

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

May 1985

The deep freeze of January left its lingering mark on ravaged shrubs and a less than beautiful azalea bloom. But oh how the dogwoods and redbuds shone. The Colonial Parkway near Ringfield Picnic area seemed snow bound. This reminds us that the take and give with plants, animals and their environment generally has a positive orientation.

You won't want to miss our monthly meeting at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, May 15 in room 117 of Millington Hall at William and Mary. Thelma Dalmas of Lynchburg will present her widely heralded program on "Spring Birding in the Mountains." This vivacious and entertaining lady is the Treasurer of the Virginia Society of Ornithology and is a bundle of energy and enthusiasm when it comes to birds and their sounds. For those who love to hear those little ditties people make up to remember bird calls you'll be thoroughly taken by Thelma's repertoire. Her infectious charm will make you glad you came to the program. We will also be making the announcement of our stipend award for a William and Mary student that night, so don't miss a moment of the action.

The club's third annual spring picnic had beautiful weather on April 27. About 25 people joined in the festivities at York River State Park. A tremendous THANKS to Jean and Tom Armour who organized and ran the show for this event. You both are great!

With birds nesting everywhere the Bluebird Committee headed by the tireless efforts of Leigh Jones, has been busy, busy. Forty-four boxes were sold this spring and 50 more have been placed in the field. Including boxes at Kingsmill, formerly manned by the Hampton Roads Bird Club, Leigh and her troops oversee 250 nest boxes for bluebirds. By mid-April boxes along the Country Road trail had eggs in them. Five boxes were placed in James City County's new Upper County Park on April 9. On April 14 Anne Beckley reported at least one of those boxes with a complete bluebird nest in it. Hey, those birds know a good thing when they see it!

Some of our bluebird boxes are used by Carolina chickadees. Their nests are easily recognized by the large amount of moss they use for building, a practice that has earned them a nickname of "moss bird".

Bob Cross' Purple Martin crew has sold 6 martin motels this spring, 3 to the Jamestown 1607 development. He is going to place a martin house in the small city park on Boundary Street to compliment one already there.

Cynthia Long used a great ploy to entice martins to her next boxes. Back in April when she first noticed martins near her yard she started playing a recording of their calls from her yard. Sure enough the gregarious martins honed in on the calls and took to her martin house right away. That's great!

I hope all of you caught Bruce Reid's delightful article in a recent Daily Press about the spring migration of warblers. Bruce is a member of our club and plans to have quarterly (at least) features on birds and/or natural history topics. Yeah! Keep up the good work, Coach.

Fred Blystone still has some bird seed for sale, especially thistle. We still don't have a replacement for Fred for handling the fall bird seek sale. If we lose this project it will quickly go to some other organization and we'll lose the primary source of income which supports our varied community services. Come on, we know you're out there!

Some plaudits are in order. Bob Cross was recently elected President of the Colonial Audubon Society. We know what an excellent choice that is. Barry Ensley and Dave West were also elected to key offices in that organization. Way to go guys.

A heartfelt congratulations to Rich Goll and Cindy Carlson who were married on May 4 in a beautiful ceremony at the Jamestown chapel. An orchard oriole fittingly provided the wedding march. Rich and Cindy now have a birds-during-marriage-ceremonies list!

When one gets in the position of hearing lots of bird news there's always the excitement of the unexpected. The following serves as one of the best this ornithophile has ever encountered. Paul Smith, a fellow birder and hawk counter par excellence from Onancock on the Eastern Shore, called me recently to tell me of a most unbelievable situation. A lady over on the shore reported to Paul that vultures were

eating her car. Now being close to sea breezes and somewhat out of the mainstream of the real world Paul wondered what type of bird seed his caller was consuming. So he checked it out. Apparently 30 black vultures regularly roost in a tree above this lady's car. To date they have devoured 3 sets of windshield wiper blades and the rubber gasket from the car's sunroof not to mention nibbling the shingles on her roof. Paul didn't actually see the vultures, but he said the scratches on her car were made by a large bird. The marauders were reported to a wildlife agency in Charlottesville, who didn't seem dismayed by the report. What's a mother to do? I can see it now! Vulture feeders for sale complete with 50 lb. bags of shredded tires.

You'll remember last fall that Scarlet, Baltimore's legendary female peregrine falcon died. Her mate Beauregard wasted no time and wooed a new lady to his side within a couple of weeks. Well the union is complete. The new grand dame of Baltimore, Blythe, has hatched 4 baby peregrines this spring. Go Beau, he said blythly!

The bird parade has been rich and varied this April and May. Mitchell Byrd reports that the 66 bald eagle nests in Virginia have better than 80 young total. A number of nests have 3 eaglets. Bill Snyder has had phoebe's nesting at his house since early April. Joe Doyle found a great horned owl's nest at Kingsmill last month and Charlie Hacker reported that by mid-April many ospreys were incubating 3 egg clutches.

A cattle egret was seen on Airport Road near Waller Mill Park on April 10 and prairie warblers were heard in Skipwith Farms the same day. During that same time period 90 - 100 horned grebes in breeding plumage were seen between Felgate's and Indian Field creeks near Yorktown. Boat-tailed grackles had returned to Indian Field Creek by April 9, and seaside sparrows and a yellow-crowned night heron were found at Queen's Lake Marina on April 10. Dick Hines had his first hummingbird April 14. It's always fun seeing those little mighty-mights showing up at the window of last fall's hummingbird feeder, as if to say to the observer -- "Hey, I'm back and I want food." Fenton Day found a common moorhen at Williamsburg West on April 16. Another moorhen was found injured at Camp Peary on May 4.

Anne Smith still had northern orioles coming to her feeders in mid-April and Tom Armour spotted a sharp-shinned hawk at Kingsmill April 17.

On April 22 a swallow-tailed kite was seen at Back Bay. Attempts by Brian Taber and others to find it the next day were unsuccessful. Near Brandon on the southside of the James Ed Hatch saw an adult golden eagle pirate food from a red-tailed hawk. Remember that an immature golden eagle was seen off and on near Brandon this winter. Sharp-tailed sparrows and chuck-wills-widows were present at Queen's Lake Marina April 22.

Brian Taber took advantage of a trip to Dismal Swamp offered by the Cape Henry Audubon Society April 23. Only one Swainson's warbler was heard. However, there were a number of blue-winged warblers, a yellow-billed cuckoo, and lots of gorgeous prothonotary and hooded warblers.

Tracy Lean who is visiting our area from England got a chance to visit Chincoteague April 21. At the refuge she was able to see whimbrel, nesting tree swallows and mute swans, glossy ibis, shovelers, dowitchers and several tricolored herons.

For the third year our bird club has posted cautionary signs around the least tern colony at Grandview Beach in Hampton. Ruth Beck and charges posted the signs April 29.

The first weekend in May was a bird count marathon. On Saturday the Hampton Roads count netted 155 species including a red-cockaded woodpecker! Tom Armour contributed a Cooper's hawk, whimbrel and piping plover for their count, and Fenton Day chocked up 90 species for that count in less than 3 hours in the Grandview area, anchored by 2 singing white-crowned sparrows.

On Sunday, May 5 the Williamsburg count was launched. Under Brian Taber's direction we were able to garner 154 species. Goodies included Bonaparte's gulls, a yellow-bellied flycatcher, a Cooper's hawk and an overbird's nest with 4 eggs in it. We especially want to thank our Hampton Roads friends for their continuous effort in the Skimino area. We couldn't do it without you folks!

Don't forget the VSO foray beginning June 11 in Highland County.

Ask Owl:

The white-winged scoter is the largest scoter. It can dive to 40 foot depths for clams. Their gizzards are able to crush shellfish that otherwise require a hammer to break. Occasionally a clam will clamp down on the scoter's tongue -- wonder how they spell relief?!