



THE FLYER

Volume 17, No. 2

February 1993

Williamsburg Bird Club

Bill Sheehan, Editor (220-2122)

Meeting

Wednesday, February 17th, at
7:30 p.m. in Room 117,
Millington Hall, at the College.

Program

Bluebirds, local and North American, will be our February focus. A scripted slide program from the North American Bluebird Society about the three native bluebird species will be shown and it will be followed by Joe Doyle, who will give a short run-down on the local bluebird situation, reporting about locations of nesting boxes around town and their success rate over the years. (Joe has been our Bluebird Committee Chairman for lo these many years.)

Field Trip

Regular February field trip will be on Saturday, February 20th. Brian Taber will lead a "riding-walking" tour of Jamestown Island. The Island presents a nice mix of bird habitat: woodlands, edge, thick understory, and tidal creeks and marshes. Red-headed Woodpeckers are usually found, along with Sapsuckers and Pileateds. Both Kinglets are there, and sometimes Brown-headed Nuthatches are squeaking in the large pine trees. Swamp Sparrows are frequently seen, and once in a while Fox Sparrows, Hermit Thrushes and Thrashers feed along the road edges. On the raptor side, Red-tailed and Red-shouldered are not uncommon, nor are Bald Eagles. After we "do" the Island, we plan to end up in Bill Sheehan's kitchen for coffee and donuts while viewing local feeder species from Bill's window.

Jamestown Island opens at 8:30 a.m., and Brian asks that we meet at the **Jamestown Settlement parking lot at 8:30.** See you there.

Coming Attractions

March 17th, Program—Stephanie Turner, park manager of York River State Park, on *Managing Habitats*.

March 20th, Field Trip—Hog Island for Eagles, Herons, Shorebirds, ducks and some early migrants.
(Allan and Emily Sharrett—leaders)

President's

Corner

Consider February "local bird" month. Our program will review the life and times of the Eastern Bluebird and our field trip will focus on the birds of the local area, with the best variety and excellent viewing of backyard birding at 104 Oak Road. The days activities (2-3 hrs) will culminate with munchkins or "human suet pills".

If members have any suggestions for new activities please contact me at 221-2217 (work) or 566-8234 (home).

I would like to request the assistance of club members who may have an extra birding field guide. The W&M Freshman Biology Majors Class (360 students) will be studying bird identification, adaptation & behavior for a 2 week period beginning late February. We need extra field guides—Peterson's, Zim-Robbins or National Geographic Society. Please write your name in the book, bring it to the February meeting and it will be returned to you at the March meeting. It is a good opportunity to introduce these young people to the skills of bird identification.

Ruth Beck



1993 Scheduled Field Trips

April 24th—Yorktown Battlefield, stopping at Parkway turnouts. Focus on spring migrants.
(Bill Williams—leader)

May 2nd—Spring Bird Count: Area saturation, as in Christmas Count. This will be our 16th Annual.

May 15th—A “spring migrant special” with a stop at Jolly's Pond on the way to York River State Park with its great variety of habitats.
(Tom Armour—leader)

June 12th—Special Species Foray to S.E. Virginia. We'll drive to Emporia where Allan Sharrett Jr., a local resident (and son of Allan & Emily) will meet and lead us to areas frequented by Mississippi Kite, Bachman's Sparrow, and Red-cockaded woodpecker.

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

August—No scheduled trip

September 18th—Waller Mill Pond. Close by, and 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

Adopt-A-Highway

Another salvo of cheers and thanks are due to Bill Davies and his band of picker-uppers! Here is Bill's modest report of their January operation:

“It's becoming a social event! Marilyn Lewis brought her friend Mack Lundy to the last effort to clean up the highway on January 16, 1993. Mack plans to join the Bird Club in the near future. (Ed. note: he did!)

These two members of the team were joined by twelve other club members for the hour and a quarter effort—a new record to clean up the strip of Route 5 from Five Forks to Route 614. And we beat the rain! Tom Armour and Pat Healy set their own record for doing their portion in about 50 minutes.

Others included in the pick-up effort were: Fred Blystone, Louise Menges, Sam Hart, Phyllis Johnson, Dorothy Whitfield, Martha and Bob Burgess, Jim Booth, and Ellen McLean.

Our efforts produced 8 bags of litter, 60 pounds of glass bottles and 14.5 pounds of aluminum. The later two items consisted of 348 cans and 125 bottles recycled.

Our next visit to the highways will be in April or May, probably in connection with Garden Week.

Many thanks to all for your worthwhile work.”

Bill Davies



Local Scene

Maybe the northern birds are not going to ignore us this year. Bob Kuehling reports a Fox Sparrow at Kingsmill on 1/16. Same date, Brian Taber came up with 3 Pine Siskins—and groups of Waxwings are starting to work some of the Holly berries. Drummond's Field produced some Field and Savannah Sparrows on 1/12 along with a Phoebe and a single Laughing Gull among 300 Ring-bills. Small groups of Red-breasted Mergansers persist in the James, along the Parkway. Bill Snyder reported 4 Great Egrets behind his home (on Powhatan Creek) on 1/13. Tom Armour found a Great Horned Owl in a large pine at Kingsmill in daylight. he also saw another Brown Pelican and a Coot at the Kingsmill marina—backed up by 35 Red-breasted mergansers and a pair of Ruddy Ducks on the James. Tom and I took the Surry County back roads from the Ferry to Hog Island on 1/15. Highlights were the raptors—nine species: Bald Eagle; Red-tailed; Red-shouldered; Harrier; Cooper's; Sharp-shinned; Kestrel and both Vultures. That was the first sunny day in a week, and just everyone was hunting.

Some of us have had small flocks of Robins in our yards recently, and a few small groups of Bluebirds appear to be checking out the houses. (Time to clean out last year's debris, folks).

On the 18th, Hog Island produced small numbers of Green-winged Teal, Pintail Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks and Hooded Mergansers. On the raptor

side there were Eagles, Kestrels and a Cooper's Hawk. And waiting for the Ferry on the Surry side—just up the hill from the toll gate—we watched a Phoebe out "bugging".

On the 17th Bill Williams kicked up a LeConte's Sparrow in the marshy ground along the James just west of College Creek turnout. That's Bill's second of the season, and the second this Club has ever recorded. A later search of the area by others produced only a Marsh Wren. Same date, Joe & Grace Doyle saw a large raft of about 1500 ducks on the York off of Camp Peary. About half & half, Ruddies and Canvasbacks. This is reassuring since our local duck counts have been generally down this winter. A Phoebe at Kingsmill on 1/20. In back of Wild Birds Unlimited on Richmond Road, Val and George Copping (the owners) have placed a couple seed feeders and suet feeders. Val reports a Northern Oriole as a daily visitor to the suet. Brian and Tom and I had no trouble finding the bird, and Tom took a few pix. On 1/24 the Doyles reported the large duck rafts had grown to over 2,000—again mostly Ruddies and Canvasbacks. A routine ride-around check of Jamestown island on 1/26 gave up a Lesser Black-backed Gull in the shallow inland water about 1/4 mile past the gate on the left. And feeding alongside the road by Pitch and Tar Bridge were 3 Fox Sparrows (Armour & Sheehan). Brian had a Red-breasted Nuthatch and a Siskin at his feeder on 1/23—a one day stand. Armour at Kingsmill and I at Hollybrook report single Siskins on 1/26. Bill Snyder has a Hairy Woodpecker at his home almost daily. And George Scott's Brown-headed Nuthatches still come to a second-floor window feeder—for peanut bits! (Nothing but envy here, George). Brian saw a Gnatcatcher along Airport Road on the 26th—to match one he saw at Drummond's Field on the 17th.

David Martin reports (1/27) a male Blue-winged Teal with some mallards at the Kingsmill Marina. The group seems to commute daily between the marina and near-by Wareham's Pond. A single Coot continues to be a daily visitor to the marina.

Drummond's Field had a female Harrier on 1/28, and

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2/01. A Kestrel is usually on the wires adjacent to Drummond's on Route 614, and a couple dozen Meadowlarks are usually present in or near the horse pasture. On 1/28, Armour spotted 3 Great Cormorants on the large buoy just upriver from the ferry landing at Jamestown. For sharp contrast, a Double-crested Cormorant posed with the trio. At Hog that day, Tom & I saw four Bald Eagles in the air at one time—above the 1st impoundment on the right as you enter. Ducks were Wigeons, Ringneck, and Common Mergansers—all in small numbers. We visited Croaker Landing and York River State Park on 1/29. In the York just off the Landing were about 50 Canvasbacks, while 2 Adult Eagles were perched on a dead tree about a half mile downstream. Enroute to the park we found 5 Rusty Blackbirds, a few Cowbirds, 3 Red-shouldered Hawks and a Kestrel. At the Park there was no avian activity, although the Chief Ranger said there were Wild Turkey close by earlier. Bob Morris tells us that for the seventh consecutive year a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks are rebuilding last year's nesting site on his Kingsmill property. Do you need any live squirrels, Bob? Today is Ground Hog Day—somewhat of a national holiday for Ruth Beck—and from the cold brightness of the day we are due for more cold weather. As I conclude, a Hermit Thrush is on my deck rail—tail moving up and down—awaiting a turn at a heated birdbath.

Florida Report

Former president Thom Blair reports from Ft. Myer that he and Rochet are enjoying "an irresponsible existence" in their RV. Thom has added two to his life list: Wood Storks and Snail Kites. About 110 species so far on this trip. The Blairs send their good wishes to all members.

California Report

Steve Rottenborn, now engaged in graduate work at Stanford, and wife Heather are settled in and very pleased with Stanford. (Ed. note: He could hardly say otherwise, since he knows your Ed. has a degree from that fine institution). Steve picked up nine "lifers" enroute, but says the best one was a Long-eared Owl in Augusta County, Va.

His primary study project is "Edge effects between riparian corridors and adjacent habitat, and the effect of riparian corridor width on bird distribution in the corridor". On the back burner is this one: "The effect of forest patch on the susceptibility of nesting birds to nest parasitism by cowbirds". Steve concludes with best wishes to the WBC folks.

Report from T•E•X•A•S

Ty and Julie Hotchkiss report from McAllen, Texas, under dateline of 21 January:

"...We have been at Bensten-Rio Grande State Park Campground with Chachalacas and Green Jays as regular visitors. Have been hiking the trails at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge and got pictures of a Hook-billed Kite and a Rose-throated Beccard. Saw a Buff-bellied Hummer today and a Vermilion Flycatcher plus a Bittern and a variety of ducks. Great show! Everyday brings something new."



A Bill Williams Travelogue from ???

"Okay, its quiz time. From the following January 1, 1993 bird information guess where the observer was. First bird of the day sighted—House Sparrow. Anybody got it yet? Boo!, hiss! Second bird of the day—now 8:00 a.m.—Chihuahuan (pronounced in the field— Che-hooa-hooa-n to reflect class and intellect) Raven. Certainly that's a give away. No? Well for those of you guessed Monterey, Mexico airport you win a cadmium-plated owl pellet.

Where's Monterey, Mexico , the nuthatches ask? Find Brownsville, Texas on a map and go west about 100 miles—Monterey—a steel town amidst incredible mountains and vast mesquite.

Return to the airport terminated six "Bob-Ake-necked" speed days of birding in north central and central Mexico revolving around the El Naranjo (the orange) bird count. Along with Dick Peake from Wise, Va., Bob and I tallied over 200 species—45 or so new ones for this gringo. Our list even included a life bird for Bob—the Sungrebe. Others were 5 parrots, a Peppershrike, 2 Woodcreepers, a Squirrel Cuckoo, Common Potoo, several hummingbirds, numerous warblers—Fan-tailed, Rufous-capped, Golden-crowned, Crescent Chested-crane Hawk, Bat Falcon, and Jacana to mention only a few. We saw all of North America's Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, it seemed, and never tired of seeing Vermilion Flycatchers* teed-up everywhere we turned in the lowlands.

One doesn't flit from Tidewater to Texas and beyond without culture shock. Above and beyond the birds and wildlife this observer was most deeply moved and impressed by the energy and resolve of the people."

*(Ed. Note: Bill, after his return and

earlier this very January, observed a Vermilion Flycatcher on the Eastern Shore. Editor has been asked whether it is true that Williams has a small bird cage in his suitcase. I don't know for sure, but, allegedly Bill once brought a live Yellow-headed Blackbird from the Eastern Shore to Jamestown possibly for "listing" purposes.)

Use of State Income Tax Forms for Wildlife and Conservation Donations

Those of us who file Virginia State Income tax returns have recently received packets complete with tax forms and instructions. In the happy event that you will claim a refund, line 27 of the tax form permits you to designate all or portions of refunds to several State programs involving birds and wildlife.

Line 27(a) is for the VA Nongame Wildlife Program. In past years, donations to this program were used for such things as the Bald Eagle restoration efforts of Mitchell Byrd and his associates; working with landowners to protect wildlife habitat for critical species; training teachers; and status surveys of species of birds, animals and fishes.

Line 27(e) is for the Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund. Three quarters of monies received will be used ... "to acquire land for recreation and to preserve natural areas; to develop, maintain and improve state park sites and facilities."

If you are not due a refund, contributions may be sent directly to the respective programs, at addresses set forth on page 15 of your Tax Bulletin. All donations are tax exempt from 1993 income.



Bird Watcher's Digest, January/
February 1993

Beaks and Seed

Q. House finches eat seeds right at the feeder. Chickadees snatch a single seed and fly off to eat it elsewhere. Why the difference in behavior?

A. Different beaks quip chickadees and finches for different lifestyles. House finches have strong beaks that can crack open sunflower seeds with little effort. Chickadees have small, weak beaks suited for picking insects and insect eggs from the crevices in tree bark. To get into a sunflower seed, the chickadee must hold the seed steady and peck it open. Pecking requires concentration that leaves the chickadee vulnerable to bullies at the feeder. When alone at a feeder, a chickadee may eat its seed on the spot. To compete against larger birds, chickadees dash in, snatch what they want, and quickly leave. Whether they eat at or away from a feeder, the energy issue remains.

A sunflower seed offers the same amount of energy regardless of who eats it; but because the chickadee is so small, that energy accounts for a larger proportion of its daily needs than it does for larger birds.

WBC Trip to Bridge-Tunnel Islands

On our January Club trip to the Bridge-Tunnel Island Amanda Allen, Jim Booth and Tom Armour had the trip to themselves, and they attracted some very fine birds indeed. Highlights:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Common Loon | Oldsquaw |
| Gannet | Black Scoter |
| Brown Pelican | Oystercatcher |
| Great Cormorant | Ruddy Turnstone |
| Tundra Swan | Purple Sandpiper |
| Harlequin Duck | Lesser Black-backed Gull |

Then for frosting on that cake, our birders drove about 25 miles north on the Eastern Shore for a possible look at a Vermilion Flycatcher and a Western Kingbird—both of which had been seen the previous week. Incredibly, both birds showed up on cue!

Local Hawk Watch

For the last 3 or 4 years, Brian Taber checked off the hawks migrating over his front steps during his lunch hour, and at other odd times. This year, from September 12 to October 27, he staked out a spot at the small Colonial Parkway turnout just west of Mill Creek. During that period, with very limited hours of observation, he registered the following raptors:

- | | | | |
|---------------|----|---------------|---|
| Kestrel | 18 | Red-tailed | 5 |
| Sharp-shinned | 14 | Cooper's Hawk | 3 |
| Osprey | 11 | Peregrine | 3 |
| Harrier | 8 | | |

The above, by their flight patterns, were all perceived to be migratory as opposed to local birds. Eagles and both vultures were seen, but not migrating.

Perhaps Brian will train some of us to help out next time around.



**Bald Eagle Breeding Data
Chesapeake System**

Dr. Mitchell Byrd has generously provided his 1992 summary breeding data for Bald Eagles in the Chesapeake System. To permit ready comparison with similar data from breeding years 1990 and 1991, we present his figures by geographic subsystems:

| Sub-system | 1990 | | 1991 | | 1992 | |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| | No. Nests | Fledged | No. Nests | Fledged | No. Nests | Fledged |
| James/Chickahominy | 18 | 32 | 20 | 28 | 26 | 37 |
| York/Mattaponi/Pamunkey | 10 | 19 | 12 | 20 | 14 | 18 |
| Rappahannock/Piankatank | 32 | 44 | 37 | 54 | 43 | 42 |
| Potomac | 31 | 37 | 32 | 43 | 38 | 37 |
| Eastern Shore/Inland Reservoirs/Lakes | <u>8</u> | <u>10</u> | <u>10</u> | <u>12</u> | <u>10</u> | <u>8</u> |
| Total System | 99 | 142 | 111 | 157 | 131 | 142 |
| Average Fledged Per Nest | 1.43 | | 1.41 | | 1.08 | |

* This, of course, is our home territory. Dr. Byrd told me that in 1973 there were **zero** known nests in the James/Chickahomany systems—a condition which persisted until 1978 when one nest was recorded. With those years in mind, the above numbers and their trend-line are largely due to his “advocacy” and vigorous actions on behalf of Bald Eagles. Thanks, Mitchell. You make us proud!



Interstate 64 Bluebird Trail Started

Since 1991, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VD)T has permitted the Virginia Federation of Garden Clubs to erect bird houses at Interstate rest areas throughout the state. New Kent County, mid-way between Richmond and Williamsburg, has rest stops on both sides of Interstate 64 between Exits 214 and 211. The Woodhaven Garden Club of Quinton, Virginia decided to sponsor birdhouses on the west-bound side and wished to concentrate on attracting bluebirds. The Garden Club solicited the help of Keith Kennedy, a bluebird enthusiast and member of the Williamsburg Bird Club, to procure the materials and to install and monitor five boxes.

The Williamsburg Bird Club donated the boxes for this effort, and early in January all five boxes were installed. The boxes are mounted on 1/2 inch galvanized steel water pipe and a six inch diameter PVC water drain pipe sheathes the pole to maximize predator protection. Further safeguards are provided by wooden con guards at the nest hole openings and sand at the pole bases.

Next time you are going to Richmond, why not stop and see the trail? The rest area is about one mile beyond Exit Number 214. If you stop in late April or early May, you will hopefully see lots of bluebird activities. If lucky, you may witness the maiden flight of a fledgling!

[Ed. Note: Our thanks to member Keith Kennedy for the above. Hope Keith will keep FLYER informed as to progress of this innovative project.]

A welcome to the newest members of our club.

Mack A. Lundy
1504 Conway Dr., Apt 102
Williamsburg, Va. 23185
220-4750

Paul & Carol McAllister
100 Justice Grice
Williamsburg, Va. 23185
229-1323

Roy Jennings
120 The Green
Williamsburg, Va. 23185
220-3665

Your friendly editor needs every member's help. Will each of you please resolve to call him once in a while—even to tell him "I ain't got nuthin". Beyond that, he'll welcome any news items, short articles for publication, comments on birds (or editors) etc. Thanks.

Bill Sheehan
104 Oak Road
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

And how can you forget a phone number like this: 220-2122. Or, in other words,
Two; Twenty; Twenty one; Twenty two.
