

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER  
February 1982

Just about the time cabin fever was reaching the point of intolerance we begin to experience a warm spell. The meteorologists explain that the jet stream has shifted so that it's allowing the southern flow of air northward. However, I also heard that some whistle-pig from the Keystone State saw his shadow (I'd like to see the sun!) and we're due to endure six more weeks of winter. Do pasture poodles sit at the jet stream controls or something? I'll put my trust in Andy Roberts and Joe "Salute" Folks!

You can put your trust in having an informative, excellent bird club program on Wednesday, February 17 at 7:30 p.m. though! Just get your spring-anxious self over to 117 Millington Hall at William and Mary on that date to get introduced to all the bird families. The old adage that it takes one to know one could not be more applicable here. What better person to speak about the individual characteristics of bird families than one of their own, (and ours) Mitchell Byrd. I mean how many professors of ornithology actually have a ring-necked pheasant residing in luxury in their home? Of course, we all know Dr. Byrd through his tireless efforts to study and protect eastern Virginia's populations of ospreys, bald eagles and red-cockaded woodpeckers. He is now on the threshold of establishing breeding peregrine falcons on the coast and his work has brought him several state conservation awards. In October, Big Byrd was presented the annual "Excellence in Wildlife Research" award by the Wildlife Society at a meeting in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Don't pass up the chance to hear the word from Byrd and to learn the facts about the feathered families. Bird books are welcome!

The field trip for this month will find us heading west young folks! We'll go to York River State Park for a morning stroll on Sunday February 21. We will assemble, as usual, at 7:00 a.m. at the south parking lot of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center. From there we will motor towards Croaker to reach the park. Once there we'll scan the York for diving ducks (canvasbacks, ruddy ducks, greater and lesser scaup, golden eye, buffle head, red head). Bald eagles and red-tails are regularly seen at the park. Then we'll walk the woods trails for winter sparrows, woodpeckers and warblers. Turkeys are a real possibility. Remember the club has adopted this park, so let's see a big turn out to visit this under explored, well-planned area.

Here's a list of the field trips for the rest of the year. Thom Blair, chairman of the field trip committee, is trying to alternate Saturday and Sunday trips to accomodate as many people as possible.

Saturday March 20	- - - - -	Hog Island Refuge
Sunday April 25	- - - - -	Cheatham Annex
Saturday May 22	- - - - -	York River Park
Sunday June 20	- - - - -	Grandview Beach
Saturday July 24	- - - - -	Craney Island
Sunday August 22	- - - - -	Hog Island Refuge
Saturday September 18	- - - - -	Kiptopeke/Bay Bridge Tunnel
Sunday October 24	- - - - -	York River Park
Saturday November 20	- - - - -	Hog Island Refuge
Sunday December 20	- - - - -	Annual Christmas Bird Count

There will be additional trips made throughout the year as demand dictates. The May annual Spring Bird Count will probably occur on Sunday May 9. Mark these dates on your social register and come on down!

The beginning of any new year requires the outlay of money. Our newly elected Treasurer, Leigh Jones, is anxious to stock the club's coffers with dues renewals. You don't have to wait to pay her personally. Send your renewals (\$5 single, \$7.50 family, \$3 student) to her at 505-B Tyler Street, Williamsburg. If we don't hear from you soon, your name will have to be

removed from our mailing list. While you are at it, sign up a friend!

While on the subject of money, don't forget the Line 20 for Wildlife on your Virginia income tax form. Donate a portion of your tax refund to non-game wildlife research by filling in the amount on line 20 and use this as a deduction on your 1982 taxes. Last year one million three hundred thousand Virginians filed tax returns. A dollar a piece or more from each of these would go along way towards putting money where Reaganomics lost it for the states. Please do what you can to show the powers that are that Virginians want to preserve and protect those species of plants and animals that don't sit in the public limelight as "game".

With Spring only a few warm spells away, we must consider the active Bluebird and Purple Martin committees. Jewel Thomas, our stellar bluebird expert is looking for volunteers to put together new nest boxes. Hopefully we can get these placed at York River Park. She is also searching for folks who would look after our existing trails at the Williamsburg Country Club and Carter's Grove.

The Purple Martin team needs a leader. After serving us admirably for several years, Sam Hart felt he would like to continue to help but asked for a new leader for the committee. We can't let this very effective study fall. Let Tom Armour know soon. The martins will be back within a month and we ought to welcome them home in southern style.

Our Records guru, Bill Sheehan, is looking for any and every item of information on birds locally, especially from areas west of Williamsburg. With his production of Volume II of the Williamsburg area birds, our lack of data on many species becomes clearly obvious. Any information on any species, especially nesting data is sorely needed. Has anyone ever seen nesting turkey or black vultures in our area, for instance?

Now that we've been in operation about five years we should have a symbol of our excellence to display throughout the birding circuits. The executive committee is putting forth a contest challenge for a person or persons to design a representative club patch. We would like to make the winning design available for the annual VSO meeting in May. A suitable prize will be made for the winning entry. Bring your designs to the monthly meetings or send them to Tom Armour at 132 Holdsworth Road, Williamsburg.

Speaking of the VSO, our parent organization will hold its annual winter trip to the Outer Banks of North Carolina over the weekend of February 19-21. Headquarters for this superb trip will be the Armada Inn. Contact Bill Williams (229-0098) if you want more information!

The VSO is also accepting its annual dues. Active membership is \$5, sustaining \$7.50, contributing \$15, family \$9. Send these to Mrs. Thelma Dalmas, 520 Rainbow Forest Road, Lynchburg, Va. 24502.

Since the January 23 field trip was rained out, eight club members made their way to Newport News City Park on Saturday February 6. As advertised they encountered all the ducks you'd love to see including the magnificent wood duck.

I move that we change the name of Northern oriole to Boldt-a-more oriole. Kay has up to 12 of these winter beauties visiting her feeding station on Tyler Street. As the cold weather intensified and stretched out last month, the orioles increased from 6 to a dozen in short order. One must wonder how many are really in our area. While birding recently on Jamestown Island,

Bill Sheehan and Tom Armour noticed a female oriole feeding at sapsucker drills in a hackberry tree. This was causing the poor sapsucker an undue amount of consternation, but it shows how species adapt to winter food shortages by being opportunistic and aggressive. Add this young lady oriole to the three Mrs. Anne Smith has at her Virginia Avenue home and the local known total hits sixteen. Surely there must be more we are unaware of.

In addition to her orioles, Anne Smith has also attracted the attention of an orange-crowned warbler. This is a rare bird locally, and it furthers the contention that you never know what will appear at our feeders.

Several people have inquired about fox sparrows this winter. Annie Newman had them at her feeders in early January, and then the recent ice and snow found this species feeding actively along thawed roadsides, especially the Jamestown end of the Parkway. A maximum of nine were located at Kingsmill, and Alice Springe had one at her feeder January 14.

The snow also produced numerous water pipits in and on the roads. This author saw about half a dozen of them in the middle of the highway in rushing traffic over near the new Farm Fresh. Three or four could be regularly seen strutting along the shoulder of 199 near Kingsmill, and the Parkway had its share too.

On January 10 an adult bald eagle was seen flying over Tyler Street by Leigh Jones, and later that day she saw a bitterly cold phoebe also. Phobes are normally insectivorous but must resort to munching on berries when the temperatures dip to the levels they did in January.

On the fifteenth of last month Brian Taber had a tree sparrow at his feeder in Gloucester, and several Williamsburgers got to see it. Brian also had several water pipits under the Coleman Bridge. He also spotted old squaw off the VIMS piers. A beautiful male of this species was seen off the Yorktown Beach January 16.

January 26 proved to be an interesting bird day here. President Armour was out for a lark and got seven of the horned variety at Kingsmill. Mr. Sheehan and Tom found them again the next day. Also on the twenty-sixth Joe Garvin witnessed an immature peregrine falcon knock a red-head bill over who-who at Indian Field Creek. The duck apparently wasn't killed. Attempts to find the falcon since then have been fruitless.

Carolyn Lowe reported a yellow-breasted chat on January 5 at Camp Peary, an excellent winter record.

Up to three bald eagles have been seen off College Creek recently. An immature eagle that Mitchell Byrd banded three years ago was found dead and badly decomposed along the James River west of First Colony; cause of demise is unknown. One of Dick Hines co-workers at C & P brought him the bird's leg band. On the brighter side Mitchell reports the mid-winter eagle survey will be in the neighborhood of 140 birds, an excellent tally considering this doesn't include an aerial survey of the Potomac River.

On the rare bird ledger, there was a lark sparrow at Staunton recently, and a Ross' goose has been intermittently observed near Virginia Beach.

On the seventeenth of January the local mercury plummeted to a numbing 2 degrees but this did not deter a male cardinal over near the Williamsburg Lodge. He was bursting forth in full song and that ring made the air temperature only a minor inconvenience. Since that date not only cardinals but song

sparrows and purple finches have taken up the chorus. A spring peeper (frog) was heard on February 4. Can they be telling us something optimistically?

Tom Armour is really taking his President's job seriously. The word is he has been seen sleuthing in and out of the college's ornithology class and even being so bold as to go on their field trips. It's never too late to teach an ..... oh well.

Rusty blackbirds have been coming to several feeders at Kingsmill, and everyone seems to be getting pounds of goldfinches. Mixed with these are a few siskins. Grosbeaks have been rare and local.

How about this for a bird encounter? Dick Hines' brother, Tommy, was out deer hunting early one morning over on the eastern shore and decided to climb into his favorite deer stand before daybreak to sit and wait. Just as he got himself squared away in the tree with his feet spread apart on an adjacent limb he thought he discerned a rush of wings. Looking down between his feet he was stunned to see a screech owl sitting unconcernedly between them! Tommy held his seat, the owl peered around for awhile, and soon left apparently never giving a hoot or letting on in any way he'd gotten so comfy with a Natty Bumppo.

Any members who have old copies of Va. Wildlife, Audubon, National Wildlife, etc. that you feel you could part with please bring them to Leigh Jones for use in Lafayette High School's very unique field biology course. Thanks.

There's nothing more pleasing to any nature fancier than the sight of a hummingbird. The notion of warm, calm spring and summer days immediately light up one's thought at the mention of these flying jewels. Well there's one in Newport News. Right now! Yep, a female ruby-throated has been a regular since last fall. How that little body managed to survive the temperatures and foul weather we've had is amazing. Bless the folks who keep it supplied with energy-rich sugar water. Now, isn't Nature a marvelous machine ?

#### ASK OWL:

Swallows have been the subject of many myths. Among these are that low flying swallows presage rain to farmers, and they were sacred to household gods since they nested so close to human dwellings.

BIRD ALERT NET

*Williamsburg Bird Club*

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