WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

December 1988

This month there will not be a meeting, instead we will hold our Christmas Bird Count on **Sunday, December 18th.** The event is in conjunction with an international effort sponsored by the National Audubon Society. Each count focuses on locating as many birds of as many species as possible during a 24 hour calendar day. The Count is conducted within a fifteen mile diameter circle and parties of observers try to thoroughly cover as much of the area as possible. We will assemble at 7:00 a.m. at the the parking lot to the immediate right of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center on the Colonial Parkway side. For those who have other obligations during the day, we'll be happy to have you join us for any time you can spare. Feeder watchers are critical to our efforts and are asked to phone in any and all observations made during that day. Feeder watchers are asked to keep track of the time spent watching. Owlers need to keep a record of time and mileage spent in that endeavor. There is a fee that each participant must pay that helps the National Audubon Society compile and print the results of the survey. The tally will be held at 5:00 p.m. at Millington Hall. The Hampton Roads Bird Club will hold there count on Saturday, December 18th. Please call Bill Williams (565-3491) for further information about either of these counts.

Bird Sightings

On November 26th, Grace and Joe Doyle found a Coot and 70 Tundra Swans at Camp Peary. Also seen were some Bufflehead and Goldeneye.

On November 30th, Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan reported seeing 3 Dunlin, 13 Hooded Mergansers, 6 Red-headed Woodpeckers, and 2 Hermit Thrushes at Jamestown Island.

Helen Vandermark has reported a hummingbird in her yard on Leon Drive.

A call to the Virginia Birding Hotline brought reports of the following: a Little Gull at Chincoteague, 23 Snow Bunting and a Lapland Longspur at Craney Island, an American Bittern, seven King Rails, and 15 to 20 Brewer' Blackbirds at Back Bay, and a Lesser Black-backed Gull seen at Fort Story and Lynnhaven.

Bill Williams reports that an Eurasian Widgeon was seen on the November fieldtrip to Hog Island and also, that a Kittiwake was seen on the Chespeake Bay Bridge Tunnel on December 2nd.

Bill Sheehan is participating in the Project Feeder Watch program described in the November Flyer. He would welcome comparing notes with other feeder watchers—in or out of the Cornell program. Give him a call at 220-2122. He has some pretty good birds at his feeders, and will even show them off on occasion.

In our October issue of the Flyer, I wrote about The Nature Conservancy acquiring a 3500 acre tract on the James River that harbors the largest bald eagle roost in the eastern United States. In the November 30th Virginia Gazette, there is an article titled, AREA EAGLE ROOST FEARED IN DANGER. The article goes on to write about the use of carbofuran-based pesticides by area farmers possibly endangering the eagle roost.

Wildlife biologists and environmentalists claim the Environmental Protection Agency is withholding its findings from a special review which confirm that the use of this chemical in pesticides presents "a virtually certain hazardous situation" for a variety of bird species and is responsible for the deaths of more than two million birds nationwide each year.

William and Mary biology professor Mitchell Byrd, carbofuran caused the deaths of six bald eagles in Virginia during 1985 and 1986. "The first diagnosed case was found at Flower Dew Hundred, adjacent to a roost," Byrd said.

A national authority on bald eagles, Byrd is the leader of the Chesapeake Bay Bald Eagle Recovery Team, which was formed to study the areas eagle population. The team's findings indicate that an average of 83 eagles roost in various areas from Fort Eustis to Richmond. The largest roost in the eastern section of the country, and reportedly 'the world's fourth largest, is located along the James River. There are three distinct populations of eagles in the area; permanent breeding pairs, of which there are six within a few miles of Williamsburg, a wintering group and summer population.

"It's the summering population that we're most concerned about," Byrd said. It is during this season that the largest influx of bald eagles—bringing the local population to about 125—coincides with the planting and pesticide application of the areas major field crops such as corn and soy beans.

Byrd would like to see the highly controversial chemical "totally banned." As recently as Oct. 30, a bald Eagle from Williamsburg was taken to the Virginia Wildlife Center's Hospital in Weyers Cave for treatment of pesticide poisoning.

Ed Clark, the center's director, estimates that one of every five birds receiving treatment at the hospital is suffering from pesticide poisoning. Carbofuran, which he regards as a "very, very, extremely dangerous chemical," acts on the central nervous system of a bald eagle, causing it to overload."

Referring to the EPA's findings in its special review of carbofuran, Clark said that carbofuran is so potent that one granule, equal in size to a large grain of sand, is lethal to small birds and mammals. "According to the EPA review, there is no way that this pesticide can be used safety," he said, pointing out that manufacturers of carbofuran, such as FMC, contend that bird killings, associated with the product's use are the result of misuse and "carelessness on the part of a few."

The EPA's special review of the chemical, "Granular Carbofuran: Assessment of Risk of Wildlife," was completed June 4, 1987, and has yet to be released by the agency. According to Clark, the internal draft document which he got from private sources "very clearly is being suppressed," while manufacturers are allowed to continue to promote the product as being safe and effective when used as directed.

In the review, however, which was obtained by The Virginia Gazette through the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, more than 40 separate bird kills resulting from label-directed use of carbofuran were documented. In all cases "no evidence of misuse of granules was found. It was concluded that "bird mortality following the label directed use of granular carbofuran is a frequent and regular occurrence.

It seems that every time there is good news—some bad news is sure to follow.

While I was in Canada this summer I saw the following article on the Pergrine Falcon.

Wildlife Biologist Babysits Peregrine Falcon Chicks

Blomidon, N.S. (CP)— Peter MacDonald has been sitting on a wooden bench in a tiny treehouse on the Bay of Fundy since early June.

He'll stay there until September, seven hours a day, seven days a week, watching five birds through a telescope.

It's one of the most important jobs he'll ever do.

MacDonald, a wildlife biologist, is manning one of four Maritime sites for nursing peregrine falcon chicks to adulthood as a part of a Canada-wide effort to repopulate the species.

He feeds the young birds—properly known as eyases—makes sure they're healthy and watches out for predators like weasels or great horned owls who might be interested in a snack of falcon filet.

It's like he's a babysitter, but not in the usual sense. These babies sit in a closed wooden "crib" on the edge of a 100-metre cliff and devour a steady menu of raw quail and chicken guts.

"Sure, you become attached to the birds, especially after you have spent so much time watching them," says MacDonald as he shoves the day's meal through a hole in the top of their cage or hack-box.

MacDonald receives them when they're one month old. When they reach the ripe old age of 45 days,the peregrines will be released to hunt on their own.

While they're out, chasing their dinner and trying those ever-treacherous first landings, MacDonald will put out a spread of raw chicken if they return empty-taloned.And it will take a while to get the hand of it.

"The peregrine falcon is a hightech hunter. An incredible amount of speed and skill is involved here." says Stephen Woodley, an ecologist who supervises a release sit in nearby Fundy Park. "And the skills don't come easy."

Normally, when the nestlings begin to fly, the parents swoop by with prey in their talons and the young attempt to snatch it from them in mid-air as they pass. After several weeks of instruction, the young being to take prey on their own.But these young falcons must depend on instinct to survive.

"When they are freed, they'll chase anything that moves," says Woodley. "Moths, flies, anything. Then they move up to mock combat and after that they will chase other birds with trying to catch them.""After this they start to stoop (dive) for kills and it's hoped they are successful."

As this process begins, five more birds will arrive at MacDonald's site and another hack-box will be set up a few feet from the first one. The new batch of birds will also be observed for a two-week period from the tree house, called a blind, before they are freed.

But until things start hopping—or flapping—the birds aren't the only things that won't fly.

"Time can go slow and it gets pretty boring sometimes," says MacDonald, who has already filled a couple of books with notes and sketches.

MacDonald's work in Blomidon Provincial Park is part of a national effort to re-establish peregrine falcons, whose numbers were ravaged by pesticides in the late 1950s.

MacDonald is tending to the first of 30 falcons that will be released this summer from four locations in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

The Maritime sites afford the falcons a prime environment—high, jagged cliffs for nesting and wide open spaces for hunting.

The program, funded in part by the World Wildlife Fund and the Canadian Wildlife Service, is in its second year. Peter Austen-Smith, supervisor of the Blomidon site, says it's too early to look for the first-year falcons to being regular nesting here yet.

"The falcons won't show territorial behavior for another couple of years," says Austen-Smith. "But we have seen the return of a falcon with one of ours bands. An aggressive fellow he was too, in protecting his territory he caused the loss of three young falcons last year.

As a result, one of the release sites had to be moved out of the range of the fiery bird—one of the 43 peregrines released from 1982 to 1987 in Nova Scotia.

Aerial agility is one of the characteristics that give peregrine falcons their mystique. Their beauty and gentle behavior in captivity are other qualities that have endeared falconers to the peregrine for over 3,000 years.

But they are most respected for the way they hunt down their game.

Diving from the sky at speeds of over 300 kilometer an hour, the falcons deliver a glancing blow from their clenched talons that usually kills their quarry.

Then, peregrines will pluck the falling carcass out of the sky and make off with it before it hits the earth.

"To watch them dive is a truly exhilarating experience," says Woodley. "They are the real masters of the air."

BIRD SEED NEWS

General Guideline for Feeding Birds from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

Birds' feeding habits vary by region, season, and among individual birds. Therefore, you may find exceptions to the food preferences shown on the chart. Seeds listed are those that attract the greatest variety of birds.

Feeding birds need not be a complicated or expensive process. Most bird species can be attracted simply by providing sunflower seed, either on the ground or in an inexpensive feeder. Even scraps of stale bread, cake, or doughnuts may attract birds. Be sure that foods are not moldy or they may be harmful to birds.

No evidence exists that birds depend on bird feeders for survival. Therefore, don't worry if you must stop feeding for awhile.

Landscaping for birds is the best way to provide for their longterm needs. For example, consider planting berry bushes for fruit-eating birds, or perennial flowers for hummingbirds. Plantings can be attractive to both you and the birds.

Bird-Feeding Tips from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

	Chickadees, titmice,[1] nuthatches	Finches	Cardinal, grosbeaks	Sparrows	Blackbirds	Jays	Wood-peckers	Orioles, tanagers	Humming-birds	Pigeons, doves	Quails, pheasants
Sunflower seed[1]	●	●	●	●	○	○	○				
Corn[2]		○		○	●	●				●	●
Millet[3]		○		○	○					○	○
Niger[4]		●									
Suet[5]	●					○	●	○			
Sugar water[6]								○	●		
Fruits[7]						○		●			

● preferred
○ readily eaten

Chart footnotes on next page—

CHART FOOTNOTES

1. Black oilseed preferred but striped seed eaten readily.

2. Cracked corn for finches and sparrows; dried whole-kernel corn for jays, pigeons and doves, quails and pheasants.

3. White millet highly preferred over red millet.

4. Seed of choice for small finches such as goldfinches, siskins, and redpolls. Also known as thistle.

5. Do not feed suet when outside temperature is above 70 degrees Farenheit as suet may become rancid and harmful to birds.

6. Mix no less than 4 parts water to 1 part sugar. Empty and thoroughly clean feeder at least weekly to prevent growth of mold, which may harm birds.

7. Raisin, currants, and slice apples, oranges, and bananas. Fruits also may attract mockingbirds, robins, bluebirds, and waxwings, especially during winter.

There is still bird seed available. Please consider giving seed or suet as a Christmas present. Call Shirley at 229-8975.

It's time to renew your membership for 1989. Renewal forms are enclosed. If there is not a form with your newsletter it means you have already paid for the upcoming year.

Starting with the January issue of the Williamsburg Flyer, please submit information to our new Vice-President for the Newsletter:

Jamie Doyle
c/o Biology Department
College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, Va. 23185
253-4240 (Dept.)
220-6611 (Home)

If you need to contact Jamie over the holiday period, she can be reached at:

1580 W. Pines Drive
Charlottesville, Va. 22901
804-977-6026