

THE

WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

Volume 14, No. 2

February 1990

Williamsburg Bird Club

The Williamsburg Bird Club will meet on **Wednesday, February 21**, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 in Millington Hall on the campus of William & Mary.

Out guest speaker will be **Mr. Walter Post Smith** of the Hampton Roads Bird Club. His subject will be the birdbanding operation at Kiptopeake, a multi-faceted and highly successful program with which Mr. Smith has been closely associated for many years.

February's field trip on **Sunday, February 25th** will be to **Cheatham Annex**. We will meet at **8:00 a.m.** in the usual place (Colonial Williamsburg Information Center Parking Lot—right hand side).

Cheatham Annex affords us a fantastic range of habitat—the York River, tidal creeks and marshes, freshwater ponds, fields, forests and lots of edge. This trip will be led by Tom Armour.

January 20th Field Trip to Bridge Tunnel Islands

Steve Rottenborn reports a highly successful trip. Our twelve participants—itsself a noteworthy number—were rewarded by 43 species, and these included such delights as Harlequin Ducks, Oldsquaw, Great Cormorants, Brown Pelicans, and Purple Sandpipers. Take a brief moment with your bird book and take a peek at the color patterns of the Harlequin Duck and the Oldsquaw.

What a show!

Bird Census Activity at W & M

Steve Rottenborn has kindly provided the Club Records Committee with the results of two bird census actions during the Oct-Dec (1989) period. One is of the territory surrounding Lake Matoka (which we commonly call "College Woods"); the other is the old Pop Lab area where some wonderful banding operations took place in bygone years. Almost one hundred species were involved, and the significant data has been incorporated in our detailed bird ledgers.

Outside of the base period, Steve threw in a 1 May sighting of a Lincoln's Sparrow near the Wildflower Refuge on Campus. That's only the third report since 1976, when Ruth Beck used to catch a couple in her mist nets each spring.

Neat Work!

Bluebirds are already looking at boxes!

Can you spare a little time to help Grace and Joe Doyle (220-3498) get our trail boxes ready to receive the 1990 nesters? You'll be glad you did when you see and hear those happy bluebirds!

Please do it **NOW** before the season gets ahead of us.

President's Corner

"HATS OFF" to Jamie Doyle for jumping in and writing the club's monthly newsletter throughout all of last year!

Jamie did a great job filling it with timely and birdy info in a crisp and entertaining format. I'm sure all the members appreciate her efforts and wish her well in all her future endeavors.

Checklist of Local Birds—1990 Update

Year 1989 saw three new birds added to our local list:

Baird's Sandpiper, Ash-Throated Flycatcher, and Brewer's Blackbird. That brings our total species to a whopping 314—just about 85% of the VSO's State-wide checklist. Not shabby at all! And certainly a tribute to the sharp eyes, field knowledge and sheer persistence of a large group of observers back through the years.

The Checklist condenses each species into a one-liner, but behind each species, we have a fairly strong collection of detailed observations which permit us to break out supporting information as to where seen, how many, when and by whom. We are fortunate, indeed, to have had access to the personal journals and records of many members, to the official local banding logs of Dr. Byrd and Ruth Beck, and to such fine studies as Bill Williams' in depth survey of Hog Island birds incident to the startup of the nuclear plant, and embracing a weekly census for almost the entire year 1974.

With such strong fundamentals, it is incumbent that we continue to add meaningful data—not for the sake of "records", but to continue the informed accumulation of local data on which we may be bold enough to draw meaningful conclusions as to the birds about us.

Fred Blystone deserves not just thanks but **PRAISE** for putting this list together in the neat and **current** package which is now yours!

If you have any questions, spot any obvious errors, or need some local detail on a favorite species, call Bill Sheehan at 220-2122.

Alaskan Wilderness Expedition

Virginia Living museum, 524 J. Clyde Morris Blvd., Newport News, Va. 23601, is sponsoring an Alaskan Expedition July 11-22, 1990. Cost \$2,300 excluding airfare. Reserve by May 1. For details, call 1-595-1900. Descriptive flyer will be available at our February 21st meeting.

Red-Breasted Nuthatch Limited Feeder Survey

Based on a very limited sample, we are pleased to report Red-Breasted Nuthatches as follows: (through Feb. 10th)

Happy Birders	Location	<u>Number</u>
Julie & Ty Hotchkiss	First Colony	1
Brian Taber	Druid Hills	1
Bill Sheehan	Hollybrook	2
Bill Williams	Deerwood Hills	1
Elsie Campbell	Quaker Estates	2

If you are aware of other birds and locations, please call the Editor and help us fill out the picture of these little cuties.

Cook's Corner

To get away from the sheer sticky nature of pure peanut butter, try an even more high energy (and manageable) mix roughly as follows:

- 1/4 cup Crisco or equivalent
- 1/4 cup peanut butter
- 1/4 cup bacon or other kitchen fat drippings
- 1/2 cut coarse cornmeal or grits.

It will mix easier if you heat the Crisco and kitchen fats.

Try daubing some on the biggest pine cones you can find (the Carolina longleaf pines are super) and hang them where you can watch them. Pine warblers are my best customer, plus mockingbirds, a Thrasher, and assorted chickadees, titmice, and White Breasted Nuthatches. Brown Creepers won't come to my cones, but will take it when smeared on a tree trunk.

I have to bring my cones in at night or the raccoons run off with them.

LOCAL BIRD SIGHTINGS

On January 6th at twilight, 3 or 4 **woodcock** put on their very impressive show for **Brian Taber** and son **John**. First, they heard the birds calling—and then as their vision improved against the sky, they were able to observe them. In a short time, as they watched, the flight patterns changed and the voice patterns changed as the birds performed their aerial courtship flights. In this maneuver, the male rises in widening circles to several hundred feet—wings whistling. As he hovers, one hears a series of chirps as he swoops erratically to the ground. There he utters a sharp “peent” sounds as he parades on the ground for his lady. Good work, Brian & John—thanks for sharing.

We received several bird sighting reports from **Bill Williams**. On January 29th, he observed a **Coopers Hawk** in flight over James Blair School on Ironbound Road. On the 30th, at dusk, he was treated to two displaying **woodcock** near the James City County Landfill on Route 611.

Bill also reports that while trying to excite some small birds with his screech owl call, he was answered in kind by a very curious live **screech owl**.

Tom Armour celebrated the Christmas Season by keeping a single **Great Cormorant** in and about the Kinsmill Marina between December 18-22. The bird posed nicely on the outboard seawall, and, at least on one day, was in immediate company with several Double-crested Cormorants, a Great Black-backed Gull and a couple of Herring Gulls. Almost like a police line-up, but much more instructive—and naturally, Tom took some photos! That's leadership, Mr. President.

Julie and Ty Hotchkiss are enjoying an extended visit to their feeders of an immature male **Northern Oriole**. The bird has been an almost daily visitor since January 6th. A tribute to Julie's cooking—no doubt! Ask Julie about visiting hours.

On the afternoon of February 6th, **Elsie Campbell** of Quaker Meeting House Road marked the return of a very early **Osprey**. This improves the previous early date of Valentines Day, 1987. An “attagirl” for Elsie.

On January 11th, at the confluence of Felgate's Creek and the York, **Steve Rottenborn** came upon a gorgeous **Red-necked Grebe** in textbook winter plumage. It lingered in the general vicinity at least through the 12th, and Steve's prompt reporting enabled a modest but goodly number of us locals to get a look.

This was only the third sighting of which we are aware. Both earlier records were in the James River at Kingsmill and both were seen and reported by Tom Armour—one in March 1979; the other in March 1985.

The club's fourth record for a **Red-necked grebe** was found by **Ty Hotchkiss** on February 9th, and right close to his home in First Colony. The bird was on Lake Pasbehegh, and was seen again on the 10th by **Julie Hotchkiss** and on the 11th by club members **Bob & Anne Beckley**, **Tom McCary**, and **Bill Snyder**—although at quite a distance.

Who'll go for #5?

On February 12th, **Tom Armour** and **Bill Sheehan** visted Jamestown Island where they found 2 **Gadwall**, 1 **Red-tailed Hawk**, 1 **Hermit Thrush**, 2 **Fox Sparrows**, and 1 **Swamp Sparrow**. Missing were **Red-headed Woodpeckers**.

Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

In RAVEN (Vol 60-1989) Bill Williams has chronicled the first breeding record of the Brown Pelican in Virginia. He notes that prior to 1980, the species was considered a "rare spring, summer and fall visitor near the coast, and that since 1980 dramatic increases occurred along the coast and well into the Chesapeake Bay.

The first local records we are aware of occurred in 1982, when small groups (2-7) were observed on several occasions in the vicinity of Coleman Bridge. Again, in 1983, one sighting of 6 birds was reported near the bridge in March.

In 1985 and in 1987, single reports were made, each of 2 birds, again in the vicinity of the bridge. In 1988, the pattern broke and the pace quickened. Tom Armour observed a single bird on the James at Kingsmill in April, and Leigh Jones reported multiple sightings of small flocks over Wormley Creek in Marlbank. 1989 brought frequent April sightings of 1-9 birds up the York as far as Camp Peary. And 1990 has started with a bang:

1/1 Single bird, James at First Colony
(Julie & Ty Hotchkiss)

1/9 Single bird, James at Kingsmill
(Tom Armour)

1/20-21 Single Bird, Chickahominy River
(Bridge piling; Rt. 5—Harding Polk)

2/1 Single bird, Kingsmill Marina,
(Tom Armour)

In China, it's the year of the horse, in Williamsburg it may well be the year of pelecanus accidentalis! Any more out there?

15th Annual nesting Bird Survey - Winter 1989 *Virginia Conservancy News*

In 1975, the Nature Conservancy initiated an inventory and monitoring program of the beach nesting and wading birds that call the Virginia Barrier Islands home during the summer nesting season.

Utilizing graduate students from the College of William and Mary under the guidance of Dr. Mitchell Byrd, the monitoring program quickly pointed out the significance of the numbers and varieties of birds that nest on the islands.

Fifteen years later, and after numerous rough boat rides, storms, foot blisters, and delightful days on the island beaches, this same group of graduate students, now grown older and even more professional in their chosen field of ornithology, continued their dedication in volunteering their time and expertise in conducting this important monitoring work. Many thanks again go to Bill Williams, Bill Akers, Jerry Via, and Ruth Beck for their outstanding contribution to the knowledge of the natural history of the Virginia Barrier Islands.

Highlights of the 15th Annual Colonial Waterbird Nesting Survey, conducted from June 18 to June 21, include 5,000 adult royal terns and 385 black crown night herons nesting on Fisherman's Island, 954 black skimmers and 745 common terns on Ship Shoal Island, and 1,092 common terns and 857 black skimmers on Little Cobb Island.

In addition, brown pelicans were documented as breeding and nesting in Virginia for only the second time. Three hundred ninety-six brown pelicans along with 37 nests (29 with eggs) were found on Fisherman's Island during this year's survey.

Our busy book lady, Alice Springe, reports the club has funded the following new book for the Library:

"On the Wing" *The Life of Birds from Feathers to Flight*. Bruce Brooks

If the title sounds familiar, the book is in fact the companion volume to the PBS television series of the same name.

1990 Mid-Winter Bald Eagle Census

This annual event, conducted by Dr. Mitchell A. Byrd and associates, is sponsored by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries as part of its "Nongame" program. (See related news item, this issue).

Dr. Byrd overflew the James, Potomac, and York Rivers during the first 3 weeks of January; followed by the Rappahanock in early February. Here is the summary:

River System	1990 Count	Current vs. 1989
James	40	Down from 100
Potomac	60	Down from 80
York	20	Up a smidge
Rappahanock	<u>180</u>	<u>2 times normal</u>
TOTAL	300	300 is a typical total

Dr. Byrd believes the reduced numbers observed on the James, Potomac, and York are attributable, at least in part, to the unseasonal prolonged freeze in December. In all instances, immature birds were notably absent, and Dr. Byrd conjectures they reacted to the freeze by seeking warmer locales to the south and elsewhere.

The excessively high number (180) for the Rappahanock included a relatively high numbers of immatures (not present in January, as deduced from concurrent waterfowl surveys during that period). Dr. Byrd believes these birds entered or re-entered the area during the warming trends of January.

In a single 3 mile stretch of the Rappahanock, above Tappahannock, they observed an unusual concentration of 97 birds. The pilot? Sherwin Beck, of course! Eagles don't fly for just anybody!

Virginia's Non-Game Wildlife Program Continues.

Since 1982 the Nongame program has gained support of thousands of Virginians in protecting resources which previously had no benefactors.

Partly because of the program, several endan-

gered species in our state have gained a strong foothold in their struggle to survive. Here at home, Dr. Byrd's Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon programs continue to receive strong support.

You may contribute directly from line 26a of the State Tax Form from your tax refund, if any, or you may contribute directly by check to:

Virginia NonGame Program
State Game Commission
NonGame Program
4010 West Broad Street
Richmond, Va. 23230-1104

All donations—tax form —or direct are tax deductible.

WBC Rare Bird Alert

We inaugurated the Alert on February 10th, with the Red-necked grebe at First Colony. So far the following members have signed up and need take no further action.

Archer	Blystone	Kinhead
Armour	Campbell	Snyder
Armstrong	Doyle (Grace & Joe)	Springe
Beck	Goll/Carlson	Taber
Beckley	Hotchkiss	Williams(Bill)

If you are not listed above and wish to be alerted to the local "rare" ones, call Bill Sheehan at 220-2122. He'll sign you up on the spot.

We note with pride that our members are participating as follows in the inner sancti of the Virginia Society of Ornithology.

Mitchell Byrd	Board of Directors
Teta Kain	RAVEN editor
Brian Taber	Records Committee
Bill Williams	Records Committee

Congratulations, Lady and Gentlemen. We are well-represented!

Charles City Vetos Boat Ramp

On February 9th, Charles City County Supervisors voted to abandon plans to construct a public boat ramp at Willcox Wharf on the James.

The wharf is almost opposite the large Bald Eagle winter roost area in the vicinity of Flowerdew Hundred on the South Side. The latter "roost" property has recently been acquired by the Nature Conservancy in order to protect the birds.

Dr. Byrd has been prominent in the development of the decision reached. The February 10th DAILY PRESS has more details.

From 1/29/90 **Times News** sent in by members Maynard & Frances Nichols in Hendersonville, N.C.

EAGLES SIGHTED

Fayetteville (AP)—Pigeons apparently aren't the only birds able to live in an urban environment—eagles have been seen in two of Fayetteville's parks.

"It's very exciting," said Robert Barefoot, director of the city parks and recreation department. "It says that if we protect our resources carefully, we can live together. We're compatible."

Barefoot saw a pair of golden eagles while walking through Mazarick Park about two weeks ago, but he said rangers have also seen the birds in the developing Clark Park.

The eagles probably don't yet live in Fayetteville year-round although they could, Barefoot said.

The Cape Fear River and the many ponds and lakes in the area **make** Fayetteville an attractive place for eagles to eventually nest, said Ron Harwood, city ranger.

"Cumberland County and Fort Bragg are developing a good population of both golden eagles and bald eagles," he said. "You can find eagles circling because a lot of our parks have large, open fields where there's prey like mice and rabbits."

The Reverend Thom Blair—Exclusive Phone Interview

Former Club President Thom Blair reports that he and Rochet continue to enjoy the challenge of Thom's being temporary rector of a prestigious Atlanta Episcopal Church. They expect to return home to Stanardsville in June or July. Thom asked me to convey his very best regards to all of his many birding buddies in the Club.

I asked Thom if he had seen any unusual birds lately. He made mention of an "occasional purple Bishop on Sundays". Not being of the Episcopal faith, your editor presumes this to be a secret code. No bird of this name appears on the current VSO "Birds of Virginia" list—not even on the hypothetical list. Love a mystery, though!

Welcome to the following new members who joined us during January

James & Patricia Buickerood
516 Newport
Williamsburg, Va. 23185
229-7293

Bill & Nancy Davies
102 Royal Court
Williamsburg, Va. 23185
253-1461

Annie Davis
112 Indian Springs Rd., Apt. 3C
Williamsburg, Va. 23185
220-1802

Emily Hobbs
194 The Maine
Williamsburg, Va. 23185
229-3398

Rebecca & Timothy Kinkead
113 Richards Road
Williamsburg, Va. 23185
253-2725

VSO Field Trip—Outer Banks

On the weekend of February 9th to 11th, 91 members of the Virginia Society of Ornithology gathered at Kill Devil Hills (N.C.) to confront the avian scene at and about the Pea Island Refuge. Undaunted by rain, thunder, lightning, tornado and waterspout, they managed to identify an even 90 species. Ruth Beck, our star girl reporter, declined to identify the member who did not have his (or her) very own species.

Here are the notables, and approximate numbers.

Horned Grebe (Dozens)	Tundra Swan (100's)
Pied-billed Grebe (2-3)	Gadwall (Lots)
*Eared Grebe (1)	*Eurasian Wigeon (1)
White Pelican (9)	Canvasback (Dozens)
Brown Pelican (Dozens)	Redhead (3)
Blk-Crowned Night Heron (several)	
Lesser Scaup (a few)	White Ibis (15-20)
White-winged Scoter (1)	Glossy Ibis (1)
Peregrine Falcon (2)	

* Best of the litter?

WBC members Ruth and Michael Beck, Bill Akers, and Brian Taber participated—as did sometime member, H. Fenton Day III.

FLYER under new management

When President Armour asked me to “volunteer” to be Editor, I knew he was a desperate man. However, I did agree provided he could prevail on Fred Blystone to be, in effect, the Publisher. Tom was at his persuasive best, and then he left town for a couple of weeks in the wilds of Florida so we couldn’t bug him for guidance!

Actually, he **has** given us a free hand, while urging us to build upon the FLYER to make it newsworthy, instructive, and reasonably timely.

So, Freddy B. and I will give it our best along those lines.

BUT, the FLYER exists to serve the membership, and your ideas are not just welcome—they are essential. So may we hear your news and views—to Bill at 220-2122, or by note or visit to 104 Oak Road. Free coffee guaranteed on all visits!

And we really want to have the best bird club bulletin in the state, by any measure.

Deadlines for March FLYER

The March meeting falls on Wednesday, March 21, and we aim to have the FLYER in your hands a few days prior. It will be most helpful if you can get all routine copy or phone inputs to us by March 10th. We’ll try to accommodate FLASH items (like late or unusual sightings or news) as late as March 14th. That has to be the “drop dead” date.

