



THE FLYER

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March 1992

Williamsburg Bird Club

Brian Taber Editor (253-1181)

March Events

Meeting

Wednesday, **March 18th**, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117, Millington Hall, on the William & Mary campus.

Program

Steve Rottenborn, a very active William and Mary student will present a look at his work in "Shore Bird Utilization of Agricultural Fields in Northhampton County, on the Eastern Shore". Steve is also leading the Owl Prowl, which will take place right after the meeting.

Field Trip

Saturday, March 21st. Meet at 7:30 am at the usual place (Colonial Williamsburg Information Center Parking Lot—right hand side). We will bird the Colonial Parkway towards Jamestown, and if there is time we will also bird Jamestown Island. Martha Armstrong will be our leader.

Prices have been drastically reduced on surplus seed from last fall's club sale. Call Tom Armour at 229-2363. He'll make you an offer you can't refuse!

Important!

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

Coming Attractions

Wednesday, April 15th

An eminent British visitor, Trevor Gunton, an officer in the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, will discuss migration of Europe's birds from Africa through Spain, Romania, and Holland to the United Kingdom; his title "Wilderness Europe".

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome the newest members of the Williamsburg Bird Club.

John & Joan Altonen (229-2060)
105 Fernwood
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

Capt. & Mrs. A. J. Booth (220-2822)
543 Thomas Bransby
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

Pat Higgs (229-2852)
114 Oak Road
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

Mary Lou Dillion (220-2606)
213 Moody's Run
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

Penny Hofer (220-5601)
5108 Scarborough Mews
Williamsburg, Va. 23188

February Field Trip

Thanks to Amanda Allen for leading and writing up the results of the February field trip. Her report is as follows:

This is the list of people who attended the trip to Hog Island, on Saturday, February 22: Johathan Akin, Joy Archer, Edith Edwards, Bettye Fields, Keith and Judy Kennedy, Dick Killion, Carolyn Lowe, Emily Sharrett, Carol Talbot, Kay Visser, and Marilyn Zeigler. The weather was absolutely obliging, sunny and clear the entire day. Some of the trip highlights included rafts of Pintails, a Greater Scaup, Hooded Mergansers, one male Green-winged Teal, a female Harrier who perched long enough to put the scope on her, large numbers of Tundra Swans and Canada Geese, and even the infamous domestic turkey waddling through the winter wheat. Likewise, the Great Blue Herons were back in the colony and we all had a good look at them perched in the nests through the scope. Along the holly tree road we picked up a number of species including: Brown-headed Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Carolina Wrens, Pine Warblers, and Tree Swallows. Though we searched high and low (some of us through the *Smilax*), no Orange-crowned Warbler appeared (though Craig Turner and I had one in the heron colony in early February, sitting in *Baccharis*) and our only two Bald Eagles were flat winged specks on the horizon (but still exciting).

On the trip back we stopped at the swamp, only to find painted turtles to add to our species list for the afternoon and even though the Bonaparte's Gulls I promised for the ferry ride home never appeared, the day was certainly full of enjoyable and exciting birding.

Travellers Out West

Ty and Julie Hotchkiss were on the road again in Texas and points west during February, finding Whooping Cranes, White-tailed Hawks, Curve-billed Thrashers, Black-throated Sparrows, Anna's Hummingbirds, an Aplomado Falcon and Yellow-footed Gulls.

Reprinted from *A Fair Bay* is this article titled

"Ruddy Duck Losing Ground Summer and Winter" by Rob Breeding

During our November bird survey on the Catlett Islands National Estuarine Research Reserve, Teta Kain and I saw what we'd been waiting for all fall: flocks of ducks swimming and diving in the waves. Most were Bufflehead, but many were Ruddy Ducks.

Recently, Ruddy populations have suffered dramatic decreases, yet we were seeing so many. Why? In the shallow water around the Catlett Islands grow enough underwater plants to attract Ruddies and other waterfowl that feed on the plants. But many areas of the Chesapeake Bay system have lost their underwater plants to poor water quality, high turbidity and siltation.

Loss of winter feeding grounds is only a part of the Ruddy's dilemma. Each spring when they migrate to the midwestern United States and Canada, Ruddy Ducks find fewer acres of wetlands in which to nest and fledge their young. Primarily because people continue to convert wetlands to croplands, duck habitat has been reduced to a fraction of its former expanse. The Ruddy, as well as other diving ducks, such as the Redhead and the Ringneck, no longer have enough breeding grounds to maintain their populations.

Until we stop destroying wetlands, and perhaps restore those that have been degraded, the predicament facing the Ruddy Ducks and other depleted waterfowl species will only get worse.

BIRDS FROM Around the Area

Bill Snyder reports that quail appear in short supply this year. He found a Northern Harrier on 1/29, at Powhatan Creek. Bob Morris reports that his Red-shouldered Hawk is re-building at last year's nest site.

Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan visited Hog Island on 1/31, finding a Great Cormorant, Snow Geese, Tundra Swans, various ducks, Rusty Blackbirds, Brown-headed Cowbirds, Forster's Terns and hundreds of Robins.

One to two Brown Pelicans have been hanging around Kingsmill Marina from mid-January to the present—reported by Tom Armour, David Martin and Dan Gardner, who fed them by throwing fish from a net.

Grant Olson reports Brown Creepers at Kingsmill on 2/27 and 2/28, Betty Williams still hosts a bathing Brown Thrasher, Bill Hines found a Mute Swan at Wareham's Pond on 2/3, Frank Evans saw several Tundra Swans on Lake Powell on 2/4, Bill Williams reports Greater Yellowlegs at Drummond's Field—late February, and Tom Armour found hundreds of Bonaparte's Gulls following the ferry on 2/27.

Bill Sheehan found a Red-breasted Nuthatch in his yard on 2/22 and has fed several Purple Finches late in February. A Red-Shouldered Hawk still comes how and then for suet. In addition to tons of Common Grackles (10,000?) and lots of Cedar Waxwings using his 4 birdbaths and stripping his hollies, jugustrum and nandina, he hosted a female Northern Oriole on 2/24, 2/25 & 2/26! The bird took peanut chips mostly, while ignoring the fresh-cut orange.

Steve Rottenborn found an Orange-crowned Warbler, Brown-headed Nuthatches, a House Wren and Greater Yellowlegs at Hog island on 2/4. Ruth Beck reports a White Pelican on 2/21 in the vicinity of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-tunnel.

Bill Williams turned up an Osprey off Route 199 on 2/27, the same day Tom Armour watched one fish at Kingsmill. A hummingbird was reported on 2/26 near the Daily Press building but subsequent looking by Tom Armour and me turned up nothing of note.

I have seen up to 3 Red-breasted Nuthatches since Christmas at my feeders, with one being found dead on 2/28.

On the 27th, Tom Armour, Bill Sheehan, Dick Mahone and Homer Jones visited Hog Island. Among the highlights were 50 Tundra Swans, 46 Snow Geese, 250 Ring-necked Ducks and 1 Coot. Also on the 27th, Steve Rottenborn saw a female Northern Oriole on the campus. The same day, the Ornithology class kicked up a Short-eared Owl at Curles Neck Farm.

Bill Sheehan had four Purple Finches thru early March and Chipping Sparrows showed up in his yard on the 5th. The same day, Bill and Tom had a Common Snipe at College Creek. Also on the 5th, Ruth Beck reports one Osprey on the York River and Tom Armour saw five on the James.

Brian Taber had Woodcock at the airport on March 2nd and has had a Fox Sparrow in his yard —March 5th thru at least the 8th.

On March 3rd, Tom Armour saw a Great Cormorant off of Hog Island and a Peregrine Falcon near the "Dead Fleet" off of Fort Eustis.

Florida Kites

When Tom Armour got to Corkscrew Swamp in southern Florida in mid-February, the ranger told him that the Swallow-tailed Kites weren't back yet. A few hours later, Tom was able to report to the ranger that they were. He found a pair soaring high with Wood Storks and herons. Tom also found Sandhill Cranes, Crested Caracaras, Reddish Egrets and Yellow-crowned Night-herons, among others. He obtained some close-up photographs of the Caracaras.

Early Birds

As noted in the Summary of Local Bird Data, a number of migrant birds will be joining us shortly. Yellow-throated Warblers are scheduled for March 14th, with Louisiana Waterthrushes right behind on the 16th. March 30th may see Prairie Warblers and Ovenbirds. March 31st is the date for Northern Parulas. Whip-poor-wills may be calling by April 1st. White-eyed Vireos and Yellow-throated Vireos should be back by April 2nd and April 7th respectively. April 7th is also the date for Prothonotaries. Wood Thrushes that survived the loss of winter habitat down south may be back by April 10th.

Avian Cinema

Perhaps you have recently seen one of the many movies about North American birds, including:

Edward Scissor-tail
Feather of the Bride
What About Bob White
Clay-colored Robin Hood
Grand Canyon Towhee
Bat Falcon Man
Beauty and the Least (tern)
Hook(-billed Kite), starring
William Robins
The King Fisher, also starring
William Robins
City Flickers, not starring
William Robins

Important Miscellaneous Items

The 46th Annual Garden Club Symposium has scheduled its birdwalk for April 7th. Several club members provide leadership and president Dick Mahone has long been an organizer.

Breeding populations of ducks were up about 6 percent this spring, according to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. However, overall duck numbers remain well below the average for the past 35 years. Scaup numbers were up 25 percent; Bluewing Teal numbers were up 34 percent from a record low in 1990 (still 10 percent below average); Northern Pintails fell 20 percent, to 62 percent below the long-term average; and Mallard numbers were unchanged at 27 percent below average. Estimates for Gadwall, Widgeon, Greenwing Teal, Shoveler, Redhead and Canvasback ducks did not change significantly. (*Ecology U.S.A.*)

Pintail in Trouble—Last fall's flights of waterfowl contained fewer pintail than at any time on record. According to the United States and Canadian government estimates, only 523,000 pintail were counted on the prairies this spring with 1.8 million counted throughout their entire breeding range. This represents a decline of over 75 percent from the levels of a decade ago and is 71 percent below the breeding populations goals of the Northern American Waterfowl Management Plan. This spring there were nearly as many canvasback on the prime southern prairie breeding grounds as pintail, whereas a few years ago the pintail outnumbered the canvasbacks ten to one. While hunting alone is not the cause of the pintail decline, it is the one mortality that can be controlled to preserve breeding populations. It has been used to help Wood Ducks, Canvasbacks, Redheads, Canada Geese, cranes, swans and eiders. The North American Wildlife Foundation urged waterfowl hunters to voluntarily refrain from shooting pintail last season and is advocating harvest restrictions until the breeding stock builds to acceptable levels. "We believe that waterfowlers will step forward for the preservation of the pintail." said executive Vice President Charles S. Potter, Jr.

From the Virginia Wildlife Federation Record January 1992

Bird of the Season

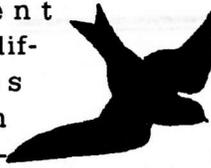
Purple Martin

Progne subis

With the first warm air of March come the first Purple Martins to our area. Early scouts returning from south of the United States find enough insects to survive, especially during mild winters such as this one. They begin to examine potential nesting sites, including the many houses that have been erected around Williamsburg.

The male is glossy, metallic, purplish-blue all over, the only all-dark North American swallow, while females and young birds are grayish below and purplish above. Our other familiar swallows show no apparent plumage differences between males and females. Purple Martins have broader wings than other swallows and do more soaring flight. They are the largest North American swallows.

Estimates vary about the vast numbers of insects a bird may consume, but thousands per day is not impossible, making this a most environmentally sound method of pest control. Great communal roosts are formed in late summer as the birds prepare for migration.



Wayward Owl Ends Its Trip at Museum

The Washington Post 1/30/92

The young Snowy Owl was hundreds of miles from home and undoubtedly short of food—lemmings and field mice, that is—when a painter found it dead on the downtown rooftop of the Washington Hilton Hotel Tuesday night.

Its two-foot-long body, covered in white feathers tipped with brown and outwardly undamaged, was lying next to a cooling tower. Building engineer Clayton Maude didn't know why the owl was there, but he had a theory about how it came to die on the roof.

"The way it looked, he just hit [the cooling tower] and dropped," Maude said. "It was a beautiful bird."

Maude took the bird to the Smithsonian Institution yesterday, where it will be stuffed and placed in the museum's research collection. Its bones and tissues will be used in DNA and other experiments.

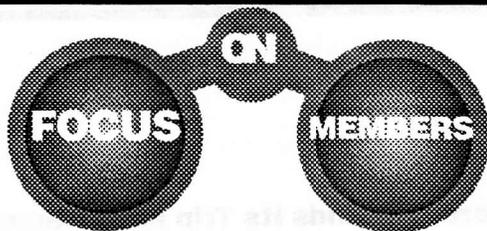
Museum of Natural History specialist James P. Dean said the owl's neck apparently was broken. Its sex has not been determined, but the brown in its feathers suggests that the owl was "less than two years old," Dean said, a relatively young age for an owl to die.

Although most Snowy Owls migrate between northern Canada and Alaska in the summer and southern Canada and northern New England in the winter, Dean said, they occasionally fly farther south during periods of extreme cold or when their normal food supply dries up.

The owl may have been the same one spotted in the Chesapeake Bay area this month and reported to the Maryland Audubon Naturalists Society's rare bird hotline, Dean said.

Dean had expected to pick the owl up at the Hilton today, but Maude said he was asked by hotel managers to remove the bird from the freezer and take it to the museum for security reasons: President George Bush is expected at a National Prayer Breakfast at the hotel this morning.

"They come in with the dogs and all, and we were afraid [the dogs] would sniff it out," Maude said.



The Eastern Shore of Virginia is a great place for birding. In 1991, it was scoured by club member Steve Rottenborn, who turned up an amazing variety of birds. Steve was working mainly on two projects; shorebird utilization of agricultural fields and monitoring of beach nesting birds of the barrier islands and surrounding marshes.

Between these assignments and his own forays, Steve was in the field more than he wasn't. He didn't plan on having a big year, but he eventually turned up an incredible 285 species on the Shore alone.

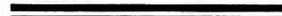
Some of the many highlights from the Shore and the Bridge-tunnel include Black-necked Stilt, White Pelican, Sooty Shearwater, Wilson's Storm-Petrel, Eurasian Widgeon, White Ibis, Hudsonian Godwit, Baird's Sandpiper, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Mississippi Kite, Red Phalarope, Sooty Tern, Willow Flycatcher, Cerulean Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Lesser Golden-Plover, Upland Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Roseate Tern, Parasitic Jaeger, Common and King Eiders, Razorbill, Black Rail, Clay-colored Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, a most surprising White-winged Dove and an apparent Eastern X Western Kingbird hybrid, with characteristics of each species.

Steve began birding when his second grade teacher in Waynesboro, who was a birder, put him in touch with the Augusta Bird Club. Years later he entered William and Mary where he is currently an undergraduate, with future plans to obtain a Ph.D at Stanford, where he hopes to study the ecology of birds using riparian (river) corridors. His research will be an important addition to current work, which will provide information necessary to secure the protection of essential habitats.

Steve leads field trips for the Bird Club and for the ornithology class at William and Mary. He has birded the east coast from Florida to Prince Edward Island and much of the Pacific coast as well. He hopes to put his knowledge to use in teaching and research.

Focus on Members will be a regular addition to this year's newsletter, but your help is needed! Please submit to me information about any of our club's members. Include information about where they are from, how they got started in birding, favorite places, favorite birds.

Information on both experienced and new birders is needed. Please help us share information about the friends, spouses and others who make our club the great organization that is is! Be sure to get permission from the person you want to feature.



The newsletter editor will certainly appreciate all manner of calls and submissions of information for the newsletter. Please call Brian week-nights between 6 pm and 10 pm at **253-1181** or send articles, local bird sightings, information about birds seen on vacations and such to **104 Druid Court, Williamsburg, Va. 23185**. This will insure that our newsletter is a reflection of the membership. If you're not sure about what to send, please call. Thank you!