



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 31, Number 11

Website: www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

December 2007

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Bob Long

This is my final president's corner. I'd like to thank the executive board and club membership for their guidance and support during my term in office. I welcome the incoming officers and wish them success in promoting WBC and its mission. The club has many exciting opportunities just waiting for new participants.

After more than twenty years in WBC I enjoyed the past two years the most. Why? Because I was intimately involved in the club's activities. So, to really get the most out of your membership, get involved. Volunteer to serve on a committee, lead a bird walk or field trip, present a program, help with refreshments.

My term as president culminated with the glorious TBV celebration, and for that I thank Cynthia Long, Historian, who hatched the idea; Shirley Devan, who promoted club mementos and produced the art exhibit; Tom McCary and Bill Williams who presented the program; Barb Streb for all of the food offering; and all those members who worked so hard to make the program and picnic a success. What a wonderful week it was. Thank you all and Happy Holidays!

NEW YEAR'S DAY BOARDWALK BIRD SHOW

By Shirley Devan

Join me New Year's Day (Tuesday, January 1, 2008) at the Greensprings Trail Boardwalk for the Third Annual "New Year's Day Boardwalk Bird Show." Unless it's raining or snowing, I'll be there from 1 – 3 p.m. to get a start on my year list! (Note that we'll bird from the "old" boardwalk over the pond – not the "new" path that's part of the Capital to Capital bike trail.)

If you're a lister too, then you'll be off to a great start because every bird is a first for the year!

This is a "come as you are" and "come and go as you please" event. You don't have to be on time or stay for the full two hours. Bring house guests if they are still hanging around. By 1:00 p.m. we should have slept off our previous night's revels

and be ready for fresh air and BIRDS!

Enjoy the holidays. I hope to see you New Year's Day at Greenspring's Trail.

WHY IS THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT IMPORTANT?

By Shirley Devan

The 2007-2008 Audubon Christmas Bird Count will be the country's 108th. Our count on December 16 will be our club's 31st annual count – our first count being December 18, 1977, just three months after that historic first club meeting September 21, 2007.

So why is it so important to do this EVERY year? I want to share with you some interesting studies being done with the monumental amount of data gathered in the 107 years of Christmas Bird Counts.

In the summary report issued by the National Audubon Society about the 2006-2007 Christmas Bird Count (just received in my mailbox a few weeks ago and distributed to everyone who paid \$5.00 last year to participate in a CBC), Scott Weidensaul, naturalist, author, and ornithologist, authored an article called, "CBC: The Climate Bird Count?"

Scott described a new study underway at the National Audubon Society whereby scientists are "trying to build a realistic picture of how climate change is affecting North America's birds. To do this, Dan Niven, Audubon's senior scientist for bird conservation, and other Audubon researchers are, for the first time, combining decades worth of Christmas Bird Count results with other enormous data sets, especially the 40-year old Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) conducted at more than 4,000 sites across America every summer. The Breeding Bird Survey is jointly coordinated by the U.S. Geological Survey and the Canadian Wildlife Service." The two data sets mesh together so well. "The Breeding Bird Survey has good information on more than 400 species, and the CBC on about 450 species. Between the two of them, we have good coverage on 550 species," according to Greg Butcher, Audubon's director of bird conservation and one of the lead scientists on the new project.

Butcher goes on to say that “one thing we want to do is a threat analysis, both for Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and Watch List species, to look at which sites and which birds are most vulnerable to climate change. ... We're going to look regionally across the continent, to get a sense of what the winners and losers will be in this global warming game we're playing. ... It's not just a case of rare birds becoming extinct, but common birds becoming rare.”

By Scott Weidensaul's measure, “the CBC is not so much the perfect data set for such an analysis – it's the only one. As the longest running and most geologically inclusive wildlife study in the world, nothing comes close to CBC for the breadth of time and space, to say nothing of species it covers.”

“The CBC started in 1900 with just 25 sites, mostly in the Northeast. While it grew quickly, it wasn't until the 1960's that the density and geographic range of the counts became statistically useful for this kind of analysis,” according to Dr. Wesley M. Hochachka of Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology, who was quoted in the article.

According to Weidensaul, “The scientists will use data from 1967 through 2006 – a stretch with solid, standardized CBC coverage across the continent, and also one that overlaps with the lifetime of the Breeding Bird Survey.”

So when you're out counting birds on our CBC December 16, don't discount the American Robins, the Common Grackles, the Carolina Wrens, or Northern Cardinals. It's not “just another cardinal.” We have to keep track of the “common” birds as well (as the uncommon) and do all we can to make sure they don't become rare. We can take nothing for granted these days. If you've not signed up to participate in the Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count Sunday, December 16, call Bill Williams, our Count Committee Chair, at 229-1124. According to Bill, “Christmas bird count data have proven to be quite valuable for tracking bird population trends and species dynamics over time, and therefore, the more comprehensive counts can be, the more valuable these data become.”

The CBC is VERY important EVERY year. Join in this citizen science project this year.

DECEMBER BIRD CLUB EVENTS

Our club does not present a program in December. Our next program meeting will be Wednesday, January 16, 2008. Check the January newsletter for details.

We will continue the Bird Walks at New Quarter Park – Susan Powell will lead the December 8 walk at 8 a.m. Bill Williams will lead the

December 22 walk starting at 7 a.m.

Our December “Field Trip” is the Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 16. Please consider joining the effort this year. Read the article above about the CBC. It's Citizen Science at its best and you can contribute – even for a few hours.

OFFICERS FOR 2008

At the November 14, 2007 Club meeting, the following officers were elected for 2008:

President: Shirley Devan

Secretary: Mary Anne Fennell

Treasurer: Charles Rend

V.P. & Program Chair: Alex Minarik

V.P. & Editor, *The Flyer*: Fred Blystone

Member-at-Large: Sara Lewis

Member-at-Large: Joanne Andrews

These officers take office January 1, 2008 for one year. Many thanks to Ruth Beck, Jeanette Navia, and David Lee for their work on the Nominating Committee. Many thanks to those who are leaving the Board and to those who answered the call to serve the club.

TRANSITIONS

By Shirley Devan

Every volunteer organization goes through transitions. It's one of the signs of a healthy organization when volunteers step up to the plate to take on leadership roles. This year the Bird Club is making a BIG transition as we see several long-serving volunteers take a break from their service on the board and committees.

Phil Young has been editing *The Flyer* since December 1996. As he recounts the story, Bill Holcombe asked for a volunteer to help with *The Flyer* at a club meeting in the fall of 1996. “Bill evidently was expecting a long, drawn-out search and when I spoke up from the front row to offer my services he was floored. He didn't know me then and was not aware that I knew very little about birds. What I should have said was that I could *edit* and *produce* a newsletter from material furnished largely from other contributors. Bill didn't want to lose me though and offered to help me with the writing. People with the necessary computer skills were not so easy to find back then. After he completed his term as program chair the board made him a vice president and co-editor. And so began a collaboration that endured to the fall of 2003.”

When Bill Holcombe decided to take a break at the end of 2003, I stepped in to write the newsletter and continued working with Phil who laid it out. Many thanks to Phil who has earned his stripes and stars over the years, managing to be in town the first week of the month when the

newsletter work had to be done and always turning it around promptly. Great job, Phil! Tom McCary has served as Vice President of Programs for five years. Tom has arranged for many fascinating speakers and programs. Thanks to Tom, we've had programs such as Dan Cristol's "Last Word on the Bluebird," Teta Kain's "Adventures on the Dragon," Jeff Trollinger's "Virginia's Birding and Wildlife Trail," the first Bird Club Book Club meeting in September 2004 when we discussed "The Big Year", Mark Obmascik's book about the rush to record, and Dr. Lou Verner's program on "Creating Backyard Bird Habitats." Tom provided an amazing variety of programs to suit everyone's interests. And who will forget Tom's entertaining narration of the "Thirty Birdy Years" slide show in September? Tom has promised to conduct the annual Bird Club Book Club program so we'll be seeing him in the front of the room again in the coming years. Thank you, Tom!

Bill Holcombe has been managing the Audubon Christmas Bird Count for over 10 years. He was Vice President of Programs from 1994 – 96 and Vice President/Editor of *The Flyer* from 1997 to 2003. Bill is taking a break from the Audubon Christmas Bird Count duties this year and handing off to the capable hands of Bill Williams. The Audubon Christmas Bird Count involves much more than just showing up on count day and taking down the numbers. Interacting with the National Audubon Society weeks before and after the count are a vital responsibility to make sure "our count" gets included in the national data set. Thanks, Bill, for keeping us in the count for these many years and for the work you've done in varied capacities to keep the Club lively and fun! We trust that you'll still get out to count birds on the CBC.

A WALK WITH MARK CATESBY

By Sally Lewis

On Tuesday morning, October 30th, I had the pleasure of meeting "Mark Catesby" and learning about his experiences in Colonial Virginia. It was a beautiful Indian summer day, and I along with 40 others met behind Bassett Hall in Colonial Williamsburg for our tour with Robb Warren, the man portraying Mark Catesby. We walked along the Bassett Trace, a trail in the 585 acres behind Bassett Hall, purchased by John D. Rockefeller for protection and as a buffer for the Colonial area.

"Mark" explained how he came to study the flora and fauna of Virginia in April 1712. He documented his findings and eventually wrote a natural history of the area with etchings he created to show the plants and animals, often putting an animal on the same page with a specific plant,

such as the hummingbird with a trumpet vine, to show their relationship. He sent many examples of plants and stuffed animals back to England... one ground cover which grew especially well in England was poison ivy! He preserved birds by slow roasting them and then stuffing the bodies with tobacco. Other specimens were preserved in jars of rum, but sometimes the thirsty sailors would drink the rum before the ship could reach England.

We discussed several plants and their significance to the colonists, such as the bayberry used to make candles (it took five gallons of small berries to make one candle.) Catesby always carried a walking stick as a protection against snakes, and one time he shot a bear cub which he stuffed and sent to England. He also told how passenger pigeons were very plentiful, and that flocks could darken the sky for three days straight when they migrated. Also, the Carolina Parrots were so numerous that they would cover entire cornfields to eat the crops, causing farmers great losses. Of course we didn't see any of those parrots on our tour, but Shirley Devan did spot a few red headed woodpeckers and a catbird while we were walking along the paths.

November 27th marks the last tour for this season, but Robb said he plans to be back next spring to continue his nature walks as Mark Catesby. At the end of our tour he told us an interesting fact. When The College of William and Mary burned for the first time, Thomas Jefferson remarked that the single greatest loss for Virginia was the section of natural history records created by Catesby.

NEW WEB SITE ADDRESS

Make sure your bookmarks include the Bird Club's new web site address:

www.williamsburgbirdclub.org. Jeanette Navia has upgraded our web site and given it additional capability. You can see more photos and even register your own observations and comments. Thanks, Jeanette, for keeping it fresh and new.

FIELD TRIP TO YORK RIVER

By Bill Williams

Despite the 8:00 a.m. 30° temperature, 18 birders ventured along the Colonial Parkway November 17 to see what waterfowl the recent cold spells might have delivered to the James and York Rivers. Absolutely stunning foliage met the group at every Parkway pull-off. An initial stop at College Creek produced a nice showing of Double-crested Cormorants, a distant perched Red-tailed Hawk, a couple of Belted Kingfishers, and 3 Swamp Sparrows.

A quick caravan to Felgates Creek near Cheatham Annex yielded 6-8 Common Loons, 2 Horned

Grebes, Ruddy Ducks, Buffleheads, a Northern Harrier, and 15-20 Forster's Terns. All watched intently as one of the loons struggled to eventually swallow a "hog choker" flounder.

Just down the Parkway at Indian Field Creek was a mixed assembly of Mallards and Hooded Mergansers, while out on the river a Brown Pelican was following a commercial fishing boat. Everyone got scope-filled views of a very accommodating Bald Eagle sitting near the crown of a nearby loblolly pine before leaving for the Yorktown waterfront.

The best sighting at Yorktown was a frigate passing beneath the Coleman Bridge probably bound for sea duty. Distant Common Loons were much in evidence as a Ruby-crowned Kinglet at the Yorktown Monument put the finishing touch to the list of 39 species, a fitting conclusion for a glorious morning of fellowship and birds.

Participants: Joanne Andrews, Tom Armour, Gary and Ann Carpenter, Inge Curtis, Mary Anne and John Fennell, Bill Kay, Cynthia and Bob Long, Cathy Millar, Alex Minarik, Betty Peterson, Rosanne Reddin, Chuck Rend, Lillian and Don Woolfolk.

CRANEY ISLAND NOW OPEN ON FRIDAYS

We've learned that Craney Island near Portsmouth will be open to the public on FRIDAYS from 7AM to 2PM. The facility is open Monday through Thursday from 7 AM – 3 PM. The facility is closed on weekends.

NOVEMBER 2007 SIGHTINGS

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

October 27: Tom McCary reports large flock of Brown-headed Cowbirds in his neighborhood along Richmond Road. On the 28th, Tom observed a Palm Warbler and an Eastern Phoebe at Shirley Plantation.

Oct 30: Tom Armour: "this AM there was an American Kestrel near the end of Treasure Is. Road."

Oct 31: Ron Geise report: "We had 3 Northern Bobwhites basking in the morning sun. Threw birdseed around them and they stayed and ate the "Manna from Heaven." Must have been raised in captivity! Would they still count on bird lists???"

November 1: Tom McCary reports the first-of-the-season White-crowned Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos at Shirley Plantation. The sparrows were perched at the top of the hedges.

November 1: Tom Armour reports: "David Martin, the Harbor Master at Kingsmill Marina, just reported that 2 American Coot had just arrived at the marina, first ones this fall."

November 4: Joe and Grace Doyle observed 38 species on their trek to Camp Peary. They observed the first Ruddy Ducks of the season on the river. Other highlights include Red-headed Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker and all three nuthatches – Red-breasted, White-breasted, and Brown-headed. Also Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and White-throated Sparrow. They saw the only Pine Warbler for the month.

November 4: Tom Armour reports: "We had our 1st White-throated Sparrow at our feeders this AM."

November 4: Lois Leeth had a pleasant Sunday morning breakfast, sharing with the early birds, one Dark-eyed Junco, one Eastern Towhee, a beautiful White crowned Sparrow, a Chipping Sparrow, and a bright and colorful Northern Cardinal.

November 4: Eleanor Young reports from Newport News Park walk: "Over 20 people joined the regular first Sunday bird walk at Newport News Park. The morning started out cold and windy but the group observed 43 species including Black-and-white Warblers, Pine Warblers, White-breasted Nuthatches and Red-breasted Nuthatches, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Winter Wrens, Pied-billed Grebes, Osprey, Green Heron, and Ring-necked Duck.

November 5: Lee Schuster reports: "I am sitting home with a semi-sick daughter and noticed the juncos have arrived at the Schuster's household."

November 7: Bill Williams reports dozens of American Robins feasting on the red berries in the dogwood trees in his yard.

November 11: Joe and Grace Doyle visited Camp Peary and observed 25 species. Highlights included Red-tailed Hawk, Bald Eagle, Great Egret, Belted Kingfisher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, and American Goldfinch.

November 12: Tom Armour reports: "David Martin, the Harbor Master at Kingsmill Marina, just reported 5 Brown Pelicans perched on the sea wall."

November 25: The Doyles visited Camp Peary and counted 42 species. They report 14 Tundra Swans, both Pied-billed Grebes and Horned Grebes, Bufflehead, Hooded Mergansers, thousands of Ruddy Ducks on the York River, and 25-30 Eastern Meadowlarks.

November 26: Tom Armour reports: "We had our 1st Hermit Thrush of the fall at our birdbath this morning."

November 28: Chuck Litterst reports “an uncommon yard bird (for me). I had a Palm Warbler in my yard yesterday about noon. Bill's Species List of Williamsburg Birds says this bird is reported until Dec. 23 but anytime I see a “real” warbler (as opposed to yellow-rumps) this late, it's a treat for me. I usually see only meadowlarks, sparrows, and bluebirds in my yard so this was a real treat.”

December 3: Bill Williams reports: “I was asked to go over to Piney Grove this morning to help sort out the individuals in one of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker clusters. We had 6 different birds. Oodles of Brown-headed Nuthatches, a couple each Red-breasted Nuthatches and White-breasted Nuthatches rounded out the nuthatch slam. A Fox Sparrow was singing too!”

December 4: Bill Williams reports: “I was out woodpeckering again this morning with another of the Piney Grove clusters – 4 birds this time.”

THIRTY BIRDY CAPS AVAILABLE

Wondering what to get the bird club member in your family for the holidays? We have just a few caps left with the “30 Birdy Years” logo. When these are gone, we will not produce any more like these. You may get one at the Wild Birds Unlimited store near Ukrops. We also have a few prints of Spike Knuth's Red-headed Woodpecker available. Contact Shirley Devan at 220-6269 or 813-1322 if you want a hat or print.

COLONIAL NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB

Whether you're a “newbie” with a new camera or an experienced photographer, if you're interested in nature photography you should check out the newly formed nature photography club. The club was organized in November and the first program will be Monday, December 10 at 7:00 p.m. at the James City Library in Croaker. The website is: <http://web.mac.com/sdevan3635/cnpc/Home.html> The login is: cnpc. The password is: lovepics

SAW-WHET OWL BANDING AT KIPTOPEKE STATE PARK

By Shirley Devan, Williamsburg Bird Club and VA Master Naturalist and Kari Abbott, VA Master Naturalist

The short notice announcement could not have been more discouraging: meet at Kiptopeke State Park on the Eastern Shore at 8:30 at night; the toll will be \$17; dress for COLD weather; restrooms not likely to be open; be prepared to stand around and wait outdoors in the dark; no flash photography allowed. By the way, Saw-whet Owls NOT guaranteed.

Nevertheless, 15 hearty souls from the Williamsburg Bird Club and Historic Rivers

Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalist Program assembled at Kiptopeke around 8:00 p.m.

Saturday night, December 1, hoping to observe the Saw-whet Owl banding that the Center for Conservation Biology (CCB) has been doing on the Eastern Shore since the end of October. This is the 14th consecutive year they have banded Saw-whet Owls on the Eastern Shore.

All over the east coast, Saw-whet Owl numbers have been way up at banding stations. This is a peak year because of the crash of the owls' food source up north. So they've migrated farther south than usual looking for small mammals. Saw-whet Owls seem to have a quadrennial cycle. Peaks were in 1995 (1005 owls – the best year), 1999 (ca. 700), 2003 (a bust), and now 2007. At Kiptopeke the bander trapped over 400 Saw-whet Owls between October 27 and November 30, 2007. In 2006, she had about 40.

In the parking lot, waiting for all to arrive and preparing to deal with temperatures in the mid-40s, with a slightly cooler breeze, we enjoyed a basic astronomy lesson from participant Joe Piotrowski. “There's the comet! There's the Milky Way. That's Mars.” Oooooooo ... Joe's knowledge really filled the time we waited, making everyone forget how cold they were. A beautiful night already.

About 8:30 we walked down to the Songbird Banding Station using the red flashlights so not to destroy our night vision. The Banding station was where we last saw Jethro Runco banding Northern Cardinals and Black-and-white Warblers in September. The path was a sand path that reflected enough light to be easily seen in the dark.

Now the waiting began. Waiting for Shannon Ehlers of the CCB to check the three net locations set up near the tip of the Eastern Shore. One location was at Wise Point, at the very tip of the Shore; the other location was directly east of Kiptopeke on the GATR Tract. The third location was in the woods south of the songbird banding station. Shannon checks each location every three hours all night with her last check at 6:00 a.m. She sleeps during the day.

Bill Williams, Director of Education at the CCB and Bird Club member, had arranged with Shannon last week to meet her at 9:00 p.m. at Kiptopeke Saturday night with a crowd of cold, curious birders and naturalists.

Nine o'clock came and went. We were waiting patiently, whispering, listening for owl sounds, taped or real, looking for car lights, flashlights, any lights to indicate Shannon was on her way. Would she have owls with her? As more time went by, hope ebbed and faded.

Then suddenly out of the darkness, two cars raced down the log road to the east of the nets. Bill said it had to be Shannon, but there were two cars. The

group waited in darkness wondering what was going on out in the nets. About 9:25 Shannon arrived followed by Dr. Mitchell Byrd, co-founder and Director Emeritus of the Center for Conservation Biology, and one of his friends from Henrico County, Linda Cole. Shannon had four Saw-whet Owls from the Kiptopeke nets – the only owls from her first net run of the evening. We all forgot the cold waiting and eagerly gathered around the picnic table to peer back at the four little owls peering out at us with big yellow eyes. Shannon had a nice wooden box, divided into 12 compartments, just the right size for a Saw-whet Owl. There was a door on the back side and screen on the front. A couple owls were perched so you saw their faces as well as their talons.

The only light we had was the headlight Shannon was wearing and the headlights from her car shining on the picnic table. One by one she pulled the little owls from their compartments. Saw-whet owls are fairly docile but every now and then they snapped their bills and clicked to register their stress. Shannon explained that even though they may be stressed during the banding process, they return to their regular state quickly after being released. Shannon revealed a secret to calming agitated Saw-whet Owls: scratch them gently between and just above the eyes. They calm right down, she said. Nevertheless, she tries to minimize the time she handles them.

With each new capture bird, Shannon attached a small numbered aluminum band, measured wing and tail lengths, extended the wings to try to determine the age and sex, weighed each bird in a Pringle can, and then held up the bird for all to see. She patiently answered questions from the group explaining a lot of interesting features of the Saw-whet, which included it is one owl that does not produce a pellet. Though the Saw-whet may look "cute" it is a predator, and uses its beak to tear off the food from its prey. Several of us got to "touch" (not pet) one of the owls.

Two birds were new captures and Shannon gave each a leg band. One bird was a "foreign recapture" meaning that it had been banded at another banding station earlier this season. The final bird was a "local recapture" meaning that Shannon had banded it herself earlier in the season.

Before release, Shannon held up the birds for all to get a good look. A short picture taking session ensued – no flashes allowed. Photographer Joe Piotrowski was able to snap quite a few pictures with just Shannon's headlight shining on the owl. When she was ready to release the first owl, she called on Justin Abbott, 10 years old, to serve as the perch for the owl. Justin held out his arm and Shannon placed the owl on his outstretched hand. The owl quickly, soundlessly floated away.

When she released the second owl, she called on Alex Powell, 10 years old, to be the perch. Amazingly, the little owl sat on his hand for about 5 seconds before taking off into the woods. Courtney Abbott, sophisticated 14 year old, was the lucky perch for the third release. Susan Powell, VP of the Master Naturalist Group, (age not disclosed) volunteered for the fourth release. By about 10:30 p.m., all the owls had been released. Excitement level was still high. We all repeatedly thanked Shannon for sharing her knowledge of owls with us and allowing us to experience Saw-whet Owl banding up close and personal. It was truly an unforgettable night, for the adults as well as the children.

On the way back to the parking lot, Bill Williams said, "Want to try for some Screech Owls?"

Absolutely! We walked a short way down a path and he started doing his Screech Owl imitation. Very quickly, we heard an owl on the right and he was moving closer to investigate. All of a sudden a shadow flew across the path about chest height and continued calling as he moved off to the left. Another close encounter with an owl.

Back at the parking lot we marveled at our fortunes this night. Some folks headed back to their hotel rooms; some headed back to Williamsburg. An unforgettable night – worth all the waiting, cold, tolls, and driving.

The fortunate 15 were: Kari and Frank Abbott with children Justin and Courtney; Mitchell Byrd and guest Linda Cole; Ron and Bobbie Geise (who had spent the entire week at Assateague, returned home Friday night to learn of this opportunity by email, and drove over to the Eastern Shore AGAIN Saturday night to see the owls,) Shirley Devan, Seig and Alice Kopinitz, Susan Powell and son Alex, Joe Piotrowski (with his lucky camera,) and Bill Williams.

Many thanks to Shannon Ehlers – and the Saw-whet Owls, for a memorable, truly awesome evening. To see Joe Piotrowski's photos, check out the Bird Club's web site:

<http://williamsburgbirdclub.org/>

LETTER FROM SAM HART, FORMER BIRD CLUB MEMBER

(Sam Hart, sent this note to Bob and Cynthia Long after they sent the Harts a "Thirty Birdy Years Pin" and a program from the September 21 Thirty Birdy Years program.)

Dear Bob and Cynthia, Thank you "a bushel and a peck" for sending me the program and the beautiful pin. I wish I had been there. Katherine and I were regular attendees. I spent many hours with Ruth Beck in behalf of Purple Martins, bluebirds, and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Ask Ruth about Bill Williams and Fred Blystone

getting lost. I loved the work at the Pop Lab. Remember us to them and others that were in the Club when we left in 2001. Sincerely, Sam Hart

THIRTY BIRDY YEARS

By Cynthia Long

2006: President, Bob Long; V.P. and Program Chair, Tom McCary; V.P. Flyer, Shirley Devan; V.P. Flyer, Phil Young; Secretary, Fred Blystone; Treasurer, Charles Rend; Past President, Alex Minarik; Member at Large, Mary Anne Fennell; Member at Large, Bill Williams. The program year began with our 2005 grad student Caitlin Knight, who reported on her bluebird research. Field trip chair, Tom Armour, led the first field trip of the year to Newport News Park where we spotted 38 species.

WBC agreed to lead twice monthly bird walks at New Quarter Park. The habitat encompasses meadows, woods, and the fossil-rich bluffs of the York River and Queen's Creek. The club continued its support of the VSO, Williamsburg Regional Library, Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, Center for Conservation Biology, and the Williamsburg Land Conservancy. We gave a total of \$6000 to these organizations. Our WBC dues, plus generous donations from Wild Birds Unlimited, fund these outreach projects. WBC also cleans up a portion of Rt. 5, under the guidance of John Fennell. Inexplicably, VDOT put our stretch up for adoption; John is trying to correct the oversight.

Ornithology grants of \$500 each went to grad students Anne Condon, Rebecca Brasso, and Caitlin Knight.

The annual spring bird count yielded 135 species. More than 2300 swallows were observed at Hog Island. Brian Taber reported a record 1525 hawks and vultures counted in 80 days on the 10th consecutive College Creek Hawk Watch.

WBC presented "Nature Camp for Grownups" at New Quarter Park in June. It was an all-day program, exploring land habitats and a kayak trip down Queen's Creek. Shirley Devan developed the plans, with instructors Bill Williams, Hugh Beard, and Gerrey Johnson teaching the classes. It was so well-received that the club scheduled another camp in October.

The birding year ended with our 30th Christmas Count. Chairman Bill Holcombe reported, "The weather was glorious. 28 birders were out scouring field, stream, and forest, and we came up with a total of 106 species of birds, a few below average."

2007: WBC officers remained the same except for Secretary. Fred Blystone retired from the board after many years of faithful service in all areas of the club. Mary Anne Fennell was elected to

succeed him. The year began with a flurry of activities in preparation for the thirtieth anniversary of the club, to be celebrated on September 21, the exact day of the first meeting in 1977. Shirley Devan created beautiful note cards from a painting by *Virginia Wildlife* artist Spike Knuth of our club bird, the Red-headed Woodpecker. These were also used for invitations to the special events. We also offered prints of the painting for sale. Shirley ordered WBC caps with our logo, which were very popular. Plans were made for a special evening program, followed by a picnic for families and friends the following day. We also anticipated a month long bird-art show at the Williamsburg Regional Library, featuring objects loaned by our members. Cynthia Long contacted long-time members and bird club friends, gathered pictures and addresses of former members and officers, and Thirty Birdy Years gained momentum.

Program Chair Tom McCary continued to entertain and inform us. Dan Cristol presented our first program of the year, a retrospective of ornithology at W&M, with special emphasis on the many graduate students who had received WBC grants. It was a wonderful record of the hard work and successes of our grant program. Dan also won a 2007 Outstanding Faculty Award, presented by the State Council of Higher Education. Dan writes a monthly column for The Virginia Gazette on birds and their habitats, generously donating his stipend to the club. Our grad students, Rebecca Brasso and Ann Condon, reported on their research at two meetings. Bob Anderson, a former grad student grant winner, presented the March program. He reported on his sighting of the Ivory Billed woodpecker in a Florida swamp in 2006. Ruth Beck was able to schedule a larger lecture hall in for the occasion, which was attended by flocks of ardent birders. Bob had studied under W&M birding legend, Mitchell Byrd. When Dr. Byrd learned of Anderson's sighting, he commented, "If Bob Anderson says he saw it, it's true." WBC published a *Species List of the Birds of Williamsburg, Virginia*, painstakingly compiled by founding father and record keeper Bill Williams. The cover featured our beautiful red-headed woodpecker painting by Spike Knuth. WBC continued its donations of books to the library, as well as books and binoculars to New Quarter Park, for use on the bi-monthly bird walks conducted by our members. George and Valerie Copping, of Wild Birds Unlimited, continued their support of our projects with donations from the sale of products to our members. WBC received the Outstanding Volunteer Award from York County for: "developing and leading bird walks twice a month, developing and conducting of two nature camps, contributing

funds for the purchase of bird watching guides and binoculars, and promoting the birding environment at New Quarter Park to their members and the birding community at large.” The handsome engraved platter was displayed at public events, and becomes the legacy of each president.

WBC members presented birding programs at the Colonial Heritage community, Williamsburg Botanical Garden, the Williamsburg Winery program supporting Historic Triangle Outdoor Adventures, W&M Elderhostel, and Christopher Wren Society. Founding mother Ruth Beck continued to work closely with VDOT, monitoring gulls and terns at the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel. She also continued her studies of shorebirds at Craney Island, a project she has pursued for 30 years.

Jeanette Navia volunteered to serve as Membership chair, welcoming new members with name tags, and encouraging visitors at WBC events to join. She also took responsibility for our website. Elise Larsen, Mikaela Howie, and Joanna Hubbard received our research grants for the year. The board honored Tom Armour, Brian Taber, and Bill Williams with honorary lifetime memberships for their extraordinary service to WBC and the conservation community at large. One of the main goals of the Long presidency was to involve more young people in birding activities, and a major part of this goal was met with the establishment of an annual scholarship to Nature Camp in Vesuvius, Virginia. We were especially proud to name this scholarship in honor of founding father Bill Williams, for many years a science teacher in the Williamsburg/James City County Schools, and presently Director of Education at the Center for Conservation Biology. One of our grad student grants was named in honor of Ruth Beck, founding mother of the club, in recognition of her years of teaching at William and Mary, and her unswerving loyalty, leadership, and service to the WBC.

Spring Bird Count recorded 7625 birds from 154 species. Bill Williams reported an American Bittern, which was a new record for the count. Thirty Birdy Years was celebrated with great success in September. Bill Williams and Tom McCary presented a delightful retrospective of thirty years, with pictures of our members through the years, and their birding activities. Mitchell Byrd gave a charming and thought provoking introduction, reminding us that we needed to do more than count and record birds — we must conserve. Barb Streb and her committee produced a marvelous reception following the presentation at the Williamsburg Regional Library. Special guests included our featured artist, Spike Knuth and his wife Susie, and past-president Bob Cross, who traveled from Tallahassee Florida to be with

us. Many other distinguished alums and members were present, more than 100! The following day we celebrated with more food, and special events for children with a picnic at New Quarter Park. The signature photo of the event to our family was the enthusiastic group of children holding up our Thirty Birdy Years cards.

I am a printer’s daughter. In printer’s language, 30 means “the end.” I thought of the significance of that number as I completed this 30 year history. Our fledgling group of 35 in 1977 has grown to almost 200 members in 2007. We have spent this year remembering our beginnings, our activities, and our members. It has given us perspective on where we have been, and reminded us often of how much farther we can fly. It is time for us to look to the future, and let the momentum of Thirty Birdy Years take the Williamsburg Bird Club to an even higher level of education and conservation. Thank you for a wonderful year. **30**