

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

April 1984

Unlike late Fall and early Winter one can at least look out and realize it can only get better. The daffodils seemed to hang on extra long this year and now the hue of redbud is scattered throughout the woods while poplars and cherry trees leaf out. Our singing sunrise is returning with robins, Louisiana waterthrushes, cardinals, chickadees and titmice spilling forth their amorous overtures. Even fish crow calls sound like warm weather, and the vocalizations of the laughing gulls on the York River makes the air smell of suntan lotion, old chicken necks and blue-crabs in a basket. Just click your heels together three times and repeat, "It can only get better. It can only get better."

Our monthly programs just keep getting better and better and April is no exception. Led by Ruth Beck the club will venture into the world of owls for this month's program which will take place on Wednesday April 18 at 7:30 p.m. in room 117 of Millington Hall on the William and Mary campus. We'll get a taste of the natural history of these fascinating and mysterious nocturnal raptors and be serenaded by a number of club members as they deliver the owl imitations they so carefully perform during bird counts to lure the owls onto a checklist. Get wise. Fly on over April 18 and join the fun.

This month's "field trip" will be more than that. On Sunday, April 29 we will hold our annual Spring Count. Brian Taber is in charge of this undertaking and will coordinate the eight team leaders and the persons going to each count area. Basically, a Spring Count runs just like a Christmas Count, where groups divide up a fifteen mile diameter circle and try to count as many individuals of as many species as possible in a "day". Our count circle is centered at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center and is divided into 8 sections; Cheatham Annex (which also covers Camp Peary), Kingsmill, Hog Island, Jamestown, Middle Plantation, Jolly Pond, College Woods and Skimino. Each area has an assigned leader (s) and as many field helpers as can be mustered. Counters are free to help as long or as short a time as they want. Spring counts often net groups over 100 species in a day and since this is prime warbler time its a marvelous experience. Please give Brian a call (253-1181) if you can help. People with feeders are very much needed. We'll begin at 7:00 a.m. at the Information Center south parking lot and tally at 5:00 p.m. in room 108 of Millington Hall at William and Mary.

Next month's field trip will be May 26 and will stay right here at home. Field trip chairman Bob Cross is calling it "Passerine Paradise". Mark that date.

The Dismal Swamp is always a fabulous place to venture in the Spring! The Cape Henry Audubon Society will have a trip there on Saturday April 28. Trip leader David Hughes (484-7398) will leave the Magnolia commuter parking lot at the junction of routes 460 and 337 in Portsmouth at 7:00 a.m. This is a super chance to see and hear blue-winged, worm-eating and Swainson's warblers.

The weekend of May 4-6 is the annual meeting of the state's primary organization devoted to birds, the Virginia Society of Ornithology. This year's extravaganza will be hosted by the Hampton Roads Bird Club at the Chamberlin Hotel on Ft. Monroe in Hampton. An entertaining and informative local chapter's workshop will take place Friday night, followed on Saturday morning by numerous superb field trips, a scientific paper session in the afternoon and a gala banquet Saturday night with guest speaker Dr. Robert Kennedy. Bob is one of Mitchell Byrd's former grad students and initiated the osprey studies in Virginia in 1970. His work with the Phillipine eagle was featured in National Geographic in 1981. He is currently the Director of the Raptor Information Center in Washington, D.C. On Sunday there will be a pelagic trip out of Rudee Inlet.

(Send a check for \$35 to Dr. Robert L. Ake, 615 Carolina Ave., Norfolk, Va. 23508). First come, first served.

Field trip locations include; Dismal Swamp, Seashore State Park and Fort Monroe on Saturday only. Newport News City Park, Grandview Beach, Wakefield (for red-cockaded woodpecker) and the Hampton waterfront will be offered Saturday and Sunday.

A registration form for the meeting and banquet is enclosed with this newsletter and there's an April 16 deadline. The Hampton Roads Bird Club has asked for our assistance with the meeting. They need "finger food" for the hungry hordes. If you can help here give John Hertz a call (565-1324). Come on. Our turn is coming in 1987!

We would like to welcome our newest members, Mrs. Jesse Davis and Dick and Becky Walck. Our membership has grown from 96 at the end of 1983 to 126. Considering only ten folks did not renew this year we actually gained 40 new bird enthusiasts. Fantastic!

A pleasant Spring hello is extended to our out-of-state members Kathryn Boldt (a life time member) Rock Island, Ill., Dawn MacLaren I Jamesville, Md. (no kidding, she says) and Maynard and Francis Nichols of Hendersonville, N.C. Thom Blair has followed the northward flight of Spring but will make a brief stay in Pennsylvania on another interim ministry. He assures us he'll be home soon.

Three of our committees are hard at their labors every Spring and this year its particularly true. Leigh Jones and the Bluebird Committee have been everywhere at once. She gave bluebird programs to the First Colony Garden Club March 11, a 4-H group March 13 and five days later to a group in Marlbank in Yorktown. Meanwhile the bluebird trails at the Williamsburg Country Club, First Colony, St. George's Farm, Spotswood Golf Course, Lafayette High School, Carter's Grove and the Country Road and New Quarter Park were all either newly set up or put in shape for the nesting season right at our doorstep. The boxes at York River State Park have been relocated within the park and Leigh has garnered the assistance of some local scout troops to help maintain and monitor nest boxes. Whew!

If you're exhausted from that consider Bob Cross' Purple Martin Committee put up 15 Martin motels by mid-March and had more than a dozen to go. Bob says his phone suffered a melt down and that the martin business has been literally booming! Two martin houses that came to us as donations have been placed locally, one at the Williamsburg courthouse and another at the Williamsburg Regional Library. Wow!

Finally, our Scholarship Committee, chaired by Ruth Beck, is in the process of sorting through graduate student research proposals to decide on this year's \$500 award. Ruth is assisted by John Hertz, Tom Armour, Mitchell Byrd and Bill Williams.

So who has time for birding? Well I hope everyone will take more than just a little time over the next 2-3 months. Virginia is about to launch itself into the breeding bird atlas era, following several states throughout the country. This monumental effort is a five year project and will attempt to firmly document all the breeding birds in portions of every one of the 804 seven and a half minute quadrangle maps that make up our vast state. Ruth Beck and Tom Armour are the regional coordinators for this area of Virginia, Region 11, and yours truly is in charge of Region 6, the Eastern Shore. On April 26, 1984 Tom and Ruth will hold a training session at 7:30 p.m. in room 108 of Millington Hall at William and Mary for everyone who can help them in any way. Their goal for 1984 is to thoroughly cover twenty areas. This can only be done, and easily be done, if

there is adequate help. We urge all available persons to be on hand at the meeting. You will be astounded at how differently bird study must be approached to document breeding and yet how very exciting the discovery is.

The club has purchased a set of cassette recordings of bird songs that correspond with the Peterson Field Guide to the Birds. These cassettes will be donated to the Williamsburg Regional Library. Again we urge any member who has a suggestion for a purchase for the library to let us know.

The Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Williamsburg-James City County has approached me about developing a bird program for elementary schools. Knowing that there is a lot of talent out there in our club I told him I'd see what I could do. Basically the idea would be to have a 30-40 minute travelling show that would inform students about birds and bird study. Since one of our organization's main goals has been educational I think this is a fabulous opportunity. The school system is willing to give us any help and materials we need. I would very much like to put the ball in motion now and hopefully develop a program before next Fall. Call me (229-0098) if you would like to be a part of something very exciting for our local youth.

Don't forget to check the section on your Virginia State income tax form that grants a few dollars to the Non-game Wildlife Research Fund. Your support and anyone you can influence is vital to Virginia's wildlife. The club gave last month's speaker's ("Spike" Knuth) honorarium to the Non-game Fund in his name.

We are looking for any and all information on the birds seen at Chippokes Plantation just across the James River in Surry County. Our club has been assigned the duty of writing up a description of the birding there for the Virginia Birding Site Guide published by the VSO (one of its editors is our own Ruth Beck). Please send any bird records from Chippokes to Bill Sheehan (220-2122) our Records Chairman. It keeps him off the street.

With any area that has as many capable field observers as this one the bird news comes hot and heavy. Here's some of what has been filtered by me. On March 14 a Eurasian wigeon was found by Fenton Day in one of the rain-filled pools at St. George's Farm. Whether this was one of the birds from Sunken Meadows Pond in Surry is merely speculative. A Eurasian wigeon was seen on Lake Powell only a couple of miles down the road from the farm for several days beginning March 26 by Bill Sheehan and Tom Armour. Again its hard to say if it's the same bird, though in all likelihood it was.

Also on March 14 Brian Taber had 5-6 performing mud-bats (woodcocks) at the Williamsburg Airport and several people noted the first purple martin's scouts in the area the same day. From March 17-20 Fenton Day observed the following species at St. George's Farm; 10-12 pectoral sandpipers, both greater and lesser yellow-legs, water pipits, a horned lark and several snipe, not to mention a Eurasian wigeon. Bill Snyder noted the first tree swallows on March 21 while Sheehan and Armour observed a phoebe carrying nesting material on March 27 at Lake Powell and heard the first yellow-throated warblers that same day at Jolly Pond. Julie Hotchkiss reported a single glossy ibis at St. George's Farm late in the day on March 27. The next day at Felgate's Creek along the York River there were numerous laughing gulls, lesser scaup and a lone Louisiana heron. Lafayette Highschool's own Mother Nature, Lou Moulds, had a fox sparrow at her feeder in Elmwood in upper James City County through March 27.

As of the first of April Anne Smith still had one or two northern orioles each day and on April 1 a male boat-tailed grackle was observed at Indianfield Creek on the York River. This location is the furthest inland breeding site for that species in Virginia. Fenton Day found 2 golden plovers at St. George's Farm on April 4. They were still there the next day and Mitchell Byrd's ornithology

class also saw 2 upland sandpipers in the same area April 5. Tom Armour picked up a dead common gallinule on Kingsmill on April 4 and he and Bill Sheehan recorded several Caspian terns at Hog Island on April 5.

On April 6 Lew Wilkinson discovered a little gull at Grandview Beach in Hampton. Lew also reported that he had had Virginia rails at Grandview and a sora rail at Fort Monroe.

Other birds that I've heard of but have no specifics on are black and white warbler at Cheatham Annex and several reports of Louisiana waterthrushes. Barn and rough-winged swallows were seen at St. George's on 4 April. Species which should be here include blue-gray gnatcatchers, white-eyed vireos and blue-winged teal.

The York River is teeming with ducks (bufflehead and lesser scaup and horned grebes). Over 600 Bonaparte's gulls were counted along the river on April 6 and royal terns and a few Forster's were also seen.

Every day brings something new, so get out there and take it all in. Purple finches, pine siskins and evening grosbeaks are feeder birds at the feeders of John and Betty Williams in Skipwith Farms.

The second annual Williamsburg Bird Club picnic will be on May 19 starting at 10:00 a.m. at New Quarter Park near Queen's Lake (we hope the entrance road will be complete, that is). Jeanne Armour and Cynthia Long are in charge and more details will come out in the next newsletter. Make a note for May.

Brian Taber would like to have some volunteers help the bird counters on April 29 by providing some goodies for the 5:00 p.m. tally. Let Brian know (253-1181).

Ask Owl: While the sides debate over the good and bad of lead shot for hunting waterfowl one might be interested in the particulars of the death of one of our endangered whooping cranes this year. The bird had been wounded, was captured and treated, but it died anyway from lead poisoning, not from the wound but from shot it had ingested. If a crane which feeds on crustaceans can gather enough lead to die from feeding one ponders the fate of waterfowl that sift and strain the bottoms of shallow ponds where hunting occurs.

Thanks to everyone who sent in pledges for my 32 laps of running (8 miles) last month. The club and Lafayette High School were credited with almost \$100 thanks to you.

The VSO foray is June 12-17 to Dickenson & Buchanan Counties and the Brakes Interstate Park. Details are available.

REGISTRATION FORM FOR THE VSO MEETING/BANQUET - DEADLINE April 16, 1984

Registration	#of persons, at \$3.00 each, or family \$5.00	\$
Banquet Fee	#of persons at \$13.00 each (includes tax and gratuity)	\$
All other meals will be on your own. Total enclosed ----		\$

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

NAMES OF ADDITIONAL PERSONS YOU ARE REGISTERING _____

Make checks payable to Hampton Roads Bird Club and mail this reservation form to: Stalma Hacker, 300 York Warwick Drive, Yorktown, Va. 23692.