



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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## NEXT MEETING

Next meeting will be on Wednesday, November 17 at 7:30 in Room 117 Millington Hall, William & Mary. Program Director Dan Cristol has arranged an interesting and unusual program to be presented by a panel. It will concern the pros and cons of solutions to the problem of "resident" Canada geese. The panelists have opposite points of view and will be introduced to you at the meeting. The subject is obviously controversial and the panelists will present and defend opposing solutions to the problems created by the presence these birds in parks, golf courses and even home owners' lawns.

## NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP

Alex has planned a field trip for November 20 that will work along the Colonial Parkway for water fowl and "whatever else." It will end up in Bill Sheehan's kitchen for coffee and the usual other "goodies" that are stirring in his wonderful backyard. Fall birds are showing up in both places. There have been reports of ducks and loons on the rivers. Bill has already seen red-breasted nuthatches at his feeder and a brown creeper working on his peanut butter offerings.

There are no "sure-thing" birding days but the prospects for this one look most favorable. The group gathers at Colony Square shopping center on Jamestown Road (near Fresh Market) at 7:15 AM and departs at 7:30 sharp

## JAMESTOWN ISLAND FIELD TRIP

Alex Minarik led the October Field trip to James-

town Island and a beautiful day of birding. The day was enjoyed by Shirley Devan, Tom Ellis and Ann Moore, Pat Groeninger, Pam Meiring, Mike Minarik, Beverly and Herb Spannuth and Marilyn Zeigler. The group identified forty species, including some very nice birds. Among them were fall-returning **wood duck, American black duck, ruddy duck, red-breasted nuthatch, ruby-crowned kinglet** and **white-throated sparrow**. Other notables included **bald eagle, northern harrier, Cooper's hawk, and brown-headed nuthatch**. A very nice day, indeed.

## Bluebird Trail Report from Camp Peary

For many years Grace and Joe Doyle have maintained a bluebird nesting box trail at Camp Peary. In fact, back in the early days of the Club, they pioneered working to increase our local bluebird population. We all have benefitted from the results.

However, bluebird production at Camp Peary is suffering a decline and the Doyles are not sure just why this is so. A few years ago this trail was producing 300 birds a year. In 1999 the number was down to 190 and this was despite an increase in boxes to approximately 100.

Some of the factors that the Doyles see as contributing to this problem are:

An increase in the numbers of boxes taken over by flying squirrels.

The rebuilding of the raccoon population over the past few years after its decimation by disease.

The boxes that were relocated a few years ago

to reduce the predation rate are still not producing very well.

We wish the Doyles success in finding solutions to the problems and remedying the situation. Congratulations to them on their years of faithful service to the bluebird.

## NEW SLATE OF OFFICERS

The Nominating Committee, headed by Marilyn Zeigler, will introduce the following nominees for bird club offices in the year 2000:

President	Ruth Beck
Secretary	Phyllis Jennings
Treasurer	Chuck Rend
V.P. & Program Chair	Dan Cristal
V.P. & Co-Editor, Flyer	Phil Young
V.P. & Co-Editor, Flyer	Bill Holcombe
Member-at-Large	Alex Minarik
Member-at-Large	Jandy Strickland

## VIRGINIA STUDYING CREATION OF COASTAL BIRDING TRAIL

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has contracted with Fermata, Inc., the company that coordinated the very successful Great Texas Birding Trail, to conduct a series of initial meetings on the subject of a similar trail in Virginia. The meetings are designed to be both informative and to help secure the goal of TEA-21 (Transportation Enhancement) funding to create a Virginia Coastal Birding Trail. The meeting schedule in our general area includes Richmond, November 8; Gloucester Point, November 9; Williamsburg, November 15 and Norfolk, November 17. The Williamsburg meeting is scheduled for the Sandy Bottom Nature Park, 1255 Big Bethel Road, which is actually in Hampton.

Felice Hancock, naturalist at Chippokes Plantation, received an invitation to attend these meetings and passed the letter on to Bill Sheehan. The meetings will be conducted by David Whitehurst of Game and Inland Fisheries and Ted Eubanks of Fermata, Inc.

The basis of all of this is described as the \$15,900,000 birding industry from which the

Texas trail secures \$5,600 in annual gross economic value per visitor.

It is not clear at this time just what all of this means but we will try to keep our readers informed of developments.

## Field Notes for October

*Excluding most resident birds and the very common migrants we report by calendar month, the identifications are called into Bill Sheehan.*

Our winter residents have started to arrive and there have been numerous sightings of **pie-billed grebes, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, white-throated sparrows, hermit thrushes** and some **juncos**. A flock of **cedar waxwings** was spotted near the lawn bowling green in back of the Williamsburg Inn. Despite several trips scanning the York River for incoming water fowl, they were virtually non-existent right up 'till the end of the month. But on October 31, Joe Doyle reported from Camp Peary the arrival of **gadwall, canvas-back, ruddy ducks and American coot**. Tony Castello, the ranger at Hog Island, reported that late in the month **pintail and green-winged teal** appeared on the impoundments there. A **snow goose** was mixed in with one of the duck flights. A contact of Lee Schuster's in Riverview Plantation reports seeing a **peregrine falcon** there for the second month. Winter visiting **red-breasted nuthatches** have been reported on feeders by Ruth Beck and Brian Taber. Joy Archer had a female **purple finch** on her feeder for several days mid-month. **Golden-crowned kinglets** and **ruby-crowned kinglets** were reported at Jamestown Island. Bill Williams continues to find some wonderful birds on the Green Springs Nature Trail in back of Jamestown High School and this time it was a **Lincoln sparrow**, which our Annotated List calls "a rare migrant." Bill also reported the first fall **brown creeper** and **pine siskin** and on the September field trip, you'll recall, a **merlin** was spotted there. On an early morning dog walk, Bill Holcombe finally got to see the **barred owl** that has been hooting in Graylin Woods and Joy Archer reports a **great horned owl** in Jamestown Farms. At the end of the month, Bill Snyder had three **wild turkeys** wander into his back yard.

### **Jamestown Island / James R. Parkway**

Great egret, black vulture, wood duck, black duck, ruddy duck, osprey, Cooper's hawk, killdeer, kingfisher, red-headed woodpecker, yellow-bellied sapsucker, fish crow, tree swallow, red-breasted nuthatch, brown-headed nuthatch, hermit thrush, catbird, brown thrasher, rufous-sided towhee, Savannah sparrow, white-throated sparrow, junco.

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

Great egret, black vulture, snow goose, pintail, green-winged teal, osprey, bald eagle, kestrel, wild turkey, killdeer, greater yellowlegs, lesser yellowlegs, spotted sandpiper, Caspian tern, royal tern, Forster's tern, kingfisher, yellow-bellied sapsucker, wood-pewee, tree swallow, rufous-sided towhee, Savannah sparrow, white-throated sparrow, blue grosbeak.

### **York River State Park**

Black vulture, killdeer, kingfisher, red-headed woodpecker, yellow-bellied sapsucker, phoebe, ruby-crowned kinglet, hermit thrush, palm warbler, rufous-sided towhee.

### **Camp Peary**

Pied-billed grebe, wood duck, gadwall, canvasback, ruddy duck, osprey, bald eagle, kestrel, wild turkey, clapper rail, American coot, killdeer, kingfisher, red-headed woodpecker, yellow-bellied sapsucker, wood-pewee, golden-crowned kinglet, brown thrasher, pine warbler, palm warbler, rufous-sided towhee, white-throated sparrow, junco, brown-headed cowbird.

### **Kingsmill**

Pied-billed grebe, brown pelican, kestrel, American coot, Caspian tern, royal tern, Forster's tern, yellow-bellied sapsucker, tree swallow, rusty blackbird.

### **Kingswood**

Ruby-throated hummingbird, yellow-bellied sapsucker, red-breasted nuthatch, hermit thrush, brown thrasher, rufous-sided towhee, white-throated sparrow.

### **Greensprings Nature Trail**

Cooper's hawk, kestrel, brown creeper, parula, palm warbler, redstart, rufous-sided towhee, Lincoln sparrow, white-throated sparrow, pine

siskin.

## **LIMITED BIRDING AT HOG IS.**

No birding will be permitted at Hog Island on Wednesdays and Saturdays until 1:30 PM, starting mid-November and continuing until the end of January. The duck hunters will have first call on the Hog Island facilities on those days and times.

## **OCTOBER VISIT TO PEA ISLAND NATURE REFUGE**

Along with the gorgeous sunrises and sunsets that go with fall visits to the Outer Banks, there is a gem of a birding opportunity at the Pea Island Nature Refuge. There were no **snow geese** on the ponds on my first visit, although a couple of small flocks flew honking to points farther south. A week later there were hundreds in evidence and you could occasionally watch small flocks settle in. But there were thousands of ducks in the area and for the most part these were **pintails**, **American widgeon** and **black ducks**. I did see one small group of **shovelers** scraping along a weed bed. A **snowy egret** danced all around them spearing edibles. Apparently, the ducks stirred the fish up from the bottom. I also watched a **great egret** grab some fairly large crabs. As the egret worked to break up the crabs, **white ibis** moved in to grab the falling pieces.

The ibis were present in large numbers (50-60) including some brown immature birds. There were also a large number of **black skimmers** and **royal terns** stretched out in a long thin line on a sand bar and a flock of 30 **short-billed dowitchers** huddled in a clump trying to avoid the wind. Large numbers of **lesser yellowlegs** formed similar densely packed groups. As one of these groups started to break up to feed, a **marbled godwit** emerged from the heap. There were also large numbers of **willetts** stalking about, fair numbers of **tri-colored herons**, **one little blue heron** and a **black-bellied plover**.

On the ocean beaches you could find **willetts**, **black-bellied plovers**, **sanderlings** and **ruddy turnstones**. It was a great time to be on the Outer Banks and we fortunately managed it in between the two hurricanes. — Bill Holcombe

(We'd love to print your birding stories too, if you would just pass them along.) Ed.

## BIRD OF THE MONTH

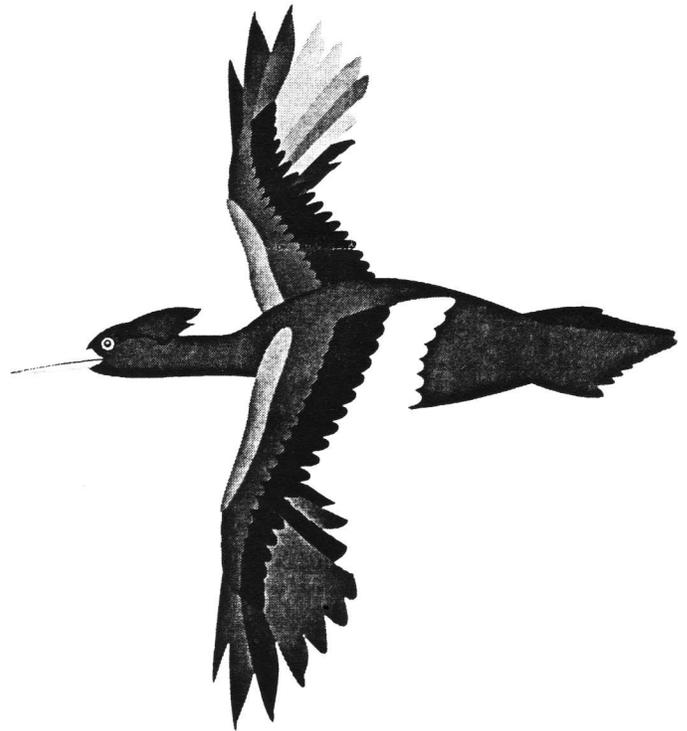
### The Pileated Woodpecker by Bill Holcombe

Our bird is one of about 200 woodpecker species worldwide and one of 23 North American woodpecker species. Woodpeckers are not songbirds (*Passeriformes*) but are in an order of their own, *Piciformes*. The distinguishing characteristic is a four-toed foot, two in the rear and two to the front, adapted to clinging to the sides of trees. (Yes, as everything must have an exception, there is a three-toed woodpecker.) All woodpeckers have strong, stiff tail feathers that they use to prop themselves against the tree trunk. During the molting time these feathers do not fall out until the new ones have arrived. Their straight, hard pointed bills are adapted to chiseling into the trunks or large limbs of habitat trees to provide either nesting holes or sleeping holes. The skulls and the brains have been particularly adapted to withstand the shock of the hammering during these excavations. Woodpecker tongues are also highly specialized for their function of reaching into bark crevices to extract insects or, in the case of sapsuckers, to absorb the tree sap from holes drilled for the purpose. These worm-like tongues can be extended to astonishing lengths, have a hard, barbed tip bordered with bristles, and are controlled by a highly adapted bone and muscle structure.

The Greek genus name for the pileated, is *Dryocopus*, which translates into "cleaver of trees." If you've ever watched the chips fly as this bird goes after insects in an old log or stump, you know how apt that name is. (Incidentally, Terres offers both pronunciations, *pie-le-ated* and *pil-eh-ated*.) This large bird (crow sized), is widely scattered in forests across the lower half of Canada, across the northern United States and in the eastern third of the U.S. down to Texas and Florida. There are large gaps of unoccupied territories within this range. For a time the bird seemed to have left most of New York State and southern New England but has made a strong comeback, adapting to the encroachments of civilization. The sheer size of this black woodpecker with

sharply contrasting white markings and the oversized, bright red crest and red facial marks, accompanied by a loud, boisterous, "Woody Woodpecker" vocalization is startling, if not unbelievable, in a first encounter. It somehow seems to be left over from another time. It is by far the largest of the woodpeckers in our area. There are white patches on the fronts of the wings. Sexes are not identical: the male is distinguished by a solid red crest that starts at the top of its bill, completely covering the crest, and by the red "mustache" that extends back from the bill. The female has a black forehead in front of her red crest and the line back from the bill is black.

My limited, personal observation is that these birds are almost always seen in pairs, no matter



what the time of year, but I find no mention of the duration of the mating. However, Terres does report that pairs appear to occupy the same territory year after year and to use a distinctive, slow, irregular vocalization of *cuk* to maintain contact while feeding their way through a wood lot. Both birds do drum on dead, resonating wood during the mating season which both advertises an

interest in mating and warns of a territorial claim. Both birds help to excavate the nesting cavity which can be used for several years or which may be replaced each year. Most of these cavities are 28 to 35 feet above the ground, but higher ones are not unusual. The opening is roughly triangular, four inches wide at the bottom and narrower at the top. The cavity has an 8-inch diameter and can be between 10 and 30 inches deep, with some wood chips left at the bottom. Both birds incubate the eggs and it is customary for the male to sit on the nest at night while the female sleeps in one of the nearby sleeping holes. There are usually several of these available near the nest. Defense of this nest is fierce and pileated woodpeckers have been known to attack approaching snakes. Another report observed the birds carrying the eggs in their mouths to a new location after a storm broke the top off of the nesting tree. Most commonly four eggs are laid during April or May, in our area, and there is just one nesting. Both birds feed the young in the nest and for some time after fledging, by regurgitating food through the bill and down the throat of the

young.

Food is about 75% animal, the balance made up of berries and nuts. The birds will strip off large chunks of bark to get at insects underneath and especially in winter will tear large chunks of wood out of trees and logs to get at carpenter ant colonies. The birds are thought to be able to hear the insects that they search for on the trees.

Banding records indicate that these birds can live to be nine or ten years old and spend most of their lives within a twenty mile radius.

The pileated woodpecker is a fairly common bird throughout our heavily wooded residential areas but its amazing appearance never fails to make a sighting a very exciting event. I hope that you have found some of these facts of interest.

*Reference: A Field Guide to the Birds East of the Rockies by Roger Tory Peterson and The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds by John Terres*