



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

I know you have seen the bumper stickers that say "I'd rather be..." For me, it would say "I'd rather be birding" because for 25 years I have spent as much of my free time as possible enjoying this wonderful pastime.

My mentors were members of the Augusta Bird Club who helped me learn the difference between downy and hairy woodpeckers, for instance, and who encouraged me early on to learn to identify birds by ear as well as by sight. I am forever indebted to them for their time and patience with me.

So as I begin my presidency of the Williamsburg Bird Club, I'd like to encourage the expert birders in our club to be mentors to the novice birders among us. The constitution and by-laws of our club state: "The purpose of the club is to promote interest in the study of wild birds and in the protection of birds and their habitat." And, if I may add, "to share the joy of birding."

Alex Minarik, President, 2004

JANUARY MEETING

Join us Wednesday, January 21, 2004 at 7:30 p.m. to hear the results of the area golf course bluebird study. The meeting will be in Millington Hall, Room 117 on the William and Mary Campus. (Note to newcomers: this building is behind Phi Beta Kappa Hall on Jamestown Road.)

Dan Cristol will give us "The Last Word on the Bluebird" and share the findings from the study of bluebirds on golf courses (also *not* on golf courses) during the 2003 nesting season.

JANUARY FIELD TRIP TO HOG IS.

Join Brian Taber for birding at Hog Island Saturday, January 24. Meet the group at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot at the Fresh Market to catch the 8:00 am ferry. Brian knows Hog Island as well as anyone in the area and counted 52 species there for the Christmas Bird Count.

BACK YARD BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS

When: Wednesday, January 21, 2004

Time: 9-11 a.m.

Where: The Minariks, 214 Hempstead Rd. (call 220-3382 for directions.)

This is a workshop for *novice* birders. Bring your binoculars, bird books and donuts. Coffee and birds will be supplied.

FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE FOR 2004

Here are the dates and locations for the 2004 field trips so you can plan your calendar. As always, these are subject to change and the monthly newsletter will always have correct information. So stay tuned.

February 21: York River via the Colonial Parkway

March 20: The Vineyards

April 24: Dismal Swamp

May: Date to be determined: Spring Count

June 19: Annual Bird Club Picnic

July: no field trip this month

August 21: Craney Island

September 18: Kiptopeke State Park on Eastern Shore

October 23: Newport News Park

November 20: York River State Park

December - date to be determined: Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count

FIELD NOTES AND BIRD REPORTS FOR DECEMBER 2003

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count in December serves as a comprehensive "field report" for the month. The list, included in the December newsletter, reported 98 species and 11,677 individuals. Here are some additional reports: December 14: Shirley Devan reports a Brown Thrasher and a Hermit Thrush at her feeders.

December 21: Tom Armour found a Fox Sparrow and a Kestrel at the Williamsburg airport in the

morning.

December 22: Tom Armour reported that there were 9 Ring-necked Ducks and 1 Pied-billed Grebe on the pond at the Vineyards — “first ducks this winter — last year there were many more and they arrived weeks earlier.”

December 25: Shirley Devan birded the pond behind WISC off Longhill Road and found three pairs of Ruddy Ducks, a Flicker, a Red Bellied Woodpecker, a Red-tailed Hawk, numerous Bluebirds and Juncos plus the usual — Chickadees, Cardinals and Titmice.

NOTE: Bill Holcombe, last year's co-editor, has graciously agreed to continue to compile the local member reports of bird sightings. Contact Bill at 229-8057 or <bowljack@aol.com.>

NOVEMBER FIELD NOTES FROM THE DOYLES AT CAMP PEARY

Joe and Grace Doyle bird Camp Peary weekly and send their tally in at the end of the month. In the transition between newsletter editors, their November sightings were inadvertently omitted from the December newsletter.

November 2: 34 species including Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Mute Swan, Canada Geese, Ruddy Ducks, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Wild Turkey, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker and Pileated Woodpecker.

November 9: 24 species including the first Bufflehead and Hooded Mergansers of the season on a windy day. They also reported a Brown-headed Nuthatch.

November 16: 39 species including Ring-necked Duck, Black Vulture, Bald Eagle, Wood Ducks, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Towhee, Common Grackle.

November 23: 28 species

November 30: 32 species including Eastern Meadowlark, Northern Harrier.

REPORTS FROM VSO'S EMAIL BIRD LIST

December 1: Black-chinned Hummingbird and Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird have been sighted at various times by different birders in the Ripley Garden, near the Smithsonian in DC. These birds were sighted here throughout December, eventually were banded, and an article about them and the birders who found them appeared in The Washington Post December 23 Metro Section.

December 1: Three Ross's Geese near

Harrisonburg; male King Eider around CBBT Islands 3 & 4. The last adult male King Eider in Virginia was at the CBBT in January/February 1994.

December 2: Bobcat at “Sparrow Alley” near Manassas Battlefield.

December 3: three Baltimore Orioles and a Dickcissel at Cape Charles yard feeder; Evening Grosbeaks at the feeder in Highland County on Allegheny Mt.; Harris's Sparrow at Julie Metz wetlands between Woodbridge and Dumfries; Greater White-Fronted Goose in Amherst County near Madison Heights.

December 5: hundreds of Green-winged Teal. plus young Peregrine Falcon at the Whitehurst Tract in the Back Bay area of Virginia Beach; 50-60 birds Horned Larks, 3 Lapland Longspurs and at least one American Pipit near Fishersville in Augusta County; Yellow-breasted Chat at yard feeder in Cape Charles.

December 6: a Pacific Loon at Kerr Reservoir in Mecklenburg County.

December 7: Raven at Syon Abbey in Floyd County; Selasphorous Hummingbird visiting a window feeder in Buchanan County.

December 9: Hermit Thrush on the mountainside just below the monastery at Syon Abbey in Floyd County.

December 9, Earthquake Day: Dave White in Zion Crossroads reports: “The earthquake epicenter this afternoon was about 10 miles from my house. I was in the kitchen looking out at the finch feeder being amazed that there were no birds on it which was unusual, when the earthquake rumbled through from east to west. We felt the effects of it for about 1 to 1-1/2 minutes. It knocked the finch feeder off the hook, which the winds of the hurricane didn't even do. Outside for about 20 minutes afterward there was no sign of bird life. Then in a flash it was back to usual with all the feeders full.”

December 10: two Snow Buntings along with 5-6 Lapland Longspurs in the Horned Lark flock and a Rough legged Hawk, plus 50 American Pipits in Prince William County near Nokesville.

December 12: a Sandhill Crane flying below the cloud cover along the Levisa River near Grundy in Buchanan County; 3 Rough Legged Hawks at Northfork Wetlands in Fauquier County; an adult Peregrine Falcon at Blandy Experimental Farm in Clarke County, VA;

December 13: 7 Wilson's Snipe at Huntley Meadows Park, Fairfax County.

December 14: 150 Horned Larks and 2 Lapland Longspurs in Rockingham Co.

December 15: A Peregrine Falcon has been seen

several times recently in the vicinity of last year's successful falcon nest in downtown Richmond (9th at Main Street), and one day last week two falcons were reported to be flying in the area.

December 16: King Eider still at the first CBBT island (public island; South Thimble Island); Clay Colored Sparrow at Julie Metz Wetlands in Prince William County.

December 21: Tom Saunders of Kilmarnock reports: "Sunday morning, 10 AM, while driving along the Colonial Parkway from Yorktown to Williamsburg we saw a pair of Common Goldeneyes, drake and hen, about 1.5 miles east of Cheatham Annex. Several Horned Grebes were in the same area and there were many hundreds (thousands?) of Ruddy Ducks and Buffleheads along the river in scattered flocks of fifty to two hundred.

December 27: A Black-throated Gray Warbler was found at the Blandy Experimental Farm, State Arboretum of Virginia (sighted through December 31); an adult California Gull seen at the Prince William County landfill.

December 28: a Yellow-Breasted Chat spotted on the Central Loudoun County CBC.

December 31: Rufous hummingbird still at Ripley Garden near Smithsonian in Washington, DC.

NOTE FROM NEW CO-EDITOR OF THE FLYER

I encourage our members to send notes about birds they have seen on their local and out-of-town travels. Perhaps you have a local spot you frequent where you notice the birds coming and going. Start keeping track (as the Doyles do at Camp Peary) and send in the highlights each month. Perhaps you've found a particularly fine birding spot nearby that you've not seen reported in *The Flyer*. Let us know about that too. Unusual bird behavior in your yard or around the area is welcome as well. Have you read an interesting book about birding lately? Or seen an interesting article in a magazine or newspaper? Have you found an unusual but exceedingly helpful birding "tool"? Send your observations and findings to me at: <sedevan@cox.net. Or call me at home in the evenings: 220-6269. I look forward to hearing from you and including your "note" in The Flyer.

Shirley Devan

AREA RESEARCH CITED IN ABA MAGAZINE

The Federal Clean Water Act requires that wetlands lost to development be replaced. A 2003 paper by our own Dan Cristol and Emilie C. Snell-

Rood presents evidence that these created wetlands are not as good as the lost, original wetlands, at least for the birds.

Their research results, funded by the Williamsburg Bird Club, have been cited in *Birding*, the magazine of the American Birding Association. The December 2003 issue quotes a study by Dan Cristol and his then-undergraduate student, Emilie C. Snell-Rood. They compared "bird populations in created vs. natural wetlands in bottomland forests of southeastern Virginia." (Their original paper was published in *Condor*, volume 105, pages 303-315.)

Dan and Emilie reported that man-made wetlands had "lower avian richness and diversity as well as different bird community composition than natural wetlands they used for comparison."

"Total avian abundance and the abundances of regularly occurring species did not differ between the created and natural sites, nor did numbers of wading birds, waterfowl, raptors, aerial feeders, or woodpeckers. But for passerines evaluated alone, the picture was dramatically different; they were significantly less abundant on the created wetlands. The created wetlands failed to support as many species with high conservation-concern rankings." These species are the neotropical migrants, highly wetland dependent, and highly habitat specific birds. Dan and Emilie ranked the Prothonotary Warbler, Swainson's Warbler and Louisiana Waterthrush as the "highest in conservation concern."

Dan and Emilie recommended that future forested wetlands "be made larger and planted with faster growing trees to speed the successional process." They hypothesized that "unnatural patterns of hydrology, particularly areas of deep ocean water and unnatural permanent flooding," might have caused the lower populations found in the created wetlands.

Their conclusion: "until further evidence is available, it should not be assumed that forested wetland creation replaces the bird communities present on the destroyed natural wetlands." Luckily, one of Dan Cristol's graduate students, David DesRochers, is continuing that study on salt marshes.

Some bird club members may remember that both Emilie C. Snell-Rood and David DesRochers presented their findings (twice each!) at meetings of the Bird Club. Emilie is now a Ph.D. student at the University of Arizona. David is a Masters Degree student studying under Dan Cristol.

As Dan Cristol says, this is evidence that the Williamsburg Bird Club is "ahead of the cutting edge." The club should take pride in the high quality of research it supports at William and

Mary under the leadership of Dan Cristol, Ruth Beck and others.

GET READY FOR GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT FEBRUARY 13-16, 2004

This "citizen project" is a joint project of National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and it is sponsored by Wild Birds Unlimited.

In 2003 over 48,000 checklists were submitted with over 512 species and over 4 million birds. Instructions for participating can be found at www.birdsource.org/gbbc. There's no fee or registration. Those who would like to participate but aren't online can submit their results at the local library. All you need is basic knowledge of bird identification and access to the internet. Here's what to do:

- **Count the birds in your backyard**, local park, or other natural area on all or any of the four count days. You can count in as many different locations as you wish, just make sure to keep separate records and fill out a checklist for each area.
- **Watch the birds** for at least 15 minutes on each day that you participate. We recommend watching for a half-hour or more, so that you'll have a good sense of what birds are in your area.
- **How to count:** Your data will be used by scientists to analyze bird populations, so it is very important that everyone count their birds in exactly the same way. On the day(s) that you count, watch your bird feeders, or take a short walk (less than 1 mile) in your neighborhood or park.

For each kind (species) of bird that you see, keep track of the highest number of individuals that you observe at any one time. Use a "Tally Sheet" to help keep track of your counts. Your tally sheet should look something like the following:

House Finch - 3, 5, 3, 1. So the High Count you would report = 5

Blue Jay - 1, 3, 6, 2. So the High Count you would report = 6

Be careful not to count the same bird over and over! Don't add another Blue Jay to your tally every time you see a Blue Jay at the feeder. You could be seeing the same individual again and again. If you record only the highest

number of individual birds that you see in view at one time, you're sure to never count the same bird more than once!

- **Submit** At the end of the day go to "Submit your bird checklist" on our GBBC web site < www.birdsource.org/gbbc. > Fill out the questions about your location, local habitat and count duration. Then enter your high counts for each species sighted on that day and location. You can submit one bird checklist for each day that you count or for each *new* area that you count in.

For example: If you count 4 days at one location, you'd submit 4 different checklists.

If you count 4 days at 2 different locations each day, submit 8 checklists..

- **Finally**, after you've submitted your data explore the GBBC web site. Check our results section to see other reports from your community and watch as data come in from other areas. Have a look through our other pages and find out other ways you can help birds. Enjoy!

Problems Getting Access to the Internet? Many libraries, schools, bird clubs, and other community based groups will be helping too. If organizations in your area are not already planning to help those without internet access, maybe you can help get something started!

BIRDING OUT OF TOWN

By Shirley Devan

One of my goals for a while has been to bird at Huntley Meadows Park near Alexandria. Huntley Meadows is one of the finest birding areas in Virginia and sports 2 miles of boardwalk, 2 miles of trails and a two-tiered observation tower.

Luckily a friend who lives near Fredericksburg agreed to let me sleep over at her house for the weekend of November 22/23.

We made a conscious decision to sleep in Saturday morning, so we did not arrive at Huntley Meadows until about 11 a.m. This alone probably disqualified us from the "serious birders club" but we decided to be happy with what we could find mid-day and feel well-rested doing it! We weren't out to set any birding records. We just wanted to enjoy the sunny weather (70 degrees) and the great outdoors.

Sure enough, as we walked through the parking lot, a birding group was just ending their trek and packing their scopes away. But we should not have worried. The boardwalk and observation decks were still littered with "serious birders" at

11 a.m. Powerful scopes, expensive binoculars and wide angle cameras were trained on the far side of the marsh, picking hooded mergansers, pintails and green-winged teals out of the crowds of Canada geese and mallards. The group was very friendly and allowed us to peer through their scopes at the pintails and teals. I asked if anyone had seen wood ducks, but no one had.

We decided to continue around the boardwalk for better light. A male hooded merganser chose that time to paddle our way and we were able to spend about 2 hours admiring this handsome bird as he displayed his crest.

While we were admiring the merganser, noisy toddlers flushed a pair of wood ducks from the marsh right in front of us and we watched them fly to another obscure location.

One of the "serious" birders approached with a "digiscope," a scope rigged so that he could attach his digital camera. The merganser was quite patient and paraded there in front of us for a good while. The birder/photographer was having trouble getting the photo he wanted — when the camera was focused, the merganser was diving. When the merganser raised his crest, the camera was not ready. The man was quite patient and experienced, so I'm confident he was successful in capturing a photo after we headed down the trail. He told us he lived about an hour away, but that he would be at Huntley Meadows every day if he lived closer. I seconded that opinion.

After spending two hours there, I could see why the park is a birder's paradise. Similar to our Greensprings Trail, it has boardwalks over marsh wetlands and wooded trails through mature hardwood forests. Also, like Greensprings Trail, residential and commercial development creeps right up to the edges. Each is an oasis in the midst of development.

The Park has a Visitor Center, an active "Friends of Huntley Meadows" volunteer group and a varied selection of nature programs for all ages.

My friend and I headed off to find lunch and decided to visit Mt. Vernon instead of Mason Neck Wildlife Refuge. I'll save this hot spot for another weekend. Besides, how can I claim to be a native Virginian if I haven't visited Mt. Vernon?

If you're going to Northern Virginia for the weekend (or just driving through on the way to someplace else and need a break after driving three hours from Williamsburg), I highly recommend it. You're likely to see great birds any time of day. The address is 3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria, VA 22306. Phone: 703-768-2525. Call for directions from I-95 south.

HELP!

For the last year or two People's Place, a City of Williamsburg agency for helping disabled people, helped us fold, collate, stamp and mail *The Flyer*.

Pat Healy, one of our members, arranged and administered it all for us, and boy were we grateful! We should also say that John Eberhardt did a fine job of it for 2 or 3 years before People's Place.

Guess what? Pat's retired now and the editors are left with this tedious job once more. Writing and producing the newsletter each month gets to be pretty tedious too, come to think of it, but having to fold, stamp and mail it on top of all that seems a rather unworthy reward after several hours of hard work.

If there is another generous and industrious soul out there who would be willing to assist us in getting out *The Flyer*, we would love to hear from him or her. Much of it can be done while you're watching TV. Call Phil Young at 229-8556 for more information.

ONCE AGAIN, TIME TO PAY DUES

This is the time of year when our treasury usually needs a little help, and it's especially so now. Postage costs have risen enormously since 1994 when the current rates were established. The board became concerned last fall that it may be difficult to continue our program of research awards at the current level. Consequently we voted a dues increase.

Here are the new annual rates:

Individual Membership — \$15.00
Family Membership — \$25.00
Student Membership — \$ 5.00
Patron Membership — \$35.00

We encourage you to consider patron membership this year. In 2002 we had 51 of them.