

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER
March 1982

Enough is enough! For almost two years we were short changed on the rainfall. Now it seems it won't stop. Poor March strolled in like a soggy lion. Let's hope the departing lamb that ushers in April is somewhat drier. You know what wet wool can be like! But all of this will provide the ultimate reward of a flower show par excellence in a few weeks. Meanwhile the crow cusses at the daffy dills.

With the January and February monthly programs under your belt you might be getting a feeling for some of those bird families. On Wednesday, March 17, 1982 at 7:30 p.m. in room 117 of Millington Hall we will continue our pursuit of those avian connections. Our topic will focus on the remainder of the bird families leading us towards an April meeting where it is hoped that the warblers will be featured. Vice President Ruth Beck will skillfully pick up where Dr. Mitchell Byrd left off in February and delve in to the subtleties of the shore birds, gulls, terns, doves, owls, woodpeckers, flycatchers and swallows. Again bird books are welcome, and will probably be quite handy. Please make plans now to attend.

The field trip for this month will be on Saturday, March 20, and will feature a journey to Hog Island in Surry County. As per usual departure time is 7:00 a.m. from the south parking lot of the Williamsburg Information Center. This particular club trip has always proved very fruitful. The waterfowl are already moving northward and Piggy Point is a stop-over for many of them as they wing towards their far north nesting territories in the prairies of Canada. Usually there are numerous Canada geese, whistling swans, mallards, black ducks, teal (green-wing and blue-wing), pintails, gadwall and ring-necked ducks. Common mergansers are always a possibility as are early shorebirds such as yellowlegs. There are always large flocks of gulls nearby and the woods areas usually produce brown-headed nuthatches, kinglets, bluebirds and various sparrows. Recent goody birds for the refuge include the very cooperative white pelican that's adopted the area since Thanksgiving and a dark phased rough-legged hawk that's been there since January. Both of these have attracted a lot of attention all over the state. If you plan to attend the excursion be sure to bring boots, warm clothes and plenty of munchies--even a lunch wouldn't be a bad idea. The trip will be leisurely and well worth the time. Go for it. There's even talk of a stop at the Surry House.

Last month's trek to York River State Park attracted five lucky birders. A more beautiful and exhilarating dawning could not have been planned. There was a very pleasant damp, wild, silence that over saw the placid York River that morning as a few ducks skirted the water surface. In the woods virtually all of the woodpeckers including a red-headed were found. Two wood ducks and a sharp-shinned hawk provided highlights along with eye-ball to eye-ball views of golden-crown kinglets, bluebirds and a red-breasted nuthatch. We had the whole park to ourselves and the birds.

Don't forget about dues, dudes. If the treasurer doesn't hear from you by April this will be your last newsletter. You can fork over five dollars (single), \$7.50 (family) or three bucks if you are a student to Leigh Jones at our March 17 meeting, or send it to her at 505-B Tyler Street, Williamsburg.

Almost any day now one can expect the arrival of purple martin scouts and the first of the swallows (tree and roughwings). The Purple Martin Committee is still seeking a chairman. Most of the pre-nesting cleaning and unplugging of boxes is complete, but we still need volunteers to help with the spring and summer banding and box maintenance. Please let Tom Armour know of your willingness to help in this endeavor.

One of the most noteworthy sounds that can filter through a soft spring morning is the distinctive warble of the male bluebird. It is a message so pure and sweet that it can't help but lift one's spirit. Fortunately, with the assistance of bird clubs all over the country, the bluebird has been saved from eradication and we can all enjoy their beauty of sight and sound. Jewel Thomas, who chairs our Bluebird Committee, will be looking for assistance with this year's efforts to increase this grand little thrushes numbers. John and Betty Williams have volunteered to look after the houses at the Williamsburg Country Club, and while a couple of people have shown interest in adopting Carter's Grove, no one has taken on the project for sure. Also efforts will be made to get a trail in action at the York River State Park where several bluebirds just seem to be waiting for boxes to be set up for them. All Jewel needs is the man-power. The birds know what to do from there.

Anyone got an idea for the club's insignia yet? Remember there's a prize in it for the winner. Bring your entries to the March meeting.

Brian Taber is going to set up a table display for the May(6, 7, 8) Virginia Society of Ornithology annual meeting in Virginia Beach. He could use help with suggestions, photographs, etc. that will properly represent the activities of our progressive club. Call him at 642-6646 if you can be of assistance.

Rare birds continue to pop up hither and yon. Rich Goll blasted off to Pennsylvania and Maryland on March 6. He garnered two life birds with a gyrfalcon and a northern shrike. The Bewick's swan in Ocean City could not be located, though this should not be considered a real loss since I understand it will be "lumped" with whistlers in the 1983 ADU update anyway.

Rich and Cindy Fletcher picked out what may prove to be a state record bird on the Bay Bridge Tunnel on Saturday February 27. If you recall that day at all, visions of rain, sleet and snow should be prime in your mind's eye. Undaunted by the weather, they found a golden-eye female that sported a definite yellow-orange bill and a somewhat flatter head appearance than the other female golden-eyes it swam with. In short, the bird may be Virginia's first Barrow's golden-eye. As of late none of the state's birding gurus have passed the blessing of acceptance on the sighting. Everyone hopes for the best on this extremely difficult bird identification situation. Also present on the tunnel islands were two or three male harlequin ducks and an immature male common eider.

Mike and Dorothy Mitchell reported a Western Grebe at Rudee Inlet. One was in this area for the Christmas Count and the speculation of course is that it has just stayed nearby.

Mrs. Anne Smith has hosted birders from various corners of the state to show off her orioles and the orange-crowned warbler. At last report the welcome little visitor was having her cake and eating it too.

Ospreys are back. One was seen on February 21 at Hog Island by Leigh Jones. Another was recently seen at Kingsmill. Tom Armour reports seeing a peregrine falcon hauling freight lickity split past Kingsmill in early March. This makes our third local record.

Did you know that there was a lark sparrow in Virginia Beach for over a month recently? How about the state's first fully documented rufous hummingbird, that is presently living inside of a home in Northern Virginia?? Funny how these escape being mentioned. The truth lies in the fact that some birders are slob, and show little or no respect for the homes, property and privacy of others. Hence many rare birds go unreported to protect not only the bird but the area it visits. Too bad.

Want to take a jaunt to the Bay Bridge Tunnel in early April? Well, Thom Blair, our eager field trip chairman has made arrangements to stop on the tunnel islands for Saturday April 3. Departure, place and time is as usual, 7:00 a.m. from the Information Center. It should be a great adventure!

The VSO Outer Banks trip over February 19-21 produced thousands of cormorants. Large flocks of gulls and gannets displayed themselves vividly offshore. Goodie birds included white -ibis, peregrine falcon and rufous black-headed gull and kittiwake.

ASK OWL

The male woodcock finds himself a moist clearing usually at the edge of a woods or hedgerow to begin his courtship antics. While on the ground he struts stiff-legged about uttering a nasal peent. Then he flies upwards in a spiral flight to a height of 300 feet. Here the male pauses in mid air and twitters and chirps loudly. Subsequently, the suitor descends to his clearing looking for all the world like a dead leaf.