



# THE FLYER

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January, 1994

Williamsburg Bird Club

## January Meeting

Our next regular meeting will be **Wednesday, January 19th, 1994** at 7:30 PM in Room 117, Millington Hall at William and Mary. The program for the meeting will be on the Bald Eagles of Virginia, and it will be presented by Dr. Mitchell Byrd.

## January Field Trip

Our monthly field trip is scheduled for January 22, and will depart at 8am from the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center. The trip will consist of birding the Colonial Parkway from College Creek to Jamestown and continuing onto Jamestown Island. Brian Taber will lead the walk. There are a variety of habitats on this trip including marshes, tidal creeks, woodlands, edges and thick understory. Winter residents include all of the eastern woodpeckers, except the Red-cockaded, Fox, Swamp and White-throated Sparrows, Ruby and Golden-crowned Kinglets, possibly Brown-headed Nuthatches, and an occasional Clapper Rail. Bill Sheehan has graciously invited us to end the trip at his home for coffee and the spectacular birding from his kitchen window.

## President's Corner

I would like to take this time to wish everyone a Happy New Year and welcome you to what we hope will be an outstanding year of birding with the Williamsburg Bird club. A great deal of work has already been done planning programs and field trips for the coming year, and we hope to have an unprecedented slate of activities and participation by the membership. The winter has

brought with it a few surprising species, and a few old favorites which have been virtually nonexistent the last few winters (most notably Evening Grosbeaks and Pine Siskins). Remember that during the winter months, many birds rely on us to supplement their diets via our feeders, so keep them filled and keep us informed of what you see showing up at them. Have a good birding year!

*Ruth Beck*

## 1994 Field Trip Schedule

This year, the majority of our monthly field trips will utilize the eight areas encompassed by our Spring and Christmas Bird Counts. Our focus will be to familiarize the participants with the areas that will be covered by the count. The areas that will be surveyed are: Cheatham Annex, Kingsmill, Hog Island, Jamestown, College Woods, Middle Plantation, and Jolly's Pond. This series kicks off with this month's trip to Jamestown Island. The rest of the schedule is as follows:

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|----------|--|
| February | York River and Cheatham Annex, Bill Williams, leader.  |
| March    | Owl Prowl after meeting, Ruth Beck, leader.<br>Jolly's Pond, Cranston Mill and Little Creek, Dave and Lee Schuster, leaders. |
| April    | Hog Island, Tom Armour, leader.  |
| May      | Ruth Beck's Barhamsville Property, followed by a "pot-luck" picnic, Ruth Beck, leader.<br>Spring Bird Count                  |

- June Greensville County Special Species Foray, Emily and Allan Sharrett, leaders.
- July Craney Island for shore birds, leader TBA.
- August No field trip this month.
- September Middle Plantation, Waller Mill and Governor's Land, leader TBA.
- October Eastern Shore and Kiptopeke for hawk migration, leader TBA
- November Kingsmill and Colonial Parkway, Tom Armour, leader.
- December Christmas Bird Count.

### Thanks Bill and Fred

With the New Year come many changes for the Williamsburg Bird Club. Among them is the change in editorial responsibilities for the newsletter. Bill Sheehan and Fred Blystone have published the newsletter for the past year, and they have proven to be an outstanding editorial team. There is a great deal of effort involved in the collection, editing, printing and mailing of the newsletter each month, and Bill and Fred have set the standard for performing this duty. They have also been extremely helpful in seeing that this responsibility is smoothly transferred to us.

As many of you know, it appears that Fred will be leaving the Williamsburg area to take a job in Dalton, Georgia. Fred is one of the club founders, and has served as treasurer since its inception. His departure will be a difficult one for the club as a whole as well as to the many individuals who have come to know him over the years. We wish him the best of luck in his new endeavors.

Bill will continue to maintain our overall bird sighting records. He welcomes information on rare and unusual sightings, but monthly sighting information should be directed to Dave and Lee Schuster so that it can be included in the newsletter. Bill's unique bird feeding experiences will always be a great source of interest and information for our club. Many of us are still trying to figure out how he gets so many great birds to frequent his backyard.

### Congratulations

Congratulations are in order to Julie Hotchkiss for the publication of her article "A Welcoming Place" in the January/February 1994 issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest*. In the article Julie describes her and husband Ty's encounters with the birds, feeders, and citizens of Salineno, South Texas during their trip there last January. A condensed version of the article will be included in a future newsletter, but in the limited space available, we really won't be able to do it justice. If you can get your hands on a copy of the original, check it out. Many thanks to Julie and Ty for sharing their experiences with the rest of the birding community, and keep up the good work!

### Feeder Watchers

If you participate in the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology Project FeederWatch and are enrolled in the National Science Experiment: Seed Preference Test, you may have found it next to impossible to obtain pure Red Milo seed. Have no fear, Bill Sheehan has contacted Wild Birds Unlimited, and they have arranged to special order pure Red Milo to help support this experiment. Red Milo is commonly used as part of so-called mixed seed, but in this area, it is

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typically not used as a stand-alone seed, so it can be difficult to obtain.

The National Science Experiment is using Red Milo as one of its test seeds in an effort to determine exactly what types of seed various bird species prefer. Believe it or not, a scientific experiment of this type has never been performed before! If you're interested in this experiment or in participating in the basic Project FeederWatch study, contact the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology at:

Project FeederWatch  
Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology  
159 Sapsucker Woods Road  
Ithaca, NY 14850

Thanks to George Copping and Wild Birds Unlimited for their cooperation in this worthy experiment.

**Christmas Bird Count**

We had a beautiful day with cool temperatures to observe 110 species on Sunday, December 19. Twenty-seven skillful birders matched last years species count, which according to Bill Sheehan is a little above average from the past 15 years. The general consensus at the final tally was that the birds were around, they just wanted to make it difficult to find them this year. Complete count data are listed elsewhere in this edition. A few highlights and "no shows are listed below:

<b>Highlights</b>	<b>No Shows</b>
1 Old Squaw	Pine Siskins
3 Osprey	Greater Yellowlegs
1 American Avocet	Snow Geese
1 Western Sandpiper	Wood Ducks
2 Black-crowned Night Herons	Pintails

I would like to extend a special thanks to all who helped make this a successful Christmas Count, especially Brian Taber who helped fill gaps and answer questions when I wasn't sure of what I was doing.

Following is a list of everyone who helped make it a great day. If anyone is left out, I apologize for missing you, but am very thankful for your help.

Brian Taber, Thomas McCary, Darryl and Georgia Thomas, A. J. Booth, Bob Fritts, Dot Silsby, Christine Bunn, Tom Armour, Joe and Grace Doyle, Bill Williams, Bettye Fields, Mary Pulley, Fred Blystone, Ruth Beck, Julie and Ty Hotchkiss, Mary Walters, Teta Kain, Dick Mahone, Dave Schuster, Dorothy Whitfield, Bob Morris, Phil and Carol McAllister, Bill Sheehan.

*Lee Schuster*

**New Maps for Christmas Count**

A special thanks goes out to Greg Caldwell of Berkeley Realty for donating eight maps to the Christmas Bird Count. In past years, we have operated the count with only a single map outlining the various count areas. This year, each area could have their own map, and it greatly improved the coverage of the various areas. The new maps include many of the new developments (like Governor's Land) and roads which gave us new places to discover. Thanks Greg for your help!

**Field Notes 12/8/93 - 1/9/94**

This has been a relatively interesting month for birds in our area. In addition to some of the late and uncommon species observed during the Christmas Bird Count, a **Lapland Longspur** was observed near the Colonial Parkway by Brian

Taber and Bill Sheehan on 12/29. This is the first-ever record of this specie in our area. Large numbers of **Water Pipits** have been observed along the Colonial Parkway between College Creek and Jamestown Island, and the Island again appears to be a haven for woodpeckers.

On the feeder scene, the **Purple Finches** are arriving, and there have been a few reports of **Pine Siskins**. Ruth Beck had eight **Evening Grosbeaks** visit her in early December. Several of us have had regular visits from **Hermit Thrushes**, and there have been some reports of **Fox Sparrows** and **Chipping Sparrows** in yards and at feeders. As this issue was being written, the Schusters had two **Pine Warblers** feeding on suet in their yard. That's the highlights, here are the rest of the field notes supplied to us this month.

Contributors - Tom Armour (TA), Ruth Beck (RB), Julie Hotchkiss(JH), Duryea Morton(DM), Dave & Lee Schuster (D&LS), George & Bonnie Lou Scott (G&BLS), Allan Sharret(AS), Bill Sheehan (BS), Brian Taber(BT), John & Betty Williams(J&BW)

#### **Colonial Parkway/James River**

**Double-crested Cormorant** - 12/8(TA/BS), 1000 on 12/16(TA); **Bufflehead** - 12/17(TA); **Hooded Merganser** - 12/20 (TA/BS); **Bald Eagle** - 12/20(TA/BS), 1 immature on 12/29(BT/BS), 1/1(RB), 1/2(D&LS), 1/3(TA/BS); **Sharp-shinned Hawk** - 12/20(TA/BS); **Red-tailed Hawk** - 12/29(BT/BS); **Killdeer**, 100+ on 12/29(BT/BS); **Laughing Gull** - 12/8(TA/BS); **Forster's Tern** - 12/8(TA/BS); **Red-breasted Nuthatch** - 12/29(BT/BS); **American Robin** - 12/20(TA/BS); **Water Pipit** - 140 on 12/29(BT/BS); **Cedar Waxwing** - 12/29(BT/BS), 1/2(D&LS); **American Goldfinch** - 120 on 12/13(TA/BS); **Field Sparrow** - 12/20(TA/BS);

**Fox Sparrow** - 12/29(BT/BS); **Lapland Longspur** - 12/29(BT/BS); **Rusty Blackbird** - 12/29(BT/BS).

#### **Jamestown Island**

**Bald Eagle** - 1/1(RB); **Cooper's Hawk** - 12/22(TA/BS); **Virginia Rail** - 1/1(RB); **Red-Headed Woodpecker**, **Red-bellied Woodpecker**, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, **Downy Woodpecker**, **Hairy Woodpecker**, **Northern Flicker**, **Pileated Woodpecker** - 12/22(TA/BS); **Blue Jay** - 12/22(TA/BS); **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** - 12/22(TA/BS).

#### **Drummond's Field**

**Red-tailed Hawk** -1/2(D&LS); **American Kestrel** - 12/11(JH), 12/13(TA/BS), 1/2(D&LS); **Killdeer**, 100+ on 12/13(TA/BS), 1/2(D&LS).

#### **Chippokes Swamp & Sunken Meadows**

**Pied-billed Grebe** - 12/9(DM/AS); **Green-backed Heron** - 12/19(TA/BS); **Tundra Swan** - 12/9(DM/AS); **American Black Duck** - 1/3(TA/BS); **Gadwall** - 12/9(DM/AS); **American Wigeon** - 12/9(DM/AS); **Ring-necked Duck** - 12/9(DM/AS); **Hooded Merganser** - 12/9(DM/AS), 1/3(TA/BS); **Bald Eagle** - 12/9(DM/AS), 12/19, 1/3(TA/BS); **Sharp-shinned Hawk** - 12/9(DM/AS); **Red-tailed Hawk** - 12/8(TA/BS), 12/9(DM/AS); **American Kestrel** - 12/9(DM/AS); **Golden-crowned Kinglet** - 1/3(TA/BS); **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** - 1/3(TA/BS); **Hermit Thrush** - 1/3(TA/BS); **Cedar Waxwing** - 12/19(TA/BS); **Rusty Blackbird** - 12/8(TA/BS).

#### **Hog Island**

**Great Egret** - 12/8, 1/3(TA/BS); **Green-backed Heron** - 12/19(TA/BS); **Tundra Swan** - 1/3(TA/BS); **Mute Swan** - 12/8, 1/3(TA/BS); **Canada Goose** - 700 on 12/19(TA/BS);

**Green-winged Teal** - 12/8, 12/19(TA/BS); **American Black Duck** - 12/19(TA/BS); **Northern Pintail** - 12/8(TA/BS); **American Wigeon** - 12/8(TA/BS); **Bald Eagle** - 12/19, 12/20, 1/3(TA/BS); **Red-tailed Hawk** - 12/8(TA/BS); **Swamp Sparrow** - 1/3(TA/BS).

### **Kingsmill**

**Snow Goose** - 56 on 12/16(TA); **Brown Creeper** - 12/24(TA).

### **Feeders, Yards and Miscellaneous**

**Black Vulture** - 12/8 on Rt. 10 near Bacon's Castle(TA/BS); **Sharp-shinned Hawk** - 12/11(BS); **Red-shouldered Hawk** - 12/10(BS); **Phoebe** - 12/13 on Old Rt. 31(TA/BS); **Red-breasted Nuthatch** - 12/11(BS); **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** - 12/11(BS); **Eastern Bluebird** - 6 on 12/20 investigating nesting box in yard(J&BW); **Hermit Thrush** - regular visitors to feeders(BS, D&LS); **Brown Thrasher** - 12/10, 12/24(BS); **Water Pipit** - 12/20(RB); **Purple Finch** - occasional visitors at feeders(BS, D&LS); **Pine Siskin** - 1/1(RB); **Evening Grosbeak** - 12/7-8(RB); **Chipping Sparrow** - 12/13 on Old Rt. 31(TA/BS), 12/26(BT); **Field Sparrow** - 12/13 on Old Rt. 31(TA/BS), 12/26(BT); **Fox Sparrow** - feeders and yards throughout area(G&BLS, BT, BS).

### **Bird of the Month**

A new feature that we have decided to try out starting this month is to provide a description, background information, folklore and any other trivia we can dig up on a local bird of interest. Hopefully this column will prove both interesting and informative. We are fortunate to have an especially fitting species to start this column in that December saw the first record of a Lapland Longspur in our area.

### **Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*)**

The most numerous and widespread of the longspurs, this bird breeds in the tundra from Alaska across Canada, north to Greenland, and east to Labrador. It is also found in Siberia, Russia, and Lapland, for which the bird was named in the 18th century. In winter it is found in open fields and on lake shores and beaches.

In all plumages, the tail pattern is distinctive, black with white edges, although the white is not always apparent. In winter they are usually found in flocks, often with Horned Larks and Snow Buntings. It walks, runs, and takes long hops over fields where weeds project above the snow. It can sometimes be found on sand dunes of coastal beaches. It has an undulating flight. Lapland Longspurs feed on insects in summer and weed seeds in the winter. It nests in wet or dry tundra hummocks in moss, grass or shrubs. The nests are made of grasses, mosses and the hair and feathers of various mammals and birds.

These birds are sometimes caught in great snowstorms in spring when migrating north. One such incident occurred March 13-14, 1904 in Minnesota. The night was cold with a heavy, wet snow falling. Morning brought a discovery of millions of dead longspurs. Within an area of 1,500 square miles, an estimated 5 million longspurs were found dead. Examination of a large number of these birds revealed that in all cases, their stomachs were empty.

The Lapland Longspur was seen in Williamsburg during our snow on December 29. Brian Taber and Bill Sheehan found one within a group of Water Pipits on the Jamestown end of the Colonial Parkway. For those lucky enough to have seen these birds, feel fortunate. For the rest of us - our time will come.

### 1993 Christmas Bird Count Totals

Common Loon	3
Pied-billed Grebe	25
Horned Grebe	19
Double-crested Cormorant	377
Great Blue Heron	79
Great Egret	4
Black-crowned Night Heron	2
Mute Swan	7
Tundra Swan	21
Canada Goose	1931
Green-winged Teal	60
American Black Duck	52
Mallard Duck	567
Gadwall	2
American Wigeon	12
Canvasback	604
Redhead	1
Ring-necked Duck	146
Lesser Scaup	2
Oldsquaw	1
Common Goldeneye	16
Bufflehead	198
Hooded Merganser	140
Red-breasted Merganser	30
Ruddy Duck	2833
Black Vulture	16
Turkey Vulture	127
Bald Eagle (Adult)	6
Bald Eagle (Immature)	8
Osprey	3
Northern Harrier	3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	10
Accipiter species	2
Red-tailed Hawk	21
Red-shouldered Hawk	14
American Kestrel	13
Wild Turkey	26
Northern Bobwhite	46
Clapper Rail	20
Sora	1
Killdeer	28
American Avocet	1
Western Sandpiper	2
Dunlin	1
Common Snipe	1
American Woodcock	4
Laughing Gull	55
Bonaparte's Gull	5
Ring-billed Gull	863
Herring Gull	135
Greater Black-backed Gull	44
Forster's Tern	72
Rock Dove	102
Mourning Dove	326
Eastern Screech Owl	1
Great Horned Owl	4
Barred Owl	3
Belted Kingfisher	30

Red-headed Woodpecker	3
Red-bellied Woodpecker	56
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	12
Downy Woodpecker	38
Hairy Woodpecker	12
Northern Flicker	115
Pileated Woodpecker	22
Eastern Phoebe	23
Blue Jay	158
American Crow	223
Fish Crow	2
Crow species	14
Carolina Chickadee	204
Tufted Titmouse	132
Red-breasted Nuthatch	2
Brown Creeper	5
White-breasted Nuthatch	70
Brown-headed Nuthatch	10
Carolina Wren	123
Winter Wren	5
Marsh Wren	1
Golden-crowned Kinglet	30
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	66
Eastern Bluebird	216
Hermit Thrush	8
American Robin	37
Gray Catbird	1
Northern Mockingbird	63
Brown Thrasher	7
Water Pipit	3
Cedar Waxwing	29
Starling	904
Yellow-rumped Warbler	607
Pine Warbler	22
Common Yellowthroat	1
Northern Cardinal	239
Rufous-sided Towhee	23
American Tree Sparrow	7
Chipping Sparrow	10
Field Sparrow	127
Savannah Sparrow	41
Fox Sparrow	6
Song Sparrow	202
Swamp Sparrow	40
White-throated Sparrow	270
Dark-eyed Junco	600
Red-winged Blackbird	1451
Eastern Meadowlark	75
Brown-Headed Cowbird	220
Common Grackle	412
House Sparrow	44
Goldfinch	127
Purple Finch	2
House Finch	185
Evening Grosbeak	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>16431</b>