



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 22, Number 4

April 1998

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Other than the coming of early spring migrants the big news of the season is the projected publication of a Williamsburg Bird Club booklet. Since 1977 the Bird Club has been observing and collecting data on local birds. To commemorate our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary a committee is assembling an annotated checklist. This list will tell the status of each bird, dates of occurrence and general location. The booklet will be published by the club with a target date of May 15. While many members have contributed observations over the years, those responsible for producing the booklet are Bill Sheehan, Ruth Beck, Dave Schuster, Lee Schuster, Brian Taber, Bill Williams and Joy Archer.

Funding of the project has been helped by contributions from the following businesses: Ace Hardware, Blue Ridge Mountain Sports, The Cheese Shop, Southern States Cooperative and Wild Birds Unlimited. As we patronize these supporters, it would be nice to thank them for their generosity. Additionally, the Board has decided that funds contributed by club members above and beyond their dues will be allocated to this project and that patrons' names will be published in the booklet. Anyone else wishing to make a special contribution as a supporting patron of this exciting venture can do so by sending a check to our Treasurer, Charles Rend, 109 John Bratton, Williamsburg, VA 23185. Make the check payable to The Williamsburg Bird Club with a notation, "Commemorative Booklet Fund." The booklets will be available at the first bird club gathering after publication. — Joy Archer

## NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be at 7:30 PM on April 18, 1998, in Room 117 Millington Hall on the William & Mary campus. Tom Armour, a long-time member of the Bird Club and much-admired birder will present a talk titled "Do You See What I See?" He will give us some tips on identifying warblers, a timely topic in April.

## BILL WILLIAMS LEADS THE APRIL FIELD TRIP TO GREENSPRINGS NATURE TRAIL

Bill Williams walks the Greensprings Nature Trail in back of the new Jamestown High School at least once a week. This winter he has routinely seen over thirty bird species there. The prospects of seeing even more birds in a mid-April walk down this new trail are good, allowing for some spring migrants. The date is Saturday, April 18. There is ample parking in back of the high school so the group will gather in the parking area farthest back towards the rear of the school. Jamestown High School is located on Route 5 (John Tyler Highway), about two miles west of the Ironbound Road intersection. If you are coming from Richmond Road you can also take Centerville Road over to Route 5 and then turn east (right). The school is about two miles farther on the left.

The group will gather at 7:30 AM and be in the field almost immediately. If the weather cooperates, this should be a really good day.

## **WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED DONATION**

Chuck Rend received a \$256.72 donation from the folks at Wild Birds Unlimited. This represents 5% of their sales to Bird Club members in the July 1997 to February 1998 period. We thank them for their generosity. Their important donation makes up a substantial portion of the funds we use to finance the club's student grant each year. Please remember that when it's time to replenish your seed supplies.

## **BLUEBIRDS AT YORK RIVER STATE PARK**

The Bluebirds at York River State Park have lots of real estate to choose from this year. Volunteers at the park have put up 21 new boxes this spring to go along with twenty more that had already been distributed around the property.

Bird Club members Dorothy Whitfield and Shirley Devan are currently monitoring the 41 boxes and have made four trips to check on them between February 28 and March 27. Dorothy and Shirley are recruiting other bird club members to assist with this effort during the spring and summer. Two people are not sufficient to cover such a large area over such a period of time. In addition, there will be weeks when they are not able to check the boxes because of vacation and other commitments.

Luckily, the boxes are in three distinct areas of the park and the effort can be divided into easily manageable sectors:

- Approximately a third of the boxes are located on the entrance road between Riverview Road and the park gate. These can be checked on foot or by car.
- About another third are around the Visitor Center and parking lots. They are more easily done on foot after parking in the lot.
- The rest are located around the maintenance area and in front of the "burn fields" out in the interior of the park. After a quick training session the park rangers allow the bluebird monitors to drive the park's John Deer "Gator" tractor to visit the boxes in the "burn fields." If you've always wanted to bounce around the park trails on a

tractor, then this is the opportunity you've been waiting for. It's fun!

Plus, the birding at YRSP is always outstanding — warblers in April and May, eagles and ospreys out on the river and lots of bluebirds. In fact, one box had three eggs as early as March 22. (Unfortunately, house sparrows got to the eggs and pecked them.) Over 25 percent of the boxes had a nest at some stage of construction at the end of March. Clearly, the bluebirds are serious about nesting early this year!

In addition to helping bluebirds, you will also accumulate volunteer hours at the State Park that will earn benefits ranging from free park passes to free camping and lodging at parks around the state. If you want an enjoyable birding experience and can devote about an hour a week to checking on the boxes in one section of the park, call Dorothy at 564-0844 or Shirley at 565-2352. They will be glad to train you on the easy checking procedures and record keeping methods.

## **MARCH FIELD TRIP TO THE VINEYARD**

Although the weather wasn't cooperating very well, the twelve people who joined Randy and April Coleman for a birding view of the Vineyards on March 21 saw some very nice birds, a total for the trip of 49. Probably the hit of the day was the Redhead duck, which was a "first" for several in the group. For some it was also the first spring glimpse of the returning Osprey, White-eyed Vireo, Chipping Sparrow, Phoebe and Tree Swallow. It also included Meadowlarks and Rufous-sided Towhees which may not disappear entirely in the winter but get awfully scarce. The group was even good enough to make some phone calls to folks who might want to see the Redheads. (Despite the drizzle and the rapidly setting sun, this co-editor was most grateful to Randy Coleman for the call that let me add that bird to my list!) Other folks enjoying this trip were Joy Archer, Hugh Beard, Jackie Diggs, Mary Kyle DuPuis, John Eberhardt, Bettie Field, Bobbie and Ron Geise, Sue Gray Al-Salam, Charles Rend and Marilyn Zeigler.

## FIELD NOTES FROM MARCH REPORTS:

*(To make a report call Bill Sheehan at 220-2122)*

The highlights are so rich this month that most birders will wish that they'd spent the whole month out there. Brian Taber has started his Hawk Watch on the James River and was rewarded with a **Golden Eagle** and a **Northern Goshawk**. Brian also reported the first **Parula Warbler** of the season from York River State Park. At the Kingsmill Marina, Tom Armour spotted the **Lesser Black-backed Gull**, the much rarer cousin with the yellow legs instead of the flesh colored ones. The Stricklands and Fitzhugh Turner both had **Northern Orioles** that visited briefly in First Colony. Vic Coleman and the Meemans saw the **Great White Pelicans** over the York River by the beach. The **Red-throated Loons** were still in that area, too. All kinds of migrating birds showed up. Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan saw **Boat-tailed Grackles** at Indian Field Creek, **Sora** were spotted passing through. **Royal Terns** showed up on the James and **Common Terns** on the York to accompany the returning **Laughing Gulls** reported last month. The first **Greater Yellowlegs** appeared at Hog Island. The **Barn Swallows** joined last month's **Tree Swallows**. Lee Schuster got a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** at York River State Park and Joe Doyle had a **Wood Pewee** at Camp Peary. Then there were **White-eyed Vireos** at The Vineyards, widely reported **Yellow-throated Warblers** too, and Ruth Beck got the first **Black and White Warbler** up in Barhamsville. And the Boyles in Governor's Land kept **Evening Grosbeaks** on the report for another month. Marilyn Zeigler at Queens Lake did the same for the **Red-breasted Nuthatch**. **Swamp Sparrows** were reported at York River State park and at the Chippokes Swamp. Unfortunately, the **Brown-headed Cowbird** has also returned. **Blue-winged Teal** were reported for the first time this winter by Tom McCary at Lake Matoka and Joe Doyle at Camp Peary. Our soon to be departing winter residents still on the report included the **Loons**, most of the ducks, **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers**, **Brown Creepers**, **Hermit Thrushes**, **Cedar Waxwings**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** and **Purple Finches**.

### **Jamestown Island and the Parkway to College Creek**

Brown Pelican, Great Egret, Wood Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Golden Eagle, King Rail, Virginia Rail, Sora, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Royal Tern, Forster's Tern, Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl, Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Marsh Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-throated Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Meadowlark, Brown-headed Cowbird.

### **Ferry, Chippokes and Hog Island**

Brown Pelican, Great Egret, Tundra Swan, Mute Swan, Green-winged Teal, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Northern Harrier, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Kestrel, Wild Turkey, Coot, Greater Yellowlegs, Royal tern, Forster's Tern, Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-throated Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Meadowlark, Brown-headed Cowbird.

### **York River**

Red-throated Loon, Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Gannet, White Pelican, Great White Pelican, Great Egret, Tundra Swan, Mute Swan, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Tree Swallow.

### **Kingsmill**

Horned Grebe, Brown Pelican, Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Ducks, Coot, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Forster's Tern, Barred Owl, Tree Swallow, Phoebe, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-throated Warbler, Rusty Blackbird, Purple Finch.

### **Camp Peary**

Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal, Widgeon, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck,

Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Wild Turkey, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Northern harrier, Kestrel, Coot, Common Tern, Kingfisher, Wood-pewee, Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Fish Crow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Yellow-throated Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Meadowlark, and Brown-headed Cowbird.

## NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to the following new members:

J. Scott Bishop  
1847 Ferrell Drive  
Williamsburg, VA 23185

David H. Shantz  
332 Wilkinson Drive  
Williamsburg, VA 23188

Molly Somerville  
108 Pinehurst  
Williamsburg, VA 23188

John & Nadine Hoenig  
204 Sheffield Road  
Williamsburg, VA 23188

Walter & Elizabeth Kurth  
3009 South Freeman Road  
Williamsburg, VA 23185

## CAN THE BALD EAGLE ADAPT TO ENCROACHING CIVILIZATION?

You may have seen the recent article in The Daily Press in which Mitchell Byrd made a cautious speculation that there may be signs of the eagles' ability to do just that. "We have begun to find nests in people's yards, which we never expected to find just a few years ago," he said.

The story was prompted by Dr. Byrd's annual aerial survey for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, made to check on new eagle nests and continuing activity in old ones. The study looks primarily at the James, Rappahannock, and Potomac Rivers. It showed 250 eagle nests in Virginia, up from 213 last year and a sad 33 in 1978.

And the nests are spreading to new areas. Dr. Byrd found new nests along the North Landing River in Virginia Beach and at Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge on Knotts Island in northeastern North Carolina. That was the first nest in 40 years. While Dr. Byrd was disturbed by the large amount of development and clear-cutting that he sees encroaching on the eagles nesting territories, he is encouraged by some signs that these wonderful birds will be able to adapt.

## BIRD OF THE MONTH

### Yellowlegs, Greater and Lesser

While all birds seem to have fascinating stories behind their life cycles, not all of them strike responsive chords in their human observers. Both the Greater Yellow legs and the Lesser Yellow Legs DO strike a very positive response in a good many birders. I am not sure that I know why this is so, but these are attractive birds. Observation in our area conjures up pleasant sunny days at Hog Island (where they were reported last month) or other such settings. They are active birds, easy to observe, and many of them have the romance of world travelers in their stories. Some make round trips between Patagonia at the base of South America and the Canadian or Alaskan tundra.

There are just a few differences between these two species that could almost be larger and smaller fraternal twins. The Greater Yellowlegs is 12-15 inches in height compared to 9.5-11 for the Lesser. The Greater has a longer (2-2.3 in) bill which is slightly upturned compared to the companion shorter (1.25-1.5 in) and straight bill. The Greater has a loud, clear three note whistle, *few, few, few* compared to a flatter, single *cu*. The Greater's spring call has been interpreted as a rolling *too-whee, too-whee* which has no comparable call for the cousin. In behavior, the Greater tends to be wilder and less gregarious, while the Lesser can be quite tame and tends to join larger flocks.

Both Yellowlegs have dark gray-brown backs speckled with black and white, well proportioned slender necks, streaked whitish under parts and bright lemon yellow legs. Both have an obvious white rump in flight. They wade in shallow water eating small fish and aquatic insects, the Greater being the more active of the two. It tends to use a

back and forth sweeping of its bill and sometimes jumps about to trap minnows.

They frequent the shallows at Hog Island and Craney Island and are sometimes there in large numbers. While they have been seen here in all months of the year, these are migrating birds that nest across northern America from Alaska to Newfoundland. They winter from Argentina to the Gulf Coast and along the lower sections of both. By far the greater migration occurs west of the Mississippi River. It is possible that non-breeding birds may actually spend all or most of the year in our area. The South American migration arrives in Florida in March, moves up the coast in April and arrives on the nesting grounds in May.

Both species nest essentially in the same areas, the Greater preferring sites closer to the water and the Lesser seeking drier ground. Both are very noisy on the breeding grounds. Nests are rough, mossy depressions on the muskeg or edges of the tundra. Incubation of the four eggs is shared. Incubation lasts about 23 days and birds are flying about 20 days after hatching.

Incidentals: Migrating birds fly day or night and usually in small flocks. They are fast flyers clocked at 40-45 mph. They have wintered on the Atlantic coast as far north as Long Island NY, although not in large numbers.

These are neat birds and I hope that we all see our share of them this year. — Bill Holcombe

## **LAST MINUTE SPRING REMINDERS**

Hummingbirds are due here any day now. It's time to get your feeders out again. And, if you haven't done so already, clean out your bird boxes. After cleaning, dust them with some flowers of sulfur to kill off any mites that may remain. You can get sulfur at the drug store.

## **LATEST WHITE -THROATED SPARROW SWEEPSTAKES**

Dan Cristol is studying the northward migration of White-throated Sparrows from the Williamsburg/James/York area and desperately needs to know when you see your *last* whitethroat of the season. Ornithological records are full of early arrival dates but no one ever reports the latest lingering dates. Please keep an eye on your feeder, yard or favorite birding spot and keep track of when in April or May you see whitethroats. When a week or two has gone by and you're sure the birds are gone notify Dan Cristol, Department of Biology, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795, phone 221-2405. Dan will tell us about the results of this new research project next year.