



December Events

Meeting: None in December; next regular meeting will be on Wednesday, January 16th, 7:30 pm in Room 117 Millington Hall, on the Campus of William & Mary.

Field Trip: Participation in the 91st Annual Christmas Bird Count. Sunday, December 16th. (See November FLYER for complete information, page 2 of this issue for count areas.) Brian Taber will again be coordinator and will make team assignments.

(A) Field Participants: Meet at 7 am at Colonial Williamsburg Information Center Parking lot—East side. At day's end, counts will be tallied at 5 pm in Room 108, Millington Hall. Questions to Brian at 253-1181, or Ruth Beck at 566-8234.

(B) Feeder Participants: See separate "Help Wanted" article on page 6. Questions to Bill Sheehan at 220-2122.

(C) Donations of Refreshments: Donations of snacks for the weary bird-counters will be most welcome, as usual. Cookies, brownies, cheese, crackers, popcorn, etc. would be most appropriate. If you can contribute, please call Brian at 252-1181 for instructions.

Seed Makes a Wonderful Christmas Gift

So call Tom at 229-2363 if you need or can use any of the following.

50# Black Oil Sunflower	\$18.00
25# Striped Sunflower	10.50
50# Striped Sunflower	20.00
40# Custom Mix	11.50
40# Special Mix	15.50
8# Sunflower Chips	6.50
25# Sunflower Chips	17.25
8# Peanut Bits	8.75
8# Thistle	10.00
8# Safflower	5.75

Program for January 1991

Dr. Gustav W. Hall will present a slide/lecture program, at our regular January 16th meeting on the subject of Greece and Turkey. Dr. Hall is Professor of Biology at the College, and conducts classes in both Botany and Ornithology. He is also a member of the Williamsburg Bird Club.

President's

Corner

December 16th is our Christmas Count Day, and I urge all members to join us in this important annual event.

Call our leader, Brian Taber at 253-1181, for an assignment to a group or count area or, just show up at the CW parking lot at 7 am and Brian will have a place for you. If you are unable to participate in the field, a count of birds at your feeder that day would be valuable. Call Bill Sheehan at 220-2122 by 4:00 pm with your totals.

Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Tom Armour

Christmas Bird Count Areas

1. Cheatham Annex— Camp Peary, Queen's Lake, Cheatham Annex, Felgate's Creek, Indian Field Creek
2. Kingsmill— Country Road to Carter's Grove, Kingsmill, Williamsburg Airport, Parkway from Info Center to just before College Creek.
3. Hog Island— Ferry ride over and Hog Island Refuge
4. Jamestown— Parkway from College Creek to Jamestown and Jamestown Island
5. College Woods— College Woods and Campus, Lake Matoaka, Lake Powell, College Landing Park on South Henry Street, Population Lab, Hickory Signpost Road, Treasure Island Rd.
6. Middle Plantation— Mid-County Park, Waller Mill Park (both entrances), Drummonds Field, News Road, First Colony
7. Jolly Pond— Jolly Pond, Landfill, Cranston's Mill Road, Little Creek Reservoir
8. Skimino— Barlow's Pond, Skimino Farms, Mirror Lakes, entrance to York River State Park, Riverview Plantation

Important!

**It's that time again!
Forms are enclosed for those
who need to renew their
memberships.**

Cornell University Project Feederwatch Report

The FLYER has described the above program in some detail in previous issues, the latest being October. The paragraphs below are excerpted from a recent Program Feederwatch release and relates to the winter of 1989-1990. For more information on the program, write to: Project Feederwatch, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850—or call Bill Sheehan (220-2122)

Feederwatchers Report a Boom Season

For folks who feed birds, hordes of hungry finches certainly put a dent in pocketbooks last winter. According to Project Feederwatch, a continentwide survey of birds at backyard feeders, one of the biggest seed quizzlers was the Pink Siskin. This "boom-or bust" species periodically leaves the boreal forest of Canada to invade the southern United States in spectacular numbers, and the winter of 1989-1990 was definitely one of the boom years. Siskins were sighted at 64 percent of feeders across the continent, compared with only 30 percent of feeders the winter before. Red-breasted Nuthatches joined the invading finches; FeederWatchers reported twice as many as in the previous winter. Pine Grosbeaks and Common Redpolls also visited feeders in large number, mainly in northern regions, while Purple

(continued on Page 3)

Finches were abundant in the south.

What causes the periodic, dramatic increases in feeder visits from northern finches and nuthatches? The answer in a nutshell: they're searching for food. In the wild, these birds eat seeds—not garden-variety sunflower or niger, but the seeds of trees, especially conifers such as spruce and fir. Conifers produce a bumper seed crop every few years and a paltry supply in the intervening ones. Scientists speculate that this pattern represents a clever reproductive strategy for the trees—in the "off" years, pickings are slim for seed-eating animals. They have few offspring and their numbers remain low. Then, in a good year, the seed eaters are overwhelmed. They can't possibly gobble up all the seeds produced, as a result, the seeds are left lying around to germinate and grow.

The significance to bird watchers? During a year of plenty, more birds have babies and more baby birds survive. The following year, when seeds are scarce, many young birds head south and end up perched on well-stocked feeders.

Miscellaneous Matters

Steve Rottenborn needs help. He has a very aggressive Mockingbird which attacks and/or intimidates all birds of lesser size which try to use Steve's feeder. Short of putting a "contract" out on the villain, Steve asks if anyone among us has experience to offer. (Editor will gladly pass comments on to Steven, and/or publish in a future edition).

Leigh (Jones) Surdukowski, long-time WBC member and our former Bluebird Chair, stopped by with husband Jim and daughter Jennifer. Leigh, now living in Charlottesville, ran the Monticello Bird Club's seed sale, and, turned over a whopping 22,000 pounds!

1991 Club Officers

To the surprise of no one, the 1991 slate proposed by the Nominating Committee (Nov. FLYER) was overwhelmingly approved by membership vote at the November meeting. Our Officers for 1991 are:

President	Tom Armour
1st Vice President/Programs	Julie Hotchkiss
2nd Vice President/FLYER Editor	Bill Sheehan
Treasurer	Fred Blystone
Secretary	Joy Archer
Executive Board At-Large Members	Bill Akers Marilyn Zeigler

The only new name in the 1991 Armour "Cabinet" is Bill Akers. Bill replaces Anne Beckley, who had asked that she not be considered for re-election. And to make sure of that, Anne served as a member of the Nominating Committee.

Bill Akers brings to us a world of birding and bird-club experience.

He holds both Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the College of William and Mary. In attaining his Master's—in biology—his major effort was in population studies of Least Terns.

Bill is a founding member and past president of the Monticello Bird Club (Charlottesville), and a past president of the Roanoke Bird Club. He has been a guest speaker at our Club a number of times, and has always been both instructive and entertaining. He is currently associated with Upjohn Pharmaceutical Company.



The Birds About Us

A Magnolia Warbler, spotted just off the Colonial Parkway towards Yorktown on November 7th by Julie & Ty Hotchkiss, is a new late record for our local area. They also saw some Horned Grebes on the York—same date.

On the 14th, Ruth Beck and Tom Armour visited Hog Island and found one White-crowned Sparrow; 10 Pintails; 5 Kestrel; 4 Harriers; and a single Red-Tail and Bald Eagle.

A large female Sharp-shinned Hawk perched for a bit on Tom's main feeder at Kingsmill on November 17th. Tom says she left hungry, at least while he was monitoring.

On the 18th, Cindy Carlson and Rich Goll reported an Orange-crowned Warbler in their yard. Also a Pine Siskin at a feeder. But on the 23rd, while on an early morning walk on The Miane-right by Lake Pasbehegh, Cindy and Rich really hit the jackpot—a pair of **Snow Buntings!** We carry the species as Rare in our greater Williamsburg recording area—and this will be only the 10th sighting we are aware of. The first was in 1962, and all have been in the Nov-Dec-Jan period! Better check it out in our guides so we know what to look for.

We should add that the 2 birds were seen by Brian Taber on the 24th and by Jane Smith of First Colony. Tom Armour saw only 1 early on the 25th, but got some close up photos. Bill Williams saw 1 later in the morning.

Tom was visited by a Siskin on the 19th, and by a Sharp-

shinned Hawk on the 20th. On the 21st, he reported a male Purple Finch. Bill Snyder hosted a single Purple Finch on the 22nd.

The Doyles counted 13 Hooded Mergansers and 7 Tundra Swans on the 18th at Camp Peary. Then, on the 23rd, 2 Ring-necked Ducks showed up on Kingsmill Pond.

On 11/20, at Fort Eustis, Steve Rottenborn counted 27 Long-Billed Dowitchers and 12 species of Ducks, including 1 Oldsquaw and some Hooded Mergansers. The Dowitchers were still in place on 11/25, and Steve also picked up a couple of Semi-palmated Plovers.

Thanksgiving was an exciting time at Brian Taber's residence. The family had turkey, and the local Sharp-shinned Hawk had Towhee. Whatever your taste, it was "T-Day"!

The Doyles, at Camp Peary on 11/25, saw a flock of about 100 Tundra Swans on the James River. A week later (12/2) Grace reported "thousands" of ducks rafted in the River—mostly Ruddy Ducks and Canvasbacks, but with some Bufflehead and a few Redheads. On the shore side, they saw seven Ring-necked Ducks and Hooded Mergansers on a pond; and Joe identified a Savannah Sparrow in a large field. (Hope they all stay for the Christmas Count!) And also on December 2nd they saw a Bald Eagle catch a rather large eel. The Eagle then became the target of several very vocal gulls, who harassed the big bird and tried in every way to get him to drop the eel.

Unfortunately, the Doyles were unable to see what happened, since the Eagle soon became lost to view when it dropped down into some trees beyond their sight.

While fishing the local James for Stripers on the 27th, Tom Armour quickly caught his limit of two. He then had time to record 5 Bonaparte's Gulls and about 25 Forster's Terns. Earlier that day, Tom and Steve Rotternborn watched a late Osprey at Newport News City Park.

Alice Springe reports a single Siskin at her feeder on the 27th, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk on the 29th. And on that date Bill Snyder got into the Christmas spirit with his "Ten Cedar Waxwings in a Cedar Tree". He refused to sing it over the phone, however.

The chilly temperatures which came in on the 29th seemed to bring more birds to the feeders than in recent weeks. Work of that good WBC seed is obviously getting around.

The "Prez" went fishing again on 11/30; caught his limit and then remembered birds. Two Goldeneye, on the James below Kingsmill.

Julie & Ty Hotchkiss closed out November by travelling all the way to Jamestown Island! There they found 7 or 8 Red-headed Woodpeckers (several locations) and saw two Barred Owls.

Bill Williams reports 3 or 4 Evening Grosbeaks close to his home in Deerwood Hills, and a single bird flying over his home—both on December 2.

Ruth Beck treated her guests to a Wild Turkey, a Red-tailed Hawk and her local flock of Canada Geese—presently eleven. Also on December 2nd. (contained on Page 5)

December 3rd saw our President back on the River. The fish wouldn't even say "hello", but Tom had a brief discussion with a Common Loon.

On the 4th, Steve Rottenborn continued his inventory of birds at Fort Eustis with the following gems: a Solitary Vireo; two Orange-crowned Warblers; a Cooper's Hawk in process of eating a King Rail; and several Clapper Rails and Sora.

Also on the 4th, four Evening Grosbeaks turned up in Ruth Beck's yard. Maybe this will be one of the big years for these beautiful birds.

On the 5th, Mandy Marvin watched an adult Red-shouldered Hawk which was perched in a tall tree back of her house on South Henry. The bird posed in the morning light for about ten minutes. Mandy sums it up: "It was an adult. The sun shone right on his front and showed his markings beautifully! What fun!" What fun indeed and that neatly sums up this great hobby. Thanks for sharing, Mandy.

Armour and Sheehan terrorized Hog Island on the 6th (From the comfort of Tom's van, of course). On stage were: a Pied-billed Grebe, 19 Tundra Swans, perhaps 1,200 Canada Geese and 1 Snow Goose. Among the ducks: 350 Green-winged Teal, 200 Black Ducks, 50 Pintail and 6 Ruddy Ducks. The raptors were well-represented—by species, if not in numbers: 1 each Harrier, Cooper's and Red-tailed Hawk, and 4 Kestrel. Gulls seen were: 8 Laughing Gulls, 17 Bonaparte's, 5 Herring and 9 Great Black-backed. Nine Forster's Terns were the only terns in sight. We looked hard for an early Tree Sparrow, but had to settle for 2 Field Sparrows and a Swamp Sparrow. •

More Birds—but not so local

The wandering Hotchkisses checked out the new RV with a few days (11/13-11/15) at Hatteras and vicinity. Birding was excellent, as the following partial listing attests: hundreds of Tundra Swans and Snow Geese; good numbers of Hooded Mergansers and Avocets; about 200 Brown Pelicans, practicing diving; Gannets offshore; Red-Headed Ducks and Green-winged Teal; White Ibis and a Moorhen at Pea Island; Black-crowned Night Herons, Snowy Egrets and Little Blue Herons, Laughing Gulls in numbers—migrating. Add a Peregrine Falcon, Sharp-shinned Hawk and a Harrier—thence home.

Steve Rottenborn went home to Waynesboro for Turkey Day, but managed to see a **Golden Eagle** at Rockfish Gap in the Blue Ridge—a storied point for hawk watchers through the years.

Thom Blair, former Club president checked in by phone from Standarsville where he and Rochet are again retired and quite happy about it. Thom has staked out a Loggerhead Shrike in the vicinity, and hopes the bird will spend the winter. He also reported watching a Merlin miss plucking a Red-headed Woodpecker out of the air, and a number of Ruffed Grouse fairly near his home. It sure helps to be a Reverend, and to have a direct line. Some of you may recall the January (1983) when a Rufous Hummingbird appeared in Thom's backyard and stayed a

while. Thom was Club president at the time, and half the birders in Virginia came by to share his find.

Julie & Ty went over Chincoteague way for a few days (24-26th of Nov.) in search of a Black-headed Gull. That didn't work out, so they settled for a King Eider. They also saw three Western Kingbirds, and closed out with a Veery on one of the Bridge Tunnel islands on the way home.

More Miscellaneous Matters

In lieu of the November field trip, Grace and Joe Doyle and Tom McCary gathered in the Editors kitchen. He didn't produce much in the way of birds, but the coffee and conversation were not bad. Finally, in and above his backyard, a few Golden-crowned Kinglets and a Back Vulture appeared. Saved a little face for the Editor—he kept trying to shift the subject from birds to boxwood, of which he has lots.

Note for Mandy Marvin. Didn't really mean to exclude you from the group participating in the October trip to Kiptopeake. **You Were There!** By the way, no one has seen Brandy Martin since the trip.



Wanted! Feeder/Yard Watchers Sunday 12/16

Sunday the 16th of December is WBC's day to participate in the 91st annual Christmas Bird Count. Last Christmas over 1500 groups of observers in North America counted over 118 **million** birds among 594 species. About 43,000 individuals participated—about 35,000 in the field, and another 8,000 watching their feeders and yards. As for WBC numbers, our highest species count was 115 in 1984; our lowest was 97 in 1982. Last year we recorded 113 species. (23,000 individual birds.

Last year was the first time WBC added in the "home" counts on an organized basis. Well over a dozen folks participated and we came up with good numbers, and even a couple species the field folks failed to find.

This year, we seek to include even **more** "yard-bird" observations. You don't need to "sign-up". All you need do is count your very own birds and call in the totals to the Coordinator. Here's how it works.

COUNT the numbers of birds you see in or near your yards and at your feeders—by species. Record only the maximum number of each species that you see at any one time. (That's the only rule, and it prevents us from counting the same bird every time he comes by for a snack).

CALL Bill Sheehan at 220-2122 between 1:30 pm and 4 pm that afternoon. He will consolidate all feeder observations and will report totals to Brian Taber for inclusion in the grand totals.

If you need more information, call Bill any evening between 4 and 6 pm.

Sweet Briar Thanksgiving Bird Count

The 25th annual Thanksgiving Bird Count took place on Thursday, November 22. This interesting event was originated by Myriam Moore of the Lynchburg Bird Club, and has been conducted annually by Dr. Ernest P. Edwards of Sweet Briar College. The procedures are relatively simple: each participant selects a circular area 15 feet in diameter—on the ground, to include feeders, bird-baths, shrubs, etc. Then, imagine the circle extending upward as a cylinder. Count the number of birds of each species which come into or through this circle durling exactly one hour.

Last year, more than 700 persons participated. The 15 most reported birds were:

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|------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Chickadee | 9. House Finch |
| 2. Junco | 10. Downy Woodpecker |
| 3. Cardinal | 11. White-breasted Nuthatch |
| 4. Blue Jay | 12. White-throated Sparrow |
| 5. Mourning Dove | 13. Red-bellied Woodpecker |
| 6. House Sparrow | 14. Purple Finch |
| 7. Titmouse | 15. European Starling |
| 8. Goldfinch | |

If you desire to participate on Thanksgiving Day, 1991, drop a card or note to:

Dr. Ernest P. Edwards
Thanksgiving Bird Count
Sweet Briar College
Sweet Briar, Va. 24595

Please send any news or articles for future issues of the FLYER to **Bill Sheehan** at
**104 Oak Road, Williamsburg, Va.
23185**
or call him at **220-2122**