



# THE FLYER

Volume 18, Number 3

March, 1994

Williamsburg Bird Club

## March Meeting

Our next regular meeting will be **Wednesday, March 16th, 1994** at 7:30 PM in Room 117, Millington Hall at William and Mary.

This month, Dick Mahone will be sharing with us his vast experience in the area of landscape gardening. His talk will specifically address what types of trees, shrubs and plants can be added to our gardens to assist in attracting birds and other wildlife. As many of you know, Dick applied his trade in the gardens and yards of Colonial Williamsburg, and to say that he is of world class caliber in landscape gardening is not an exaggeration. We look forward to a very interesting and informative program.

After the meeting, Ruth Beck will lead us on a short walk about campus in search of **Owls**. Bring your binoculars and be prepared for just about anything.

## March Field Trip

Our monthly field trip is scheduled for March 19, and will depart at 8:00am from the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center. We will visit the Jolly's Pond area, which is one of the primary sites in our Christmas and Spring Bird Counts. Dave Schuster will guide us through the area, where we hope to see a variety of waterfowl, woodland winter residents, early spring migrants, and raptors. In addition to Jolly's Pond, we will also do some "road-birding" along some of the lesser traveled country lanes in the area. Since the setting for this trip is primarily rural in nature, we should have good opportunity to see a wide range of field birds including **White-throated, Field, Song and Chipping Sparrows,**

**Meadowlarks, and Bluebirds.** The area is also excellent for birds-of-prey such as **Red-tailed, Red-shouldered and Sharp-shinned Hawks,** and **Kestrels;** a **Bald Eagle** or **Osprey** aren't out of the question either. Due to the necessity to caravan on this trip and the very limited parking at Jolly's Pond and along the roadsides, we ask that everyone meet at the visitor's center so that we can minimize the number of vehicles.

## Welcome to our Newest Members

John and Emily McDowell  
105 Southpoint Drive  
Williamsburg, VA 23185  
253-0183

## February's Field Trip

Bill Williams led an outstanding field trip to Cheatham Annex on the 19th. The primary focus of the day was waterfowl, and we saw plenty on which to apply the identification skills we learned from Ruth Beck at our February meeting. Waterfowl highlights included **Tundra Swan, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead and Ruddy Duck.** The mild temperatures and clear sky also made it an exceptional day for raptors, and we spotted both **Cooper's and Red-tailed Hawks, Bald Eagles** and a great view of a **Peregrine Falcon** on wing that was spotted from a long distance flying toward, then past and away from, the group. Other highlights included a **Brown-headed Nuthatch, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Belted Kingfisher** nicely perched, and **Northern Bobwhite Quail.** Many thanks go out to Bill and Cheatham Annex for a wonderful Saturday morning of birding in a place not everyone gets to visit. The lucky



attendees were: Joy Archer, Dale Davis, Joe & Grace Doyle, Bob Fritts, Phyllis Johnson, Marilyn Lewis & Mack Lundy, Cynthia Long, Dick Mahone, Jean & Charles Rend, Dave & Lee Schuster, Emily Sharrett, Betty Williams, Bill Williams and Dorothy Whitfield.

### Field Notes for February, 1994

Whew! After last month, it seems everyone took a bit of a breather and stayed inside for the bad weather. No one went to Hog Island during the month of February??!! If you did happen to venture out and brave the weather, there were still good opportunities to see a lot of interesting birds. A trip to the Colonial Parkway at College Creek after the big ice storm on the 12th found our **Lapland Longspur** visitors of December had returned, and they brought about 40 of their friends with them in the form of **Horned Larks**, with a couple of **Water Pipits** thrown in for good measure. The ice forced most of the ground feeders to the road, and **Killdeer** and **Fox Sparrows** were fairly abundant. Bill Williams had **Tree Swallows**, a **Common Snipe** and an **American Woodcock** in this area as well. He also had **Red-necked Grebes** and an **Oldsquaw** on the York River near Yorktown. I'm sure some of you caught my gaff in last month's newsletter when I listed the January notes as February bird sightings. Here are the real notes for February. Thanks again to all of our contributors.

Contributors - Tom Armour (TA), Jean & Peter Brown (J&PB), Henry DeGraff(HD), Joe & Grace Doyle(J&GD), Julie & Ty Hotchkiss (J&TH), Keith Kennedy(KK), Charles Rend (CR), G. & M. Schiavelli (G&MS), Dave & Lee Schuster (D&LS), Bill Sheehan (BS), Bill Snyder(BSn), Brian Taber(BT), Mr. & Mrs. Pettway(MMP), Bill Williams(BW), Suzy Woodall (SW), Marilyn Zeigler (MZ).

### Colonial Parkway/James River

**Red-breasted Merganser** - 2/14(BS); **Killdeer** - 2/12(D&LS/TA/BT/BW); **Common Snipe** - 2/11(BW); **American Woodcock** - 2/12(BW); **Tree Swallow** - 2/18(BW); **Water Pipit** - 2/11(BW); **Horned Lark** - 2/12 approx. 40(D&LS/TA/BT/BW); **Savannah Sparrow** - 2/11-12(BW/BT/D&LS); **Fox Sparrow** - 2/11-12(BW/BT/D&LS), **Lapland Longspur** - 2/12(D&LS/TA/BT/BW).

### Jamestown Island

**Pied-billed Grebe** - 2/27(BSn); **Wood Duck** - 2/27(BSn); **Ring-necked Duck** - 2/7(TA/BS); **Greater Scaup** - 2/7(TA/BS); **Osprey** - 2/28(BSn); **Bald Eagle** - 2/16(MZ); **Cooper's Hawk** - 2/7(TA/BS); **Killdeer** - 2/12(D&LS); **Barred Owl** - 2/6(MZ); **Pileated Woodpecker** - 2/7(TA/BS); **American Robin** - 2/7 350+(TA/BS); **Cedar Waxwing** - 2/7 250+(TA/BS); **Fox Sparrow** - 2/12(D&LS); **White-throated Sparrow** - 2/12(D&LS).

### Sunken Meadows

**Tundra Swan** - 2/5(TA/BS); **American Wigeon** - 2/5(TA/BS); **Gadwall** - 2/5(TA/BS); **Ring-necked Duck** - 2/5(TA/BS)

### Kingsmill

**American Coot**- 2/14(TA); **Great Horned Owl** - 2/5(CR); **Pine Siskin** - 2/14(TA).

### York River State Park

**Horned Grebe** - 2/9(TA/BS); **Canvasback** - 2/9(TA/BS); **Bufflehead** - 2/9(TA/BS); **Ruddy Duck** - 2/9(TA/BS).

### York River/Yorktown

**Red-necked Grebe** - 2/21(BW); **Oldsquaw** - 2/13(BW).



**Camp Peary (J&GD)**

Red-necked Grebe, Tundra Swan, Mute Swan, Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Mallard, Gadwall, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Red-tailed Hawk, Wild Turkey, Flicker, Towhee, White-throated Sparrow, Meadowlark.

Chesapeake Bay Bridge/Tunnel Islands - 2/5(D&LS)

Common Eider; Harlequin Duck; Oldsquaw; Black Scoter; Surf Scoter; White-winged Scoter; Bufflehead; Red-breasted Merganser; Ruddy Turnstone; Purple Sandpiper; Snow Bunting.

**Feeders, Yards and Miscellaneous**

Common Goldeneye - 2/22(J&TH); Black Vulture - 2/27(BS); Bald Eagle - 2/21(D&LS); Red-shouldered Hawk - 2/1-28(BS, D&LS); Merlin - 2/22(J&TH); Red-bellied Woodpecker - 2/1-28(D&LS); Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - 2/14(J&PB); Downy Woodpecker - 2/1-28(D&LS); Hairy Woodpecker - 2/1-28(BS); Pileated Woodpecker - 2/23(D&LS); Eastern Phoebe - All Winter(SW); Red-breasted Nuthatch - 2/1-28(BS); Brown Creeper - 2/11(BS); Pine Warbler - 2/1-28(D&LS); Hermit Thrush - 2/1-28(BS, D&LS); Cedar Waxwing - 2/1-28(D&LS); Brown Thrasher - 2/1-28(BS, D&LS); Purple Finch - 2/1-28(BS, D&LS, KK); Evening Grosbeak - 2/1-28 30+(D&LS, HD), 2/26(G&MS); Field Sparrow - 2/12(KK); Fox Sparrow - 2/1-28(BS), 2/11(MA), 2/21(J&TH); Red-winged Blackbird - 2/12-14(KK, D&LS); Northern Oriole - 2/9(MMP).

**Local Bird Data Errata**

It seems that a few lines have slipped in the listing of the breeding data of the Summary of

Local Bird Data sent out with last month's newsletter. Birders being the sticklers for detail we are, here are corrections to the erroneous data:

- 1) Peregrine Falcon should be listed as B.
- 2) Killdeer and American Woodcock belong to the B's listed near them.
- 3) The F for Forster's Tern should be for Least Tern.
- 4) The B for Black Skimmer should be for Mourning Dove.
- 5) Ringed Turtle Dove should be listed as F.
- 6) B's and P's for Black-billed Cuckoo through Red-headed Woodpecker should all be shifted down one line.
- 7) The P for Tree Swallow should be B.
- 8) The B for Bobolink should be for Red-winged Blackbird.

Any other questions or corrections should be directed to Bill Sheehan so that they can be properly accounted for in next years summary. There you have it; sorry for the inconvenience.

**The Migrants are Coming! The Migrants are Coming!!**

Spring is rapidly approaching, and by the time you get your next newsletter, many of the spring migrants will be "singing and winging" their way through Williamsburg. So get out your field guides, put your bird song tapes in your car so you can listen to them as you drive around, and get ready for what we all hope is going to be a great spring migration. Some of the earlier migrants and summer residents have already arrived, such as the Osprey and Tree Swallows. Other migrants and their earliest recorded date of arrival are:



<b>Species</b>	<b>Earliest Arrival</b>
Tree Swallow	2/25
Palm Warbler	2/26
Bank Swallow	3/3
Rough-winged Swallow	3/10
Barn Swallow	3/11
Yellow-throated Warbler	3/14
Louisiana Waterthrush	3/16
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	3/21
Blackpoll Warbler	3/26
Black & White Warbler	3/26
Veery	3/27
Prairie Warbler	3/30
Ovenbird	3/30
Northern Parula Warbler	3/31
White-eyed Vireo	4/2
Indigo Bunting	4/3
Black-throated Green Warbler	4/4
Yellow-throated Vireo	4/7
Prothonotary Warbler	4/7
American Redstart	4/11
Kentucky Warbler	4/15

**WBC Bird Count Contest**

Don't forget to sign up with Bill Holcombe if you want to participate in the Williamsburg Bird Club First Annual Spring Bird Count Contest. There are three levels of participation: Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced. You pick which classification you are most comfortable with, sign up before the cut-off date of March 16, list the species of birds you see in Virginia in March, April and May, and mail your lists to Bill by June 7. Winners will see their "names in lights" in the June newsletter. It's all in the name of good sport, and maybe we'll all learn something along the way.

**Virginia Life Listers**

We are fortunate to have among our members some of the best birders in Virginia. Once again this year, Bill Williams and Brian Taber are second and third, respectively, among the state life listers recorded by the Virginia Society of Ornithology. Below is a list of WBC members and other local individuals whose names are prominent on the list. Congratulations to all, and keep up the good work.

Bill Williams	369
Brian Taber	368
Dorothy Mitchell	343
Steve Rottenborn	340
Rich Goll	336
Cindy Carlson	332
Tom Armour	328
Tom McCary	164

**Spring Bird Count**

As with the Christmas Bird Count in December, we take a census of the birds in the greater Williamsburg area in the spring. Typically, the count is held on the second or third weekend in May, and we survey eight areas: Cheatham Annex, Kingsmill, Hog Island, Jamestown, College Woods, Middle Plantation, Jolly Pond, and Skimino. Further details as to the exact date and who to contact to sign up will be published in the April newsletter.

**Virginia Birdline Update**

The function of the Birdline is to serve as a medium for the distribution of current bird sightings in Virginia. Following are some changes you may want to note, especially if you are working on the club competition for March, April, and May.



To listen to/submit bird reports by:

Voice: (804)238-2713  
Fax: (804)238-9145  
Compuserve: 70303,3445  
Internet: CWILLIS@wyvern.wyvern.com  
(Les Willis)

The Birdline is updated on Tuesday evenings, with special reports of show-stopping birds made on Friday and Saturday (subject to availability). The Birdline hours are 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Note: To skip the recording and make a report immediately, press the asterisk (\*) key at any time.

All unusual birds that are out of place, out of season, etc. should be called in so that other birders can have an opportunity to observe for themselves. A report of a bird that you may see frequently, but may be of interest to others will be welcomed.

## Bird of the Month

### Evening Grosbeak *Coccothraustes Veopertinus*

I guess I'm being a bit selfish in picking the **Evening Grosbeak** as our Bird of the Month, but I took so much pleasure in watching them all month, I couldn't pass them up. Despite the fact that they have eaten us out of house and home, the fascination of watching them invade, scare off everything else (including each other sometimes), and then take off in mass was well worth the extra cost.

The former genus name, *Hesperiphona* was derived from the Greek name for the evening star, Hesperus. The latter part of the name, phona, is from the Greek word phone, meaning voice. Thus the translated name, "evening

singer" is a mistaken belief that this bird sings in the evening.

The **Evening Grosbeak** is a gregarious, chunky bird about the size of a **Starling**. The male, resembling a large **Goldfinch**, has a yellow forehead and eyebrow stripe. The rest of the head and nape is brown, becoming yellow on the lower back, rump and belly. The wings are black with a large white patch. The female is drab gray with just a hint of yellow. The wings are similar to the male's. In spring, an amazing thing happens to their large conical beaks. They turn from yellow to a light green.

Up to the winter of 1889-90, **Evening Grosbeaks** were almost unknown in the Eastern United States. That winter brought a great eastward expansion, reaching the coast of Massachusetts. One reason for this expansion is the widespread planting of box elder. This tree provides lots of seeds that the **Grosbeaks** enjoy. Another reason is the large number of bird feeders filled with sunflower - another favorite food.

They breed from north-central British Columbia, east through central Canada, into Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland, and Nova Scotia. In the U.S., they breed to Northeastern Minnesota, central New York, and Northern New England. In courtship, the males feed females and either one will bob or sway in front of the other, or the female may quiver her wings and give short calls as she receives food.

The **Grosbeaks** live in fir, spruce and other trees of the northern coniferous forest. They feed on some insects in the summer, but their most important foods are buds and seeds of maples, conifers, cherries, dogwood berries, and buds of elm, ash, and other deciduous shrubs. In winter, they feed on seeds from tulip poplar, maple, box elder, and of course sunflower seeds at our



feeders. They also can be seen in flocks on the road feeding on salted sand and gravel, which aids in digestion.

As mentioned before, the **Evening Grosbeak** is exciting to have at your feeder, but they can be expensive. When they visit your feeders, and they like feeders with ledges, tray type feeders or the ground, they tend to eat and run.

Records for **Evening Grosbeaks** in Williamsburg have been spotty over the last few years. The last big year was 1984. There were 60 or so at our house in Banbury Cross (near Barlow's Pond) on March 3, and they have been steady visitors for the last month.

