

The Williamsburg Flyer

November 1986

Now that the days are shorter and cooler, it's the perfect time for a trip South, where the migrating birds concentrate and join the tropical residents. If you cannot make such a trip, the November Club program will at least help you to imagine it. Bill Akers of Charlottesville will be our speaker, showing us slides of Costa Rica, a real paradise for birders. Bill has made several excursions there and has amassed much knowledge of the country and the amazing variety of habitats and wildlife.

Plan to be on hand in Millington Hall on **November 19th at 7:30** for a very entertaining evening.

The November field trip will be a journey to the Back Bay wildlife refuge, just south of Virginia Beach. We will depart from the Information Center parking lot at **7:30 A.M. on Saturday, December 6th**. That's right, the November trip is in December! We will meet up with a large group of birders attending the annual Virginia Society of Ornithology field trip. There is always a lot of bird news and good company at this event. The habitat is mainly beach and marsh with Snow Geese, Tundra Swans, hawks, sparrows and gulls in good supply. In past years, such birds as Parasitic Jaeger, Sandhill Crane and Fulvous Whistling Ducks have turned up as well. A special thank you goes to Barbara Moorman who submitted the following account of the October field trip to Hog Island:

"All of us (all two of us) shared the October 18th excursion to Hog Island with fully camouflaged (even to their faces) bow-and-arrow hunters. As a result we did not take to the lesser paths, but stayed on the main road and pull-offs. Even so we managed to see a number of species.

Ruth Beck was her usual excellent teaching-self, and the writer benefited greatly.

First seen was a Great Blue Heron, followed by a flock of principally Red-Winged Blackbirds, a particularly beautiful male in display for some moments, almost by request. Eight Great Egrets posed on a far-away bank, with Canada Geese, and Mallards swimming in the foreground. A Brown Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Turkey Vulture and Osprey were also in evidence. We saw a Rock Dove and a Mourning Dove and of course Laughing Gulls, Herring Gulls, and Great Black-backed Gulls were in good supply. Quickly glimpsed were a Caspian Tern, a Royal Tern, and a Killdeer. Further along we spied a common Grackle, and Song Sparrows were both seen and heard. Northern Cardinals complete the list. Although we saw no owls, a hunter to whom we talked had seen two, probably Barred, early that morning and seemed significantly impressed. It was a beautiful early morning, with coffee at Surrey House tasting especially good. And we got back in time to pick up bird seed!"

The date for our 10th Annual Christmas Bird Count is December 21st. This very important and fun census is part of a nationwide effort to compile data on early winter bird movement. We need as much help as possible to search through our eight designated areas. We need people to watch feeders during the day also.

Bill Williams is the coordinator of the count and can be contacted for further information. Please join the volunteer effort and give one hour or many hours to the cause. We will gather at the Information Center at 7 a.m. to get an early start. Excellent weather will be provided, of course. We will tally our results at 5:30 p.m. in Millington Hall in the conference room just down the hall from our regular meeting spot. Refreshments will be on hand for weary counters.

There has been a shift in birdlife over the past month from the fall transients to the winter visitors. Reports of White-winged Crossbills from Washington, D.C., have been tantalizing. Also, Pine Siskins are showing up at feeders, Red-breasted Nuthatches are around, White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows are moving down from the North. A Long-eared Owl was reported from a back yard in Arlington in mid-October.

There has also been word of a strange gull at Ocean City, Maryland, and a report of a possible White-tailed Eagle from Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania. A Greater White-fronted Goose was seen on October 23rd at Flowerdew Plantation where the species was seen last year in the company of several thousand Canada Geese. Flowerdew is about 40 minutes from Williamsburg up Route 10, west of the James River, toward Richmond.

Near Roanoke in October were several varieties including Henslow's Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Baird's Sandpiper and Short-eared Owl.

Tom Armour tells of a Rough-legged Hawk captured at Fisherman Island by Paul Baker on 10/20, apparently a first for Paul. Tom also relates the story of fellow Kingsmill resident, Harry Knight, who was walking his dog early one morning and found a Great Horned Owl entangled in a soccer net. Several people (with gloves, of course) freed the bird -- which sat dazed for a moment -- then flew off intact.

Also being reported in our area are Winter Wrens, lots of Golden-crowned Kinglets, more than enough

Yellow-rumped warblers, Cedar Waxwings and Sharp-shinned Hawks. A Great Cormorant was seen by Dara Bradshaw at Hog Island in October. Great Cormorants are also being seen at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel as are White-Winged, Black and Surf Scoters and King Eider.

The Thanksgiving Feeder Count is coming up again. Anyone wishing information on this annual census may contact me for further details.

Carolyn Lowe headed this year's Nominating Committee for Club officers. The tentative slate of proposed candidates includes: Bill Williams, President; Brian Taber, Vice-President in charge of the newsletter; Joy Archer, Secretary; Fred Blystone, Treasurer; Steve Reams and Joanne Braun, Board Members at Large. The search continues for Vice-President in charge of programs. The slate will be presented for discussion and vote at the November meeting, with officers changing on January 1, 1987.

In response to my call for information on squirrel-proof feeders, I received a suggestion from Bill Synder that seems so simple it probably works. He says to throw a handful of whole corn, which is cheap, on the ground near the feeders full of not-so-cheap sunflower seed. The squirrels apparently are so distracted by the corn snack that they don't bother much with anything else. I will definitely try it.

The aluminum pole that I put my cylinder feeder upon has been coated with Vaseline which has kept squirrels off for the last six weeks; however, when the weather turns harsh and the Vaseline gets harder, I doubt I'll be so lucky. As for now, they're eating less and I'm enjoying it more.

Shirley Raynes still has some bird seed available following our Club sale. Please call her at 229-8975 if you would like to pick up some thistle seed, peanut bits, sunflower or wild bird food. Shirley did a great job of coordinating the purchase and delivery of 13,000 pounds of seed.

BIRD OF THE SEASON: WINTER WREN *Troglodytes Troglodytes*

If you are out birding around Williamsburg during late fall and winter, you may see a tiny bird restlessly moving about in forest undergrowth or in a brush pile. Listen for the Winter Wren's distinctive double call note of "kip-kip" or "tick-tick", suggestive of a Song Sparrow's note.

When you finally get a glimpse of the bird,

perhaps after making some squawking noises yourself, you will see a brownish fluff with an almost non-existent tail. There is dark barring on the flanks and belly which you will see if the bird ever stops bobbing and weaving through the vines and twigs. There is also a rather inconspicuous buffy eye line.

Winter Wrens are only about 3" long compared to the 4" of the House Wren and the almost 5" of the Carolina Wren. The House Wren's tail is much longer and has very faint barring.

What the Winter Wren lacks in size, it makes up for in song. The spring song is several seconds long, consisting of rapid high pitched, rising and falling notes, warbling, tinkling and trills. The description does not do justice to the tune, but once heard, it would be difficult to forget.

Among the better local areas to find Winter Wrens are News Road, Jamestown Island, Centerville Road and along the Colonial Parkway wherever there are fallen logs and tangles. The bird breeds in much of the Appalachians, Canada, New England and along the West Coast, wintering south to Florida and the Gulf Coast. It also occurs in Europe.

To submit information for the newsletter, contact Brian Taber at 253-1181 or write to 104 Druid Court, Williamsburg.

DATES TO REMEMBER

NOVEMBER PROGRAM

November 19 - Millington Hall - 7:30 p.m.
Bill Akers with slides of Costa Rica

FIELD TRIP

Saturday, December 6 - 7:30 a.m.
Information Center Parking Lot
Back Bay Wildlife Refuge

ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

December 21 - 7 a.m. - Information Center

Results will be tallied at 5:30 p.m. in Millington Hall in the Conference Room. Refreshments will be served.

THANKSGIVING FEEDER COUNT

Call Brian Taber for information - 253-1181

