

The Williamsburg Flyer

March 1986

Well, March came in not exactly like a lion or a lamb, perhaps more like a great blue heron, which coincidentally is the topic of our March program. Ruth Beck, of the William and Mary Biology Department, will share her knowledge of great blues with us on the 19th at 7:30 in Millington's room 117. She will talk about the life history of these fascinating birds as well as their distribution in Virginia. Ruth has spent many a day searching for rookeries, cataloguing locations, and observing behavior. Please be on hand and be prepared to enjoy yourself. The project is funded by the non-game wildlife contributions donated through Virginia Income Tax returns as reported in the February newsletter.

The March field trip will be held on Saturday, March 22nd and the destination is Jamestown Island, an intriguing habitat of tangled vines, undergrowth, swamps and pine woods. Expected are such early birds as blue-gray gnatcatchers, Louisiana waterthrush and yellow-throated warblers. Red-headed woodpeckers, brown-headed nuthatches, hermit thrushes, waterfowl, and singing pine warblers are almost all a certainty. Please meet at 7:30 at the Information Center to help usher in the first days of Spring.

The February field trip was held on a chilly, windy day when it looked as though snow were imminent. Only a few raindrops fell, though and 10 birders travelled down the parkway towards Jamestown, across the ferry to Hog Island refuge and then on to Sussex County to look for red-cockaded woodpeckers. The extremely rare woodpeckers are not at home, however, the group saw habitat, a nest hole and heard from Ruth Beck much about the birds' interesting history in Virginia. The group did observe snipe, brown-headed nuthatches, immature eagles, green-winged teal and shovellers before heading home for lunch. Thanks to Ruth for an enjoyable winter's day outing.

The club program in February, for those who missed out, was presented by Teta Kain who took us on an adventure to her favorite hidden swamp somewhere in Surry County. Her slides and narration were very entertaining as we saw birds, plants, animals and patterns from her perspective. Thank you, Teta!

Spring peepers have begun to sing and great horned owls are reportedly nesting in Kingsmill. Fred Blystone submits the following paragraph about feeding bluebirds:

"People have asked me on a number of occasions about feeding Bluebirds during the winter. Sialia (The North American Bluebird Society's Journal) mentions, as Anne Beckley did at the last meeting, making what they call Miracle Meal. This recipe consists of one part flour to three parts yellow corn meal placed in the largest mixing bowl of an electric mixer. Add spoonfuls of lard (not shortening) and mix until the mixture will make firm balls. You can also mix in peanut butter or peanut hearts. This mixture is packed into 1½ inch holes drilled into vertical logs with a hook in one end and hung from a tree limb. The blue birds also seem to really enjoy the

suet balls that the bird club sells - I have seen as many as five bluebirds at one time on the ball that I have outside of my living room window. Except for seeing the birds in a nest, I don't think anyone has ever seen so many bluebirds in such a small space."

Soon bluebirds will be seriously checking out nest boxes and competing with chickadees and titmice for these convenient apartments.

Blue winged teal have been reported on Lake Powell and large flocks of ring-necked ducks have been seen near Jamestown Island. Woodcocks are doing their crepuscular dances to impress females and can be seen in open areas that are adjacent to wet, wooded areas.

Fox Sparrows have made an excellent showing recently in Kingsmill, First Colony, Season's Trace, Skipwith, and Kingswood to name only a few areas. Two birds have been regular at my feeder for almost a week.

Cedar waxwings are forming large flocks all over our area now and are quite a sight as they noisily feed on what's left of the winter berries and seeds. You may recall that Jack Gross reported a yellow-throated warbler at his feeder in January, well, at Betty William's feeder in Skipwith, a yellow-throated showed up there in February. This is a first winter record for our area and just goes to show that nearly anything is possible at feeders.

Julie Hotchkiss made a trip to the Bay Bridge Tunnel on February 22nd and found a male harlequin duck and a first winter iceland gull. These first winter birds are a beautiful creamy color with no dark color on the wingtips and a dark bill. They usually stand out even in a large crowd of other gulls.

Julie is also heading a committee to find a keynote speaker for the Virginia Society of Ornithology annual conference that we will host in 1987. Please give her any suggestions that you may have.

At the February meeting, Bill Snyder was presented with a Jefferson Cup to say thank you for his service as Bird Club President in 1985. Also, a thank-you letter from Leigh Jones was received by the club. Leigh had also received a Jefferson Cup for her service as Treasurer and Blue Bird Committee Chairwoman before departing to the Charlottesville area last summer. Her many hours of work for the club are much appreciated and I am hopeful that she will make a few trips back to say hello.

Bill Sheehan made available in February the 8th edition of the analysis of local bird data. It is a great report and reflects not only his hard work, but also that of feeder watchers and field birders who have contributed their notes over the past several years. Our club should be proud to have this up-to-date report.

Bill Williams spoke at the February meeting about an idea proposed by a local business that wants to promote a winter bird weekend, perhaps as early as next year. We could supply field trip leaders and bird information in exchange for a donation to the club. The membership voted to accept the idea in principle subject to further discussion about specifics. Please bring your suggestions or concerns to future meetings.

Shirley Raynes still has some bird feed products for sale. If anyone is

interested in suet cakes, sunflower, thistle or mix, please call her at 229-8975.

There has been a lot of interest in the proposed amphitheatre in Newport News Park. Anyone wishing to make comments can, I understand, address them to Brandol M. Haney, Director of Planning, 2400 Washington Avenue, Newport News, VA 23607, or to W. Dean Short, Chairman of the Planning Commission, 710 Denbigh Blvd, Building 1-A, Newport News, VA 23602. At a recent Sierra Club meeting, there was a discussion of some of the possible adverse effects on the local flora and fauna.

Also, Gary Frazer of our club's Environmental Awareness Committee has asked that we give space for some facts concerning upcoming plans for the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge:

"The Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge is in the process of preparing a master plan for the refuge. The goals of the master planning process are to identify the refuge's resources (e.g. migratory waterfowl, colonial nesting birds, undeveloped beaches), document the demands upon those resources (e.g. birdwatching, surf fishing, ORV use), and develop a management strategy that will maximize public benefits in a manner consistent with the overall goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System. It's not going to be an easy job, but those of you who have visited Chincoteague NWR during a summer weekend can surely attest to the timely and critical nature of the effort. Because of the complexity of the task and the greatly divergent perspectives that have been offered to date on how to "maximize public benefits," the master plan is being prepared in the form of an environmental impact statement (EIS) that will lay out a number of alternative proposals for public comment. A draft of this EIS should be available in late spring/early summer. The refuge staff is compiling a mailing list of those people interested in updates on the planning process and information on where they can obtain access to a copy of the draft EIS for their review. Call or write Dennis Holland, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Box 62, Chincoteague, VA 23336, ph. (804) 336-6122/5600 to get your name on this list or to ask any questions that you may have. Public meetings will also be held following release of the draft EIS. While none have yet been scheduled for the Hampton Roads area, one might be if enough people expressed an interest. It's your refuge, too, so make your feelings known!"

If any one has ever wondered about the pelagic or sea-going birdlife off of Virginia's coast in the winter, I have some current information for you. There was a bird trip on February 8th, which left Ocean City, Maryland headed for Poor Man's Canyon in Virginia. Canyons such as these near the continental shelf represent very deep water and are the focus of much marine life. Poor Man's Canyon, some 60 miles off Chincoteague, may be the closest deep water to our shores. There are regular pelagic trips from Ocean City and anyone needing further information may contact me.

The results of the February 8th trip were very good, though a hoped-for great skua was not found. There was, however, an excellent variety of birds including dovekie, thick-billed murre, razorbill, puffin, manx shearwater, northern fulmar, iceland gull, black-legged kittiwakes and thousands of gannets, especially near the fishing and processing ships.

The date for our annual Spring bird count is May 4. More details on the count will be in the April newsletter.

I want to again thank people for contacting me with information for the newsletter. Please keep me up-to-date by calling Brian Taber at 253-1181 or writing to 104 Druid Court, Williamsburg.

Bird of the Season: Yellow-throated Warbler, *Dendroica dominica*

Sometime in late March, local birders can generally count on hearing, if not seeing, yellow-throated warblers. Local spots that are best bets for the bird include Jolly Pond, Lake Powell and Lake Matoaka. There is usually little else singing at this time of year, so the "tee-ew-tew-tew-tew-wi" song is always a pleasant early Spring surprise.

The yellow-throated is usually a treetop bird, creeping slowly about in search of small insects. It is about 5 inches long, has a gray back, white belly, black and white head, bright yellow-throat and upper breast, white wing bars and black streaks on sides and flanks.

The preferred habitat may be sycamores, baldcypress or mixed forests often near water. Spanish moss may be used in the nest, along with bark, hair and down. The range is southeastern United States and they can be heard singing here until well into June.

In winter, yellow-throated warblers withdraw to the Bahamas, Costa Rica and the Gulf Coast. Some birds remain in South Carolina and as we found out recently, it is also a rare winter visitor to Williamsburg.