

WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

February, 1988

The program for February sounds exciting. The speakers will be Ty and Julie Hotchkiss; their topic, Magic Mexico-Birds and Ruins of the Yucatan. The meeting will be on February 17th, 7:30 p.m., in Room 117 in Millington Hall.

The February field trip will be on Saturday, the 20th. We will be going to Newport News Park and the Colonial Parkway along the York River. This should be an outing filled with excellent views of the varied waterfowl resident during the winter season. Please assemble by 7:30 a.m. at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center.

The club members who ventured to Hog Island on last month's field trip were treated to a bald eagle, six brown-headed nuthatches, a number of common mergansers, good looks at savannah sparrows, as well as the usual waterfowl that frequent the area. They also heard a winter wren. On January 30th, Bill Sheehan and Tom Armour went to the same area and reported four eagles, fifty-eight tundra swans, five green-winged teal, pintail, and common mergansers.

Peg Smith and others have reported ruby-crowned kinglets coming to their suet during the last several weeks. Bill Sheehan had a blue-gray gnatcatcher at his feeder on February 1st. Looking at the latest issue of Bill's Analysis of Local Bird Data shows this to be a month and a half earlier than the next earliest reported sighting. There have been a number of fox sparrows and hermit thrushes seen at and near feeders during January and early February. Tom Armour and Bill Snyder report Tundra Swans, Ring-necked Ducks, American Widgeon, and one Common Goldeneye on Lake Powell near the end of January.

There were a number of bird sightings reported at the January meeting. These included Bill Williams' glimpses Great Horned Owl and Red-Shouldered Hawks, John and Scottie Austin seeing White Pelicans at Assateague, Brian Taber and others traveling to Leesburg for a look at a Lewis' Woodpecker, and Brian Patterson seeing Glaucous and Lesser Black-backed Gulls at Virginia Beach and King Eider, Harlequin Ducks, and Great Cormorants on the Bay Bridge. Bill Williams reports that robins and black-birds are flocking and displaying the restlessness usually observed before they start to head north for a new breeding season.

The bird club has recently purchased five new books for the Williamsburg Regional Library. They are as follows: *Audubon Handbook-How to Identify Birds*, by Farrand, *Garden Birds* by Noble Proctor, *Tracks in the Sky* by Blake, *A Birdwatcher's Handbook* by Socha, and *The Bird Feeder Book* by Donald Stokes. This is but one of the things we do for the community with profits from our bird seed sale.

The January/February 1988 issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest* had a response in the **The Backyard Bird Watcher's Question Box** that I thought might be of interest to those of you who feed birds. The question was about possible contamination of bird seed, especially during mild weather. The response, by Dr. Louis Locke of the National Wildlife Health Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin says "that people feeding birds must learn to keep their feeder clean. Spoiled food or food upon which other birds have defecated should be thrown away. An important rule is to put out only that amount of seed that will be consumed in a day's (or half-day's) time. The ground feeding area (especially in mild weather) should be alternated with another area at intervals. The best feeders are those that do not allow the birds to sit in the food".

If anyone is interested in subscribing to *Bird Watcher's Digest*, you can do so by sending \$15.00 to BWD, Box 110, Marietta, Ohio 45750. For a gift that is thoughtfully perfect for bird watching friends (or for yourself), you should consider this magazine. It has fact-filled articles on attracting and feeding birds, identification, bird behavior, and unusual birding adventures.

THE FAR SIDE



When ornithologists are mutually attracted

We have added the following new members: Marion Simmons, whose contribution to the newsletter is on the next page; Mr. & Mrs. Pat Crizer, Mr. & Mrs. W. B. MacDonald, and Michael & Patricia Healy. We also are welcoming back John and Scottie Austin. This would also be a good time to offer congratulations to member Leigh Jones on her upcoming marriage to James Surdukowski. Leigh is now living in Charlottesville and teaching at Albermarle High School.

Classifications of Birds

Birds vary in size from the Ostrich which may stand 8 feet high to the smallest hummingbird which may measure no more than 2-1/2 inches in length including a relatively long bill. Between these two extremes, there are over 8,600 different living species which occupy an amazing number of habitats and which display a variety of characteristics that enable them to pursue their different ways of life successfully.

This diversity is the result of rapid evolutionary change during the past 50 million years. For example, when a flock of birds were accidentally swept, perhaps by a freak storm, to the isolated Hawaiian Islands, they found an environment rich in new food sources which they had not before encountered. After many generations different members of the original immigrant population became modified to take advantage of the variety of available foods. Some evolved short heavy bill with which to feed on nuts and seeds, while others developed long, curved, slender bills that enable them to feed on nectar. Today there are 22 different species of honeycreepers on the Hawaiian Islands, and all have evolved from a single immigrant species.

The function of classification is to make sense of the diversity of species by grouping together related forms. The Hawaiian honeycreepers are grouped together in a single family called Drepanididae, not only because they have features in common, but because there is good evidence that they have all evolved from a common ancestor.

The family is not the only group to be used in bird classifications. In fact, there are five main groupings: classes, orders, families, genera and species. Species are defined as populations, the members of which are able to interbreed and produce fertile offspring. Closely related species are contained in a single genus, members of closely related genera are contained in the same family, and so on.

I received an interesting letter from one of our new club members, Marion Simmons, who recently moved to our area from New York. She wrote about a new project of the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University. This volunteer program, Project Feederwatch, is designed to gather data on the kinds and numbers of birds using feeder throughout North America. The lab hopes to learn more about why birds are found where they are, and to monitor changes in bird distribution and abundance through time. Marion writes, "as participants, we count the number of birds we see at our feeders at any one time during the same two days each week, from November 14 through April 1. We define an area about fifty feet square that we can see all at once from one window. Then we count the largest flock of each species which come to the feeders and are seen in the area during the two day count. Recorded on computer readable forms, the count is returned to the Laboratory in Ithaca, New York." She goes

Fred says that he still has bird feeders and suet for sale as well as copies of the new addition to the Peterson Field Guide series, *Hawks*, by William S. Clark and Brian K. Wheeler. The club is selling the books for \$11.00 each.

Fred also reports that he received a phone call from Sue Ridd, who is the Statewide Project Director of the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Project of the VSO. She is looking for someone to be a regional coordinator. The primary duties of this person would be to organize a mini foray in June. Sue is planning to attend our next meeting so please talk to her there or contact her at P.O. Box 6837, Richmond, Va. 23230.

If there is a membership renewal form enclosed with this newsletter, it means that your dues for 1988 have not yet been received.

Please remember that the Nongame Wildlife Contribution can be made through the Virginia Individual Income Tax Return.

I need your help in putting this newsletter together.

To submit information, please contact:

Shirley Raynes at 229-8975
or write to
104 Vaiden Drive, Williamsburg, Va. 23185

on to say that so far her largest count has been: 36 house finches, 9 dark-eyed juncos, 2 Carolina wrens, 6 American goldfinches, 4 purple finches, 2 Carolina Chickadees, 2 nuthatches, 4 pine siskins, 3 cardinals, 8 mourning doves, 3 tufted titmice, 1 brown-headed cowbird, 1 song sparrow, and 5 grey squirrels. She regrets that she has not been able to include 4 bluebirds that have been in the area all winter, but have never come to the feeders and six cedar waxwings that have been enjoying her holly tree recently. She recommends the "Living Bird Quarterly" and Project Feederwatch, and says for information on either, write to: Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, New York 14850.

I would like to add that one possible way to bring bluebirds and cedar waxwings into the count area is to add a bird bath and/or suet. I have found that all the birds enjoy the clean water and the bluebirds really love the suet.