



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

Volume 31, Number 1

Website: www.wmbgbirdclub.com

January 2007

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Bob Long

The December 23 bird walk at New Quarter Park began on a wet, dreary morning with some 10 stalwart birders braving the elements. We walked down the trail to Queens Creek and set up scopes to observe the water birds (Buffleheads, Great Blue Herons, etc). Then we trudged uphill watching for field and forest guys. After about 2 hours and some 40 species we finished at the fire ring overlook above Queens Creek. There the New Quarter Park staff greeted us with a roaring bonfire and delicious breakfast treats — thank you Molly Nealer. We were then joined by members of several other recreational organizations: mountain bikers, astronomers, Appalachian Trail hikers, and bird club family members.

To me this exemplifies the essential elements of a good bird watching day: camaraderie, competition, outdoor exercise, and gustatory pleasure. All in all, a delightful way to enjoy a wintry Saturday morning.

JANUARY 17 PROGRAM

Dr. Dan Cristol, Associate Professor of Biology at William and Mary, will present a survey and review of the ornithology research projects undertaken over the years at William and Mary. He'll include the ones carried out by graduate students who have received club scholarships and bring us up to date on these W&M graduates — where they are and what they are doing now in the field of ornithology.

Many thanks go to "Dr. Dan" for presenting our program this month and for the contributions to the club of his stipend for the articles he writes for The Virginia Gazette. His articles always seem to answer just the birding question we have on our minds, and he keeps us up to date on the ecological health of our growing community. Thanks again, Dan, for your insightful, well-written articles as well as for your generous financial contribution to the club.

Be sure to tell Dan "thanks" next time you see him! The program will begin at 7:30 p.m. in Room 117 in Millington Hall at William and Mary.

JANUARY 20 FIELD TRIP

Join us for the first field trip of the year! Field Trip Coordinator Tom Armour will lead a convoy down the Colonial Parkway from Williamsburg to Yorktown to survey the York River for wintering ducks and waterfowl. Expect to see rafts of Ruddy Ducks with surprises mixed in. We'll also look for sparrows, swans, Bald Eagles over the river, shorebirds on the flats, and Red-throated Loons and Common Loons at the Yorktown Beach. Four Common Goldeneye were spotted New Year's Day at Yorktown Beach. This is a good field trip for those spotting scopes Santa brought you. We'll travel in our own cars. Dress warmly, as the wind off the river can be chilling in mid-January. Meet at the Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Road for 8:00 a.m. departure.

NEW QUARTER PARK WALKS IN JANUARY

Bill Williams will lead the January 13 and 27 bird walks at New Quarter Park. Meet Bill at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot near the park office January 13. The January 27 walk begins at 7:00 a.m.

Our December walks at the park were well attended — by birders and birds! Nine birders participated in the December 9 walk and we spotted 33 species, including the Dave Lee's first Red-headed Woodpecker since Hurricane Isabel. Dave — you came to the right place! We found 38 species December 23 and were thrilled to have 13 birders including Twila Frieders from Northern Virginia (her second bird walk at NQP) and Joanne Andrews's family — husband, Alex, and their son, Alex, and grandson, Tristan. Son and grandson were visiting from Juneau, Alaska, for the holidays.

Join us at New Quarter Park and see the birds while the trees are still nude!!

CBC '06 – A BEACH DAY

By Bill Holcombe

Few of the “regulars” on this year’s Christmas Bird Count, Sunday December 17, 2006, can remember needing suntan lotion for this event or wishing for iced tea instead of hot coffee. 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. When entering the count data to Audubon each species line shows the historic high count for those data and in almost every case our numbers were well below the high. So, not only was the species count a little off, so were the numbers of each species reported. Some missing species that we have more often than not, and were totally missing were Northern Shoveler, House Wren, Wild Turkey, Palm Warbler, and Fox Sparrow.

On the plus side we got some species that are relatively scarce in our historic reports; Red-throated Loon, American Bittern, Virginia Rail, Dunlin, Lesser Black-backed Gull, and a first time ever, Ipswich Savannah Sparrow. This bird is so rare for these parts that it still must be accepted by the governing body of this count.

There is a special category called “Count Week” that can be reported and we had three good ones, King Rail, Northern Pintail, and Rusty Blackbird.

So, despite the unseasonably great weather that must have had some effect on the birds, we had a respectable count and one that must have been a wonderfully pleasant day for all of the participants: Tom and Jean Armour, Hugh Beard, Ruth Beck, Catherine Bond, Fred Blystone, Shirley Devan, Gary Driscoll, Betty Fields, Adrienne Frank, Jane Frigo, Roberta and Ron Giese, Sara Lewis, Carol and Paul McAllister, Jacob McClaine, Alex Minarik, Bob Newman, Sandra Peterson, Mary Pulley, Peggy Romman, Lee Schuster, David Shantz, Dot Silsby, Sam Skalak, Brian Taber, and Bill Williams. Thanks to all!

NEW YEAR’S DAY “BOARDWALK BIRD SHOW”

By Shirley Devan

Wayland and Elizabeth Bass and Dorothy Whitfield joined me on the boardwalk at Greensprings Trail for the New Year’s Day “Boardwalk Bird Show.” The temperatures were in the mid-60s and the dark skies spitted off and on. The sun peaked through for about 3 seconds before the wind-driven clouds passed over. The weather conditions certainly depressed the number of species and the number of birds! From 12:45 to 2:45 we recorded 15 species. The highlights were close looks at several Red-headed Woodpeckers as

well as circling Bald Eagles – one each adult and immature. A Great Egret flew over the swamp, and the many Green-winged Teal and Canada Geese were splashing about on both sides of the boardwalk. About 2:45 the skies opened up and we quickly headed to our cars – arriving soaking wet!

DECEMBER 2006 BIRD SIGHTINGS

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

November 26: Joe and Grace Doyle report 36 species from their foray to Camp Peary. Earlier visits in November produced 37 species on November 5 and 30 species on November 19. Ring-necked Ducks and Buffleheads appeared the first time on November 5, along with a Green Heron and Hooded Mergansers that showed themselves on the 19th.

November 29: Tom Armour reports: “at The Vineyards, 6 Ringed-neck Ducks, 5 Bufflehead, and 4 Common Snipe at Treasure Island Road.”

December 7: Tom Armour reports: “this morning at the Vineyards, 25 Bufflehead and 24 Ring-necked Ducks.”

December 10: Tom Armour reports: “this morning at the Vineyards, 50 Ring-necked Ducks, 6 Bufflehead, 12 Mallards, and on College Creek at The Landing, 5 Black Ducks.”

December 11: Joe and Grace Doyle report seeing many rafts of Ruddy Ducks on the York River from Camp Peary. They have the general feeling that there are very few birds around – Mallards and Wood Ducks are scarce as are many of the usual suspects. They did see 200-300 Ring-necked Ducks and 4 Tundra Swans on Beaverdam Pond. They also spotted 9 Tundra Swans near Cheatham Annex.

December 18: Linda Sherer reports from Florida: “It is almost as warm there [VA] as here in Florida! In our usual forays to Wakodahatchee, birds seem a little scarce there so far this December. There is only one Great Blue Heron on a nest site, when usually we find at least four by now. A few Anhingas nesting, but normally lots more. Earlier in the month we did see a Purple Swamp Hen at Wakodahatchee, so they have apparently moved up from the Ft. Lauderdale area.”

December 19: Dorothy Whitfield reports a Pileated Woodpecker making quick work of the suet block in her backyard feeder.

December 19: Lois Leeth sent along a note

reporting these birds at her feeder: White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Cardinal, Mourning Doves, Carolina Wren, American Goldfinches, White-throated Sparrows, Carolina Chickadees, American Crow, Tufted Titmouse, and Dark-eyed Juncos.

December 20: Tom Armour reports: "this afternoon at the Vineyards, 1 Greater Scaup (same one as last year?), 30 ring-necked Ducks, and 10 Bufflehead."

December 21: Tom Armour reports: "this morning in our yard a Hermit Thrush and at the Vineyards, the male Greater Scaup was again present, also about 25 Bufflehead and 30 Ring-necked Ducks."

December 26: Tom Armour reports: "This afternoon at the vineyards there was a Lesser and a Greater Scaup mixed in with the usual 30+ Ring-necked Ducks and 15 Bufflehead."

December 28: Fred Blystone, Bill Williams, and Shirley Devan saw the Eurasian Wigeon at Ridgeway Park in Hampton, a Common Golden-eye and 33 Red-throated Loons at Yorktown Beach.

December 31: Alex Minarik also saw the Eurasian Wigeon at Ridgeway Park.

December 31: Tom Armour reports: "This afternoon at The Vineyards pond, 1 Greater Scaup, 12 Ring-necked Ducks, and 40+ Bufflehead."

December 31: Dorothy Whitfield reports the Pileated Woodpecker visits her suet feeder while Dwight Davis gives his bird report on WHRO radio.

January 1, 2007: Tom Armour reports: "The Greater Scaup was at The Vineyards with the Buffleheads and Ring-necked Ducks this morning; also a Belted Kingfisher at the end of Treasure Island Road."

TIE ONE ON FOR THE BIRDS

By Thomas B. McCary

It all started last Christmas when my brother gave me a handsome tie with lots of little generically designed songbirds on it. The perfect gift for a birder! After experiencing surprise and appreciation, this bird watcher naturally wanted to identify the colorful creatures. I concluded the small brown and gold birds most probably were products of an artist's flight of fancy. They had indeed that generic look, that look of whimsy.

My interest had been piqued, however, and whimsy leads to whimsy. I knew I had seen real birds on ties before, and one's tie should make a statement. Off to some fashionable shops I went, hoping to net a few good birds on my anticipated new neckties. The excitement of the chase had

thoroughly seized me.

Yet my first store brought only disappointment. Yes, there were attractive ties in abundance, but all one saw were stripes and dots and paisley patterns. There was not a bird to be found.

The next establishment had a paucity of ties. But, wait! A cravat with rather a Caribbean motif suddenly caught my eye. Exotic parrots practically flew out from the cloth. I thought of adventures and explorers of old, of Long John Silver and a bottle of rum. I took the birds as good omens for a smooth sail.

The parrots were prophets to be sure. The third shop was the charm. Not one variety of pheasant, but four types displayed their gorgeous forms. A graceful quail, perhaps generic, hung in the air. Wood Ducks in flight appeared on another tie. Yet another cravat on a deep blue background depicted the bold green head of the mallard drake. The number of ties with game birds would suggest an appeal to the huntsman.

For the lover of a quiet life on a farm, there was a tie with a rooster, playfully perched on the back of a sheep. A cravat to crow about indeed! And for the man with pink flamingoes in his garden ... You guessed it, there was a lovely red tie – with pink flamingoes. An acquired taste, they tell me.

Ah, decisions, decisions. I put off my purchase, but I made my list. Real birds, for the purist, do appear on ties. There are also birds woven with some artistic license. One may take his pick. I like the no-nonsense, real looking birds, but I thank my little brown and gold jobs for starting me on yet another quest. Generic you may be, but you still are special. From now on at the tie counter, in addition to flair, I'll be looking for feathers.

SAVE THE DATE – SEPT. 21, 2007

The 30 Birdy Years Committee, chaired by Cynthia Long, has been hard at work over the last few months. Lots of exciting things are in the works and you'll hear about them in the first months of 2007. But one thing is for sure – September 21, the actual date of the first meeting of the Bird Club in 1977, will feature a birthday party and program in the auditorium at the Williamsburg Regional Library on Scotland Street. Mark this date on your calendar and look forward to an exceptional program plus special guests, awards, art show, and birthday cake!

THIRTY BIRDY YEARS – 1980-1982

By Cynthia Long

Ruth Beck succeeded Bill Williams to the presidency in 1980. She also continued her research into the life of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, regularly checking their nesting cavities with her woodpecker peeper, a cleverly constructed angled mirror mounted on a long stick. She also conducted studies at the population lab at William and Mary, on the Yellow-breasted Chat, using mist nets, willing graduate students, and bird club members to help in the studies.

1980 Club activities included the installation of a large bird feeder at the Pines in memory of Roy Trow; increased membership; purchases of more books for the Williamsburg Library; and updating records to share with the VSO. Susan Sturm served as Vice-President/ Programs, and Bill Williams moved to Vice-President/ Newsletter. Alice Springe did double duty as Secretary/ Treasurer. Tom Armour served as Field Trip chairman. The club began the year with \$448.73 in the treasury and the first bird seed sale yielded about \$75 profit. Fred Blystone cheerfully hauled and stored bird seed at his home on Stanley Drive. Dr. Mitchell Byrd's eagle survey counted 35 eagles along the James and Chickahominy Rivers. Bill Sheehan continued to keep records. 239 species had been recorded by club members since 1977.

The second Bird Seed Savings Day was held in conjunction with the Peninsula Science Center, (Virginia Living Museum) and yielded a profit of \$700. Fred Blystone and Ruth Beck hauled thousands of pounds of seed to the Colony Square Shopping Center for distribution. The 1980 Christmas Bird Count reported 109 species, 6 people participating with temperatures between 10 and 20 degrees.

By January 1981 the treasury had increased to \$1103.51, Jewel Thomas and Paula Pence, the bluebird co-chairmen, now had trails at York River State Park, Williamsburg Country Club, and Carter's Grove Plantation. In November officers' terms were changed to one year from two – it had been difficult to get members to commit to a two year board position. The club voted to adopt York River State Park, where they planned to monitor and assist in ornithological programs. The club also approved the scholarship program for a William & Mary graduate student in ornithology and agreed to donate \$300-\$500 per year as funds were available.

1982—President, Tom Armour; Vice-President/Programs, Ruth Beck; Vice-President/ Newsletter, Bill Williams; Secretary, Cynthia Long; Treasurer, Leigh Jones; Members at Large,

Cindy Fletcher and Brian Taber. Ruth Beck's programs for the year concentrated on characteristics of different bird families. Mitchell Byrd reported 19 young falcons were fledged. Treasurer Leigh Jones reported over \$2300 in the bank. Membership was about 60.

In June of 1982 the club selected Rich Goll's drawing of the red-headed woodpecker for the official logo. He was given a copy of Bent's *Life History of North American Woodpeckers* in appreciation for his design. The club ordered 220 patches – the supply ran out in 2006. The Purple Martin committee banded 467 martins this year. The third Bird Seed Sale yielded over \$1800 which enabled us to award our first graduate student scholarships to Bob Anderson and Fenton Day. WBC members assisted with the Colonial Williamsburg Garden Symposium, leading early-morning bird walks. Ruth Beck and Rich Goll were elected to the VSO Board. Captain Tom Armour, a highly decorated Navy pilot, steered us through the fifth year with aplomb, maintaining the momentum of the young club. Field trip chairman, Thom Blair, gave us plenty of opportunities for active birding. Editor Bill Williams described the many species of birds our members were seeing, both in Tidewater and far-away places. The bird seed sale kept us solvent and enabled us to fund graduate students, donate books, and buy bird houses and feeders. It was all so exciting that some of our members even took to the skies themselves. Visit our website at www.williamsburgbirdclub.com to see some great pictures of our ornithomorphic WBC members.

T-SHIRTS, POSTERS, FLAGS – OH MY!

Check the home page of our web site for a stunning image of a Red-headed Woodpecker in its natural habitat – a dead Red Oak tree. This painting, by renowned wildlife artist Spike Knuth, was commissioned by Cynthia Long and she presented it to her husband, Bob, as a Christmas gift. Together, they (and artist Spike Knuth) have given the club permission to use this image to commemorate our 30 Birdy Years. Thanks, Cynthia and Bob! (For those of you who do not have internet access, the Longs will bring the painting to the January 17 meeting.)

We are in the midst of deciding whether to offer special 30 Birdy Years commemorative hats, T-shirts, posters, or garden flags – or all of the above! No item would cost more than \$20. Would you be willing to buy a T-shirt for yourself or your child or grandchild with this beautiful image on the back? How about a garden flag or a poster? Or a hat? Call Shirley Devan at 220-6269 to register your vote. Or email her at sedevan52@cox.net. We'll be asking for a show of hands at meetings too. Look for more information in the next newsletter, on the web site, and at the meetings.