



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be Wednesday, March 19 at 7:30 in Room 117, Millington Hall on the W & M campus. Former President and Bird Club member, landscape gardening expert Dick Mahone, will help you plan changes and additions to your spring garden that will help to attract more varied birds to your yard. Dick has been at this for a long time and plied his trade for many years at Colonial Williamsburg, where he was responsible for landscaping those beautiful grounds.

NEXT FIELD TRIP

On Saturday March 22 Randy Coleman will host a field trip for our bird watchers at the Vineyards. Members interested in joining the outing should gather in the parking lot at the CW Visitor Center (to the right of the building as you enter) at 7:15 AM and be ready to leave in consolidated groups at 7:30. Randy will meet them at the Vineyard clubhouse parking lot at 7:45.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Hello Spring!! I think we have a pleasant surprise this year with an early spring. The spring brings a lot of eagerness to get out and see what is passing through on the avian front. The board met recently and we came up with ideas to help members meet those challenges. Details are listed elsewhere in the newsletter but I'll mention a couple to entice you. The club is looking for help maintaining the bluebird trail at Eastern State Hospital and maybe at York River State Park. We need people to help clean and monitor the boxes

the club is supposed to be caring for. Joe Doyle has been working the trail at Camp Peary this way all along and we certainly appreciate his work.

Many years ago the club adopted the York River State Park as a project to monitor their birds and work the bluebird trails. We are thinking of offering bird migration walks on weekends in the spring and fall.

Please consider your interest level and how you would like to participate. Board members will help but we really see other club members chipping in too. Lee

FIELD NOTES

A Painted Bunting was sighted again on February 15 and its location may mean that it was "the" Painted Bunting reported in January. This sighting by Mr. & Mrs. John Drew, placed the bird not far from the January sighting in Birchwood reported by Sam and Katherine Hart. The rest of the February report is very normal for this time of year. The waterfowl reports cover the expected visitors with only the reports of Northern Shoveler Ducks on Queens Lake and a Common Merganser on Powhatan Creek being a bit unusual. Most of our winter residents were reported: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Fox Sparrow, Junco, and Purple Finch. Regrettably, no Evening Grosbeaks, Red-breasted Nuthatches or Pine Siskins were sighted and the Winter Wrens of December and January seem to have disappeared. The early Osprey sighted February 16 sitting on a duck blind in College Creek, just off of the Parkway, was a bit unusual but not a

record book entry. The earliest sighting remains February 6, 1990 with three earlier records made on February 12, 14 and 15. There was a tying date in '52.

Jamestown and James River: Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Tundra Swan, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Black Duck, Mallard, American Widgeon, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser (Powhatan Creek), Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Black Vulture, Osprey (2/16, Col.Crk), Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Kestrel, Merlin (Col.Crk.), King Rail, Killdeer, Great Black-backed Gull, Bonaparte's Gull, Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Pileated Woodpecker, Phoebe, Fish Crow, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler, Towhee, Fox Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Meadowlark, Cowbird.

Hog Island: Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Egret, Tundra Swan, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Black Duck, Mallard, Pintail, Gadwall, American Widgeon, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Killdeer, Great Black-backed Gull, Bonaparte's Gull, Kingfisher, Pileated Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler, Towhee, Red-winged Blackbird, Meadowlark, Cowbird,

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Double-crested Cormorant, Wood Duck, Mallard, Pintail, Gadwall, Ring-necked Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Killdeer, Great Black-backed Gull, Bonaparte's Gull, Kingfisher, Pileated Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler, Towhee, Red-winged Blackbird, Meadowlark.

Camp Peary: Pied-billed Grebe, Tundra Swan, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Widgeon, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Hooded

Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Black Vulture, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, American Kestrel, Wild Turkey, Northern Bob-white, Killdeer, Kingfisher, Red-headed Wood-pecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Brown Creeper, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Towhee, Field Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Cowbird.

Kingsmill: Mute Swan, Ring-necked Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Killdeer, Yellow-bellied Sap-sucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler, Towhee, Red-winged Blackbird, Purple Finch.

Kingswood: Red-shouldered Hawk, Kingfisher, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler, Towhee, Fox Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird.

Neighborhoods and Miscellaneous: John McDowell for four days had a pair of strange behaved Red-shouldered Hawks in his yard. First they sat huddled together on a low branch. That's not so unusual at this time of year but then squirrels started searching and scampering about beneath the tree without reaction from the hawks. Then the hawks were on the ground too, scratching with their talons and pulling with their bills. The squirrels continued playing only five feet from them! Talk about the lion and the lamb lying down together! Graylin Woods had Hermit Thrush and Brown Creeper to report.

Reporters this month included: Joy Archer, Tom Armour Grace and Joe Doyle, Mr. & Mrs Drew, Bill Holcombe, John McDowell, Steven Reams, Bill Sheehan, Bill Snyder, Brian Taber and Bill Williams.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome five new members who have joined our club so far this year:

Joan and Roy Johnson
149 North Quarter, Wmsbg.

Russell and Joan Natoce
116 Holly Hills Dr., Wmsbg.

Mary S. Holm
113 Copperfield, Wmsbg.

The Bilodeau Family
114 Warham's Point, Wmsbg.

Anne B. Guerrant
410 S. England St., Wmsbg.

HOG ISLAND TRIP IN FEBRUARY

There is something special about Hog Island. It is always fun to scope it out, even when weather conditions aren't perfect. Today there were white caps on the James and seemingly inescapable gusts were everywhere. Yet with Brian Tabor's skillful leadership we identified Bald Eagles, Brown-breasted Nuthatches, Pintails, about twenty hard working Bonaparte's Gulls, Swamp Sparrows, Winter Wren, Kestrel, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Tundra Swans and numerous other interesting birds for a total count of fifty. Participants were: Chris & Dave Wilcox, Terry & Jack Johnston, Randy & Jandy Strickland, Shirley Devan and a friend named Linda from Blacksburg, Barbara Moorman Rockwell, Chuck Rend and Joy Archer.

BRIAN TABER'S HAWK WATCH

Brian Taber started a local hawk watch in February and plans to continue it through April. It is being rather productive and Brian would like to have one or all of the following: assistance to cover most days, company to help spot hawks and observers to help pass the time. Brian tried out several hawk watching spots before settling onto this one and he's seen a fair amount of activity. So far he has seen both vultures, Merlins, Sharp-shinned Hawks and Coopers Hawks. His results

will be reported to a national hawk watch group. The location is the riverside turnoff at College Creek on the Parkway. It is the smaller of the two turnoffs there and is on your right coming from Jamestown or, over the bridge and on your left if coming from Williamsburg. Brian says that the site is productive from about 10 a.m. until 2. During the week he can only spend his lunch hour there, 11:30 to 12:30 but on weekends, when he can, he is there the full time. If you would like to help, if you would like to improve your hawk spotting ability, if you would like to add to your spring count, call Brian at home, 253-1181 or work, 259-3123. Brian says that you will see a lot more than hawks as the migrants have started moving. The river bank is a good place to see them. If you haven't called but find you have some free time during his hours there, just stop by and see what it is all about.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

The Common Goldeneye

Some of our winter visiting ducks will very soon be organizing their trip north. While many of these water fowl don't leave until May, or even June, the Common Goldeneye plans for April departures and earns this month's feature. You've only got about four weeks left to get to our local waterways for a look at these gorgeous creatures before they answer the call to the Canadian wilds.

The Common Goldeneye, one of the diving ducks, first of all reminds us that all ducks don't go, "Quack, quack", and all ducks don't build big grassy nests near the water. The Goldeneye does neither, or at least the male doesn't. The male's courtship voice is described as a harsh "zee, zee." The female on the nest does vocalize a low, harsh, "Quack".

In their winter stay here they are very quiet and while it is difficult to get close enough to hear it, the notable whistle of the bird's wings in flight may be their loudest sound. When it comes to nesting the Goldeneyes build their's in tree hollows as much as 50 feet in the air and as far as a mile from water. Two days after the 8 to 12 chicks hatch they come streaming out of the nesting hole in a fluttering line with tiny wings

flapping madly as they drop to the ground. After a brief rest they parade off to the water, sometimes a considerable distance away.

This duck does have a prominent golden eye in a very dark head with a greenish gloss to it. The bill is black. Between the bill and the eye is a prominent round white spot. The back is black and everything else from the edge of the dark head and neck to the black rear end is white. Wings are wings mixed color but more white than black. In flight at a distance this can look like a white duck with a black head.

The breeding range is coniferous forests from northern New York state, Maine and Vermont and virtually all of Canada with such forests. A study in the "50's reported that the Common Goldeneye represented twenty percent of the breeding ducks in Ontario, Quebec and Labrador. The winter range includes most of the U.S. with open water in winter. The major concentration (over 60%) lies along the Atlantic flyways where the water ranges from brackish to saline.

They arrive here in late October and stay until mid to late April. Mating relationships are formed each year and courtship starts upon arrival at the winter grounds. Goldeneyes have some of the most elaborate courtship displays of any ducks. Females encourage male displays by stretching their necks out low to the water while making a hissing sound. This action encourages males to reach skyward with their bills and to lean this stretching motion backwards almost to the point of tipping backwards. There are also mutual water sipping displays and food presentations by males. While most pairs are formed by the time the ducks leave the wintering grounds, some of these displays are repeated on the nesting ground along with special displays associated with copulation.

Females start looking for nesting sites about three weeks after arriving at their northern destination and are laying eggs by the fourth week. A clutch of 10 is average. These hatch in about 30 days and fledging is complete in about 60 days more. The male/female bonding period ends when the female starts sitting on the nest. The female abandons her young as the end of the fledging period approaches. Estimates of fledging mortality range from 71% to 47%.

Goldeneyes can stay submerged for a just under a

minute and can forage as deep as 20 feet, although the general preference seems to be in 5 to 6 feet of water. They eat all kinds of insect life found in the water as well as bivalves, crabs, crayfish and small fish. They swim with their feet only. They have been clocked flying at fifty miles an hour. Birds average 2 pounds with males slightly heavier.

These handsome and fascinating birds can now be seen in the York river all the way from the York State Park to the Yorktown beach. They are in the impoundments at Hog Island and in nearby reaches of the Chesapeake. While a scope certainly helps in identifying ducks on the rivers, you can see many of them with binoculars.

WHICH BIRDS ARE "PERMANENT"? WHICH ARE "TRANSIENT"? WHICH DO I REPORT?

Those can sound like dumb questions to birders who have lived on the peninsula for a long time but as many of us are transplants it takes a long while to know what is garden variety here and what is, "Oh, wow!" The answer is not quite the same in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut and parts north. Using the Summary of Local Bird Data as of January 1, 1997, that you received last month with the *Flyer*, compiled by Bill Sheeran, you to do this and a lot more. That report was used to break our local bird population (Williamsburg, James City County, York County and Hog Island) down into these categories: Permanent Residents, Common Transients Seen All Months, Winter Residents and Summer Residents. If a sighting is not on one of these lists, you've probably got an "Oh, wow!" or at least, "Nice Bird!" But please remember that these lists are maintained and changed by reports from members. Bill Sheeran needs member's reports on most everything but Permanent Residents—and even some of those with an *.

Permanent Residents: Great Blue Heron, Mute Swan, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Peregrine Falcon*, Wild Turkey*, Northern Bobwhite*, Clapper Rail*, King Rail*, Virginia

Rail*, Killdeer, Ring-billed Gull, Mourning Dove, Screech Owl*, Great Horned Owl*, Barred Owl*, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker*, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Bluejay, American Crow, Fish Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown-headed Nuthatch*, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Mockingbird, Northern Cardinal, Rufous-sided Towhee, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Black Bird, Eastern Meadowlark*, House Finch and Gold Finch. Species with * are limited to specific locations so please report where and when they are seen.

Common Transients Seen All Months: (Most of these are seen more frequently spring and summer. The Waxwing is more common in cool months. The Woodcock is found in very specific locations at very limited times.) Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Egret, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, American Black Duck, Mallard, Ruddy Duck, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel, Greater Yellowlegs, American Woodcock, Laughing Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Forster's Tern, Eastern Phoebe, House Wren, Marsh Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, Pine Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Northern Oriole.

Common Winter Residents: Tundra Swan, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Merganser, American Coot, Common Snipe, Winter Wren, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Savannah Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Rusty Blackbird, Purple Finch*, Pine Siskin*, Evening Grosbeak*.
* Means especially scarce this year.

Common Summer Residents: Osprey, Lesser Yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitcher, Royal Tern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Whip-poor-will, Chimney

Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Purple Martin, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Marsh Wren, Wood Thrush, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Northern Parula, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Black and White Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Oven-bird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Orchard Oriole.

BLUEBIRD TRAILS

In past years, the club has maintained several bluebird trails around the Williamsburg area. They were at the Country Club, York River State Park, Eastern State Hospital and various other places. Thanks to Paul and Elaine Mertus, the trail at Eastern State is still in good shape and we would like to keep it that way. We need a few people to volunteer a couple hours a week to monitor and maintain the trail throughout the nesting season. Interested? Please contact Lee Schuster or Ruth Beck. The bluebirds are scouting now so join in and help the club care for the Bluebirds.

MIGRATION BIRD WALKS

This spring the club would like to begin offering migration walks at York River State Park every weekend beginning in April. This is a great opportunity to work on warbler identification skills and to spot some birds that are not often seen in our area. This project is still in the planning stage so the starting date has not been set. We are looking at starting April 1st, about 7:30 every Saturday morning through May, except for the regular field trip Saturdays..

This may sound like a great idea but it can't be successful without some guidance. That is where we hope our members will step forward. Every hike will need a leader to provide direction (leading the way) and to record and turn in the day's results. Anyone who is interested in participating should call Lee Schuster at 565-6148. She will fill you in on the details and put you on the list.