



# THE FLYER

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January 1991

Williamsburg Bird Club

Bill Sheehan, Editor (220-2122)

## January Events

**Meeting:** Wednesday, January 16th, 7:30 pm in Room 117, Millington Hall, on the Campus of William & Mary.

**Program:** Dr. Gustav W. Hall will present a slide and lecture program on the subject of Greece and Turkey. A member of WBC, Dr. Hall is Professor of Biology at the College, and conducts classes in both Botany and Ornithology.

**Field Trip:** The January field trip will be Saturday, January 19th. Tom Armour will lead, and we will travel the Colonial Parkway, with multiple stops at selected turnouts. Very little walking is involved in this one, yet it offers a great chance to observe ducks, gulls, raptors and whatever other avian surprises may reveal themselves. Tom will bring his scope and some bird tapes. Sounds like a great way to start another wonderous year of birding. Meet at **8:00 a.m.** at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center Parking lot (East side).

## Bay Bridge Tunnel Users

Through the years, the Bay Bridge Tunnel Authority has been most cooperative with local birders in allowing access to specified areas. Recently, the Tunnel police have reported more and more instances wherein birders (not identified) have abused the privilages by blatantly disregarding safety signs and climbing inand around unauthorized areas. More recently, and even more disturbing, are police reports that several prime offenders have given verbal abuse to the police.

According to David Hughes and Bettye Fields, the Authority may rescind priviliges now accorded us if violations of Bridge Tunnel regulations continue.

## Important!

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

## Coming Attractions

Cindy Carlson and Rich Goll will share their experiences on a **Safari through Kenya**—February 20th.

Duryea Morton will introduce us to the **Puffin Colony at the Maine Audubon Camp**. Dur once served as a director of the camp while in the employ of the National Audubon Society—March 19th.

Ken Clark, a 1990 recipient of a WBC grant, will tell of the **Shoreline Feeding Habits of Bald Eagles Along the James River**—April 17th.

## President's Corner

At the start of this New Year I'd like to thank all the club officers, directors, committee chairmen and members for all their efforts last year that resulted in a very successful year for the club.

Any suggestions by members for new club activities, or efforts that might enhance the club's operation, conservation and environmental efforts during the coming year will be most welcome.

I hope the New Year will be a happy one for all members, producing many good bird events and another successful year for the club!

*Tom Armour*



Ruth Beck has recently become only the second person in Virginia to receive the Commander's Award for Public Service. The award was under auspices of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in recognition of her work in the protection and management of Least Terns at Craney Island. In her work at Craney, Ruth has attained and maintained a delicate balance between the peculiar requirements of a tenuous species of breeding birds, and the sometimes contrary mission of the Corps of Engineers in accepting and managing vast quantities of dredged material with minimal disruption of fragile nesting areas.

H. H. Bailey, of Newport News, in his classic *Birds of Virginia*, published in 1913, says this of the Least Tern:

*Formerly one of our most abundant of sea-birds, this beautiful little tern is now (1913) almost extinct as a breeding bird on our coast. In 1889 these birds were so numerous that a large colony were breeding at the entrance of Back River into the Chesapeake Bay. Shortly after this, the slaughter commenced; the birds being shot and skinned for the millinery trade . . . . During the breeding season on the islands (ed. note: Va. barrier islands) sometimes three to five hundred birds were shot in a single day.* Bailey continues to say that the slaughter went on for a few years until the "market gunners" could no longer make a living shooting and skinning the birds at the 10 cents paid by the wholesale millinery houses.

In our area, as late as the early 1960's 30 or 40 pair nested on the beach where College Creek enters the James. At that time, the Park Service significantly altered the beach and shoreline to enhance visibility from the Colonial Parkway—or so we are told—and the Least Terns were unable to adjust.

Cheers for Mrs. Beck, a founding member of WBC, our president on several occasions, and a great lady. **We're proud of you, Ruth!**

## Julie Hotchkiss Writes Again!

Julie (our Program Chairman and First Vice President) has a superb article in the Jan/Feb issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest*. The title is "Catesby's Virginia"—and it's a marvelous treatment of mid-eighteenth century Williamsburg through the eyes of naturalist Mark Catesby. The subject is very personal to Julie, because she and Ty put together the CW sponsored film "The Colonial Naturalist"—a film which is still correct, and which many of us have enjoyed a number of times. **Bravo Julie!**

If you don't take the *Bird Watcher's Digest*, try a friend who does—or the Library—or contact the magazine at P.O. Box 110, Marietta, Ohio 45750. Subscription rates are:

One Year (6 issues) - \$15.00  
Two Years (12 issues) - \$27.00  
Three Years (18 issues) - \$39.00

## Still Some Seed Available

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

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

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## Local Stuff

On December 5th an American Crow found Bill Snyder's new peanut-buttered pine cone, and partook heartily. This was not one of the species which Bill invited, and the Crow was indeed lucky that he didn't become a wall-hanging in Bill's study.

Steve Rottenborn flushed a Woodcock from the Pop Lab on S. Henry Street on 12/6. He also reported that a flock of about 200 Rusty Blackbirds was using the woods behind his dormitory as a roost area.

On the 8th, Mandy Marvin watched what she believed to be a Cooper's Hawk feast on a Common Grackle—right behind her residence on South Henry Street. Same day, Bill Williams observed a Cooper's Hawk at Drummond's Field—and the Hotchkisses saw one at First Colony. Earlier that day at Hog Island, Williams counted one each of Merlin, Harrier, Kestrel and Sharp-shin. Brian Taber appears to have a resident Sharp-shin in Druid Hills, and I seem to have one in Hollybrook. We may be sharing the same bird, since we live but a short "hawk-mile" apart.

Early on the 9th, I watched 4 Brown Creepers working the oak trees in my yard, and one was occasionally singing. First one I had heard (and watched) sing other than in the spring. Bluebirds continue to visit my uncovered feeders daily—up to 5 at a time. They take only the peanut bits, yet I have never seen one take peanut butter from my large pine cone.

Bill Williams has had as many as 24 Evening Grosbeaks in Deerwood Hills—from the 8th on. Brian T. had 2 Fox Sparrows in his yard on the 8th and 9th. Usually it takes a snow to bring these beautiful birds to our yards. Tom Armour has been getting a female Purple Finch and a couple Siskins almost daily. Tom had a Phoebe in his yard at Kingsmill on the 12th, and Steve Rottenborn spotted one in Hollybrook on the 13th. Steve also spotted a dozen Waxwings in my largest Holly on the 13th, and a flock of about 10 visited First Colony (Hotchkiss) on the 14th. At Jamestown Island on the 12th, Armour spotted 2 Evening Grosbeaks, 2 Sapsuckers (one was pecking away at persimmons), 4 Red-headed Woodpeckers, both Kinglets and about 60 Blue Jays—foraging in small groups of 3 or 4. Ruby-crowned Kinglets are starting to come to feeders (pine cone types, at least) for peanut butter and for small bits of suet. Same pattern with Pine Warblers—at least in First Colony and Hollybrook.

About December 10th, Billy Hynes saw a Barn Owl fairly near his duck blind where the Barn Owls tried to raise a family last summer.

On 12/13, while exercising his young bird dog, Dick Mahone saw a Kestrel, a Sharp-shinned and a Red-tailed Hawk. To cap that, an adult Bald Eagle first posed in a large treetop, and then took off in magnificent flight. Dick wondered just how big that wingspread is, so we did a little research:

<u>Species</u>	<u>Wingspread</u>
Bald Eagle	72" to 90"
Turkey Vulture	68" to 72"
Great Blue Heron	? to 84"
Great Black-backed Gull	60" to 66"
Great Horned Owl	48" to 60"
Red-tailed Hawk	48" to 58"
American Crow	33" to 40"
Mockingbird	13" to 15"
Chickadee	7-1/2" to 8-1/2"
Hummingbird	3" to 3-3/4"

December 23rd, brought a female Sharpie to Tom Armour's yard, and a Wood Duck to Kingsmill Pond. And we couldn't find a single Wood Duck on Christmas Count Day! Tom also saw 15 Laughing Gulls and a dozen Forsters Terns near the Kingsmill marina.

A single Red-breasted Nuthatch slipped through my backyard on the 23rd. The bird was quite vocal, and did not approach my free lunch counters at any time. First one I have heard and seen since late November. Same date, Julie Hotchkiss reports 3 Evening Grosbeaks at a neighbor's feeder in First Colony.

Larry Ricketts reported over 100 Cedar Waxwings eating berries from his American Holly trees in his yard on Oak Road—Dec. 30th.

Armour had a Sharp-shinned Hawk in his yard on 12/29, 12/30, and New Year's Day. At least 2 different birds. Also on 1/1 Tom had 2 Red-shouldered Hawks in sight at the time time. One was on his suet feeder. I (Sheehan) had a Red-shoulder at my suet for over 20 minutes on 12/30. The 1/2 inch wire made him work for every bite. Bird was an immature. Tom also saw a single Coot on Kingsmill Pond on 12/30.

Meanwhile, Bill Williams reports a Winter Wren out his way on Bush Neck Road, and a single Tree Sparrow at Hog Island on 12/31—same place as in prior years. However, when Bill tried to "shush" it up on New Years Day, the bird refused to play. Also on 1/1 Bill saw 2 Brown Pelicans over the York off of Indian Field Creek. At home, Bill still had a few Evening Grosbeaks and Purple

Finches through 1990.

Tom and your editor toured the Outer Loop at Jamestown Island on 12/30; 2 Red-tails, an eagle, 4 Red-headed Woodpeckers and some Brown-headed Nuthatches in a pine tree. Supporting cast included Jays, both Kinglets, a Pileated and lots of Towhees, Cardinals and Juncos.

On January 2, a Cooper's Hawk perched for Julie Hotchkiss and friends—right in her First Colony backyard.

January 3 brought a Golden-eye to the James in back of the Hotchkiss menage. Julie & Ty then checked out the York and saw good-sized rafts of Ruddys and Canvasbacks. They seem to favor the York year after year. Wonder why. Anyway, Doyles also report continued concentrations of Ruddys and Canvasbacks in the York —off Camp Peary. Doyles also saw 16 Ring-neck Ducks on Kingsmill Pond on 1/3, and a Red-tailed Hawk hassling a Red-shouldered.

Hotchkisses visited Stoneybrook section of Newport News recently and saw 7 or 8 Monk Parakeets flying about. There has been a small colony in that area for a number of years—since the escape from captivity of a pair owned by a local resident. My good friend Hugh Rutledge lives in Stoneybrook and told me they were nesting in a Martin house last year, and had taken it over. At that time Hugh had up to 11 birds at his feeders—for sunflower, cracked corn and fruit, as I remember it. The Monks are South American birds, and were heavily imported here as cage birds in the 60's and probably later.

## Away from Home

At Craney Island on 12/6, Steve Rottenborn saw an Eared Grebe, the resident Rock Wren and a Snow Bunting. Enroute to N.C., Julie and Ty Hotchkiss stopped in at Craney on the 10th. The Rock Wren was still there, as was a Rough-legged Hawk. The travelling Hotchkisses then went south to the Edenton area, where at the Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge, they reported the astounding estimated number of **60,000** Tundra Swans! Wish someone would ask Ty how long it took to count them. Not too far from there, on a large lake in Pettigrew State Park (N.C.) they saw about 100 Common Loons.

At Buckroe Beach on 12/8, Bill Williams spotted an Eared Grebe. Taber and Armour also found it, next day.

Reaching back into November, Amanda Allen was at home in Annapolis for Thanksgiving. She was working with horses on a farm very near the Bay Bridge when...but let Amanda tell it.

"I had an immature Bald Eagle stop by on a dead walnut snag, then fly right overhead. As I watched, a mature Eagle came up in the rear! they perched in a tree in the pasture for about 20 minutes, tormented by the crows—while I completely ignored the poor horses and ran to the car for the binocs! What a treat! Bald Eagles used to nest in the woods there—but no one had seen one at the farm in years." Good show, Amanda. Our thanks to you.

(continued on page 7)

## **WBC Christmas Count**

On Sunday, December 16th, Brian Taber and 25 stalwart birders infiltrated the greater Williamsburg area. Some few started well before dawn to exchange hoots with owls; others scoured the marshes, foraged in the fields, scanned the skies, watched the waters, and walked through the woods. They challenged and recorded each avian challenge. Meanwhile, back on the homefront, ten of us were also watching and counting the birds in our yards and at our feeders.

The happy result of this truly group effort was a total species count of 111 species—over 22,000 individual birds. While not a record year (115) we had a good, solid, better than average (107) count. Perhaps the single highlight was the **Solitary Vireo** found by Cindy Carlson and Rich Goll. This is a first ever for our Christmas Counts, though the Solitary is known to winter north into coastal North Carolina. A golden feather for Cindy and Rich.

**See the complete species list on page 6**

### **CBC** Participants in our Count effort were:

#### Shock Troops

Joy Archer  
Tom Armour  
Ruth Beck  
Jeanne Burge  
Fred Blystone  
Cindy Carlson  
Pat Crizer  
Grace Doyle  
Joe Doyle  
Bettye Fields  
Rich Goll  
Julie Hotchkiss  
Ty Hotchkiss

Teta Kain  
Tom McCary  
Nancy McDaniels  
Marty McDonald  
Mandy Marvin  
Dorothy Mitchell  
Bob Morris  
Mary Pulley  
Steve Rottenborn  
Dot Silsby  
Brian Taber  
Bill Williams  
Marilyn Zeigler

#### Home Guard

Jeanne Armour  
Amy Campbell  
Cynthia Long  
Dur Morton  
Grant Olson  
Bill Sheehan  
Peg Smith  
Alice Springer  
Rodney Taylor  
Suzy Woodall

During the count, our stellar group of feeder-watchers called in 31 different species totalling almost 300 individual birds. The top ten went like this:

House Finch	46	American Crow	18
Dark-eyed Juncos	44	Mourning Dove	17
Titmouse	20	Carolina Wren	16
Carolina Chickadee	19	Blue Jay	14
Goldfinch	19	Evening Grosbeak	11

Our **special** thanks go to our good friends and neighbors of the Hampton Roads Bird Club who provided welcome expertise. Their CBC was on Saturday, December 15th—the day before ours. They had bad luck on the weather, especially in the morning when the rains came, but they still managed 111 species—below their usual standard. Since we also managed to record 111, I took a nose count and found that each of us found 26 species which the other Club didn't have! That's a 23% differential, and would give us a grand area total of 137 species. Anyone who wishes to know the specific species involved, please call me—220-2122.

## Williamsburg Bird Club 1990 Christmas Bird Count

Loon, Common	7	Killdeer	31	Bluebird, Eastern	242
Grebe, Pied-billed	12	Snipe, Common	1	Thrush, Hermit	7
Horned	75	Woodcock, American	1	Robin, American	159
Cormorant, D.C.	325	Gull, Laughing	6	Catbird, Grey	1
Heron, Great Blue	106	Bonaparte's	29	Mockingbird, Northern	64
Swan, Tundra	156	Ring-billed	1,440	Thrasher, Brown	10
Mute	3	Herring	367	Pipit, Water	47
Goose, Snow	18	Great Black-backed	115	Waxwing, Cedar	98
Canada	2,040	Tern, Forster's	51	Starling, European	894
Teal, Green-winged	472	Dove, Rock	115	Vireo, Solitary	1
Duck, Black	546	Mourning	349	Warbler, Yellow-rumped	492
Mallard	488	Screech Owl	1	Pine	12
Pintail, Northern	105	Owl, Great Horned	8	Palm	4
Gadwall	14	Barred	1	Cardinal, Northern	245
Wigeon, American	44	Kingfisher, Belted	32	Towhee, Rufous-sided	96
Canvasback	2,649	Woodpecker, Red-headed	22	Sparrow, Chipping	14
Redhead	4	Red-bellied	105	Field	103
Duck, Ring-necked	194	Sapsucker, Yellow-bellied	20	Savannah	40
Scaup, Lesser	54	Woodpecker, Downy	66	Fox	4
Goldeneye, Common	75	Hairy	12	Song	325
Bufflehead	238	Flicker, Northern	177	Swamp	66
Merganser, Hooded	287	Woodpecker, Pileated	51	White-throated	267
Duck, Ruddy	2,873	Phoebe, Eastern	11	White-crowned	1
Vulture, Black	15	Jay, Blue	214	Junco, Dark-eyed	606
Turkey	111	Crow, American	309	Bunting, Snow	2
Eagle, Bald	9	Fish	29	Blackbird, Red-winged	2,124
Harrier	2	Chickadee, Carolina	201	Meadowlark, Eastern	139
Hawk, Sharp-shinned	11	Titmouse, Tufted	148	Blackbird, Rusty	1
Cooper's	1	Nuthatch, Red-breasted	4	Grackle, Common	111
Red-shouldered	9	White-breasted	86	Cowbird, Brown-headed	37
Red-tailed	19	Brown-headed	45	Finch, Purple	15
Kestrel, American	15	Creeper, Brown	17	House	212
Merlin	1	Wren, Carolina	228	Siskin, Pine	7
Turkey, Wild	3	House	2	Goldfinch, American	256
Bobwhite	51	Winter	13	Grosbeak, Evening	12
Rail, Clapper	9	Marsh	4	Sparrow, House	56
Coot, American	2	Kinglet, Golden-crowned	115		
		Ruby-crowned	43		

## Away from Home

(continued from Page 4)

Bob and Dona Morris, from their home in Gleneden Beach, Oregon, report many thousands of ducks along their local Pacific Coast, along with Eared and Western Grebes, several varieties of Loons, Snow Buntings, Long-billed Curlew, Red-necked Phalarope, Peregrine Falcon, and other less spectacular species.

Bill Williams reported a "bunch" of White-crowned Sparrows at Shirley Plantation on 1/1, and 3 Wild Turkeys near Sunken Meadows (Claremont area).

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## New Members

At this time we would like to welcome the following new members.

Charles & Jean Rend  
109 John Bratton  
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

Marie Hodges  
P.O. Box 1400  
Gloucester Point, Va. 23062

Amanda Allen  
CS 1331, William & Mary  
Williamsburg, Va. 23186

Jack & Lucile Van Horn  
200 Governors Drive  
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

Mr. & Mrs. Duryea Morton  
1111 Helmsley Road  
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

## Miscellaneous Matters

We asked our astute Political Staff Writer, who astutely declines to be identified, if he could summarize the reasons behind the strong repeat showing of the Armour Administration. "Simple" he said. "Armour used three very clever political ploys."

(1) To any potential contender for office, he would say; "This job is for the birds!"

(2) In all of his campaign speeches he used Mr. Bush's proven pitch—modified. Tom always said "watch my mandibles". (We believe he picked that word up in Dr. Byrd's Ornithology class a few years ago)

(3) Not having a Camp David, when things got tough Tom went fishing on the James on one of Kingsmill's ponds.

There is no question. The man is a master. No hint of PAC money, nor has he sought a salary increase. Bless you, Tom, and have a happy and productive second term.♦



## Mockingbird

In last month's FLYER I mentioned that Steve Rottenborn needed help with a very aggressive mockingbird. In the January/February 1991 issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest*, Pat Murphy, who writes the Backyard Bird Watcher's Question Box section, fields the same problem from three different people. The answer given was:

*We too once had a mockingbird take over our feeders, making all the other would-be feeder birds neurotic and mostly absent from our yard. We learned that mockers become territorial in the fall over a food supply that may or may not support them until the spring nesting season arrives, when they have other things to think about. Our bird would not be tricked into letting other birds into the yard, no matter what we served or how we moved the various feeders around the place. The siege came to an end in the spring on a rainy day, when I found the mocker singing in the rain, as disheveled a bird as you ever saw. Nearby sat another mockingbird, equally disheveled, presumably his mate for the season. All combat had stopped.*

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