



# THE FLYER

Volume 17, No. 1

January 1993

Williamsburg Bird Club

Bill Sheehan, Editor (220-2122)

## January Events

**Meeting** Wednesday, January 20th, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117, Millington Hall, at the College.

### Program

**Dr. David Johnston**, from Fairfax—way up north, will present a program entitled: **Sea-birds of Christmas Island, The Largest Atoll in the World**. Dr. Johnston is a man of many skills, among them: editor, educator, and as a consultant to the World Bank. [Your own editor's atlas finds Christmas island in mid-Pacific, just a degree or two above the equator: 1,500 miles south of Honolulu; 3,500 miles southeast of San Francisco; and about 5000 miles due west of Quito, Ecuador]

### Field Trip

Regular January field trip will be on **Saturday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>**. Matthew Campbell will be our leader, with destination the **Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel Islands**. This is an unusual place to observe some species which do not normally venture into our area. As a sample, Brian Taber and Tom Armour visited the islands on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, and were rewarded with Brown Pelicans, Great Cormorants, Scaup, King Eider Duck, Harlequins, Oldsquaw, Gannets, Scoters (three species), Purple Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones. Tempting!

The Bridge-tunnel is cold, and sometimes windy. Dress for warmth, and bring lunch and a thermos of hot stuff. We expect to be home by mid-afternoon. Meet at 8 a.m. at Colonial Williamsburg Information Parking Lot (East Side). We'll carpool where possible in order to reduce aggregate toll fees.

## Coming Attractions

Emily Sharrett, our Field Trip Coordinator, has developed an outstanding package of Field Trips for the new year. Listed below is the trip scheduled for February. The remaining Field Trips are listed on page 2.

**February 20th, Jamestown Island.** A ride and walk trip to check out wintering species—and ending up in Bill Sheehan's kitchen for coffee & donuts while checking his yardbirds close-up and personal.

(Brian Taber—leader)

### President's Corner

City or county, street or meadow, telephone pole or tree—wherever you are so are birds. The fact that birds are everywhere, along with their coloration and calls and ability to fly may account for our own interest in birds. It is this interest that keeps us together as a Bird Club for monthly meetings, programs and field trips. I look forward to working and birding with all of you in 1993. This year promises some new and exciting activities. Come and participate in as many activities as possible. I especially encourage you to join us for the field trips. We are fortunate to live in a seasonally bird-rich area. Presently, we have wonderful winter waterfowl to observe. Also, remember to look out both the back and front windows at the feeder and yard species. Seeds and suet bring a variety of permanent residents and winter species.

I wish each of you a Happy New Year, and the best of birding in 1993.

*Ruth Beck*



---

### **1993 Scheduled Field Trips**

March 20th—Hog Island for Eagles, Herons, Shorebirds, ducks and some early migrants.

(Allan and Emily Sharrett—leaders)

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

You might want to mark your calendar for all of the events so you can plan on the ones which appeal to you. In each forthcoming FLYER we will publish current and in depth information as to time, what species we might expect to see, etc.

---

### **From Our Past President**

It has been especially rewarding to me—a horticulturist—to have been President of the Williamsburg Bird Club. In the process, I have made many new friends, learned a lot about local birds, and have become more and more curious about bird habitat in terms of plant species.

Special thanks to the 1992 Club officers and Board members for their fine support and patience. And very best wishes to all members of this fine Club for 1993. Happy birding!

*Dick Mahone*

---

A welcome to the newest members of our club.

Robert & Audrey Fritts  
407 Moody's Run  
Williamsburg, Va. 23185  
229-9516

---



---

## **The Local Scene**

To close out November, the Doyles met with a Brown Pelican; 70 Tundra Swans; 5 Mute Swans; 6 Red-headed Woodpeckers and a Sapsucker at Camp Peary. Later, at Kingsmill Pond, they saw 10 Ring-necked Ducks; 6 Hooded Mergansers and 2 Pied-billed Grebes. Can't leave the Doyles without noting their 12/1 report of watching a Phoebe alight on a deer's back—apparently picking up insects from the deer's back and haunches. The Phoebe would occasionally go to the ground close to the deer. This routine was observed 3 or 4 times from a window in their Kingsmill residence by both Doyles. (Joe Doyle believes the Phoebe's mother may have been frightened by a Cattle Egret!)

On 12/04 I watched a Pileated eating berries from a loose-limbed Aronia bush. He had a tough time maintaining his balance while flapping around in a very undignified manner. Same day, Tom Armour saw a small flock of waxwings in that Cypress swamp near Chippokes State Park. Then at Hog Island 6 Pintail and 70 Hooded Mergansers were "ducks of the day" in the impoundments. A Harrier and 3 Kestrel were also noted, but nary a shorebird. On 12/6 Ruth Beck spotted a Wild Turkey and a lone Evening Grosbeak—a rare bird to date this season—both at home in Barhamsville.

Julie Hotchkiss had a Fox Sparrow in her First Colony yard on 12/04; and on 12/6 met a Coopers Hawk in the 4-H Club woods on Rt. 614. On the 8th, by way of getting rid of some old black sunflower seed, I spread them rather heavily in my beds. I was able to count 14 Cardinals and 7 Towhees at one time—for me a new yard high for Cardi-

nals. On 12/14, Tom Armour scoped over 1,000 Ruddy Ducks, 12 Goldeneye and 100 Bufflehead from the Parkway along the York. And a Great Cormorant was perched on a piling just off Yorktown Beach. On 12/14 Bill Snyder announced a beautiful Fox Sparrow in his yard on Powhatan Creek. Tom Armour picked up 2 Common Mergansers while he was fishing on the James near Kingsmill. Tom and I toured the outer loop of Jamestown Island on the 16th. Our favorites were 3 Hermit Thrushes, 2 Brown-headed Nuthatches and 8 Red-headed Woodpeckers; but 2 Red-tailed Hawks, a Sapsucker pecking on a persimmon, 6 Swamp Sparrows and 7 Hooded Mergansers were happily received. A Phoebe visited me on 12/16, and David Martin reported a Brown Pelican at the Kingsmill Marina that date. Armour found a Barred Owl at roost in Kingsmill on 12/16—probably getting ready for the Christmas Count where he was duly recorded on the 20th. Tom also saw 75 Red-breasted and 2 Common Mergansers on the James that date. Next day, Tom had an unusual nonbirding experience. He was in his Jon-boat, doing a little fishing and checking out his fish-finder sonar. Suddenly, a River Otter broke the surface a short distance away, came in closer and then circled the boat. Tom believes the subdued clicking noises of the sonar may have attracted the otter. With all that excitement, he still managed to spot a Bald Eagle and 7 Hooded Mergansers. On 12/23 Bill Snyder watched 5 Common Egret on a pond or stream off Rt. 60, east of Busch Gardens. Skiffe's Creek, maybe? Christmas Eve brought me 20 waxwings—just passing through!

A Peregrine Falcon performed for the Doyles and their son, Jeff, near Wareham's Pond at Kingsmill on 12/24. Great find!

On 12/30, Tom Armour listened to 3 Barred Owls talking to each other during the night. Spooky! and Peter Brown, at The Coves, welcomed a visiting Purple Finch. Also on the 30th, Tom saw a Coot, two Bald Eagles and a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers. Tom & I closed out the year with 9 Red-headed Woodpeckers on Jamestown Island.

To start 1993, the Doyles watched a Ringed Turtle Dove on the rail of their deck, and in a nearby tree.

(continued on Page 4)

---



Grace said they were too close to see the bird in their binoculars, while it was on the deck. We have no prior local record; in fact, it does not appear in the Virginia Checklist. Robbins, in his *Birds of North America* treats it this way:

"A common cage bird that has become resident in Los Angeles and locally from Miami to Baltimore" Both Robbins and Peterson Guides have pictures of it.

On 1/3, Bill Snyder reported 6 Great Egret in his backyard—foraging along Powhattan Creek. 1/4 found Armour & me enroute to Hog Island. Best birds were probably 6 Great Egrets (maybe Bill Snyders?), 2000+ Canada Geese, 20 Tundra Swans, 60 Green-winged Teal, 10 Pintail, 75 Ring-necks, 2 Common Mergansers, 6 Ruddy Ducks; 1 Harrier, a Redtail and 3 Kestrel (along Rt 10), a Clapper Rail and 3 Palm Warblers. Rarest bird of the day was undoubtedly Dr. Mitchell Byrd, who was taking a "busman's holiday" at Hog Island. Armour plans to count Mitchell on his 1993 list. We should audit that lad's records.

George Scott in Kingsmill has Brown-headed Nuthatches at his feeder—almost daily for a couple months. What are they eating, George? On 7 Jan., Drummond's Field gave up 6 Greater Yellowlegs; 2 Lesser Yellowlegs; 1 Kestrel; 1 Red-tailed Hawk (in the 4-H woods) and a couple Meadowlark. Same date, an adult White-crowned Sparrow performed for Tom and me in a hedgerow on the old Rte 31 about 1/4 mile north of the Jamestown Marina entrance. In company were Song, Field and White-throats. Suzy Woodall scores big with a Phoebe in her yard—daily for a month or so. And Bill Williams apparently has the only Purple Finches in town—two of them almost daily. Bill also picked up 2 Fox Sparrows at Hog island—not normally seen there.

### **From Our Christmas Count Records**

In most cases, comparisons of yearly count records don't lead to firm conclusions as to changes in species populations. Variables of weather, expertise of observers, time of day, and the like tend to make short-run conclusions rather hazardous. However, as we build a base of experience over the years, the yearly ups and downs level off—and the results of a few species suggest and even confirm trends. We have pulled the count numbers on three which may so qualify, and here they are.

Year	E.Bluebird	House Finch	House Sparrow
1977	60	4	330
1978	60	3	113
1979	66	3	266
1980	78	49	324
1981	77	25	205
1982	126	69	131
1983	258	70	194
1984	137	56	166
1985	147	93	113
1986	139	74	77
1987	189	136	130
1988	157	232	84
1989	220	380	90
1990	242	212	56
1991	149	94	39
1992	237	118	23

Bravo to the Bluebirds and to Joe Doyle for being our point-man for nesting boxes and other matters involving this beautiful species. And, as for the Finches and Sparrows; are the Finches driving the House Sparrows underground? Are the Sparrows experiencing an avian ailment peculiar to them? Wonder if our Club professionals have a view on this. In the absence of a scientific reason, the editor continues to believe it is because he has a Havahart Sparrow trap!



From *Tidings*—the quarterly publication of the Lower James River Association.

### **Land is returned to the birds**

Under a little-known federal program, some landowners are plugging drainage ditches in their pastures to turn the land back into marshes.

The program aims to restore converted wetlands to their original appearance and function. In Virginia the program is coordinated by Partners for Wildlife which has launched 16 projects covering roughly 100 acres in eight counties east of Interstate 95 since 1991.

"We're trying to recreate natural wetland communities," said Bridgett Costanzo, who coordinates the work out of the Fish and Wildlife Service's office in White Marsh.

This year the program has a budget of \$70,000 to \$100,000 which it uses to provide surveyors, a contractor with equipment and management plans. The individual landowner pays nothing.

Government officials once doubted farmers would be willing to trade income-producing tracts for wetlands and birds, Bob Misso of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said.

But in six years, the program has grown from a handful of demonstration projects to a network of restored wetlands and marshes covering 200,000 acres nationwide. The office also has a backlog of 2,000 landowners waiting to get involved.

The land in the project is expected to revert to natural wetlands vegetation, which acts as a natural water purification system and controls erosion, while providing a rich source of nutrition and shelter for migratory fowl.

### **Christmas Bird Count**

It came up raining on the morning of Sunday, December 20th. But that did not deter Brian Taber and 26 spirited birders from finding a very respectable 110 species—a bit above the average of prior 15 years of participation in this now international event. Complete count data are listed elsewhere in this edition. A few highlights and "no shows", along with a list of "perpetrators" are listed below:

#### **Highlights**

- Twenty-six Bald Eagles: (12 adults; 14 immatures)
- One Common Moorhen
- Three Brown Pelicans
- Two White Pelicans
- One Great Cormorant

#### **No Shows:**

- Black Vulture
- Wild Turkey
- Fish Crow
- Fox Sparrow
- Pine Siskin
- Evening Grosbeak

#### **Perpetrators:**

Amanda Allen; Sue Gray Al-Salam; Joy Archer; Tom & Jeanne Armour; Henry DeGraff; Joe & Grace Doyle; Bettye Fields; Ty & Julie Hotchkiss; Teta Kain; Carolyn Lowe; Paul & Carol McAllister; Ellen McLean; Mark & Helen Mort; Mary Pulley; Dave & Lee Schuster; Dorothy Silsby; Brian Taber; Ada Van Ness; Bryan Watts & Bill Williams.

Brian extends special thanks to all who participated. In turn, we all thank Brian for organizing and managing so many successful Christmas and Spring Counts in past years.





## In Our Yards & At Our Feeders

On page 1, Ruth urged us to be alert to the birds around our houses. Below is a compilation of those species reported to FLYER from Christmas Eve to January 10th. Thirty-eight species is a strong showing but I'm certain that there are a few more you haven't told us about. Tell Bill Sheehan at 220-2122.

Turkey Vulture	Carolina Wren
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Golden-Crowned Kinglet
Red-shouldered Hawk	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Red-tailed Hawk	Bluebird
Mourning Dove	Robin
Barred Owl	Mockingbird
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Brown Thrasher
Downy Woodpecker	Cedar Waxwing
Flicker	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Pileated Woodpecker	Pine Warbler
Phoebe (1)	Cardinal
Blue Jay	Towhee
American Crow	White-throated Sparrow
Carolina Chickadee	Junco
Tufted Titmouse	Common Grackle
White-breasted Nuthatch	Purple Finch (3)
Brown-headed Nuthatch (2)	House Finch
Brown Creeper	Goldfinch

Reported at one location only:

- 1) Phoebe—Suzy Woodall: Toano
- 2) Brown-headed Nuthatch—  
George Scott: Kingsmill
- 3) Purple Finch—  
Bill Williams: Deerwood Hills

## Last Year's Monthly Headlines

January	Painted Bunting at Marlbank
February	Northern Oriole on Campus
March	White Pelican at Hog Island
April	Black-headed Grosbeak at Chisel Run
May	Eagles produced young at Kingsmill
June	(Birds all too busy to be interviewed)
July	Young Cowbird being fed by Song Sparrow
August	American Bittern at Jamestown Island
September	Fulvous Tree Duck at Queen's Lake
October	LeConte's Sparrow at Drummond's Field
November	Brown Pelican invasion of York & James
December	Dealer's choice. See Christmas Count List

## Need a New Years Resolution?

Your friendly editor, just back from a year's banishment, 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.**

# 1992 Christmas Count

LOON, Common	9
GREBE, Pied-billed	29
Horned	18
PELICAN, American White	2
Brown	3
CORMORANT, Great	1
Double-crested	363
HERON, Great Blue	161
EGRET, Great	1
SWAN, Tundra	188
Mute	9
GOOSE, Snow	2
GOOSE, Canada	1,441
DUCK, Wood	2
TEAL, Green-winged	55
DUCK, American Black	32
MALLARD	942
PINTAIL, Northern	90
GADWALL	9
WIGEON, American	17
CANVASBACK	939
REDHEAD	2
DUCK, Ring-necked	541
SCAUP, Lesser	8
GOLDENEYE, Common	17
BUFFLEHEAD	213
MERGANSEER, Hooded	92
Common	4
Red-breasted	55
DUCK, Ruddy	913
VULTURE, Black (Count Week)	1
Turkey	34
EAGLE, Bald	26
HARRIER, Northern	5
HAWK, Sharp-shinned	6
Cooper's	1
HAWK, Red-shouldered	4
Red-tailed	15
KESTREL, American	15
BOBWHITE, Northern	16
RAIL, Clapper	4
King	1
MOORHEN, Common	1
KILLDEER	28
YELLOWLEGS, Greater	34
DUNLIN	1
SNIPER, Common	1
WOODCOCK, American	3
GULL, Laughing	30
Bonaparte's	27
Ring-billed	2,071
Herring	193
Great Black-backed	67
TERN, Forster's	42
DOVE, Rock	55

DOVE, Mourning	450
SCREECH-OWL, Eastern	2
OWL, Great Horned	2
Barred	4
KINGFISHER, Belted	25
WOODPECKER, Red-headed	11
Red-bellied	57
SAPSUCKER, Yellow-bellied	5
WOODPECKER, Downy	44
Hairy	5
FLICKER, Northern	115
WOODPECKER, Pileated	20
PHOEBE, Eastern	7
JAY, Blue	171
CROW, American	219
CHICADEE, Carolina	179
TITMOUSE, Tufted	83
NUTHATCH, White-breasted	29
Brown-headed	4
CREEPER, Brown	6
WREN, Carolina	116
Winter	3
Marsh	1
KINGLET, Golden-crowned	53
Ruby-crowned	34
BLUEBIRD, Eastern	237
THRUSH, Hermit	3
ROBIN, American	354
MOCKINGBIRD, NORTHERN	81
THRASHER, Brown	5
WAXWING, Cedar	316
STARLING, European	968
WARBLER, Yellow-rumped	378
Pine	12
Palm	4
YELLOWTHROAT, Common	5
CARDINAL, Northern	176
TOWHEE, Rufous-sided	23
SPARROW, Chipping	40
Field	114
Vesper	1
Savannah	116
Song	1,032
Swamp	225
White-throated	401
JUNCO, Dark-eyed	138
BLACKBIRD, Red-winged	4,113
MEADOWLARK, Eastern	79
BLACKBIRD, Rusty	4
GRACKLE, Common	291
COWBIRD, Brown-headed	21
FINCH, Purple	5
House	118
GOLDFINCH, American	116
SPARROW, House	23