

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

February 1984

Dawn these days has sound to it. Bird sound. Male cardinals are tuning up and woodcock suitors have begun their crepuscular flirtations, behaving more like yo-yos than birds. It's light when I get to work now and darkness has just barely taken hold when the news comes on in the evening. One gets the feeling that a curtain is drawing slowly across a stage to reveal the panorama of Winter's exit and Spring's entry.

The Virginia Society of Ornithology will make its entry into the process of developing a state Breeding Bird Atlas. During 1984 the society will make a trial run of the breeding bird studies necessary to make the 5 year project run smoothly. Sue Ridd, formerly of our bird club, is head of this massive undertaking and will be here on Wednesday February 15 to explain the fine details to us. A number of our members will be actively involved as regional coordinators and field assistants. We hope many more folks will take an active role after Sue's presentation. Come on out at 7:30 p.m. to room 101 (same ole place with a new number) in Millington Hall at William and Mary. You will also be able to get details on this month's exciting field trip, as well as catch up on all the latest bird talk.

Hey did you catch the spiffy write-up we received in the Wednesday February 1, 1984 edition of Your Neighbors in the Daily Press? There was our stalwart leader, John Hertz, assisting in the installation of 12 new window feeders the club purchased for the Pines nursing home. Monies from our bird seed sale have been used to purchase seed for feeders already at the home and now 12 more marvelous feeding stations. What a pleasant way to use the funds, huh?

At our last monthly meeting in January the membership present gave unanimous approval to the purchasing of "Audible Audubon" units for six of our local elementary schools. The "Audible Audubon" package consists of a microphonograph into which a card is inserted that has a bird's picture on it, information written about the bird and a recording of the bird's song. The cards come in sets of ten and we decided to provide seven sets of different bird groups to the schools along with the microphonograph. When contacted about the donation the schools were warmly appreciative.

Our most recent Bird Seed Savings Day met with lots of rain on February 4, but that didn't dampen the helpful enthusiasm of Tom Armour, Ruth Beck, Carolyn Lowe, Leigh Jones, Bill Saunders, Anne Beckley and Joy Archer. They helped the ever-organized Sultan of Seed, Fred Blystone, dispense his wares most efficiently. Fred indicated that purchases for this sale were up 50% over the same sale last February. He cited a number of first time buyers and people holding back on their Fall orders as reasons for the increase. Obviously folks are spreading their seed forms around because we attracted a lot of new faces. Way to go.

Fred has some extra seed available, so in case you are running low, call him at 229-4346.

Mr. Blystone is also our club Treasurer. He will be including a membership renewal form in the newsletter of any members who are in arrears for 1984. Here's a list of the new members thru January 29th...

Richard Newman	Robert & Joan Brown	Kitty & Mark Semisch
Alden & Irene Eaton	Dick Springe	Robert & Jean Harrington
Mary Thomas	Mr. & Mrs. Richard Stinely	Dr. & Mrs. Steven Reams (Patron)
Louise Moulds	Margaret Hamilton	Mrs. C. R. Schober
Sherley Redding	Jack & Annette Gross	Michael Beck
Edwin Bond	Carolyn Will	

and we need to welcome back Mr. & Mrs. Homer Jones and John & Scottie Austin.

If you will remember last month's fine presentation about bluebirds given by Committee chairperson Leigh Jones you might take note that 'tis the season to be tending those empty boxes as the bluebirds will begin pairing up soon. The boxes need to have all old nesting material removed (look out for old eggs!!) and it is recommended that the inside of the box be dusted with Sevin. Should wasps appear in the boxes this summer use a pyrethrum spray to get rid of this nuisance.

During the Bird Seed Sale Leigh was able to sell every one of the bluebird boxes that had been made at the Veterans' Hospital and could easily have sold many more. Outstanding!

Our Bluebird Committee got on solid tracking in 1981 when Jewel Thomas set up 2 trails, one at Carter's Grove and another at the Williamsburg Country Club. That year we fledged 30 new bluebirds. In 1982 Jewel added boxes at York River State Park and all three trails produced 54 bluebird fledglings. Last year Leigh took over the committee helm and expanded the trails to the Country Road, Eastern State Hospital, St. George's Farm and New Quarter Park. We counted 150 brand new bluebirds. Plans for 1984 include setting up boxes at Marlbank in Yorktown, and already Badische and several Boy Scout troops have shown interest in working with those marvelous little thrushes at other locations. In most cases just the mention of bluebirds wins immediate interest from everyone and as the club increases in size this committee will likely become one of our most important assets!

In addition to the Bluebird Committee its worth mentioning at this time our other standing and fully functioning committees and their chairmen; Purple Martin Committee--Bob Cross, Field Trip Committee--Bob Cross, Records Committee--Bill Sheehan, Bird Seed Savings Day--Fred Blystone, Publicity--Grant and Norma Olson, Scholarship Committee--Ruth Beck--Picnic Committee--Jeanne Armour and Cynthia Long. For those of you who are new you can see there's a lot going on and plenty of help is needed.

In addition to the committees our club also financially supports through affiliate memberships the Nature Conservancy, The American Bluebird Society and the Virginia Society of Ornithology.

Betty Williams maintains an up-to-date scrapbook of the club's activities and bird related activities of its members. Anytime material worthy of being placed in the scrapbook comes your way please bring it to a club meeting so it can find a proper home. Thanks!

Since 1978 the club has purchased 19 books for the Williamsburg Regional Library as well as a complete 25 volume set of Bent's Life Histories of North American Birds. We are always looking for new purchases for the library and are presently looking in to procuring cassette tapes of the Birds of North America which compliment the Peterson Field Guide. Many times the library gives us a wish list, but we would also like to get suggestions from our own members. Think about it!

During January Ruth Beck was the guest speaker for the very enthusiastic Windsor Forest Garden Club while Tom Armour gave one of his spectacular slide presentations to the Norther Neck Audubon Society. Certainly we are ever anxious to disciple the bird word.

I don't need to remind you that its income tax time again I'm sure. But I would like to put a little bird song in your ear not to forget to make a contribution to the Virginia Nongame Research Program when you file your state taxes. A little bit from everyone goes a long way for everyone.

The VSO Board meeting will be March 3 in Charlottesville. Rich Goll and Ruth Beck are Board members and would gladly voice your concerns. The annual Spring meeting of the Society will be May 4-6 at the Chamberlain Hotel in Hampton. You ought to try to attend some or all of the meeting. It promises to be quite an

affair hosted by the Hampton Roads Bird Club. And don't forget the Winter Outer Banks field trip February 17-19. Tom Armour and Ruth Beck are the hosts headquartered at the Armade Inn.

Winter climes seem to bring out the best in local birds as the following will attest. In early January Tom and Jeanne Armour were entertained by a pair of barred owls which set up courtship right in **their Kingsmill backyard** in broad daylight. Jeanne said they really looked like they were necking!! Actually if the smaller male owl doesn't convince the larger female he's sincere she may make a meal of him! The nerve of today's youngsters!

On January 22 Barbara Ema was privy to a red-shouldered hawk's breakfast. The raptor landed on her birdbath and then proceeded to walk around a shrub from which it extracted a tasty sparrow. Guess who's coming to dinner?!

The Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel is always a great place to **visit** during the winter. On January 7 Leigh Jones, Bob Cross, Mike Britten, Bruce Reid, Rich Goll and Cindy Fletcher birded the "islands" and came up with a pair of beautiful harlequin ducks, king and common eiders, hundreds of Bonaparte's gulls and several great cormorants. At Back Bay Bruce Reid saw a marbled godwit and thousands of snow geese. In the surf were gannets and numerous horned grebes.

Charlie Hacker has had an orange-crowned warbler at his feeder almost daily since December 12.

January 13 was a hot day birdwise around Williamsburg. Bill Sheehan and Tom Armour discovered an immature goshawk at Hog Island. The bird was perched in a lone tree sitting in the open near a marsh. This is so uncharacteristic of this typically woodland species as to really leave one guessing. Anyway the bird cooperated with lots of eager birders through Sunday January 15 and was well photographed by Tom. Present at the exact same location were up to 4 (maybe 6) tree sparrows. The goshawk is simply a rare bird even in its range and obviously this sighting constituted a local first.

Not only was there a rare bird of prey at hand on January 13 but also a rare feeder bird. Barbara Ema noticed what she thought was an unusual grosbeak at her feeder. Four houses away Fred Blystone saw what was certainly the same bird and also realized there was something unusual about it. Checking through their field guides Barbara and Fred independently came to the conclusion they had seen a black-headed grosbeak female. Elated goshawk chasers braced for another rare bird vigil, but the last time the grosbeak was seen there was a territorial mockingbird hot on its rump. Southern hospitality that aint! So feeder aficionados keep your eyes peeled. That bird can't be too far away and may show up again where mockers don't roam. This bird is also a local first and reminds us of the male of this species Maynard Nichols entertained several years ago in Gloucester.

Dick Hines had a phoebe in his yard in the Hamlet on January 14 and on February 7 saw an immature bald eagle passing over beautiful downtown Norge.

Barred owls were active around Queens Lake January 16 and 17 according to Leigh Jones and Peg Smith had a red-shouldered hawk at her home on the seventeenth. Ann Smith has her usual northern orioles on Virginia Avenue despite lots of heavy construction on the Hospitality House. Ann also has several pine warblers visiting her sumptuous handouts. Pine siskins continue to be spotty throughout the area. Fox sparrows have been present at the feeders of Ty and Julie Hotchkiss, Bill Snyder and Dick Hines. Bill Sheehan put out some raisins on January 21 and quickly attracted a hermit thrush. The following day he had a catbird show up. Alice and Dick Springe saw about 15-20 water pipits near Jamestown Island January 22.

A European rarity made a startling appearance at St. George's Farm on January 25. Fenton Day found a barnacle goose amidst the 800 or so Canada geese that had been using the field during the frigid weather. The rare bird alert went out and several folks saw the bird quite well including Bob Cross, Brian Taber, Tom Armour and Ruth Beck. By 5:00 p.m. however, a ground fog crept in and the bird could not be seen by our Hampton friends and several late arrivals including yours truly. The next afternoon there were no geese to be found.

The barnacle goose is a rare straggler to North America but it is also a species aviculturists like to have. The possibility exists that any unusual waterfowl are simply escapees as was the bar headed goose at Hog Island two years ago. We can only hope that this barnacle goose proves to be a genuine wild bird (and also that it shows up again!)

The goose watchers also reported flocks of 30-40 water pipits at St. George's Farm and folks who have been journeying to Hog Island have been seeing common mergansers, with a high count of 27 on January 13.

The season's first displaying woodcock was noted January 27 at Shellis Square. John and Betty Williams played host to a male northern oriole on February 1. It hasn't returned, unfortunately.

I think it's especially noteworthy the number of relatively rare and unusual birds we are finding coming to feeders or simply being seen. It points to the fact that there are certainly lots of still undiscovered birds out there. These strangers simply pop in and out causing us to marvel and speculate about what we are not seeing. It also stimulates us to look even harder.

A white pelican is being regularly seen at Sandbridge again this winter.

A rustic bunting made the first appearance for this Asian species in the lower 48 states in Northern California in mid-January. A week prior another Asian species, the slaty-backed gull, made an appearance near St. Louis, while two other Asian species, the brambling and the Siberian accentor, were discovered on the West Coast.

Ask Owl:

In the winter the Cape May Warbler changes its insect eating habits and feeds on nectar and juices obtained by sucking on fruits. It is the only warbler to have evolved a tubular tongue to allow such a feeding habit.

Broad-winged hawk in winter become almost owl-like in their behavior in Panama. They feed at dusk on large katydids that are attracted to lights. Here in North America they eat mammals and birds.