

# The Williamsburg Flyer

May, 1987

**T**he wet, windy and cool weather in April eliminated about half of the best birding days in a month that is usually very exciting. The birds continued to move, but seeing them was a real problem. The storm which lasted from the 15th to the 23rd seemed like it would never leave. When it finally did, it opened the way for a flood of activity.

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Before the sightings, though, a reminder that the May club program will be held on **May 20th at 7:30 in Millington Hall**. The speaker, **Dorothy Mitchell** is a well known member of the Hampton Roads Bird Club. Look forward to excellent slides and delightful commentary.

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There will be no field trip in May because we will be conducting our **10th Annual Spring Count on May 3rd**. The results will be in the June newsletter. The April field trip, led by Bill Williams was a brave contingent of four who traveled to Cheatham Annex on April 25th. Joy Archer, Jamie Doyle, and Carolyn Lowe were able, despite very poor weather, to find Caspian, Royal, Least and Forster's terns, Glossy Ibis, Cattle Egret, Little Blue Heron, all swallows except Cliff, Palm Warbler, and Blue Grosbeak, to name a few. Earlier that day, Bill saw a Turkey near Jolly Pond. Bill also found a short-billed Dowitcher on April 24th at Indian Field Creek and a Sora on April 27 at St. George's field near Jamestown.

Earlier in the month, Bill Akers of Charlottesville reported 20 Lesser Golden-Plovers at the Roanoke Airport. They may have been brought eastward by a strong midwestern storm system.

At the end of March, Bob Cross and Dr. Byrd discovered a Short-eared Owl near Jamestown Island bringing our area owl list to eight species.

Thom Blair found an ovenbird on March 31, while Tom Armour and Ruth Beck saw a Great Cormorant on the Surry side of the ferry. A Cinnamon Teal was reported near the Virginia-North Carolina border just south of Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge in early April.

A Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel trip on April 5 revealed that the female Harlequin Ducks were still present along with Purple Sandpipers and at least one Great Cormorant. At Grandview Beach in Hampton, a Red-necked Grebe and a Wilson's Plover were seen near the rock pile. On April 15th an American Bittern was in the Granview Marsh.

Closer to home, Fenton Day found a Snowy Egret at College Creek on April 14, and a Solitary Vireo in Druid Hills on April 24. On April 12 Parular warblers, Yellow-throated warblers, Ovenbirds and Louisiana Waterthrushes were all singing at Waller Mill on one of the few warm days.

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The birdclub again provided leaders for the 41st Annual Williamsburg Garden Club Symposium early riser's bird walk on April 7th. Several trips were offered on a chilly morning and among the birds seen and heard were Great Horned Owl, Bald Eagle, Osprey, and Royal Tern.

On April 16 Julie Hotchkiss reported 28 Common Loons together on the James River in front of her house during stormy weather. One Red-breasted Merganser was also among them. Julie and her husband, Ty, recorded a Spotted Sandpiper and Evening Grosbeaks on April 19 and Cattle Egrets on April 18 on the Chickahominy River. They heard a Wood Thrush on April 17 and have seen lots of Caspian Terns flying north along the James. Julie reports, too, that a neighbor had a Ruby-throated Hummingbird on April 12.

On April 15, I rode a fishing boat offshore from Virginia Beach hoping for whales and birds. No whales were to be found and about a dozen Black-legged Kittiwakes were the only pelagic species. Red-throated and Common Loons were plentiful as were Gannets and Bonaparte's Gulls. Later in May and early June we'll see a great influx of seabirds off the Virginia coast.

Tom Armour reports that Joe Doyle found a Summer Tanager at Camp Peary on April 19. On April 21, 15 Evening Grosbeaks were along Olde Town Road and Rich Goll and Cindy Carlson still had them coming to a feeder. They also continue to see Pine Siskins and perhaps both species will remain through our Spring Count.

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Solitary Sandpipers, Hooded Warblers and Yellow-throated Warblers were all present by April 21 at Williamsburg West. Bobolinks had returned to the area by April 28.

The most exciting discovery recently was the Black-necked Stilt reported by Julie Hotchkiss. This elegant shorebird is very rare away from the coast and seldom seen anywhere in Virginia. The bird was feeding with a large group of Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs in the temporary pond at St. George's field near Jamestown. The bird was at the pond all day on April 27 but has apparently not been seen since. This is only the second record for our reporting area.

Birds seen subsequently at St. George's include Glossy Ibis, Little Blue Heron, Cattle Egret, Semi-palmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper and White-rumped Sandpiper.

Fred Blystone reminds us to welcome new members Nancy and Jim Emory to our club.

I am enclosing a summary by Carolyn Lowe of the work done by our newly formed Conservation Committee. The club has provided information about birdlife and habitat to the developer at Ford's Colony:

Acting upon the concern expressed by Bird Club members, a committee has made recommendations to the developers of Ford's Colony for the protection of the Chisel Run bird habitat near Williamsburg West in James City County. This diverse wetland habitat, now within property owned by Ford's Colony, has been a favorite birding area for many years and an important part of our Christmas and Spring counts. At least 158 species have been recorded here during the seasonal cycle.

To mitigate the impact of development on the most sensitive features of the area, particularly the freshwater pond and adjacent swamp, we have recommended the following: 1) To consider alternatives to building an access road across Chisel Run Creek, or, in the absence of a feasible alternative, to cross at a point that would be least disruptive to wildlife and the integrity of the habitat. 2) To avoid dredging and deepening the pond so as not to destroy its value as a food source and nesting site for ducks, herons, sandpipers, Canada geese and other birds. (The developers intend to draw water from the pond for a nearby golf course.) 3) To leave broader woodland buffers along the swamp in order to provide greater protection for nesting populations of Wood Ducks and Red-headed Woodpeckers.

Following our discussions and a site visit with a Ford's Colony representative, the developers promised to consider our recommendations during their planning process. We hope they will recognize the value of this natural asset to the community, including prospective residents of Ford's Colony, and will include the protective measures we have suggested in their development plans. The response from Ford's Colony to date has been encouraging -- we'll keep you advised.

The time is drawing near for the **Annual Conference of the Virginia Society of Ornithology**. As host club, we have formed committees which continue to meet and arrange festivities, meals, field trips and lodging. It should be a great event, please plan to attend. Anyone wishing to help, please call me or Bill Williams. There is still lots to do!

The dates are **June 5th - 7th**.

## Bird of the Season: Black-necked Stilt

*Himantopus mexicanus*

The Black-necked Stilt is a relative of the avocets. Like those birds, it has very long legs and a very slender bill. The Black-necked Stilt is white underneath, on the rump and on the lower back. The wings, back and neck are an unpatterned black. The red legs are very distinctive. The bird is much bigger than the sandpipers with which it commonly associates.

It is a bird of mud flats, flooded fields, marshes and shallow lakes. It is an active feeder, running and picking and probing for crustaceans, beetles, larvae and other foods. Hunting, rather than habitat destruction has seemed to be the cause of their decline in the eastern United States. The bird has several sub-species and is found worldwide.

The nest is a grassy structure — sometimes even a floating platform built near fresh or salt water. In winter, the Stilt may be found in California, Florida, the Gulf Coast and southward. This elegant wader is regularly seen at the Pea Island Refuge at Cape Hatteras in summer.

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

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