

WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

April 1988

WELCOME SPRING!

This month's meeting will be on **April 20th, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 in Millington Hall.** Tom Armour will be our speaker and will talk about and show slides of The Birds of Virginia.

As I write this newsletter, Bill Williams is out of town, and I didn't find out about a bird walk for this month. We'll have to wait until the meeting to get any information about this. **The Spring Count will be Sunday, May 1st.** Please contact Brian Taber at 253-1181, or meet at the Information Center at 7:00 a.m. on the 1st, to find out what areas need to be covered.

There are a number of bird sightings to report for the month. Tom McCary, a teacher at Fork Union, came home for spring break and on March 16th spotted a Dickcissel feeding with House Sparrows at a feeder on Richmond Road. The bird was seen by Bill Williams, Brian Taber, Tom Armour, and Ty & Julie Hotchkiss. Brian Taber reports seeing a Yellow-throated Warbler at Jolly Pond on March 28th. Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan saw a Yellow-throated Warbler and a Louisiana Waterthrush in the same area on March 31st. On the same day Tom was able to get Virginia and King Rails to respond to a tape on Jamestown Island. On April 3rd, Mike and Dorothy Mitchell caught a Le Conte's Sparrow in their banding net. Bill Williams sent in the following report: 70+ Bonaparte's Gulls seen from the Jamestown Ferry on March 6th, also on the same day, 8 Turkey near Sunken Meadows in Surry, 1 Fox Sparrow at his feeder on March 9th, and 30+ Bonaparte's Gulls at York River State Park on March 4th. Brian Patterson reports an adult Thayer's Gull on the northern most island of the Bay Bridge Tunnel. There have also been reports of Osprey, Purple Martins, and Tree Swallows in the area.

Brian Patterson is planning several pelagic trips in May. One is on Sunday, May 22nd out of Rudee Inlet. There is no weather date for this trip and the cost will be \$65 per person. He is also planning a few 6-person trips on a marlin boat. These trips are about twice as expensive as the May 22nd trip, but more time is spent in deeper waters further out where the birding is apt to be more productive. More information on any of these trips can be had by calling Brian at 253-7651 or 253-4707.

methods to discourage House Sparrows from using bluebird nest boxes. It must be kept in mind that sparrows are considered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to be an imported alien bird species. Their population has increased to such numbers throughout the North American continent that they have had a negative impact upon many native bird species. They are not protected by law, so may be dealt with as each person sees fit. It is more universally acceptable to repel or discourage sparrows than to trap them and do them in.

The following ways of dealing with sparrows have recently been proposed:

- a. Attach a windsock, 4 feet long, to nest box top.
- b. Attach streamers to nest box top; this idea is reported to have a 50 percent success rate.
- c. Attach aluminum foil streamers measuring approximately 5 inches by 1/2 inch with thumb-tacks to the inside of the top of the box.
- d. Paint the inside of the box white using exterior grade latex paint.

Never put a perch on a nest box or roosting box as sparrows love it!

Bluebirds do not use a nest for raising more than one brood of young. If they use the same nesting box or natural cavity for another brood they will build another nest for this purpose on top of the old nest, unless the old nest is removed first. We recommend that bluebirds nests be removed from nesting boxes as soon as the young birds have flown. A nesting box in a single location may be used by bluebirds for many years, especially if previous nestings in it have been successful.

The March/April issue of Bird Watcher's Digest has an article by Leland Devore of Fort Deposit, Maryland that I think brings up an interesting possibility.

"The Hartford Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society in 1986 came up with a new "game" composed of a series of competitive field trips of short duration. The game is really quite simple. Eight leaders, chosen from club members, are the key personnel, and each of them selects one day in May an an area in which to count birds. The leader's names, their counting locations, and the dates of each outing are published and distributed to all bird club members; anyone may join any or all leaders on their specific days. Since there are eight days of counting, one for each leader, many team members count on more than one team.

(continued)

Teams assemble on the designated day and at the announced location at 7:00 a.m. Identification and counting officially begin at 7:15 and end at 10:00, allowing 2-3/4 hours of concentrated birding. The leader must see each bird that is recorded, and each sighting must be verified by a team member who belongs to our club--we've stipulated this because the public is welcome to join us.

At 10:00 the team's list is tallied and scored as follows: Each non-warbler species seen counts one point; each warbler counts two points; each species not found by any other team also counts double. The last scoring has to be cranked in by the coordinator of the competition after all score sheets are in, so no one knows who has won until after the last day's count. This uncertainty adds suspense to the entire contest, right down to the tape.

The reward for the winning team lies simply in being Number One; the winning leader gets a free membership in the bird club for the next year. If any one of the eight outings is cancelled because of rain, that's just too bad. That leader simply gets a zero.

Many uncontrollable variables affect the final scores--the weather, the different locations, the expertise of the leaders and team members, and perhaps most important of all, luck. For instance, a few birds found by one team and not found by any other may slip a team into first place because of the double scoring for such species.

Don't protest that this scoring system isn't fair! These are simply our rules, as fair as awarding a touchdown more points than a field goal in football. Our system allows an element of chance that we enjoy, and, since a few lucky doubles may make a big difference, it gives less experienced bird watchers a chance to compete favorably with "experts".

Our spring contests are fast, fun, and exciting. Perhaps you may want to organize one for your club."

Reminder!

A whole dollar of your state tax refund may be donated for the conservation and management of endangered species and other nongame wildlife. Check the box on the front of your State Return and your refund will be reduced by the amount of your donation. If you are not due a refund and would like to contribute, you must send your check under separate cover to the Commission of Game & Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, Va. 23230-1104, ATTN: Nongame Program.

This will be the last time a membership renewal form will be enclosed in the newsletter of those who have not sent in their dues for 1988. **PLEASE RENEW**--we'd hate to lose you as a member.

In case you did not read the following articles that were in our local newspapers, I am reprinting them in the newsletter for your reading pleasure.

No One Squawks About the Billing -- The big, green parrot who has been freeloading in backyards on the east side of Williamsburg has been stealing choice seeds from area bird feeders and has also run up \$35,000 in unpaid rent at the Fort Magruder Inn. The hotel said that the parrot has lived there since the fall of 1986. The parrot has a regular perch on the hotel's fourth floor. It is thought that he escaped from the petting zoo area at Busch Gardens. Animal handlers from Busch succeeded in trapping him once, but he soon returned to his home at the Fort Magruder.

Soaring Vultures Return - Swallows return to Capistrano, vultures are back again at Queens Lake. They can be seen soaring and cavorting in the late afternoon before clustering into treetops to sleep after a day of foraging. Last year they selected roosting sites in the yards of residents on East Queens Drive. This year, the vultures have chosen a new roosting site just around the corner from their previous habitat. Residents of this area have become vulture watchers and the vultures have become like family. In the late afternoon we look for their return, until the sky is filled with 30 to 40 birds with three-foot wingspans. The slanting rays of the late afternoon sun transforms their dark wings into silver shafts tinged with pink. A children's book at the Williamsburg Library emphasizes that vultures have a special place in ecology; they help clean the earth of dead animals. They are among the strongest and most skillful fliers in the world. Their large wings are powerful and designed for soaring rather than flapping flight. Rising air currents are an aid to flight, and vultures will cruise at about 40 miles an hour. Vultures are amazingly long-lived. Some have survived over 50 years in captivity, while others in the wild have lived for 20 or more years.

The Golden Fleece Award -- Sen. William Proxmire gave his "Golden Fleece" award to two government agencies for a \$107,000 study that found the sexual performance of Japanese quail improved with practice. Proxmire, Wisconsin Democrat, presents the "Fleece" each month to recognize what he considers a waste of taxpayer money. Proxmire said that although this research may be well designed, the question remains whether, with massive federal deficits, spending for this project is the best use of taxpayers' monies. You decide!

Very Important

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

The 54th Annual Meeting of the Virginia Society of Ornithology will be held May 6th, 7th, and 8th at the Tysons Corner Holiday Inn in Fairfax County. Room reservations need to be made directly with the Holiday Inn by April 22. The phone number is (703) 893-2100. The mailing address is: Holiday Inn Tysons Corner, ATTN: Sam Kelly, Reservations Dept., 11960 Chain Bridge Road, McLean, Va. 22102. The nightly rates are \$50.00 Single; \$58.00 Double (up to 4 in room) + 6.5% tax.

VSO ANNUAL MEETING REGISTRATION FORM, MAY-6-8, 1988

REGISTRATION: _____ No. of persons @ \$10.00 each = \$ _____

BANQUET: _____ No. of persons @ \$17.00 each = \$ _____

SATURDAY BREAKFAST: _____ No. of persons @ \$ 6.50 each = \$ _____

SUNDAY BREAKFAST: _____ No. of persons @ \$ 6.75 each = \$ _____

TOTAL: \$ _____

NAME(S) _____ PHONE () _____

ADDRESS _____

Make checks payable to NORTHERN VIRGINIA CHAPTER, VSO, and mail with reservation form to: Susan Schupp, Registrar, 9091 Blue Jug Landing, Burke, VA. 22015 (Phone 703-323-8121), by April 22.

If you are not a member of the VSO, you can join by contacting Mrs. J. H. Dalmas, 520 Rainbow Forest Drive, Lynchburg, Virginia 24502.