



THE FLYER

W. J. Sheehan, Editor

Volume 14, No. 3

March 1990

Williamsburg Bird Club

PROGRAM FOR MARCH — DOUBLE FEATURE

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

PART ONE: "An Ode to Drawing Blood and Sucking Sap". From that title, it just might appear that Agatha Christie or Alfred Hitchcock might be involved. Not so, however, but even better! **Miss Jamie Doyle** will share with us her personal involvements in two rather prestigious field ornithology programs last summer and fall. One involved hawks; the other, woodpeckers.

PART TWO: An "**Owl Prowl**" of some of the local night spots where the wise ones are believed to gather. By popular demand this is a repeat of the highly successful "owling" event of a year ago.

Field Trips - Seasonal Specials

Regular March Trip: To **Hog Island** on **Saturday, March 24th**. To accommodate the early ferry schedule, we'll meet at **7 a.m.** at the usual place (Colonial Williamsburg Information Center Parking Lot—right hand side). Brian Taber will be the Head Birder.

Hog Island, of course, is one of our premier birding hot-spots. For a fast check on what has been at Hog in recent weeks, look under the section captioned Local Sightings, this issue.

Regular April Trip: To **Newport News City Park** on **April 21st**. A fine opportunity to observe warblers since the spring migration will be in full swing, and the Park's varied habitats provide a wide choice of

President's Corner

All members of the Williamsburg Bird Club are invited to contribute to the FLYER any bird news, sightings, and bird stuff encountered on their travels. Call our Editor, Bill Sheehan, at 220-2122, or me at 229-2363.

Annual Spring Count

On **April 21st** This one corresponds to the Christmas Count, wherein the Hampton Roads club members help us cover the following eight areas:

1. Cheatham Annex: to include Camp Peary, Queens Lake, and Felgate's and Indian Field Creeks on the Parkway.
2. Kingsmill: to include the Country Road to Carter's Grove, Williamsburg Airport, and the Parkway to College Creek.
3. Hog Island: Ferry ride and the Refuge.
4. Jamestown: Parkway from and including College Creek to Jamestown and Jamestown Island.
5. College Woods: to include W&M Campus, Lakes Matoaka & Powell, College Creek at South Henry St., Population Laboratory, Hickory Sign Post and Treasure Island Roads.
6. Middle Plantation: to include Middle County Park, Waller Mill Park (both entrances), Drummonds Field, News Road and First Colony.
7. Jolly Pond: to include JCC Landfill, Cranston's Mill Road, Little Creek Reservoir.
8. Skimino: Skimino Farms, Mirror Lake, entrance to York River State Park, Riverview Plantation.
9. Feeder Watchers: to include any one who has the time and interest to tell us what's in your yard that day.

Time:

7 a.m.-Colonial Williamsburg Information Center Parking Lot

5 p.m.—Room 108 Millington Hall for Tally

Coordinator—Brian Taber 253-1181

See April FLYER for more detailed information—particularly for those who choose to participate from their own yards and feeders.

Hog Island Birding Checklist

A copy of the above title is included with this issue of the FLYER for your personal use. We are especially pleased to be able to provide it for three good reasons:

1. It is most timely in that our March 24th Field Trip is scheduled for Hog Island.
2. The checklist was published as part of the Nongame Wildlife Program of the State Game Commission. This is one of the fine products of the donations of many Virginians through the tax return checkoff procedure, or through direct contribution.
3. And not least, the data which is presented in the checklist was provided from records of the Williamsburg Bird Club.

Dozen Most Wanted Species

When you review your recently updated SUMMARY OF LOCAL BIRD DATA, note that for many species we show "Rec." preceded by a number from 1 to 24. The number represents the total recorded sightings of the species to date. Usually, the bird bears the "R", for rare, designation. Then, when the numbers reaches 25, we drop the "Rec." label and upgrade the frequency from "R", rare, to "U", uncommon.

The following list is our current most wanted group. Please report any new sightings (or old ones you didn't report) so we can promote these birds from Rare to Uncommon. (Numbers in parenthesis represent our current number of recorded sightings)

Brown Pelican	(19)	
American Bittern	(9)	
Least Bittern	(24)	Dick Hines?
Mute Swan	(18)	
Oldsquaw	(23)	
Broad-winged Hawk	(19)	
Peregrine Falcon	(12)	

Moorhen	(11)
Willet	(11)
Black Tern	(21)
Horned Lark	(19)
Snow Bunting	(9)

How about it, Brian P., Brian T., Steve, Julie & Ty, Rich, Cindy, Bill W., Ruth, Ornithology Field Trips? Can you help?

From *FeederWatch News*, Autumn 1989

Baffling Squirrels

You could spend a fortune on fancy store-bought squirrel baffles, only to find that your personal squirrels are just a little smarter or more acrobatic than average. Why not try these low-cost homemade baffles, designed and tested by other FeederWatchers, to keep squirrels out of your bird seed.

- Albert and Marion Fowler (ME) suggest inverting a plastic pop bottle (the large size) over a pole. On the upturned bottom of the pop bottle, mount your platform feeder.
- Orion Arnold (NJ) also uses plastic pop bottles as squirrel baffles. He punches a hole in the center of the bottom of each bottle and strings them on the clothesline from which the feeders hang.
- Karen Star (NJ) found another inexpensive way to make an excellent squirrel baffle. Get a large plastic salad bowl, punch a hole in the center, invert the bowl, and slip it over the feeder support pole. Fix the bowl in place with clamps. The baffle can be used over hanging feeders, too. Frederick Shear (NY) uses plastic garbage can lids in the same way.

- A sleeve of stovepipe over the feeder support pole is another way to baffle squirrels, but be sure to cap the top—birds some times fall inside and get stuck.

Finally, if you hate making squirrel baffles, just put one good baffle on a support post and hang all your feeders from the one post.

Mark Trail:

Comic Strip Conservationist

Certainly one of our very favorite Comic Strip characters has to be the Dodd & Elrod widely syndicated outdoorsman and nature writer Mark Trail.

Hope you saw the Sunday, February 18th strip in which Mark Trail is watching chickadees with a young enthusiast, and commenting on the growth of bird watching. He tells the youngster that this popular sport is now called "birding", and that the sport participants even use computers in recording elements of their hobby. Mark estimates that "over 55 million..... engage in watching, feeding, and photography of wildlife". He concludes by telling his young enthusiast that "it is theoretically possible to see 836 species (of birds) in North America, but so far the record is 772".

Thanks, Mark Trail!

Curles Neck—Haven for Raptors, & Others

Curles Neck is a former plantation/dairy farm site on the James, about 7 or 8 miles west of the Harrison Bridge turnoff on Route 5. A bit remote from Williamsburg, its open fields presently attract Short Eared Owls, a Rough Legged Hawk, several Northern Harriers, half a dozen kestrels, a pair of Red-tails, and an occasional Bald Eagle.

Last year, Longspurs, Horned Larks, and Pipits were present, and a Ross' Goose—among the hundreds of Canadas, became a photo celebrity.

WBC Field Trip to Cheatham Annex, February 25th

On that cold and windy morning, nine brave souls under the leadership of Tom Armour combed the fields, woodlands, and waters of Cheatham Annex. While there were no real surprises, they came away with a very respectable 45 species. Among them, and certainly noteworthy, were

Tundra Swan	50	Hairy Woodpecker	1
Mute Swan	2	White-breasted Nuthatch	4
Green-winged Teal	1	Brown Creeper	1
American Wigeon	2	Golden-crowned Kinglet	2
Goldeneye	4	Bluebird	12
Bufflehead	100	Hermit Thrush	2
Hooded Merganser	4	Robin	50
Red-breasted Merganser	2	Brown Thrasher	1
Red-tailed Hawk	1	Pine Warbler	6
Kestrel	2	Fox Sparrow	1
Kingfisher	1	Swamp Sparrow	1

(Ed. Note) Only a few Yellow-rumped warblers! Are they unusually scarce this winter, or are my correspondents finding them so very common as to be beyond mention?

Cornell's Nation-wide FeederWatch Program

For the second successive year, club member Suzy Woodall is participating in the Cornell University FeederWatch program. This program involves, at two-week intervals during fall, winter, and early spring, the recording of species of birds and their numbers which actually use our feeders, ground feeding areas and birdbaths.

In recent weeks Suzy has been reporting 16 to 18 species, a number which will increase into the 20's as changing weather conditions bring new species to her yard. Among Suzy's present guests are:

Sharp-shinned Hawk	Carolina Wren	Song Sparrow
Downy Woodpecker	Eastern Bluebird	White-throated Sparrow
Blue Jay	N. Mockingbird	Dark-eyed Junco
Carolina Chickadee	Cedar Waxwing	Common Grackle
Tufted Titmouse	Pine Warbler	Purple Finch
House Finch	Pine Siskin	American Goldfinch

Suzy blames the general absence of woodpeckers, nuthatches, and creepers on the fact that she has no large trees to attract them in close.

Invasion Imminent! Warblers and Vireos

And a little early preparation will most certainly add to our ability to identify them. So, dust off the Field Guide, with particular attention to field marks and songs.

Essentially, there is a group of early arrivals who present themselves here from about mid-March well into April. The second group starts sifting through from the latter part of April through early June. For most of us, the first group is by far easier; new leaves on the deciduous trees are not so far advanced as to completely impair our vision; many of the early warblers work the low parts of the trees, down into the shrubbery level; and most of their songs seem (to me, anyway) to be different enough from each other to be identifiable. Finally, a few early successes should pump up our confidence enough so that we don't actually dread the arrival of the second group!

To help you select some of the "earlies" to study, here is what our club records reveal about historic arrival dates, with a few miscellaneous comments thrown in:

Yellow-throated Warbler— From March 14. Song is distinctive. Breeds locally.

Jolly Pond is consistently good for early viewing.

Black and White Warbler— From March 28. Works limbs rather than foliage. Song is distinctive, but not loud. Head stripes differentiate from Black-poll, a mid to late April arrival.

Northern Parula— From March 31. Distinctive song. Lots of them.

Louisiana Waterthrush— March 21. Mostly seen on or near the ground in wet places. Distinctive song and call note. Jolly Pond; Hickory Sign Post Road, near bridge.

Ovenbird— From March 23. Rather furtive. Stays on ground, walking. Song is described as "Teacher—Teacher—Teacher", volume increasing.

Yellowthroat— Early March. A few winter here. None on Christmas Count this year, but Anne Smith reported one Jan. 19th. Black domino mask on male is giveaway mark, but can be confused with Kentucky Warbler—a later arrival. Mostly in shrubbery.

Prairie Warbler— March 30. Distinctive song. Likes cut over growth, or "edge" habitat. Stays fairly low; lots of them.

Prothonotary Warbler— April 1. Almost always near water. Loud Song. Jolly Pond usually has early.

White-eyed vireo— April 4, Loud, distinctive and frequent song. Low trees & shrubs.

Yellow-breasted Chat— March 30. Largest warbler. Stays in undergrowth and briar patches. Weird collection of notes & catcalls. Heard more than seen.

Solitary Vireo — Late March. This bird winters north to the Coastal Carolinas. Song similar to Red-eyed Vireo, but "higher, slower, sweeter". Head markings distinctive. Check your guides, for they may not all be Red-eyes.

Palm Warbler — Frequently winters here. Bill Williams found 4 at Cheatham on Dec. 17th (Count Day), and Armour/Sheehan found a dozen there on the 18th. They stay low or on ground, and wag tails up & down when perched.

Pine Warblers are permanent residents, are here all year, and visit some of our feeders (especially suet & peanut butter mixes) all winter. Yellow-rumped Warblers winter with us, but usually head North and West to breed by very early May.

Hope the above helps—or at least whets the appetite!

LOCAL BIRD SIGHTINGS

Two **Field Sparrows** appeared at and about **Brian Taber's** feeder (Druid Hills, J.C.C.) on and after February 21st.

On February 26, **Tom Armour** spotted 25 **Red-breasted Mergansers** on Warehams Pond in Kingsmill. On the same day he observed twenty **Goldeneye** in the James near Kingsmill Marina, and as we spoke on the phone, a pair of **Wood Ducks** whistled by his window.

Charlie Hacker netted and banded a **Nashville Warbler** at his home in Edgehill (York County) on January 23rd. Whether this is the latest or the earliest record is open to debate. The latest date we have is October 13, the earliest is May 1. Thanks, Charlie, for your card with the details.

Bill Snyder celebrated George Washington's real birthday by watching 5 **Wild Turkey** cross the Parkway and slowly disappear into the woods toward the York—just beyond the turnoff from the Parkway to the Victory Center.

A short while earlier, at the confluence of Felgate's Creek and the York, Bill had unlimbered his trusty scope long enough to spot the following:

Goldeneye	6	Hooded Merganser	12
Bufflehead	6	Horned Grebe	1

And high above a magnificent **Bald Eagle** was wheeling about—probably checking Bill's count.

Steve Rottenborn strikes again! Yet another York River **Red-necked Grebe**. This time he found the bird at the first turn-out after you leave the Parkway enroute to the Victory Center.

Julie & Ty Hotchkiss report the following as highlights of their 2-17-90 visit to the Bridge-Tunnel.

Lesser Black-backed Gull	Single bird
Double-crested Cormorants	Long lines, perhaps staging for onward movement
Great Cormorant	A few mixed in and in company with the D.C.'s
Northern Gannet	An estimated 700—feeding
Red-necked Grebe	Two (Did Ty really bring the one from First Colony's Lake Pasbehegh?)
Red-throated Loon	Two
Harlequin Duck	Six
Oldsquaw	Two
Surf Scoter	Two

On March 1, Julie and Ty saw and photographed the **Orange-crowned Warbler** which has been coming to a feeder in the Oyster Point section of Newport News.

Julie also reports that a **Dickcissel** has been visiting Dorothy Mitchell's yard in Newport News at least since the last week in February. Locally, we had only two Dickcissel records in the 80's: in May of '84 on Rt. 614 in the vicinity of Greenspring Plantation site (Fenton Day), and one which visited a feeder at 612 Richmond Road for a few days in March, 1988 (Tom McCary).

On March 2, **Tom Armour** and your Editor visited Sunken Meadows (near Claremont) and Hog Island, with the following partial results:

Sunken Meadows

Tundra Swan	25	Ring-necked Duck	100
Wood Duck	6	Mallard	6
American Wigeon	75	Belted Kingfisher	1
Gadwall	200	Pileated Woodpecker	1

Enroute to the Meadow, two Kestrels and a Red-tailed Hawk showed themselves.

Hog Island

Blue Blue Heron	25	Red-breasted Merganser	45 (Ferry)
Tundra Swan	52	Harrier	1
Canada Goose	2,500	Red-tailed Hawk	1
Green-winged Teal	35	Kestrel	1
Black Duck	45	Killdeer	2
Mallard	200	Great Black-backed Gull	6
American Wigeon	10	Swamp Sparrow	2
Common Merganser	10	Red-winged Blackbird	3,000

On March 3rd, a single Osprey greeted our President at the Kingsmill Marina.

The **Taber** twosome, **Brian** and **John**, checked out the interior parts of Hog Island on 3/4 and came up with some noteworthy species and numbers.

Canada Goose	3,000	Ring-necked Duck	100
Tundra Swan	100	Ruddy Duck	1
Pintail	1,000	Bald Eagle	2
Green-winged Teal	1,000	American Coot	10
Shoveler	6	Brown-headed Nuthatch	20
Gadwall	15	Palm Warbler	1
American Wigeon	50	Yellowthroat	1

Joe and **Grace Doyle** saw three **Tree Swallows** on February 25th at Camp Peary. This is a very early date, and constitutes our only February record!

On March 5th, while playing tennis at Kingspoint, Grace watched two large flocks of **Tundra Swans** fly over in a northerly direction, from the direction of Hog Island. The first flock, of 100, appeared about 11:30 a.m., followed by a flock of 62 almost half an hour later.

Red-headed Woodpecker: Local Favorite

Time to devote a little attention to our Club Logo, and his place in our local universe. We consider this bird to be uncommon, but with Permanent Resident status.

He has been reported from quite a number of local scenes, as the following table will attest.

Kingsmill	York River State Park
Queens Lake	Taylor's Creek, Rt. 107
Lafayette High	Longhill Swamp
Ferncliffe Dr. (JCC)	Mill Creek on Colonial Parkway
Jamestown Island	Rt. 614 (Vic. of Greensprings)
College Woods	Golden Horseshoe Golf Course
Camp Peary	Bassett Woods
Strawberry Plains Road	Williamsburg West
Cheatham Annex	Yarmouth Creek
Jones Mill Pond	Waller Mill Park
First Colony	Bush Neck Road
Hog Island	News Road

On our annual Spring Count Day, we have counted anywhere from 4 to 19, with an average of 10. On the Christmas Counts, we have gone from zero in 1983 (to our collective shame) to 23 just a year earlier—with an average of 8. Both of the above averages are over the past 12 years.

Perhaps we can validate some of the old familiar places this spring, and even add some new ones. All we need is date, place and number. And if it makes you more relaxed, his Latin name is *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*.

Evening Grosbeaks-Scant Pickings 89/90

Early returns in December gave some hope we might enjoy a strong Grosbeak winter—in contrast to the weak patterns of the last few years. Between 02 and 09 January we recorded the following:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Observer</u>	<u>No. of Birds</u>	<u>Location</u>
12/02	Charles Hacker	2	Edgehill, York County
12/09	Martha Armstrong	2	So. Boundary St. Wsbg.
12/10	Julie/Ty Hotchkiss	1	First Colony, JCC
12/14	Tom Armour	1	Kingsmill, JCC
12/15	Bill Williams	2	Deerwood Hills, JCC
12/17	Elsie Campbell	4	Old Quaker Estates, York C.
12/18	Bill Snyder	4	Powhattan Creek, JCC
12/18	B. Pierce (Armour)	12	Kingsmill, JCC
01/09	Jim Kincaid	1	Kingspoint, JCC

Plants to Attract Hummingbirds (and Butterflies)

In about 1986, the State Game Commission (NonGame Program) published a smallish 20-page booklet entitled: *A Planting Guide for Virginia Nectar-Seekers*. While largely oriented to Butterflies, it incorporated the following list of cultivated plants especially recommended for Hummers:

Small Trees

Mimosa (albizzia julibrissin rosea)

Shrubs

Weigelia (weigelia sp)

Honeysuckle shrubs (Tatarian, Siberian or Zabel's)

Butterfly Bush (Buddleia dividi) 'Dubonnet'.

Azalea (Red varieties)

Red Spirea (Spirea sp)

Vines

Trumpet Creeper (campsis radicans) Red or Red-orange

Honeysuckle vines (Lonicera)

Goldflame Honeysuckle vine (Lonicera beckrotti)

Scarlet Honeysuckle vine (scarlet red flowers)

Trumpet Honeysuckle vine (Lonicera sempervirens) 'magnifica'

NOTE: These cultivated vines are not to be confused with the wild pest honeysuckle we so often encounter in our yards.

Clematis vine

'Red Cardinal'

'Niobe'

'Crimson Star'

Perennials

Garden Phlox

Coral Bells (Heuchera)

Bee Balm (Monarda) 'Cambridge Scarlet'

Red Hot Poker (Tritoma)

Hardy Fuschia (F. riccartonii)

Hardy Hibiscus

Hollyhock or Althea (Althea rosea) single flower

Cardinal Flower (Lobelia fulgens)

Columbine (Aquilegia hybrida)

Penstemon

And much more—native plants, plants for specific butterfly species, and helpful hints.

Not sure this is still in print, but a person could inquire of:

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

Jay Mundy on Gill Nets

In the Outdoors page of the Sports Section C of the Daily Press, Sunday, February 25th, Columnist (and outdoorsman) Jay Mundy wrote a meaty column which touched on a number of problems surrounding the presently legal use of gill nets by commercial fisherman.

The main problems involve fish—like catching thousands of pounds of rockfish (striped bass) and then having to destroy them since it is illegal to catch them. But, incident to this and even more chilling to us have to be the following paragraphs.

In addition to the rockfish, hundreds of sea birds such as loons, ducks, and cormorants are caught in the nets. Waterman will tell you that it isn't the monofilament webbing of the net that most often kills or injures these birds, but a waterman's knife.

"These birds twist and turn and become so entangled in the net, the only way to get their feet out is to cut a few strands of webbing—which doesn't hurt the net—or cut off the birds feet," said a fisherman who has witnessed the act many times but asked that his name not be used because he fears reprisals by the offenders.



Deadlines for April FLYER

The April meeting will be on Wednesday, April 18th. It will be helpful if you can get any news or articles to me at 104 Oak Road, Williamsburg, Va. 23185 by April 7th.