



# THE FLYER

Volume 17, No. 9

October 1993

Williamsburg Bird Club

## Meeting

Wednesday, October 20th, at 7:30 pm in **Room 211**, Millington Hall, at the College of William and Mary. (**Please note change in Room number, a one-time change to accomodate a special W&M requirement.**)

## Program

**Ellen Bentley**, a graduate student at Virginia Institute of Marine Science, will describe her research on the **Habitat Analysis of Yellow-Crowned Night Herons**. Ellen was recipient of a WBC research grant a year ago. She holds a bachelor's degree in Ecology/Evolution from Cornell University, and is presently a candiate for an advanced degree at VIMS.

## Field Trip

**Saturday, October 30th**— Brian Taber will lead this annual event to the Bay Bridge Tunnel Islands, and on to Kiptopeke to catch the fall raptor migration. Brian asks that we meet him at the C.W. Information Center Parking lot at **7 a.m.** to permit car pooling and general instructions. [This trip was initially scheduled for October 23rd, a date which is in conflict with W&M Homecoming]

## Coming Attractions

### November 17th—(Meeting)

Guest Speaker: Dana Bradshaw, former WBC member, will speak on the subject of **Neotropical Birds**. His outstanding article on this subject drew wide acclaim when published last May in *Virginia Wildlife*. Dana is presently a field biologist with Virginia Game and Inland Fisheries Department.

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If you are interested in serving on the Executive Board of the Williamsburg Bird Club, be sure to read the article titled "Election of WBC Officers" on page 5.

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## President's

Corner

After that hot, dry summer these crisp October days and nights are at least delicious. In the bird department, we say our good-byes to the migrant species, and expectantly await the arrivals of our winter visitors. The latter will be thirsty, and hungry, and it's not too early to check out our seed and suet feeders, ground feeding spaces, and plan our winter water sources. Winter lies ahead, and the sheer pleasure of watching bird antics "close up and personal" makes a little pre-planning worthwhile indeed.

*Ruth Beck*



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## **More Coming Attractions**

### **November 20th— (Field Trip)**

President Beck will introduce us to the Beck's lovely and spacious sylvan hide-away in Barhamsville. Their "estate" includes a large fresh-water pond, and a mixed bottomland hardwood habitat. If you were a bird, that is surely a place you would visit. Directions will be detailed in the November FLYER.

### **December 19th—Christmas Bird Count**

Lee Schuster will be coordinator. See separate articles (this page and page three) this issue, for more information on this nation-wide event.

### **Welcome to New Members**

Mary Walters  
P. O. Box 1008  
Gloucester, Va. 23061

693-5228

Randy & Doan Carter  
4008 Governor's Square, No. 3  
Williamsburg, Va. 23188

229-2076

### **Christmas Count Areas**

These are the areas that will be surveyed, along with some of the landmark locations in each section:

**Cheatham Annex**—Camp Peary, Queen's Lake, Cheatham Annex, Felgate's Creek, Indian Field Creek.

**Kingsmill**—Country Road to Carter's Grove, Kingsmill, Williamsburg Airport, Parkway from CW Information Center to just before College Creek..

**Hog Island**—Ferry ride over and Hog Island Refuge.

**Jamestown**—Parkway from College Creek to Jamestown and Jamestown Island.

**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.

**Middle Plantation**—Mid-county Park, Wallter Mill Park (both entrances), Drummond's Field, News Road and First Colony.

**Jolly Pond**—Jolly Pond, Cranston's Mill Pond, Little Creek Reservoir.

**Skimino**—Barlow's Pond, Skimino Farms, Mirror Lakes, entrance to York River State Park and Riverview Plantation.



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## **Christmas Bird Count**

Sunday, December 19th marks the day of our annual Christmas Bird Count. The annual count came about when 27 conservationists decided to protest the traditional bird shoot, and instead of shooting birds, they counted them on Christmas Day 1900. The event originated as a protest to the traditional holiday 'side hunt' in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds and other animals in one day.

Today, volunteers from all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South America, Bermuda and the West Indies will count and record every bird species seen or heard during one calendar day. More than 1600 individual Christmas Bird Counts will be held during a two and a half week period.

Each count group has a designated circle 15 miles in diameter—about 177 square miles—where they try to cover as much ground as possible within a 24-hour period. The data collected by each count group is then sent into National Audubon Society headquarters in New York. Count data is published in a special book sized edition of *American Birds* magazine.

Apart from its attraction as a social, sporting and competitive event, the annual count reveals interesting and scientifically useful information on the early winter distribution patterns of various birds species and overall health of the environment.

The Williamsburg Bird Count involves 8 areas centered around the

Williamsburg Visitor Center including Williamsburg, James City County and part of York County. The day begins around 5:00 a.m. and ends with the final tally at 5:00 p.m. An individual may participate the entire day or only part of the day. Each area will have a leader who knows the territory to be covered. Look over the 8 areas that will be surveyed on December 19th. There will be sign up sheets at both the October and November meetings for everyone who is interested. If there are any questions or if someone is unable to attend the meetings please call Lee Schuster at 565-6148 (after 6:00 p.m.)

**See Count Area information on Page 2**

## **September Field Trip**

Amanda Allen, and eight other birders checked out the Waller Mill Pond area during the September Bird Walk on the 18th. Although it was a quiet birding morning, that's what mid-September usually produces in a Waller Mill habitat. There were plenty of birds to go round, and they included Green-backed Heron, Redstarts, Scarlet Tanager, Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Wood Pewee. The "eight other" birders were Joy Archer, Grace & Joe Doyle, Lee and Dave Schuster, Bob Fritts, Dorothy Whitfield, and Barbara Rockwell.



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## **Barn Owl Pellets**

Barn Owl pellets such as the ones Tom Armour recovered from a duck blind in the James River are masses of undigested parts of a bird's food. They consist of the fur, feathers, bones, bills, claws and teeth of small mammals and birds, as well as the hard parts of insects and crustaceans. The pellets are regurgitated from the birds mouth and may be up to 2-1/2 inches in length. The pellets are found at or under the regular roost or nest sites of the bird—not must owls, but all raptors. Laboratory dissection of the pellets provides a scientific method of analyzing a bird's food without having to kill the bird to do it. In fact, our own Ruth Beck uses them for such purposes in the biology lab classes she teaches—in this very building.

## **Project FeederWatch**

Project FeederWatch is a joint effort of two bird research centers: Long Point Bird Observatory in Ontario and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in New York. Every two weeks from November to March, thousands of “kitchen-window scientists” across North America count birds at their backyard feeders, noting which species visit, and how many.

Together, the volunteer FeederWatchers collect far more data than a single scientist ever could. Cornell ornithologists use the information to track bird population trends.

For example, this past winter many FeederWatchers thought they saw fewer birds than normal at their feeders. But the FeederWatch data, once analyzed,

didn't support this gut reaction. According to researchers, the “missing” birds were mostly invasion species—birds such as Common Redpoll, Evening Grosbeak, and Pine Siskin. These birds breed and winter in northern areas but sometimes wander south when food is in short supply. This past winter wasn't a big invasion year, perhaps because food was plentiful in the north.

Other bird species that really did decline the previous winter showed modest increases this past winter, including Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-bellied Woodpecker, American Goldfinch, Northern Cardinal and Carolina Chickadee.

On the down side, some ground-feeding sparrows showed declines. For White-throated Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow, this was the second year in a row that FeederWatch noted a downward trend.

But for these birds, fewer feeder visits may not mean a real change in population levels. For the last two years, eastern winters have been mild, with little snow. As a result, birds may have shunned feeders because natural food was easy to find.

If you wish to participate in the project, send \$14 (check or card) to Project FeederWatch, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, New York 14850, and you will receive a participant's kit and complete instructions.

At least four of our members will be repeat participants this year and will be glad to field your questions.

Dur Morton	253-0225
Dave Schuster	565-6148
Marion Simmons	220-4741
Bill Sheehan	220-2122



**Election of WBC Officers**

In accordance with our Club By-Laws, the Executive Board has designated four members to constitute a Nominating Committee. The Committee is charged with developing a proposed slate of officers (for the year 1994) for each of the following positions:

- President
- First Vice President (Program Chairman)
- Second Vice President (Editor, THE FLYER)
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Board Members at large (2)

The above, together with the immediate past president, constitute our Executive Board.

Members of the Nominating Committee are:

- Marilyn Zeigler (Chair) 220-2536
- Julie Hotchkiss 229-7741
- Lee Schuster 565-6148
- Fred Blystone 229-4346

If you are willing to serve in any of the above capacities (or if you know a member who might be interested), please call Marilyn or any other Committee member.

The proposed slate will be published in the November FLYER, and announced at the November Club meeting on November 17th.

**Club Records**

From time to time we are asked about the records of local birds which we have maintained since the Club's inception in 1977. Somewhat arbitrarily, we have tried to

include Williamsburg, James City County, York County and parts of Surry County—notably Hog island. We have on record a total of 320 species. One way to classify these species is by frequency, and a current analysis would look like this:

- Accidental 39 (no more than 5 records last 50 years)
- Rare 75 (Less than 25 observations)
- Uncommon 91 (25 or more observations; usually species appearing in small numbers in limited habitat)
- Common 114 (Species which can be found most of the time in proper season and habitat.)

If you prefer percentages, 36% of our grand list is accidental or rare; 29% is uncommon, and only 35% are classified as common.

Another way to sort them out is by breeding status, and you will quickly see that we are quite shy on hard evidence of recent breeding:

- Breeding species: 92
- Probably breeders: 11
- Known former breeders: 5

Lots more information is available to members in the annual **Summary of Local Bird Data** which is usually distributed with the February FLYER. We need the continuing interest and help of all members, particularly with respect to arrival dates and nesting dates and any observed or perceived changes in patterns.



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**Local Scene**

During the last week of August, hundreds of Robins were observed feeding along the roadsides of the Outer Loop at Jamestown Island. On 8/24, Brian Taber saw a Nighthawk over the Parkway near Mill Creek. On 9/05, at Camp Peary, the Doyles recorded *hundreds* of Bobolinks, 2 Red-tailed Hawks, a White-eyed Vireo and several Red-headed Woodpeckers. On 9/02, Brian Taber set up his hawk station on the Parkway—late afternoon. Nighthawks showed up on 9/02 and 9/04. Migrators appeared to be 15 Osprey on 9/05; 3 Kestrel on 9/06, along with a Sharp-shinned Hawk and 3 Osprey. Bill Williams saw 14 Nighthawks over Williamsburg Crossing on 9/05. (More Nighthawks have been reported to us this year than the last 7 years combined.) On 9/09 a Scarlet Tanager visited my yard, as did a Crested Flycatcher. On 9/10 Tom Armour and I visited Jamestown Island: Bald Eagle; Scarlet Tanager; 4 White-eyed Vireo; several Acadian Flycatchers and Wood Peewees; multiple Pine Warbles trilling; and 10-12 groups of Robins gleaning. On 9/11 a recently fledged Red-bellied Woodpecker was being fed repeatedly by an adult female at my deck feeder. I note that on June 16th, the same thing had happened except that two young were involved. I conclude that two broods were involved, but none of my bird books address breeding frequency within a season. Anyone else?

On 9/13, the 1st impoundment at Hog Island was bone dry—not a bird in it! We did manage 50 Bobolink, 2 Great Egret and 5 Royal Terns. Canada Geese—totally out of view. One Harrier and 4 Kingbirds near Bacon's Castle were observed. At Camp Peary, on 9/05, Doyles found 4 Wild Turkey and a possible Shrike. On 9/10 Dick Fouts, out Skimino way, watched a dozen Nighthawks "hawking" insects over a new mown hayfield. On 9/15, at Kingsmill, 35 Royal Terns and 4 Forsters Terns lined up on the seawall. On 9/18 Tom Armour inspected the duck blind near College Creek where Barn Owl activity was previously noted. He found fresh pellets and a large assortment of other evidence that owls have at least used the blind as a roost. No specific evidence that young had been present. On 9/15 Julie Hotchkiss recorded a Yellow Warbler in First Colony, and a Prothonotary Warbler in Bassett Woods. Then, on the 19th, Redstart, Black & White Warbler and Summer Tanagers—all at First Colony. Same date, Marilyn Zeigler and Joy Archer saw a Northern Oriole and some Red-headed Woodpeckers at Jamestown island. Marilyn found a Summer Tanager and 2 Indigo Buntings at Queens Lake on 9/21.

Hog Island had over 1,000 Canada Geese on 9/24—with one gorgeous Snow Goose in company. Small representations of ducks were also present: Mallards, Blacks, Shovelers and Green-winged Teal. Royal, Caspians, and Forster's represented the Terns, and a Clapper Rail called out from the marshes. On 9/24 Ruth Beck and Donna Ware visited Craney Island for botanical purposes, but also found 2 Wilson's Phalaropes and 2 Avocets. On 9.25 a Rose-breasted Grosbeak passed through my yard. Kingsmill Marina raised the ante to 78 Royal

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and 28 Forster's Terns on 9/27; and Tom further reported Parula Warbles, Redstarts and both Tanagers in his yard. On 9/28, Betty Williams watch 2 Red-shouldered Hawks screaming at and diving on a Red-tailed Hawk in Skipwith Farms. Betty had seen this once before, but in springtime. Are territories defended year 'round? As September nears end, the Hummingbird situation gets tighter. Burns Lane on 9/27; The Coves on 9/28; Kingsmill on 9/29. In past years those who maintained feeders have had occasional birds well into October. Catbird in my yard 9/30. Same date, at the JCC Parkway turnouts, 500 Tree Swallows, 1 Red-tailed Hawk, and both Royal and Caspian Terns over the James. On 10/01 at least 2,000 Tree Swallows were in and over the Parkway marshes—mostly concentrated at College Creek where they were eating bayberries and (apparently) seeds of several marsh grasses. Osprey still at College Creek, and at Kingsmill. 10/02 Barred Owl calling on Oak Road.

More late hummers reported as we approach our press deadline: 10/03 by Sue Roundtree on Powell Ave., 10/04 by Jean and Peter Brown in the Coves. At Camp Peary on 10/03, Doyles found a Phoebe and a couple Wood Ducks. (No migrant duck species in sight). At Kingsmill, they watched 2 Red-shouldered and 1 Red-tailed Hawks. On 10/05 Larry Ricketts and your editor watched a bouncy little Winter Wren working in, out and under my shrubbery on Oak Road. When I closed my greenhouse about dusk, the bird was in it. First Winter Wren I ever had as an overnight house guest!

### **Donation to the Local Library**

Alice Springe, our favorite book-person, reports that our Club has donated the following bird book to our local library: *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, 2nd edition.

### **Hummingbird Feeders**

Bird Clubs in other parts are recommending more and more that feeders be cleaned and replenished one more time after normal departure times. Some of us are doing this locally, with mixed success and high hopes for a real late Ruby-throat or even one of the uncommon ones which may come in via weather fronts. We have a fair number of October records, and even a well-substantiated Thanksgiving Day appearance.

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

Bill Sheehan (220-2122)  
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