

The Williamsburg Flyer

February, 1987

January's precipitation in our area equalled that of about three-fourths of 1986 -- the year of the celebrated drought that may have been Virginia's worst. First, the rains came pouring on New Year's Day, then the sleet came three weeks later, and finally the snow. Most of Virginia received up to a foot and a half of snow on January 22nd, but southeastern Virginia was spared. Then, a second northeast storm dumped 6-8 inches on Williamsburg and another foot on many other parts of the state. By January 27th, Charlottesville had had 30 inches, Richmond about 24. The snow and the very cold temperatures have finally brought some birds in to feeders.



The February Bird Club Program will be held on the **18th** at **7:30** in **Millington Hall**, as usual. Our speaker is Thom Blair's brother, **Mr. Carvel H. Blair**. The speaker is a scientist, a Senior Coastal Engineer, who will tell us about "**Chesapeake Bay: Problems and Solutions.**" Besides being an expert on the Bay, an issue very dear to many Virginians, Mr. Blair has even published an article "Birds through the Periscope" about his days on a submarine. Other accomplishments include his many studies on sedimentation. He is an associate professor of Math and Computer Sciences at Old Dominion University and has also worked with the Department of Oceanography there. He is a retired Captain of the U.S. Navy. The following is a brief abstract about his talk:

CHESAPEAKE BAY: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Chesapeake Bay is an estuary -- a semi-enclosed water body where ocean water mixes with river water -- and estuaries have special problems. Because of differences in density, salt and fresh water set up a two-layered two-directional circulation that tends to trap pollutants in the estuary. A multimillion-dollar EPA study of the Bay identified three main problems: damage to plants and animals from toxic substances; overenrichment by nutrients; and loss of submerged aquatic vegetation. A fortuitous groundswell of public interest has not only kept federal funding of Bay work but also kindled interest and support from state governments (Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania) and the District of Columbia. Monitoring and research have begun to show the answers to these and other problems. Permanent solutions, however, require

continuing government funding which in turn requires continued public support. Concerned citizens must know the facts, be willing to pay necessary taxes, and most of all keep pressure on legislators and administrators if we are to Save the Bay for ourselves and our children.



Last month's program was a real treat as Ruth Beck brought us up to date on Virginia's Piping Plover population predicament. We learned that the Nature Conservancy and the Virginia Game Commission, together with help from Ruth and Dr. Jerry Via of Virginia Tech, are trying hard to assess the condition of these birds. The study included looking at relative abundance and the effect of human disturbance. Ruth and Jerry walked many miles of barrier island beaches to find and mark nests and record the number of adult and young birds. We are very fortunate, too, that Ruth personally demonstrated the "start-stop" technique of the Piping Plover as it moves across the dunes. Club member Bob Cross will be continuing the study next year as a William and Mary graduate student.

The **February Field Trip** will be held on the **21st**. The trip will feature the south side of the James River, including Sunken Meadow Pond, Hog Island and Flowerdew Plantation. Please be on hand for an interesting day of waterfowl and raptors. Departure time will be **7:30 a.m.** from the **Williamsburg Information Center**. The trip should continue until early afternoon.

Fred Blystone reminds us that he still has some 10 pound bags of sunflower hearts and a few feeders for sale. He will be including membership renewal forms with the newsletter of those who have not paid 1987 dues.

Please welcome Jamie Doyle as a new Club member!

Club members Adrienne Frank and Gary Driscoll have been keeping a close eye on the very active feeder station in their yard off of Olde Towne Road. On January 31st, they chalked up an impressive 25 different species including Purple Finch, Rufous-Sided Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Goldfinch, Pine Warbler and Eastern Meadowlark. The Meadowlark was a real surprise and was also reported by Betty Williams of Skipwith. Betty also has had Purple Finches and Fox Sparrow.

On January 24th, Julie Hotchkiss saw about 40 Water Pipits at St. George's field near Jamestown. She has also been having a lot of Goldfinches and Purple Finches at her feeder, especially since the snow of January 22nd. Julie also saw the Rough-legged Hawk that has been a regular at Craney Island this winter. Also at Craney, she saw 2 Short-eared Owls.



The January 22nd snow brought the first Pine Siskins to my feeder which has been very slow this season. The weather did finally send a Fox Sparrow, Rusty Blackbirds and a Brown Thrasher, but no Purple Finches. Eastern Bluebirds had been checking out my nesting boxes as of January 31st.

On January 4th, the crack birding team of Bill and Cecilia Williams, Rich Goll and Cindy Carlson was out making the rounds to local hotspots. They found the Snowy Owl, the Eurasian Widgeon, two Barred Owls, Tree Sparrows, Merlin, Common Mergansers, Loggerhead Shrike and Black-crowned Night-Heron to name only a few! Rich and Cindy had been to the Eastern Shore several days before that and seen four Harlequin Ducks on the Bridge-Tunnel and a Razorbill in the surf at Chincoteague. Bill has been to Craney to see Lapland Longspurs, Rough-leg and Short-eared Owl.



The Hopewell Snowy Owl was still being seen as of January 20th. It has the appearance of a healthy bird and it may actually be able to return to the north following winter -- many Snowy Owls that come south never return.

BIRD OF THE SEASON:

Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa*

During the winter, Golden-crowned Kinglets are often quite common in our area. They are seldom seen well, however, because they are tiny, inconspicuous birds. At under four inches, they are among the smallest of all birds. They move quickly through shrubs and trees, and are often seen quite high. They flick their wings very rapidly and even hover while searching for their food which consists of insects, larvae and insect eggs.

Golden-crowns are short-tailed, olive-grey birds with very tiny beaks. They have a white eye-stripe and there are black borders to the crown patch. The female's crown patch is yellow, the male's orange. The call is a quick, high-pitched, usually three part series of hissing notes, similar to that of the Brown Creeper. The range in summer is Canada, parts of the eastern mountain ranges and the Rocky Mountains. It prefers spruces and other evergreens. In winter, Golden-crowns cover much of the United States and Mexico.

The almost globular nest is made of lichen, bark, feathers and spiderwebs, and has a small opening at the top.

On **February 3rd**, Ruth Beck hosted a planning meeting at her house for the upcoming Virginia Society of Ornithology Annual Conference which our Club will be hosting. Details from that meeting will appear in the next newsletter.

Fenton Day and Dara Bradshaw found three adult Greater White-fronted Geese at Curles Neck Farm off of Route 5 past Charles City Courthouse. In addition, there were about 8,000 Canada Geese. Fenton also reports that up to three Bald Eagles are being regularly seen in the College Creek area and that Water Pipits are near the farm on the Colonial Parkway to Jamestown.



Resources For You

Alice Spring sent me a list of books that our Club has bought and placed in the Williamsburg Regional Library. It is an impressive list, compiled since 1978 and is as follows:

Birds of California by Small
Guide to North America Bird Clubs by Rickert
A Guide to Field Identification: Birds of North America by C. S. Robbins
Welcome The Birds to Your Home by J. Curtis
Life Histories of North American Birds, 26 volumes
Great Blue, the Odyssey of a Great Blue Heron by M. Crowell
Stories About Birds & Birdwatchers by M. Bowers
Virginia Society of Ornithology: Virginia's Birdlife, 2 copies
Audubon Society Handbook for Birders by S. Kress
The Wading Birds of North America by A. Landis
Country Journal Book of Birding and Bird Attracting by A. Pastorius
Waterfowl of the Chesapeake Bay Country by B. Meanley
The Birdwatchers Companion by C. Leahy
A Celebration of Birds by R. Peck
The Birdwatchers Activity Book by D. Heintzelman
How Birds Work by R. Freethy
Sea Birds by P. Harrison
Guide to Bird Behavior, v. 2 by D. Stokes
America's Favorite Backyard Birds by K. Harrison
The American Robin by L. Eiserer
Field Guide to Bird Songs, East-Audio cassette
Watching Birds - video cassette
The Herons Handbook by J. Hancock
National Geographic FGT Birds of North America Feeding the Birds by M. Paid
For the Love of an Eagle by J. Cowden
Random Ramblings by Y. Larner
Birdwatching with American Women by D. Strom
Catesbys Birds of Colonial America by A. Feduccia
Audubon Society Guide to Attracting Birds by S. Kress
Bird Behavior by R. Burton
America's Bald Eagle by H. Ryden
Getting Started in Bird Watching by Cronin
Garden Birds by Proctor
Birds Worth Watching by Sutton
The Birds Around Us
The Pleasure of Watching Birds by L. Oberman

DATES TO REMEMBER**Feb. 18**

February Bird Club Program -- 7:30 in Millington Hall.

Our speaker is **Mr. Carvel H. Blair.**
"Chesapeake Bay: Problems and Solutions."

Feb. 21

February Field Trip

Departure time -- **7:30 a.m.** from the **Williamsburg Information Center.** The trip should continue until early afternoon.



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