



THE FLYER

Volume 19, Number 2

February, 1995

Williamsburg Bird Club

Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday, February 15, 1995** at 7:30 PM in Room 117, Millington Hall at William and Mary.

This month's speaker will be Brian Watts of the College of William and Mary Biology Department. The title of his presentation is "Effects of Marsh Size on Coastal Communities."

February Field Trip

On Saturday, February 18, Bill Williams will lead a trip down the Colonial Parkway towards Yorktown. Bill is also going to try to get access to Cheatham Annex so that the club can visit some of the freshwater ponds and surrounding habitat in that area, however, these plans have not yet been finalized. As usual, the trip will begin at the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor's Center where everyone is asked to meet at 7:30 a.m.

Special Meeting

There will be a general meeting Sunday, February 12 at 3:00 in room 108 Millington Hall of the local committee for the joint meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society and the Virginia Society of Ornithology May 4 - 7, 1995. Please come or call if you are interested and have not attended any of the planning meetings.

Fisherman Island Field Trip

Don't forget the special trip to Fisherman Island on February 25. It is a special place to visit, especially this time of year, with a variety of birds to look for. There is a lot of walking on this trip and everyone must stay together as a

group. We will probably cover 3 miles, some of it being loose sand. It is necessary that we know how many people will be going for carpooling reasons and for the Refuge Manager. Please call Lee Schuster (565-6148) no later than February 20. Be sure to dress for extreme weather conditions. We are not allowed to eat on the island, but you may want to bring a snack for the trip home. Meet at the Williamsburg Visitor's Center at 7:30 a.m. to be on the island by 9:00. We must be off the island by 12:30 p.m. If time allows, and we aren't frozen, there will be an optional tunnel-island stop on the way back.

New Members

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

Ruth A Ologge
703 London Company Way
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Ronald & Roberta Giese
2 Landing Circle
Williamsburg, VA 23188

Theresa Dunn
7959 Berkeley Dr.
Gloucester Point, VA 23062

Virginia & Dwight Rollins
3028 S. Freeman Rd.
Williamsburg, VA 23185

President's Corner

With the advent of spring, even if it feels like winter has just arrived, I want to encourage all active birders (at any level) to constantly refine your ability to watch, interpret and record various aspects of bird behavior and ecology. One of the



most important habits to develop is that of carrying a small field notebook and writing down observations in the field or backyard while the details are still fresh in your mind.

There are many ways to organize your notebook; one is by species, and another by date. I generally use date and species. Other possibilities include organizing by habitat, by geographic region, etc. If you choose to organize by species, it is most convenient to include all observation for only one species per page, and then list dates in chronological order on that same page. Use the 24 hour clock i.e. 6 a.m. = 0600 and 6 p.m. = 1800. If you choose not to use this, be sure to record a.m. or p.m.

Many useful data may be obtained by recording counts: number of eggs in a clutch, how many birds fledged, how many birds in a flock of shorebirds. Similarly, behavior can be easily quantified. You can record the delivery rate of adults fielding young. Whatever level you observe, record!

Remember that you are an observer, not a participant. You want to be as unobtrusive to the bird as possible. Keep a safe distance away, do not interfere while feeding on nests.

You can contribute your data and findings directly to our records chairman, Bill Sheehan, by calling him at 220-2122. Such agencies as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University also have programs for volunteers and observers. If you are interested in these various data resource programs, you can obtain further information on them by writing to:

Bird Population Studies
Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology
Sapsucker Woods Road, Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14850

January Field Trip

Our January field trip turned out to be a beautiful, but chilly, morning. Eight people braved the wind and cold to explore the Colonial Parkway on the Yorktown side. As we got closer to Yorktown, the birds started showing up. The highlight was six Northern Gannetts flying over the river near the Coleman Bridge along with all three Mergansers - Hooded, Common, and Red-breasted. Marilyn Zeigler wanted to hide the Tundra Swans from us, but she finally decided to share the sighting. As far as duck go, the group saw Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, and Ruddy ducks, and on the way home some of us saw a Brown Pelican.

Our group consisted of Ron and Bobby Giese, Tom Armour, Carolyn Lowe, Marilyn Zeigler, Charles Rend, and Dave and Lee Schuster.

We encourage everyone to participate in our trips. Good fun, fellowship and birding are had by all. See you in February!

Renewal Reminder

Please remember that it is time to renew memberships for 1995. Dues are \$10.00 for individuals, \$15.00 for families, \$25.00 for Patron Membership, and \$3.00 for students. Send your renewals to:

Treasurer, Williamsburg Bird Club
P.O. Box 1085
Williamsburg, VA 23187-1085

Field Notes for January, 1995

This month produced an interesting sighting. At Barlow's Pond there is a **Eurasian Wigeon** mixed in with a group of **American Wigeon** and **Ring-necked Ducks**. The bird was first spotted in the middle of the month, and of this writing



(February 5), it is still there. Many people have come by to see him, and if you haven't seen a Eurasian Wigeon, you might want to take this opportunity to stop by and check it out. It's unusually accessible thanks to the fact that the American Wigeons tend to congregate near the dam on which Route 646 is constructed. He spooks easily, so be careful if you decide to get out of your vehicle. Ruth Beck has also had a Eurasian Wigeon visit her lake in Barhamsville.

I don't have a lot of detailed data this month, but quite a few people have provided general sighting information. Thanks to everyone who provided sightings: Joy Archer, Tom Armour, Ruth Beck, Joe and Grace Doyle, David Martin, Dave & Lee Schuster, Marion Simmons, Bill Snyder, Bill Sheehan, Alice Springe, Brian Taber, and Bill Williams.

Jamestown Island/Colonial Parkway

Common Loon; Great Egret; American Black Duck; Mallard; Wood Duck; Hooded Merganser; Red-breasted Merganser; Ruddy Duck; Cooper's Hawk; Killdeer; Belted Kingfisher; Red-headed Woodpecker; Hairy Woodpecker; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; Pileated Woodpecker; Eastern Phoebe; Brown-headed Nuthatch; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Gray Catbird; Brown Thrasher; Fox Sparrow; Field Sparrow; Savannah Sparrow; Song Sparrow; Swamp Sparrow; White-throated Sparrow; Eastern Meadowlark.

Hog Island

Great Egret; Black-crowned Night Heron; Tundra Swan; Mute Swan; Green-winged Teal; American Black Duck; Mallard; Bald Eagle; Northern Harrier; American Coot; Bonaparte's Gull; Ring-billed Gull; Herring Gull; Great Black-backed Gull; Forster's Tern; Belted Kingfisher; Gray Catbird; Red-winged Blackbird.

York River

Common Loon; Horned Grebe; Northern Gannett; Brown Pelican; Great Cormorant; Tundra Swan; American Wigeon; Canvasback; Redhead; Common Goldeneye; Bufflehead; Hooded Merganser; Common Merganser; Red-breasted Merganser; Ruddy Duck; Bald Eagle; Bonaparte's Gull; Ring-billed Gull; Herring Gull; Great Black-backed Gull.

Camp Peary

Pied-billed Grebe, Tundra Swan, Mallard, Gadwall, Canvasback, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Bald Eagle(7), Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, American Coot, Killdeer, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cedar Waxwing, Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Eastern Meadowlark.

Feeder's Yards and Miscellaneous

Pied-billed Grebe - Kingsmill; Brown Pelican - James River at Kingsmill; Gadwall - Kingsmill; Eurasian Wigeon - Barlowe's Pond, Ruth Beck's pond; American Wigeon - Barlowe's Pond; Sharp-shinned Hawk; Red-shouldered Hawk; Red-tailed Hawk; American Kestrel; American Coot - Kingsmill; Great Horned Owl; Barred Owl; Brown Creeper - Kingswood; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Hermit Thrush - Kingswood; Brown Thrasher; Cedar Waxwing - Williamsburg Landing; Pine Warbler; Rufous-sided Towhee; Junco; Purple Finch; Goldfinch.

Adopt-A-Highway

Bill Davies and his group dodged the bad weather January 28 to do another superb job on the Bird Club's section of highway. The club has adopted the 2 mile section of Route 5 from Five Forks to Centerville Road. Thirteen people



contributed 22.5 person hours collecting 13 bags of trash. In addition, the group collected 97 lb. of glass (202 bottles), and 13 lb. of aluminum (317 cans). these were recycled.

Thank you Bill and crew for the hard work: Jim Booth, Sam Hart, Pat Healy, Phyllis Johnson, Dorothy Whitfield, Bill Williams, Bill Kafes, Mary Kafes, Bill Holcombe, Charles Rend, Tom Mikula, Bob Morris, and of course, Bill Davies.

Birding in a Tropical Paradise

by Carolyn Lowe

(Part 2 of 3)

A winding road with breathtaking views led us to our next destination. Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve in a stronghold of biodiversity in the Tilaran mountains of northwestern Costa Rica. The famous sanctuary harbors 400 species of birds, 2500 different plants, and more than 100 species of mammals. It's also a living laboratory where scientists are studying the wandering habits of quetzals and bellbirds, the alarming disappearance of amphibians -- including Monteverde's famous golden toad -- and the strange animal life in bromeliads.

Our birding began on the grounds of our Swiss chalet-like hotel where we saw Boat-billed Flycatchers, Emerald Toucanets, Mountain Robins, Masked Tityras, and Hoffman's Woodpeckers. We spent the entire next day hiking through the Preserve, the nearest thing to birder's heaven. Sightings included the Chiriqui Quail-dove, Slate-throated Redstart, Long-tailed and Olivaceous Woodcreepers, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, Mistletoed Tyrannulet, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Streak-breasted Tree Hunter, Slaty-backed and Orange-billed Nightengale Thrushes. Also, the Prong-billed Barbet, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Rufous-browed Peppershrike,

Spotted Barbtail, and a brief look at the elusive Three-wattled Bellbird. And each turn in the trail turned up a new hummingbird, from the green-crowned Brilliant and Magenta-throated Woodstar to the Purple-throated Mountain Gem and Coppery-headed Emerald. We came upon a Black Guan partially hidden in the brush beside the trail. It didn't move for several minutes -- nor did we -- then suddenly took off.

The day's greatest thrill was our first encounter with the endangered Resplendent Quetzal. Hearing the bird's call, we followed the sound into a patch of deep forest and suddenly spotted a male quetzal perched about 10 feet above us, its long floating streamers an immediate giveaway. Soon more quetzals appeared, including one or two females, and we watched in awe as the dazzling bird glided in and out among the trees in a courtship ritual. It was a magical moment. We saw several more during our walk back to the hotel, giving us nine quetzal sightings for the day!

The urgent need to protect what remains of the Costa Rican rain forest was brought home to us during our visit to Monteverde. We met Ree Sheck of the Monteverde Conservation League who told us about the group's efforts to preserve the rain forest through land purchase, as well as through reforestation, creation of biological corridors, education and research. The League's most inspiring project is the International Children's Rain Forest, a protected area near the Preserve that has grown to 40,000 acres with support from people in 37 countries.

A final note on Monteverde. People stopped each afternoon to observe the gathering of hummingbirds at feeders outside a local shop. The day we were there, the most memorable visitors were the "giant" Violet Sabrewings with their striking white tail spots and the furry



Kinkajou that came repeatedly to sip sugar water, holding on by wrapping its prehensile tail around the chord of the hanging feeder. A delightful show.

Leaving the mountains, we headed to Baja Mar on the Pacific coast. Birds seen along the way included the Blue-crowned Motmot, Yellow-throated Brush Finch, White-fronted and Red-colored Amazons, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Rose-throated Becard, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, and Amazon Kingfisher. Magnificent Frigatebirds put on aerial demonstrations, and a Long-tailed Manakin perched briefly on a wire giving us our one and only look at the species. Late afternoon brought us to the bank of the Tarcoles River and the spectacle of the day: Scarlet Macaws flying over in pairs, colors flashing and squawking loudly as they headed for their evening roosts. We counted 22 in a brief space of time.

The next two days produced some of the best birding of the trip, beginning with Carara Biological Reserve, the northernmost moist-wet forest in the Pacific lowlands. The awesome beauty of the Reserve more than made up for the heat and humidity. Trees of enormous girth, often soaring 30 to 40 meters into the upper canopy like the pillars of a green cathedral. Lianas and creepers coiling around tree trunks and dangling to the forest floor. Finding birds against such a backdrop required perseverance, but it paid off. We were rewarded with sightings of the Barred and Black-hooded Antshrikes, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Fiery-billed Aracari, Blue Dacnis, and Double-toothed Kite. We marveled at the sight of the Royal Flycatcher spreading its showy orange crest, the sprightly movements of the Orange-collared Manakin, and the brilliant colors of the

four Baird's Trogons we spotted high up in the canopy.

Our list grew as we roamed the area around our hotel a Villa Lapis. Here we saw the Green Kingfisher, Black-crowned Tityra, Red-crowned Woodpecker, and Yellow-crowned Euphonia (a "kingly" place). We almost gave up on an elusive pair of Riverside Wrens until Jerry's repeated playback of the recorded song lured them into the open for a brief look. Jerry's mastery of this technique accounted for a number of memorable sightings during the trip.

Bird of the Month

Purple Finch

(Carpodacus purpureus)

The New Hampshire state bird, the Purple Finch visits our area during the winter months. Very often confused with the House Finch, the number of Purple Finches around here lately have been slim. When trying to distinguish the two species, the female Purple Finch is much easier to recognize.

The male has a burgundy-red crown, nape, throat, breast, upper belly, and flanks. The lower belly is whitish which is a distinguishing characteristic from the House Finch. The undertail coverts are also white. The cheeks are reddish brown and outlined in red. The back is a streaked brown with some burgundy-red, and the rump is red. The wings are streaked brown with a reddish edge. The tail is deeply notched.

On the female, the upper parts are dark brown with streaks. The underparts are whitish mixed with buff-yellowish tones and streaked with dark brown. The dark brown cheeks and mustache are emphasized by a whitish eyebrow. This eyebrow



sets the female Purple Finch off from the female House Finch.

In the summer, the Purple Finch lives in the coniferous forests of Canada and the northern states of the U.S. They can also be found in the open areas of swamps, along streams and in various ornamental conifers. They migrate southward in large flocks usually when the seed crops of spruce, pine and other conifers are low. Their flight is undulating and they can be identified in flight by their call note - a sharp metallic tick or tuck. They travel in nomadic flocks which descend on backyards for a short time and then move on.

Purple Finches are mostly seed eaters. This includes seeds of weeds, grasses, elm, maple, cedar berries, winterberry, and more. In late spring they may eat beetles, green caterpillars, and in summer they feed on fruits such as blackberries and raspberries.

Their nests are usually found in spruces, firs, pines and cedars about 6 - 50 feet above the ground. In the mountains, they are found at 3000 - 5000 ft. elevation. The nests are cups of tightly woven grasses, twigs, and bark lined with mosses, hair, and snake skin.

The numbers of Purple Finches have been low over the past few years with only one spotted on this year's Christmas Count. Reports at feeders thus far are very low. I had three at my feeders in late January.

When watching your feeders, look very carefully at the red colored finches that empty your feeders. Most will be House Finches gobbling away, but look carefully at the birds (females especially) and maybe a Purple Finch will appear.

WBC Spring Bird Listing Contest

It's safe to say, that if you ask any of last year's participants they will tell you that they got out to do more looking, saw more birds and had an exciting three months by participating in the 1st Annual Spring Bird Listing Contest. It is real simple... participants listed all of the birds that they identified within the state of Virginia between March 1 and May 31. Here's how it works:

- 1) The contest will start again this year on March 1. Sign up as a participant with Bill Holcombe or Ruth Beck before March 15.
- 2) Identify yourself as a Number 1 - a relative newcomer to bird identification; Number 2 - an intermediate birder who has been at it for several years but still gets confused and is glad when an "expert" is at hand; Number 3 - one of those who expects to quickly identify 95% of the birds seen unless they are "off the course" strays.
- 3) Keep a record on a VSO card that you can get from Bill or Ruth. Last year many birders also kept a record of where the birds were seen. This made the reporting at the end even more interesting.
- 4) Turn the results in to Ruth or Bill by June 7.

Results will be reported in the June or July newsletter. Your rewards come from the unexpected birds that you spot on those beautiful spring mornings that you might not have otherwise turned out for and the satisfaction of welcoming back all of the migrating birds.