



THE FLYER

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January, 1995

Williamsburg Bird Club

Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday, January 18, 1995** at 7:30 PM in Room 117, Millington Hall at William and Mary.

The speaker for the meeting will be Dana Bradshaw, and he will be discussing one of our local endangered species with his talk entitled, "The Future of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker." Dana has recently rejoined the Biology Department at the College of William and Mary, and he has done several programs for the bird club in the past. He is an interesting and entertaining speaker, so please come and hear what he has to say about the Red-cockaded Woodpecker.

January Field Trip

As of press time, the January field trip has not been scheduled. Its date and location will be announced at the January meeting.

Special February Field Trip

In February, the club will sponsor two field trips. In addition to the regular trip on the 3rd Saturday, we will be taking a group to Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge on February 25. This is the southernmost barrier island at the southern tip of the Eastern Shore. Our group will be the only group on the island, exploring the bay side and marshes, as well as the ocean side, and hopefully the ponds found on the island. There will be lots of walking on this trip, some in soft sand. The group will have the opportunity to see waterfowl that has been around all winter as well as possible early arrivals for the spring.

In order for us to go, we must have a minimum of 10 people. There will be someone from the refuge with us. The time on the island will be 9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., so we will carpool from the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center, leaving at 7:30 a.m. No food is allowed on the island, but bring a sack lunch to munch on as we head home. For those interested, a stop at the tunnel islands will be optional on the way back.

To assure that we have enough people, the refuge must know an approximate number of participants. If you are interested in this trip, please call Lee Schuster at 565-6148 to reserve a spot. Please let me know no later than February 20th.

New Members

The Williamsburg Bird Club would like to acknowledge their newest members:

Kay West
2207 Lockwood Ct.
Richmond, VA 23233

Susan E. Smith
124 Queen May Ct.
Williamsburg, VA 23188

Audry A. Hoitsma
199 Lewis Robert Lane
Williamsburg, VA 23185

It's Renewal Time

Enclosed with this newsletter are renewal notices for 1995. Dues are \$10.00 for individuals, \$15.00 for families, \$25.00 for Patron Membership, and \$3.00 for students. Enclose your dues in the supplied envelope and mail, or bring it to the next meeting.

**Field Notes for December, 1994**

The big excitement for the month of December was the appearance of a Rufous Hummingbird in the yard of Phyllis Jennings at Kingsmill. While not unheard of, this sighting is quite unusual and generated quite a bit of excitement in the local birding community. Lee and I took a quick trip along the York River today (1/8) and we saw quite a few species of ducks, including a couple we didn't expect; specifically an immature **Surf Scoter**, and an **Oldsquaw**. **Ruddy Ducks** and **Canvasbacks** were congregating in very large rafts along the Parkway, and there were one or two **Redheads** sprinkled in amongst the others. It's a good time to see ducks, especially on the York River, so if you can get out on a nice day, take advantage of it; you won't be disappointed.

Thanks to everyone who provided sightings: Joy Archer(JA), Tom Armour(TA), Joe and Grace Doyle(J&GD), Phyllis Jennings(PJ), Dick Mahone(DM), Dave & Lee Schuster(D&LS), Bill Sheehan(BS), Brian Taber(BT).

Jamestown Island/Colonial Parkway

Common Loon - 12/16 (TA/JA/BS); **American Black Duck** - 12/9 (JA/TA/BS); **Mallard** - 12/9 (JA/TA/BS); **Hooded Merganser** - 12/9 (JA/TA/BS); **Cooper's Hawk** - 12/16 (JA/TA/BS); **Clapper Rail** - 12/9 (JA/TA/BS); **Virginia Rail** - 12/7-9(JA/TA/BS); **Killdeer** - 12/28(JA/TA/BS); **Belted Kingfisher** - 12/9-16 (JA/TA/BS); **Red-headed Woodpecker** - 12/16 (JA/TA/BS); **Hairy Woodpecker** - 12/9(JA/TA/BS); **Eastern Phoebe** - 12/27-28(TA/JA/BS); **Brown-headed Nuthatch** - 12/16(JA/TA/BS); **Marsh Wren** - 1/8(D&LS); **Golden-crowned Kinglet** - 12/22(JA/TA/BS), **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** - 12/16-31(JA/TA/BS); **American Robin** - 12/28(JA/TA/BS); .

Hog Island

Canada Goose - 1500 on 12/29 (TA/BS); **Green-winged Teal** - 12/29 (TA/BS); **American Black Duck** - 12/29 (TA/BS); **Mallard** - 12/29 (TA/BS); **Ring-necked Duck** - 12/29 (TA/BS); **Bald Eagle** - 12/29 (TA/BS); **Northern Harrier** - 12/29 (TA/BS); **Laughing Gull**, **Bonaparte's Gull**, **Ring-billed Gull**, **Herring Gull**, and **Greater Black-backed Gull** - All from Ferry 12/1-31 (TA/JA/BS); **Forster's Tern** - 12/1-31 (TA/JA/BS); **Red-winged Blackbird** - 2500 on 12/29 (TA/BS).

York River

Common Loon - 12/5 (TA/BS), 1/8 (D&LS); **Horned Grebe** - 12/5 (TA/BS), 1/8 (D&LS); **Tundra Swan** - 1/8 (D&LS); **Canvasback** - 1/8(D&LS); **Redhead** - 1/8(D&LS); **Oldsquaw** - 1/8 (D&LS); **Surf Scoter** - 1/8 (D&LS); **Common Goldeneye** - 1/8 (D&LS); **Bufflehead** - 12/5(TA/BS), 1/8 (D&LS); **Red-breasted Merganser** - 1/8 (D&LS); **Ruddy Duck** - 1/8 (D&LS); **Bald Eagle** - 12/5 (TA/BS).

Camp Peary (J&GD)

Pied-billed Grebe, **Tundra Swan** - 60 on 12/4, **Mallard**, **Gadwall**, **American Wigeon**, **Canvasback**, **Redhead**, **Ring-necked Duck**, **Lesser Scaup**, **Bufflehead**, **Hooded Merganser**, **Ruddy Duck**, **Bald Eagle**, **Northern Harrier**, **Red-tailed Hawk**, **American Kestrel**, **Killdeer**, **Belted Kingfisher**, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, **Pileated Woodpecker**, **Eastern Phoebe**, **Brown-headed Nuthatch**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, **Hermit Thrush**, **Cedar Waxwing**, **Yellow-rumped Warbler**, **Pine Warbler**, **White-throated Sparrow**.

Feeder's Yards and Miscellaneous

Common Loon - Kingsmill (TA); **Red-breasted Merganser** - 12/4 at Kingsmill (TA); **Sharp-shinned Hawk** - 12/1-31(BT/BS); **Red-shouldered Hawk** - 12/1-31 (BS); **American Coot** - 12/1 at Kingsmill (TA); **American Woodcock** -



12/20 at Hill Pleasant Farm (DM); **Rufous Hummingbird** - 12/7-14? at Kingsmill (PJ/TA/BT); **Hermit Thrush** - 12/20-31(D&LS); **Brown Thrasher** - 12/1-31(BS); **Pine Warbler** - 12/1-31(BS).

Christmas Bird Count

Once again we had a good day for our count. Despite the lack of birds at our feeders, 27 of us found plenty of birds browsing the fields, rivers, lakes, forest, and parks around Williamsburg. There were a few surprises, some high numbers and some low numbers. (See the results summary on page 5.)

As the compiler again this year, I would like to thank all those that helped and anyone that was cheering us on. There were many people that helped to make this a successful day. If I miss anyone in the participant list below, I apologize. Everyone that showed up didn't necessarily have their name turned in to me. Let me know who you are and I'll include you in the next newsletter.

For all those that helped and gave me advice - Thank you very much!!

Christmas Count Participants:

Tom and Jeanne Armour, Amanda Allen, Joe and Grace Doyle, Joy Archer, Paul and Carol McAllister, Emily Sharrett, Bob Moore, Brian Taber, Gary Driscole, Dot Silsby, Ada Van Ness, Sue Grey Al-Salam, Bill Williams, Bettye Fields, Mary Pulley, Carolyn Lowe, Julie Hotchkiss, Elaine and Paul Mertus, Tom McCary, Ruth Beck, Elva Mikula, and Dave and Lee Schuster. Also thanks to Charles Rend for helping out at the final tally, and Bill Sheehan for his advice, good record keeping, patience, and friendship.

Count Highlights:

1 Yellow Warbler (Jamestown Island)

1 Prairie Warbler (Hog Island)
2 Rusty Blackbirds
1 American Bittern (Hog Island)
6 Screech Owls
12 Great Horned Owls
2 Barred Owls
4505 Canvasbacks
601,333 Grackles (Good or Bad?)

Special Note

A few weeks before the count, a member in Kingsmill had a Hummingbird visit the plants on her deck. Although speculation has it that it was a Rufous Hummingbird visiting us from the West, the hummer did a good job dodging those that tried to get a glimpse. The bird was interested in her Pineapple Sage plant.

Seeking New Members and Volunteers for Local Land Conservancy Group: Historic Rivers Land Conservancy

The Historic Rivers Land Conservancy was formed as the first local land trust created in Virginia under the provisions of the state's Conservation Easement Act. The conservancy is a private, non-profit land trust dedicated to preserving the natural, scenic, and historic resources in the James and York River watersheds. **Their primary purpose is to identify and protect areas of ecological and historical significance through land acquisitions and conservation easements.** Under the Easement Act, landowner's keep ownership of their property while forsaking development rights, in return for lower tax assessments and charitable tax write-offs. Their wish is that both the landowner and public benefit through conservation easements. **The conservancy has recently acquired a 195 acre conservation easement at Governor's Land along the James**



River shoreline. This beautiful spot of land will offer nature lovers the opportunity to enjoy the sights and sounds of birds overlooking a breathtaking view of the James River. **They are also closely working with Williamsburg, James City County and York County government in developing a Greenway for each of these localities.** Local community members have been contacted for their feedback to help formulate plans for bike paths, walking and hiking trails, and quiet paths for bird watchers. These are only a few of the many plans in process. The Greenway Task Forces have created a large local resource map and a short slide program that will help neighborhood groups understand and plan a Greenway for their area. **Membership Benefits:** Knowing that you are helping preserve the natural beauty and habitat of our area for you, your children, and grandchildren. - Quarterly Greenway Newsletter -outlining HRCL current events and Greenway news. - Invitations to annual meeting and social events. - Opportunities to learn new skills. **The success of HRLC depends on the interest and support of individuals and groups in our area.** The conservancy hopes that you will choose to become a member and help preserve the natural heritage of this beautiful area. For those interested in membership or attending a Board Meeting, please contact: Shaune Reams at 253-1954, Betty Rogers at 229-3779, or Joy Archer at 229-1432.

Birding in a Tropical Paradise

by Carolyn Lowe

(Part 1 of 3)

From the flamboyance of trogons, motmots and macaws, to the flashing iridescence of hummingbirds, to the colorful, clown like appearance of toucans, Costa Rica offers a feast

of sights and sounds to the birder -- and to anyone who loves nature in all of its splendor.

Last March, I had a chance to enjoy this bounty, along with 13 other birders, under the very able leadership of Jerry Via, Bill Akers, and Peggy Spiegel. During our two-week journey from the Caribbean slope to the Pacific slope, we traveled from sea level to 10,000 feet, and through five life zones -- in country less than half the size of Virginia. By the end of our sojourn, we had seen 329 of the approximately 840 species of birds recorded in Costa Rica. With two major coasts, mountains that cover more than half of the land area and more kinds of forests than occur in all of temperate North America, Costa Rica has a remarkable diversity of habitat to support this wealth of birdlife.

No place left a more indelible impression than Rara Avis, the lush rain forest preserve on the Caribbean side where we spent three days of dawn-to-dusk birding. Though occupying only six percent of the earth's surface, tropical rain forests are believed to contain more than half the world's species. But as E. O. Wilson, renowned biologist, points out, "Despite their extraordinary richness, and their reputation for exuberant growth, these forests are among the most fragile of all habitats." To get to Rara Avis required more than four hours of bone-jarring travel in tractor-drawn carts over roads that were boulder-strewn rivers of mud. But it was well worth the test of endurance.

Hummingbirds were in great abundance -- at feeders outside the dining hall, along the creek below our lodge, and along the trails through the surrounding forest. We saw White-necked Jacobin, Crowned Woodnymph, Green-fronted Lancebill, Purple-crowned Fairy, Long-tailed Hermit, and my own favorite, the tiny Snowcap, deep purple with a shining white crown. Other



early additions were the Cinnamon Becard, Shining Honeycreeper, Lined Foliage-gleaner, Silver-throated and Emerald Trogons. Also the Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Yellow-eared Toucanet, and a pair of Collared Aracaris.

Almost as thrilling as the birds was the profusion of exotic plants, from the stem fruit tree to the stained glass palm, which is now being cultivated as a source of revenue for local farmers. Of the approximately 250,000 plant species known, 68 percent occur in the tropics and subtropics, especially in the rain forests. Each evening, we witnessed something almost surreal; the gathering of moths, large and small, on the lantern-lit walls of the lodge porch. Drawn by the light, they appeared out of the darkness to form a living tapestry of ornate patterns and colors.

From Rara Avis, we journeyed over the next two days to the hot, dry country of Guanacaste on the Pacific slope. Sightings along the way were nonstop. Among the best were the Pied Puffbird, Northern Jacana, Keel-billed and Chestnut-mandibled Toucans, Ringed Kingfisher, and Golden-headed and Crimson-collared Tanagers. The Scarlet-thighed Tanager, Crested Guan, and Violaceous Trogon were feasts for the eyes. We watched noisy Montezuma Oropendolas feverishly building their bag-like nests in the top of a tall umbrella-shaped tree, and enjoyed an extended look at a rare Pheasant Cuckoo as it perched quietly in full view.

We finally arrived at La Pacifica, a large finca in an area of dry forest and savannas. I seemed to be a favorite hangout for Cinnamon Hummingbirds and Rufous-naped Wrens. I got my best bird picture of the trip thanks to a Turquoise-browed Motmot that allowed me to get within arm's length.

From La Pacifica we took a side trip to even hotter and drier Santa Rosa National Park, site of Costa Rica's battle for independence in 1856. Sightings of special note were the Crested Caracara, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Zone-tailed Hawk, Scrub Euphonia, Squirrel Cuckoo, and Double-striped Thick-knee. I had a glimpse of the Plain-capped Starthroat as the hummer darted past, and the rapid clear notes of a Black-headed Trogon led us to its hiding place in the bush. We stopped to watch a troop of adult and baby Howler monkeys cavorting in the trees directly over our heads. (To be continued next month.)

Bird of the Month

Ruddy Duck

(Oxyura jamaicensis)

As we rode down the Colonial Parkway from Yorktown, we noticed large rafts of ducks relatively close to the shore. It was a beautiful winter day, and a closer look at these ducks identified them as Canvasbacks and Ruddy Ducks. Those small, chubby ducks, swimming low in the water appeared to be little ducklings lagging behind the Canvasbacks.

The Ruddy Duck is the most common and widespread of the two species of "stiff-tails." They are expert divers, and have the ability to sink below the surface of the water without leaving ripples. Ruddys dive rather than fly to escape enemies. Because of their small rounded wings, they cannot lift into the air without pattering their large powerful feet along the surface.

The Ruddy Duck's shape is very recognizable - stocky, short-necked, large-headed, long stiff tail. In breeding plumage, the adult male is a rusty red with pure white cheeks, a dark cap and nape and a bright powder blue bill. In fall and winter, they



are gray instead of rust-red, and their bill is also gray. Females resemble winter males, but they have a horizontal streak through the cheek.

Ruddys feed on plants, insect larvae, and small creatures found on the bottom of shallow ponds and bays in the winter. They nest on marshy lakes and ponds in the Prairie Provinces of Canada, and North Central U.S., Utah, Idaho, and California. Their nests are basket like structures built of marsh plants and firmly attached to growing reeds.

The female weighs about one pound, yet she lays a huge egg - as big as the egg of a Wild Turkey. A clutch averages about 8 eggs with a total weight of about 2.5 to 3 pounds. She will often deposit her eggs in the nest of other waterfowl. An unusual act is the establishment of a dump nest. Several females will deposit as many as 60 eggs in this dump nest, and then ignore them.

Another unusual behavior for male Ruddys is their method of courting. During courtship displays, the male Ruddy BURPS. He inflates an air sack in his throat and uses this sack to make drumming noises for the female. Finally he opens his bill, and the air in the sack is released with a soft belching sound.

Over the years, the Ruddy Duck has declined in numbers. Problems include droughts in their breeding range, and drainage, as well as tameness and ease of shooting. Ruddys visit our area during the fall and winter, and for us are a pleasure to observe.

1994 CHRISTMAS COUNT RESULTS

Species	Total	Species	Total	Species	Total
Red-Throated Loon	0	Clapper Rail	11	Golden-Crowned Kinglet	30
Common Loon	4	King Rail	1	Ruby-Crowned Kinglet	64
Pied-Billed Grebe	24	Virginia Rail	1	Eastern Bluebird	223
Horned Grebe	11	Sora	0	Hermit Thrush	13
Double-Crested Cormorant	843	American Coot	18	American Robin	581
American Bittern	1	Killdeer	37	Gray Catbird	0
Great Blue Heron	75	American Avocet	0	Northern Mockingbird	38
Great Egret	27	Greater Yellowlegs	6	Brown Thrasher	1
Black-crowned Night Heron	0	Lesser Yellowlegs	0	Water Pipit	0
Tundra Swan	133	Western Sandpiper	0	Cedar Waxwing	621
Mute Swan	9	Dunlin	0	Starling	1383
Snow Goose	0	Common Snipe	1	Yellow Warbler	1
Canada Goose	1456	American Woodcock	7	Yellow-Rumped Warbler	455
Wood Duck	7	Laughing Gull	97	Pine Warbler	11
Green-winged Teal	116	Bonaparte's Gull	63	Prairie Warbler	1
American Black Duck	50	Ring-Billed Gull	841	Palm Warbler	0
Mallard	330	Herring Gull	195	Common Yellowthroat	1
Northern Pintail	21	Greater Black-Backed Gull	39	Northern Cardinal	105
Northern Shoveler	3	Forster's Tern	73	Rufous-Sided Towhee	29
Gadwall	32	Rock Dove	48	American Tree Sparrow	0
American Wigeon	18	Mourning Dove	244	Chipping Sparrow	48
Canvasback	4505	Eastern Screech Owl	6	Field Sparrow	101
Redhead	0	Great Horned Owl	12	Vesper Sparrow	0
Ring-necked Duck	176	Barred Owl	2	Savannah Sparrow	21
Greater Scaup	0	Belted Kingfisher	29	Fox Sparrow	1
Lesser Scaup	2	Red-headed Woodpecker	7	Song Sparrow	209
scaup sp.	0	Red-Bellied Woodpecker	76	Swamp Sparrow	59
Oldsquaw	0	Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker	33	White-Throated Sparrow	479
Common Goldeneye	22	Downy Woodpecker	40	White-Crowned Sparrow	0
Bufflehead	116	Hairy Woodpecker	7	Dark-Eyed Junco	249
Hooded Merganser	135	Northern Flicker	67	Red-Winged Blackbird	923
Common Merganser	15	Pileated Woodpecker	32	Eastern Meadowlark	52
Red-Breasted Merganser	11	Eastern Phoebe	5	Rusty Blackbird	2
Ruddy Duck	2320	Blue Jay	67	Common Grackle	601,333
Black Vulture	14	American Crow	187	Brown-Headed Cowbird	35
Turkey Vulture	89	Fish Crow	3	Northern Oriole	0
Bald Eagle (Adult)	8	crow sp.	35	Purple Finch	1
Bald Eagle (Immature)	16	Carolina Chickadee	151	House Finch	148
Northern Harrier	2	Tufted Titmouse	79	Pine Siskin	0
Sharp-Shinned Hawk	8	Red-Breasted Nuthatch	0	Goldfinch	119
Cooper's Hawk	0	White-Breasted Nuthatch	52	Evening Grosbeak	0
Red-shouldered Hawk	11	Brown-Headed Nuthatch	25	House Sparrow	23
Red-tailed Hawk	29	Brown Creeper	2	Total	620,741
American Kestrel	12	Carolina Wren	91		
Ring-necked Pheasant	0	House Wren	1		
Wild Turkey	0	Winter Wren	2		
Northern Bobwhite	36	Marsh Wren	1		