

# 2024



## Annual **REPORT**

PROTECTING WILDLIFE THROUGH FIELD  
RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND HABITAT  
CONSERVATION FOR OVER 25 YEARS

 [vawildliferesearch.org](http://vawildliferesearch.org)



## Welcome to the 2024 CVWO **Annual Report!**

Be sure to click the links below to explore individual research topics and discover in depth the amazing work CVWO accomplished in 2024.

### President's Report



reaches an ever-growing audience of people with an interest in wildlife and conservation.

Our newer partnerships, like the Finch Research Network and Veracruz River of Raptors join our older ones like Department of Wildlife Resources, Center for Conservation Biology, Kiptopeke State Park, Eastern Shore of VA National Wildlife Refuge, Hawk Migration Association, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Winter Wildlife Festival, American Birding Association, VA Master Naturalists, Williamsburg Bird Club and VA Society of Ornithology...great company!

CVWO also supported fourteen partner organizations in 2024, totaling \$18,499! These funds are made possible by the support of YOU throughout the year! Our organization has been able to support ornithological research projects for students and give grant donations for partner projects that support conservation efforts. Thank you to everyone who has supported CVWO in the past, during 2024 and for your future support!

Thanks to the many, many people who make all this possible!

### *Brian Taber*

You can reach Brian at this [email](#)

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# RAPTOR RESEARCH



PEREGRINE FALCON



## CVWO Raptor Research

CVWO's Raptor Research includes seasonal migratory observations of raptors passing through two Hawkwatch sites along Virginia's coastal plain. The fall hawkwatch is conducted on Virginia's Eastern Shore at Kiptopeke State Park, and the spring watch is in James City County at College Creek along the James River.

Counters submit data to [Hawkcount.org](https://hawkcount.org), which contributes to the Hawk Migration Association's Raptor Population Index (RPI), a project that produces conservation assessments and population trends derived from migration counts of raptors.

As if the challenges of long-distance migration were not enough, according to research published in March 2025 in GeoHealth, scientists have found that, increasingly, raptors are transporting H5N1 bird flu pathogen. The original research article was summarized at Phys.org: click [HERE](#).

"Far more bird species than ducks, geese and swans are transporting highly pathogenic H5N1 today, the study found. Cormorants, pelicans, buzzards, vultures, hawks, and Peregrine Falcons play significant roles in spreading avian flu. That makes them both victims and vectors of the disease and upends traditional approaches to monitoring H5N1 spread and predicting and responding to outbreaks. Culling of poultry birds worked in the past to mitigate burgeoning outbreaks, but it has failed to stop the current outbreak."

Our watch sites are popular destinations, and we enjoy sharing our efforts and mission with the public.

- [Kiptopeke Hawkwatch Report](#)
- [College Creek Hawkwatch Report](#)

# BUTTERFLY RESEARCH



## About CVWO Butterfly Research

Since 1998 when CVWO established a Monarch Butterfly Migration Program at Kiptopeke State Park, volunteers have conducted fall surveys and tagged Monarchs. Monarch numbers are declining at an alarming rate, due to a variety of factors. Several tagged Monarchs have later been found at their winter roost sites near Mexico City.

CVWO sponsors three local North American Butterfly Association ([NABA](#)) butterfly counts in which over 150 butterfly enthusiasts participate. Click [HERE](#) for more information.

CVWO volunteers also help manage butterfly and pollinator gardens at Kiptopeke State Park, Williamsburg Botanical Garden, Jamestown Marina, and First Landing State Park.

Recent research published in March 2025 in the journal *Science* finds startling declines in butterflies.

“Using records of 12.6 million individual butterflies from >76,000 surveys across 35 monitoring programs, we characterized overall and species-specific butterfly abundance trends across the contiguous United States. Between 2000 and 2020, total butterfly abundance fell by 22% across the 554 recorded species. Species-level declines were widespread, with 13 times as many species declining as increasing. The prevalence of declines throughout all regions in the United States highlights an urgent need to protect butterflies from further losses.”

- [Monarch Migration Project](#)
- [Williamsburg Area Butterfly Count](#)
- [Chippokes Butterfly Count](#)
- [Delmarva Tip Butterfly Count](#)

# WATERBIRDS REPORT



## About the Waterbirds Team

The Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory's Waterbirds Team was formalized in 2015 to maintain the continuity of shorebird and colonial nesting seabird monitoring studies. The CVWO Waterbird Team devoted the 2024 field work to documenting the volume and diversity of bird species frequenting Craney Island Dredged Materials Management Area (CIDMMA) in Portsmouth, Virginia. Breeding activity was focused on three species: Black-necked Stilts, American Oystercatchers, and Least Terns. In addition to shorebird and seabird studies, CVWO sponsors Wood Duck monitoring at Harwoods Mill with support from the City of Newport News.

- [Waterbird Team Report](#)
- [Wood Duck Research](#)

## SONGBIRD RESEARCH



## About Songbird Research

CVWO volunteers monitor two species in the coastal plain of Virginia – Prothonotary Warblers at six sites and Purple Martins at four sites.

Prothonotary Warblers face threats on both their breeding and wintering grounds. In South America, the threat is deforestation. In the US the threat is the conversion of bottomland hardwood forests to other uses plus changes in forest structure, which likely affect the amount of acreage in suitable breeding habitat.



Click [HERE](#) for link to the Audubon website with a fascinating and animated look at the annual migration paths and timing for the Prothonotary Warbler.

The Datazone website shows the most recent population numbers for the Prothonotary Warbler ([click HERE](#)). The data show that these warblers have declined about 11% (as of 2021) and the area of occupancy is declining for the reasons noted above. Scientists estimate about 2,100,000 mature individuals which is a decreasing population trend.

Populations of Purple Martins declined about 25% between 1966 and 2019, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Enthusiasts have helped counteract declines somewhat by putting up nest boxes, and people now provide virtually all nest sites for Purple Martins in the eastern US. Click [HERE](#) for the Audubon website showing annual migration paths and timing for Purple Martins. Click [HERE](#) for a link to the Datazone website showing the most recent status of Purple Martins. Partners in Flight Scientists estimate a US/Canada population of 8,700,000 individuals. Click [HERE](#) for an interactive database.

- [Prothonotary Warbler Report](#)
- [Purple Martin Monitoring](#)



## In 2024, CVWO awarded four Graduate Student Research Grants to the following students:

### **Clara Cebral-Marani**

Master's student at William & Mary in Dr. John Swaddle's lab. Research project: "How deadly are windows: Bird window collision underestimation and window-avoidance behaviors."

### **Iroshmal Peiris**

Master's Student, Department of Biological Sciences, Old Dominion University. Research project: "Investigating avian contributions to Gulf Coast Tick distribution within Coastal Virginia."

### **Max Rollfinke**

M.S. Candidate in Biology at William & Mary under advisor Dr. Dan Cristol. Research project: "Determining the source of mercury exposure in Virginia's birds."

### **Samuel Arnold**

M.S. Candidate in Biology at William & Mary under Dr. Matthias Leu. Research project: "Waterbird Use of Living Shorelines across the Gradient of Urbanization."



**The Big Sit!** is a semi-competitive birding event organized by the New Haven Bird Club. The event first took place in 1992, and the Observatory has participated annually since 1999. The event is an international, one-day bird survey event, from a single spot, during fall migration.

CVWO participated by submitting a team report from the Kiptopeke Hawkwatch platform. The circle was the sixth highest in the U.S. out of over ninety circles!

The New Haven Bird Club is looking to partner with World Migratory Bird Day for the 2025 event. Save the date for October 11-12, 2025! The final Big Sit! The worldwide report can be found by clicking [here](#).

**READ THE KIPTOPEKE BIG SIT! REPORT HERE**

## **Second Annual Coastal Virginia Birdathon**

# COASTAL VIRGINIA BIRDATHON



2024 FUNDS RAISED

**\$13,914**

Thank you to the teams, volunteers, supporters and organizations that made the 2024 Coastal Virginia Birdathon a success!

Congratulations to the **Gulls Gone Wild**, who take home the coveted Piping Plover Trophy for raising the most funds in support of CVWO. This year, the event took place on September 28 where 11 total teams raised a whopping

**\$13,914**

in support of CVWO wildlife, research, conservation, and education efforts. Congrats to the other winners, including **The Islanders** (Special Venue category), **What the Flock** (3-hour category) and the **Cape Charles Warblers** (24-hour category).

[READ THE BIRDATHON REPORT HERE](#)

## Christmas Bird Count



Shorebirds in Cape Charles. Photo provided by Nick Newberry.

Shorebirds checking out a washed up whale carcass. Photo by Mario Balitbit.



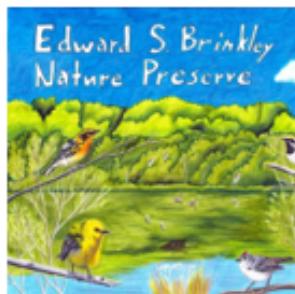
On December 30, 25 birders took part in the 125th nationwide Christmas Bird Count, marking the 60th consecutive count in Cape Charles. Despite some species disappearing over the decades, this year's total of 154 species was above recent averages. Highlights included a Golden Eagle, Blue-headed Vireos, and over 12,000 Dunlin.

While some key species were missed, strong boat coverage—thanks to support from the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory and The Nature Conservancy—helped yield impressive numbers, especially in the northern islands. The tradition remains strong, with promising participation from younger birders.

Photo provided by Baxter Beamer.

[\*\*Read the Full 2024 Christmas Bird Count Report Here\*\*](#)

## CVWO Supports Conservation Grants in 2024



[\*\*READ THE CONSERVATION REPORT HERE\*\*](#)

## CVWO Projects & Teams

# CVWO Team Leads for 2025

Raptors | Brian Taber

Butterflies | Deborah Humphries

Songbirds | Shirley Devan

Waterbirds | Dave Youker



Raptors



Butterflies



Waterbirds



Songbirds



Conservation Grants



Education



## New CVWO Coloring Book!

CVWO would like to thank Anna Stunkel and the American Birding Association for providing artwork and images for this book. Funding for this project was provided through the Bill Akers Environmental Education fund of CVWO. Limited hard copies are still available. If you contact us, we'll mail you a copy!

Visit our friends who provided art:

# BIRD COLORING BOOK



Protecting wildlife through field research,  
education and habitat conservation

vawildliferesearch.org

- [Anna Stunkel Art](#)
- [American Birding Association](#)

[Download it Here!](#)

## CVWO Partners

[American Bird Conservancy](#)

[City of Chesapeake Parks, Recreation & Tourism](#)

[Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge](#)

[Finch Research Network](#)

[James City County Parks & Recreation](#)

[Kiptopeke State Park](#)

[Monarch Joint Venture](#)

[Hampton Roads Bird Club](#)

[Hawk Migration Association of North America](#)

[Teaming with Wildlife](#)

[U.S. Army Corp of Engineers \(CIDMMA\)](#)

[U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#)

[Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation](#)

[Virginia Master Naturalists, Historic Rivers Chapter](#)

[Virginia Society of Ornithology](#)

[Williamsburg Bird Club](#)



### SUPPORT CVWO

Your donation can make a big difference in 2025. Use the form below to join or renew your 2025 CVWO support and donate to one of our ongoing projects such as the Kiptopeke Hawkswatch, Monarch butterfly research, waterbird research, and more. Your donation is tax-deductible and student scholarships are welcome. No donation is too small and every gift is welcome.

We look forward to hearing from you!

I want to support CVWO's 2025 research. Enclosed is my check for:

Support Level:  
 Wingate \$55  
 Summer \$40  
 Thrill \$100  
 Falcon \$250  
 League \$500 (Life Supporter)  
 Other

I would like to make an additional donation for:

Purchase Brian Teller's book, "Riding the Wind: A Birder's Ups and Downs" \$25  
 Kiptopeke Hawkswatch  
 Monarch butterfly research  
 Waterbird research  
 Piping Plover and Purple Martin research  
 Annual Scholarships to William and Mary & Old Dominion Graduate Students

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email (please print clearly) \_\_\_\_\_

May we include your email in our Constant Contact List? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ (We do not share email addresses.)

If YES, would you like to receive CVWO's monthly newsletter and Annual Report by email? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Return this form with your check, payable to CVWO, to: PO BOX 764, Lighthouse, VA 23090-0764

Or you may donate securely and quickly online via PayPal. You don't need a PayPal account. Visit our website at <https://vawildliferesearch.org/support-cvwo> where you can donate with your credit or debit card.

Thank you! Your interest and generosity are more important than ever!

**Thank you for supporting CVWO's nonprofit work and our mission to protect wildlife through field research, education, and habitat conservation!**

**Our paid seasonal biologists and our dedicated volunteers work to solve those conservation problems by gathering data and providing public education. Your donations support that important effort.**

**Support CVWO**



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