



THE FLYER

Volume 15, No. 4

April 1991

Williamsburg Bird Club

Bill Sheehan, Editor (220-2122)

April Events

- Meeting** Wednesday, April 17th, 7:30 pm in Room 117 Millington Hall, on the Campus of William & Mary.
- Program** Ken Clark will share with us the results of his in-depth study of **The Shoreline Feeding Habits of Bald Eagles Along the James River.**
- Spring Bird Count** Our 14th annual Spring Bird Count will take place on Sunday, April 28th. Brian Taber (253-1181) will again be coordinator, and asks that we meet at the CW Information Center Parking Lot—right hand/ East side—by 7:30 a.m. For more information, see March FLYER and page 2 of this issue.

The early Purple Martin "scouts"

should be checking in even before you receive this FLYER. The follow-in birds will be returning in increasing numbers through April, and will normally set up housekeeping starting in late April or early May.

If you have a Martin house, be sure it is clean and otherwise ready to open up as soon as the early birds appear in the area. If you open the apartments up too soon (or leave them open all winter) you may be inviting English Sparrows to pre-empt the Martins!

Coming Attractions

In May, our program will be a double feature by two of our 1990 grant recipients:

Tim O'Connell will give us the results of his studies on the **Effects of Gull Predation on Reproductive Success of Chesapeake Bay Terns.**

Greg Kellor will report his findings on **Reproductive Success and Substrate Selections by the Common Tern and Black Skimmers.**

President's

Corner

For those who were unable to attend our March meeting, I wish to inform you that Fred Blystone was presented a well-deserved gift as a token of our appreciation for his many years of dedicated service. For the past thirteen years Fred has never failed to respond to any request for assistance in club matters.

For a number of years Fred managed the Annual Bird Seed Sale that provides the financing of our research grant, book purchases for the library, and all other club projects. He is also Club Treasurer, and perhaps even more important, is responsible for the production and distribution of our fine monthly newsletter, THE FLYER.

Without Fred's presence our club would not be the same. Many thanks, Fred!

Tom Armour

14th Annual WBC Spring Count

April 28th, a Sunday, has been selected for the date. Brian Taber (253-1181) will again coordinate and would like us to check in with him at the CW Information Center Parking lot by 7:30 a.m. (unless, of course, he has pre-assigned you). Brian emphasizes that we don't all need to be expert birders. To cover all of our areas, we need lots of sharp eyes, acute ears, and good counters. So, come if you can—even for a few hours.

As you may remember from prior years, the Spring Count is patterned after the Christmas Bird Count. We try to flood a specific 15-mile diameter circle (whose center is the CW Information Center) with observers. That circle is divided into 8 sub-areas, and Brian assigns a team to cover each area. These areas are described in the March FLYER.

In past years, our average species count has been 155—ranging from 141 in 1979 to 166 in 1989. Last year we brought in 157—not too bad for an April date.

At 5 p.m. all are invited to the compilation of the area counts—to be held in Room 108 of Millington Hall, on campus.

Special note for feeder-watchers, window watchers, and yardbirders. If your home is within 7-1/2 miles of the CW Information Center, you can help by recording all bird activity around your property on Count Day. Add them up by species and call your totals in to Bill Sheehan (220-2122) between 1:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. Bill will consolidate and report to Brian in time for the 5 p.m. tally. **One rule only: count only the maximum number of each species seen at one time.** This prevents us from counting the same bird over and over again. So, come out if you can. But if not, phone your numbers in to Bill.

Evaluation Committee for Grants to W&M

Each year, our Club endeavors to provide a monetary grant of approximately \$500.00 to assist a student in a research project related to birds. Selection of the project to receive this grant is no easy task, and the President has appointed a very strong and balanced committee to evaluate all proposed projects, and to select and recommend a project for the Club's support. This year the Committee composition is:

Ruth Beck (Chair)
Joe Doyle
Ty Hotchkiss
Allan Sharrett
Marilyn Zeigler

Deadline for submission of Research Project data to the Club is April 15th. Good luck, researchers!

New Members

We would like to welcome the newest members of our Club.

Keith & Judy Kennedy
Rt. 2, Box 926
Quinton, Va. 23141

Cheryl & Tom Varner
119 Druid Drive
Williamsburg, Va. 23185-3239

Larry Ricketts
103 Oak Road
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

Valerie & George Copping
258 E. Queens Drive
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

BIRDS FROM Around the Area

Before we get into the excitement of March, we'll tip our hat to the Bob Glovers—who live in Jamestown Farms—who identified a Painted Bunting at their feeder on February 16th. As far as they know, this was only a one-day performance.

David Martin, who lives in the farther reaches of James City County—near Diascund Reservoir—brought to Tom Armour a small Owl which had been killed the night of 3/9 when it visited his dog enclosure. The common wisdom was, logically, that this was to be a Screech Owl. It wasn't! When Tom got a close look, it was obviously a Saw-Whet Owl—and only the 3rd recorded occurrence of the bird in our area. Our speculation is that this beautiful, tiny Owl entered Mr. Martin's dog enclosure in search of food (either dog food, or a small rodent who was foraging) and was killed by one of his dogs. The carcass was in remarkably good condition and has been turned over to the W&M Biology Department (in frozen condition!) for use as a study skin.

Bill Williams, in his Deerwood Hills neighborhood, found 3 Red-breasted Nuthatches on 3/9 and 1 on 3/10. Bill also picked up 4 Fox Sparrows and 3 Hermit Thrushes on nearby Bushneck Road. Same day (3/10) Joe and Grace Doyle reported 2 Tundra Swans at Camp Peary—

and also 3 Osprey, each attending a nest. Further, they found that up to 10 Evening Grosbeaks had been visiting the feeders of a Peary resident for several weeks.

On 3/11, Armour/Sheehan found 3 pairs of Hooded Mergansers and 2 Hermit Thrushes at Jamestown Island. Same day, Steven Rottenborn roused a Clapper Rail at Felgate's Creek on the Parkway along the York. Steve had previously reported Gannets in the York, east of the Coleman Bridge. He augmented those with sightings of 20 on 3/1 and 3 on 3/11. Dr. Byrd chipped in with 3 on 3/3. Steve has a research project going on the Eastern Shore in which he is examining the feeding habits of shorebirds in relation to local agriculture usage. He found in one field—adjacent to the water—1750 Dunlin and 375 Black-bellied Plovers foraging all at once. Hope we'll have a report on Steve's findings upon completion of his research.

The Hotchkisses found a dozen Wild Turkey near Sherwood Forest Plantation on 3/12, and on the same day, a Brown Creeper turned up in Bill Snyder's yard. Jean Rend, patrolling the Country Road, identified a very early Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

Steve and Dr. Hall's Ornithology class visited Hog Island on 3/14 and turned up 14 varieties of waterfowl! 700 Mallards headed the list, with

300 Green-winged Teal, 200 Pintail, 100 American Wigeon, and lesser quantities of others—including a single Snow Goose and a single Blue-winged Teal. The resident Cooper's Hawk put in a welcome appearance for the class. But that isn't all: near Chippokes, they saw Rusty Blackbirds, and a field full of Ring-billed Gulls—plus a rare (for us) Lesser Black-backed Gull. Not content with that, the ferry trip (one way or the other) brought a Laughing Gull and 175 Bonaparte's Gulls doing a little fishing. Quite a Trip!

Fox Sparrows have been popping up in lots of places. Bob Morris at Kingsmill has from 1 to 6 almost daily. Several other folks have reported single birds on an intermittent basis. This gorgeous bird, our largest sparrow, is strictly a ground feeder, and rather furtive. On 3/15, Tom A. had a female Purple Finch and a Hairy Woodpecker.

On the Bay-Bridge Tunnel (Island #4) Brian Patteson came up with a rare California Gull and took its picture a few times. This was on 3/16, and I don't know whether the bird was seen again. Bill Williams and Steve R. failed to find it on 3/17. The bird is so rare in Virginia that the Virginia Society of Ornithology considers it as "hypothetical". Brian's photos, if conclusive, could change that to "accidental".

Then came the Brown Pelicans; three appeared at the KM Marina on St. Patrick's Day; two were seen later that day by

Charles Rend in the James off the marina while he was checking out a new scope. Meanwhile, five appeared in the York River off Cheatham Annex (Doyles). Next day, back at KM, Armour saw five early and David Martin counted a whopping twenty-five late on the 18th.

Back to the 17th, Julie & Ty watched 8 Red-necked Grebes working down the James in a loose group. A few members called to report increased activity among Common Grackles, Red-winged Blackbirds and Cowbirds in their yards and at feeders.

Dr. Gus Hall and his Ornithology class squeezed into the Editor's kitchen on the 19th—to check out the feeders. Some of the small birds came out in good numbers to greet them—notably Pine Siskins, Goldfinches in all phases of molt, a pair of Purple Finches to compare with House Finches at very close hand, some Towhees, a rather sprightly Downy Woodpecker, various shades of Pine Warblers, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet and a few others.

On 3/20, Tom, Homer Jones and I made a run around Jamestown Island and down the Jamestown end of the Parkway. The Island gave up two Red-headed Woodpeckers and unusually large concentrations of White-throated Sparrows. The Parkway produced 3 Osprey over the James, a Virginia Rail at the College Creek turnout, and a very vocal Phoebe by the bridge over Halfway Creek.

Barry Ensley called in mid-

March to report an Orange-crowned Warbler at his feeder (in Grafton, near the Harwood's Mill Reservoir) almost daily since early January. Forgot to ask you what the bird is taking from your menu, Barry.

In Kingsmill on 3/20, a pair of Pied-billed Grebes appeared in Kingsmill Pond and the next day turned out to be a good one for Tom A. That morning, a Lesser Black-backed Gull showed up at the Kingsmill Marina, in company with Greater Black-backed Gulls, Herring Gulls, Ring-billed Gulls and Laughing Gulls. 25 Royal Terns and 2 Caspians completed the scene. The Lesser Black-backed Gull was still there on the 22nd (Steve R) and 23rd (Julie Hotchkiss).

Chipping Sparrows were present on 3/21. Homer Jones found one near Queen's Lake, and two showed up at one of the Editor's feeders. Homer also noted two Bald Eagles over the Parkway—west of the Weapons Station.

Rusty Blackbirds showed up on 3/22 for Brian Taber at Jolly Pond and on Hickory Signpost Road—off Rt. 5. Same day, Steve R. saw a Louisiana Waterthrush at Jolly Pond. Early Purple Martins appeared on 3/23: one on the house in front of the library for Brian; one at Hog Island for the WBC field trip. On 3/24, two passed over Brian's house while he was spotting high-flying migrating (mostly) raptors. And on that score, Brian scored: 1 Eagle; 1 Osprey; 1 Harrier; 8

Sharp-shinned Hawks, 6 Kestrels and a Red-tail. Watch, out, Kiptopeke.

On 3/24, the Doyles visited Camp Peary and came up with a real fine mix: 4 Brown Pelicans, flying west low over the York; one Wild Turkey—a full-bearded Tom; a Martin; 4 Phoebe's; 1 Red-breasted Nuthatch; and a House Wren. Duck numbers were way down, but Ring-necks, Wigeon, Bufflehead, Lesser Scaup and Canvasback persist in token quantities.

From Barhamsville, Ruth Beck reports a Yellow-throated Warbler on Sunday, 3/24. Five more at Jolly Pond on 3/25, singing away for Armour & Sheehan. Two Louisiana Waterthrushes also showed. And Tom's Lesser Black-backed Gull posed for him at the KM Mariana—from a distance. Last day bird was seen: 3/26.

Hotchkiss local safari to Craney Island on 3/25 netted (figuratively) 130 Brown Pelicans, 2 Avocets and a Horned Lark. On, then, to Bay Bridge Tunnel which presented lots of Gannets, 5 Oldsquaw, Oystercatches, Great Cormorants and a Lesser Black-backed Gull. Somewhat out of place were a Field Sparrow and a House Finch.

Bill Williams checked out Buzzard's Bay (in the Chickahominy) and found 2 Shovelers, a pair of Blue-winged Teal and 10 Common Mergansers. Date was 3/24, and closer to home Bill saw and heard an early Black and White Warbler!

On 3/26, Rottenborn saw/heard Yellow-throated War-

blers and Louisiana Waterthrushes at Lake Matoaka. Julie and Ty found 2 Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers and 5 Red-headed Woodpeckers on Jamestown Island.

On 3/27 a large female Sharp-shinned Hawk lunched on a Mourning Dove in Tom's backyard—right in front of the whole Armour tribe, including grandchildren. Same thing happened next day—without the large audience. Tom now is down to 10 doves.

Gnatcatchers popping up all over: 2 in Hollybrook (Rottenborn); 3 at Kingsmill (TA); Camp Peary (Doyles); Barhamsville (Beck)—all between 3/27 and 4/1. Tom saw 8 Red-breasted Mergansers on 3/28 off KM.

Julie/Ty saw a single Common Loon on Diascund Reservoir on 3/28, and Armour found groups of 5 and 11 on the James on 3/30. Steve had a few on the York, but the exact date escapes me. On 3/30, Marilyn Zeigler (fresh from 234 species! in Costa Rica) came home to Queens Lake in time to greet 7 Purple Finches. Same day, Bob Morris met about 100 Bonaparte's Gulls near KM Marina.

Doyles had a long, close look at a Black-crowned Night Heron early on 3/31, at KM. Also saw a few Barn Swallows. Then on to Camp Peary for Chipping Sparrows, a Kestrel, a Harrier and a few Bonaparte's Gulls! Grace reports large groups of Ruddy Ducks in the York, with some small representation of Canvasbacks and at least 2 Red-

head Ducks. Ruth Beck closed out March with a calling Whip-Poor-Will on the evening of 3/31—in Barhamsville.

April should be even more wondrous! And as I write, Tom reports (no April Fool) that a Lesser Black-backed Gull is again on station at Kingsmill Marina. April 2 brought a single Cattle Egret to the little intermittent wet spot in the pasture at Drummonds Field.

And then Bill Williams took a few days off. On April 2, out his way on Bushneck Road, he found an Ovenbird, a White-eyed Vireo, a Winter Wren, a Pine Warbler carrying nesting material, a few Palm Warblers, two Black & White Warblers and a Cooper's Hawk. Eleanor & John Hertz, on April 3, saw 2 Common Loons way over at Little Creek and some Gnatcatchers along the parkway.

On April 4th, I was rewarded with a bright, shiny male Hummingbird. My feeder was in place. Same day, Tom spotted a Fox Sparrow in my yard. He also saw six **baby** Wood Ducks on Kingsmill Pond, and 33 Bonaparte's Gulls at his marina.

Mark Trail Rides Again

On February 10th, the Washington Post discontinued from its comic pages *Mark Trail*.

Some 16,000 irate letters and phone calls later, the Post said "Uncle", and our conservation-minded hero, Mr. Trail, and his playmates will return to the Post on March 29th. Not only that, but the Post will publish 42 strips in order to bring us up to date during the missing seven weeks. Thank you, POST!

Hi-Way Clean Up Time

Bill Davies has selected Saturday, April 20th as our 4th litter pickup of the 2 mile section of Route 5 from Five Forks to Greensprings Road (Rt 614). In you can spare him an hour or two, please meet by 8 am in the "back" of the Colony Square parking lot on Jamestown Road. This is where Nick's Market holds forth, and for our purposes the "back" of the lot is next to Jamestown Road—where we used to pick up our bird seed. Please call Bill at 253-1461 if you can help, or for further information. Rain date would be Saturday, April 27th. Please try to help! Thanks

March WBC Field Trip

Tom Armour headed a scouting party of WBC birders across the James to Hog Island on 3/23. Joy Archer, Julie Hotchkiss, Emily Sharrett, Bill Davies and Grant Olson participated in a very fruitful (or birdful) morning. Seventy species is pretty heady, and here are some highlights.

Pied-billed Grebe	1	Cooper's Hawk	1
Great Egret	1	Red-shouldered Hawk	1
Tundra Swan	75	Red-tailed Hawk	1
Green-winged Teal	400	Kestrel	7
Pintail	1	American Coot	50
Shoveler	15	Greater Yellowlegs	8
Am. Wigeon	10	Lesser Yellowlegs	3
Ring-necked Duck	250	Pectoral Sandpiper	6
Bufflehead	50	Royal Tern	10
Hooded Merganser	10	Belted Kingfisher	6
Ruddy Duck	6	Phoebe	3
Bald Eagle	1	Purple Martin	1
Harrier	1	Tree Swallow	50
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	Brown-headed Nuthatch	6

Looks as though the other hundred of us missed a good one!



Good Deeds and Generous People

Grant Olson and Tom Armour, in a joint effort with Southern States Cooperative, replaced a defective pole to the Martin house in front of the store. Even as they worked—and even as the house was lowered—about 10 Martins chirped out encouragement! Goodlads, Grant and Tom!

Dur Morton, who at the March meeting gave us a most instructive insight into the Maine Puffin colony, has most generously donated his \$50.00 speaking fee to the Club to be used in support of the Hampton Roads Waterfowl Rescue Program.

George and Valerie Copping, owners of Wild Birds Unlimited at 1441 Richmond Road, were most kind to supply the club, at cost, a Purple Martin house, which we are donating to The Nature Conservancy for installation on the Eastern Shore. If you haven't visited the store yet, you ought to. In addition to seed, they have a very good selection of feeders, houses, and other nature related gifts.

VSO Annual Meeting— May 3-5, 1991

The Monticello Bird Club in Charlottesville will host the 57th Annual Meeting of the Virginia Society of Ornithology, Friday afternoon through Sunday, May 3rd, 4th and 5th.

Friday events include exhibitions, briefings on prospective field trips, and a lecture by Dr. Lesley Lanyon, Curator of Birds Emeritus of the American Museum of Natural History. Saturday will feature a wide selection of field trips, and the presentation of professional papers during the day. In the evening, there will be social hour, awards banquet, and a program by Dr. J. P. Meyers on the *Future of Birds and Birding*. Dr. Meyers was a Senior Vice-President for Science at the national Audubon Society from 1987 to 1990. He is currently the Director of the W. Alton Jones Foundation. Sunday morning will provide more field trips, with a check-out time of 12 noon. Days Hotel (804) 977-7700 or (800) 325-2525 will provide special rates.

If you are interested, call Tom Armour, Ruth Beck, Bill Williams, Brian Taber or Bill Sheehan. They have more detailed information and may be able to provide answers to questions on registration, hotel rates, meals, programs, etc.

Kiptopeke Hawk Count - Fall 1990

Bill Williams has delivered the following letter to Tom Armour in Tom's capacity as Club President:

March 5, 1991

Dear Tom,

Enclosed please find a summary of the Fall 1990 Kiptopeke Hawk Count. As a result of the Williamsburg Bird Club's financial assistance, I was able to complete 162.5 observation hours in 18 days between September 1 and October 28, 1990. Over all, the count covered 470.5 hours in 63 days tallying 11,611 raptors.

I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to the Bird Club for their assistance. Quite honestly had it not been for this partial funding of my expenses, I could not have put in the time I did at Kiptopeke.

I have submitted a proposal to present the Kiptopeke data at a symposium on the Eastern Shore's natural resources. The Bird Club will be fully recognized when and if any publication of the data occurs.

Sincerely,
Bill Williams

Bill's numbers are summarized below, with species listed in order of numbers of birds observed:

Sharp-shinned Hawk	4,629	Turkey Vulture	227
American Kestrel	2,779	Red-tailed Hawk	193
Osprey	1,097	Red-shouldered Hawk	46
Cooper's Hawk	678	Black Vulture	34
Broad-winged Hawk	496	Bald Eagle	23
Merlin	495	Golden Eagle	2
Peregrine Falcon	449	Rough-legged Hawk	1
Northern Harrier	285		

11,000+

There were 183 unidentified raptors.

Important Miscellaneous Items

Alice Springe checked the shelves of the library recently to see what bird-related video tapes were available: five videos comprise the *Audubon Society Guide to Birds of North America*. Each video contains identification and range data of from 80 to 116 birds—totally 500 species for the whole set. Each video tape is from 75 to 94 minutes. Volume I, for instance, depicts 116 Loons, Geese, Ducks, Swans, and Raptors. And, locally speaking, about 15 of Tom Armour's slides are included but not attributed to him. Another video of special interest is *Attracting Birds to Your Backyard*, with Roger Tory Peterson and narrated by naturalist Michael Godfrey.

Julie Hotchkiss has an article in the April edition of the magazine *Trailer Life*. It is a saga of an early Swedish settlement (circa 1846) in Julie's home area of western Illinois. The name of the village is Bishop Hill, and Julie describes its origins, as well as how it has retained its original values through the years. Julie's home town (Galva, IL) is only 6 miles away, and she treats her subject with a warm sense of personal involvement.

A baby Condor was born on 3/18 at the San Diego Zoo. No vital stats are available.

The Owl Prowl following the March meeting attracted a caravan of 8 cars, containing about 25 hard-case owlers. According to the head owl, Steve Rottenborn, two Great-horned Owls spoke up on Treasure Island Road, and two Barred Owls gave a hoot at Jolly Pond. One of them was kind enough to pose! Screech Owls chose not to speak, which was a prudent decision in view of the fact that both of the larger Owls find the Screech Owls very tasty, Ruth Beck sez!

Joe Doyle (who chairs our Bluebird Committee) has arranged for the fabrication and assembly of a limited number of Bluebird nesting boxes. These will be available to Club members at the amazingly low price of \$7.00 each. If you are interested, call Joe at 220-3498 or Tom Armour at 229-2363 for information on where and when to pick up. Limit will be two boxes per member to ensure maximum distribution.

Hummingbird feeders should be polished up and filled. Azaleas are already popping, and the honeysuckle group will soon entice them into our yards.

Birds from Afar

Birding in Costa Rica with Marilyn Zeigler & Ruth Beck

Costa Rica features a wonderful variety of environments in a mountainous country the size of West Virginia. From March 5th thru the 18th a group of 15 led by Jerry Via and Bill Akers saw 330 species of birds there.

First stop was deep in wet Caribbean-slope jungle at 2000 feet. The trip in Rara Avis featured a 4 1-/2 ride in a cart pulled by a tractor across two rivers and up a corduroy road—a vivid experience! When one arrived, walking in deep mud made every step an adventure. The bird highlights of this area were: Solitary Eagle; Bay Wren; a rare gem, the Emerald Tanager and 8 other tanagers; a pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamars; Lattice-tailed Trogon which posed admirably; Squirrel cuckoo; King Vulture; Common Pauraque; Collared Aracari; and Chestnut-mandibled Toucan.

Over in the northwest Pacific lowlands, in dry forest and farmland, were the Double-striped Thick-knee; Laughing Falcon; Turquoise-browed Motmot; along a stream were elusive Boat-billed Herons. A troop of howler monkeys observed the bird-watchers. (Hard-core people listers, no doubt)

Spectacular roads led to Monteverde Cloud Forest at 4500 feet, and later, above the timberline on the Pan American Highway (over 10,000 feet), into another forest of dwarf bamboo. From that height one descended a twisty incline to San Gerardo, a farm in a high valley. In Monteverde the day began with a feisty Emerald Toucanet; later appeared a courting pair of Three-wattled Bellbirds; and a Resplendent Quetzal who swirled his tail streamers in public for 15-20 minutes. In San Gerardo seven more Quetzals underscored this performance, feeding in fruit trees. Other highland specialties:

Black Guan; Prong-billed Barbet; 11 species of hummingbirds; Mountain Robin; Golden-browed Chlorophonia; Long-tailed and Black-and-Yellow Silky-flycatchers; and Timberline Wren. A kettle of Swallowtailed Kites soared overhead.

One evening by a Pacific beach 16 Scarlet Macaws arrived in pairs just at sunset. And there had been 4 species of kingfishers; 2 species of Motmots; Lineated and Pale-billed Woodpeckers on the same beach; also 6 toucans; 24 sorts of flycatchers; and 22 kinds of tanagers.

Costa Rica is to be applauded for setting aside large chunks of territory as national parks and preserves, although they are hard-pressed financially to maintain them. Often we had seen familiar North American warblers, Wilson's and Chestnut-sided especially, and were reminded of the fragile long-range relationship when "our" birds migrate thousands of miles to a country like Costa Rica which continues to be deforested at a worrisome rate.

(Ed note: our thanks to Marilyn and Ruth for this nifty summary of their adventures)

Please send any news or articles
for future issues of the FLYER to
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104 Oak Road, Williamsburg,
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or call **220-2122**