

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

APRIL 1981

The final whisps of winter's beard trail away as March wanes, and one feels the advantage of the lengthening days. It is a time for cleansing - the home, the car, the yard, the soul. At last those buds which tetered on bursting in early March can give it their all cheered on by the rejoicing frogs, toads and birds. 'Tis a time of renewal and excitement.

Wednesday, April 15 at 7:30 pm in room 117 of Millington Hall on the William and Mary campus will also be a time of renewal and excitement. The excitement will be generated by our speaker, Elizabeth Wilkins of VIMS, who will speak to us on the foraging behavior of black ducks. In addition, we will announce plans for our upcoming Spring Count and field trips. The renewal time is for anyone who hasn't done so already for 1981. After April 15 those persons who have not renewed their memberships will be dropped from our mailing list.

The April field trip is scheduled for Newport News Park on Saturday, the 18th. Departure from the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center south parking lot will be at 7 am. There should be ample spring migrants on hand for scrutiny at the park as well as a few hold over waterfowl. Since the park is only a fifteen minute drive folks may choose to stay for only an hour or so. There is a possibility the group may spend some time in Bassett Hall woods also. This underexplored area offers prime birding haunts that need to be searched. This field trip should be an excellent one, so make every effort to attend.

As everyone should be aware by now our Bluebird Committee has been very hard at work getting ready for 1981. The committee's chairperson, Jewel Thomas, brought about twenty more houses to the March meeting for club members to assemble and all of the assembly kits were picked up. These houses, when completed, will be placed at the Williamsburg Country Club on Route 143, east of town. This will give us two "trails" counting the one at Carter's Grove. Ben Gilbert, who looks after the Carter's Grove area for Colonial Williamsburg, reports that bluebirds have already taken an interest in some of the boxes placed there in February. As a matter of interest folks might like to know that the boxes, fittings and pipe run the club \$9.50 each. A small investment when you consider they last for years and bring joy, knowledge and a sense of satisfaction to us all.

Purple martins were first noted locally on March 18 at Cheatham Annex. Already birds can be seen sitting on or near old established martin motels. Sam Hart's committee has finished its major cleaning job anticipating another successful breeding season, but not before a few of the martin boxes became infested with English sparrows and starlings. Again we hope folks will spare some time to help Sam and Jewel with their valuable club projects.

We all doff our unencumbered hats to Cynthia Long whose persistence at one of our local retail stores prompted the store manager to purge his shelves of that messy Tanglefoot. Now how about the Federal budget, Mrs. Long!

Bill Snyder has brought three rather timely environmental issues to the fore. The Park Service has been systematically removing all the dead trees along the Colonial Parkway. Obviously, some of this is justifiable in view of potential road hazards. However, it doesn't seem to be confined to just that. Apparently, trees well off the roadway are also being removed. Dead trees are, of course, dwelling and feeding places for many animals, birds especially. Next he expressed concern over

the use of chemical sprays to remove vegetation from rail road tracks. With what we now know about pesticide pollutants and their magnification through a food chain the concern is most deserving of attention. Finally, there was a question about the massive vegetation removal along the Interstate. Apparently, this is standard procedure not only for visual purposes, but also for fire safety and overall roadside clearance. Several member offered to look into these matters. We look forward to their updates.

At the March 21 Virginia Society of Ornithology Board of Directors meeting several noteworthy items were discussed. The VSO journal, the Raven, will move closer to getting "caught up" in its publication schedule with a projected six issues or more being sent out during 1981. Since one year constitutes four issues this fine journal should make great gains in the months ahead.

The VSO annual meeting for 1981 will be held on May 29 - 31 at Mountain Lake. This beautiful resort near Blacksburg is a perfect bird organization meeting place. The weekend will offer fabulous field trips, a local chapter's workshop, a scientific paper session, a grand banquet and guest speaker, and excellent birding companionship. The special package rates for the weekend are:

Hotel accommodations

\$71 plus 4% tax per person double occupancy

\$85 plus 4% tax per person single occupancy

Cottage accommodations

\$65 plus 4% tax per person double occupancy

\$77 plus 4% tax per person single occupancy

These rates include two nights lodging, six meals, gratuities, and use of hotel recreational facilities. For further information contact Bill Williams or Ruth Beck.

Also at the annual meeting the Virginia Birding Site Guide will be available for the first time. It will contain easily followed directions and birding possibilities for practically all of the state's excellent bird haunts. Ruth and Dr. Richard Peake are editing the publication, one no Virginia birder will want to be without.

The VSO annual breeding bird foray for 1981 will be held on the Eastern Shore in Accomac County from June 2 through June 7. The headquarters will be the Whispering Pines Motel on Route 13 near Accomac. Basically, the design of the foray is to gather all of the evidence of breeding bird activity for the entire county. Anyone interested should contact Mr. Barry Kinzie P. O. Box 446 Troutville, VA 24175.

Mark Lassiter, the naturalist at the York River State Park, will be conducting a morning bird walk on Saturday, April 25 from 7 am to 12 noon on the park grounds. Anyone interested should contact Mark at 564-9057.

Dr. Ernest P. Edwards of Sweetbriar College is offering a non-credit course in Field Ornithology and Ecology June 22 - 27, 1981 and a one day Bird and Wildflowers of the Blue Ridge Parkway on May 9. Contact Bill Williams for further details if you are interested.

BIRDS

Since the white-winged crossbill made its first appearance in Richmond in February several club members were able to add this neat species to their lists. Fred Blystone and Leigh Jones saw it March 8. Right on the heels of this great bird our own Maynard Nichols of Gloucester had an immature male black-headed grosbeak

show up at this feeder March 17. (Remember you heard it first at our March 18 meeting!) Once the word got out lots of folks got to see the bird including Ruth, Leigh, Fred, Tom Armour, Betty Williams, Dorothy Mitchell to name a few. As with so many of the goodies this year one of the greatest aspects of chasing them has been the warm reception the "owners" of the rarity have extending. This was certainly true in Gloucester. The Nichols simply could not have been more hospitable despite having their small kitchen so full one Sunday that there was hardly room to move around. The arrival of the grosbeak and one of Mrs. Nichols sugar cookies were a birding treat beyond equal. Thank you, grand people, from everyone you made feel "at home".

The March 13 owl hoot brought out twenty-seven eager owlers. A relatively warm, moonlit evening made it a delight to be outside. However, the owls were less than cooperative. One poor screech owl at Cheatham Annex made a brief appearance for the first party. A monotone, low purr was all he would render acoustically. Apparently, he also provided brief excitement for the second crew aboard some forty-five minutes later.

From Powhatan Creek off the James River, Bill Snyder reported the season's first swallows locally. Roughwings were seen March 11 followed a day later by tree swallows. On March 18 he had a great egret. Bill also observed a red-tailed hawk sitting in his yard over seeing his bird feeder.

Rich Goll called in early March to report that the harlequin ducks were still present at Rudee Inlet in Virginia Beach. Also on hand was an apparent second year Iceland gull. A fox sparrow was still at Dick Hines' feeder as late as March 17. Hopefully, club members who had this species around kept track of their last dates seen. Phoebes are singing locally as they prepare to nest in and around out buildings and bridges. Yellow-throated warblers were first noted at Lafayette High School on March 30 followed a day later by Louisiana waterthrush. A black and white warbler graced Queen's Lake March 31. Spotted sandpiper, laughing gulls, blue-gray gnatcatcher and blue-winged teal are already with us as of March 28 and 29. At Cheatham Annex pheasants have begun to cough their mating pleas and turkeys are regularly seen displaying at the old rifle range. All of our local bodies of water are attended by ospreys.

By the time of the monthly meeting (April 15) several more species should have made their appearance, including green heron, wood thrush, hummingbird, scarlet tanager, barn swallows, whip-poor-will, several species of tern, ovenbird and yellow-throated vireo. This time of year is wonderfully exciting as the winter residents persist and the spring migrants and summer residents move in providing us with something old and something new.

It is not enough to have a black-headed grosbeak gracing your feeder for the convenience of the state's competitive listers for Maynard Nichols. He's also got pine siskins that allow him to reach out and touch them. Those rascals probably get so involved in porking out on sun flower seeds they become oblivious to everything else. A recent issue of National Wildlife has some delightfully incredible stories on peculiar bird behaviors and next to grouse siskins seem to be as tame at times as any animal could be.

Here's how the Spring Count situation looks at this point. The Hampton Roads count is scheduled for May 2. The Williamsburg count is on tap for May 9. For our own local tally we encourage as many people as possible to join us, even for a short time. Many of us will begin well before dawn gleaning owls, nightjars and whatever else can be heard from the sounds of the night. We will cover the same areas as the

Christmas Count circle - Hog Island, Jamestown, Kingsmill, Cheatham Annex, College Woods, Middle Plantation, Skimino and Jolly Pond. Anyone who is interested should let Bill Williams know beforehand. We will all assemble at the Information Center at 7 am for those who aren't inclined to be out any earlier. Tally time will be 5 pm in the small conference room on the first floor of Millington Hall at William and Mary. Many of us will also make a day of it with the Hampton Roads count. If you would like to help out there, please let Ruth or Bill know. This is an excellent count that provides superb birding from seashore to upland woods.

ASK OWL

Many people wonder why cormorants are often seen sitting on poles with their wings held open. This particular group of birds lacks oil glands for waterproofing their feathers. Hence after several hours of diving for fish they become water-logged and must dry out.