



# THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 29, Number 3

March 2005

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Alex Minarik

I had been counting the birds in my yard for nearly two hours Friday, February 18th, the first day of the Great Backyard Bird Count, and frankly was disheartened. The numbers seemed so low. I hadn't even had a single woodpecker yet! This was terrible. I unloaded the dishwasher then walked over to the sliding glass door to get a better look outside. There was some movement high up in the pines and I aimed my binoculars. A male purple finch! I couldn't believe my eyes. Then a second one appeared and then what looked like a female. They and another female eventually came down to my thistle feeder for a brief time. They were the first purple finches I had seen this year and their timing could not have been better. Reenergized by their appearance, I continued counting in between housecleaning chores for the rest of the day and ended up with 31 species and 100 individual birds to contribute to the GBBC.

## MARCH 16 PROGRAM

Our VP of Programs, Tom McCary, has scheduled Elizabeth Long, William and Mary biology graduate student, for our March 16 meeting. Elizabeth will share her research on the "Prey Selection of Peregrine Falcons During Breeding Season in Virginia." Elizabeth earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Richmond. The Club awarded her one of two William Sheehan Ornithology Research Grants in 2004. She will receive her M.S. in Biology in the spring; her advisor is Bryan Watts of the College's Center for Conservation Biology. Join us at 7:30, March 16 in Room 211 in Millington Hall to hear a fascinating report on Peregrines' diet.

**Note:** Our room assignment at Millington Hall has changed to Room 211 for this semester, upstairs from our usual room. Feel free to use the elevator up to the second floor.

## MARCH 19 FIELD TRIP

Join Vineyard's resident Randy Coleman as he leads club members around the Vineyards looking for migrants – birds coming and going. Meet him at 8:00 a.m. at the Vineyards clubhouse. Likely birds to look out for: late winter residents like Hermit Thrush plus early spring migrants like Common Yellowthroats, Yellow-throated Warblers and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers.

Directions: Follow the VDOT signs to the Vineyards. Turn left at the second entrance. Follow the main road around to the right. The clubhouse is on the left, just before the lake.

## SEND YOUR ANNUAL DUES

The Club Treasurer, Chuck Rend, reminds members that Annual Club Dues are now due. If there is an envelope in your newsletter this month, that means your dues are OVERDUE. This will be the last Flyer you receive if your dues are not paid in March. If you've lost the envelope, mail your check to WBC, PO Box 1085, Williamsburg, VA 23187. Here are the membership levels: \$35 for patrons, \$25 for families, \$15 for individuals and \$5 for students.

Consider joining this year at the patron level to support the club's activities, scholarships and organizations the club supports – Williamsburg Land Conservancy, Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, Center for Conservation Biology at W&M, Williamsburg Regional Library and the Virginia Society for Ornithology.

## THANKS FOR REFRESHMENTS

This year Barb Streb is coordinating refreshments served at the end of each meeting. Barb provided the wonderful pastries and juice at the February meeting. We really appreciate Barb and her team for bringing the special treats and beverages.

## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Williamsburg Bird Club welcomes new members Dorothy Kroenlein and Ariel White. We look forward to seeing you at upcoming meetings and field trips.

## DID YOU KNOW...

Our own Club President Alex Minarik was quoted in the February 17 issue of the Daily Press, page C5. Dave Schleck of the Daily Press interviewed Alex about the Great Backyard Bird Count. Alex said, "You feel like you're contributing to science, so that's a good thing." The article also included a note about the Bird Club and its activities – meetings, field trips and the Audubon Christmas Bird Count.

## RESULTS OF THE FEBRUARY 2005 HOG ISLAND FIELD TRIP

By Bill Williams

Fourteen bird club members thumbed cold noses at the mid-20s temperatures on Saturday, February 19, 2005 to see what great birds Hog Island Waterfowl Management Area in Surry County had waiting. Even though the air temperature was below freezing much of the morning, excellent birds got folks warmed up fast. Fourteen hearty birders were: Alex and Mike Minarik, Mary Ann and John Fennell, Marilyn Zeigler, Louise Burns, Brac Bracalente, Dave Lee, Tom McCary, Ariel White, Dick Kiefer, Alice Presson, Jan (did not get last name-from Yorktown) and Bill Williams.

Put Alex and Mike Minarik in the field and both will spot terrific birds before you know it. Mike did not disappoint. As if viewing soaring adult Bald Eagles and a mixed flock of Ring-necked Ducks, American Wigeon, Gadwalls and Green-winged Teal weren't enough, he looked up in the remnants of an Osprey nest and announced "I think there's an owl in there." Be darn! Right there, out in the open just west of the observation deck was a Great Horned Owl sitting snugly amongst the twigs, seemingly oblivious to the group's excitement. In all likelihood the bird was incubating! A couple of folks digiscoped pictures through spotting scopes!

Soon Alex spotted Eastern Meadowlarks and an American Coot. But Mike wasn't done yet. Down the road an American Kestrel was on the wires. When the group went to get a closer look, Mike said he thought there was a Bald Eagle in a nest at the other end of the wood lot from the owl. The nest was easy to see, but no eagle was in view...yet. Suddenly an adult stood up, moved to

the edge of the nest and then flew off.

The group ended the day with an Osprey at the Surry ferry dock. The trip list came to 52 species and included 14 adult Brown Pelicans, several of which followed the ferry across the river!

## BIRD SIGHTINGS – FEB. 2005

*Report your backyard birds and local sightings to Shirley Devan at 220-6269 (evening phone) or [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net) (home email). If you encounter interesting birds on your vacation/travels, please share!*

**January 30:** Marilyn Zeigler reports seeing 6 Wild Turkeys crossing the Colonial Parkway between the tunnel and Route 199 overpass.

**February 1:** Tom McCary reports seeing the last-of-the-season White-crowned Sparrows at Shirley Plantation. Tom Armour reports: At the Vineyards, 3 Greater Scaup, 7 Ring-necked Ducks, 10 Buffleheads and 1 Cooper's Hawk.

Bill Holcombe reports: "I continued to have Bluebirds and Yellow-rumps on my feeder the whole last week of January. For 2 days they were joined by a gorgeous Yellow-bellied Sapsucker whose yellow belly I finally saw. Also, I had first year Yellow-rumps which baffled me until I checked the book. The Winter Wren that I've seen several times this year popped up again in the same area and may even be the same one."

**February 2:** Carol McAllister reports: "My husband Paul and I have had bluebirds regularly visiting our feeding station this winter in Kingsmill. This is the first time in twelve years that this has happened. They are attached to crunchy peanut butter which we spread on suspended blocks of wood. Originally there were two, then four and now up to six come on a daily basis."

Tom Armour reports: at the Airport 6 Eastern Meadowlarks.

**February 3:** Dorothy Whitfield reports two male and one female Eastern Bluebirds at her feeders.

**February 4:** Tom Armour reports: I had an American Kestrel on Treasure Island Rd.

**February 5:** Tom Armour reports: today at the Vineyards Pond (in Williamsburg) the 3 Greater Scaup were joined by 5 Lesser Scaup. Also, there were 9 Bufflehead and 3 Ring-necked Ducks.

Tom Armour, Bill Williams and Brian Taber began the 9th season of the College Creek Hawk-watch on the James River near Williamsburg, coordinated by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. "The sunny, relatively warm weather made us push the usual season opening by about 10 days. We were rewarded after nearly 2 hours by a group of 6 Turkey Vultures that took about 30 minutes, in a strong northeast wind, to migrate

across the 1-1/2 miles of water. That was the slowest trip we have ever recorded at the site!"

**February 6:** Bill Williams reports from the Greensprings Trail: "The total Greensprings Trail list is at 199. I had a grand northbound exodus 1140+ Ring-billed Gulls there today. The flight began at first light and continued for almost an hour. Just before daybreak (6 February) an American Woodcock was in rare form displaying for all he was worth as Northern Cardinals, Barred and Great Horned Owls sang in the background."

**February 6:** Eleanor Young reports from Newport News Park: 30 species including Pileated Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Canada Goose, Pied-billed Grebe, Gadwall, Ring-neck Duck, American Wigeon, American Goldfinch.

Joe & Grace Doyle report from their weekly visit to Camp Peary: 37 species including fifteen Wild Turkeys in the middle of the road! Other highlights were 20 Mute Swans, lots of Ruddy Ducks, Canvasbacks, Buffleheads, Red-breasted Mergansers, Northern Harrier, Towhees.

**February 9:** Dorothy Whitfield reports a male Pileated Woodpecker at her suet feeder, providing very good close up views. "This guy is a neighbor-hood regular – seen frequently in the trees and pecking on a rotted log in the yard."

**February 13:** Bill Williams reports: The first Tree Swallow of 2005 was observed at College Creek today.

Joe and Grace Doyle report from their weekly trip to Camp Peary: 41 species, including several hundred Ring-necked Ducks, many White-throated sparrows, all the woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatches, only a few Mallards, four Gadwall and two American Wigeon.

**February 14:** Tom McCary hears and sees Eastern Meadowlarks at Shirley Plantation. Dorothy Whitfield reports a male Eastern Bluebird on her suet feeder.

**February 15:** New member Ariel White reports: "I went birding on the Colonial Parkway between Williamsburg and the Gloucester Bridge for the first time today and saw lots of ducks. I didn't keep a running tally, but here are some estimates: >500 Ruddy Ducks, >50 Bufflehead, >50 Red-breasted Mergansers, ~25 Redheads, ~25 Canvasbacks, ~10 scaup species (lesser I think), a pair of Common Goldeneyes, 1 White-wing Scoter (with eye-patch of white). Other bonuses: 1 Bald Eagle, ~20 Horned Grebes, 3 Kingfishers, 15 Tundra Swans, 5 Common Loons, Herring Gulls, Great Black-back Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls."

**February 16:** Marilyn Ziegler reports a Sharp-shinned Hawk in her yard. Bill Williams reports 1 Lesser Black-backed Gull at College Creek.

**February 18:** Alex Minarik reports: "I had 4 purple finches, 2 male and 2 female, at my thistle feeder. This is the first and only time I have had them this year."

**February 20:** Bill Williams reports 2 Fox Sparrows on the Green Springs Trail. Mitchell Byrd reports 3 Blue-winged Teal at Hog Island.

Joe and Grace Doyle report from Camp Peary: 38 species including 27 Tundra Swans – a larger number than usual. They remarked about how few gulls they see – only three individuals on this date. Joe sees many more gulls at the shopping center parking lots.

**February 23:** Tom McCary spots an Eastern Phoebe at Shirley Plantation.

**February 24:** Linda Scherer reports "a very nice Fox Sparrow shuffling around under my feeders. Nice to see on this gloomy day."

Joe Doyle reports the antics of his pet Yellow-rumped Warbler. "Last year this fellow learned how to jump from the chair and hover at the suet feeder. This year he's back and even more skilled at latching onto the suet feeder to chow down."

**February 25:** Tom McCary sees a male and female Towhee on the sunflower seed feeders in his yard.

Dorothy Whitfield reports the neighborhood Pileated Woodpecker perched on her deck railing and at her suet feeder, oblivious to the small dog Dorothy was dog-sitting. She reports that the Hermit Thrushes left about two weeks ago.

**February 26:** Diana Nolan reports: "We have lots of activity today at the feeders - besides the usual visitors (2 pairs of Bluebirds, Cardinals, Goldfinch) we have a Red-bellied Woodpecker, a Carolina Wren and a Mockingbird. Jack said the Mockingbird has got to go! But now has changed his mind and decided to feed it what it likes — grapes, raisins and chopped meat! I think we will have more than Mockingbirds with that diet."

Bill Booth reports from his home in Kingsmill – a pair of Myrtle Warblers in the yard. Shirley Devan reports a Ruby-crowned Kinglet on the suet feeder. Bill Williams reports a Red-throated Loon on College Creek.

Alex Minarik reports: "Mike and I went to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel islands and saw fantastic views of one male and four female Harlequin Ducks. Also saw one Red-necked Grebe, all three scoters, Double-crested and Great Cormorants, Long-tailed Ducks, Lesser Scaup, Purple Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstones, Gannets, Red-throated and Common Loons, Red-Breasted Mergansers and 2 harbor seals."

Bill Williams reports that Ospreys have been seen daily since today along the Jamestown section of



the Colonial Parkway.

**February 27:** Dorothy Whitfield reports that two male Purple Finches have come to her feeders every day for several weeks. Also, a Yellow-rumped Warbler, Red-bellied Woodpecker, two Carolina Wrens and as many as 5 American Goldfinches were around her feeders and perched on her deck railings.

Bill Williams reports 42 Rusty Blackbirds and 7 Tree Swallows at the Greensprings Trail. Also, Tundra Swans were on the move this date with 16 flying over Greensprings Trail just after daybreak. A single Canada Goose was entrained with another 20 swans around noontime at College Creek!

Joe and Grace Doyle report from Camp Peary: 40 species. The highlight was 25-30 Eastern Meadowlarks in a field with the starlings. They report never seeing that many before. They also spotted about 30 Tundra Swans flying north. A Red-shouldered Hawk flew across the road about 15 feet in front of them to provide a good look.

**March 1:** Joe Doyle reports that the Osprey has returned to the nesting platform at Camp Peary.

## **TOM ARMOUR'S FLORIDA TRIP**

According to Tom, who spent the last two weeks of February in Florida: "We listed 122 species, a new record for us, and I got some nice pictures with my new digital camera. Highlights were: 500+ Redheads on a small lake near St. Petersburg, a Long-billed Curlew, 11 species of the waders, 28 species of shore birds, a Mississippi Kite, a Crested Caracara, 5 Roseate Spoonbills, nesting Anhinga and Great Blue Herons (both feeding young), 50 American Avocets and about 10 Loggerhead Shrikes, many close-up."

## **AUDUBON'S "URBAN AVIARY"**

By Shirley Devan

Birders have abiding faith in serendipity. Last fall my husband and I planned a trip to New York City for the weekend of February 18 – 20. As January turned into February, I realized I would not be home for the Great Backyard Bird Count that very weekend. Then I realized I would miss the club field trip to Hog Island too. Both would be disappointing misses.

Perhaps we will get to Central Park to see the Red-tailed Hawks, I thought. That's probably the best chance I have of turning this into any kind of good birding weekend.

As the weekend approached and the days in New York filled up with museum visits, shows and dinner with friends, I realized the Red-tail Hawks

were not in my future for this trip. Oh, well. I can keep track of their mating rituals on the web.

Then serendipity intervened! The timing of our trip to New York turned out to be perfect – we indeed did visit Central Park, but our purpose was to see The Gates, the saffron (not orange!) exhibit installed along 23 miles of Central Park roads and paths for just two weeks. The Gates were stunning against the gray and brown of the park's winter duds and we could even see them from the airplane as we approached LaGuardia. The wind and sun worked their magic with the fabric and visitors snapped photos and romped joyfully. The temperatures were in the mid-20s with the wind chill much lower than that. Needless to say, my non-birding spouse was not eager to traipse around Central Park anymore to look at Red-tailed Hawks. The Gates would be our Central Park experience this trip.

Then serendipity squared! The friends we planned to meet for dinner Saturday night clued me into an exhibit that only New Yorkers would likely know about – 40 original watercolors by John James Audubon painted for his double elephant folio "The Birds of America" at The New-York Historical Society. When our friends discovered that I was a birder they invited us to meet them at the museum Saturday afternoon.

Many of us have seen Audubon's pictures in books and magazines and know how beautiful they are in reproduction. To see an original Audubon watercolor up close is a precious opportunity – as rare as seeing a Van Gogh or a Cezanne. Forty such watercolors in one exhibit is worthy of national and international notice. How lucky were we!?

From the Society's web site about the exhibit: "The Society's Audubon collection is the largest single repository of 'Auduboniana' in the world. The N-YHS holds 435 watercolors preparatory for 433 of the 435 plates in Birds of America. No watercolors for plates 84 and 155 are known to exist."

The N-YHS was one of the original subscribers to Audubon's publication of The Birds of America. The final list of subscribers was only 161 but approximately 200 completed sets were produced. Many sets have been dispersed and lost. Most remaining sets are held by museums, institutions, universities, libraries, etc. Eleven sets are held privately. "The age of the watercolors makes them extremely fragile, and only a few are placed on display at any given time", said Roberta J. M. Olson, the exhibit's curator. "To preserve the watercolors, each can only be exhibited once every 10 years."

All the watercolors were spectacular, but the most

intriguing for me was the display of three items. Plate # 83 is a wonderfully warm picture of a family of House Wrens – nestlings in their nest (actually an old, ragged hat hanging on a branch) with the parents perched nearby, one of whom is offering a spider to a nestling, whose mouth is wide open. The curators had displayed Audubon's original watercolor. Next to it was the copperplate engraving from the original. Then the third item was the print made from the copperplate and hand-colored – by Audubon again. This trio illustrated not only Audubon's creative process but also the production process whereby he was able to produce about 200 sets of paintings. The Society's collection includes one of the rare double-elephant folio editions of 435 plates (a bound, leather covered book). Also featured were numerous personal items of Audubon's, including a subscription list in his own handwriting, his own portable writing desk, his wide-brimmed hat, his rifle and a purse for tipping, sewn by his wife Lucy Bakewell Audubon.

The exhibit hall also featured bird songs and calls for several of the birds in the paintings.

The exhibit is on display until March 27. If you are in New York in March, make a point to visit this museum on the west side of Central Park.

Rarely will you see this many Audubon prints in one place at one time. Truly a once in a lifetime experience. Web site: <<http://www.nyhistory.org/aviary/index.html>>

Two recent Audubon biographies have rekindled interest in this self-taught genius artist and natural historian. John James Audubon: The Making of an American by Richard Rhodes, 2004, and Under a Wild Sky, by William Souder, 2004. I can heartily recommend Souder's book, which preceded the publication of the Rhodes book. After seeing the paintings in New York, I'm moving the Rhodes book to the top of the pile on my night stand. Isn't serendipity wonderful? Turned out to be a great birding weekend after all.

## **SPRING BANDING PROGRAM AT FIRST LANDING STATE PARK**

by Robert Ake, CVWO

Beginning March 1, 2005 Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory will begin a spring songbird banding program at First Landing State Park that will continue through the end of May. CVWO has overseen spring banding programs in past years from 1999 to 2002 at Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR. The new banding station is located near the intersection of Long Creek and White Lake trails. The banding program will examine the use of that area by migrants and breeding birds. From measurements taken from the banded birds the health, age, range and other parameters of the

birds will be assessed. Jethro Runco, the songbird bander at Kiptopeke State Park in the fall, will oversee the spring banding. The station is about a mile and a half south of the visitor's center parking lot, an easy walk from the parking lot. Make plans to visit Jethro at the station during the spring.

## **BIRD FRIENDS PARTICIPATE IN BACKYARD BIRD COUNT**

By Bill Williams

The Center for Conservation Biology and the Williamsburg Bird Club assisted eight members of the Bird Friends of Chambrel in participating in the 2005 Great Backyard Bird Count on the blustery morning of February 18, 2005. The stalwart group spotted 44 birds of 17 species during their 10:00-11:00 a.m. "watch" on the Chambrel grounds. Among the most notable birds counted were Eastern Bluebirds, 3 Bald Eagles, American Goldfinches, American Robins and Carolina Wren.

Williamsburg Bird Club members, Kingsley Stevens, Mike Minarik, Ruth Beck and Bill Williams assisted with documenting the birds. Bill and other staff at the Center of Conservation Biology have worked for more than a year with the Chambrel management and residents to initiate the Bird Friends group, which now boasts a membership of more than 50. George and Valerie Copping of Wild Birds Unlimited have been wonderfully helpful assisting Chambrel to have the best arrangement of bird feeding and bird study equipment, including the donation of a pair of binoculars!

Although many of the species observed on Friday were found near Chambrel's bird feeders, other species such as the Bald Eagles, Black Vulture and Turkey Vulture and Yellow-rumped Warblers were seen flying overhead or feeding in the trees and shrubs on the property.

All of the data were submitted to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology as part of the 4-day, February 18-21, Great Backyard Bird Count. This annual "citizen science" event was begun in 1998 to create a set of information about birds from as many habitats across the United States and Canada as possible. In 2004 more than 50,000 counts were submitted, documenting 4 million birds of 512 species. As of February 22, 2005 Cornell had received 38,000 checklists, tallying more than 4.5 million birds of 559 species. What a great way for the Bird Friends of Chambrel to see their interest in birds contribute to a national project!

## THE BIG YEAR, REVISITED

By Shirley Devan

When last we checked in with Mike Boatwright of Amherst, VA, at the end of October, he was sitting at 319 birds on his Virginia Big Year list. Check the November 2004 issue of *The Flyer* for the first note about Mike's Big Year. Below is a second "email interview" I conducted with Mike at the end of February.

*Now that 2 months have passed, what is your perspective?*

It was a fantastic experience. I visited a number of sites I hadn't been to in years and even went to a few places I had never birded, like Rappahannock National Wildlife Refuge where I got the LeConte's Sparrow. Also ran into a lot of birders I hadn't meet before and had a chance to bird with some folks I hadn't birded with in a while. Despite all this, I certainly will not try to repeat anytime soon. A Big Year puts a lot of strain on the pocketbook and family (not to mention all those miles on the car ... 25,000+.)

*Any birds you had counted on and didn't get?*

I really thought I would get an Evening Grosbeak, despite the fact that they're not as easy to get as they used to be. Also missed Saw-whet Owl (just couldn't seem to find the right time to get out to one of the banding stations.) I was hopeful that the Clark's Grebe would return to Ft. Story area. It did, but on January 1, 2005, despite the fact that I spent most of December 31 scoping the ocean off Ft. Story and First Landing State Park without seeing the bird.

*What was the final tally and did you break any records?*

Final tally was 344. Todd Day had 347 in 2002 and Ned Brinkley had 346 in 1996. So close, yet so far away.

*What were the final days like? Frantic racing around?*

My wife Sandra and I spent December 29-31 at the coast trying to get whatever I could. We stopped by Karen Kearny's house in Deep Creek to pick up Lark Sparrow (a bird I thought I might miss after having missed several during the fall). I managed to run up to Chincoteague and got the Snowy Owl by walking the 3 hour round trip down the beach past the Coast Guard station, while Sandra sat in the car reading and eating. Ned called me the night of December 29 to tell me about the owl. So I skipped the Cape Charles CBC to run to Chincoteague. I also lucked into a Common Black-headed Gull feeding in the surf along the beach while walking back from the Snowy Owl spot. On the 31st we took a break from staring at the ocean off Ft. Story to check out

the CBBT. Although I missed the Clark's Grebe, we managed to find a Little Gull off Island #3 and a female King Eider off Fisherman's Island. Not a bad ending!!

I couldn't have done it without the support and help of the entire birding community. Ned Brinkley and Todd Day were invaluable resources. They helped me with strategies and called me about good birds throughout the year. Adam D'Onofrio unknowingly became my partner in crime during the year. (I wonder if he would have gotten hooked up with me if he had known what he was in for!) Seriously, Adam had a great year and saw many new state birds and quite a few lifers, as well as really getting to know the good birding spots in VA, and met lots of birders (Adam moved to VA from NJ a couple of years ago and had not done much running around VA.) That all changed in 2004!)

## TAKING STOCKA OAXACA

By Bill Williams

That's Wa-Ha-Ka.

Oaxaca is a large, impoverished southwestern Mexico state. The capital, Oaxaca City, population 900,000, is 5,000 feet above sea level, vibrant, richly cultural and endlessly busy. The old churches there are architecturally exquisite, not only in their emotionally moving, elaborate European influenced motifs, but in the deeply spiritual functions they afford the citizenry. The city's pulse is most warmly experienced in its main square, the Zocalo, where one encounters dozens of street vendors selling all manner of jewelry, native designed tapestries and delightfully decorated clothing. Surrounding the square are superb restaurants and lots of enticing store shopping. It's not uncommon to be eating a great meal and be entertained by a full orchestra performance from the pavilion below. And that's before the birding begins!!

On the grounds of the Hotel Mision de los Angeles the plaintive "twee yurp" of a Clay-colored Robin is the birder's wake-up call, followed at daybreak by the pessimism of Inca Doves. "No hope. No hope."

Suddenly, a Vermilion Flycatcher flits by brilliantly alighting only meters away. A series of chattering calls overhead announces the location in a mimosa tree of one of Oaxaca's 20+ endemic species, a White-throated Towhee, a rather dull unspectacularly gray-brown towhee with a partial rufous collar separating a whitish throat from a grayish breast. It does get better. Soon Bewick's Wrens are singing, a Western Tanager in winter garb appears with the towhees and numerous Yellow-rumped Warblers of the Audubon's race are everywhere. The day's next robin looks



similar to our own except that across its back and upper wings is rusty red. Its throat is heavily streaked in black and the face is all dark with a red-orange eye. A Rufous-backed Robin. Dusky and Berylline hummingbirds flutter about in the manicured blooming vegetation as Cedar Waxwings zip en masse into the crown of a fruiting eucalyptus, displacing an Orchard Oriole. Above the tall buildings soar in tandem a Short-tailed Hawk and a Crested Caracara. And the actual birding with the Field Guides leaders doesn't begin until tomorrow.

Early the next morning finds our group of 14 far out of Oaxaca City in very arid farmland paying close attention to prickly pear and candelabra cactus where Gray-breasted Woodpecker (much like our Red-bellied), Curve-billed Thrasher, Northern Mockingbird (note the latino lilt in their lyrics!), American Kestrel and Blue Grosbeaks wait for the sun to warm the desert chill. A target bird is the endemic Boucard's (pronounced Boocards) Wren, a large gregarious relative of the Cactus Wren which is soon located moving through a shallow draw with noisy fanfare. An adult Cooper's Hawk patrols a nearby ridge as a Loggerhead Shrike watches and waits.

Further up the valley, approaching higher elevations, a search for endemic Oaxaca Sparrows, proves successful, much to the relief of the guides. Sometimes they struggle to find even 2 for the whole week. For this tour as many as 5 at a time were seen in different locations the same day! Ho-hum! West Mexican Chachalacas sprint and fly across the dirt road. A nearby pressa, or pond, produces Least Grebes, Blue-winged and Green-winged teal, the latter a write-in rarity, and Ruddy Ducks. A Great Kiskadee is found near Wilson's Snipe, American Pipits and Least and Spotted sandpipers. A Little Blue Heron, Cattle and Great egrets forage at pressa's edge. Forests at slightly higher elevations present the group with excellent looks at Townsend's, Hermit, Orange-crowned, Olive, Wilson's, Rufous capped, Golden-browed and Red-faced warblers. Painted and Slate-throated Redstarts are enchanting as they rush about hawking insects. Hummingbirds encountered in the upper forests include Green Violet-ear, White-eared and Blue-throated.

A group of endemic Gray-barred Wrens begins their raucous descent through the tree tops down the mountain slope. Watch for Dwarf Jays, another endemic, among the Stellar's Jays traveling with the wrens we are told. Sure enough two of the Dwarf Jays offer brief but definitive views before they vanish. Many participants fail to see them or the Rose-throated Becard traveling among the fast moving assembly.

Another day is spent in the pine forests of la Cumbre at 9,000 feet where "crippling" views of

the endemic Red Warbler are tempered by wow-vision encounters with Black Robin, Chestnut-sided Shrike-Vireo, the world's second smallest hummingbird the Bumblebee Hummingbird, Collared Towhees, Chestnut-capped Brush Finch, Russet Nightingale-Thrush and Mountain Trogon. Doing the touristy thing near Oaxaca is easy and worth every minute. Monte Alban ruins are breathtaking and the birds there included endemics Dwarf Vireo, Golden Vireo and Pileated Flycatcher. Rock and Canyon Wrens create a lively diversion from the ancient stone structures here and at other sites such as Yagul and Mitla. Drifting aloft, a White-tailed Hawk peers down as the species probably did during the 100 BC-900 AD Zapotec occupation of these ancient cities. A truly memorable site is the world's largest cypress tree at Tule just west of Oaxaca City.

Another early morning in the field yields stunning close-ups of the endemic Slaty Vireo, a pair of guide-surprising Red-headed Tanagers, 2 Black-vented Orioles and at last, 2 cooperative Ocellated Thrashers, yet another often difficult endemic. Bridled Sparrows, Beautiful Hummingbird and a White-collared Seedeater compete with a Peregrine Falcon and White-tail Kite for birds of the day. Driving back to Oaxaca City the group watches with rapt(or) attention as a Red-tailed Hawk flares to the ground to grab a meter long snake which flails, yellow-green belly in the air, in agonizing surprise.

Oaxaca City is easy to get to with a once per day direct flight from Houston via Continental Airlines. Taxi service in the city is inexpensive and readily available. ATM machines are conveniently located, providing the best and safest means for getting pesos, valued in January 2005 at approximately 10/dollar. The city offers numerous hotels. The one Field Guides uses, Hotel Mision de los Angeles, has over 200 rooms. A Holiday Inn Express is within a few blocks of the Zocalo. Oaxaca and Mexico's birds, Muy Bien!



## Members' Photo Album – February 2005

### Williamsburg Bird Club



Sandhill Crane seen by Alex Minarik in Tampa, Florida area the week of February 7, 2005.



February 19, 2005. Great Horned Owl at Hog Island, seen on club field trip. Photo by Ariel White.



February 2005. Roseate Spoonbills in Florida. Photo by Tom Armour.



October 22, 2004. Gannet Colony at Cape Kidnappers, on the East Coast of the North Island at Hawke's Bay near Napier, New Zealand. Photo by Herb Spannuth



November 11, 2004. Yellow-Eyed Penguin at the Conservation Reserve, located near the end of the Otago Peninsula on the East Coast of the South Island southeast of Dunedin, New Zealand. Photo by Herb Spannuth.