



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 20, Number 1

January 1996

Next Meeting

The first bird club meeting in the new year will be on **Wednesday, January 17, 1996, at 7:30 PM** in room 117 Millington Hall on the William & Mary campus. Ruth Beck will be the speaker of the evening giving us an update on her three long-term projects to provide nesting habitat for Black Skimmers, Least Terns, and Common Terns, along with collateral projects that have developed from that effort. Also, if you would like to know more about the what-where-and-how of birding on Craney Island, you will find that out, too. For visitors or members new to the Club, Professor Ruth Beck was not only the immediate past president of the Williamsburg Bird Club but has also been its mentor and guiding spirit from the start.

Let's hope for a good turnout to greet and salute Lee Shuster, our new president!

January Field Trip

Grace Doyle and Joy Archer plan to stay fairly close to home for this wintertime excursion: First stop will be at College Landing Park. Then it will proceed to Jamestown Island via the Colonial Parkway. Finally, and likely the most cozy stop of all considering the prospect of cold weather, will be a visit to Bill Sheehan's house. From the kitchen window we should be able to view a nice variety of birds in his garden bower. As usual, field trippers will gather at the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center parking lot (the lot to the right as you enter.) Meet at 7:15 AM for a 7:30 sharp departure. The trip should be finished sometime before noon.

January is Dues Time

A membership renewal form accompanies this issue of *The Flyer*. Note that the amounts remain unchanged: \$10.00 for individuals, \$15.00 for families, \$25.00 for Patron Membership, and \$3.00 for students. Please mail your remittance along with the completed form to Tom Rend, our treasurer, in the enclosed envelope. Better yet, save 32 cents by bringing them to the January meeting.

President's Corner

Happy New Year!! As I begin my tenure as president of OUR club, I am looking forward to a busy but productive year. Hopefully the production will come from our many talented members becoming more involved in the activities and business of our club. People have approached me with suggestions for our club, but foremost we must involve more people so the ones helping now will not run out of steam.

Secondly, I hope the year will be productive birdwise. The more people we have out observing the variety of birds that live here, pass through on their northern or southern journeys or just visit for the winter, the more our club list will grow. If your schedule allows it, participate in our monthly trips and go with other club members to see what birds are using our city as a place to call home or a place to rest and fuel up before they continue on to their destination. It doesn't matter what level of bidder you are, there is always something new to see and learn.

Happy Birding and I'll see you at our January meeting!!
Lee Schuster

Cornell's Bird Feeder Watch Program

The Ornithology Laboratory at Cornell University conducts a Bird Feeder Watch Program every year and has done so for the past several years. The more widespread the program the better; in each month of operation participants take a two-day sighting of all birds observed on their feeders. By tracking these sightings and making comparisons, "The Lab" can compile significant records of geographic shifts in bird populations as well as shifts in size of those populations.

Bill Sheehan is a participant and made this feeder report for December 23 and 24: Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nut-hatch, Brown Creeper, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Titmouse, Blue Jay, Carolina Wren, Red-wing Blackbird, Blue Bird, Hermit Thrush, Pine Warbler, Cardinal, Towhee, White-throated Sparrow, Junco, House Finch and Goldfinch.

If you find this idea appealing you can get an application and full information from the Feeder Watch Program, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY, 14850. Participants are asked to contribute a \$15 fee each year to pay for the processing of the information. Most participants find that a good bargain.

Bird of the Month

Eastern Hermit Thrush (Catharus guttatus)

As this wonderful and much loved bird is our own fall-winter residents, January seems like a good time to pay it some attention. While his more distant cousins, the brown thrasher and the robin may be spotted almost year 'round, the Hermit is the only true thrush likely to be found outside of the tropical world in the winter months. Virginia is near the northern limits of this winter range but confusingly, hermit thrushes from time to time, during a mild winter, will stay much farther north. The bird breeds northward starting in the Alleghenies just north of Virginia and continuing

up through New England and well up into Canada. There are recorded sightings of thousands of these birds collecting on the Ohio side of Lake Erie before making the crossing into Canada in early April.

Unfortunately, the Hermit Thrush when it goes north, takes it's beautiful song with it. And, while we are blessed with the lovely morning and evening songs of the Wood Thrush, experts seem to agree that we are listening to the second best of the thrushes. However, we would have to be fortunate enough to hear the rare songs on the winter grounds, usually weakly delivered, or go to the Hermit's breeding territory to make a comparison. The Hermit can survive in the colder climates because berries and vegetable matter make up a large portion of its diet. Those things are common here and in the milder Virginia climate enough grubs, worms and insects can be found even in winter, to keep the bird healthy.

The 7-inch long Hermit Thrush is slightly smaller than the Wood Thrush and has a grayish brown head and body, whereas the Wood Thrush is a redish brown. The Hermit Thrush's tail has this reddish brown color too, contrasting with its duller body. The contrasting tail color helps to distinguish it from all other thrushes. The tail provides a second identifying characteristic: the Hermit Thrush habitually cocks the tail upward in a quick movement and then lets it settle back into place. This thrush also lacks the large eye and eye ring of the Wood Thrush.

How common are these birds around here in the late fall and winter months? Bill Sheehan says that they have appeared in every Audubon Christmas count since 1970; 17 were spotted this year and reported in every covered section except Hog Island; the highest number reported was 55 and the lowest 1. "To coin a word," said Sheehan, "you might say that they are ubiquitous!" While that may sound funny, they aren't quite as "ubiquitous" as all that! "So how come I don't see them", some might ask? They are rarely seen at feeders (although one regularly visits Bill Sheehan's warmed water supply). You must go to terrain near a stream where bushy, woody plants

cover moist and leafy soil. Jamestown Island and College Woods are two good choices. If you look near a ravine with a moist bottom, that should increase your opportunities. And if you can learn to listen for and recognize the burbling-clucking call of the bird it will help. Learn to imitate that call and your chance of calling them into view increases dramatically. Maybe we can find an illustration at the next meeting.

Field Notes for December 1995

The highlight of the month was Brian Taber's confirmation of the wintering Yellow-breasted Chat in Governor's Land that he was asked to come check out on the last day of the year. Our records show this occurring only twice before....Brian also went to great length to identify the two Dublin in winter-dress, mixed in with the almost as startling 11 Short-billed Dowitchers spotted 12/17 during the Bird Count at Hog Island....And to make this a "hat trick" Brian still had the Red-breasted Nuthatch at his feeder at the start of the year...Julie and Ty Hotchkiss kept the Evening Grossbeak sightings alive with a report of 5 at their feeder on 12/10. Tom Armour had a Pine Siskin at Kingsmill, also on the 10th. Tom and Bill Sheehan got adrenalin shock when they followed a lone Turkey into a thicket at Chippokes and the thicket exploded with 12 Turkeys heading for the trees.

The bird sightings reported here were made by Joy Archer, Tom Armour, Joe and Grace Doyle, Dave and Lee Shuster and Brian Taber and we thank them for their efforts.

Jamestown Island/Parkway-James Side

*Hooded Merganser(12/2), *Hermit Thrush (12/2) *Adult Bald Eagle (12/2)Black Duck (12/5), Cedar Wax Wing (12/3), Tundra Swan (12/5), Fox Sparrow(12/13),

Ferry, Chippokes, Hog Island

*Red Tail Hawk (12/9), *Kestrel (12/9), *Bald Eagle (12/9) Great Egrets (12/11), *Green-wing Teal (12/11), Lesser Scalp (12/11), *Mallard Duck (12/11), *Bufflehead (12/11), *Hooded

Merganser (12/11), *Sharp-shinned Hawk(12/11), *Forster's Tern (12/11), *Bonaparte's Gulls and *Greater Black-backed Gulls (12/11), Gadwall (12/15), Red-breasted Merganser (12/15), *Harrier (12/15),-CHIPPOKES - Cooper's Hawk (12/15), *Turkey (12/15), Phoebe (12/15), Chipping Sparrow(12/15), *Fox Sparrow (12/11), Rusty Black Birds (12/29).

York River/Parkway-York Side

Northern Gannets (12/8), *Common Loons (12/8), *Bufflehead (12/8), *Ruddy Duck (12/8), Tundra Swan (12/8), *Killdeer (12/8), Common Goldeneye (12/19).

Camp Peary

*Killdeer(12/3), *Ring-billed Gull (12/17), *Belted Kingfisher (12/3), *Eastern Phoebe (12/17), Red-breasted Nuthatch (12/24), Kinglets , Golden & Ruby-crowned (12/17), Cedar Waxwing (12/3), *Fox and *Song Sparrows (12/24), Pied-billed Grebe (12/3), *Double-crested Cormorant (12/17), *Tundra & *Mute Swans (12/17), Green-winged Teal (12/24), *Canvasback (12/3), *Ring-necked duck (12/17), Redhead Duck (12/24), *Bald Eagle (12/3), American Coot (12/24), Cooper's, *Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks and *American Kestrel (12/3).

Backyards and Miscellaneous

Tom Armour had a Purple Finch at his Kingsmill Feeder 12/16 and in a nearby pond on the same day, Coot, Mute Swan and Pied-billed Grebe...Bill Williams says the up-to-date Saw-whet Owl banding count at Kiptopeke is 1,050A report from a distant member in Yardley, Pa. also involved the "ubiquitous" Saw-whet. Ted Tobish and his neighbors could not figure out why all of the Chickadees had suddenly disappeared from the feeders....until they found Saw-whets, who dine on the tiny birds, in the nearby pines! Ted also reported that this year for the first time that anyone can remember, the Red-breasted Nuthatch has taken over from the White-breasted cousin on local feeders. Bill Williams also noted that all of the chirping birds in the

rafters of Lowe's warehouse store in Newport News have taken up residence immediately above the bird food supply! Marilyn Zeidler and a Sharp-shinned hawk watched two Evening Grosbeaks visit her feeder a few days ago and Bill Holcombe saw a Purple Finch at his. He remarked that they are quite distinct from the more common House Finch.

(*Sighted on two or more separate dates)

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Once again we had a good day as far as weather and birds for our annual Christmas Bird Count. The day began quite chilly, but 33 people stuck it out and helped our total species count reach 108. This is typical of the number of birds we have seen in past years. In 1977, the club recorded 100 species as our lowest count number and in 1984 we listed 115 species as our highest count number. The numbers have been about even for the past 6 or 7 years. Just a little trivia...the total number of species seen in the 19 years the club has been participating is 159. Not too bad!!

As the compiler again this year, I would like to thank all those that helped in the field as well as those that cheered us on and supported us this long day. Many people showed up at the final tally who were not birding with a group and we thank you for your interest. Hopefully your interest was peaked and next year you will spend some time with a group during the day. Dave and I even had a gentleman with us from Mississippi. He was in Richmond, wanted to participate and he was a great help.

Listed below are all those that helped make this day successful. If I miss anyone that participated, I apologize. Everyone that showed up didn't necessarily have his or her name turned in to me. And I didn't get the names of the persons that showed up at the final tally who brought delicious goodies. Let me know who you are and I'll remember you for next year and the next newsletter. For all those that helped and gave me advice, thank you very much! I could not have

done it without you.

Participants: Bill Williams, Ron and Roberta Giese, John McDowell, Bill Holcombe, Brian Taber, Ruth Beck, Ann Moore, Dick Mahone, Anne and Phil Young, Dot Silsby, Chris Burr, Eddie Wilson, Carol Brown, Bettye Fields, Mary Pulley, Brian Turner, Dave and Lee Schuster, Emily Sharrett, Bob Morris, Paul and Carol McAllister, Tom Armour, Joe and Grace Doyle, Joy Archer, Carolyn Lowe, Marilyn Zeigler Julie Hotchkiss, Paul and Elaine Mertus. Charles Rend, and Dorothy Whitfield.

Count Highs and Lows:

1 Rough-legged Hawk - Camp Peary (first ever on count)

1 Orange-crowned warbler - Middle Plantation

11 Short-billed dowitchers - Hog Island

More Black vultures than Turkey vultures(135 vs. 82)

Second highest number of Bald Eagles (28 - highest is 29)

Highest number of Red-shouldered hawks (16)

Increase in Mute swans (17) - in 1986 one was recorded

Birds We Should Have Seen But Did Not

Fish crow, Rusty blackbird, Turkey Low numbers for Pintails

Lowest number of Kestrels (7) since a single bird in 1977

No Red-headed woodpeckers

See total results in back of Newsletter

Thanks again, everyone.



Please note, the club will need a volunteer as compiler for the 1996 Christmas bird count. Contact me if you are interested. - Lee Schuster

1995 Williamsburg Bird Club Christmas Count

Species	Total	Species	Total	Species	Total
Red-throated Loon	0	Lesser Yellowlegs	0	Yellow-Rumped Warbler	505
Common Loon	3	Western Sandpiper	0	Pine Warbler	16
Pied-Billed Grebe	40	Dunlin	2	Palm Warbler	0
Horned Grebe	10	Short-billed Dowitcher	11	Common Yellowthroat	0
Double-Crested Cormorant	415	Common Snipe	0	Northern Cardinal	142
Great Blue Heron	123	American Woodcock	4	Rufous-Sided Towhee	20
Great Egret	23	Laughing Gull	8	American Tree Sparrow	0
Black-crowned Night Heron	0	Bonaparte's Gull	137	Chipping Sparrow	84
Tundra Swan	155	Ring-Billed Gull	1109	Field Sparrow	45
Mute Swan	17	Herring Gull	136	Vesper Sparrow	0
Snow Goose	1	Greater Black-Backed Gull	121	Savannah Sparrow	45
Canada Goose	1158	gull sp.	30	Fox Sparrow	6
Wood Duck	2	Forster's Tern	5	Song Sparrow	254
Green-winged Teal	61	Rock Dove	116	Swamp Sparrow	11
American Black Duck	69	Mourning Dove	328	White-Throated Sparrow	307
Mallard	387	Eastern Screech Owl	2	White-Crowned Sparrow	0
Northern Pintail	12	Great Horned Owl	4	Dark-Eyed Junco	730
Northern Shoveler	2	Barred Owl	6	Red-Winged Blackbird	7683
Gadwall	5	Belted Kingfisher	19	Eastern Meadowlark	118
American Wigeon	289	Red-headed Woodpecker	0	Rusty Blackbird	0
Canvasback	1713	Red-Bellied Woodpecker	63	Common Grackle	333
Redhead	2	Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker	10	Brown-Headed Cowbird	628
Ring-Necked Duck	461	Downy Woodpecker	49	blackbird, sp.	300
Greater Scaup	0	Hairy Woodpecker	5	Northern Oriole	0
Lesser Scaup	200	Northern Flicker	90	Purple Finch	1
scaup sp.	245	Pileated Woodpecker	21	House Finch	118
Oldsquaw	0	Eastern Phoebe	8	Pine Siskin	14
Common Goldeneye	19	Horned Lark	18	Goldfinch	120
Bufflehead	181	Blue Jay	127	Evening Grosbeak	3
Hooded Merganser	276	American Crow	199	House Sparrow	36
Common Merganser	0	Fish Crow	0	Total	25561
Red-Breasted Merganser	1	crow sp.	62		
Ruddy Duck	2964	Carolina Chickadee	189		
duck, sp.	40	Tufted Titmouse	140		
Black Vulture	135	Red-Breasted Nuthatch	3		
Turkey Vulture	82	White-Breasted Nuthatch	52		
Bald Eagle (Adult)	12	Brown-Headed Nuthatch	17		
Bald Eagle (Immature)	16	Brown Creeper	9		
Northern Harrier	3	Carolina Wren	63		
Sharp-Shinned Hawk	6	House Wren	3		
Cooper's Hawk	3	Winter Wren	4		
Red-shouldered Hawk	14	Marsh Wren	0		
Red-tailed Hawk	24	Golden-Crowned Kinglet	72		
Rough-legged Hawk	1	Ruby-Crowned Kinglet	48		
American Kestrel	7	Eastern Bluebird	235		
Ring-Necked Pheasant	0	Hermit Thrush	17		
Wild Turkey	0	American Robin	74		
Northern Bobwhite	25	Gray Catbird	2		
Clapper Rail	5	Northern Mockingbird	54		
Sora	0	Brown Thrasher	10		
American Coot	46	Water Pipit	0		
Killdeer	76	Cedar Waxwing	80		
American Avocet	0	Starling	949		
Greater Yellowlegs	1	Orange-crowned Warbler	1		