

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

January 1984

In fond memory of Marge Sheehan

The old year departed in an icy temperament as if we had somehow offended it, coast to coast. The present beginnings of the New Year seem to have a milder disposition and we'd like to believe they will stay that way. Even now you can note longer days, though it will be a while before more visible signs of greener times become apparent.

In the meantime it is apparent that we are back to our series of monthly meetings. This month we will convene on Wednesday, January 18 at 7:30 p.m. in room 117 of Millington Hall at William and Mary to hear Leigh Jones speak to us about the activities of the local bluebirds and the Bluebird Committee. Leigh is a highly regarded Biology teacher at Lafayette High School here in Williamsburg and since assuming the chairmanship of the Bluebird Committee last year has more than tripled its number of nest boxes. She also inaugurated the sale of nest boxes made through the Veteran's Hospital last summer, netting the club some funds and lots of excellent publicity. Everyone loves the sights and sounds of the charming thrushes we know as bluebirds. I'm sure you will find Leigh's presentation delightful, stimulating and informative. See you there.

Due to the potential for unsettled, albeit frigid, weather our January field trip will stick close to home. Depending on the availability of unfrozen water we bird local hotspots such as the Colonial Parkway towards Yorktown (bald eagles, ducks, swans) and possibly Newport News Park (lots of up-close waterfowl). Be ready to go at 8:00 a.m. Saturday January 21 in the parking lot to the immediate right of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center on the Colonial Parkway side. We'll have a good morning of good birds and stay warm to boot! This will be a super way to get your birding feet off to a grand start for 1984!

Everyone should welcome our new officers for 1984. They are:

John Hertz - President
Cynthia Long - Vice President - Programs
Bill Williams - Vice President - Newsletter
Treasurer - Fred Blystone
Secretary - Alice Springe
Board of Directors - Anne Beckley, Ruth Beck

As we enter our seventh year of operation we look forward to continued excellence from our leadership. Let's don't forget the steller performance of last year's executives. Thom Blair, who lead us through the spring and winter months as President brought us an enthusiasm to every meeting that was optimistically infectious. We look forward to his return from New Orleans soon. Bob Cross not only handled a superb series of monthly programs for the year, bringing praises from every quarter, but he admirably shouldered the President's position as well through the summer and not to mention being the Purple Martin Committee chairman, a full time job in itself. What a fabulous contribution to our club. In addition to handling the Bluebird Committee Leigh Jones handled the Treasurer's job in fine fashion and cheerful Alice Springe did the Secretary's job as well as seeing to our publicity for meetings and bird counts. They all deserve a nightingale's chorus. Don't you think so!?

January means membership renewal time. A renewal form is enclosed with this newsletter. Please fill it in. Dues are \$5.00 for individuals (students \$3.00), \$7.50 for a family or \$25.00 for contributing members (these will get a free club patch). Club patches and dues can be handled through Fred Blystone, 120 Stanley Drive, Williamsburg (or see him at the meeting). Upon payment of your dues, (make checks payable to the Williamsburg Bird Club) you will receive a beautiful membership card. While you are at it why not join our parent organization the Virginia Society of Ornithology. Dues are \$5.00 (active), \$7.50 (sustaining), \$15.00 (con-

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tributing) or \$9.00 (family). Make checks payable to the VSO and send them to Mrs. John Dalmas, 520 Rainbow Forest Road, Lynchburg, Va. 24502.

By now most of you should have received by mail our winter Bird Seed Savings Day information. Please share the information with your neighbors, friends and colleagues. This is a great way to promote birds and the club. Also, Fred Blystone, our stalwart seed salesman is looking for helping hands on Saturday February 4 to assist in dispensing the seed purchases. Give him a call and say you'll be there (229-4346). Also on sale on February 4 will be some more bluebird houses made by the Veterans in Hampton. Price - \$3.00.

Don't forget the Third Annual Hampton Roads Waterfowl and Wildlife Festival to be held in the Hellenic Community Center on Traverse Road in Newport News (across from the Ramada Inn on Route 17 at the I-64 exit) on January 14 (10 a.m. to 7 p.m.) and January 15 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

December means Christmas Bird Counts and 1983 had some of the best ever locally. On December 17 the Hampton Roads count made a strong showing with 118 species. Anchoring this effort were such noteworthy birds as a green heron, purple sandpipers, almost 1200 laughing gulls, 4 royal terns, an orange-crowned warbler, 2 northern orioles, 3 Lapland longspurs and 3 snow buntings.

The following day we had our local count and managed our best ever total of 111 species. Every group seemed to chip in goody birds when we needed them, and it shows what a strong effort can produce. Here are some of the highlights found by the thirty "counters". 5 snow geese, 1 redhead, nine lesser scaup (bay ducks are very scarce this year), 1 cooper's hawk, (always rare here), 9 bald eagles, 2 clapper rails, 5 woodcock, 5 laughing gulls, 6 phoebes, 2 house wrens, 3 marsh wrens, 2 catbirds, 1 yellowthroat, 1 northern oriole (remember we had 15 3 years ago to lead the nation!) 1 chipping sparrow, 1 tree sparrow (always rare here) and two very unexpected birds a blue-gray gnatcatcher and a magnificent, adult female peregrine falcon with a full crop. The count compiler wishes to thank everyone for a super effort.

The Cape Charles Count on December 30 was held under horrible birding conditions. The winds were gale force and temperatures hovering between 9 and 30 degrees. Still 145 species were recorded and I hear among them were long-billed curlews and white-fronted geese.

A few bird observations of note have been brought to my attention over the last month. Bill Snyder had evening grosbeaks on December 6 (now they seem to be in several locations - while pine siskins remain scarce).

Charlie Hacker, in Yorktown, captured an orange-crowned warbler in his yard December 9 and 10 and behold the bird turned out to be the same one he captured and banded in his yard last year! Imagine the odds on the little fellow even living through the year much less returning to Charlie's home!

Leigh Jones, Bob Cross and Bill Sheehan found our 9th record American bittern at Cheatham Annex December 11. The bird was trying for all the world to look like a stump.

Dick Hines has had a few pine siskins at his feeder and irregular visits from a red-breasted nuthatch (scarce again this winter) and a fox sparrow.

Bryan Taber had a Cooper's hawk in his yard in early January and on New Year's Day Alice Springe identified a group of snipe sitting by a frozen puddle off the Colonial Parkway (you mean Dick actually fell for the old snipe hunt trick Alice?)

Also on January 1 several "blue" phase snow geese were seen with a flock of Canada geese at St. George's farm by Julie Hotchkiss.

Bruce Reid reports seeing 2 common mergansers and 2 snow buntings at Hog Island recently.

I hope all of you caught Bruce's article in the Daily Press (Sunday January 8) about Mitchell Byrd's mid-winter bald eagle survey. On January 2, flying with Sherwin Beck, Mitchell and Bruce found 63 eagles along the James River. The next day they found 26 on the Potomac River. Ice on the rivers probably affected the eagle count forcing many of them to areas where open water could be found. The survey also found that all known eagle nests had fresh material in them in preparation for the egg laying which will begin next month late.

Two adult bald eagles are being regularly reported along the Colonial Parkway near Yorktown between Felgate's and Indian Field Creek.

Many of you may be curious about the results of Bob Ake's attempt to see 500 species of birds in North America in 1983. Bob went to Texas December 19 needing 12 species to reach 500. When he left on December 28 he had seen 191 species in 9 days added 2 life birds (he's now seen 709) and his year list stood at 501. His five hundredth bird was the whooping crane and 501 was a ferruginous hawk. His two lifers were white-collared seedeater and red-crowned parrot. The trip list included Sprague's pipit, clay-colored robin, greater prairie chicken, Mexican crow, brown jay, 6 bobcats, Williamson's sapsucker and the coldest Christmas in recorded history in south Texas with temperatures dipping in to the teens and never getting over 30.

Ask Owl:

We all know about the flu right? Well guess what seems to be the major carrier of the flu virus. Ducks! That's right. According to a Science 83 article our quacky friends harbor the flu viruses quite effectively without getting it themselves. Remember the old song "Be kind to your web-footed friends" - But do so at a distance!