

WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

December 1987

The November program was a very enlightening presentation by Pete Money, the educational director for the Living Museum in Newport News. The museum, one of only a few that earns the title "living," is a combination of natural history exhibits, hands-on activities and wildlife. We saw a slide show that highlights the renovated buildings, nature trails, plants and animals.

Mr. Money also brought two living visitors, a male Kestrel and a Barred Owl. The birds are a well-traveled part of the museum's outreach approach to educating the public about our environment. As the birds looked carefully over the audience, Bill Williams observed that they were "adding to their people list."

Several important features were pointed out, such as the Kestrel's bony eye ridges and black facial markings which provide sun shade and glare reduction respectively. The bird also has two focal points in the eye so that it can examine the horizon and the ground below at the same time. The Barred Owl has its own adaptations to hunting including night vision perhaps 100 times better than human vision. Their loose, downy feathers enable almost silent flight.



1988 OFFICERS

The slate of officers to lead the club in 1988 was presented by Carolyn Lowe of the Nominating Committee. The slate was accepted and is as follows:

President
Vice-President/Programs
Vice-President/Newsletter
Secretary
Treasurer
Board Member
Board Member

Bill Williams
Grace Doyle
Shirley Raynes
Joy Archer
Fred Blystone
Steve Reams
Martha Armstrong

Anyone interested in leading any of the monthly field trips in 1988 should contact Bill to work out schedules and details.

SEED SALE NEWS . . .

Our seed sale was accomplished this year despite a three hour delay in starting. The truck had to make an extra trip to Newport News to unload seed that wasn't ours. Thank you to all of the helpers that morning and to the patient seed recipients.

Congratulations to Shirley Raynes for her successful organization and for handling the unusual events so well! Contact Fred Blystone if you are interested in purchasing bird feeders. Shirley still has some seed and suet cakes.

Fred also has 25 of the new Peterson Series Hawk Field Guides in time for Christmas. Call him for more information.

CHRISTMAS COUNT - DECEMBER 20th

Our Christmas Count will be held on December 20th. Please assemble at 7:00 a.m. at the parking lot of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center. We will tally at 5:00 p.m. in Millington Hall, in the conference room, just a few doors down from our usual meeting place. Come and be part of this huge and very popular event. Participants are asked to pay \$4.00 to help defray the costs of the monumental publishing task. The results appear in the magazine, American Birds.

The Hampton Roads Bird Club Count will be held on December 19th. Please call Bill Williams for details on these and other area counts.

As a reminder, our club does not hold a meeting or have a field trip in December due to Christmas Count activity.

Many people warm up for the Christmas Count by doing a Thanksgiving Feeder Count. After several poor feeder counts, I finally had some birds this year. Despite morning temperatures around 60°, the birds were very active. At one point I had four male Towhees, five Titmice, a Song Sparrow, a House Finch, four Chickadees, two White-throated Sparrows, a Carolina Wren, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, a Cardinal and a Brown Thrasher. All of this with my ancient cat sleeping just under the feeder! There were no winter finches, but perhaps the Thanksgiving activity was a hint of an interesting winter just around the corner.

Please welcome new club members, Ruby Thomas and Tom and Marianne Nell!

Anyone interested in winter pelagic trips out of Virginia Beach should contact Brian Patteson at Box 125, Amherst, Virginia 24521.

John and Eleanor Hertz took an exciting vacation to Denmark and Norway in early September. They traveled as far as the North Capes area near Russia, above the Arctic Circle at 72 degrees latitude. They saw Reindeer herds, Fulmars, Arctic Terns, Iceland Gulls, Kittiwakes, a White-tailed Eagle and several species of Eiders. They even said it wasn't very cold!

Early November was as warm as summer, but on Veteran's Day, an early snowstorm blew into our area bringing gale force winds, ice and a couple of inches of snow. Some people reported Purple Finches at their feeders as a result of the weather. On the following day, a sub-adult Bald Eagle was circling low with vultures over the large field at Ironbound and Monticello.

Julie Hotchkins has just returned from a trip to the West Coast and the Grand Canyon. She hiked to the floor of the Canyon and found lots of Dippers and, appropriately, Canyon Wrens. In California their Pelagic trip was shortened by rough seas, but they did see Buller's Shearwater.

Julie spent the day at the Bridge-Tunnel on November 30th and saw a female Dickcissel, both eiders, Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs and all three species of scoters. What a great day!

A call to the recorded message on the Voice of the Naturalist in Washington, D.C. on 11/29/87 revealed that many winter birds are headed our way. Chincoteague had 19 species of ducks including a Eurasian Widgeon in the ocean and 5 Common Eiders. Brant, Fox Sparrows, and Snow Buntings are being seen in Maryland and Northern Virginia. Someone who has been monitoring the hotlines of northern areas reported to the voice that it appears to be a great Snowy Owl and finch year. Let's hope he's right!



BIRD WATCH

Tom Armour found waterfowl to be in good supply at Hog Island on November 27th. Despite poor weather, he observed several Shovelers, some Tundra Swans, Ring-necked Ducks, Pintails, Green-winged Teal and Black Ducks.

Also, there were Forster's Terns, Bonaparte's Gulls and a flock of about 500 Canada Geese. At his house, Tom has been serving Purple Finches along with House Finches and Goldfinches at the feeder as of Thanksgiving.

Fenton Day has a job counting geese this fall and he has managed to scare up a number of other birds as well. At Curle's Neck near Hopewell, he found a Greater White-Fronted Goose, a Lesser Golden-Plover, and a Lapland Longspur. In other locations he has turned up some early Pine Siskins, Purple Finches and Evening Grosbeaks.

There is word of at least two Common Eiders at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel.

The newsletter of Bird Watcher's Digest for November ran the following article about feeders, entitled "Birders Enjoy Battling Squirrels:"

"Early one January morning, Luciele is eating breakfast with her husband. Suddenly, she sits upright and drops her spoon in her cereal. 'It's back,' she states in a low and drawn-out voice. 'I just know it; it's back.'

She leaps to the window to find it -- that same squirrel with whom she has battled all winter. Opening the window, despite the ten-degree weather, she begins screaming uncontrollably to the squirrel: 'Shoo! Get away! Scram!'

'Luciele, for cryin' out loud! The neighbors!,' her husband pleads. 'Get back in here!'

Like Luciele, many people who feed birds in their backyard, fight the same battle year after year with the neighborhood squirrels. There just doesn't seem to be any way to completely stop the bushy-tailed thieves.

In a November/December issue of Bird Watcher's Digest Laura Riley addressed this problem in a story entitled "Squirrel Wars Revisited." In the article Riley found that there are a few fool-proof ways to keep squirrels from stealing bird seed, but many nearly fool-proof methods used by BWD readers.

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Birders Enjoy Battling Squirrels (continued)

To these ends, Riley found that readers are using a variety of ordinary (and not so ordinary) objects in battle. These include coffee cans, coat hangers, clothespins, copper sheeting, magnets, metal kitchen mixing bowls, plastic bleach bottles, bricks, beads, empty beer balls, ice cream buckets, intravenous hospital poles, pizza pans, pulleys, phonograph records, tent poles, television towers, tennis balls, springs, stove pipes, steel filled clothesline, fishing line, electric fencing, light reflectors, garbage can lids and umbrellas.

Riley categorized anti-squirrel tactics into three distinct groups: The Baffle Technique, Psychological Warfare, and Diversion.

The Baffle Technique is used to prevent entry; to a hanging feeder or access to a free-standing or pole mounted feeder. Psychological Warfare attempts to make getting to the feeder not worth the squirrels' while. And finally Diversion simply appeases the squirrels with their own foodstuffs leaving them uninterested in what has been designated for the birds.

Baffles seem to encourage squirrels, almost as if by challenge. Eventually most squirrels find ways to avoid, manipulate or overcome even the most thought out baffles.

Psychological warfare may oftentimes border on "unfair," Riley noted. Among some examples of Psychological Warfare (fair and unfair) are water hoses, electric fences, and loud noises intended to frighten.

Others prefer to use a box trap and then escort the uninvited dinner guests out of the area. More often than not, however, squirrels find their way back within 24 hours.

Diversion is really letting the squirrels have their cake and eat it too.

Riley found squirrel "cake" to include peanut butter on crackers and bread, turkey meat, bananas, oranges, apples, and even vitamins!

No matter which of the three types of tactics bird watchers use, Riley also found that many of them enjoy matching wits with the squirrels as much as they enjoy the birds or squirrels themselves.

To her husband's relief, Luciele closes the window and returns to fish her spoon out of the Frosted Flakes.

'Luciele, this obsession of yours is getting out of hand,' he says.

'Oh, I'm really not that serious about the squirrels,' she explains. 'It's more of a hobby than an obsession.'

'Hobbies are fine,' he replies, 'but can we at least do away with the moat around the backyard?'

I cannot honestly say that I enjoy the battle, but I am glad that the squirrel population is not what it was a hundred years ago. The "Audubon Naturalist News" for October, 1987 reports that in the 1800's there were accounts of bands of squirrels "advancing along fronts a hundred miles wide, and requiring five days to pass!" Anyone for Brunswick stew?



I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as newsletter editor and certainly have a better appreciation now for all of those who do such work. I want to thank everyone who called or wrote to me with information and ideas, as it made my job easier.

Our club is about birds and people and our publication should reflect the activities of each. I learned a great deal from the experience and I am thankful for the opportunity to write about such a fine club.

Best of luck to the officers of 1988.

Happy Holidays!

During the last two years, I highlighted 22 Birds of the Season. They can be found in the clues and answers of the following crossword puzzle:

DOWN

1. Black Vulture is one
2. Eurasian shorebird
3. Swallow genus
4. _____ Widgeon
7. Great Myiarchus
10. _____ throated Zonotrichia
11. Troglodytes
13. Dendroica warbler (abb.)
14. _____ philadelphicus
17. As small as a Ruby-throated Hummingbird

ACROSS

2. Melanerpes erythrocephalus is this
5. Clutch size of Swainson's Thrush
6. Sterna
8. Best bird of the 1987 Williamsburg Spring Count
9. Tundra hunter, genus Nyctea
12. Great _____
15. Himantopus
16. Carduelis pinus
18. Goatsucker
19. Seiurus motacilla (abb.???)
20. Blackbird with a song like an old hinge
21. Baird's is one

To submit information for the newsletter, contact
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