

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

MAY 1981

"It's the merry, merry month of May", but, you couldn't prove it by the weather. Fake's me out! Wearing a down jacket on spring counts two weeks in a row just doesn't seem right. Boy, wait till Mike Wallace and Harry Reasoner hear about this!

Nevertheless, birds and birders must press on. Our regular monthly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 20 at room 117 Millington Hall on the William and May campus. The program will begin at 7:30 pm and will feature you. Yes, you. This will be a show and tell affair. We're especially interested in your favorite bird slides. Bring 'em along and share an important moment of discovery with everyone. If you don't have slides you may have a bird's nest or egg fragment and an anecdotal tail to tell about your treasure. This should be a fun evening. Everyone becomes an expert!

We wish to express our deepest sympathy to the families of the Hampton Roads Bird Club at the untimely deaths of their President, Betty Hodges and long time member Ash Rawls. Our prayers are with them.

Over the last few months we've been razzing everyone to let us know about bird books we could place in the Williamsburg Regional Library. Well your suggestions haven't gone unheeded. Here is a list of those publications we've purchased so far: Great Blue, by Crowell; Stories about Birds and Bird Watchers, by Bowers; two copies of Virginia's Birdlife, An Annotated Checklist; and a subscription for 1981 of Bird Watchers Digest. We don't want to stop there so let us know what you think the library and public would benefit from.

If you are interested in feeding hummingbirds you may want to try some hummingbird nutrient preparation sold through hardware stores. It is supposed to be more nutritious for the hummers and less attracting to some insects. The standard mix is a 25 percent solution of sugar water with red food coloring added. Once these entertaining fellows find your feeder you are in for many delightful moments.

Alice Springe reports that "Crazy" the front-door-loving pileated woodpecker is back rapping, tapping on her door. You know, like I know? Birds of a feather?!

Since our Spring Count took the place of the monthly field trip you might be interested in other birding activities still available. The annual meeting of the Virginia Society of Ornithology is scheduled for Mt. Lake Hotel near Blacksburg on May 29 - May 31. The VSO Foray to Accomack County is booked for June 2 - 7. There is a pelagic trip out of Oden's Dock at Cape Hatteras on May 24. If anyone desires further information on any of these please alert Bill Williams or Ruth Beck.

Our Bluebird Committee is well into the nesting season. As of mid-April no bluebirds had taken up residence in our new houses at Carter's Grove although a Carolina wren had. We don't mind, Jewel, Ruth, Tom Armour, Caroline Lowe and Sam Hart placed ten boxes at the Williamsburg Country Club recently. At one location their activities were closely scrutinized by eager bluebirds! Our fingers are crossed. Rumor has it that this merry band of boxers had more fun romping around the country club golf course on golf carts than they did placing out thr bird houses.

The Purple Martin Committee has found the going rough early in the nesting season. English sparrows have been a great nuisance and may have to be trapped. The dry, cool weather has probably contributed to low numbers of martins. Hopefully the situation will improve as spring progresses.

Following up on last months environmental concerns we get the following reports. The Park Service is cutting only those dead trees along the Colonial Parkway that are road hazards. Interior trees are not going to be disturbed. The railroad spraying is done to prevent fire hazards and the Interstate cutting provides for vision as well as preventing fires.

On the birding front there's a mountain of information to report. Going all the way back to late March the birding parade has been magnificent. Maynard Nichols managed to hold the attention of his black-headed grosbeak until March 30. What a celebrity! The first black and white warbler was noted at Queen's Lake March 31. On April 1 our earliest whip-poor-will was heard by Leigh Jones near the Golden Horseshoe Golf Course. Fox sparrows were enticed to remain at Bill Snyder's home until April 3. Parula warblers and ovenbirds showed up on April 4 and 5 respectively. A very late redhead was located at Indian Field Creek on April 7 and an initial hummingbird was coming to a feeder in Skipwith Farms on April 11. Common loons made appearances on the York and James Rivers about April 14. The first yellow-crowned night heron was found at the Queen's Lake Marina April 16. Perhaps the find of the season was Brian Taber's 34 water pipits at St. George's Farm near Jamestown on April 20. Ten to twelve of these neat birds were still present April 25. A red-throated loon was present near Yorktown on April 21. Our first spring record of Louisiana heron was made on Jamestown Island April 22 and cattle egrets made their regular spring appearance there the same date. Throughout the latter days of April several warbler species were particularly notable including blue-winged, black throated, green and Cape May. By early May Fenton Day was finding the locally rare Cerulean warbler and cliff swallow near St. George's Farm. Winter holdovers included pine siskins, evening grosbeaks and purple and house finches. Even red-breasted mergansers and a greater scaup managed to hold out with a few buffleheads and horned grebes.

The Hampton Roads Spring Count tallied an incredible 169 species. Considering the unfavorable weather conditions the count seems even more staggering. Our own count was hit by cool early morning winds and a dirth of birds. We managed to squeeze out 154 species highlighted by Susan Sturm and Nancy Courtney's discovery of a very probable yellow-bellied flycatcher. Other goodies included pectoral sandpiper (found after the tally at College Creek!) Glossy ibis, worm-eating warbler, and sharp-tail sparrow. Everyone commented on how few individuals of each species we were able to garner. The north winds can take a lot of blame for that. Thanks to everyone for their marvelous and expert help.

ASK OWL

Over on the Eastern Shore the locals don't know black skimmers or terns by proper names. They call skimmers flood gulls and terns are referred to as strikers. Both of these colloquialisms are references to these birds feeding habits.