

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

October 1984

The avian enthusiast in me never ceases to find excitement in the virtues of bird lore. Strolling into Merchants Square the other day through the breezeway by the toy and Christmas stores, I entered the hustle and bustle of the tourist traffic. But what caught my attention was not the throngs but the songs. There, like some exuberant sentinel was a mockingbird, gloriously extolling a beautiful day and for all intents and purposes snubbing the money wielding visitors. Check it out sometime. The four or five holly trees that cluster in front of the Trellis must be the mimic thrush's lair. I mused that CW doesn't miss a trick, but then realized that probably no one anywhere nearby hear the choruses but me. I smiled for the independent arrogance of birds.

There should be smiles on the faces of those who attend the October 17, 1984 club meeting. Chuck Rosenberg, a graduate student at William and Mary will present some of the results of his studies on barn owls. Chuck was awarded a \$500 stipend last spring by the club, and it will be fascinating to see to what use the money has been put. His research has been aired on television and should provide a marvelous topic for the meeting's centerpiece. Be on hand at 7:30 p.m. in room 117 Millington Hall at William and Mary.

The field trip this month will be to one of the most productive bird areas anywhere during this time of year. On Saturday, October 20 there will be a contingent leaving the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center south parking lot (immediately to the right of the center on the Colonial Parkway side) at 7:00 a.m. for the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel and the Kiptopeke bird banding station. The CBBT islands are traps for almost any kind of bird that becomes exhausted flying across the bay. In addition, island 2 has become famous as the place to observe the rare lesser black-backed gull. As many as 4-5 of them regularly roost there and observing their yellow legs and dark gray wings and mantle, comparing their smaller size to herring and great black-backed gulls is as easy as looking out your car window 20-30 feet away. Great cormorants have been regular on the islands in the Fall and even eiders and harlequin ducks are possible. The Kiptopeke banding station will provide hands on experience with migrating song birds and you never know what will be in the goody box or which hawks will be flying overhead. Be prepared for cold wind and bring food and drink. Caravaning will help reduce the tunnel fees for individuals and provide for lots of conversation about all the great birds.

Our November trip will be on the 25th to Back Bay and in December there'll be the Christmas Count. An organization is only as strong as the contributions its members make to the organization's well being. Over the last several months we have been extremely fortunate to have stellar support from a number of individuals. Bob Cross saw to it that 30 new purple martin homes were erected in the area this spring and reports that the ones placed in town at the library and courthouse were very successful. Leigh Jones orchestrated the work on several more bluebird trails and had additional boxes placed throughout existing trails. For her efforts she has been nominated by the North American Bluebird Society as a candidate for that organization's Roger Foy Newcomer's Award, something our club can be especially proud. Fred Blystone has again brought off another successful Bird Seed Savings Day, an effort very few of us can even begin to fathom the time, headaches and plain physical work involved.

With Bob, Leigh and Fred striding in front there were several others who chose tasks this summer that deserve special mention as well. Jack Gross has spent many man hours researching and putting together the proper data and written support to file a request for non-profit status for the bird club. Having seen the length of the red tape roll that unraveled with the application, I can assure you we all owe Jack a tremendous thanks. Our request is being processed and the results and

their ramifications will be made public as soon as they are made known to us.

Bert Emerson saw a chance to assist with the newsletter mailing and computerized the club's membership list on to two month's worth of mailing labels. We all greatly appreciate Bert's contribution, one that will be easily visible with the new mailings.

All of this serves as a preface for the work of this year's Nominating Committee; Ruth Beck, Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan. They have canvassed potential candidates for club offices for 1985 and recommend the following slate of officers who have agreed to serve:

President - Bill Snyder
Vice President, Programs - Anne Beckley
Vice President, Newsletter - Bill Williams
Secretary - Alice Springe
Treasurer - Fred Blystone
Board Members at Large - Carol Hall
Gary Frazer

During the red tape roll out this summer for the non-profit status report it was found that the club had slightly over \$900 in collected user fees from previous Bird Seed Savings Days. Attempts to pay these fees (collected as a sales tax with the seed purchases) to the state over the years believe it or not, kept meeting with virtual disinterest from the agencies contacted. Finally, with Jack Gross' help and know how (he's an IRS man) the fees have been turned over to the proper people. The club essentially did not lose anything. The money had been collected for that purpose all along, and we can all rest assured that we are square with the state financially.

The Williamsburg Bird Club has been tabbed for the Virginia Society of Ornithology to host its 1987 annual meeting in Williamsburg. The request is for a joint meeting with the Maryland Ornithological Society, should that group be able to accept. Ruth Beck and Bill Williams are tentatively in charge of preparing for the meeting, and Ruth has already arranged for the College of William and Mary to assist in the meeting's sponsorship. The immense task of organizing such an affair will take lots of people doing lots of things. If you are called on please lend a hand. The year 1987 seems distant but it will be on us all too quickly.

Tom Armour was the featured speaker on October 3 at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science's Oceanography for Landlubbers series. His fantastic photographs of water and ocean birds more than highlighted the evening.

Fred Flystone doesn't really want to go into the feed and seed business from his home. Though the bulk of the October 6 Bird Seed Savings Day was a success there was a lot of seed left over. If you didn't buy seed and still want some or if you did buy but didn't pick it up get in touch with the Sunflower Sam right away (229-4346). He'd appreciate it.

A pleasant welcome to our newest members of the flock Tom and Susan Crockett, Leigh McDougal and Peter McLean. Peter is a grad student at William and Mary and wants to study red-shouldered hawks, requesting any information about where he can locate them locally.

A bit of sad news came out of the city of Baltimore during September. Aside from the Orioles failing to catch the Tigers for the pennant another tragedy struck the bird world there. Scarlet, the city's beloved peregrine falcon died of natural causes. She had been a successful breeder in the city and was often featured in news stories. Her mate Beauregard seemed doomed to a lonely life, but in less than a week ole Beau had himself a new lady. Now Baltimore must wait to see if she

can take up where Scarlet left off. We hope so.

The bird scene over the last month has been rather meager regarding songbirds. Reports of Nashville, Blackburnian, Cape May and magnolia warblers from the Hotchkiss' in First Colony have been supplemented by sightings of Swainson's thrushes at Queen's Lake, a hooded warbler on Dick Hines' back porch, summer tanagers and an indigo bunting on September 30 near Farm Fresh and thousands of tree swallows along the Jamestown end of the Colonial Parkway. Twenty-five to 30 sora rails were heard on Yarmouth Creek on September 9 and up to 500 geese have been counted at Hog Island. A late hummingbird was seen September 19 in town and up to 20 of them were counted on September 15 at Kiptopeke.

Yet all of this pales in comparison to the birds that have had the Eastern Shore hopping. During the VSO's annual trip to Chincoteague (Sept. 14-16) no less than a dozen of our own club members joined in. Fenton Day found one of the rarest birds to hit Virginia in years. Amongst a flock of 200-300 pectoral sandpipers he spotted a juvenile sharp-tailed sandpiper. This Siberian bird looks like a chipping sparrow with a long bill, and unless one could spot its white eye line it was difficult to find amongst the pectorals. The bird was still around two weeks later and obviously attracted alot of attention. Its rufous cap, white eye line and buffy breast offset against strong mottling on the back and wings made a truly spectacular sight.

Though this bird was rare enough to suit everyone the fun wasn't over. During the group tally of birds outside four sandhill cranes flew over. That brought back reflections of a similar incident at Back Bay several years ago when a single sandhill flew over a VSO crowd during a tally session. Also found were two yellow headed blackbirds and a lark sparrow as well as marbled and Hudsonian godwits and a Philadelphia vireo. Wow, what a weekend. The listers all went weak from excitement and the new birders wondered what's the big deal in seeing "rare" birds! It's easy!

Through mid September the raptor migration through Kiptopeke on the Eastern Shore was sparse. But since that time it's been nothing short of fantastic. A huge falcon flight took place from September 26 through at least October 6. On the latter date a record count of 4860 hawks was tallied including a stunning 172 merlins, 665 kestrels and 3800 sharp-shins. From September 1 through 30 approximately 9000 hawks were seen while October 4 through 7 a similar total was recorded. To see 5000 hawks of 12 species in one day is mind boggling and certainly not easily forgotten. Brian Taber, Rich Goll, Fenton Day and Cindy Fletcher watched in awe as a Cooper's hawk casually and quietly picked a kestrel from a telephone line and proceeded to devour it! Can you imagine! A group of hawk banders near the America House captured the season's first goshawk and believe they had another in the nets that got away. And, finally, after 22 years of operation the Kiptopeke banding station caught its first peregrine falcon. Actually the bird was captured by Charlie Hacker's better half, Stalma. The station is still abuzz from the excitement when she brought in the beautiful falcon.

The Cape Henry Audubon Society will conduct a field trip to Craney Island on Saturday November 3 and there are weekend canoe and birding excursions every weekend at the York River State Park. The birding trips are from 7:00 - 8:00 a.m. on Saturdays and the canoe trips are from 10:00 a.m. - 12:noon and 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. on Saturdays.