

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

April 1982

Please note that this is the month that begins with a practical joke. As my pen sews these words together there is a prediction of snow! Now who is fooling whom? The plants---red bud, dogwood, forsythia, service berry, bloodroot---speak of spring. Robins are in full song, and chickadees are already building nests. So what's with this snow? How can we find Easter eggs?

Well by the time you get all your eggs in the proverbial single basket it will be time to attend our April 21 meeting. Since we are not subject to the change our weather caters to, we will meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 117 of Millington Hall. The program will be the last installment of our detailed survey of the bird families. We will concentrate on the Passeriforms or "perching birds". This is an apropos group to initiate Spring since they will be migrating through our area in great variety and numbers over the next several weeks. Be prepared with your bird book in hand. Also featured with the program will be a unique bird's silhouette quiz that everyone will become involved in. Make a special effort to attend this meeting, it should be great fun.

So far we have no entries in our logo design contest. Are we destined to be the group whose noteriety is derived from a symbol with nothing on it? The ole snowy owl in a snow storm routine or a crow perched on a cave stalactite just don't seem to suit us. Come on---what's you got to lose?

Jewel Thomas was recently given a letter of commendation by the Williamsburg Garden Club Council for her excellent work with our bluebird trails. Her dedicated efforts have seen two trails become established and a third one is ready to go. York River State Park has agreed to let us put up five houses there for a modest beginning in a potentially great area for the bluebirds. Not only has Jewel seen to getting the trails going but she's made sure there were plenty of houses to put on them. Last month she brought in 19 boxes that club members could take home to assemble and return. You represent us very well Jewel---Thanks!

Speaking of recognition, Kay Boldt was recently named Woman of the Year by the local chapter of Business Professional Women. Mrs. Boldt is best known to all of us through her lovely wintertime orioles, but her work in various church and civic groups is known by many area residents. She moved to Illinois the first of April and Williamsburg is poorer from her departure. We hope she will stay in touch.

The field trip for Fools Month will take place on Sunday, April 25. Our destination will be the far away reaches of close~~by~~ Cheatham Annex. Departure as usual will be 7:00 a.m. from the south parking lot of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center. Crowing pheasants, gobbling turkeys and wobbling warblers are Cheatham's forte in Spring. This trip is such an easy and productive one that a large turnout is expected. Hopefully this trip won't meet the same one as March's and get washed out. See you there!

May will be one of the busier than usual months for birders. To kick things off we will hold our annual Spring bird count on Sunday May 2. The format will be the same we follow for the Christmas count. We will cover eight

local areas (Kingsmill, Hog Island, Jamestown, Jolly Pond, Middle Plantation, Skimino, College Woods, Cheatham Annex) from 7:00 a.m. (or earlier) until 5:00 p.m. Leaders will be needed for all eight areas, and each leader could use lots of help, even if its only for an hour or two. All groups will assemble at 7:00 a.m. at the Information Center and receive assignments and last minute instructions. We will tally at Millington Hall, room 108, at 5:00 p.m. These Spring "Big Days" are super fun and lots of birds are available for sight and sound. Please join us and bring friends. Those interested should give a little whistle at Bill Williams 229-0098.

Right on the heels of our count on May 7, 8, 9 bird enthusiasts have their choice of two excellent meetings. The Virginia Society of Ornithology will hold it's annual confab at the Mariner Motel in Virginia Beach. Field trips to the Dismal Swamp (Swainson's warbler), Seashore Park, Back Bay and a pelagic trip on Sunday are only some of the attractions. Two of our club members, Rich Goll and Ruth Beck, have been nominated for positions on the VSO Board of Directors and need the affirmative vote they should get at the business meeting on Friday May 7. A local chapter's workshop and a paper session are also very exciting. Let Ruth, Tom Armour or Bill Williams know if you want more information.

Also on that weekend the Wilson Ornithological Society will hold its annual meeting in Blacksburg. Many of the world's foremost avian experts will be on hand for this very educational and productive conference.

Next in line on May 15 the Hampton Roads Bird Club will hold its Spring bird count. Many of their members are the backbone of our local count, so we like to encourage a lot of our folks to lend a hand down there. Birding in the tidewater area is excellent so let someone know if you can join the crew to help out.

As has been widely publicized over the last several months, the Endangered Species Act is up for review and revision this year. While this newsletter has not served as a forum for politics, it does seem appropriate to encourage our members to make their voices heard regarding endangered species by contacting the area Senators and Congressmen. If there are important issues to be resolved they literally won't know unless we tell them. Think about it!?

Bird news? Boy have we got bird news! As in the past years several of our members led walks for the early risers during the Williamsburg Garden Symposium in late March--early April. Highlights for the out-of-towners included clapper rail, wild turkey, numerous ducks and several warbler species to compliment a magnificent, bright, clear morning. Leaders included Martha Armstrong, Thom Blair, Ruth, Brian Taber and Bill Sheehan. The walks have become a very special attraction for the Symposium participants, and it gives us a chance to spread the birdy word to visitors.

The influx of spring time birds began as early as mid-March. On the fourteenth Dick Hines' bass fishing on Yarmouth Creek off the Chickahominy was momentarily interrupted by the singing of a very early (by 10 days) yellow-throated warbler. Also in the area were 50-100 snipe, evening grosbeaks, pine warblers, phoebes, and unconcerned beaver, and the biggest "hawg" bass at 6 lbs. 7 oz. Dick ever caught. Julie Hotchkiss spotted a large, dark bird feeding in the field at St. Georges Farm near Jamestown on March 16. It turned out to be a very cooperative glossy ibis that stayed around until at least the eighteenth. Purple martins were spotted at Anderson's Corner on March 17 and within a few minutes afterward rough-winged and tree swallows were checked in by Bill Snyder and others.

On March 14 Brian, Rich and Cindy Fletcher took a pelagic trip some 25 miles offshore in hopes of seeing alcids and kittiwakes, and possibly jaegers, skuas or petrels. Birdwise, the trip produced only a lesser black-backed gull. However, the crew did observe a very large whale, probably a fin whale, that appeared to be in the 50 foot class. See what wonders birding brings!

John and Betty Williams and Margaret Dunham took part in a week long vacation trip to Bermuda in early March. Aside from enjoying the tropical sun and scenery they were able to see the island's "yellow birds" and "long-tail" birds. The former are actually kiskadee flycatchers from Texas that winter in the tropical luxury while the "long tails" are really white-tailed tropic birds.

The warmer climes and the space shuttle launch lured the Becks, the Armours, and Alice and Dick Springle to Florida. Alice reports that wood ibis were on Merritt Island. Tom was driven to the home of a burrowing owl in south Florida, and the little guy let Tom rattle off pictures from only a few feet away. President Armour also got the low down on how and where to see two Bahama bananaquits in the Sunshine State. He couldn't squeeze them in to his schedule, but apparently there are folks who can give you directions so explicit they even tell you which bush the birds are in. Hey, wait for me!

Back here at home Leigh Jones found an early parula warbler in Marlbank near Yorktown on March 21. Four days later Thom Blair was at Hog Island and saw both species of yellowlegs, cattle egret and shovelers. On the same day at Kingsmill Ace Armour gleaned a first year iceland gull from the hordes of ring-bills that were moving through. This is a new bird for our area and an outstanding find this far inland. The iceland gull is much like the glaucous gull but is smaller in overall size. The bill is somewhat petit when compared to other gulls and the head is small. The all-white wings extend beyond the tail at rest, whereas the glaucous gull's wings are even with the tail.

In the waning days of March blue-gray gnatcatchers buzzed in (March 27) and Louisiana waterthrushes arrived. Carolyn Lowe had palm. black and white and prairie warblers at Camp Peary, and Mrs. Smith continued to play host to her star orange-crowned warbler. The white-pelican, ole steady Eddie, was still on hand March 30 at Hog Island. Ospreys were, and are, hard at work constructing nests on local duck blinds, especially along the York River.

When you awoke Saturday morning, April 3, and discovered it was raining (or had rained--depending on your waking inclinations) you could easily have predicted the bird club had a trip in tow. Right again, you clever rascal! In fact, five people--John and Eleanor Hertz, Tom Armour, Betty Williams and Carolyn Lowe--lit out for the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. Undaunted by the impending and predicted rains and very high winds they braved on and came away highly rewarded for their efforts. Included in their tally were many gannets, both loons, glossy ibis, a gnatcatcher, brant, all three scoters, a great cormorant, greater and lesser scaup and purple sandpipers. Sounds like a super trip, but then aren't they all.

As the days lengthen, the species we should be anticipating are whip-poor-wills, wood thrush, hummingbirds, green heron, ovenbird, great-crested flycatcher, yellow-throated and red-eyed vireos, any of the herons and egrets and many warblers, especially redstarts, and parulas to mention only a few. A late influx of siskins, purple finches and grosbeaks should be watched carefully for how long the stay. Captain Sheehan is really after breeding information this year so there's another item to be on the look-out for. The bluebird trail at the Williamsburg Country Club already has two bluebird nests and two chickadee nests!

Bob Cross spent two weeks in mid-March birding Texas. He garnered 41 life birds. Maybe we can get him to tell us some of them at the monthly meeting.

Ask OWL:

What is the purpose of the spur on the wing of the Jacana (jah-kon-ah or jak-ah-nah)? According to an expert on the family, this spur is used for fighting!