



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 21, Number 10

November 1997

NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be at 7:30 PM on Wednesday, November 19th in room 106 Millington Hall on the William & Mary campus.

Mr. Don Schwab of the Virginia Department of Game and Fisheries, who will address the group, is the Region 1 (Tidewater area) biologist for Non-Game, Threatened & Endangered Species. He is a director of K.E.S.T.R.E.L. and is in charge of passerine banding there. He also does banding and conducts studies of butterflies in the Dismal Swamp. His subject will be "Grassland Birds."

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The following persons names have been placed in nomination by the Nominating Committee, for election to serve in 1997. The election will be held during the November meeting:

President — Joy Archer
Vice President — Hugh Beard
Secretary — Mary Kyle DuPuis
Treasurer — Charles Rend
Member-at-large — Ron Giese
Member-at-large — John McDowell

Our thanks go to Marilyn Zeigler, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, for assembling such a fine slate of candidates.

NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP

Tom Armour will lead a fall field trip down the Colonial Parkway along the York River shoreline on Saturday, November 22. He hopes to show us migrating waterfowl who arrive about this time each year, such as Goldeneyes, Ruddy Ducks,

Buffleheads, Horned Grebes, Scaup and Canvasbacks. It's a little early now, but maybe there will be some Loons too.

As usual, we'll gather in the C.W. Visitor Center Parking lot (right side of the building as you enter) at 7:45 AM and depart there at 8 o'clock sharp. Dress warmly! It can be cold and windy on the riverbank this time of year.

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

It is hard to believe another year is about to end and even harder to believe my two years of president are coming to a close. They certainly went quickly and I enjoyed the experience, especially getting to know so many nice people.

Ducks are arriving so now's the time to travel to the York River to see who is here for a visit. We always have good numbers of migrating ducks, especially on the York, but don't ignore the little lakes and ponds around the area. I remember the Eurasian Widgeon seen on Barlow's Pond a few years ago. The winter feeder birds are arriving too so watch for them. If you are interested in taking part in Project Feeder Watch with Cornell University, contact them ASAP because it begins this week. Considering the weather pattern we have been having lately, maybe we'll have warm temperatures again this winter. That could mean — EVENING GROSBEAKS! I missed them last year. They're heavy eaters so, of course, my pocketbook didn't mind.

The November meeting will be our last for the 1997 year and the club will not have a formal meeting until the third Wednesday in January. People who help conduct the Christmas Count will gather together after the count as usual. If you don't make it to the next meeting, have a

wonderful holiday season. We'll see you again in January. — Lee

TRASH PICKER EXPLOITS

October 25th dawned gray and dreary but became lighter and lighter, ending with sunlight streaming down on the haloes of the good souls who were out at 8 AM on Route 5. The Adopted Highway called and we answered: the trash pickers included Pat Bostian, Pat & Mike Healy, Bill & Mary Kafes, Bob Morris, Leonard & Alice Lee Sargeant and Carol Talbot. It was a particularly good day for dead wildlife — possum, racoon, garter snake and rabbit. Bellows Virginia Vodka remains the drink of choice, although we also found that Anheuser Busch products are a local favorite. Two drivers tooted and gave us a thumbs up, their thanks for a job well done. Our illustrious leader, Bill Davies, is to be commended for putting up the bright orange caution sign. He'll be back to full strength soon and will lead us on our never ending fight *for* truth and *against* trash.

FIELD NOTES

October was a fantastic start for the Fall birding season with these notables: a **Golden Eagle** spotted on the bank of the James River by Ty and Julie Hotchkiss; a **Wood Stork** in a creek off the York River between the Cheatham Annex and the Weapons Station by Florida birders visiting with Tom Armour; two **Peregrine Falcons** seen at Camp Peary by Joe and Grace Doyle; two **Red-breasted Nuthatches** reported by Tom Armour at Kingsmill and by Brian Taber at Kingswood; and, finally, Dick Mahone found a **Ring-necked Pheasant** feeding in the midst of his Guinea Hen flock! Putting this into some perspective, this was the fourth local record of a Golden Eagle, the fifth local record of a Wood Stork and the first Ring-necked Pheasant since 1992. While the Peregrine is believed to breed locally, sightings are few and far between. The Red-breasted Nuthatch was especially scarce last winter season. It is wonderful to list all of these marvelous sightings in one report.

Returning winter residents reported included just six of the ducks, and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker,

Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Junco and, of course, those Red-breasted Nuthatches. Sora, the small Rail that visits us in the fall and in the spring was seen on Jamestown Island by Joy Archer and Bill Sheehan. The sighting is a feat in itself as this bird keeps itself virtually hidden in the swamps.

Jamestown Island and Parkway (James River) Great Egret, Green-winged Teal, American Widgeon, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Osprey, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Clapper Rail, Sora, Bonaparte's Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Royal Tern, Forster's Tern, Red-headed Woodpecker, Tree Swallow, Winter Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Catbird, Thrasher, Black and White Warbler, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Junco.

Hog Island Great Egret, Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, American Widgeon, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Yellowlegs, Dunlin, Royal Tern, Forster's Tern, Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Marsh Wren Catbird, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Junco.

Camp Peary Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Gadwall, Ruddy Duck, Black Vulture, Bald Eagle, American Kestrel, Wild Turkey, Clapper Rail, Lesser Yellowlegs, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pee-wee, Eastern Phoebe, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Palm Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Chipping Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark.

York River State Park Great Egret, Red-headed Woodpecker, Phoebe, Tree Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow.

Kingsmill Pied-billed Grebe, Brown Pelican, Red-shouldered Hawk, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Tree Swallow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, White-throated Sparrow, Junco.

Kingswood Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Phoebe, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Thrasher, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Junco.

Miscellaneous and Neighborhoods The Hotchkisses made identification certain when they caught their Golden Eagle both perched and in flight near the James River in First Colony. Our President, Lee Schuster called in Ovenbirds and Black and White Warblers at Banbury Cross. A Cooper's Hawk was reported in the Jolly Pond area. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was seen in Jamestown Farms and a Red-shouldered Hawk was seen sitting on a wire watching the confusion at 199 and Route 5.

Contributors to this month's Field Reports included Joy Archer, Tom Armour, Martha Briggs, M. Boggs, Grace and Joe Doyle, Ty and Julie Hotchkiss, Dick Mahone, Lee Schuster, Bill Sheehan, Bill Snyder, Brian Taber and Marilyn Zeigler.

It's Almost Here!!!

1987 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Sunday, December 21, is the date of this event which has excited and pleased its participants for 98 years. We hope that all members who can, will join in. Get some experience now for the 100th Anniversary running in 1999. Any level of birding skill that provides another pair of eyes and ears is welcome.

Here's how it works. Our club is assigned an area within a radius of fifteen miles from the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center by the National Audubon Society. Members of The Newport News and Hampton Bird Club help us by leading the search in some of the nine areas of our territory. The date is chosen so they can help us and some of our people can help them on their's too. Eight teams under experienced leaders start covering their territories at about 7 AM and end the day between 3 and 4 PM.

The nine territories are : (Some locations within the territories are listed for clarification but not every new subdivision is included.)

Cheatham Annex - Cheatham Annex, Queen's Lake, Felgate's Creek, Indian Field Creek

Camp Peary - The Camp itself.

Kingsmill - Carter's Grove Country Road, Kingsmill, Williamsburg Airport, Parkway from the C.W. Visitor Center to just before College Creek.

Hog Island - Scotland Ferry Ride and Hog Island
Jamestown - Parkway from College Creek and Jamestown Island

College Woods - College Woods and Campus, Lake Matoaka, Lake Powell, College Landing Park, Hickory Signpost Road

Middle Plantation - Governor's Land, First Colony, Drummond's Field, Green Spring, News Road, Waller Mill Park

Jolly Pond - Jolly Pond, Landfill, Cranston's Mill Road, Little Creek Reservoir

Skimino - Barlow's Pond. Skimino Farms, Mirror Lake, entrance to York River State park, River-view Plantation

Each territory records the species and numbers seen. At 5 o'clock we meet at Millington Hall and compile the territory reports into a master list which we send on to the Audubon Society. About 1,700 other counting groups send theirs' too. Eventually we get a copy and analysis of the results and the highlights are reported in *The Flyer*.

If you would like to join in this year, seek out Bill Holcombe at the November meeting or call him at 229-8057. You can pick any area that appeals to you or leave it to Bill to assign you to one that needs help. An Audubon requirement is that you pay \$5.00 to defray the cost of compiling and recording the data and mailing information to participating groups. You will be given a meeting time and place by your leader. You can help out for a half day or a whole day but you must still pay the \$5 either way.

Suggestions for participants: It can be quite cold at 7 on a river or pond, so dress warmly even if a mild day is predicted. Heavy shoes that can stand up to muddy trails and sloppy footing will help. For later in the day you may be glad to have some bug spray along. Bring something warm to drink and a hearty lunch. Obviously you will need your glasses and a book. You'll do lots of walking but most of your heavier gear can be left in a car, as most of us will shift locations several times.

There is a great special flavor to this event and if you have never partaken of it we urge you to come out and see for yourself.

A TALE OF LIFESAVING AND RESCUE

On a recent October day as Julie Hotchkiss arrived home from town the phone rang with an urgent call from David, a neighbor. David was frustrated in his efforts to do something about, "a duck that's been caught in a net out in the river for the past two days." He had called county police, Conservation and Recreation, Game and Inland Fisheries and every other place that he could think of, but no one had come to save the duck. Did Julie think they could get the canoe out and go do something about the problem?

Julie said, "Sure," called husband Ty, changed into canoe clothes and the three of them set out. Some distance from the First Colony shore they came up to the floundering bird, which turned out to be a Double-crested Cormorant, rather than a duck. But the poor creature was badly in need of help. Fishnet mono-filament was tangled all around the bird's feet and wings and its struggles had criss-crossed the line into an unintelligible mess. David had brought clippers with him and while Julie held the bird's hooked beak shut and Ty maneuvered the canoe, David clipped away at the entangling line. After considerable effort from all three the bird was freed. Then they worked themselves and the bird away from the net so that the cormorant would not repeat the performance.

Julie said that, although there was no way to be sure, they think that the same bird hung around the area for a few more days and appeared to be doing all right. "So, it turned out not to be a duck," said Julie, "but cormorants are good old birds and I'm glad that we got this one loose."

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker by Bill Holcombe

This bird has just recently returned to our part of the world from its breeding range across Canada and the northern tier of U.S. states. It also breeds in the mountains south to Georgia.

Our Club records indicate this handsome winter visitor can arrive as early as September 27 and stay with us until June 9. At 8 to 9 inches long, they are very slightly smaller than the very common Red-bellied Woodpecker and, to my way of thinking, the male is even more handsome. The slab of rich red from the bill to the top of the head is matched in the male with the same vivid red across the throat; the female has a white throat. A white band runs from one side of the head to the other just below the eyes, setting off a black band through the eyes. A small white stripe above the eye gives way to black on the head below the red forehead slab. The back is black with a white stripe down the middle and two prominent white bars running halfway down the body from the shoulder. Breast and under parts are white. Immatures are brown but they have the prominent white bars running down from the shoulder.

This is the bird that drills those closely spaced rows of holes that sometimes run horizontally across the tree, and other times vertically down the trunk. They can be found in almost any dense patch of woods here. They are also seen regularly at Jamestown Island and were also reported last winter at Kingsmill, Kingswood, Hickory Sign Post Road, Graylin Woods and Green Spring.

Those closely spaced holes are drilled in 275 different species of trees and are designed to get to the soft inner bark which permit the bird's long, brush-tipped tongue to lap up the sap that fills these shallow holes. Hummingbirds, other woodpeckers, flying squirrels and insects also enjoy the results of the drilling. Sapsuckers eat beetles, larva, ants and wasps much as other woodpeckers do. The Audubon Encyclopedia mentions that they can be attracted to suet, berries and sugar water offered in hummingbird feeders! (I am going to try that.) Incidentally, many studies of the effects of sapsucker drilling on fruit trees show that they do no permanent damage.

All woodpeckers use the intricate mechanism of bone, muscle sinew and nerves that permits them to drill trees to communicate by drumming and tapping. Sapsuckers, especially, make use of this communication device. They drum and tap on almost any surface that sends a loud signal, including tin roofs, down spouts and even garbage

cans. This drumming is believed to announce both territorial claims and mate seeking interest. Both males and females drum and tap. Tapping is not quite so loud as drumming and is much more slowly done. The spacing provides patterns. Some studies indicate that they use tapping to communicate decisions about nest selection. (For all of these years I've wondered why woodpeckers were so dumb as to hammer on dead limbs, my chimney, and my drains!)

We don't get to see the nesting activity of these birds but the chores are shared by both sexes. The male takes the lead in nest selection, showing preference for live Aspen, dead Aspen stubs or dead birches, elms or butternut trees. Both sexes participate in digging out the hole to a depth of about 14 inches. The opening usually faces south or east. Both sexes share incubation and feeding. Young leave 25-29 days after hatching. Banding data indicate they live 6 to 6-1/2 years.

This is a really eat visitor to have every winter and I hope that all of you get to enjoy some sightings. Bill Sheehan has a regular in his back yard so don't ever pass up an invitation to that great spot.

(The Reference for this article was The Audubon Encyclopedia of North American Birds.)

THANK YOU SUPER BOWL III SUPPORTERS

Our team, Wild Birds Unlimited of Williamsburg, began our big day, September 20, 1997 at sunrise on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-tunnel, where there were hundreds of terns and gulls feeding above schools of fish. We found Sandwich Terns and Black Terns there, along with the more expected waterbirds. There was also a Red-breasted Nuthatch atop the brick building on island 3. Another team, "the Bad Boys," was there too. We watched a tired, acrobatic warbler trying to escape an energetic Merlin. It didn't.

On Fisherman Island we saw several herons and egrets and a White Ibis. Near the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge we found our first ducks. Then we saw a flock of warblers (the only warbler flock of the day) — which included Nashville, Black-throated Green, Prairie, Black & White, Pine, Tennessee and American Redstart.

The temperature was rising rapidly into the 90's and a southwest wind was steadily increasing — not good conditions for finding songbirds. At Kiptopeke we saw an adult Peregrine Falcon, which for several minutes flew around the banding station trying to figure out how to get at the lure bird among all the trap nets.

On some back roads we found Gull-billed Terns and Wood Ducks at a secluded pond, and then traveled to Oyster, where high tide made birding unproductive. In contrast, the landfill pond near Oyster was filled with gulls, crows, vultures, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shovelers and some swallows.

We found lots of birds at Chincoteague. Highlights were Avocets, Stilt Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitchers, a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, a Lesser Golden Plover, and both Night Herons and the "Bad Boys" for the final time. Leaving Chincoteague at dusk, we found a Bald Eagle, a Northern Harrier and three Common Nighthawks.

Back at Kiptopeke after dark, we ended the day with two vigorously singing Eastern Screech Owls.

Our total was 120 species, way ahead of last year's 110, but we came in a close second to the Bad Boys who found 124. Our team raised \$700! The whole event raised over \$2000! **Thanks again!!!**

Tom Armour Bill Williams Brian Taber