



# THE FLYER

Volume 19, Number 10

December, 1995

Williamsburg Bird Club

## Happy Holidays and the Safest of New Years

Dave and I would like to wish all our members the merriest of Holidays and a safe, healthy New Year. May all your wishes be granted and life birds be knocking at your door. Happy Birding in 1996!!

## Next Meeting

We don't have a meeting in December, so our next meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday, January 18, 1996** at 7:30 PM in Room 117, Millington Hall at William and Mary. Details of the January program will be in the next newsletter. Hopefully we'll see you at the countdown for the Christmas Bird Count on December 17.

## December Field Trip

As is tradition, the December field trip will consist of our annual Christmas Bird Count to be held on Sunday December 17. Lee has been busy calling and coordinating with those who have signed up this year, and the count team is shaping up. There's still time to sign up and help out. Hopefully, Lee has contacted everyone who has expressed interest to her or me, but it is possible that someone's name may have fallen in a crack somewhere. So, if you're interested, call us ASAP and we'll add you to the group.

Each area can always use someone to help count or tally during the day. If you can't come out and participate in the birding, we urge you to come by room 108, Millington Hall at 5:00 p.m. for the final tabulation of the birds seen by the Williamsburg Bird Club Team. We typically

enjoy light refreshments provided by those who come to the final tabulation, and discuss the sightings of the day. There is almost always something interesting to discuss, be it unusual or rare species spotted, large numbers of a specific species, or the lack of a particular species showing up for the count. The Christmas Count is often a harbinger of what to expect for the winter bird feeding season. The Christmas Count is a fun and interesting activity that everyone can enjoy, and we hope to see many of you at the final tabulation Sunday afternoon.

## A Message from the President

As the holiday season approaches us, may the good will of the season strengthen our good intentions to love our world and all who share it with us. As 1995 ends, so does my term as president of the Williamsburg Bird Club. It truly has been a pleasure to work with every one of you. The membership has my warmest appreciation for all of your support. I look forward to continued good birding for 1996.

*Ruth Beck*

## Farewell from the Editors

As we write our last newsletter, it is hard to believe that we've been at it for 2 years. We have enjoyed sharing the birds seen by us and others with the rest of the club. We have learned a great deal about birding, editing and newsletter publication during our tenure as editors. Our goal was to enlighten you about birds, let you know what could be found close to home, and simply bring the club together through our common interests. Hopefully we have achieved our goals.



The new editor, Phil Young, takes over in January. We are sure the newsletter will be taken to an even higher level. Please support him as you have us by sending him articles and things of interest to go into the newsletter. Remember, the newsletter is supposed to be representative of all members.

Thank you for a great 2 years. We look forward to keeping in touch with everyone as the new year brings many birding opportunities.

## New Members

A Williamsburg Bird Club welcome to our new Members:

Eileen Weldon  
140 Pasbehegh Dr.  
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Charles Drubel  
107 Holcomb Dr.  
Williamsburg, VA 23185

## November Field Trip Summary

Emily Sharrett led our group of nine to the Williamsburg Vineyard and Winery, as well as a last stop at Bill Sheehan's backyard sanctuary. Randy Coleman, a birder who lives at the vineyard, led the group on a walk which included an excursion past the grape arbors and open areas. Bluebirds, Tufted Titmouse, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and a Red-shouldered Hawk made an appearance. After some time in the field, the group headed to Bill Sheehan's kitchen for coffee, donuts, and some up-close birding with some familiar and not-so-familiar backyard birds. Close by on bushes, tree trunks, and the deck were a Rufous-sided towhee, Dark-eyed Junco, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and of all

things a tail-less Brown Thrasher. Of course this was just a small sampling of his back yard.

Those that enjoyed the day were Joy Archer, Marilyn Zeigler, Barbara Rockwell, Ann and Phil Young, Tom McCary, and Dorothy Whitfield. Special thanks to Emily Sharrett, the trip leader, and to hosts Randy Coleman and Bill Sheehan.

## Field Notes for November/December, 1995

Reports of winter residents are really starting to pour in, and it looks like it could be a very good year for backyard birding, so let's start there. First, we'll talk **Evening Grosbeaks**. For as long as we've been here, this is the earliest we've had reports of this bird in any numbers, and needless to say Lee and I are very excited. Ruth Beck had 9 evenings at her place on December 1, and we had 20 on the 9th. There have been quite a few other sightings of this beauty throughout the area. Brian Taber had a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** at his house on 11/5 along with a **Northern Parula**. We have had a **Hermit Thrush** throughout November in our back yard. Bill Sheehan has had this bird all month too, along with a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** and a **Red-shouldered Hawk** that takes suet and meat chunks from a platform on his deck. There have been several reports of **Sharp-shinned Hawks** taking songbirds at feeders, and **Kinglets** and **Juncos** are here. Juel Duke has seen a **Northern Parula** on December 1st and 2nd, and **Pine** and **Yellow-Rumped Warblers** as well. She also had a **House Wren** on 11/2. Tom McCary saw a **Winter Wren** at William & Mary on 11/24. On 11/19, Bill Sheehan had up to 3 **Fox Sparrows** visit his place at once, and Julie Hotchkiss has had them in her yard too. This morning,



December 10, we had both male and female **Purple Finches** visit our feeder.

The wintering ducks still don't seem to have appeared in force, but reports are that **Hooded Mergansers** are everywhere along the James River and at Jamestown Island. Hog Island has been producing **Green-winged Teal**, **Black**, and **Mallard Ducks**, and a few **Snow Geese**. A trip to Chippokes State Park by Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan yielded **Red-breasted Mergansers**, **Ruddy Ducks**, **Bufflehead** and **Lesser Scaup**. A trip to Sunken Meadows by the same checked off 78 **Tundra Swans**, 9 **Pied-billed Grebes**, 25 **Ring-necked Ducks**, **Gadwall**, and **American Wigeon**. **Surf Scoters** and **Northern Gannets** have been spotted along the York River. Tom Armour has had **American Coots** at the marina in Kingsmill.

At Camp Peary, the Doyles have been averaging about 45 species per trip, and their duck spottings are on the rise. They have seen **Canvasbacks**, which have not as yet been reported by anyone else. By far the big event for them this month was the sighting of a **Red-necked Grebe** on 11/19, a good find for anyone in this area.

The **Laughing Gulls** are rapidly giving way to the **Ring-billed Gulls**. **Wild Turkeys** have been spotted on Centerville Road, and Joy Archer had a couple of **Northern Harriers** on Jamestown Island. **Red-Tail Hawks**, **Red-shouldered Hawks**, **American Kestrels** and other various birds of prey can be seen on wires along highways throughout the area. Big number birds include 100+ **Cedar Waxwings** on the outer loop of Jamestown Island. Keep your eyes peeled for a **Bohemian Waxwing** when checking these birds out. Eastern U.S. reports of this species are up dramatically this year, and they appear to be dipping a little further south

than in the past. They have been seen in Pennsylvania and Maryland. In the peanut fields near Chippokes Swamp, Bill Sheehan and Tom Armour saw on the order of 10,000 blackbirds. Their survey identified **Red-winged Blackbirds**, **Grackles** and **Starlings**. They were hunting that elusive **Yellow-headed Blackbird**, but none were to be found that day.

Finally, I'd like to close this month out talking about owls. Specifically **Saw-Whet Owls**. Now these little gems don't show up much in our area, but this fall again has been a banner season for this bird. Over 800 have been **banded** on the Eastern Shore at Kiptopeke, as many as 125 in one night. Reports are similar from across the Eastern U.S. Dave Whalen has a project through the Center for Conservation Biology to study the migration of this bird. If you'd like more information on this project and its status contact Dave at the center.

Well, it looks like its going to be a great winter for birding, so heat up your binoculars and try to get out into the field. We hope to see you out there!

## Test Your Knowledge

Alright members, we can't end our newsletter reign without a final test of the things you may (or may not) have learned from our newsletters. Answers are found at the end of this issue. Here goes:

- 1) What birds are crazy?
- 2) What bird is part of a stove?
- 3) What bird is a highway sprinter?
- 4) What bird gives milk?
- 5) What bird is sour?
- 6) What bird is a famous magician?
- 7) What bird is what you are doing in trying to keep up with 6<sup>th</sup> graders? (Lee knows this to be a fact.)



- 8) What bird is a midget?
- 9) What bird did the kings bring with gold and frankincense?
- 10) What bird would be part of a ditch digging crew?

Alas, our editorial appointment has reached an all-time low.

## Birding on the Web

Did you hear about the Western Grebe spotted on Maryland's Eastern Shore? How about the Black-headed Grosbeak and Bohemian Waxwings in Pennsylvania, or the Saw-whet Owl in downtown Baltimore? How, you ask, do I know these things? The answer is the World Wide Web, the Internet, or how about simply the Information Superhighway. Yes, birding has tapped into the electronic world of computers and high-speed communications, and the birding information that can be obtained is absolutely amazing. If you have a home computer and a modem, you too can do some "birding on the web."

First you need to get hooked up with an Internet provider, like America Online, Infinet, Global Connect, Widowmaker or any number of commercial services available out there. Through this service you will be able to send and receive E-mail, which is the true key to electronic birding.

A National Birding Hotline Cooperative(NBHC) has been established to exploit the expanding medium of computing technology to share birding information among North American birders. Part of the NBHC is an organization called BIRDCHAT which is basically a nationwide coffee klatch which discusses birds and birding. You can elect to receive information in four categories: Rare Bird Alerts(RBAs) for Eastern(BIRDEAST),

Central(BIRDCNTR) and Western(BIRDWEST) North America, and the basic bird discussion group(BIRDCHAT) itself.

The way it works is you send E-mail to [LISTSERV@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU](mailto:LISTSERV@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU). The first line of the message must be:

SUBSCRIBE category name

Where category is the category of service you'd like to subscribe to, and name is your full name. For instance, if Ima Birder wants to subscribe to BIRDCHAT the first line of their E-mail would be:

SUBSCRIBE BIRDCHAT Ima Birder

The computer will automatically make note of your E-mail address and put you on a mailing list to receive all correspondence sent to BIRDCHAT. From then on you can post your own articles (with a few simple rules to keep the group under control), read other's articles or respond to articles of interest.

Lee and I signed up for BIRDEAST and BIRDCHAT and Lee's E-mailbox has been flooded with interesting and useful bird tidbits. We get RBAs from Canada to Florida, and its very interesting to see what others in the Eastern U.S. and Canada are seeing.

If I've overwhelmed you with all this computer jargon, but you're still interested in finding out more, give me a call and I'll see if I can explain it all a little simpler. If you've already merged onto the Information Superhighway and want to find out more about BIRDCHAT you can call me too, or better yet send me E-mail at [DMSchust@aol.com](mailto:DMSchust@aol.com). Hope to see you out on the Web!!



## Bird of the Month

### Northern Gannett (*Morus bassanius*)

It is difficult to think of a special bird every month when you've been unable to do much birding. Once again, another weekend passed by and we were not out with our binoculars. We were out though - on a sailboat in the middle of the York River. As we sat there with little wind enjoying a nice cool December day, Dave looked up and saw a Northern Gannett heading up river. A few minutes later, here comes another heading in the same direction. Then again another Gannett shows up heading towards the Bay, obviously looking for food as it flew past us. By the end of our trip (and the wind did pick up rather quickly) we had several fly-bys - I'm sure some were the same bird.

The Northern Gannett is a large goose-sized bird with a six-foot wingspan. The Gannett takes about four years to reach adult plumage. The adult is mainly white with black upper wing tips from the wrist outward. Larger than a gull, the white body tapers at both ends. The bill is long, thick and grayish in color. The head has a cream buff tone and the tail is long, wedge-shaped and pointed. The young stay at sea for the first 3 years of life, and their plumage is "salt and pepper" becoming white as they approach adulthood.

Now, where do you see these interesting birds? During this time of year, the York river has proven good for us, as well as the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. Not only can they be distinguished by their size and coloration, but in flight, they alternate rapid wing beats with short glides.

When a Gannett is hungry, catching dinner can be a big headache. They will dive from 50 feet or more in the air into schools of fish close to the

surfaces. Fish that satisfy their tastes buds are mackerel, herring, pollack, garfish, and haddock. Their skull is hard and cushioned by air cells under the skin. This protects the Gannett from hard impacts with the water. They do not dive from the surface to feed.

You will not find any nesting Gannetts around here. They nest in colonies on ledges of cliffs. Seaweed and debris can be found stacked in their nests. Gannetts mate for life or "until death do them part." They breed from the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec and Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Iceland.

This winter when you are out birding the bay or the York River area, always check out those large white birds. Very graceful, the Northern Gannett is always a good find.

## Quiz Answers

- |                 |            |              |
|-----------------|------------|--------------|
| 1) Loon, Cuckoo | 5) Bittern | 9) Murre     |
| 2) Ovenbird     | 6) Merlin  | 10) Shoveler |
| 3) Roadrunner   | 7) Puffin  |              |
| 4) Cowbird      | 8) Peewee  |              |