



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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April 1996

Next Meeting

The next club meeting will be on April 17, in room 117 Millington Hall, William & Mary College campus, at 7:30 PM. The speaker for the evening is Peggy Spiegel, well known birder from the Roanoke area, whose topic will be "Attracting Birds to Your Backyard." Peggy is field trip chairperson of the VSO and owner of a wildlife supply shop in Roanoke who has a wealth of experience to draw on for this topic.

April Field Trip by Joy Archer, Field Trip Chairperson

In the April field trip, Saturday, April 20, we will look for warblers and all other comers at Governor's Land and, time permitting, on Jamestown Island too. Emily Sharrett will be the leader. As usual, members will assemble in the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center parking lot (to the right of the building as you drive in) at 7:15 AM. Then we'll car pool to Governor's Land, leaving at 7:30 sharp.

A Special Thank You

March was a special month for some and a frustration for others. A very special thanks goes out to Juel Duke for her gracious hospitality while her yard guest, the Common Redpoll, visited her feeders. Word spread quickly and many people flocked to her yard to see this unlikely visitor. According to Bill Sheehan it has been about eight years since Williamsburg has recorded a Common Redpoll. Juel and her husband Jay had to endure many phone calls and

visits by strangers to her house during odd hours of the day. She graciously greeted Dave and me early one Monday morning (before 7:00) before we all had to be at work. THANK YOU Juel for opening your yard to those interested in seeing the Redpoll. And those of us who tried but didn't see the bird enjoyed all the other special bird visitors your yard had to offer. Your yard is a special place. — Lee Schuster

Searching for March Warblers by Bill Holcombe

Up at five...bundle up and out the door.
All set to sight two, three, six or more.
No time to waste...Early birder gets the best.
On to hot spots touted by Beck an' the rest.
Here...Great spot...Big trees and creek below.
What's that in the bush?...A damn Junco.
OK, now, flitting at the top of the tree!
Focus...Don't breathe...another Chickadee.
Something yellow!...halfway up. Don't flinch...
Oh, Nuts! Just a shining, new Goldfinch.
There for real! Pointed beak...Heart goes thump!
...It's the hundred fifteenth Yellow Rump!
Small flock flits through the trees on the right!
And stop over there...silhouetted by light!
All this repeats with grunts, stoops and spins
But nary a migrant fills the lens.
Fingers frozen...Neck in pain.
Oh, thank God, here comes the rain.

Spring Bird Count

It is that time again!! This year our Spring count will be held Sunday, May 5. We can always use some help, experienced or not. This count is busy due to the migrants so we need all the eyes and ears possible to spot the birds in the various areas. The count areas are the same as our Christmas count. This is a great opportunity to pick up some of the warblers that we rarely see, boost our life lists and learn from the many experienced birders we have in the club. If you are interested, call Brian Taber at 253-1181 and he will set you up with a group.

Feeder Wash

You have heard of a car wash — what about a feeder wash? Yes, it's important to cleanse and disinfect your feeders at least once a year to prevent the spread of diseases to newly arrived birds.

In late spring the Bird Club and Wildbirds Unlimited will offer a feeder wash for our members and neighbors to bring in bird feeders to be washed. It will be at the store on Richmond Road. A local steam cleaning company will provide the equipment needed for the cleaning and we will ask for a donation to the club per feeder. All the money raised will go toward the grant we give each year to a William and Mary student for local bird research. Look for the date and additional information in upcoming newsletters as well as at the Wildbirds Unlimited store.

March Field Notes

Have bird sightings to report? Call Bill Sheehan at 220-2122. Leave word on his machine if he's not there or put a message on his fax, 220-6734.

Among the unusual sightings of the month are Bill Williams' Eurasian Widgeon down in Poquoson, ninth sighting on Sheehan's records; Snow Geese were spotted flying north; Woodcock and Pipits on the James River Parkway; A Lesser Black-backed Gull on James River (tenth local record.) What may have been the final

sighting of the Common Redpoll was at Juel Duke's on 3/31. Bill Snyder reported a Tree Swallow on Powhatan Creek 3/10. Two of our early warblers described last month have been reported, the Yellow-throated Warbler in Kingswood by Brian Taber 3/26 and the Louisiana Water Thrush at Hickory Signpost Bridge by Bill Williams, 3/3. An early Catbird was in Bill Holcombe's yard on 3/24 and Tom Armour spotted Purple Martins at the library 3/26. He also sighted Boat-tailed Grackles at Indian Fields Creek on the York River (quite rare in our area.) Five Wild Turkeys were seen on Route 5 at Centerville Road by Fitzhugh Turner. A late report from John McDowell lists a dozen Evening Grosbeaks in brilliant breeding plumage in the Schuster's front yard on April 2, and about a dozen Chipping Sparrows, a Hairy Woodpecker and some Pine Siskins for good measure. Lee's been telling us that Grosbeaks have been there all winter.

Reports from Favorite Birding Spots — (birds commonly seen year 'round not included)

Raptors widely seen at Hog Island and two or three other spots include American Kestrel, Bald Eagles, Osprey, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Northern Harriers, Red-shouldered Hawks and Red-tailed Hawks.

Jamestown Island — Killdeer, Laughing Gull, Royal Tern, Great Horned Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, Brown Creeper.

James River/Parkway — Osprey, King Rail, Green-winger Teal and Coot at College Creek; Killdeer, Woodcock, Laughing Gull, Bonaparte's Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Royal Tern, Belted Kingfisher, Common Egret and Mute Swan also at College Creek; Canvasback Duck, Lesser Scaup, Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Fish Crow and Pipit.

Ferry Ride/Chippokes/Hog Island — Black Vulture, Common Egret, Royal Tern, Tundra Swan, Green-winged Teal, Black Duck, Pintail Duck, Gadwall, American Widgeon, Lesser Scaup, Red-headed Merganser, Hooded Mer-

ganser. Chippokes: Wild Turkey, Red-headed Woodpecker, Meadowlark, Rusty Blackbird.

York River/Parkway/Yorktown — Bonaparte's Gull, Royal Tern, Belted Kingfisher, Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, Gannet, Brown Pelican, Common Egret, Tundra Swan, American Widgeon, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Fish Crow.

Kingsmill — Laughing Gull, great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Hairy woodpecker, Mute Swan, Red-breasted Merganser, Coot, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Chipping Sparrow and Purple Finch, all seen by Tom Armour. Also, Evening Grosbeak, Yellow-breasted Chat and Brown-headed Nuthatch spotted by Jean Rend.

Kingswood — Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Purple Finch, Yellow-throated Warbler, Fox Sparrow seen by Bill Sheehan.

Neighborhoods & Miscellaneous — Juel Duke's Deerwood feeders have attracted, in addition to the Common Redpoll, Pine Siskins, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Purple Finch...A Common Merganser has been seen on Powhatan Creek. Ring-necked Ducks were on Lake Powell and Pied-billed Grebes on Lake Matoka...the female Barred Owl continues to keep almost daily vigil in Bill Holcombe's backyard...Pine warblers, Yellow-rumps and Cedar Waxwings are widely reported...ugh, and so are Brown-headed Cowbirds.

March Field Trip by Joy Archer, Field Trip Chairperson

The March field trip on March 23 brought out a goodly crowd (24) on a chilly and windy but sunny day to explore and enjoy the Vineyard and Williamsburg Winery, under the thoughtful stewardship of Randy & April Coleman. They planned our excursion in two stages with a welcome coffee/doughnut break in the middle at the Vineyards Clubhouse. During the break from the comfort of the clubhouse we could keep an

eye on the lake for both Pied-billed Grebes and for Gadwalls. The number of species spotted, including the lovely walk down to College Creek, totaled 39 with some good looks at a Kestrel, Red-tailed Hawk, Bluebirds and about 40 Tundra Swans creating dramatic shimmering effects as they passed overhead.

Members who participated included: Phoebe Kent, Ron & Kay West, Jane Crone, Pat Thacker, Joy Archer, Emily Sharret, Grace & Joe Doyle, Caroline Williams, Dorothy Whitfield, Mary Kyle DuPuis, Randy & Randy Coleman, Ron & Bobbie Geise, Carolyn Lowe, John & Rosemarie Eberhardt, Pat & Mike Healy, Chuck Rend, Juel Duke, and Hugh Beard.

President's Corner by Lee Schuster

According to the calendar, Spring is here. The flowers in my yard are beginning to show their colors, I've mowed my grass twice, and the Goldfinches are working on some new feathers. But as I look outside, the thermometer indicates 40 degrees and I still have Pine Siskins and Evening Grosbeaks cleaning out my seed container.

Looking at the bright side, the signs of spring are slowly overtaking the winter blues. These inconspicuous indicators of spring are showing up: Yellow-throated Warblers are here, Parulas are not far behind, and the silence of winter is becoming louder with the songs of spring. Each morning it seems the songs of cardinals and wrens are drowning out the demands of the grosbeaks. Make sure those nest boxes are cleaned out and brush the dust off the humming bird feeders. Some birds will be just passing through our area, while others will call Williamsburg home. Keep your eyes and ears open as the curtain rises on our spring show. I hope to see you at our April meeting. Happy birding.

New Members

Welcome to the following new members:

Gil & Jeanne Frey
184 Blue Wing Lane
Surry, VA 23883

Sam Fletcher
101 John Paine
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Wayland & Elizabeth Bass
104 Thomas Nelson Lane
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Library Donations

We just got a note of thanks from the Williamsburg Regional Library for the club's \$83 donation enabling their purchase of books on birds. Books added in fiscal year 1995 were:

Bluebirds Forever — Troops, Connie
Spotted Owl, The — Alvin, Virginia
Book of N. American Owls, The
Field Guide to E. Bird Songs (audio tape)
Bluebirds and Their Survival — Davis, W.
Bird Watcher's Digest (Subscription)

The Trash Pickers — Pat & Mike Healy

The Williamsburg Bird Club met on Saturday, March 16, to perform our civic duties on Route 5. With 14 "garbagers" we covered the 1.8 miles in a little under an hour and a half. We collected 13 bags of garbage and 8 bags of recycleables (which Bill Davies picked up for us) and have determined that Budweiser is, indeed, the King of Beers. We found a dead possum and Richard H. Everson's keys on his dog tags — he has O Positive blood and no religious preference. Tom Armour retains his title of "Fastest Junkman in James City County."

We were without the unerring direction of Bill Davies, our fearless leader. The substitute organizers, Pat & Mike Healy, ran a relatively confusing three-ring circus. Thanks to all those who demonstrated great patience: Tom Armour, Don Nelson, Joy Archer, Carolyn Williams, Sam Hart, Charlie Rend, Mary & Bill Kafes, Bob Morris, Pat Bostian and Dorothy Whitfield.

Weekend Surprises by Shirley Devan

I was headed to Clarksville, Virginia, the small town where I grew up down on Buggs Island Lake in Mecklenburg County. It was Saturday morning, March 9, and my mother was expecting me by lunch.

My windshield bird watching paid off that morning. Instead of the usual turkey vultures, I spotted the sun-brightened white head and tail of a Bald Eagle soaring overhead close to Indian Fields Tavern on Route 5 in Charles City County. Luckily, I had a compact pair of binoculars in my glove box. Quickly, I pulled off the highway into a driveway. I grabbed the binoculars and was able to get a good look at the eagle before he (she?) headed out over the James River. Already it had been a spectacular birding day.

My mother still lives in the house where I grew up. Our house is still surrounded on three sides by six neighbors. Only two of the neighbors' yards sported bird feeders and I could only see one of them from my mother's den. Margie and Gene next door have a very bird-friendly yard — bluebird houses, fruit trees, flowers, shrubs, and feeders. Sitting in my mother's den I can look out the window to see the birds (and Margie and Gene) coming and going about 75 feet away.

Sunday morning I was keeping one eye on Gene's bird feeder for him (he and Margie were out of town) while I was reading the paper. Suddenly, there was an unfamiliar bird at their feeder. It had a white wing patch in addition to being gold, yellow and brown. And it was a good size bird.

Mmmmm, I wondered. What kind of bird had they attracted and what kind of seed were they using? The bird didn't look like the usual assortment of House Finches, Titmice, and Chickadees I have at my feeder. I continued to keep one eye on the feeder. The strange bird was still there. In fact, several like him were coming and going, hogging the feeder and driving away the Goldfinches which are tiny by comparison. Obviously these birds had settled in for Sunday brunch.

I ran out to my car to get my binoculars, cursing myself for not bringing my scope. From the sidewalk I trained my binoculars on Gene's feeder. A

Starling-size bird with a huge yellow beak was quickly making its way through the sunflower seed supply. Could they be some kind of Grosbeaks? How was I supposed to know? I had never seen one before. And my Peterson field guide was at home in my backpack. I knew it was not a Rose-breasted Grosbeak because I had seen pictures of those beauties. I vaguely remembered that there were other Grosbeaks. I could only guess at my find. Was it an Evening Grosbeak? I scanned the trees around the yard. There were 10 to 12 males and females perched in the trees! Just like Saturday, the sun was bright and the colors on the males were stunning.

That Sunday morning was very cold, so I continued to watch the Grosbeaks at brunch from my mother's den, marveling to my mother all the while at my unexpected good fortune at spotting a bird I had never seen before. Every hour or so I would venture out into the sunny cold to look at them through my binoculars and to scan the trees overhead. They were still feasting when I left about 3 p.m. to head back to Williamsburg.

As soon as I arrived home I headed for my field guide. There on the front of the Peterson guide was a picture of my Grosbeak! My suspicions were confirmed. My first Evening Grosbeaks — and practically in my mother's backyard. I called her immediately to tell her how lucky she and her neighbors were to attract such wonderful birds to their feeder. She promised to tell Gene and Margie as soon as they arrived home. The surprise of seeing a new bird, particularly when and where I least expected it, was something I'll never forget. The field guides and bird books say that this is the southern edge of the range for Evening Grosbeaks, but that they are spreading south and east. So maybe there will be more of them as the years go by. Bill Sheehan's list in the February bird club newsletter listed the Evening Grosbeak as a rare to common transient and winter resident in this area. I noted in the March newsletter that particular mention was made of only one report of an Evening Grosbeak (in Windsor Forest).

The weekend trip to my mother's just goes to prove that I should never be caught without my binoculars, my scope and field guide, no matter

how far I travel or how close I am to home. And I should always be prepared to be surprised.

Useful Phone Numbers

Flyer editor, Phil Young, should you care to write an article or voice an opinion, 229-8556.

Bay-Bridge Tunnel, should you care to get a permit to stop for birding on the islands, 1-804-331-2960 or 1-804-624-3511.

Virginia Bird Hotline, 1-800-238-2713

Washington D.C. Bird Hotline 1-301-652-1088

Migrants With April Arrival Dates

Little Blue Heron 4/4
Yellow-crowned Night Heron 4/4
Semi-palmated Plover 4/22
Solitary Sandpiper 4/14
Short-billed Dowitcher 4/1
Common Tern 4/13
Yellow-billed Cuckoo 4/24
Veery, Swainson Thrush 4/11
Wood Thrush 4/11
White-eyed Vireo 4/4, Red-eyed 4/11
Summer Tanager 4/19, Scarlet 4/13
Rose-breasted Grosbeak 4/27
Blue Grosbeak 4/16
Indigo Bunting 4/3
Bobolink 4/26
Orchard Oriole 4/20

Warblers:

Tennessee 4/29
Yellow 4/24
Chestnut-sided 4/29
Magnolia 4/29
Cape May 4/20
Black-throated Blue 4/16
Blue-throated Green 4/4
Bay-breasted 4/19
Blackpoll 4/13
American Redstart 4/11
Prothonotary 4/7
Kentucky 4/16
Hooded 4/15
