at Natural Tunnel SP, *Scott* 11 May (ph. AB), representing a second eBird record for that county. The Regional high count for **Virginia Rail** was noted this winter in *Wise* but this spring has since seen that record ousted with an outstanding count of 7 from Burkes Garden, *Tazewell* 13 May (CD, ph. DS). **Semipalmated Plover** also experienced a Regional high count of 4 from the Saltville Well Ponds, *Smyth* 12 May (ph. LA, RC). A lone individual was observed at Cavitts Creek Pk., *Tazewell* 10 May (ph. CD). Shorebirding in sw. Virginia was above average this spring with a total of eleven species recorded. Only two checklists were submitted with **Least Sandpiper**, one from the Blue Ridge Discovery Center, *Smyth* 10 May (CC) and the other from Burkes Garden, *Tazewell* 13 May (ph. DS). A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was also observed in Burkes Garden, *Tazewell* 13 May (DS). For the second spring in

a row, **Red-necked Phalaropes** were reported in above-average numbers across the state. Southwest Virginia had its first record, with 3 seen from the Saltville Well Ponds, *Smyth* 22 May (BB), cementing this location as one of the Region's best shorebird spots. A **WHITE-FACED IBIS** at Burtons Pond, *Bland* 5 Apr (ph. K&DO) was a truly exceptional record; not only was it the first record for the Mountains & Valleys, but it was also the first record anywhere in the state west of Richmond.



White-faced Ibis ph. in *Bland* by Karen Owens, 5 Apr 2021.

OWLS — WARBLERS

Whitetop Mt. continues to be one of the best locations for **Northern Saw-whet Owl** in the state. One was seen on the mountain in *Grayson* 11 Mar (CD), and 3 were heard in *Smyth* 23 Apr (BRDC, IL, v. r. SP). **Evening Grosbeaks** persisted in several locations into the spring including 3 spotted at Breaks Interstate Pk., *Buchanan* 10 Apr (ph. DO, RM); 12 at Happy Hollow Rd., *Buchanan* 20 Apr (ph. KK); and one f. at Camp Henry, *Smyth* 8 May (MS). **Lincoln's Sparrow** tends to be a difficult spring bird for sw. Virginia. The first record of this species came from Gose Mill Pond, *Tazewell* 9 May (DS) and the second came as a first county record at Riverstone Organic Farm, *Floyd* 10 May (LAn). The region recorded the lowest number of **Golden-winged Warblers** for the spring since 2015. The only record of this species came from The Cove, *Tazewell* 28 Apr (CD).

Contributors: Lee Adams, Logan Anderson (LAn), Erin Anthony, Matt Anthony, Blue Ridge

Discovery Center (BRDC), Bryan Boyd, Cade Campbell, Rebecca Currin, Clancey Deel, Kelly Krechmer, Roger Mayhorn, Daryl Owens, Karen

& Dean Owens (K&DO), Silas Powell, David Raines, Leighton Reid, Ireland Saxton, David Schlabach, Melanie Smith.

CENTRAL



Editor:

Baxter Beamer

1218 University City Blvd., Apt. 23B

Blacksburg, VA 24060

barobe09@gmail.com

Albemarle, Amherst, Bedford, Campbell, Caroline, Fluvanna, Goochland, Greene, Hanover, Louisa, Nelson, Orange, Powhatan, and Spotsylvania counties; the cities of Charlottesville, Fredericksburg, and Lynchburg.

WINTER 2020-21

Overall, this winter offered impressive diversity to hardy birders who braved frequent foul weather and bouts of freezing temperatures. The mild start to the winter, which coddled late passerines and other would-be winter strays, soon shifted to periods of brutal cold in late January and February, with above average snowfall in many parts of the Region. Still, an impressive number of fair-weather species were able to survive harsher conditions, providing some remarkable records for the Region. Exceptionally poor waterfowl numbers through much of the early winter were bolstered by the polar vortex event that affected the Great Lakes, sending many deep-water diving duck species to the Region in mid-February. Numerous boreal finches from the fall's irruption were welcome additions to backyard regulars throughout the winter. Highlight species included Greater White-fronted Goose; Surf Scoter; Long-tailed Duck; Red-necked Grebe; Rufous Hummingbird; Virginia Rail; Sandhill Crane; Laughing & Lesser Black-backed Gulls; Snowy Owl; Loggerhead Shrike; Marsh Wren; Evening Grosbeak; Lapland Longspur; and Nashville, Blackburnian, and Wilson's Warblers.

GEESE — GREBES

Atypical for the winter period, there were no **Ross's Goose** reports. Several **Snow Geese** were found: 2 at Stillfreds Pond, *Albemarle* 23 & 27 Dec (BB, TB); 2 at Green Springs, *Louisa* 16 Dec (AR); one at W. R. Rd. Farm, *Fluvanna* (ph. CL);

and one at McDuff, *Caroline* 27 Feb (MA, EA). There were only two **Greater White-fronted Goose** reports; 2 were at Stonehouse L. Pk., *Amherst* 30 Jan (ph. AF, m. obs.) and later moved to Mill Cr. L. Pk. (ph. MH); another was at L. Vista, *Bedford* 7–10 Feb (ph. ML, m. obs.) The cold snap that delivered the only notable waterfowl influx did not seem to bring this species to the Region. **Cackling Geese** numbers were quite poor in comparison to recent years, with only one at Sportsplex, *Spotsylvania* 15 Jan (ph. BB) and 2 at McDuff, *Caroline* 27 Feb (MA, EA). The only **Tundra Swans** reported in the western Piedmont portion of the Region were 4 at Stillfreds Pond, *Albemarle* 19–27 Feb (ph. BB, TB, m. obs.) The disrupted polar vortex sent arctic air to the Great Lakes region in mid-Feb, resulting in the only deep freeze in an abnormally ice-free winter there. States s. and e. of L. Erie saw a significant influx of displaced waterfowl post-freeze. In the Region, **Canvasback** and **Lesser** and **Greater Scaup** were some of the most visible arrivals from the Great Lakes as well as **Redhead**, **Common Goldeneye**, and **Horned Grebe** in smaller numbers. These species were nearly absent from the Region prior to 13 Feb. A **Surf Scoter** was reported at Thrashers L. Pk., *Amherst* 15 Dec (ph. MB) and lingered there until 4 Jan. It was also a good winter for **Long-tailed Ducks**, which were reported in good numbers from several locations: Two at Northeast Res., *Louisa* 16 Dec (ph. AR); one at L. Monticello, *Fluvanna* 17 Feb (ph. TO); up to 5 at Bremono Bluff, *Fluvanna* 19–21 Feb (ph. CF, m. obs.); and 5 at L. Anna, *Louisa/Spotsylvania* 21–24 Feb (BB, TMD). Especially notable in an “off” winter

for the species, a **Red-necked Grebe** was at L. Anna in both *Louisa* and *Spotsylvania* 6–31 Dec (ph. AR).

HUMMINGBIRDS — SHRIKES

A **Rufous Hummingbird** arrived at a feeder in the Greenbrier neighborhood of *Charlottesville/Albemarle* 1 Dec (ph. DC) and successfully overwintered until the end of the period. The bird was banded 7 Jan and confirmed as a HY f. Rufous (BP). **Virginia Rail** is likely an underdetected and very rare winter resident in the Region, and one was at Hidden Swamp, *Albemarle* 8 & 23 Feb (BB, TB). A lone **Sandhill Crane** once again returned to Green Springs, *Louisa* and was encountered on 15 Dec (a. r. WB) and 7 Jan (ph. SH, WH, NT). Another was seen near Liberty University, *Lynchburg* 21 Feb (PE), and 3 were photographed just west of Yancey Mills, *Albemarle* that same date (ph. MH). A **Laughing Gull** was at L. Anna, *Louisa* 6 Dec (ph. AR). Single **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were present there 6 & 29 Dec (ph. AR, MN), and 4 were present 21 Feb (BB, TMD). An **Osprey** was a truly unexpected midwinter sight at Elkton Farm Rd., *Bedford* 28 Jan (ph. MB). Accidental visitors to the Region even in good winters, a **Snowy Owl** was an exciting discovery at Spotsylvania Solar, *Spotsylvania* 30 Dec (ph. SN). **Short-eared Owl** numbers were once again low at Green Springs, *Louisa*, with 2 on 10 Dec (MN) representing the high count. Single **Northern Saw-whet Owls** were found at High Peak Rd., *Amherst* 2 Dec (MH) and at an annual wintering site at Beagle Gap in SNP, *Albemarle* 2 Dec (DS). Two **Peregrine Falcons** were found: at Carysbrook Plantation, *Fluvanna* 6 Jan (ph. NT) and another at L. Anna, *Spotsylvania* 10 Feb (ph. AB). Two **Loggerhead Shrikes** were reported, above average for this nearly-extirpated species: one at Stinson Vineyards, *Albemarle* 20 Dec–25 Feb (ph. JC, m. obs.) and another at Old Rose Mill Rd., *Nelson* 22 Dec (BL).

CHICKADEES — DICKCISSEL

Black-capped Chickadees had a sizable irruption into the Region this winter, and multiple individuals were documented in *Albemarle*, *Bedford*, and *Charlottesville*. **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were common and widespread following a large fall irruption, and were reported from every county and city within the Region. Very rare midwinter, a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** lingered at Powhatan SP, *Powhatan* 13 Jan (LS). **House Wrens** were unusually widespread in the Piedmont section of the Region. Up to 2 were at Whittman Rd., *Goochland* 6 Dec–17 Jan (ph. AB); another was at Pleasant Grove Pk., *Fluvanna* 10 Jan (ph. NT); one was at Ragged Mountain Natural Area, *Albemarle* 29 Jan & 11 Feb (ph. SH, WH, NT); and one was at Galt's Mill Marsh, *Amherst* 23 Feb (ph. MB). Extremely rare for the Region in winter, a **Marsh Wren** was found at Hidden Swamp, *Albemarle* 8 Feb (BB). The massive irruption of **Evening Grosbeaks** from fall 2020 brought numbers of the species not recorded for three decades to the Region. Many of these boreal wanderers overwintered in the Region, delighting lucky bird feeders throughout the winter. Grosbeaks were reported from *Albemarle*, *Amherst*, *Campbell*, *Caroline*, *Fluvanna*, *Goochland*, *Hanover*, *Louisa*, *Orange*, *Powhatan*, and *Spotsylvania*. The peak count of 68 came from a private residence in *Amherst* 3 Jan (m. obs.). **Pine Siskin** and **Purple Finch** numbers were reduced compared to the fall, but good numbers persisted throughout the Region this winter. The above average snowfall brought 3 **Lapland Longspurs**, not annually reported in the Region, to Stillfreds Pond, *Albemarle* 19 Feb (ph. BB, TB) and at least one lingered there until 25 Feb. **Chipping Sparrow** numbers were abnormally high across the Region, with a peak count of 250 from Fox Run Ln., *Albemarle* 16 Jan (RK). **Vesper Sparrows** were also present in above average numbers across the state, and one was at Warbler Cr. Farm, *Bedford* 12 Feb (BE). Single overwintering **Baltimore Orioles** were reported from feeders in *Albemarle*, *Bedford*, *Charlottesville*, and *Spotsylvania*. A **Nashville**

Warbler was discovered at the Morton Dr. Rivanna Trail, *Charlottesville* (ph. TB) 31 Dec, and continued there until at least 18 Jan. One of only a handful of continental winter records of the species, a **Blackburnian Warbler** was a mind-boggling companion to the aforementioned Nashville 31 Dec & 2 Jan (ph. TB). A continuing **Wilson's Warbler** at Riverview Pk. 2 Jan (ph. TB) capped off a truly impressive roster of winter warblers in *Charlottesville*. An unseasonal **Indigo Bunting** was photographed at Montpelier, *Orange* (ph. KK) 23 Jan. A **Dickcissel** visited a private feeder at Mosby Mt., *Albemarle* 15–20 Dec (ph. KS).

Contributors: Matt Anthony, Erin Anthony, Baxter Beamer, Tucker Beamer, Michael Boatwright, Allen Bryan, Joe Coppock, Todd M. Day (TMD), Patty Elton, Bob Epperson, Conor Farrell, Abigail Follmer, Mary Hopkins, Matthew Hosmer, Reid Keller, Kelly Krechmer, Carson Lambert, BJ Little, Margaret Lyons, Sean Nestor, Max Nootbaar, Travis O'Neil, Bruce Peterjohn, Andrew Rapp, Kieran Sean, David Shoch, Len Smock, Nik Teichmann.

SPRING 2021

A good variety of migrants was encountered this spring, with several standout species. Long periods with no rainfall, especially in May, ensured that no terns were detected, though shorebird diversity was still good. There were few surprises when it came to neotropical passerines, though most species put on a good showing for winter-weary birders. However, winter persisted well past the calendar in the form of numerous lingering finches after the massive irruption flight from the previous fall. Species highlights included Long-tailed Duck, Red-necked Grebe, Clapper Rail, Common Gallinule, Upland Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Anhinga, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Philadelphia Vireo, Loggerhead Shrike, Black-capped Chickadee, Evening Grosbeak, Orange-crowned Warbler, Painted Bunting, and Dickcissel.

GEESE — KITES

A **Cackling Goose** was at Beaver Hill Pond, *Albemarle* 5 & 6 Mar (ph. BB). Five **Northern Shovelers** at N. Montea Rd., *Bedford* 5 May (ph. BE) exceeded the Gold Book 25 Apr extreme late date; an **American Wigeon** that accompanied them was also late. A **Long-tailed Duck** visited Beaver Hill Pond, *Albemarle* 2 Mar (ph. PM) and continued there through 6 Mar. Perhaps stranded on the small body of water and unable to take flight, a **Horned Grebe** lingered at a retention pond at Fluvanna Co. High School until 19 May (ph. m. obs). Another very late grebe was a **Red-necked Grebe** at L. Anna, *Louisa* 14 May (ph. JH), quite exceptional after an otherwise poor season for the species. Likely only the second time one has occurred in the Region, a **CLAPPER RAIL** was discovered at Chris Greene L., *Albemarle* 9 Apr (ph. GB). A significant portion of the inland records of this coastal specialist have occurred in Apr. Between one and 3 **Sora** were at Hidden Swamp, *Albemarle* 21 Apr–12 May (ph. m. obs), and

another was at Rockcastle, *Bedford* 5 May (ph. BE). Up to six **Virginia Rails** were noted at Hidden Swamp, *Albemarle* 25 Mar–12 May (ph. m. obs), suggesting the possibility of breeding at the site. A **Common Gallinule** was encountered by canoe at Rivanna Res., *Albemarle* 29 Apr (ph. GB, SB). Far from annual in the Region, an **Upland Sandpiper** was present in a field near Olney Corner, *Caroline* 11 & 13 Apr (ph. NN). Two **White-rumped Sandpipers** were notable visitors to the Central Plains Ponds, *Fluvanna* 15 & 16 May (ph. ST, m. obs.). Part of a noticeable inland presence in Virginia this spring, solitary **Red-necked Phalaropes** were found at Woody's L., *Bedford* 21 May (ph. MJ) and at Groomes Pt., *Orange* 22 & 23 May (ST, ph. DN). An **ANHINGA** was a surprising flyover at James R. WMA, *Nelson* 11 Apr (ph. ES, TS), representing approximately the 6th Regional record. A very rare visitor to the Region with only a handful of records, a **Yellow-crowned Night Heron** was at Old Trail, *Albemarle* 28 Apr (ph. KK). The sole **American Bittern** reported was at Greenbrier Pk., *Charlottesville* 27 Apr (ph. TB). Rare but ever increasing, a **Mississippi Kite** was spotted at L. Hanover, *Hanover* 30 May (AC). The species has established itself as a breeder in the Richmond area, and likely breeds in the easternmost portion of the Central Region.

FLYCATCHERS — WRENS

Always an uncommon migrant and especially so in spring, there were 2 **Olive-sided Flycatchers** reported: one at Warbler Cr. Farm, *Bedford* 4 May (ph. BE), and another at Greenbrier Pk., *Charlottesville* 10 May (ph. TB). Two **Alder Flycatchers** were also detected: one at Rivanna Trail Belvedere, *Albemarle* 11 & 14 May (ph., a. r. BB) and another at Greenbrier Pk., *Charlottesville* 18 May (CF). Very rare for the spring period was a **Philadelphia Vireo** at Chris Greene L., *Albemarle* 16 May (ph., a. r. GB). A wintering **Loggerhead Shrike** was last detected 3 Mar at Stinson Vineyards, *Albemarle* 3 Mar (BH, MH). Another was found near

Stanardsville, *Greene* 21 May (GG), suggesting that this near-extirpated species may yet cling on as a hopeful breeder in the Central Region. Several **Black-capped Chickadees** lingered after the irruption winter: in *Charlottesville* at the University of Virginia Dell, 4 Mar (ph. TB), and in the Greenbrier neighborhood of *Charlottesville/Albemarle* 5–14 Mar (DC, m. obs); 16 Mar at James R. WMA, *Nelson* (ph. DC); and 22 Mar at Stillfreds Pond, *Albemarle* (ph. BB, TB). **Marsh Wrens** were found at three locations. One at Hidden Swamp, *Albemarle*, a favored site for the species, 25 Mar (BB, CF) was very early and likely a holdover from the winter; up to 2 were present there until 9 May. Another was at Bland Wade Ln., *Nelson* 18 & 19 Apr (ph. TS, ES), and yet another at Stillfreds Pond, *Albemarle* 24 Apr (ph. BB).

FINCHES — DICKCISSEL

Excellent **Evening Grosbeak** numbers persisted at several locations throughout the spring and even into May, with the last report 18 May at Green Springs Rd., *Louisa* 18 May (WG). **Purple Finches** also lingered well into May, with the latest report consisting of a lone f. visiting a feeder in *Caroline* 29 May (ph. AC). Multiple **Red Crossbills** were found after a good irruption flight the previous winter. Those at higher elevations, such as at Zinks Mill School Rd., *Nelson* 15 Apr (a. r. DC) and at Sawmill Run in SNP, *Albemarle* 18 Apr may pertain to more local birds, while those at Ed Jones Rd., *Albemarle* 7 & 8 Apr (ph. DC, a. r. BB, TB) were certainly wanderers; the flight call spectrograms of the latter matched “Type 10” crossbills (the primary type that irrupted over the past winter) (*vide* MY).

High numbers of **Pine Siskins** continued well into the spring period after their irruption, with the latest reports of lingering birds on 16 May in *Albemarle*. A **Lincoln’s Sparrow** continued from the winter at Puppy Cr. Rd., *Amherst* 3–24 Mar (ph. MB). No **Golden-winged Warblers** were detected in the Region this spring, however there was one **Brewster’s Warbler** (first-generation hybrid Blue-winged x Golden-winged Warbler) at Bedford Elementary, *Bedford* 1 & 2 May (ph. TS). Five **Orange-crowned Warblers** were found, impressively high for this rare spring migrant: one 13 Apr at the Fluvanna Heritage Trail, *Fluvanna* 16 Apr (ph. BG GG); at Observatory Mtn., *Albemarle* 17 & 27 Apr (ph. BB, DC); 17 Apr at Bland Wade Ln., *Nelson* (ph. ES, TS); and at Greenbrier Pk., *Charlottesville* 23 Apr (ph. TB). Notably early was a **Cape May Warbler** 21 Apr at Hidden Swamp, *Albemarle* (ph. BB, TB). A **PAINTED BUNTING** visited a feeder in Fifeville, *Charlottesville* 15 Apr (*vide* DS), one of few all-time reports from the Region. Only two **Dickcissels** were found: a migrant over Hidden Swamp, *Albemarle* 21 Apr (ph. BB, TB) and a singing male at Bienvenue Rd, *Hanover* 23 May (a. r. AB).

Contributors: Guy Babineau, Susan Babineau, Baxter Beamer, Tucker Beamer, Mike Boatwright, Allen Bryan, Drew Chaney, Allen Cumbia, Bob Epperson, Conor Farrell, Barbara Goodson, Greg Goodson, Warner Granade, Jordan Hillsley, Brabble Hoffman, Mark S. Hoffman, Kieran Kilday, Pete Myers, Diane Nastase, David Shoch, Ezra Staengl, Theo Staengl, Shea Tiller, Matt Young.

SOUTHEAST



Editor:

Adam D'Onofrio

25118 Smith Grove Rd.

North Dinwiddie, VA 23803

bigadfromlb@comcast.net

Charles City, Chesterfield, Henrico, Isle of Wight, James City, New Kent, Prince George, Southampton, Surry, Sussex, and York counties; the cities of Franklin, Hopewell, Richmond, and Williamsburg.

WINTER 2020-21

Temperatures averaged near normal in December, slightly above normal in January and slightly below normal in February. Heavy precipitation continued from the fall season into December with totals 3.4 inches above normal. In January the precipitation finally slowed down, averaging near normal, but in February it picked up again with totals 2.4 inches above normal. The two major Christmas Bird Counts were held again this year; the 81st annual Hopewell CBC tallied 110 species and the 44th annual Williamsburg CBC had 113 species. Hopewell was hampered by heavy rain throughout the day which likely led to a lower-than-normal species count and lower numbers of individuals. The Williamsburg count had some light rain but still managed a number of new high counts. Highlights of both counts are noted in the text. It was a very exciting rarity season in the Region with two first state records, Pink-footed Goose and Western Meadowlark. Other rarities included Cinnamon Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Brewer's Blackbird, and Painted Bunting.

Abbreviations: Ancarrow's (Ancarrow's Landing, *Richmond City*); Curles Neck (Curles Neck Farm, *Henrico*); Dutch Gap/Henricus (Dutch Gap Conservation Area/Henricus Historical Park, *Chesterfield*); Hog (Hog Island WMA, *Surry*); JRP (James River Park System, *Richmond City*); Shirley (Shirley Plantation,

Charles City); Swift Cr. (Swift Creek Reservoir, *Chesterfield*).

Christmas Bird Counts: HoCBC (Hopewell, 14 Dec); WiCBC (Williamsburg, 20 Dec).

GEESE — RAILS

Ross's Geese were noted at Westover Plantation, *Charles City* and on Turkey Is. Rd., *Henrico* this season with a high count of 4 birds at Westover 12 Dec (ph. ABr). Presumably, the same 4 birds were seen again at the same location on the HoCBC. A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was spotted on the HoCBC at Curles Neck. Either the same bird or a different one was photographed on nearby Turkey Is. Rd., *Henrico* 23 Jan (JF). Certainly a highlight in the Region, a first state record **PINK-FOOTED GOOSE** was discovered in a **Canada Goose** flock along Shirley Plantation Rd., *Charles City* 11 Dec (ph. ABr). Two other observers were able to get to the spot before the bird flew away (ph. EO, AB). Despite diligent searching, the bird was not seen again on or near public property. However, it was re-encountered on the HoCBC among the big goose flocks at Curles Neck, a private location. Expected in the region, a number of **Cackling Geese** were recorded at the traditional spots in *Henrico*, *Charles City* and *Prince George*. A new high count of 57 **Wood Ducks** was tallied on the WiCBC. Typically absent during winter in most of the Region, **Blue-winged Teal** have taken a liking to the digs in the marsh at Dutch Gap/Henricus in recent years. Up to 10 birds were

recorded there throughout the season (m. obs). With only a handful of Virginia sightings historically, a pair of **CINNAMON TEAL** along the Chickahominy R., *James City* made for an excellent record. Unfortunately, the pair was not seen alive by birders, having been taken by a waterfowl hunter and photographed and identified post-mortem 29 Jan (HG *fide* GD). An imm. m. **EURASIAN WIGEON** was definitively identified at Dutch Gap/Henricus 27 Dec (ph. MC). The bird continued until at least 29 Jan (m. obs.). A fine count of 320 **Redheads** was made off Yorktown, *York* 30 Jan (NB, SM, JH). Two **Surf Scoters** continued from the fall season at The Boathouse at Sunday Pk., Swift Cr. 1 Dec (WE). A single Surf Scoter was photographed from the Genito Rd. Pull-off, Swift Cr. 9 Jan (AB). A f. **White-winged Scoter** was also seen several times from the Genito Rd. pull-off, Swift Cr. 1 Jan–6 Feb (SR, TB, AH). A **Long-tailed Duck** was off Archer's Hope, *James City* 2 Jan (BW). A f. **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** visited a feeder on Breezy Pt. Dr., Yorktown, *York* 17 Feb (ph. CS). Apparently, it was a continuing bird but it is unknown how long the bird had been present. A **King Rail** at Hog was a new species for the WiCBC. Up to two King Rails were at a traditional winter location along Carter's Mill Rd., *Henrico* 7–21 Jan (JF, ABr, a. r. BB). Seven **Virginia Rails** on the WiCBC was a new high count. A **Sora** was at Gospel Spreading Farm, *James City* 20 Dec (MA, EA). Up to two **Common Gallinules** continued from the fall season at Shirley 5 Dec–24 Jan (m. obs.). Likewise, up to two Common Gallinules continued from the fall season at Dutch Gap/Henricus 6 Dec–22 Jan (m. obs.).

SHOREBIRDS — FINCHES

A **Least Sandpiper** was at Mainland Farm, *James City* 28 Jan (ph. by AR, CJ). Five **Short-billed/Long-billed Dowitchers** were inconclusively photographed at Dutch Gap/Henricus 27 Dec (CG). Out of season **Spotted Sandpipers** were found at the Pony Pasture section of JRP 5 Dec (SR) and at Fort Boykin Historic Pk., *Isle of Wight* 22 Dec–24 Feb

(TC). Single **Lesser Yellowlegs** were noted at Curles Neck 18 Dec (LSm) and at Bennett's Cr. Nursery, Smithfield, *Isle of Wight* 4 Jan (NB, RB, SL). Twenty-one **American White Pelicans** on the WiCBC was a new high count. A noteworthy American White Pelican sighting away from Hog came from Chuckatuck Cr., *Isle of Wight*, a single bird on 19 Dec (DC). A **Cattle Egret**, rare in winter, was photographed in a farm field along Rte. 58, *Southampton* 5 Dec (JM). A **Green Heron**, also rare in winter, was at Basset Hall Woods, *Williamsburg* 10 & 12 Jan (CM). A new high count of 373 **Black Vultures** was made on the WiCBC. Nineteen **Great Horned Owls** was also a new high count on the WiCBC. A **Short-eared Owl** was spotted at Curles Neck on the HoCBC. Possibly the same bird was seen from outside the gate at Curles Neck 20 Dec (TMD). A new high count of 25 **Hairy Woodpeckers** was made on the WiCBC. Single **Blue-headed Vireos** were found at the Claremont area of *Surry* 13 Dec (ph. ABr) and at Windsor Castle Pk., *Isle of Wight* 22 Dec (JMo). Not surprising in this major irruption year for the species, a new high count of 64 **Red-breasted Nuthatches** was established on the WiCBC. Continuing a recent trend, up to 2 **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** wintered at Ancarrow's (m. obs.). Other unseasonable Blue-gray Gnatcatcher sightings included one at a residence on Grace St., Smithfield, *Isle of Wight* (ph. HD); one at and around Shirley 12 Dec–2 Jan (m. obs.); and one at Dutch Gap/Henricus 10 Dec–10 Jan (ph. WR, ph. BB, MN). A new high count of 59 **Brown Thrashers** was made on the WiCBC. **Evening Grosbeaks** continued from the fall season in good numbers throughout the



Common Redpoll ph. at Saltwood Ct., *Henrico* by Adam D'Onofrio, 18 Feb 2021.

region. A **Common Redpoll**, rare in the region even in irruption years, visited a feeding station on Saltwood Ct., *Henrico* 31 Jan (ph. TT, ph. AD). The bird was quite elusive during its near three week stay, seen on 5 Feb (TT, ph. BB, ph. MA), 14 Feb (ph. TT, ph. JE) and finally on 18 Feb (ph. AD). Another Common Redpoll was a one-day wonder on Trump Town Rd., Windsor, *Isle of Wight* 12 Feb (KR). An irruption year for the species resulted in a new high count of 117 **Pine Siskins** on the WiCBC. One hundred twenty-three Pine Siskins in Governor's Land, *James City* 20 Dec set a new high local peak count (CO).

SPARROWS — BUNTINGS

A flock of 324 **Chipping Sparrows** was a new high count on the WiCBC. A **Vesper Sparrow** at Fort Boykin Historic Pk., *Isle of Wight* 21 Feb was noteworthy (TC). Rare in winter, two **Lincoln's Sparrows** were encountered in the region. One was at Malvern Hill Battlefield, *Henrico* 6–23 Dec (ph. ABr) and the second was at Shirley 16 Jan & 4 Feb (ph. ABr). An ad. m. **YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** continued from the fall season in an enormous mixed blackbird flock at Chippokes Plantation SP 1 Jan (NB). A second first state record graced the region this season in the form of a **WESTERN MEADOWLARK**, found at Mainland Farm, *James City* 18 Dec (ph. BT). The bird remained until at least 18 Jan, often in the company of a group of **Eastern Meadowlarks**, and was enjoyed by many. Two m. **BREWER'S BLACKBIRDS** were found rooting around in the cow pasture at Chippokes Plantation SP 24 Dec (ph. EF, NF). Up to 3 birds continued in that area through 2 Jan (ph. NB, JL, ph. JFo). Illustrating a recent trend, there were several winter reports of **Black-and-white Warblers** throughout the Region. A **Nashville Warbler** was at Bryan Pk., *Richmond City* 12 & 13 Dec (RBe, LS). There were several reports of multiple **Common Yellowthroats** throughout the Region this winter. Very unusual was a report of 3

American Redstarts at Shirley 15 Dec (ph. MK). Very rare in winter, a **Yellow Warbler** was at Shirley 12 Dec–18 Jan (MA, BB, TMD, MNo, ph. ABr). A **Yellow-throated Warbler** visited a feeding station in Kingsmill, *James City* 20 Dec–13 Feb (ph. LN, JC). A **Wilson's Warbler** was at the Moor House, Yorktown Battlefield, Yorktown, *York* 23 Feb (ph. EW, ABro). Four **Western Tanagers** were recorded in the Region this season. The first was a m. at Allen's Mill Rd., *York* 19–31 Dec (ph. JW, et al.). Up to 2, a f. and an imm. m., were at or around Bacon St., Yorktown, *York* 31 Dec–28 Feb (m. obs.), and a fourth bird, an imm. m., was in Rolling Woods, *James City* 29 Jan (GB) and 2 Feb (ph. DCr). Another new high count on the WiCBC was 666 **Northern Cardinals**. Very rare in winter, a **Blue Grosbeak** was at Malvern Hill Battlefield, *Henrico* 21 Dec (ph. ABr). Two ad. m. **PAINTED BUNTINGS** visited feeding stations in the Region. One was on Grace St., Smithfield, *Isle of Wight* 13 Dec–28 Feb (ph. HD, m. obs.). The other was in Ford's Colony, *James City* from mid-Jan through at least 13 Feb (ph. HC).

Contributors: Erin Anthony, Matt Anthony, Nancy Barnhart, Baxter Beamer, Robert Beard (RBe), Gordon Blair, Arun Bose, Angier Brock (ABro), Rexanne Bruno, Allen Bryan (ABr), Timothy Burnett, David Clark, Jim Corliss, Dan Cristol (DCr), Matthew Crittenden, Helen Cronk, Terri Cuthriell, Hap Dashiell, Greg Davis, Todd Michael Day (TMD), Adam D'Onofrio, Wendy Ealding, Jack Esworthy IV, Elisa Flanders, Nick Flanders, James Fox (JFo), Jan Frye, Chris Gilbert, Hunter Griggs, April Harper, Jeff Honig, Cheryl Jacobson, Michael Kendrick, Stephen Living, Joyce Lowry, June McDaniels, Cindy McLaughlin, Sidar Morales, James Moreland (JMo), Lisa Nickel, Max Nootbar (MNo), Martina Nordstrand, Carol O'Neill, Ellison Orcutt, Andrew Rapp, Kay Rawls, Steve Roble, Warren Rofe, Liz Scher, Cindy Schulz, Len Smock (LSm), Tina Trice, James Webb, Elizabeth Wilkins, Bill Williams.

SPRING 2021

Temperatures in the Region averaged 2.7 degrees above normal in March but were near normal in both April and May. Precipitation finally started to let up in March, averaging slightly below normal for the month. In April and May, precipitation was well below normal, averaging 1.8 inches below typical for both months. Spring migration was unremarkable this year with the most notable trend being a few early dates among migrating passerines. Rarities this season included Clapper Rail, Sandhill Crane, Ruff, Swallow-tailed Kite, Bicknell's Thrush, Yellow-headed Blackbird and Painted Bunting.

Abbreviations: Dutch Gap/Henricus (Dutch Gap Conservation Area/Henricus Historical Park, *Chesterfield*); Hog (Hog Island WMA, *Surry*); JRP (James River Park System, *Richmond City*).

GEESE — KITES

A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was spotted on Turkey Is. Rd., *Henrico* 2 Mar (ph. DC). A **White-winged Scoter** continued from the winter season at the Genito Rd. pull-off, Swift Creek Res., *Chesterfield* until at least 26 Mar (SR, JD, PS). A f. **Black Scoter** was at Jamestown Is., *James City* 18 & 19 Mar (ph. BW). An imm. m. **Long-tailed Duck** was viewed from the Wetlands section of JRP 3 Mar (ph. LM). An ad. **Hooded Merganser** with five recently fledged young at Beaverdam Cr., *York* 26 May (ph. TM) provided the first confirmed local breeding record for this species. A wayward **CLAPPER RAIL** was discovered at the Virginia State Capitol Grounds, *Richmond City* 24 Apr (JL) and remained there through 27 Apr (ph. AB, E&BO, JD). Single **King Rails** were noted at Hog 22 Mar (TC, TT) and along Carter's Mill Rd., *Henrico* 23 Mar (CF). **Common Gallinules** in the Region included up to 2 birds continuing from the winter season at Dutch Gap through 6 May (m. obs.). Single birds were also observed at Hog 30 Mar (ph. AD) and at Cheatham Annex, *York* 2 May (ph. DH, LC). A **SANDHILL CRANE** was

photographed on the grounds of Bacon's Castle, *Surry* 30 Apr (ph. KK). A m. **RUFF** at Hog 15 May (ph. NB, KB) provided a fourth local record, three of them coming in the last four years. A **Stilt Sandpiper** was seen at Hog 8 May (AD, TTr) and 13 May (TC). A **Western Sandpiper**, a rare spring transient, was at Jamestown Is., *James City* 19 May (BW). An **Eastern Willet** (*Tringa semipalmata semipalmata*), rare w. of Chesapeake Bay, was spotted flying n. across the James R. from Hog into *James City* 3 May (BW). Two **Black Terns** were noted flying upriver at College Cr., *James City* 10 May (BW). Six incubating and up to 30 nest building **Double-crested Cormorants** on Cheatham Pond, Cheatham Annex, *York* 16 May confirmed a first local breeding record for this species (DY). Two **Anhingas** were at Harrison L. National Fish Hatchery, *Charles City* 31 May (ph. SR). The number of **American White Pelicans** at Hog continues to rise with a new local peak count of 119 birds recorded there 31 Mar (TC). A **Snowy Egret**, a rare transient this far inland, was spotted at Point of Rocks Pk., *Chesterfield* 9 Apr (JM). Two **SWALLOW-TAILED KITES** were noted in the Region this spring. The first was at Dutch Gap/Henricus 9 May feeding over the marsh (ph. AB). Possibly the same bird was seen there again 11 & 30 May (DW). A second bird was spotted on I-64 near Yorktown, *York* 16 May (BA, TTr).

VIREOS — BUNTINGS

An early **Blue-headed Vireo** was at the Green Springs Interpretive Trail, *James City* 2 Mar (ph. CJ). A **Sedge Wren** was seen at Williamsburg-Jamestown Airport, *James City* 2 May (AR, CS). A **BICKNELL'S THRUSH** was a rare find at Tormentor L., *Isle of Wight* 11 May (a. r. by TC). The last **Evening Grosbeaks** reported from the large winter irruption were 3 at a feeder on Old Gee Rd., *Prince George* 8 May (CH). A **Common Redpoll** visited a feeder at Governor's Land, *James City* 11 Mar (ph. CO). A few **Pine Siskins**, another species that underwent a large winter irruption, remained at Governor's Land, *James City* through 31 May (ph. CO). An imm. m./f. **YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD**

visited a private feeding station in the Bellwood section of *Chesterfield* 11–18 Apr (ph. BB, m. obs.). Early **Ovenbirds** included one at Chub Sandhill NAP, *Sussex* 27 Mar (ph. by ABr) and 2 at Dutch Gap/Henricus 31 Mar (JF). An early **Northern Waterthrush** was at the Wetlands section of JRP 11 Apr (AB, WT). A **Cape May Warbler** visited a private suet feeder in the Tuckahoe area of *Henrico* 2 Mar (ph. KL). This bird had apparently been present at this location since Jan. A **Prairie Warbler** at Cranston's Mill Pond, *James City* 30 Mar set a new local early date (ph. TM). A **Black-throated Green Warbler** at Hog 27 Mar also set a new local early date (NB, KB). Another early Black-throated Green Warbler was noted at Matoaka Lake and Woods, *Williamsburg* 31 Mar (AR, CS, LF). A **Wilson's Warbler** continued from the winter season at Moore House Rd., Yorktown, *York* 20 Mar (ph. by NB). A f. **Western Tanager** continued from the winter season at Bacon St., Yorktown, *York* through 21 Mar (m. obs.). A m. **Blue Grosbeak** at Stonehouse, *James City* 12

Apr provided a new local early date (ph. CA). The ad. m. **PAINTED BUNTING** that spent the winter in a residential yard on Grace St, Smithfield, *Isle of Wight* was last reported on 9 Apr (HD).

Contributors: Bob Anderson, Carol Annis, Kenneth Barnhart, Nancy Barnhart, Baxter Beamer, Arun Bose, Allen Bryan (ABr), Drew Chaney, Linda Cole, Terri Cuthriell, Hap Dashiell, John Ditto, Adam D'Onofrio, Conor Farrell, Lily Fenton, Janice Frye, Deborah Humphries, C. Hunter, Caleb Jones, Kevin Koons, John Lindner, Kathy Louthan, Lisa Manzi, James Maw, Terry Moore, Carol O'Neil, Ellison & Beth Orcutt, Andrew Rapp, Steve Roble, Christina Sabochick, Pamela Scrima, Tracy Tate, Wes Teets, Thuy Tran (TTra), Tina Trice (TTr), Dorothy Wells, Bill Williams, Dave Youker.

EAST

Editors:

Fred Atwood

Flint Hill School
10409 Academic Dr.
Oakton, VA 22124
fredatwood@yahoo.com

Adit Nehra

3404 Blakesley Hall Ct
Herndon, VA 20171
nehra.adit@gmail.com

Amiel Hopkins

117 Casmar Street
Vienna Virginia 22180
amielhopkins@gmail.com



Essex, Gloucester, King and Queen, King George, King William, Lancaster, Mathews, Middlesex, Northumberland, Richmond, and Westmoreland counties.

WINTER 2020-21

A total of 157 species – slightly above average – was recorded this winter. This was a “superflight” year for boreal finches. A rich cone crop last summer facilitated a population boom, followed by the poor crop this year, thereby fueling the massive irruption. Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, and Red-Breasted Nuthatches, all sometimes missed altogether in the Region, were not only seen in every East Region county, but recorded in abundance. Perhaps the highlight of this winter was the unprecedented (in recent times) invasion of Evening Grosbeaks, which were seen in ten of the Region’s eleven counties. The relatively mild winter climate enabled several songbirds to linger well into the winter. Most waterfowl were present in low or average numbers, probably for the same reason. Their numbers are higher here when they are driven south by freezing bodies of water in the north. Notable rarities include Black-headed Gull, Snowy Owl, and Tennessee Warbler. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which obviously impacted birding across the Region, especially nocturnal and group excursions, birders persevered and the Christmas Bird Counts went forward as planned, with safety restrictions such as masks and social distancing. Two all-time high counts and two unusual species were seen on WBCBC. Seven high counts and four unusual species were recorded on WCBC. The MCBC recorded four high counts and no unusual species. There were 43 high counts and no unusual species on the NLCBC. There were numerous high counts and new species on MPCBC as this was only the 2nd year of the count. Data for this report were sourced from eBird, the Virginia Birds listserv, NNASnet (Northern Neck Audubon Society), the Gold Book, USFWS, Center For Conservation Biology, four Christmas Bird

Counts, and the Middle Peninsula Birding Facebook Group.

Abbreviations: Beaverdam (Beaverdam Park, *Gloucester*); Bethel (Bethel Beach NAP, *Mathews*); Leedstown (*Westmoreland*); New Pt. Comfort (New Pt. Comfort NAP, *Mathews*); The Pocket (a portion of the Pamunkey R. in the Pamunkey Indian Reservation, *King William*).

Christmas Bird Counts: MCBC (Mathews, 3 Jan); MPCBC (Middle Peninsula, 27 Dec); NLCBC (Northumberland-Lancaster, 15 Dec); WBCBC (Washington’s Birthplace, 20 Dec); WCBC (Walkerton, 3 Jan).

GEESE — DUCKS

The most notable waterfowl record this winter, courtesy of WCBC, was a **Ross’s Goose** at The Pocket and a nearby corn field in *King William* (m. obs.). This species is rare but somewhat regular here. There are only seven winter eBird records for the Region, and it was the first winter eBird record for the county. A flyover flock of 12 **Snow Geese** was spotted at Hickory Hill, *Gloucester* 22 Feb (SW). This ties the all-time high count for the county in eBird. Although large flocks of over 100 have been recorded a few times, most sightings in the Region are individuals mixed in with Canada Geese. A very solid seven other reports of this species were recorded this season, all as individuals except for a pair and a group of 5. No **Greater-White Fronted Geese** were found this year. They have been seen in six of the previous ten years. Eight **Cackling Geese** were found at five locations.

According to USFWS the migratory Atlantic population of **Canada Geese** has declined as much as 75 percent in recent years, so the hunting bag limit was again set at one bird per day this winter. However, they are still present in our Region in large numbers. The season's high count of 10,580 birds 10 Jan was a tally of four separate flocks in the Rappahannock R. and farm fields of Leedstown (FA, CT). WBCBC had its all-time high count of 24,081. The WCBC total of 7434 was about average for the history of this count, but was about 10,000 less than the high recorded 4 Jan 2009. Though the Chesapeake Bay Foundation reports that numbers of **Tundra Swan** are declining in the Chesapeake Bay region, 1257 were reported from 47 locations in all counties. The high count of 323 on 26 Feb (AE) on a private *Essex* farm, which harbors critical feeding and roosting habitat for the species, is roughly half the historical winter highs. Though Chesapeake declines have been noted, the overall eastern population has actually increased in other wintering sites such as coastal North Carolina. The local decline has been attributed to declines in water quality, deterioration of SAV (submerged aquatic vegetation), and declines in clam populations. The non-native, invasive **Mute Swan** population seems to be under control for now, though up a little from recent years. None were reported at Washington's Birthplace National Monument, *Westmoreland* or Beaverdam, where they have been regulars in the past. The previous high of 36 at Beaverdam 2 Jan 2009 (NF) dwarfs this year's high of 8 at Fleeton Pt. *Northumberland* 15 Dec (EO). A total of 48 birds was reported from twelve locations in *Northumberland*, *Westmoreland*, and *Mathews*. This year's high count of 72 **American Black Duck** in Leedstown 7 Feb (FA) was only about half the expected seasonal high. The high count of 6 **Redheads** at Beaverdam 4 Dec (HC, RC) is the lowest winter high in eBird since 2004 and is only a fraction of the all-time winter eBird high of 250 and the average high of 107. The high of 775 **Ring-necked Ducks** at LaGrange Ln., *King George* 18 Jan (FA) is about half the average winter high for the Region. A pair of **Long-tailed Ducks** at The

Pocket 21 Feb (FA) was the first record in eBird for *King William*. Even though this is far upriver from their normal haunts in the Chesapeake Bay, it is not surprising because in that week they also appeared in many inland locations throughout the State.

BOBWHITE — OWLS

Northern Bobwhites fortunately appear to be stable in the Region: 49 were found at twelve locations in six counties with a high of 8 near Warsaw, *Richmond* 8 Jan (JT). MCBC had a new all-time high count of 116 **Wild Turkeys**. Healthy numbers of **Clapper Rails** were noted in the Region, with a total of 31 at eleven expected locations in salt marshes at the lower ends of the peninsulas. An ad. and imm. **Common Gallinule** were spotted at a private quarry pond 3 Jan in Walkerton, *King and Queen* (NN, M&JC, AR) as part of WCBC. Single gallinules were observed here both 3 Feb (FA) and 3 Nov 2019 (FA), which along with the presence of a dull-marked immature this year, suggests there may have been successful breeding. A high count of just 125 **American Coots** at Beaverdam 23 Dec (HC, RC) is far fewer than previous years, when counts here frequently exceeded 1500. A **Semipalmated Plover** at New Pt. Comfort, *Mathews* 3 Jan (MB, DY) represents just the 6th eBird winter record for the Region. Twenty **Ruddy Turnstones** at Bethel 16 Jan (MS) was the 2nd highest Regional winter count in eBird. A group of 500 **Dunlin** at Bethel 16 Jan (MS) was the 3rd highest Regional winter count in eBird. A tally of 74 **Wilson's Snipe** in *King William* (AB, EO) was the highest



Black-headed Gull ph. at Bethel Beach, *Mathews* by Ty Smith, 6 Feb 2021.

count for WCBC since 31 Dec 2006 when 202 were tallied. A new bird for WBCBC, a **Lesser Yellowlegs** in Leedstown (AH, AN, SK), was the first winter county record, and 4th winter eBird record on the Northern Neck. A **Willet** at New Pt. Comfort on the MCBC (MB, DY) was just the 6th eBird winter record for the Region. An outstanding find of a **Black-headed Gull** mixed with a group of **Bonaparte's Gulls** at Bethel 4–6 Feb (CA, ES, ph. TS) was the long-anticipated first record for the Region. No **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** could be found this winter. They have been reported in five of the previous ten years. Coastal populations of **Brown Pelicans** continue to increase; 242 flying into Ingram Bay at Fleeton Pt., *Northumberland* 15 Dec (EO) was a new winter high count and the 2nd highest count ever for the Region, helping to establish the NLCBC's new high count of 305. As usual, most reports were from the Chesapeake Bay shore as well as the mouths of major rivers, and most were in smaller groups, averaging five individuals. No **Great Egrets** were found in the Northern Neck this winter, but single birds were found at five locations in *King William*, *Gloucester*, and *Mathews*. The first **Osprey** of the spring arrived right on time at Kilmarnock, *Northumberland* 27 Feb (BW). The 43 **Red-shouldered Hawks** tallied on WCBC was a new count high and far exceeded the average of 19 and the previous high of 38 in 2014. This season's total of 11 **Eastern-Screech Owls** at ten locations was comparatively low, perhaps a reflection of COVID-19 5AM curfew restrictions interfering with standard owling protocol. Yet again there were no reports of **Barn Owl** or **Short-Eared Owl**. A **SNOWY OWL** was photographed 31 Dec near Kennard, *Richmond* (JG). It is only the 2nd county record of this charismatic irruptive winter visitor, and the 5th for the Region.

WOODPECKERS — FINCHES

Red-Headed Woodpeckers experience dramatic population fluctuations in response to acorn crops. Lower-than-average numbers of this species were recorded this winter, with just 42 birds at 26 locations including a high of 6. The

woodpeckers still appear widespread, having been seen in every county. According to the Audubon Society their mysterious nationwide decline may result in part from logging of old growth forests and competition for nest cavities with invasive starlings. MCBC had a new high of 27 **Yellow-Bellied Sapsuckers** and WCBC's 41 was its 2nd highest tally, surpassed only by 43 on 31 Dec 2017. It was a typical year for **American Kestrels** with 52 individuals at 46 locations. Kestrels appear to be relatively stable in the Region. Seven **Merlins** in six locations and 6 **Peregrine Falcons** in five locations indicate that falcons are doing well in the Region. Two separate sightings of **White-Eyed Vireos** – near Center Cross, *Essex* 23 Dec (BC) and Beaverdam 5 Jan (LC) – are the 2nd and 3rd eBird winter records, respectively, for the Region. Both are the first winter eBird records for their county as well. Finding 4 **Blue-Headed Vireos** in the winter season here is unprecedented: individuals were found at Hickory Hollow NAP, *Lancaster* 19 Dec (RB); Union Hope Rd., *King William* 3 Jan (FA); Dragon Run SF, *King and Queen* 14 Jan (M&JC); and a private *Gloucester* residence 4 Feb (JS). There were only three other winter eBird reports in the Region before this year and the *Lancaster* bird was the first winter eBird record for the county. In keeping with a trend noted in past reports, the grassland-reliant **Horned Lark** has declined considerably in the Region, yet the species was well represented this winter with 20 sightings of 348 birds at 14 locations including one count of 175 at a private *Essex* farm across the river from Leedstown 2 Jan (M&JC). This is the Region's highest count since 330 were tallied in Leedstown 31 Jan 2010 (FA). A count of 12 **Tree Swallows** at Rappahannock River Valley NWR--Hutchinson Unit, *Essex* 24 Feb (DCh) was higher than usual for such an early date. A tally of 230 **Blue Jays** was a new high for the WCBC, where the previous high was 142 and the average was 77. In this remarkable irruption year, 237 **Red-Breasted Nuthatches** were reported in 131 locations. Somewhat expected during a mild winter, 6 **House Wrens** were reported on the MCBC, and 5 others were seen including 2 at West Point Rail Yard, *King William* 8 Dec (ABR).

Twelve **Marsh Wrens** were reported from 5 locations. The high count was 4 at Starvation Rd., *Gloucester* 11 Dec (HC), but only 2 could be found there 25 Jan (HC, RC). Two at Stratford Hall, *Westmoreland* (JW) was a new high count for the WBCBC. They are not seen every year, but in milder years should be expected. An impressive congregation of 214 **Cedar Waxwings** on aptly named Cedar Pt., *Middlesex* 11 Feb (M&JC) was the Region's 3rd highest winter count. This highly mobile species congregates in huge numbers when fruit is abundant, and then will disperse again after it is consumed. Besides this count, all the others were below 100. It was the best winter for **American Pipits** since 2017. A total of 393 were reported from 19 locations with a high of 65 in a farm field near The Pocket 3 Jan (FA, AH, AN). Arguably the highlight of this winter was the irruption of **Evening Grosbeaks**. This heavily declining and beautiful bird was a treat to see across the Region. In fact, they were reported in every county except *Richmond*. All in all, there were 96 sightings of 255 birds in 25 locations with a high single location count of 31 at Walkerton Millpond, *King and Queen* 10 Jan (FA). A flock of up to 30 was present almost every day from 3 Jan on into the spring season at a private home in *Gloucester* (CS). Another "superflight bird," **Purple Finch**, was seen in every county in the Region for a total of 261 birds at 72 locations. The high of 16 was an all-time winter high at a different private home in *Gloucester* 31 Jan (EB). The other finch that irrupted this year was **Pine Siskin**. A total of 131 were seen in 27 locations with a high of 35 at a private farm in *Essex* 2 Jan (M&JC).

SPARROWS — TANAGER

Considering the relatively mild winter, it was unexpected to find an unusually high count of 6 **American Tree Sparrows** on MCBC, especially since this species is not found annually in the Region. Dramatic declines of **White-Crowned Sparrows** have been noted in the Region with just 14 in 5 locations, and none at two usually reliable places in Leedstown where habitat has not changed over the years. Only 3 were found on

the CBCs: 1 on WCBC and 2 on NLCBC. The WCBC had a banner year for sparrows with new high counts for **White-throated Sparrow** (1911), **Savannah Sparrow** (157), and **Song Sparrow** (762). It is unusual to get all three of the saltmarsh sparrows at a single location in winter, but it happened this year, with one **Seaside Sparrow**, 6 **Saltmarsh Sparrows**, and the least common, a **Nelson's Sparrow** at Guinea Marsh 14 Feb *Gloucester* (JS). This is the only location in the Region where they are regularly seen during winter. According to the Center for Conservation Biology, these sparrows, fully dependent on delicate seasonal marsh cycles, are severely threatened by the effects of climate change. A **Lincoln's Sparrow** was seen at Leedstown 24 Jan (FA). This is the 5th winter record for the Region, but the 2nd at this location. A total of 462 **Eastern Meadowlarks** were observed in 42 locations and in every county. There were 4 **Baltimore Orioles** at four separate locations this year; this is unusual, but not unheard of in a mild winter. All four were at feeders. Reflecting recent and widespread declines, just 29 **Rusty Blackbirds** were recorded at seven locations, yet a fairly high count of 14 was produced at Barnesfield Pk., *King George* 27 Feb (MA). It was a great winter



Tennessee Warbler ph. in Urbanna, *Middlesex* by Jessica Coker, Feb 2021.

for warblers this year, with probably the most exciting being a **Tennessee Warbler** at a feeder at Cedar Pt., Urbanna, *Middlesex* 7 & 14 Feb (ph. JeC). This was the first Regional record for winter in eBird. Single **Orange-Crowned Warblers** at Suggests Pt. Rd., *Richmond* 8 Jan (LA) and West Point, *King William* 8 Dec (CF) were also notable. A **Cape May Warbler** at a feeder near White Marsh, *Gloucester* 28 Jan (ph. SC, TC)



Cape May Warbler ph. in White Marsh, Gloucester by Susan Crockett, 28 Jan 2021.

was the first winter eBird record for the county and the 3rd for the Region. Five **Common Yellowthroats** at four locations was noteworthy, although not too unusual considering this mild winter and the yellowthroat's northward-expanding winter range. There was also a high count of 9 **Pine Warblers** along Monte Verde Rd. *Essex* 3 Feb (M&JC). Twelve **Palm Warblers** were found in nine locations this winter, similar to the thirteen at five locations last winter. Exactly a decade ago, though, there were none reported wintering in the East Region. This may be indicative of the trend noted elsewhere in this report of southerly species choosing to migrate earlier in the spring and later in the fall, linger earlier and later into the season, and sometimes overwinter north of their typical range. The season's high of 200 **Yellow-rumped Warblers** at Dameron Marsh NAP, *Northumberland* 15 Dec as part of NLCBC is dwarfed by past highs up to 1200. Furthermore, only ten counts surpassed 50. However, the season's average count of 13 birds was slightly higher than the cumulative average of just under

12 birds per checklist where reported. A very unexpected **Blue Grosbeak** turned up at Rappahannock River Valley NWR--Mothershead Unit, *Westmoreland* 20 Dec (AH, ph. AN). Quite possibly the highlight of WBCBC, this was the first winter Regional record in eBird and the 4th for the State. A male **Painted Bunting** turned up at a feeder at Locust Hill, *Middlesex* 4 Jan and was seen frequently throughout the winter and on into Apr (AE). The Region's 5th overwintering **Western Tanager**, according to eBird, was reported at Tyndalls Pt. Pk., *Gloucester* 14 Jan (DC). An individual similar in appearance continued at a residential feeder a mile away across the river in *York* from Feb to Mar, perhaps the same bird. A second tanager was seen at a *Gloucester* residential feeder five miles nw. of and over the same Feb to Mar timeframe as the *York* tanager (m. obs.).

Contributors: Lee Adams, Cindy Andrews, Matt Anthony, Fred Atwood, Eirlys Barker, Meredith Bell, Rob Bielawski, Arun Bose, Allen Bryan (ABr), Luke Cannon, Bob Carter, David Chewing (DCh), David Clark, Harry Colestock, Rochelle Colestock, Jessica Coker (JeC), Maeve and Joey Coker, Susan Crockett, Tom Crockett, Anna Dustin, Anonymous Ebirders, Nick Flanders, Amiel Hopkins, Joe Girgente, David Govoni, Seth Kellogg, Adit Nehra, Nick Newberry, Ellison Orcutt, Andrew Rapp, Cindy Schulz, Ty Smith, Evan Spears, Jason Strickland, Mark Sopko, John Townsend, Clark Trader, Susan Walton, Betsy Washington, Jeff Wright, David Youker.

EAST



Editors:

Fred Atwood
Flint Hill School
10409 Academic Dr.
Oakton, VA 22124
fredatwood@yahoo.com

Nick Newberry
Flint Hill School
11018 Devenish Dr.
Oakton, VA 22124
nickenew1@gmail.com

Essex, Gloucester, King and Queen, King George, King William, Lancaster, Mathews, Middlesex, Northumberland, Richmond, and Westmoreland counties.

SPRING 2021

Highlights this spring season were: Black-necked Stilt, Gull-billed Tern, high numbers of several wintertime irruptive species (Red-breasted Nuthatch, Evening Grosbeak, Pine Siskin), Western Tanager, and Painted Bunting.

Data was sourced from the Virginia Birds listserv, eBird, NNASnet (Northern Neck Audubon Society listserv), and the Gold Book.

Abbreviations: Bethel Beach (Bethel Beach NAP, *Mathews*); Dameron (Dameron Marsh NAP, *Northumberland*); Hughlett Pt. (Hughlett Point NAP, *Northumberland*); Hutchinson (Hutchinson Unit of Rappahannock R. NWR, *Essex*); K. G. Ponds (Privately owned ponds along Rte. 3 near Sealston, *King George*); New Point Comfort (New Point Comfort NAP, *Mathews*).

WATERFOWL — IBISES

A m. and f. **Ring-necked Duck** were present at K. G. Ponds 25 Apr (FA); the old quarry ponds between this location and LaGrange Ln. have had this species recorded each of the past 5 years between the first week of Apr and mid-Jun. A tardy m. **Bufflehead** was photographed from Bethel Beach 15 May (ph. AB). A m./f. pair of **Hooded Mergansers** was found swimming together at the newly opened Machicomico SP, *Gloucester*, 23 Apr – raising the possibility of local breeding (ph. H&RC). A brace of female-type **Red-breasted Mergansers** was seen from New Point Comfort 16 May (GC, JT). A flock of 23 **Ruddy Ducks** off Sandy Pt. Rd., *Northumberland*, 4 May was a notably large flock

for so late in the season (D&BF). The first **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** of the season was discovered 3 Apr near Susan, *Mathews* (GB). Single **King Rails** were reported on two occasions from the same private location near Leedstown, *Westmoreland* 3 & 25 Apr (FA); this is one of few locations in the Region where they have been reported in the past. Two **Common Gallinules** were seen at a private location in Whitehall, *King and Queen*, 10 Apr (FA); this species has now been recorded here in both winter and spring multiple times since first being sighted 3 Feb 2019 (FA). A single **Black-necked Stilt** was well photographed at a private farm along the Rappahannock R. in *Essex* 29 Apr (ph. M&JC); this represents a first eBird record for that county. A lone **Ruddy Turnstone** was seen at Hughlett Pt. 17 May and represents the first spring eBird record for *Northumberland* (JD). A **Dunlin** discovered in a flooded field at a private location along the Rappahannock R., *Essex*, 29 Apr provided a first eBird record for the county (ph. M&JC). A count of 110 **Least Sandpipers** at low tide at Old Garden Cr. Rd., *Mathews*, 8 May represents a new eBird high count for the Region (FA). An ad. **Bonaparte's Gull** at Bethel Beach 27 May is one of the latest spring records of this species for the Region (*fide* NN). The first **Laughing Gull** of the season was reported from the Warehouse Boat Ramp, *Gloucester* 7 Mar (LN). A **Gull-billed Tern** at Bethel Beach was the first spring eBird record for *Mathews* and only the second for the Region (*fide* NN). An imm. **Common Loon** spent several days in Aberdeen Cr., *Gloucester*, from 25 May until at least 4 Jun (H&RC). A **Least Bittern** was seen on private property near Leedstown, *Westmoreland*, 23 May (FA) in a marsh where it has been seen during the breeding season in years past; no other representatives of this species were recorded this

season. A **Cattle Egret** was found strutting around a horse-filled pasture off Robins Neck Rd, *Gloucester*, 15 Apr (ph. JS). **Glossy Ibis** were found in 3 counties: *Lancaster*, *Northumberland*, and *Westmoreland*. Most notable were 2 at a private location near Leedstown, *Westmoreland* 25 Apr (FA).

SWALLOWS — BUNTINGS

Seen as a harbinger of spring for many, the first **Tree Swallow** report of the spring was a flock of 12 birds at Hutchinson 24 Feb (DC). Some participants in the large wintertime movement of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** lingered past when this species is typically found in the Region, with 8 May in Port Haywood, *Mathews* marking the last confirmed report (GB). The first **Wood Thrush** of the season was heard 12 Apr along Barefords Mill Rd., *Essex*, 12 Apr (a. r. M&JC). As with this past winter, **Evening Grosbeaks** stole the show with 44 reports from *Essex*, *Gloucester*, *King George*, *King and Queen*, *Lancaster*, and *Middlesex*. The peak count of this species was 46 at a private feeder set up near Gloucester, *Gloucester*, 12 Mar (ph. CS), and the final report was of a singleton at a feeder near Champlain, *Essex*, 8 May (ph. AW). It was also an excellent winter for **Purple Finches** with reports from 8 of 11 counties in the Region and a maximum of 6 at a private feeder in *Sassafras*, *Gloucester*, 10 Mar (EB). The latest report was from a feeder in Gloucester Courthouse, *Gloucester*, 3 May (ph. TC). **Pine Siskins** were found in *Gloucester*, *King George*, *Northumberland*, and *Westmoreland* with a maximum of 12 at a private feeder in Gloucester Courthouse, *Gloucester*, 8 Mar (ph. TC) and the final report of the season from the same location 10 May (ph. TC). The first **Grasshopper**

Sparrow to be detected was a singing m. in a field in King George, *King George*, 7 Apr (SB). The final **Dark-eyed Junco** report of the season was a brace seen near Montross, *Richmond*, 18 Apr (BK). A tardy **White-throated Sparrow** was videoed at Dameron 25 May (v. r. M&JC). **Nelson's Sparrows** were reported from three locations, all tidal saltmarshes, with a singleton at Eastern Naxera shoreline, *Gloucester*, 5 May (JS); another single at Bethel 15 May (ph. H&RC); and 2 at Hughlett 3 Mar (JD). **Black-and-white Warblers** were recorded at two locations 30 Mar with a single bird in Dunnsville, *Essex*, (M&JC) and 3 in Foster, *Mathews* (ph. MS). An early **Blackpoll Warbler** was recorded singing in Horner's, *Essex*, 29 Apr (a. r. M&JC). An overwintering **Western Tanager** at Gloucester Point, *Gloucester*, was last seen 4 Mar (ph. H&RC); this represents the third spring eBird record for this species in the Region. A remarkably early m. **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was photographed at a feeder in Gloucester Point, *Gloucester*, 3 Apr, which was the second earliest record for this species in Virginia this spring (ph. TH). A **Painted Bunting** first reported 4 Jan in Locust Hill, *Middlesex*, continued through 10 Apr (ph. RM); this represents the third spring eBird record for the Region.

Contributors: Frederick Atwood, Eirlys Barker, Arun Bose, Gee Brownley, Scott Byrd, David Chewing, Maeve and Joey Coker, Harry & Rochelle Colestock, Tom Crockett, George Cummins, JoAnn Dalley, Dan & Beth Fedorko, Bryan Knedler, Lindsey Nelson, Nick Newberry, Cindy Schulz, Mark Sopko, Jason Strickland, Jaclyn Tolchin, Alice Wellford.

COASTAL



Editor:

Matt Anthony

10002 Crystal Palace Ln., #103

Spotsylvania, VA 22553

mhanthony2@gmail.com

Accomack and Northampton counties; the cities of Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach.

WINTER 2020-21

On the whole, the winter of 2020-2021 was a fairly mild one in the Coastal Region. Temperatures averaged between 40° and 50° for most of the period, with occasional high or low spikes. Dec and Feb both had multiples days where temperatures peaked at 70°. On only a few occasions did the Region have below-freezing temperatures, with the low of 27 coming on 26–27 Dec. It was a rainy winter, with 3.5 inches above historical averages by the end of Feb, and an overall accumulation of over 8 inches above normal since Nov 2020. Though other Regions experienced a few substantial snowfall events, snow in the Coastal Region was sporadic and rarely accumulated. Birding on the Coast this winter was highlighted by a few notable large-scale events, including a major influx of Dovekie close to shore as well as substantial movements of winter irruptives including Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches, Pine Siskins, and Purple Finches. No offshore trips went out this winter, with multiple attempts weathered out, but dedicated seawatching on the Virginia Beach coast somewhat compensated for this. There was a nice diversity of overwintering warblers, with records for at least a dozen species (including the expected winterers). Perhaps the most noteworthy avian event was Virginia's first Buff-bellied Hummingbird, which visited a feeder in *Norfolk* and was seen for several days to the delight of many birders. Other significant records included Trumpeter Swan, Western Grebe, Great Skua, Common and Thick-billed Murres, Pacific Loon, Manx and Sooty Shearwaters, Brown Booby, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Common

Raven, Brewer's Blackbird, and Townsend's Warbler.

Abbreviations: Back Bay (Back Bay NWR, *Virginia Beach*); CBBT (Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, *Virginia Beach/Northampton*); Chincoteague (Chincoteague NWR, *Accomack*); Craney (Craney Island Dredged Material Management Area, *Portsmouth*); ESVNWR (Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR, *Northampton*); Fishermans (Fishermans Island NWR, *Northampton*); Ft. Story (Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, *Virginia Beach*); Grandview (Grandview Nature Preserve, *Hampton*); Little Creek (Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, *Virginia Beach*); Little Is. (Little Island Pk., *Virginia Beach*); Northampton Preserve (Northampton County Preserve [formerly Cheriton Landfill], *Northampton*); Rudee (Rudee Inlet, *Virginia Beach*); Stumpy (Stumpy Lake Natural Area, *Virginia Beach*)

Christmas Bird Counts: CCCBC (Cape Charles, 30 Dec); NRCBC (Nansemond River, 4 Jan).

WATERFOWL

Though **Snow Geese** were reported from numerous locations along the coast, with flocks numbering in the thousands on the Eastern Shore, records on the Peninsula this winter were far fewer. The only ones reported were 2 in the Foxbridge neighborhood, *Hampton* 22 Dec (BBa, SB), and 3 at the Lions Bridge, *Newport News* 25

Feb (ME). **Ross's Geese** made a strong showing in the Region this winter, with a total of about eight reports. *Northampton* had three records, all in the lower part of the county. The first was a single bird with a flock of **Canada Geese** at Bay Creek 18 Dec (ph. MC), followed by a flyover with a groups of Snows at Magothy Bay NAP 8 Jan (ph. MN, BBe), and a single bird in a huge Snow Goose flock on Simpkins Dr. 31 Jan (MA). In *Virginia Beach*, a smattering of reports from the Woodhouse Corner area may have pertained to the same bird moving around. The first report was from the HRSD Atlantic Treatment Plant 10 Dec (ph. K&TB), with continuing reports at this location through 16 Jan (K&TB), as well as isolated reports at nearby Sherwood Lakes 11 Dec (ph. SK); Harris Teeter Retention Pond 1 Jan (ph. SM); and a field at the corner of General Booth Boulevard and Corporate Landing Parkway 3 Jan (BH). Elsewhere in *Virginia Beach*, a long-staying bird at Windsor Lk. was found 19 Jan (ph. LR) and remained through the end of the reporting period, while a bird at Stumpy 8 Dec (ph. JSn, ph. RR) only remained through 11 Dec (ph. CH, ph. SM, m. obs.). Ross's are typically present in small numbers with the huge Snow Goose flock at Chincoteague, and this winter was no exception. The first report came on 1 Dec (CM) with scattered sightings thereafter, including a high count of 8 on 15 Feb (JF). Rounding out the reports of this diminutive goose was one in a field on Whedbee Carroll Ln., *Chesapeake* 19 Dec (LM). There were also two reports of presumed **Ross's Goose x Snow Goose** hybrids: one from Chincoteague 13 Dec (ph. DL), and another from the fields on Indiantown Rd., *Northampton* 14 Feb (ph. MA, EA). **Cackling Geese** were much scarcer by comparison, with only two records of single birds with large Canada Goose flocks: one in a field opposite Nottingham Seafood Market, *Northampton* 9 Feb (ph. MA), and another in a field near Seaview Farm, *Northampton* 14 Feb (MA, EA). **Mute Swans** have become quite rare in recent years, no doubt as a result of invasive species management measures, and this winter brought only three reports, all from *Accomack*: 2 at Chincoteague 23

Dec (WG); a single bird there 6 Feb (WG); and 2 on Wallops Pond in Wattsville 14 Feb (DL). The only **TRUMPETER SWAN** in the region put in a few appearances at Chincoteague between 20 Dec (ph. LG) and 28 Dec (LG).

Blue-winged Teal, often wintering in small numbers, were present at a few locations, including Chincoteague, Back Bay, and Princess Anne WMA. The high count was 17 birds at Back Bay 16 Feb (ph. CH, DC). **Eurasian Wigeons** were present in even more locations, with records from four cities and counties. As is often the case, Chincoteague hosted multiple birds, including a high count of 5 at the Wash Flats 28 Dec (TvW). Others included a young m. at Jane's Pond, *Northampton* 2–9 Jan (ph. RK, m. obs.); an ad. drake at Haygood Pt. Pk., *Virginia Beach* 21 Jan–27 Feb (ph. RB, m. obs.); up to 2 drakes at Hoffer Cr. Wildlife Preserve, *Portsmouth* 12 Dec–9 Feb (AM, HR, ph. m. obs.); and singles at Craney 3 Dec (BW, ph. BT, LS) and 25 Feb (AMi, LS, BW, DY). Though by no means rare across the Region, it merits mention that **Northern Pintail** was only reported from one location on the Peninsula, Grandview, with a high count of 25 on 19 Dec (SS, RP, m. obs.) and a few additional reports through 23 Feb (VM). In the same vein, **Canvasback** was frequently reported in the Region but had a poor showing on the Shore; the only records were Chincoteague 25 Dec (LG) and *Northampton* Preserve 28 Dec (ML). Always a fun bird to spot in Virginia, **King Eider** only graced two locations this winter. One, a continuing bird from the fall, was at Rudee 1–14 Dec (ph. SK, m. obs.), while a second was at Cape Charles NAP, *Northampton* 6–8 Dec (ph. MP, TMD). By contrast, **Common Eider** was much more abundant, with reports from over a dozen locations. Of note was one at Langley AFB, *Hampton* 19 Dec (ph. MS, WB), the only record for the Peninsula, as well as a high count of 9 at Chincoteague 9 Jan (ph. BBe, MN). Perhaps the most shockingly absent species this winter was **Harlequin Duck**, though surely these handsome waterfowl are under-reported now that the CBBT is no longer accessible. Nonetheless, the only

reports were 3 at CBBT Is. #3, *Northampton* 6 Feb (CO, ph. DS), and one at Rudee 29 Jan (ph. MWM). Rounding out our waterfowl, **Common Mergansers** are always rare along the coast, but especially so this year, with only three reports: singles at Sherwood Lakes, *Virginia Beach* 19 Dec–25 Feb (BH, ph. m. obs.) and a lake on Haviland Dr., *Virginia Beach* 22–23 Dec (ph. ABa, m. obs.), as well as 3 at Little Creek 31 Dec–1 Jan (DY, TT, ph. KS, CT).

QUAIL — CRANES

Northern Bobwhite were detected only a few times this winter, with reports of single birds at Magothy Bay NAP, *Northampton* 30 Dec (GA); Mallard Pool at Chincoteague 5 Jan (LG); and HRSD Atlantic Treatment Plant, *Virginia Beach* 6 Feb (K&TB), as well as 3 on Seagull Ln., *Accomack* 8 Jan (BN) and a high count of 8 at Magothy Bay NAP, *Northampton* 21 Feb (ph. RB). Perhaps the most oddly absent bird this winter was **Red-necked Grebe**, a species that is usually uncommon but reliable along the coast. This winter brought only three reports, all single birds: Rudee Inlet 28 Dec (HM); Little Creek Channel, *Virginia Beach* 15 Jan (TMD, IT); and Back Bay 15 Jan (ph. SM). The only coastal **Eared Grebe** this winter was a cooperative and long-staying bird at Cape Charles Harbor, *Northampton* 19 Feb (ph. MA) that continued to be seen into Mar. **WESTERN GREBE**, usually edging out Eared as the rarest grebe, was seen at two locations this winter. One was first spotted at False Cape SP, *Virginia Beach* 20 Dec (ph. MFM) and presumably the same bird was spotted slightly north at Back Bay and Little Is., with the last report coming from the latter location 7 Feb (ph. RB). There was also a well-described sight record from Grandview 23 Jan (NB). **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** made a remarkable showing in the Region this winter, as these tenacious little birds continue to show that they can survive our warming winters. The lion's share of reports was from *Virginia Beach*, with single birds at Cypress Pt. 1 Dec–19 Jan (DSc); a yard in Woodhouse Corner 2 Dec (K&TB);

Eaglestone Arch 26 Dec–23 Feb (ph. HG); and Knotts Is. 29 Dec (RLA). A residence on Laurel Cove Dr., *Virginia Beach* hosted up to two hummers, including an ad. m. 2 Dec–20 Feb (ph. LSi). Elsewhere, there were also birds at New Jersey Ave., *Norfolk* 1 Dec–21 Feb (ph. PS); one at Leafwood Dr., *Norfolk* 2–5 Dec (ph. JW); and one at various locations in Cape Charles, *Northampton* 3 Dec (ph. MA) and 24 Feb (MA). A second *Archilochus* at Cape Charles 3 Dec (MA) was likely a Ruby-throated as well, though was not viewed conclusively enough to rule out other species. The only **Rufous Hummingbird** this winter was a photogenic bird visiting a private yard on Saddlehorn Dr., *Chesapeake* 10 Jan–18 Feb (ph. KR, m. obs.). A *Selasphorus* hummer identified as a possible Rufous was in a yard in *Norfolk* 9 Jan (ph. CHa), and the observer indicated that it was a continuing bird. Undoubtedly the superstar of the winter was a **BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD** visiting a



Buff-bellied Hummingbird ph. in Larchmont, *Norfolk* by Cindy Hamilton, 31 Jan 2021.

private yard in the Larchmont neighborhood, *Norfolk* 9–15 Jan (ph. MG, m. obs.). After news of the sighting spread, it came to light that the bird had previously been visiting a different feeder at a nearby yard since 2 Dec (ph. BI, *vide* RLA), with no overlap between its appearances at each location. This sighting was not merely a first record for Virginia, but the only record anywhere n. of North Carolina apart from a bizarre outlier from just n. of Milwaukee, *Ozaukee*, WI in 2017. **Sora** were present in force in the area around Back Bay, but elsewhere they were few and far between, represented only by 2 at Craney 3 Dec–4 Feb (BW, BT, DY, et. al.) and one at Chincoteague 11–30 Dec (JL, m. obs.). Still, this

meager showing bested **King Rail**, which was not detected anywhere away from its stronghold in the freshwater marshes around Back Bay. **Common Gallinules** are a rare but regular winter visitor, and these marsh chickens put in appearances at Craney 3 Dec (ph. BT, BW, LS) and 14 Jan (ph. BW, AMi, DY, LS); Chincoteague 28–29 Dec (ph. LMc); Back Bay 17 Jan (ph. SM); and Princess Anne WMA, Virginia Beach 14 Feb (ph. RB) and 28 Feb (TT). Finishing out the *Gruiformes*, **Sandhill Cranes** were reported from both Eastern Shore counties. Two were seen in a field on Cedar Grove Dr., *Northampton* 8 Jan (ph. BBe, MN), and presumably the same birds were detected later that day further north on Cherrystone Dr. (ph. BBe, MN). There were also 3 in a marsh at Greenbackville, *Accomack* 29 Dec 9 (LB).

SHOREBIRDS

As is the case almost every winter, a huge congregation of **American Avocets** overwintered at Craney; these birds were present for the duration of the report period, with a peak count of 219 on 3 Dec (BW, BT, et al.). This species is far more notable in *Newport News*, but King-Lincoln Park is not terribly far as the avocet flies, and flocks of 76 on 24 Jan (ph. AC) and 70 on 30 Jan (ph. AC) were likely splinters from the main group at Craney. Away from Hampton Roads, avocets were recorded at only two locations this winter. Two at Northampton Preserve 20 Dec (JM) were continuing birds from the fall, and another was at Chincoteague 8 Jan (ph. JL). **American Oystercatchers** were widespread on the Shore, with fewer reports from *Virginia Beach* and only three reports of single birds elsewhere in the Region: Messick Pt., *Poquoson* 2 Feb (JSt); Grandview 23 Feb (DC); and Craney 25 Feb (ph. BW, DY, LS). Though **Semipalmated Plover** is a rare wintering species, reports came in from several spots up and down the Shore, with multiple records each from Chincoteague; Willis Wharf, *Northampton*; and various barrier islands in *Accomack* and

Northampton. Across the Bay, the only reports were 3 at Craney 17 Dec (BW, DY); 2 there 4 Feb (ph. BW, LS, DY, AMi); and 3 at Grandview 6–19 Dec (JWi, ph. JG, HW). Far rarer among winter *Charadrius* was a **Piping Plover** at Grandview 3 Dec (ph. ABr), which is one of only about a half-dozen winter records for this species in Virginia. **Least Sandpipers** are often present in very low densities, and this winter was no exception. The highest count was a total of 11 birds spread across several barrier islands during the CCCBC. Apart from this, records came in from ESNWR 13 Jan (AR, SS); Grandview 3 Dec (ABr) and 29 Dec (ph. KRi); and throughout the report period at Craney, with a high of 78 on 25 Feb (BW, LS, DY, AMi). **Whimbrels** were also present in small numbers, with all records coming from *Northampton*. The CCCBC turned up a total of 8, with 7 from the flats at Toms Creek (NN, DCr) and a single bird at Oyster (ph. ABo). Elsewhere, there were reports of a single bird at the Northampton Preserve 3 Dec (AR, LA); 2 at Box Tree Marsh, *Northampton* 18 Dec (GB); and 6 there 2 Jan (ph. RK). **Red Knots** are typically uncommon to rare along the coast in winter, and this year most of the reports were concentrated around Back Bay in lower *Virginia Beach*, with about a dozen sightings. Elsewhere, there were reports of a single bird foraging with a large shorebird flock in the fields at Bulls Farm, *Northampton* 1 Jan (MA, EA), and another solo bird at Chincoteague 15 Dec (ph. JL). Far and away the most noteworthy report of this species was a combined count of 131 on the CCCBC from Mink and Smith Islands, hinting at the incredible concentrations of birds that go largely undetected with our limited access to Virginia's barrier islands. **Purple Sandpiper** is always an extremely local species in Virginia, but detections are down somewhat without regular access at their typical CBBT stronghold. Most of the records this winter were at this species' traditional haunts, with regular or semi-regular reports coming in from the Cape Charles fishing pier, *Northampton*; Rudee; Grandview; and the CBBT (on the few occasions anyone was able to bird it). Away from these spots, the only other

records were up to 2 at Ft. Story 1–4 Dec (SM), and one at East Beach, *Norfolk* 3–4 Dec (MFM, MA). **Long-billed Dowitchers** are often around in small numbers in winter, but this year they seemed quite scarce. Back Bay had the bulk of the reports, with sightings of 6 on 29 Dec (CF, DC), 6 on 15 Jan (DC), and 12 on 5 Feb (RLA, LMo). The only other reports were 3 at Chincoteague 3 Dec (NN); 10 on Lawson Rd., *Poquoson* 26 Dec (DC); and a high count of 16 at the Northampton Preserve 3 Dec (AR, LA). The CCCBC typically turns in high counts of **American Woodcock**, and this year was no exception, with a total of over 48 individuals (*vide* BW)! The CCCBC also yielded the only **Spotted Sandpiper** of the season, a single bird on Mink Is. (EO).

SKUAS — SKIMMERS

Seawatching effort has been growing in *Virginia Beach* of late, and the winter of 2020-2021 yielded some exciting finds for birders posted up along the coast. Doubtless a major boon for seawatchers was the presence of shrimp trawlers close to shore off Little Is., which drew masses of gulls, gannets, and other seabirds in close to shore. One of the most exciting finds was a well-described **GREAT SKUA** seen by an experienced seawatcher off Little Is. 4 Jan (ABa), only the second time this species has been sighted from shore in Virginia and the first since 1999. A lesser cousin to the powerful skuas, **Pomarine Jaegers** were seen from shore twice: one off Ft. Story 1 Dec (SM), and another off Little Is. 18 Jan (ABa, TT, WT). Far more numerous were **Parasitic Jaegers**, which were detected from shore on over a dozen occasions between 5 Dec (ph. RB) and 21 Jan (ph. MFM, ph. JSt). Almost all of these sightings were on the southern *Virginia Beach* coast, between Sandbridge and False Cape SP. An exception to this was two reports from Rudee: 5 Dec (ABa) and 3 Jan (ABa). The highest single-day count – at least 7, but possibly more – came from a marathon day of seawatching at Little Is. 16 Jan (MA, RB, NN, m. obs.) that also yielded several other noteworthy

sightings as detailed below. Certainly, one of the most exciting avian events this winter was the major influx of **DOVEKIE**, which were recorded in numerous places up and down the coast. This was all the more remarkable given that there were essentially no offshore outings this winter, and nearly all of the sightings of these delightful little auks – which are not always found in numbers



Dovekie ph. at Little Is Pk. by Baxter Beamer, 16 Jan 2021.

even at sea – came from inshore waters or from shore! Nearshore trips run by Rudee Tours detected this species on a few occasions, with a high count of 12 off the southern tip of *Northampton* 14 Jan (ph. RT). *Virginia Beach* had a spate of reports from shore, including at 88th St. Beach 2 Jan (ABa); Rudee 28 Jan (ABa) and 8 Feb (TT); and False Cape SP 15 Jan (ph. MFM). Five birds were seen from Back Bay NWR 15 Jan (ph. SM), and reports continued at this location through 18 Jan (TT). The epicenter of from-shore Dovekie in *Virginia Beach*, however, was clearly Little Is., where as many as 5 were logged almost daily between 16 Jan (ph. MA, ph. RB, m. obs.) and 10 Feb (ph. SK, ABa, DC). At times, multiple birds were in view just feet from the fishing pier, to the joy of many birders! Away from *Virginia Beach*, reports were fewer and no doubt limited by the lack of easy ocean viewing. Nonetheless, Dovekie were also reported from Chincoteague 15 Jan (ph. BBB) and 18 Jan (ph. ABi, SB); South Metompkin Is., *Accomack* 15 Jan (ph. ZP); and East Beach, *Norfolk* 31 Jan (ph. HR). A murre of either species is notable in Virginia waters, yet this winter we had records of both. A **COMMON MURRE** was reported on an offshore survey near the Dominion Energy wind turbines, *Northampton* 20 and 28 Jan (ADi). A second

Common Murre was seen from shore at Ft. Story 31 Jan (ph. SK). Adding to the alcid extravaganza, a **THICK-BILLED MURRE** was seen in the channel between North Racoon and South Skidmore Islands, *Northampton* 4 Feb (ph. DJ, ZP, DR), and though the observers were on a boat at the time of the sighting, the bird likely



Thick-billed Murre ph. in Skidmore Is. Channel by Danielle Jones, 4 Feb 2021.

would have been visible from land. Though almost pedestrian by comparison, **Razorbills** were also in evidence this winter, with dozens of reports from the *Virginia Beach* coast between Ft. Story and False Cape SP, as well as several from the CBBT. The only other reports were from Chincoteague: a single bird 24 Dec (ph. LG), and 2 on 4 Feb (TT). **Bonaparte's Gulls** seemed to be less abundant this year than is typical, and larger flocks that were present off *Virginia Beach* earlier in the year all but vanished as the winter wore on. Nonetheless, we did manage one record apiece for each of the two rarer small, hooded gulls. A **Black-headed Gull** was at East Beach, *Norfolk* 30 Jan (ph. DS) and 1 Feb (ph. BBe); though in years past this spot was somewhat reliable for them, this was the first record here since 2016. The only **Little Gull** this winter was an ad. mixed with Bonaparte's Gulls off Little Is. 17 Jan (AR). Though **Laughing Gulls** are often quite scarce in winter, this year there were dozens of reports, both coastal and inland, representing every county and city in the Region. White-winged gulls seemed less numerous this year than in the past few, but there were a handful of reports for each species. The first **Iceland Gull** of the season was one at Cape Charles Beach, *Northampton* 14 Jan (ph. AR, SS). Other reports were all from *Virginia Beach*, beginning with a

first-cycle at Ft. Story 1 Feb (ABa, ph. SK). Rudee Inlet hosted at least 2, possibly 3 individuals, beginning 15 Feb (CW). A gleaming white first-cycle photographed there 19 Feb (ph. TM) was certainly a different bird than the duskier third-cycle the following day (ph. BBe). The latter seemed a compelling candidate for **Thayer's Gull**. Three locations hosted **Glaucous Gulls**: Rudee 28 Jan (ABa, ph. JM) and 4 Feb (DC); Little Is. 6 Feb (ABa); and Cape Charles Beach, *Northampton* 21 Feb (RLA, ES, TS). Also meriting a mention, an apparent **Herring x Glaucous (Nelson's) Gull** was an exciting find at Rudee 5 Feb (ph. TM) and 20 Feb (ph. BBe). Once a major rarity in North America, **Lesser Black-backed Gull** hardly merits a mention these days, particularly in winter. True to form, this species was seen in dozens of locations throughout the Region, but there was a notable paucity of records from the lower Shore, where the only *Northampton* records away from the CBBT were 7 at Kiptopeke SP 17 Feb (TT) and 6 at Cape Charles Beach 26 Feb (AR, LA). **Royal Terns** were spotted sporadically at over a dozen locations in *Virginia Beach*, including a high count of 33 at First Landing SP 4 Dec (ABa). The vast majority of these records were from Dec, with only a handful of Jan and Feb birds. Away from *Virginia Beach*, Chincoteague had a smattering of reports, all in Dec, while the only *Northampton* report was one at Kiptopeke SP 27 Dec (MK). Though not, strictly speaking, a Virginia sighting, a Royal Tern spotted near Redington Shores, *Pinellas*, FL 7 Jan (ph. KC) had been banded as a chick 25 June 1990 on Fishermans (JWe), making it over 30 years old! Small groups of **Black Skimmers** were reported from a few widely-scattered locations, including one at Chincoteague 19 Jan (ph. GL); 9 at Back Bay 29 Dec (AD); 2 at Little Is. 27 Dec (TT) and 23 Jan (DL); and up to 4 at Pleasure House Pt. 28 Dec (ph. RB, ph. KRi). The high count was 20 birds at Grandview 10 Jan (ph. DC); 3 of these birds remained through 30 Jan (ph. AR, JWa).

LOONS — WOODPECKERS

One prize for patient seawatchers this winter was **PACIFIC LOON**, a species not recorded in the Coastal Region since 2018. This winter, we had two! The first of these was seen from Little Is. 16 Jan (ph. NN, m. obs.) and continued there through 15 Feb (CF). Another was spotted from Messick Pt., *Poquoson* 21 Jan (JSt). Despite the lack of any offshore trips, Virginia birders notched two species of tubenose this winter. The rarer of the two was a **SOOTY SHEARWATER** spotted in the cloud of gulls and gannets following the shrimp trawlers off Little Is. 16 Jan (ph. RB, m. obs.). A bit more expected was **MANX SHEARWATER**, seen on multiple occasions this winter. From shore, seawatchers tallied up to 2 at Back Bay 15 Jan (ph. SM) and 18 Jan (TT), and at Little Is. 16 Jan (RB, MA, m. obs.) and 18 Jan (ABa, TT, WT). The high count was 6 on a Rudee Tours boat trip in near-shore waters off *Virginia Beach* 24 Jan (ph. BBe, ph. AR, m. obs.). A recently deceased ad. f. **BROWN BOOBY** discovered at Craney 10 Dec (ph. BW, BT, AM, LS) was particularly notable given that Virginia has no previous winter eBird records for this species. Another species with detection rates sharply impacted by diminished CBBT access was **Great Cormorant**, which was reported from shockingly few locations this winter. Apart from a handful of CBBT reports, this species was only seen at a few locations: 85th St. Beach, *Virginia Beach* 1 Dec (AR, LA) and 8 Feb (TT); First Landing SP 12 Jan (ph. JM) through 19 Jan (ABr) with a high of 4 on 15 Jan (AR, SS); 4th View St., *Norfolk* 10 Jan (AR); Magothy Bay NAP, *Northampton* 30 Dec (RBT); and South Metompkin Is., *Accomack* 15 Jan (ZP). **American White Pelicans** were at a few spots across the Region this winter, with high counts of 13 and 11 at, respectively, Stumpy Lake 18 Jan (ph. KK) and Magothy Bay NAP 1 Dec (AR, LA). Elsewhere, single birds were at Back Bay 29 Dec (ph. DC, CF); *Pleasure House Pt.* 20 Jan (TT) through 22 Jan (ph. DC, ph. K&TB); and *Chincoteague* 13 Dec (ph. SR) through 17 Dec (ph. JL, ML). Uncommon and difficult to detect,

American Bitterns were mostly reported from the marshes around *Chincoteague* and *Back Bay* this winter. Away from these strongholds, the only records were from *ESVNWR* 17 Jan (ST, PK, et al.) and 22 Jan (WF, BF), as well as *Great Dismal Swamp NWR*, *Suffolk* 17 Dec (ph. GH). Reports of three species of mid-sized waders were very localized this winter. **Snowy Egrets** were mostly concentrated at *Chincoteague* and northern *Virginia Beach*, with only a handful of reports elsewhere. **Little Blue Herons** were even more restricted, with the only reports coming from *Chincoteague*, *Tangier*, and the southern tip of *Northampton* – none were reported away from the Shore. Likewise, **Tricolored Heron** was almost entirely confined to the Shore, with ample reports from *Chincoteague* and southern *Northampton*. The lone exception to this was a long-staying bird at *Back Bay* that was spotted between 10 Feb (ph. SK, ph. RR) and 28 Feb (LR, ph. TM). Providing a mirror image of these distribution patterns, **Cattle Egrets** were only spotted in southern *Virginia Beach* at a smattering of locations on the west side of *Back Bay*. Much rarer as an overwintering bird, **Green Heron** was only detected at two locations. One at *Chincoteague* was present prior to the report period, and continued to be seen through at least 14 Feb (JGe). On practically the opposite end of the Region, an ad. was at *Third Port Pond*, *Newport News* 5 Dec (ph. LW). The only **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** was at *ESVNWR* 2 Dec (AR, LA). **White Ibises** were present in abundance at *Chincoteague* and in south *Virginia Beach*, but reports elsewhere were few and far between; the only ones were one at *Pleasure House Pt.* 5 Jan (BBe, MN) and 13 Jan (BBe); one at *Bayville Farms Pk.*, *Virginia Beach* 19 Jan (ph. SM, ph. JM); 2 at *ESVNWR* 2 Dec (AR, LA); and one at *Fishermans* 4 Dec (NN, AR, LA). **Osprey** are practically regular low-density wintering species in the Tidewater, with records too numerous to mention. There were far fewer on the Shore, however, with only about a half-dozen reports from southern *Northampton* and *Chincoteague*. **Golden Eagles** were only reported thrice this winter, all from lower *Northampton*:

Kiptopeke SP 6 Dec (WT); Magothy Bay NAP 30 Dec (MB); and 2 over Wise Pt. 17 Feb (ZP). **Barn Owls** are quite rare in the Region anymore, but as is often the case, diligent searching turned up a few on Christmas Counts, including one on Fishermans for the CCBC and 2 for the NRCBC (*fide* BW). Though many birders had hoped the 2020-2021 winter would be a **Snowy Owl** invasion year, this largely did not pan out. Nonetheless, we did have a handful of these charismatic Arctic owls in the Coastal Region. Chincoteague can usually be counted on to have a Snowy, and it did not disappoint – one was first



Snowy Owl ph. at Back Bay NWR by Marlee Fuller-Morris, 23 Dec 2020.

spotted 26 Dec (ph. CMo) and reported sporadically through 17 Jan (ph. MPa). Another long-staying bird was at Craney from 4 Jan (ph. DC, ph. AH) through 4 Feb (ph. BW, DY, LS, AMi). The other two reports were both one-day wonders: a bird on a residential roof on 83rd St., *Virginia Beach* 20 Dec (ph. JH, m. obs.) and another (possibly the same bird) spotted in the dunes at False Cape SP 23 Dec by campers and relayed to birders who happened to be there (ph. CH, ph. SK). Though this winter seemed to be a good one for **Short-eared Owls** in the Piedmont, it was decidedly not on the Coast, where the only reports were from *Accomack*, including the typical location at Saxis, which had a high of 5 on 24 Jan (ph. G&HS), as well as Factory Pt. 30 Jan (ph. LG). Rounding out the non-passerines, the translocated **RED-COCKADED WOODPECKERS** at Great Dismal Swamp were still going strong, with one report from the Sycamore Ditch site, *Chesapeake* 7 Jan (RLA).

FLYCATCHERS — CHATS

Apart from phoebes, any flycatcher is a cause for excitement in winter, so it was certainly gratifying to see reports of **ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER** from three different locations! The first of these was a one-day wonder at the Harris Teeter Retention Pond, *Virginia Beach* 10 Dec (ph. SM), followed in short order by a longer-staying bird at Sandy Bottom Nature Pk., *Hampton* first spotted 19 Dec (MNi) and remaining through 28 Dec (BBa, SB). Rounding out the reports was one on the NRCBC, *Suffolk* (DY, JWr). The state's first **COUCH'S KINGBIRD** was discovered at Chincoteague in Nov, but lingered into the winter with the final reports on 6 Dec (JSt, BHo). Among our hardier passerines, **White-eyed Vireos** were detected on two occasions – the first on Colchester Rd., *Virginia Beach* 23 Dec (TT), and the second at Chincoteague 19 Jan (ph. ST, m. obs.). **COMMON RAVENS** have only been seen on the Coast a handful of times since the 1930s, though as they continue their eastward march in the state perhaps records will become more widespread. In any event, a bird soaring over I-64, *Newport News* 10 Jan (EO) was an exceptional find. The spot where this bird was seen was not far from where one was reported in Oct, suggesting that perhaps this bird is lingering locally. The only unusual swallow of the winter was a single **Barn Swallow** at Magothy Bay NAP, *Northampton* 2 Dec (AR, LA). **Cave Swallows** were stunningly absent this winter – in fact, the only report of this species statewide in 2020 was a Nov bird in *Prince George* (ph. ABr), and the Coast failed to add any additional records this winter despite ample historical precedent. Surely a highlight for seasoned birders and casual observers alike was the abundance of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** this winter, with reports of these comical little creatures coming in droves throughout the Region. Less remarked-upon, but no less notable, was the invasion of **White-breasted Nuthatches**. This phenomenon was particularly evident on the Shore, where this typically uncommon and very local species was

reported regularly from dozens of locations where it is not normally present. Both **Sedge Wren** and **Marsh Wren** seemed to do well this winter, with plenty of reports of each spanning the Region, mostly from reliable locations including Back Bay; Grandview; Chincoteague; Saxis, *Accomack*; and Magotha Rd., *Northampton*. **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** occasionally linger into the early days of winter, and this season was no exception, with five Dec reports: Cape Charles Central Pk., *Northampton* 3 Dec (ph. MA); Kiptopeke SP 11 Dec (AHe, RH, WO); a yard in Laurel Manor, *Virginia Beach* 16 Dec (TM); Munden Pt. Pk., *Virginia Beach* 18 Dec (ph. ABa); and Fishermans during the CCCBC (*vide* BW). **American Pipits** were reported sporadically from locations widely scattered across the Region, but typically only in small groups, so a flock of 112 on Munden Rd., *Virginia Beach* 17 Jan (ph. RB) far outstripped other counts. Perhaps the most talked-about phenomenon of the year was the remarkable invasion of **Evening Grosbeaks**, one of the strongest showings this species has made in Virginia in decades. The movement began in earnest in the fall, and continued in most places into the winter. However, while grosbeaks were common and widespread in the Piedmont and Mountains, the irruption never seemed to quite



Evening Grosbeaks ph. in Onancock, *Accomack* by Martina Coker, 21 Feb 2021.

reach such heights on the Coast. Here, our winter reports were few and widely scattered: 4 on 5 Dec at a yard in western *Virginia Beach* (ph. BD); a Christmas present at a residence on Arthur Drive, *Suffolk* 25 Dec (LAr); one at the Brownsville Preserve, *Northampton* 28 Dec (GR, MLi); two at ESVNWR 30 Dec (ES, TS); and a flock of up to

12 birds visiting a feeder in Onancock, *Accomack* beginning 3 Feb and continuing into Mar (L&JM, ph. MC). If grosbeaks were fewer than hoped for, the invasion of other finches continued unabated, with both **Purple Finches** and **Pine Siskins** present in impressive number throughout the Region, though numbers of the latter did seem to taper off later in the winter. Though birders speculated that **Red Crossbills** would be on the move this winter, that was largely not the case in Virginia apart from a relative handful of reports. All of the Coastal reports were on the Shore, though we did as well as any region, with multiple reports from both counties and at least one long-staying, chaseable flock. Crossbills were recorded at Kiptopeke beginning in the fall and spilling over into winter, with reports there 4 Dec (MA) and 8 Dec (a. r. TJ, DG, TMD, MA). The latter birds were identified from audio as Type 10. Other reports for *Northampton* included 2 at Brownsville Preserve 28 Dec (GR, AL, MLi); 7 at ESVNWR 14 Jan (AR, SS); and 3 near Cheriton 19 Jan (ZP). At Chincoteague, a flock was present in the fall and continued throughout the winter, with most reports coming from the Woodland Trail, though the highest single count was 26 at the Assateague Lighthouse 26 Feb (LG). **Snow Buntings** were only present at a few locations this winter; the most reliable spot was the beach at First Landing SP, where a small group was seen between 4 Dec (ABa, ph. JM) and 23 Feb (SK). The highest count at First Landing was 4 on 17 Jan (ph. HW). Elsewhere, there were reports of 5 at 85th St., *Virginia Beach* 21 Dec (MSa) and 3 at Little Creek 31 Dec (DY, TT) and 24 Jan (ph. KS). This winter was not a bad one for **Clay-colored Sparrow**, with four reports including a long-staying bird at the Harris Teeter Retention Pond, *Virginia Beach* between 30 Dec (ph. RB) and 16 Feb (ph. MFM). Other reports included one at a private residence in *Virginia Beach* 13 and 22 Jan (BH); 2 visiting a feeder at Saddlehorn Drive, *Chesapeake* 4 Feb (ph. KR); and one on the NRCBC (RLA, BW). Always uncommon on the Coast, **White-crowned Sparrows** were reported very sporadically this winter, though they did seem to be reliable at the

few locations that had them. The longest-staying birds were up to 2 at the HRSD Atlantic Treatment Plant, *Virginia Beach* 13 Jan (m. obs.) through 24 Jan (ph. SK), and as many as 6 at the Harris Teeter Retention Pond, *Virginia Beach* 6 Dec (ph. RB) through 28 Feb (RB). Though all six were never reported by a single observer, detailed analysis of age and plumage confirmed the count (*vide* RB). Two of the birds at the latter location were determined to be of the **Gambel's** subspecies (ph. RB, m. obs.), making this one of very few locations in the East hosting more than a single Gambel's this winter. Other White-crowned observations included one at Back Bay 28 Dec (JE) through 13 Jan (ph. RR); one at Cayman Ln., *Virginia Beach* 18 Feb (K&TB); one in Townsend, *Northampton* 30 Dec (WT); and one on Stoakley Rd., *Northampton* 13 Feb (ZP). The only **Vesper Sparrows** were in lower *Northampton*, but here there was a scattering of reports across multiple locations and often including multiple individuals. The highest count was an astounding 28 birds at the intersection of Pond Drain and Arlington Rds., *Northampton* 1 Jan (GA, KKI). **Yellow-breasted Chats** seemed to do well this winter, with a half-dozen reports all from the Tidewater: singles at Back Bay 2 Jan (ph. GH) through 1 Feb (ph. TT); Harris Teeter Retention Pond, *Virginia Beach* 11 Dec (MCo) through 21 Feb (LR); Munden Rd., *Virginia Beach* 14 Jan (ph. SK); Moses Grady Trail, *Chesapeake* 23 Jan (ph. BK); Elizabeth R. Pk., *Chesapeake* 5 and 14 Jan (ph. DGi); and a private yard in Larchmont, *Norfolk* 9 Jan through at least 14 Feb (ph. MG, m. obs.).

BLACKBIRDS — BUNTINGS

Though **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** can often be found by patient observers working large mixed blackbird flocks, this winter brought only a single report: an ad. m. in a thousands-strong blackbird flock in agricultural fields off Princess Anne Rd., *Virginia Beach* 2 Feb (DC) and 3 Feb (K&TB). One of the most unexpected and exciting developments this winter was the presence of not

one, but two different individual **BULLOCK'S ORIOLES** visiting yards in *Virginia Beach*. The first, a young m., visited a yard in South Shores Estates beginning 27 Dec (JMa) and was last seen 4 Jan (ph. BBe, ph. MN, m. obs.). Coincidentally, a stunning ad. m. was spotted in a yard backing up to L. Smith 4 Jan (ph. BZ, MZ) and continued



Bullock's Oriole ph. at L. Smith by Bob Zobot, 26 Feb 2021.

to visit into Mar. Taken together with a third bird (also an ad. m.) in *Harrisonburg*, the 2020-2021 winter represents a remarkable incursion of this species in Virginia! **Rusty Blackbirds**, those once-common denizens of swampy bottomlands, continued their sad decline and were impressive in their scarceness this winter. The Coastal Region notched fewer than a dozen reports, a tragic state of affairs for such a charming bird. By and large, these reports were not large flocks, with the high count of 37 provided by a continuing group of birds at Red Wing Pk., *Virginia Beach* 13 Dec (AR, RW, CL). The only **BREWER'S BLACKBIRDS** this winter were at what can now be described as “the” reliable location at Breeze Farms, *Virginia Beach*, where they were reported throughout the winter with a high count of 14 on 19 Dec (ph. JG, HW). Among our overwintering warblers, **Black-and-white Warbler** is almost common enough in the Tidewater to be considered a regular low-density winter species, with dozens of reports this winter from *Virginia Beach*, *Chesapeake*, *Norfolk*, and *Portsmouth*. Away from this cluster, records were fewer and far between. The Peninsula turned in three sightings: Sandy Bottom Nature Pk., *Hampton* 19 Dec (MNi); Hilton Village, *Newport News* 14–15 Jan (ph. AC); and Huntington Pk.,

Newport News 16 Jan (ph. AC). Likewise, the Shore also had three, including one at Kiptopeke 29 Dec (Anonymous eBirder) and 2 different birds at widely-spaced locations on the CCCBC (GA, ph. ABo). The only other record was at L. Meade Pk., *Suffolk* 24 Dec–6 Feb (CMi). There were two reports of **Nashville Warbler** this winter – the Beasley Tract of Princess Anne WMA 27 Dec (ABa) and Magotha Rd., *Northampton* 1 Jan (MA, EA). **Northern Parulas** turned up at three locations: White House Ln., *Virginia Beach* 9 Dec (TT); Atlantic Park neighborhood, *Virginia Beach* 16 Jan (MA, BBe, ph. TB); and Saddlehorn Drive, *Chesapeake* 18 Jan and 4 Feb (ph. KR). Four **Yellow-throated Warblers** made appearances, all singles at bird feeders: Kempsville, *Virginia Beach* 10 Dec–26 Feb (ph. UD); Redmill, *Virginia Beach* 19 Dec (ph. NE); Corinthia Drive, *Newport News* 20 Dec and 3 Jan (ph. ABol); and Mill Stone Rd., *Chesapeake* 14 Feb (EC). Our only **Prairie Warblers** this winter were a lingering bird at Chincoteague that was spotted on 1 Dec (ph. MFM) and again 6 Dec (JTF), as well as one on the NRCBC (*fide* BW). The unquestionable star of the show for wintering warblers was a gorgeous m. **TOWNSEND’S WARBLER** that began visiting a feeder in Kempsville, *Virginia Beach* in late Nov and remained through 10 Dec (ph. UD). The location where this bird was seen is only a few miles from



Townsend's Warbler ph. in Kempsville, *Virginia Beach* by Una Davenport, 4 Dec 2020.

Mt. Trashmore Pk., where one was seen 26–27 Sep (m. obs.), begging the question of whether this could be the same bird. No less remarkable was a **Black-throated Green Warbler** that

visited a feeder in Kempsville, *Virginia Beach* 18 Dec (ph. JFi), one of very few winter records for this species in the state. Virginia only has six eBird records of winter **Summer Tanagers**, and remarkably, two of those records were from this winter(!) – one visiting a feeder opposite the parking area at Northampton Preserve 25 Dec (ph. MA, EA) through 20 Feb (ph. BBe, ph. NB), and another at a feeder on Condor Drive, *Chesapeake* 16 Jan (ph. EM). **Western Tanager** has gone from being a sought-after rarity to an almost expected species in recent years, particularly in the Peninsula and Tidewater, and this year brought several reports. *Virginia Beach* had by far the most, including one f. in the Little Neck section 1–10 Jan (ph. JB, ph. RL, MeC); a f. in the Middle Plantation section to 16 Feb (ph. RL, MeC); a m. and f. at close location in the Seabreeze section through 28 Feb (ph. JB); and a m. at 89th St. 11 Jan (ph. JM). Away from *Virginia Beach*, records included a f. in the Greenbrier neighborhood, *Chesapeake* 5–6 Jan (ph. JP); an ad. m. at the Windsor Great Pk. neighborhood, *Newport News* 18 Dec (JSt) and 19 Dec (MA); a f. in *Poquoson* 2 Feb (ph. ALu) that the observer indicated had been present for two weeks; and a m. on Paddock Rd., *Norfolk* 15 Feb (ph. JK). Our only **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** for the Coastal Region put in an appearance at a feeder at Quail Pointe Cove, *Virginia Beach* 5 Dec (ph. CH). An exceptionally late **Blue Grosbeak** at Grandview 6 Feb (ph. DCh, TC) was Virginia's first Feb record in eBird. The only **Indigo Bunting** this winter was one visiting a feeder on Saddlehorn Drive, *Chesapeake* 29 Jan–18 Feb (ph. KR). At times, this bird shared the feeder with a **Painted Bunting**, giving some lucky observers a winter two-bunting day! The influx of Painted Buntings in the Mid-Atlantic this winter was a noteworthy event that was nonetheless easily overlooked by birders in the Tidewater, which is practically a part of this species' regular winter range. True to form, *Virginia Beach*, *Norfolk*, *Chesapeake*, and *Portsmouth* together accounted for dozens of Painted Bunting reports this winter, with a high count of 4 (two apiece m. and f.) at the Atlantic

Park neighborhood, *Virginia Beach* 5 Jan (ph. BBe, MN) and 16 Jan (MA, EA, BBe, TB). The only report elsewhere in the Region was a m. and f. visiting a feeder in Wythe, *Hampton* 14 Feb (ph. CHa).

Contributors: Robert L. Ake (RLA), Logan Anderson, Erin Anthony, Matt Anthony, George Armistead, Linda Arthur, Lynn Badger, Andrew Baldelli (ABa), Bryan Barmore (BBa), Nancy Barnhart, Baxter Beamer (BBe), Tucker Beamer, Karen & Tom Beatty (K&TB), Anne Bielamowicz (ABi), Steve Bielamowicz, Rob Bielawski, William Boeh, Joy Bolander, Adam Bollinger (ABol), Arun Bose (ABo), “BowBrownBrook” (BBB), Michael Braun, Allen Bryan (ABr), George Burruss, Sharon Burton, Andrew Cameron, Drew Chaney (DCh), Tim Chaney, David Clark, Melissa Cocker (MeC), Martina Coker, Mike Collins (MCo), Elisha Cook, Kara Cook, Daniel A. Cristol (DCr), Una Davenhill, Todd M. Day (TMD), Beth Deir, Adrian Digby (ADi), Adam D’Onofrio, Martha Elliott, Jack Estworthy IV, Nadene Evans, Chris Farabaugh, John Fisher (JFi), Betsy Foster, William Foster, James T. Fox (JTF), Janice Frye, Marlee Fuller-Morris (MFM), Jonathan Geisler (JGe), David Gibson, Joe Girgente, Doug Gochfeld, Margie Gomez, William Goode, Jr. (WG), Hope Grasser, Linda Greble, Cathy Hamilton (CHa), Cindy Hamilton, Carole Hargett, Andrew Hawkins, Joy Haycox, Alyssa Hemler (AHe), Rentz Hilyer, Bill Hohenstein (BHo), Brandon Holland, Greg Hudson, Barbara Innes, Tom Johnson, Danielle Jones, John Keifer,

Steve Keith, Roberta Kellam, Michael Kendrick, Kristin Klein (KKl), Kyle Klotz, Beth Knight, Peter Kussin, Carson Lambert, Joanne Laskowski, Daniel Lebbin, Aylett Lipford, Michael Lipford (MLi), Gretchen Locy, Marguerite Long, Reese Lukei, Andree Lupico (ALu), Laura Mae, Tommy Maloney, James Marcum, Alina Marston, Ellis Maxey, June McDaniels, Laura & Jim McGowan (L&JM), Hugh McGuinness, Leah McMillion (LMc), Victor Melendez, Mark Wolfman Messmore, Christine Miller (CMi), Alex Minarik (AMi), Chris Monahan, Chris Montross (CMo), Lauren Mowbray (LMo), Steve Myers, Ben Nettleton, Nicholas E. Newberry, Marc Nichols (MNI), Martina Nordstrand, Clark Olsen, Ellison Orcutt, Wendy Ormont, Milton Paul, Michelle Payne (MPa), Robert Peterman, Zak Poulton, Jess Price, Andrew Rapp, Deanna Reese, Garrett Rhyne, Kathy Richardson (KRi), Keith Roberts, Steve Roble, Rueben Rohn, Lisa Rose, Hank Rouland, Rudee Tours (RT), Max Sandkam (MSa), Patricia Scanlon, Debbie Schroeder (DSc), Lee Schuster, Loretta Silvia (LSi), Sam Simon, Gary & Helen Smith (G&HS), Ty Smith, Jonathan Snyder (JSn), Mark Sopko, Evan Spears, Dana Spontak, Jason Strickland (JSt), Karl Suttman, Stuart Sweetman (SSw), Brian Taber, Tracy Tate, Wes Teets, Simon RB Thompson (ST), Cassidy Titus, Robert B. Toner (RBT), Ian Topolsky, Tiffany VanWyck (TvW), Jamie Walker, Jacob Warner (JWa), John Weske (JWe), Lucas White, Bill Williams, Cathy Williamson, James Winkelmann (JWi), Hannah Wojtysiak, Robert Wood, Jennifer Wright (JWr), Howard Wu, Dave Youker, Bob Zobot, Marion Zobot.

SPRING 2021

Weather this spring started out as one might expect, with temperatures in March averaging 53°, consistent with the historical average of 55°. Nonetheless, things began to heat up toward the end of the month, with several days reaching highs of over 80°. Though the peak temperature in April was 88°, on the whole average temperatures were a bit cooler than typical; May likewise remained somewhat cooler than average despite isolated days with intense heat. It was a fairly dry spring, with almost no rain to speak of in March and below average precipitation in May. As is often the case on the coast, spring migration was touch-and-go, with few big migration events and some species represented by only a few reports. Earlier in the season, birding was marked by lingering irruptives from the preceding winter, including Red-breasted Nuthatches, Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, and a few Evening Grosbeaks and Red Crossbills. There were two offshore outings: one at the beginning of March that reported impressive numbers and diversity of alcids and other winter pelagics, and a second boat in May that was considerably more lackluster. A few major rarities caused a great deal of excitement, particularly Virginia's first White Wagtail and second Heermann's Gull. Other significant records included Western Grebe, White-winged Dove, Yellow Rail, Ruff, Great Skua, Thick-billed Murre, California Gull, Magnificent Frigatebird, White-faced Ibis, Snowy Owl, Bullock's Oriole, and Western Tanager.

Abbreviations: Back Bay (Back Bay NWR, *Virginia Beach*); CBBT (Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, *Virginia Beach/Northampton*); Chincoteague (Chincoteague NWR, *Accomack*); Craney (Craney Island Dredged Material Management Area, *Portsmouth*); Ft. Story (Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, *Virginia Beach*); Grandview (Grandview Nature Preserve, *Hampton*); Rudee (Rudee Inlet, *Virginia Beach*)

WATERFOWL

By the end of Mar, most of the northbound **Snow Geese** had cleared out, but a notably late report was a bird at Bluebird Gap Farm, *Hampton* 3 Apr (ph. MA, EA) that was still present through at least 6 May (ph. TH, KG, et al.). Though this bird was associating with domestic fowl on a tiny pond, subsequent conversation with the farm managers confirmed that this was a wild bird which showed up unexpectedly and had been lingering there for many months (*vide* Bluebird Gap Farm). A **Ross's Goose** that had been present at Mt. Trashmore Pk., *Virginia Beach* since late Jan continued through 13 Mar (LR). The only other report this spring was a bird off Lankford Hwy. near Parksley, *Accomack* 18 Mar (BH). A presumed **Snow Goose x Ross's Goose** hybrid was also noted associating with several hundred Snow Geese in a field on Indiantown Rd., *Northampton* 21 Mar (AR). **Mute Swans** were quite scarce this spring, with only four reports, all from Chincoteague NWR or neighboring Chincoteague Is., *Accomack*. Single birds were reported from Swan Cove 7 Mar (Anonymous) and Ballard Boat Launch 22 Mar (CM), while 2 were at the Wildlife Loop 5–6 May (DH, JL). Three locations hosted **Eurasian Wigeons** into the spring, though all were long-staying birds carrying over from the previous winter. One at Craney remained through 11 Mar (BW, LS, DY), and a Chincoteague bird was seen through 20 Mar (ph. PK, m. obs.). The longest-staying individual was a drake at Haygood Pt. Pk., *Virginia Beach* which remained through 26 Mar (RR). Among lingering dabblers, a drake **Northern Shoveler** still present at Craney 28 May (ph. BW, RLA, DY) stood out as notably late. A teal photographed at Craney 4 Mar (ph. BT) showed features of both the American and Eurasian subspecies of **Green-winged Teal**, and was presumed to be an intergrade. A few sea ducks of multiple species also hung around into the spring. The latest **Common Eider** report was a sighting of 2 at Back Bay 14 May (RLA, LM, DA). Detections of **Harlequin Ducks** were likely impacted by reduced CBBT access, and the only

report this spring was 3 at the *Northampton* end of the CBBT 14 Mar (RT). **White-winged Scoters** were still being seen regularly into Mar, with nearly a dozen widely-scattered reports. Significantly late, however, was one off Ft. Story 14 May (ph. SM, AM). Later still was a **Long-tailed Duck** at Grandview 24 May (ph. DC).

GREBES — CRANES

A long-staying **Eared Grebe** that delighted many birders at the Cape Charles Harbor, *Northampton* lingered into the spring with a final report 7 Mar (MA, EA). A **WESTERN GREBE** at Back Bay was likewise a holdover from the winter; though reported sporadically in the preceding months, the only spring sighting was 29 Mar (ph. BE, et. al.). Also at Back Bay was a surprise **White-winged Dove** sheltering in dense foliage near the Dune Trail 5 May (ph. SM, ph. RR, AM), though this bird was unfortunately not relocated by subsequent seekers. Always an uncommon migrant locally, **Black-billed Cuckoos** made a fairly strong showing in the Tidewater cities this spring. Most reports were clustered around Dismal, which turned in over a half-dozen. Elsewhere, this elusive low-density migrant was spotted at Cavalier WMA, *Chesapeake* 22 May (ph. RB); Chesapeake Arboretum, *Chesapeake* 27 Apr (a. r. CB); Mt. Trashmore Pk., *Virginia Beach* 10 May (ph. SM, AM, RR); and Marshview Pk., *Virginia Beach* 13 May (ph. DC). The only report across the Bay was a bird detected by nocturnal flight call at Saxis WMA, *Accomack* 6 May (KG, et. al.). **Common Nighthawks** were scarce this spring, with only a handful of reports including 2 at Dismal 6 May (TT); Parkway Drive, *Newport News* 28 May (DS); and three reports from White House Ln., *Virginia Beach* with a high count of 6 on 11 May (TT). The exception to the nighthawks' sparse showing was Craney, which hosted a maximum of 4 through May (BW, RLA, DY, LS) and has been a breeding site for this species in the past. Perhaps the most surprising sighting was one spotted in *Northampton* waters on a pelagic trip

about 40 miles offshore 23 May (ph. ABo, m. obs.). Even less common among the nightjars was **Eastern Whip-poor-will**, with only a single report coming from Camp Pond Rd. in the extreme sw. corner of *Suffolk* 5 May (NE). Rare hummingbirds had largely cleared out by the start of spring, but the lone exception was a **Rufous Hummingbird** that continued visiting a feeder on Saddlehorn Drive, *Chesapeake* through 4 Apr (ph. KR). A few **Common Gallinules** turned up this spring, with birds being seen semi-regularly for months at both Princess Anne WMA and Back Bay. Elsewhere, there were reports from Sandy Bottom Nature Pk., *Hampton* 17 May (ph. MN) and 21 May (ph. WH, SH), as well as the causeway at Chincoteague, *Accomack* 26 May (LB). Without a doubt the most exciting *rallidae* encounter was the multiple **YELLOW RAILS** that lingered for over a week at Chincoteague. First detected 29 Apr (a. r. WT), these elusive birds were heard by dozens of birders up through 7 May (a. r. PD, SG, SF). At one point, at least 4 birds were calling simultaneously (JF)! The only **Sandhill Crane** was one on Stone Rd. just e. of Cape Charles, *Northampton* 12 May – first reported by a local resident, it was later seen and documented by birders (ph. MeP, ph. MiP).

SHOREBIRDS

This spring, **Black-necked Stilts** were in ample evidence at known breeding locations at Chincoteague and Craney, but showings elsewhere were sparse and limited to *Virginia Beach*. Nonetheless, the Commonwealth's largest city notched stilts at three widely disparate locations: 5 at Beasley 15 Apr (ph. SK, SM) with a single individual lingering through 20 Apr (K&TB); up to 2 at Back Bay between 22 Apr (ph. MH) and 7 May (ph. JMc, AB); and two reports a month apart at Pleasure House Pt. including one 17 Apr (ph. ZP, AB) and 3 on 20 May (ph. CB). It is not unusual for **American Avocets** to linger at Craney in good numbers even when they are scarce in the rest of the state, and this year repeated the pattern. Birds were

present throughout the spring, with a peak count of 206 on 15 Apr (BW, DY, LS) that gradually dwindled to 41 by 28 May (BW, RLA, DY). Craney likewise accounted for the only **American Golden-Plover**, a species that is typically fairly rare in spring. It was present 15 Apr and again 29 Apr (ph. BW, BT, DY, LS), and was carefully studied by experienced observers to rule out European and Pacific. **Piping Plovers** were numerous at their usual breeding haunts on the barrier islands in *Accomack* and *Northampton*, with migrants also showing up at Back Bay and False Cape SP by mid- to late-March. Away from the three immediate coastal jurisdictions, the only reports were at Grandview – 2 on 15 Apr (ph. LA, ph. JW, m. obs.) and a single 24 Apr (NF, m. obs.). Also on 15 Apr, Grandview furnished the only western shore report of **Whimbrel** this spring, a single individual (LA, JW, m. obs.). **Long-billed Curlew** was again recorded at the now-traditional location at Gull Marsh, *Northampton* by groups of birders on two organized boat excursions. Only a single bird was present 21 Mar (ph. BB, ph. MA, ph. AR, RK) and again 12 Apr (ph. DC, ph. CH, ph. DN, JMa). The only Eurasian shorebird to visit the Commonwealth this spring was **RUFF**, but this proved to be an exceptionally good year for them, with three records from Virginia’s Coastal Plain – two of which fell in this reporting Region – a reeve at Beasley Tract 10 Apr (ph. JMc, m. obs.) and a second reeve at Craney 22 Apr (ph. BW, BT, DY, LS). **Stilt Sandpipers** made a very poor showing this spring; the only well-documented report was one at Whitehurst Tract 16–17 Apr (ph. RB, m. obs.), while a handful of undocumented reports from Chincoteague may also have been correct. **Purple Sandpipers** only lingered into the spring at a few locations in lower *Northampton*, especially Cape Charles, as well as Rudee Inlet, *Virginia Beach*. The latest report was 3 on a Rudee Tours boat trip 8 May (RT); specific location info was not provided, but they may have been seen at the inlet. **White-rumped Sandpipers** were only reported at Chincoteague this spring, with sightings of one along the

causeway 9 May (BH) and 2 at the Refuge 13–15 May (HD). Continuing the trend of poor shorebird showings this spring, **Western Sandpipers** were only in evidence at a few scattered locations including multiple reports from Chincoteague as well as 4 on the beach at 15th Bay St., *Norfolk* 14 May (Anonymous eBirder). Craney bucked the trend with a consistent stream of reports through the spring, including a high count of 52 on 15 Apr (BW, DY, LS). **Long-billed Dowitchers** were only detected at four locations this spring: Chincoteague, Craney, Beasley Tract, and Back Bay; most notable was a count of 21 at the latter location 5 Mar (RLA, DC, LM). Seldom-detected in the Region in late spring and summer, an **American Woodcock** made for a surprising prey item for one of the **Peregrine Falcon** pair nesting on the Armada Hoffer Building, *Virginia Beach* 21 May (ph. RL, *fide* BW). The latest **Wilson’s Snipe** of the spring were 2 at Chincoteague 11 May (SF); this was the only location where any remained into May. Coastal Virginia largely missed the **Red-necked Phalarope** invasion that excited birders in inland parts of the Commonwealth; our only reports were one at Craney (where the species is practically regular!) 20 and 28 May (BW, LS), as well as another single offshore in *Northampton* waters 23 May (NN, BB, m. obs.). The only **Red Phalaropes** were 2 at widely spaced positions in



Thick-billed Murre ph. in *Northampton* waters by Baxter Beamer, 3 Mar 2021.

Northampton offshore waters 3 Mar (ph. RB, m. obs.).

SKUAS — GULLS

The only **Great Skua** of the spring was encountered in *Northampton* waters on a pelagic outing 74.6 miles ENE of Rudee Inlet 3 Mar (ph. RB, ph. BB, ph. AR, et. al.). Of the jaegers, only **Parasitic Jaeger** was seen this spring, with three reports (all from shore): one from Ocean View Pk., *Norfolk* 19 Apr (DC); 3 from 88th St. Beach, *Virginia Beach* 26 Apr (AB); and one from Chincoteague 24 May (HOH). An unidentified jaeger sp. from Chincoteague 21 May (BB) may also have been Parasitic, but was too distant for a definitive identification. There were a few holdovers from the winter influx of **Dovekie**, with onshore reports of 4 from Chincoteague 28 Mar (BH) and a single bird impressively far up the Bay at Ft. Monroe 6 Mar (AB). Offshore numbers were truly astounding, with a total count of 1,058 on a pelagic in *Northampton* waters 3 Mar (RB, TMD, MA, et. al.). The same trip also yielded a total count of 33 **Atlantic Puffins**, the only report of the season, as well as a single **THICK-BILLED MURRE** encountered 49.9 miles ENE of Rudee Inlet. A **Black-headed Gull** in breeding plumage put in a brief appearance for a few lucky observers at Pleasure House Pt. 6 Mar (ph. AB, ph. JMc, ph. RB). Nearly a month later, another (or perhaps the same) bird was spotted there 2 Apr (ph. SM) and continued sporadically through 25 Apr (ph. RB). Far and away the most exciting gull of the season was Virginia's second



Heermann's Gull ph. at *Virginia Beach* oceanfront by June McDaniels, 12 May 2021.

HEERMANN'S GULL, a stunning third-cycle bird first detected at 25th St., *Virginia Beach* in the waning light of 11 May (ph. JFu). Fortunately, the bird was relocated the following

morning at the 15th St. fishing pier and was seen throughout the day, ranging up and down the beach from there to Rudee Inlet (ph. MA, m. obs.). Analysis of photos strongly suggested that this was the same bird that had been seen in Florida for an extended period, and this bird's remarkable saga continued after its appearance in Virginia with a string of sightings up and down the East Coast in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Jersey, South Carolina, and Georgia.



California Gull ph. off *Virginia Beach* by Baxter Beamer, 3 Mar 2021.

Undoubtedly a gulling highlight in any year without a Heermann's, an adult **CALIFORNIA GULL** was spotted 1.5 miles e. of Rudee Inlet by a returning pelagic boat 3 Mar (ph. BB, ph. AR, ph. MA, et. al.), and was the first reported in the state in several years. **Iceland Gulls** were reported from four locations in Hampton Roads this spring: an ad. at Ft. Monroe 2 Mar (ph. BB, IT); an ad. and imm. at Pleasure House Pt. 2 Mar (ph. BB, IT, TMD); an imm. at the same location 31 Mar (ph. JMc, ph. PL) and 3 Apr (JM, AB); an imm. at 88th St. Beach, *Virginia Beach* 30 Mar (AB, JMc); and an imm. at Rudee Inlet 25 Mar (ph. SM, m. obs.). An imm. **Glaucous Gull** was spotted at Rudee 27 Mar (ph. RB, m. obs.) and lingered in the vicinity through 4 Apr (CC, RC). Another was at Ft. Monroe 6 Mar (AB).

FULMARS — OWLS

A total of 5 **Northern Fulmars**, the only ones reported this spring, were seen on a pelagic outing to Norfolk Canyon 3 May (ph. RB, ph. BB, ph. MA, et. al.). Easterly winds pushed **Sooty Shearwaters** to within sight of shore at several locations in *Virginia Beach* and at Chincoteague 24 and 25 May (m. obs.), but a truly impressive report from a few days earlier included a tally of 107 from the beach at Chincoteague 21 May (ph. BB). Offshore, a Rudee Tours pelagic outing had 6 Sooties in *Northampton* waters 23 May (m. obs.), but much to the chagrin of those aboard the boat, these and **Wilson's Storm-Petrels** were the only tubenoses. Ironically, the only **Great Shearwater** of the spring was seen from shore at Chincoteague the following day, 24 May (HOH). The same observer also had a second, light-bellied shearwater that was either a Great or **Cory's** but was too distant for a certain identification. A very unexpected (and rather serendipitous) sighting was a **MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD** seen from Ft. Monroe flying se.



Magnificent Frigatebird ph. off Ft. Monroe by Anna Weaver, 15 Apr 2021.

in the direction of *Newport News* 15 Apr (ph. AW). **Anhingas** made a good showing in the Region this spring; apart from the traditional breeding spot at Stumpy L., there were also reports from Blackwater Rd., *Chesapeake* 20–28 Mar (ph. KR, ph. DC, m. obs.); up to 3 from the North R. Landing Bridge on Indian R. Rd., *Virginia Beach* 3–30 Apr (ph. RB, m. obs.); Honey Bee Golf Course, *Virginia Beach* 20 Apr (ph. PM); and one on the *Suffolk* side of Dismal 15 May (ph. CA). **Great Cormorants** only

remained into the spring at the CBBT, where the latest report was 3 on the *Northampton* side 25 Mar (ST). There were three reports of **American White Pelicans** in the Region this spring: one at Pleasure House Pt. 26 Mar (ph. MH); 4 soaring over a private residence on Chincoteague Is., *Accomack* 27 Mar (JM); and a single at Buckroe Beach, *Hampton* 5 Apr (ES). **American Bitterns** turned up in a handful of locations this spring, mostly at regular sites including Dismal and various places in upper *Accomack* and southern *Virginia Beach*, as well as a single bird at Riverside Farm Ln., *Northampton* 17 Apr (LG). **Least Bitterns** were even less widespread, with almost all reports coming from Back Bay and Beasley in *Virginia Beach* or Chincoteague and Saxis in *Accomack*. A slight outlier to these patterns was a bird that dropped in at the airfield at Naval Air Station Oceana, *Virginia Beach* 16 Apr (ph. KS). Birders seeking the Yellow Rails at Chincoteague were also treated to 2 **WHITE-FACED IBISES**, an ad. and a juv., foraging with other waders on the Marsh Trail. First spotted 1 Mar (ph. MA, TMD, m. obs.), these birds continued through at least 6 May (ph. ABu, m. obs.). A White-faced Ibis was also spotted on the Wildlife Loop 8 May (ph. DCh, TC), but photos suggested that this might have been a different individual than either of the two seen on the Marsh Trail. **Swallow-tailed Kites** made a good showing this spring, with four sightings in the Region. The first was a flyover at a private residence in the Winona section of *Norfolk* 13 Apr (ph. BA, *fide* BW). The same observer was lucky enough to see a second bird a little over a month later at mile marker 250 on I-64, *Newport News* (BA, TT, *fide* BW). In the interim, there were also sightings of 2 at Back Bay 2 May (ph. TS) and one at Kiptopeke SP 8 May (GB). The only **Snowy Owl** in the state this spring was one resting on the rocks just off the beach at Grandview 6 Mar (ph. EAh, LN). Though the species is surely present more often than detected, a **Long-eared Owl** at Naval Auxiliary Landing Field Fentress, *Virginia Beach* 15 Mar (ph. KS) was nonetheless a nice surprise.

FLYCATCHERS — SPARROWS

An uncommon migrant in much of the state, **Olive-sided Flycatcher** is particularly rare on the coast, making one at a private residence in Larkspur, *Virginia Beach* 6 May (ph. SM) especially notable. **Willow Flycatchers** were recorded at a handful of locations, including singles at Mt. Trashmore Pk., *Virginia Beach* 6 May (ph. AB); Chincoteague Is. Nature Trail, *Accomack* 12 May (G&HS); Back Bay 20 May (a. r. K&TB, CH); Chincoteague NWR 27 May (LB); and Craney 29 May (DY). The high count this spring was 2 at Back Bay 27–29 May (BO, ph. RB). **Cliff Swallows** were reported surprisingly infrequently, with *Virginia Beach* furnishing the only 2 records: one at First Landing SP 29 Apr (ph. JMc) and 2 at 64th St. Beach 2 May (AB). Doubtless an aftershock from the irruption this winter, lingering **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were widespread, with dozens of reports coming in from every county and city in the Region. Undoubtedly the most exciting record of the spring was Virginia's first **WHITE WAGTAIL**, of the "white-faced" group found in



White Wagtail ph. at Ft. Monroe by Tucker Beamer, 12 Apr 2021.

w. Europe, which delighted scores of birders at Ft. Monroe, *Hampton* from 12–19 Apr (ph. SO, ph. CK, CMo, m. obs.). Lingering **Evening Grosbeaks** were scarce, with only two reports: a group of 10 in Onancock, *Accomack* through at least 15 Apr (ph. ML) and a single m. that visited a feeder in South Shores, *Virginia Beach* 12–16 May (ph. JMa, m. obs.). Other winter finches that continued into the spring included **Purple Finches**, which were widespread and reported in every jurisdiction apart from *Poquoson*, and **Pine**

Siskins, which were reported everywhere on the southside but were only spotted at about 4 locations on the Shore (all in *Accomack*). The **Red Crossbills** that were seen reliably at Chincoteague through the winter continued into the spring, with a peak count of 25 on 20 Mar (BH), and at least 3 still around on 1 May (HD). A group of 10–12 was also reported from the Chincoteague Is. Nature Trail, *Accomack* 21 Apr and 20 May (JM). The only other location to host crossbills, and the high count for the spring, was a flock of 35 at the *Chesapeake* portion of Dismal 4 May (ST). A long-staying **Clay-colored Sparrow** at the Harris Teeter Retention Pond, *Virginia Beach* remained through 19 Apr (ph. CH). The same location also hosted up to 3 **White-crowned Sparrows** that remained through 11 Apr (SM, m. obs). One of these was of the **Gambel's** subspecies; this individual was last conclusively documented 5 Apr (ph. RR). Other lingering White-crowned Sparrows in the Tidewater area included one at Elizabeth R. Pk., *Chesapeake* 21–22 Apr (ph. DG); one at a private residence on Dana Drive, *Suffolk* 8 May (ph. CMi); one at a private residence in Laurel Manor, *Virginia Beach* 11 May (ph. TM); and one at Back Bay 4 May (ph. PS) and 13 May (ph. JS, ph. K&TB, SK). On the Shore, there was also a bird that put in sporadic appearances at a feeder in Parksley, *Accomack* 23 Mar, 1 Apr, and 30 Apr (ph. VK), as well as sightings at Chincoteague 8 May (ph. G&HS) and 14 May (ph. TP). The Region's only **Vesper Sparrow** of the spring was one at Dismal along the Railroad Ditch trail, *Suffolk* 27 Mar (ph. AR, EC, CG, CS). The most notable sparrow on the coast this spring was a singing **LeConte's Sparrow** at Saxis WMA, *Accomack* 6 May (KG, TH, EK, GF). **Lincoln's Sparrows** were fairly scarce, with reports coming from only three locations, all in *Virginia Beach*: Beasley Tract 7 May (ph. DCh) and 14 Mar (ph. RB); Back Bay 7–13 May (AB, SM, ph. RB); and Mt. Trashmore Pk. 10 May (ph. RB, SK).

ORIOLES — DICKCISSELS

The winter saw two **BULLOCK'S ORIOLES** visiting feeders in *Virginia Beach*, and one of these, an ad. m. at a private residence on L. Smith, lingered through 17 Mar (ph. BZ). Remarkably, an imm. m. that put in a brief appearance at a feeder on Saddlehorn Dr., *Chesapeake* 15 Apr (ph. KR) made for the third occurrence this year in the Coastal Region! The only **BREWER'S BLACKBIRDS** this spring were 3 at what has by now become a semi-regular location at Breeze Farms, *Virginia Beach* 25 Mar (RR). **Louisiana Waterthrush** is a rare migrant and thinly-distributed breeder in much of the Region, but especially so in lower *Northampton*, making a sighting of 2 at Cape Charles NAP 30 Mar (ph. BK) quite notable. Even more notable was an overshoot **Swainson's Warbler** that was singing on the Woodland Trail at Chincoteague 27 Apr (a. r. WT, KH, JM). After the exceptional passerine migration on the coast in spring 2020, many local birders were hoping for a repeat this year and were doubtless disappointed with the return to the more lackluster spring migration that is typical in this part of the state. Many of the lower density warblers were recorded at only a few (or in some cases only one!) spots this spring. The only **Tennessee Warbler** was at Mt. Trashmore Pk., *Virginia Beach* 10 May (ph. RB) as part of a relatively robust local influx of spring migrants. **Nashville Warbler** was recorded at only two spots: Indiantown Pk., *Northampton* 2 May (BB) and coincidentally the same day at Chincoteague Is. Nature Trail, *Accomack* (G&HS). Likewise, **Kentucky Warbler** was only reported from two locations – singles at Chincoteague 1–2 May (ph. NB, m. obs.) and Dismal 18 May (LB, NNo). The only **Bay-breasted Warbler** was a gorgeous m. at Chincoteague Is. Nature Trail, *Accomack* 12 May (ph. G&HS). **Blackburnian Warblers** were reported a bit more frequently, with one in each jurisdiction along the immediate coast: Cape Charles NAP 30 Apr (MA); Back Bay 10–11 May (ph. AC, MC, K&TB); and Chincoteague 21 May (SGa). A bit more common overall,

Chestnut-sided Warbler was reported from a handful of spots in *Virginia Beach* but nowhere else apart from one at Chincoteague 11 May (JG). Rounding out the less-common warblers, **Wilson's Warbler** was reported from Chincoteague 7 May (AWo); Mt. Trashmore Pk., *Virginia Beach* 10–11 May (ph. RB, m. obs.); Back Bay 11 May (K&TB, ph. SM, m. obs.); and Chincoteague Is. Nature Trail, *Accomack* 12 May (G&HS). **Western Tanagers** that wintered at various private residences in *Virginia Beach* continued into the spring, with four locations accounting for 6 birds. These included a m. and f. in the Sea Breeze section of Little Neck; a m. and f. in the Middle Plantation section of Little Neck; and two, one of which was a m., at unspecified locations in Great Neck. In each case, property owners reported that they last saw the tanager(s) “on or about April 10, 2021” (RL, *fide* BW). Migrant **Dickcissels** were detected at two locations: one at Back Bay 2 May (ph. RB), and 2 identified by nocturnal flight calls at Saxis WMA, *Accomack* 6 May (KG, TH, EK, GF). A pair at Stone House Rd., *Accomack* 11 May (ph. G&HS, JL) were in the same spot as the summer of 2020 and may have been local breeders rather than migrants.

Contributors: Eric Aho (EAh), Robert L. Ake (RLA), Corby Amos, Bob Anderson, Logan Anderson, Erin Anthony, Matt Anthony, Drew Avery, Larissa Babicz, Andrew Baldelli, Nancy Barnhart, Baxter Beamer, Karen & Tom Beatty (K&TB), Rob Bielawski, Gail Blazer, Arun Bose (ABo), Charlie Bruggeman, Lesley Bulluck, Abigail Butler (ABu), Elena Calderone, Charlie Carr, Ryan Carr, Drew Chaney (DCh), Tim Chaney, David Clark, Mike Collins, Allen Cumbia, Todd M. Day, Hartmut Doebel, Paul Driver, Nicole Eason, Bruce Evans, Scott Fackenthal, Nicholas Flanders, Greg Fleming, James Fox, Justin Fuller (JFu), Joshua Gant, Laurie Gardner, Scott Garrison (SGa), Kurt Gaskill, Clay Gibbons, David Gibson, Stephen Grimes, Cindy Hamilton, Kim Harrell, Tim Hodge, Susan Hofacker, Will Hofacker, Bill

Hohenstein, Marcia Horman, Matthew Hosmer, David Hunter, Steve Keith, Rick Kellam, Phil Kenny, Eric Kershner, Victor Klein, Caitlyn Kufahl, Benson Kwong, Joanne Laskowski, Phil Lehman, Marguerite Long, Reese Lukei, Tommy Maloney, James Marcum (JMa), Joel Martin, June McDaniels (JMc), Craig Metzgar, Christine Miller (CMi), Pam Monahan, Carolyn Morgan (CMo), Lauren Mowbray, Amy Myers, Steve Myers, Diane Nastase, Lindsey Nelson, Nicholas Newberry, Marc Nichols, Nikola Novak (NNo), Haley Olsen-Hodges (HOH), Sarah O'Reilly, Bill Oyler, Melanie Parker (MeP), Michael Parker (MiP), Zak Poulton, Tim Pruitt, Andrew Rapp, Keith Roberts, Reuben Rohn, Lisa Rose, Rudee Tours (RT), Christina Sabochick, Patricia Scanlon, Lee Schuster, Eric Seidlitz, David Singletary, Gary & Helen Smith (G&HS), Ty Smith, Karl Suttman, Brian Taber, Tracy Tate, Wes Teets, Sarah Toner, Ian Topolsky, Thuy Tran, Joshua Ward, Anna Weaver, Bill Williams, Adam Woodis (AWo), Dave Youker, Bob Zobot.