



# THE FLYER

Volume 17, No. 4

April 1993

Williamsburg Bird Club

## Meeting

Wednesday, April 21st, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117, Millington Hall, at the College.

## Program

Our guest speaker will be Thelma Dalmas of the Lynchburg Bird Club. Her subject will be **Rare Birds of Virginia**. She is an exceptionally experienced birder, and has 350 species on her personal Virginia list. Thelma has been and is very active in the inner councils of both her home club and the Virginia Society of Ornithology. Presently, she serves as vice-president of her Lynchburg Club and as a member of the board of the VSO. We welcome her back.

## Field Trips

### (a) Regular April Walk

The regular April walk will be on Saturday, April 24th. Bill Williams will lead us along the Colonial Parkway and the York River, to Yorktown, and, if time and weather permit, back to Jamestown along the James River. Minimum walking will be in order, but we will pop in and out of cars at the turnouts which Bill selects—just to look and listen.

We would expect to observe both late staying waterfowl and early migrants. Bill guarantees some good looks at Osprey—on and off nest—and suggests the possibility of Eagles, Brown Pelicans, and other wondrous birds which he might arrange to appear. Meet Bill at 7:30 a.m. at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center parking lot (East side).

### (b) Spring Bird Count: Sunday, May 2nd

See Page 3 for more details

## Coming Attractions

**April 17th**—Adopt-A-Highway cleanup along our section of Route 5. Please contact Bill Davies at 253-1461. Rain date will be April 24th.

**May 19th**—Program: Mr. Sam Gamble of Lynchburg will present *Birding in Australia & New Zealand*.

**May 22nd**—Field Trip: Tom Armour will lead a "Spring Migrant Special" to York River State Park.

## President's

Corner

Rain, Rain, Rain!!!

April 1st, 12:40 a.m.—a flash of lightning and a clash of thunder ushers in the new month. April will bring new "spring green" growth to the trees and the forest floor. It is also an exciting month for birds. The migrants are continuing to funnel through this area while nesting is beginning with vigor. Bluebirds are busily investigating nest boxes. Red-shouldered Hawks are incubating. Keep your binoculars handy at home and in the car for good birding.

*Ruth Beck*



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## **More Coming Attractions**

**VSO Annual Meeting** - May 14-16, Norton, Va.  
Host club is Cumberland Natural Club. Banquet speaker will be Ted Eubanks, who runs the Piping Plover project on the Texas and Mexican Gulf Coast.

**June 12th**—Special Species Foray to S. E. Virginia counties. Emily and Allan Sharrett will lead to areas where we might see Mississippi Kites, Bachman's Sparrow, and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers.

**VSO Field Trip** - Mount Rogers - June 25-27

**July 24th**—Craney Island, Portsmouth. A hotspot for migrating shorebirds.  
(Tom Armour—leader)

**August**—No scheduled trip

**September 18th**—Waller Mill Pond. Close by—look, listen and walk to observe fall migrants.  
(Amanda Allen—leader)

**October 23rd**—Bay Bridge Tunnel Island, and on to Kiptopeke to catch the fall migration of raptors.  
(Brian Taber—leader)

**November 20th**—Ruth Beck's 26 acres in Barhamsville, which include a large fresh water pond and mixed bottomland hardwood habitat.  
(Ruth, of course)

**December 19th**—Christmas Bird Count

### **Dismal Swamp Anyone?**

If there is any interest, Steve Reams might be willing to coordinate a birding trip to Dismal Swamp. Please call him at 253-1954 if the idea appeals.

## **Announcement of Greenway Workshop**

By Carolyn Lowe

Local citizens are invited to participate in a greenway workshop on Thursday, April 15, from 7 to 9 p. m. at the Williamsburg Regional Library.

Sponsored by the Historic Rivers Land Conservancy (HRLC), the purpose of the workshop is to give citizens an opportunity for direct involvement in the creation of a regional greenway system to bring environmental, recreational and economic benefits to our community. Such a greenway would link natural, scenic and historic resources from the James to the York river with a network of trails, bikeways, parks and wildlife corridors, enabling residents and visitors to leave their cars and get into the landscape.

Local government planners from Williamsburg, James City County and York County, as well as resource planners from the National Park Service, will assist HRLC in conducting the workshop. Maps and slides will be used to present a vision of a regional greenway, and examples of successful greenway projects in other parts of the country will be shown.

The results of the workshop will lead to the next steps in developing a greenway master plan for our community. For more information about the workshop, call 565-3167 (Carolyn Lowe).

{Ed note. WBC member Carolyn Lowe is president of HRLC, and members Shaune Reams, Joy Archer, Brian Taber and Bill Williams serve as directors}.

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## **Spring Bird Count**

Brian Taber will coordinate the club's 16th Annual Spring Bird Count on Sunday, May 2nd. This count is in the format of the Annual Christmas Count, wherein we try to saturate a specific 15 mile diameter circle with observers. That circle is divided in sub-areas, and Brian assigns us to teams to cover each area. There will be no central meeting place, so please call Brian (253-1181) for assignment—evenings from 6 to 10 p.m.

Brian emphasizes that we don't need to be expert birders for this one; experienced leaders will lead the sub-groups. We do need lots of sharp eyes, acute ears and good counters. This is a particularly great opportunity for beginners and for those who have never experienced the sheer excitement of the spring migration! In past years, our average species count for the day has been about 156—ranging from 141 in 1979 to 166 in 1989. Last year we brought in 164!

(Special note for yard and feeder watchers. Please report any **unusual** sightings to Bill Sheehan (220-2122) between 2 and 4 p.m.)

A talley will be held at 5 p.m. in Room 108 of Millington Hall, on campus, to consolidate all counts. All are welcome!

The areas that will be surveyed, along with some of the landmark locations, are:

1. **Cheatham Annex**—Camp Peary, Queen's Lake, Cheatham Annex, Felgate's Creek, Indian Field Creek.
2. **Kingsmill**—Country Road to Carter's Grove, Kingsmill, Williamsburg Airport, Parkway from CW Information Center to just before College Creek.
3. **Hog Island**—Ferry ride over and Hog Island Refuge.
4. **Jamestown**—Parkway from College Creek to Jamestown and Jamestown Island.
5. **College Woods**—College Woods and campus of W&M, Lake Matoaka, Lake Powell, College Landing Park on South Henry Street, Population Lab, Hickory Signpost Road and Treasure Island Road.
6. **Middle Plantation**—Mid-County Road, Waller Mill Park (both entrances), Drummond's Field, News Road and First Colony.
7. **Jolly Pond**—Jolly Pond, Cranston's Mill Pond, Little Creek Reservoir.
8. **Skimino**—Barlow's Pond, Skimino Farms, Mirror Lakes, entrance to York River State Park and Riverview Plantation.

Please call Brian Taber at 253-1181 for further information about the count and the talley.



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**Local Scene**

There is lots of action in our bird world this time of year, so hang on and let's take a sample.

A Hairy Woodpecker at my suet on 3/6 and almost every day through March. On 3/7 Henry DeGraff found 4 American Wigeon and 5 Tundra Swans on Barlows Pond. He also has daily Siskins and "now & again" Purple Finches at his home nearby. Same day, Doyles recorded exceptionally large groups of Tundra Swans (50 & 100) at Camp Peary and suspect they are migration movements. Doyles also noted Canvasbacks on the York, and 4 each Osprey and Red-tailed Hawks. Kingsmill Pond had Wood Ducks and Ring-necks that day. On 3/9, Bill Snyder reported 4 Blue-winged Teal on Powhatan Creek, and a daily Hairy Woodpecker at his feeder. On 3/10 College Landing Park (off of South Henry) had Phoebe's, and 6 or more Clapper Rails were "clapping" at College Creek turnout on the Parkway. On 3/10, 6 Great Egrets were in Powhatan Creek at Snyder's home. John & Eleanor Hertz reported 2 Pintail Ducks displaying at Jamestown Island ca. 2/26, and a pair of adult Eagles at Season's Trace on 3/3. At Queens Lake on 3/12, Homer Jones watched a Pileated excavate what appeared to be a nesting hole behind his yard. Same day, Val Copping (and 2 others) watched a Peregrine Falcon over the railroad tracks (and perched) behind her Wild Birds Unlimited store on Richmond Road. A group of local pigeons might have been the attraction, Val opines.

Allan Sharrett and grandson Christopher saw 2 Coot at the KM Marina on 3/13. Tom Armour reports the birds' continued daily presence at least through March. Same date, Alice Springle noted an Osprey at Lake Matoaka.

Bill Williams hit the jackpot with a

new area bird on 3/14—an adult Black-headed Gull feeding on the low, low tide flats on the James near College Creek. First ever recorded here—not an unusual occurrence for Bill. Same date, Marilyn Zeigler watched 2 Gannets on the York just east of Coleman Bridge. Also, along the Parkway were Bufflehead, Goldeneye and about 20 Tree Swallows. (Marilyn also reported 120 Tundra Swans at Hog Island on 3/12). Also on 3/14, my yard on Oak Road hosted a mixed flock (50 birds) of Cowbirds, Red-wings and Common Grackles. That may have been the reason for a visit of a Cooper's Hawk whose presence quickly cleared the yard of the little guys. On 3/15 Bill Snyder's private piece of Powhatan Creek produced a Horned Grebe. A day later, Bill Williams worked the pasture pond at Drummonds Field (Rt 614) for both Blue-winged (11) and Green-winged Teal (3), plus 2 Canvasbacks and a Fox Sparrow. He went back on 3/21 to find 46 Snipe and 3 Palm Warblers—and then located a single Common Loon in the York. On 3/22, a dove crashed against a window at Lyman Peter's Williamsburg home, and lay limply in his yard. As he started out to check it out, a hawk appeared and plucked the dove from the ground. Lyman suspects the resident Red-shouldered Hawk who frequently patrols the yard. On 3/23, Tom Armour found a Pectoral Sandpiper, a single Snipe and a Harrier at Drummonds Field. Same morning, early, 8-9 crows were "annoying" a perched Barred Owl in my yard. While loud, the crows seemed to treat the owl with prudent respect. Same day, the Sharretts had a few Rusty Blackbirds at their feeder—along with Cowbirds and Red-wings. Out at First Colony, Julie and Ty Hotchkiss watched 2 Wild Turkey walk through their yard (3/24). Thanksgiving is a long way off, Ty! Same day, American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal tested Drummonds Field, while a dozen Tree Swallows, 1 Kestrel and 1 Tom Armour watched from strategic locations. Later, Tom and I saw Bonaparte's Gulls and Red-breasted Mergansers from the ferry enroute to Hog Island. Enroute, Chippokes Swamp produced Rusty Blackbirds and Hog had Green-winged Teal, Pintails, Wigeons,

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Osprey, Tree Swallows, Royal Terns, a Harrier and a Catbird—the later in same location as on the WBC birdwalk of 3/20. Bill Davies started it with a Canada Goose which bore a large white neckband with the letters LKL—3/25 at Jamestown island. On 3/27, Armour spotted another banded Goose with the letters LK3 on the Parkway near Mill Creek. Then, on 3/28 he saw one at Kingsmill with LL5. We'll pass these on to the Game Commission. On 3/26, Royal Terns (11) showed up at KM Marina and on 3/27 the Laughing Gulls returned from their February vacation with a mass demonstration at the Marina—150 by Tom's impeccable count!

Five Greater Yellowlegs were in place on 3/25 at Drummonds Field, along with a few Wigeon and Green-winged Teal. Down the Parkway, 11 Lesser Scaup and a couple Red-breasted Mergansers were diving in the James near Gospel Farm.

And the Brown Pelican finally found Queen's Lake! On the 27th, Donna LeClair was quite startled to see one there and called Grace Doyle to report it. A week before, Pelican were reported over Queen's Creek—almost to the QL Marina. Lock up your fishponds! Same day, in a driving rain, Tom and I toured the York River turnouts: a Common Loon; 2 Horned Grebe; 50 Ring-necks; a dozen Goldeneye; 6 Osprey, 100 Bufflehead and 10 Bonapartes Gulls were reward enough. On 3/29, Drummonds Field still had both Teal, a few Wigeon and Greater Yellowlegs, a Kestrel and Tree Swallows. From Chippokes Swamp, we could see one of Dr. Byrd's Eagles (on nest) and tallied four woodpeckers: Red-headed, Downy, Hairy and Pileated. A Phoebe and Ruby-crowned Kinglet rounded it out. Hog Island brought a few species of ducks and a considerable concentration of Field Sparrows along the main road—perhaps 80, with a few in song. The Schusters, near Lake Barlow, were still enjoying a couple Purple Finches almost daily. Lee and Dave were particularly intrigued at a few Wood Ducks

checking out nesting holes in some nearby trees. They look so clumsy! They also had a Fox Sparrow visit in about mid-March—as did Brian Taber, but with repeat performances on 3/27-3/30. On 3/28, Grace Doyle reported a Canada Goose **standing** on the edge of an Osprey nest (at Camp Peary) which she and Joe had marked the week before. Don't know whether this was a rest stop or an eviction, but we'll monitor it. Grace also reported Ringnecks, Canvasbacks, Bufflehead and Ruddy Ducks on the York—but no Tundra Swans for the first time since October. And on 3/28, Taber & Williams saw a single Martin from the Parkway turnout on the James just east of Gospel Farm.

Gnatcatchers are popping up: Taber at the swamp on News Road, Ruth Beck at her home in Barhamsville—both on 3/29. Ruth has a Great Blue Heron on her pond who **dives** for fish like an Osprey. On 3/31 David Martin watched a Brown Pelican catching small shad near KM Marina; and Bill Williams welcomed 2 Yellow-throated Warblers and a Louisiana Waterthrush at Jolly Pond. Barn Swallows at Drummond's on 3/31, and Dick Mahone spotted a couple Martins over downtown Williamsburg. Doyles and Beck counted 64 Great Blue Herons at a rookery at Camp Peary in late March.

So it's on into April. Williams saw 4 Cattle Egret at Drummond's Field on the 1st. Same date, Mahone found a number of owl pellets in a Newport News park in which a Great Horned Owl customarily roosts. cursory examination revealed skeletal matter of apparent rodents, feathers, and what appeared to be squirrel fur. (My kind of owl!). On 4/02 at Chippokes Swamp, 2 Bald Eagles (one on nest), a Red-tail, several Gnatcatchers and Yellow-throated Warblers and a feisty Ruby-crowned Kinglet in full song. Barn, Tree and Rough-winged Swallows were patrolling Hog Island—not much else, except Ospreys, the latter seemed to be in

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a nest-building frenzy at Hog and on the James River Channel markers. 4/02 brought the Doyles a Black-crowned Night Heron on KM Pond—with 3 of same on the 3rd. The Scotts at KM still have at least two Brown-headed Nuthatches feeding on a 2nd floor windowsill—very tame, says Mrs. Scott. Bill Snyder saw a Prothonotary Warbler at Hog Island on 4/03, along with a single Coot. My 2 Brown Creepers were absent as of 4/02, as were the 6-8 Juncos who wintered with me.

Although not quite “local”, Taber and Williams saw a Swallow-tailed Kite at Kiptopeake on 4/03. And on the 4th, returning from Eastern Shore, Shaune and Steve Reams stopped along the Bridge-tunnel for Harlequin Ducks, a King Eider, both Cormorants, Scoters and “thousands” of Red-breasted Mergansers. At home on Queen’s Lake, they saw 3 or 4 Yellow-crowned Night Herons. Steve believes they may have nested in the area within the last few years, since he observed what appeared to be a mating ritual an April or two ago. A Glossy Ibis was seen in the vicinity of Drummond’s Field on 4/3 and 4/4. And on that date Grace Doyle observed 5 Black-crowned Night Herons at KM Pond. At Camp Peary on 4/4 Grace reported 50 Canvasback, 15 Ring-necks, 5 Hooded Mergansers, 4 Yellow-throated Warblers and a Brown Creeper. At Kingsmill Marty and Mac MacDonald had a male Indigo Bunting in all his spring glory at a feeder. Both Teal (about 20 each) were at Drummond’s on 4.5, and at least two Louisiana Waterthrushes were in song at Jolly Pond. Emily and Allan Sharrett had been watching a couple suspicious looking blackbirds for a couple days. Looked a bit like Rusty Blackbirds; then they thought the birds **might** be Brewer’s Blackbirds. on 4/5, the birds appeared in front of their window and in company with a small flock of Red-wings, Cowbirds and Rusties. Definitely Brewer’s Blackbirds, and only our second local WBC record! Nice detective work, Sharretts.

Wow! and its just beginning. Thanks to all of you who took time to call me. Happy birding till next month.

### **Birds Which Breed Locally**

Next time you look at your Summary of Local Bird Data, take a look at the column which is headed: BREED. You will find that we classify 92 species as **Breeding**, with another 5 designated as **Former breeders**, and 11 more as **Probable breeders**. Among the categories of **former** and **probables**, we are looking for evidence that these species do, in fact, now breed here.

Those now classified as **F** are: Least Bittern, Snowy Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron, Ring-neck Pheasant and Least Tern.

Those now classified as **P** are: Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, King Rail, Virginia Rail, Chuck-wills-widow, Whip-poor-will, Tree Swallow, Bank Swallow, Yellow Warbler and Seaside Sparrow.

If you find any evidence of breeding birds of the above species, please notify your editor (220-2122) so we can check it out and upgrade our record base. Evidence of breeding, in addition to actual nests with eggs or young, can include: repeated territorial songs in the same location; adult birds carrying nesting material; and adult birds feeding fledged young. Please stop, look and listen—and help us add to our growing local bird knowledge. You, too, can become a fully-fledged bird detective!



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**Viva Costa Rica!**

By Brian Taber

Club members Brian Taber, Ruth Beck and Michael Beck visited Costa Rica in March, led by club member Bill Akers. Bill has made 10 trips to the West Virginia sized Central American country, which contains an incredibly diverse population of birds. The group of 17 managed to find more than 360 of the country's 800 regularly occurring birds during the 2-week tour.

The group enjoyed near-perfect weather as they travelled from the Caribbean lowlands across mountains as high as 11,000 feet to the Pacific lowlands. They visited tropical dry forest, tropical rain forest, cloud forest and disturbed second-growth and agricultural areas.

They found some familiar birds, which were wintering there, including Tennessee, Chestnut-sided, Wilson's, Black-throated Green, Yellow and Kentucky Warblers, as well as Wood Thrushes and Summer Tanagers.

They found 9 species of herons, 29 species of raptors, 11 species of parrots, 29 species of hummingbirds, 10 species of trogons, 6 kinds of toucans, 38 kinds of flycatchers and 30 members of the tanager-honeycreeper group.

There were also many birds with interesting and exotic and unfamiliar names, such as Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Green-crowned Brilliant, Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Blue-throated Goldentail, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Fiery-billed Aracari, White-necked Puffbird, Spectacled Foliage-gleaner, Dot-winged Antwren, Long-billed Gnatwren, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Black-faced Solitaire, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Slaty Flowerpiercer and many more. [Ed. note: warned you about names!]

Everyone agreed that it was a wonderful adventure.

**Local Hawk Watch**

Brian Taber opened our new migrant hawk-watching site on 3/31—observing 6 Kestrel, and one each Osprey, Harrier, Cooper's Hawk and a Red-tail—all deemed to be migrants in light of flight direction and altitudes. Site location is at the parkway turnout overlooking the James—about 1 mile west College Creek, and about a quarter mile east of the Gospel Farm white fences. The eastern-most park service "billboard" at this turnout is headed: Archers Hope. Brian sets up camp (chair and all) on the grassy knoll to the left of the sign. He welcomes company and will instruct any of us in the art of in-flight identification. He devotes noon hours and sometimes 5-6 pm times—sometimes aided by Williams, Armour and Sheehan. Try it yourself, or call Brain at 253-1181 the night before. If you are "on your own" please let Brian know which raptors you identify, along with the date and time of observation. We'll report totals in FLYER each month—in season.

**March Bird Walk Results**

The March walk (20th) was at Hog Island, with a brief stop at the Chippokes Swamp (Rt. 634) enroute. Members participating were Joy Archer, Tom Armour, Barbara Rockwell, Lee and David Schuster, Marilyn Zeigler, with Emily and Allan Sharrett as leaders.

Notable performers were: At Chippokes Swamp: 2 Bald Eagles, a Phoebe, and 2 Rusty Blackbirds. At Hog Island: 25 Green-winged Teal, 2 Hooded Mergansers, 7 Common Mergansers, 2 Harriers, a single Sharp-shinned Hawk, 2 Red-tailed Hawks, 2 Kestrel and 2 Great Horned Owls. The latter were carrying on a conversation in one of the pine groves. Also noteworthy were sparrows; Chipping, Savannah, Song, Swamp and White-throated. And finally a Catbird—in the tangles by the lookout tower.

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## **PLANTS FOR BIRDS, AND EVEN FOR BUTTERFLIES**

Member Cynthia Long is expert in plant matters, so we asked her to share with us some ideas we might use in our yards for plants which birds might enjoy too. Instead of just a list, Cynthia went the extra mile and gave us this absolutely nifty summary of her and Bob's experiences at Queens Lake. Within it are some great ideas, and a number of things to ponder. Thanks, Cynthia!

### **An Evolving Habitat**

By Cynthia Long

Eighteen years ago we bought a 1/2 acre homesite, and enthusiastically planned a landscape for wildlife. Armed with information from the National Wildlife Federation, we began to plant trees and shrubs. To learn more about Virginia wildlife, we joined the Williamsburg Bird Club, and the Virginia Native Plant Society. Through them we learned to truly appreciate our God-given landscape, and the animals that grace the rich habitats in our Williamsburg neighborhood.

The lot had been corn fields, according to local residents, and had subsequently been closely planted with pine trees. We were blessed with sassafras, dogwood, sweetgum, blackberry and bayberry.

Sassafras are a delight—their yellow blossoms bring in some of the first butterflies. When their black fruit ripens in August, woodpeckers come in a great flock, and feast in a drunken orgy. We have downy, red-bellied and pileated all at once. The pileated have a hard time balancing on the slender branches, it is wonderful watching them maneuver.

Shrubs include holly, both American and winterberry, plus several exotic varieties. Native beautyberry produces brilliant fuchsia fruit relished by the birds. Bittersweet vines have become pests as they wind around the pine trees, setting fruit in only the highest branches near the light. Although I still enjoy the multiflora rose, I know they are undesirable, as they crowd out our natives, and grab at Bob as he mows the small strip of lawn adjacent to the street.

But they do make interesting hips for the birds, and add to the hedgerow that separates our garden from passersby. NWF recommended elderberry and autumn olive, which took me some time to locate. The elderberry is a great success, but today autumn olive has been identified as a serious pest, and the seeds are planted by bird express. Blueberries have furnished lots of food for birds, especially bluebirds. Our cocker, Holly, watches the berries ripen and enjoys picking them for her own snacks. (Well, she **is** a bird dog.)

Flowering shrubs include lilac, kerria, azaleas and butterfly bush, all are good for attracting butterflies and moths. I inadvertently provided food for hungry voles by planting lots of expensive tulips, all but one were eaten. We did get hawks and owls, though, so we did our part for the food chain. Sunflowers, black-eyed susans, coreopsis, butterfly weed and daisies are all good perennials for butterflies and seed eaters. Dill and rue are wonderful butterfly plants; the larvae strip them to naked branches, but they will recover. We have loved keeping track of our flora and fauna, learning from successes and failures. The list has grown along with the habitat, giving us many happy hours observing our wildlife neighbors.

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Your friendly editor welcomes any news items, short articles for publication, comments on birds (or editors) etc. Thanks.

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