

SISKIN

Newsletter of the Northern Virginia Bird Club

Vol. 58, No. 2 May 2013 www.nvabc.org

Inside—

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- Calendar of NVBC field trips and events for May 1–June 18, 2013
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- NVBC budget for FY2014
- Reports and photos from 2013 winter trips to Chincoteague and Highland County

Siskin photos—

The Siskin is published on the Northern Virginia Bird Club website, www.nvabc.org. Go there to see the photos in color.

NVBC MEETING—WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 8 PM

Polar Wildlife: Svalbard, Churchill, and Antarctica

Speaker

Fred Atwood

Fred Atwood's program will include awe-inspiring tear-jerking scenery of the vast polar wilderness, its beautiful art forms in the ice, and the rugged wildlife that lives in these extreme places. Polar bears, penguins, leopard seals, whales, alcids, and jaegers are just a few of the denizens of these frigid habitats that he will feature.

Fred Atwood has taught high school biology and field natural history/ornithology in Northern Virginia since 1978. He is also an avid nature photographer and has been leading high school students on ecology/photography trips since 1983 to such destinations as Ecuador, Costa Rica, East Africa, Svalbard, Hudson Bay, and Antarctica. In 1998 he was funded by the National Science Foundation as a Teacher Experiencing Antarctica to participate in fish research for a month at McMurdo station.

Election of NVBC Officers for 2013–2015

Officers and directors will be elected to serve two-year terms beginning July 1, 2013. The following people have agreed to be candidates:

President: Larry Meade

Vice President, Programs: Joanna Taylor Vice President, Field Activities: Elton Morel

Secretary: Diane Marton **Treasurer**: Jean Tatalias

Directors: Steve Bruck, Catherine Kubo

Members of the club may make additional nominations from the floor.

Early bird refreshments start at 7:30 PM. There will be a drawing for door prizes.

Meeting place: Church of the Covenant, 2666 Military Road, Arlington (directions are on p.5).

A three-scoter day at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel

White-winged, Black, and Surf Scoters photographed by Reid Williamson on NVBC's 2013 Chincoteague Winter Weekend







Val Kitchens

Val Kitchens, a Director Emeritus of the Northern Virginia Bird Club, died peacefully of heart failure on February 16, 2013. Val was president of the club and editor of *The Siskin* for many years. Under her leadership the club evolved into the thriving organization we know today. One of her biggest gifts was helping beginning birders get started. Many of us owe our birding formation to her. Val organized and ran the telephone tree which was our birding hotline before the days of the Internet. On the Va-bird listsery, she regularly shared her sightings along with good advice. She organized and led many field trips including the winter and spring Chincoteague and Highland Country trips. Val worked closely with the parks of Arlington County, especially Long Branch where the club leads monthly birding walks and, lately, Fort C. F. Smith where she was instrumental in getting a water feature installed.



Photograph by Pat Blyer

Val's love for birding translated into an American Birding Association life list with 712 species—the Black-cowled Oriole in south Texas being her last ABA lifer. The reports of the Virginia Avian Record Committee credit Val with numerous state and Piedmont sighting records. But Val's contributions went far beyond bird lists. She cared deeply about conservation and believed that it was important for birders to work for preservation by coming together and speaking with one voice. She saw a critical need to acquire parkland "while there is still some land left to preserve." Val's incredible energy and commitment will be sorely missed.

—Joanna Taylor and Steve Bruck

Ducks at home and away



at Kent Narrows and a Hooded Merganser in a small pond in Burke. Photos by Larry Meade Long-tailed Ducks at the CBBT. Photo by Reid Williamson

A Greater Scaup





Presidential Peentings

Spring is a special time for birders. As birds of all kinds move north to their breeding grounds, we are out in force to experience their journey. This is when we have Big Days and birdathons. We relearn all of the warbler songs so that we are ready to find these beautiful little birds. We make major progress on our life and/or year lists. Some birders also begin to monitor Bluebird trails in late March. The beauty of migration is that special birds can pop up almost anywhere. You might, for example, find a Mourning Warbler at Monticello Park in Alexandria or in the little park in your local patch. Of course, you need to be out there to find the birds. If you have not participated in an NVBC bird walk recently, spring is the season to get into the swing of things. If you are relatively new to birding, you are especially welcome. Spring is here and the birds are coming!

-Larry Meade

CHINCOTEAGUE SPRING WEEKEND

The Chincoteague Spring Weekend club trip is scheduled for May 17–19 (Friday-Sunday). Mid-May is an excellent time to visit the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge; spring shorebird migration is in full swing with most birds in breeding plumage. Last year's trip netted nearly 100 species including such Eastern Shore specialties as Black-necked Stilts, American Oystercatchers, Piping Plovers, Whimbrels, Marbled Godwits, Little Blue and Tricolored Herons, Cattle Egrets, Glossy and White Ibis, Gull-billed, Least, and Common Terns, Black Skimmers, Clapper Rails, Seaside Sparrows, Chuckwill's-widows, and Brown-headed Nuthatches.

Plans for the weekend include birding the Chincoteague NWR on Friday afternoon starting at 3:15 PM (optional) or on Saturday starting at 7:30 AM. Activities on Saturday morning include birding along Beach Road, Swan Cove and Tom's Cove and a walk around the Marsh Trail overlooking Snow Goose Pool. We have reserved the Chincoteague Natural History Association's bus for a 90 minute trip to the Washflats on Saturday at 1 PM., providing a look at territory otherwise inaccessible by vehicle. Time and tides permitting, we will also visit the Queens Sound Flats and the Chincoteague City mudflats. On Sunday morning, we will visit Saxis Marsh. The trip concludes at noon on Sunday.

NVBC membership is required for this trip. To sign up, call or email Elton Morel (703-553-4860 or eltonlmorel@verizon.net). Larry Meade will co-lead. The trip is limited to 28 people and usually fills up, so please contact Elton Morel first to ensure that space is available before making hotel reservations. When signing up, please indicate whether you are

interested in the Washflats bus trip (fee) on Saturday afternoon and a Saturday evening group dinner. If the trip is full, your name can be put on a waiting list.

We have obtained a special rate of \$84 per night on 20 rooms for Friday and Saturday nights at the Best Western Chincoteague Island Hotel on Maddox Boulevard. A two-night stay is usually required. Hotel reservations must be made by April 17 to get this special group rate. Participants should make your own reservations by calling 800-553-6117 and be sure to say you are with the Northern Virginia Bird Club. Check-in time is 3 PM on Friday, May 17, and a 72-hour cancellation notice is required. Chincoteague NWR is a U.S. fee area, and Saxis Marsh is a Wildlife Management Area requiring a permit; the trip leader can provide participants with more information on obtaining a permit if needed.

—Elton Morel

Birds of Paradise

Eighteen expeditions to the rain forests of New Guinea and Australia, over 500 days in the field lugging equipment and supplies, staking out sites, climbing into the canopy, waiting, watching, observing—does it sound like fun? To Ed Scholes, ornithologist, and Tim Laman, photographer, it has been their life's work for the last eight years. Their objective: to observe and document the courtship behavior of all 39 species of Birds of Paradise

The co-sponsors of their expeditions, National Geographic and The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, are now making the most of the resulting material. They have released a TV special, a gorgeous book of photos and text, a web-site with video clips, and, for those of us lucky enough to live in the DC area, a wonderfully entertaining and informative exhibit at the National Geographic Museum. The exhibit includes still photos, video clips, a short film about the expeditions, educational material, and interactive displays. A visit is something that birders and non-birders can enjoy and learn from.

The exhibit will be here only until May 12, 2013, after which it goes on tour to other US locations. So, if you haven't gotten down there yet, make it a point to go while it's still in town! More info at: http://events.nationalgeographic.com/events/exhibits/2012/11/01/birds-paradise.

—Catherine Kubo

SUMMER TRIP TO HIGHLAND COUNTY

ur summer trip to Highland County in the mountains of western Virginia, led by Marv Rubin and Beth Moore, is scheduled for the weekend of May 31–June 2 (Friday-Sunday) and still has space available; trip limit is 16. Headquarters will be at the Highland Inn in Monterey (call 888-466-4682 for reservations, and say you are

with NVBC); room prices vary. We will have an optional trip to the Blue Grass Valley on Friday afternoon; meet at the inn at 3:15 pm. Saturday morning, we will go to Paddy's Knob. Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning we will bird other areas of the county. We will arrange group dinners in the Highland Inn's dining room both evenings. The trip will end in Monterey about noon on Sunday. Call Marvin Rubin (703-915-7545) or send an email (mbrubin@verizon.net) to sign up for this weekend. Club membership is required.

—Marv Rubin

UPCOMING TRIPS AND EVENTS

Compiled by Steve Williams

Note:

- Beginning birders are welcome on all trips.
- To make reservations when they are indicated, please call one of the trip leaders.
- If in doubt about a trip because of weather, call one of the leaders.
- Check the NVBC website for any updated information about trips: http://www.nvabc.org/trips.htm. To receive email notices, add your name to the NVBC eMail Exchange; for sign-up directions, see the back page of the newsletter.

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DIRECTIONS

Bluebird Trail (6/8) From I-495, exit onto Chain Bridge Rd (VA-123) toward Vienna. Continue on Maple Ave (still 123) in Vienna, turn onto Beulah Road. Continue for about one mile until a left turn onto Clark's Crossing Road. Continue to the end of Clark's Crossing and park at the parking lot overlooking the W&OD Trail.

Daniels Run Park (5/8) 3721 Tedrich Blvd, Fairfax, VA 22031. From the Capital Beltway, take US 50 W 2.7 mi to Fairfax Circle. Exit the circle SW on Old Lee Highway. In 1.2 mi, turn left on Old Post Rd (just past Historic Blenheim on the right). Drive 1 ½ blocks to the end of the street. We have walk-day permission to park in the Country Club Hills pool parking lot.

Dyke Marsh (5/5, 6/2, 6/12) From Alexandria, take Mount Vernon Pkwy south. Cross I-495; continue 1.2 miles to Belle Haven Park entrance on left. Meet at south parking lot.

Eakin Park (5/16) From I-495, take Rt 50 west one mile to Prosperity Ave; turn left onto Prosperity and go one mile to parking lot on left.

Huntley Meadows Park (5/29, 6/15) From Beltway, take Rt 1 south 3 mi. to Lockheed Blvd. Right on Lockheed; go 0.5 mi. to Harrison Lane, park entrance on left. Meet in parking lot.

Long Branch Nature Area (5/1, 6/5) From Rt 50, take Carlin Springs exit and go south on Carlin Spgs. 0.5 mile to Nature Center on left, just south of No. Va. Community Hospital. Meet in Nature Center parking lot. Meadowood (5/11) From I-495, take I-95 south 7 mi. to Lorton exit. Left on Rte. 642. Immediately after passing under RR tracks (1/4 mi.) turn right on Lorton Market Rd., which soon becomes Gunston Cove Rd. After crossing Rte. 1, road becomes Gunston Rd. Go 1.8 mi. to 10406 Gunston Rd. (BLM, Lower Potomac Station Office). Park on right next to horse barns just before field station building.

Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge (5/25) From I-495, take I-95 south 9 miles to (left) Exit 161 (Woodbridge). South on Rt 1 about 2 miles to Dawson Beach Rd. Go left on Dawson Beach 0.7 mile to entrance gate. Meet in parking lot. Bring scope. US fee area.

Wildlife Thompson Management Area—Trillium Trail (5/4) From I-495. take I-66 west 51 mi. to Linden exit (Rt. 79). Go left (south) from exit ramp on Rt 79 approx. 1000 ft. to Rt 55. Turn left (east) onto Rt 55; go 1.2 mi. to Freezeland Rd (Rt 638). Turn left (north) and follow Freezeland, as it bears right, 5.3 mi. to Trillium Trail Parking Area on rightlook for sign on kiosk. (Parking Area is just before radio towers.) Note: each participant must have an Access Permit issued by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. You can purchase permit online www.dgif.virginia.gov, by telephone at 1-866-721-6911, or from a agent—a list of license agents is on the DGIF website. You cannot get a permit at Thompson WMA.

NVBC Meeting (4/17) Church of the Covenant, 2666 Military Rd, Arlington, 22207. From intersection of Spout Run Pkwy and Lorcum Lane, go about a half mile on Lorcum, turn right onto Nellie Custis Dr at the bottom of the hill, and continue on Nellie Custis as it bears right and becomes Military Rd. Stay on Military and turn left into church drive just after passing traffic light at Marcey Rd. After entering church drive, turn right and go to lower lot. The door to Fellowship Hall, where meeting is held, is at the west end of the lot.

TRIP LEADERS

David Boltz	703-768-7499
Charlotte Friend	703-532-0207
Catherine Kubo	703-352-1238
Larry Meade	703-206-9030
Beth Moore	703-807-2646
Elton Morel	703-553-4860
Marc Ribaudo	703-680-1134
Peter Ross	703-528-2731
Marv Rubin	703-915-7545
Jean Tatalias	703-281-6099
Joanna Taylor	703-243-5989
Carolyn Williams	703-273-1961
Steve Williams	703-619-0381



A second-year Bald Eagle at Dyke Marsh. Photograph by Larry Meade

NVBC Budget

The Board of Directors of the Northern Virginia Bird Club has adopted the following budget for the coming year:

INCOME

Bird Watchers Digest/pin sales	\$	150
Dues for FY 2014	2	3,050
Gifts received	_	150
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 3	3,350

EXPENSES		
Meeting Expenses	\$	650
Printing and postage	1	,700
Organization costs (e.g., permits,		
PO box, website, fees)		500
Donations made by		
club/scholarship		500
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$3	,350

Annual dues are the Club's largest source of revenue, but supplements from Bird Watcher Digest subshares and donations made to the Club are also important and very much appreciated. The Club is designated a 501(c)(3) charity by the IRS and thus gifts beyond the annual dues are tax deductible. As shown, the largest expenses are for printing and mailing *The Siskin* and for the quarterly Club meetings. At times the Board approves additional expenses paid from reserve funds, especially when exceptional speakers are available if we support their local travel expenses.

—Jean Tatalias

WINTER TRIP TO CHINCOTEAGUE

From breezy to balmy with a few good birds in between

Twenty-four Northern Virginia Bird Club members enjoyed the annual club winter trip to Chincoteague this last February. It all started out on a bitterly cold and windy Friday afternoon at the entrance road to Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge with a Tri-colored Heron. The traditional wildlife loop produced several duck species, including Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintails, Green-winged Wigeons, and Black Ducks. One lone Tree Swallow was spotted over Snow Goose Pond. A few noisy Tundra Swans were heard and seen as well. Beach Road was very productive, not necessarily with the number of birds but with the quality of them. Our best sightings included a male Eurasian Wigeon and an American Avocet in Swan Cove. The beach itself did not produce much besides windblown and cold birders.

The historically traditional walk behind the hotel on Saturday morning was skipped in favor of Beach Road and the Marsh Walk. We found the Avocet again in Swan Cove; this time sleeping with the ducks on what little remained of open water. It was surprisingly to see that the overnight cold had pretty much frozen over the waters in the NWR. On the beach we had an excellent study of an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull in amongst the more common gull species and there were two large flocks of Snow Geese sleeping along the edge of Tom's Cove and Swan Cove. Whilst on our way up and down Beach Road, some of us saw a Merlin perched on top of a dead tree. Others were challenged finding a snipe or two along the water's edge. Marsh Trail and the observation deck overlooking Snow Goose Pond was a tad quiet. Due to past nights freeze the pond was almost completely frozen over resulting in hundreds of ducks huddled together on what remained of open water. We did get good looks at a few Harriers though.

After we broke for lunch, a few stray birders walked the neighborhood behind the Best Western and found a Little Blue Heron and Marbled Godwit. Once these strays were rounded up, we then reassembled and caravanned to Mary Rubin's house with its many feeders. We had excellent looks at a Palm Warbler, a couple of Pine Warblers, Brownheaded and Red-breasted Nuthatches, a Hermit Thrush, Fox Sparrows and a few of us spotted two skittish Pine Siskins. Next up was the Chincoteague Island Nature trail which turned out to be not very productive save for adding a couple of Golden-crowned Kinglets to our list. While driving on Chicken City Road back to the hotel, a Wilson's Snipe was spotted on a lawn just a few feet off the road. We all drove slowly by the snipe which seemed not to care much about us. In an attempt to find the Little Blue Heron and Marbled Godwit back, we all walked the neighborhood behind the hotel. We didn't find these birds again, but we did pick up a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a Forster's Tern. Queens Sound Flats boat launch, our next stop, was fun. This is where we found the usual noisy American Oystercatchers, a large flock of Brant and a female Common Goldeneye. We timed our last visit of the day at the Chincoteague City Mudflats at low tide. Here we found a good assemblage of shorebirds including about 60 Black-bellied Plovers, many Dunlins, a couple of Western Sandpipers and a few Long-billed Dowitchers.

On Sunday, we drove to Kiptopeke State Park for a quick visit before we started the CBBT tour. Notable sightings were a male Common Goldeneye, a Long-tailed Duck, Black Scoters, a Northern Gannet and a Red-throated Loon. Our last stops included the four islands of the CBBT. Instead of freezing cold wind, it was remarkable calm and very sunny; downright balmy for a winter's day. Highlights were six Common Eiders at Island #3 -- two immature males and four females -- in amongst a large flock of Long-tailed Ducks and all three scoter species. In fact, we saw all three scoter species and Gannets at each of the four islands as well as Great Cormorants on islands 2, 3 and 4. Surprisingly, we found Purple Sandpipers only on island #2.

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During the trip 105 species were seen and several of the participants got stellar looks of life birds, such as Golden-eye, Tri-colored Heron, Eurasian Wigeon, American Avocet and many more. The funniest sighting was the Wilson's Snipe next to the road.

-Elton Morel & Gerco Hoogeweg

Common Loon photographed by Reid Williamson at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel



The Wilson's Snipe spotted next to Chicken City Road. Photograph by Gerco Hoogeweg



Gray Catbird wintering on the Eastern Shore photographed by Gerco Hoogeweg



Brown-headed Nuthatch taking a seed from Marv Rubin's feeder. Photograph by Reid Williamson

Dunlin photographed at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge by Reid Williamson



HIGHLAND COUNTY WEEKEND

A Snowy Adventure

ourteen Northern Virginia Bird Club members led by Marv Rubin and Elton Morel went on the annual winter trip to Augusta and Highland Counties, March 1-3. Despite the snowy, cold and windy weather, we saw 56 bird species for the weekend. Highlights were Rough-legged Hawk in Augusta County, and an Eastern Screech-Owl and Golden Eagles in Highland county. Despite three persistent and thorough attempts to find the Say's Phoebe on Hevener Road, we were unable to find this rare visitor to Virginia

Local Augusta County birder Allen Larner graciously led us around his birding patch on Friday afternoon. The Rough-legged Hawk was easily found sitting on a fence post on Hall School Road, but it wasn't very co-operative as it flew up into the woods giving us only distant scope views.

We then went to the Swoope area which is southwest of Staunton, mostly to look for Short-eared Owls near dusk. Our first stop was at a Bald Eagle nest on Cattleman Road and we visited Smithfield Pond at a private location looking for any waterfowl. We spotted Gadwalls, American Wigeons and a female Green-winged Teal, and enjoyed a visit with the property owners. While still on Cattleman Road, we started our vigil near dusk hoping for Short-eared Owls. We might have had a Short-eared Owl, but a Red-tailed Hawk flew in along the same tree line causing us to be uncertain as to whether we really had an owl or whether we were on a second Red-tailed Hawk. Alas, we had to settle for a few Eastern Meadowlarks and Whitecrowned Sparrows

On Saturday morning, we drove to Highland County with a productive stop at the McDowell feeders where we found many Pine Siskins, a few Purple Finches and Black-capped Chickadees, and a Redbreasted Nuthatch.

We broke for lunch, making a "peregrinating" walk to an excellent eatery, Evelyn's Pantry. After lunch, we started towards Blue Grass Valley via Route 220. Stopping at the trout farm, we spotted an amorous Belted Kingfisher couple on the far side of the pond, as well as six Eastern Bluebirds and a cold Eastern Phoebe

While stopping to look at Horned Larks in a field on Hardscrabble Road, Linda Chittum spotted an adult Golden Eagle sitting in a tree. We then went to Hevener Road to look for the Say's Phoebe. Just as we were about to give up at this location, Bev Leeuwenburg drove up and gave us a tip about the location of a red morph Eastern Screech-Owl. Once again, Linda found the owl and we all had good but distant scope looks at the bird. Horned Larks were found again near the feed lot on Laurel Fork Road, one of which landed in the road giving us excellent looks.

A visit to the feeders on the corner of Blue Grass Valley Road and Snyder Lane yielded more Purple Finches and Black-capped Chickadees. After failing to



A pair of Golden Eagles circles over Highland County. Photograph by Reid Williamson

find Red-headed Woodpeckers on Maple Syrup Road, we looped back around to New Hampden and found American Tree Sparrows and a Chipping Sparrow in amongst a large flock of juncos. We spent the rest of the afternoon looking for the Long-eared Owl on Wimer Mountain Road and Say's Phoebe and Rough-legged Hawks in Blue Grass Valley, to no avail. We comforted ourselves in the evening with a delicious dinner at The Highland Inn.

On Sunday morning, the coldest day of the trip, we headed towards Blue Grass Valley again looking for the Say's Phoebe with no luck. On the way north on Route 220, Su Kim spotted a flock of Wild Turkeys feeding in a ravine. A drive down Blue Grass Valley Road south of Hightown looking for raptors seemed unproductive until Linda saved the morning by finding a pair of Golden Eagles in a tree as we reached Mill Gap Road. The pair took flight, circled around a bit giving us excellent looks at the eagles. A little bit of drama was added to the show when the eagles were dive-bombed by a passing Red-tailed Hawk. We all agreed that this was an excellent way to end the birding trip.

-Elton Morel and Marv Rubin

Club members in Highland County during NVBC's 2013 winter weekend. Photograph by Reid Williamson



NORTHERN VIRGINIA BIRD CLUB P.O. Box 5812 ARLINGTON, VA 22205-0812

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DATED MATERIAL

JOIN THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA **BIRD CLUB**

Northern Virginia Bird Club dues for 2013 are \$8 for Individual and \$12 for Family Membership. Members receive our quarterly newsletter, The Siskin. Checks for dues should be sent to: Northern Virginia Bird Club, Attn: Membership, P.O. Box 5812, Arlington, VA 22205-0812.

If you miss an issue of The Siskin or need to report an address or ZIP Code change, please send an email message to nvabc@verizon.net or leave a message for Charlotte Friend at 703-532-0207.

Please note: NVBC does not exchange, give away, or sell its membership list.

NVBC ON THE WEB

Current information and special notices about NVBC meetings, field trips, and other activities, along with a printable membership form, are posted on the club's website, www.nvabc.org. If you have information or pictures you would like to see on the website, please email the webmaster, Len Alfredson, at nvabc@verizon.net.

NVBC eMAIL EXCHANGE

By participating in the club's email exchange, you can get email notices of late

updates to *The Siskin* and the field trip sched- CLUB CONTACTS ule. To join the exchange and receive a list of **President**: Larry Meade, 703-206-9030 email addresses for other participating NVBC members, send an email nvabc@verizon.net. Put "EXCHANGE" in the subject field and your full name in the message area. You must place your name on the list in order to receive information about other members. The list is for NVBC members' use only.



Vice President, Programs: Joanna Taylor 703-243-5989

Vice President, Field Activities: Steve Williams, 703-619-0381

Secretary: Diane Marton, 703-527-7360 Treasurer: Jean Tatalias, 703-281-6099 Immediate Past President: Paul Mocko, 703-243-4987

Directors: Steve Bruck, 703-425-8584; Catherine Kubo, 703-352-1238; Elton Morel, 703-553-4860

Directors Emeritus: Len Alfredson, Don Wiesnet

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Merlin photographed by Reid Williamson on NVBC's 2013 Chincoteague Winter Weekend