



THE FLYER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WILLIAMSBURG BIRD CLUB

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June 2007

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Bob Long

What a wonderful spring! Our yard has produced numerous youngsters. Bluebirds, wrens, chickadees, brown thrashers, downy, pileated, and red-bellied woodpeckers, catbirds, and cardinal babies are still being fed by their parents. The wrens were hatched in a bike helmet hanging in the garden shed, and when they fledged they played in the lawnmower like a merry-go-round. While sitting in the garden with Shirley Devan watching the bluebirds fledge, a rose-breasted grosbeak flew to a nearby dogwood branch and posed in full sun for several minutes -- beautiful.

The club received a thank you letter from the New Quarter Park staff for our participation in the park's celebration. We enjoyed the experience and promoted our club's agenda to the visitors. Thanks to Joanne Andrews, Sara Lewis, Cynthia Long, and Jeanette Navia for their help.

We need volunteers to lead our Christmas and spring bird counts because Bill Holcombe and Brian Taber are both retiring after many years leading these important activities. We especially welcome new members to become part of this wonderful experience. Let any WBC board member know if you are interested.

The WBC picnic at the Beck's was a resounding success—good food, good birds, good friends. A good time was had by all. Have a great summer.
Bob

CRANEY ISLAND FIELD TRIP

Our next field trip will be Saturday, August 18, 2007 when Ruth Beck, Professor Emeritus from

William and Mary, will lead us to Craney Island in the Elizabeth River near Portsmouth. Car-pooling is a CRITICAL for this trip. Travel time is about an hour one way. Meet by 6:45 a.m. at Colony Square Shopping Center on Jamestown Road so we can sort out car pools to leave by 7:00. Bring bug spray, sun screen, hats, water, snacks and/or lunch. Consider wearing long sleeves and long pants. Craney Island has no shade and the heat and insects can be oppressive. We will travel around the island by car stopping at the best spots so little walking is required. Given all that, the birding is often wonderful. Ruth has been studying Craney Island birds for over 30 years and is THE expert on birds at Craney Island. Don't miss this opportunity!

THIRTY BIRDY YEAR REMINDERS

SEPTEMBER 21 & 22, 2007

Our NEXT club meeting will be our 30th Birthday Party – Friday, September 21.

Save Saturday and Sunday, September 21 – 22, 2007 for two days of celebration of Thirty Birdy Years. Friday evening, 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, featuring special guests, awards, art show, and birthday cake!

Then Saturday, September 22, the Club will host a picnic at New Quarter Park from 4 – 7 pm. We'll have activities for the whole family – including children. This event will be this year's "Nature Camp." The picnic will be FREE for members; non-members can join the Club at the door or pay a small fee for dinner!

30 Birdy Years Celebration Weekend
Save the dates!! September 21 and 22!! Read more inside.

CAPS, POSTERS, PATCHES, AND NOTE CARDS

If you don't have a cap or poster yet, stop by Wild Birds Unlimited to get one ... or a few! George and Val Copping have graciously agreed to accept donations to the club and dispense gifts of appreciation – caps, posters, note cards, patches.

HAVE ART WORK TO EXHIBIT?

Spike Knuth, noted wildlife artist and painter of “our” Red-headed Woodpecker displayed on our note cards and posters, has confirmed that he will exhibit at our art show at the Williamsburg Regional Library September 11 – October 18, 2007! We encourage Club members to submit their own artwork of birds in their native environment. “Inclusivity” will be the rule in selection. We hope to display at least one item from each person who submits. Keep in mind that items can be paintings, photographs, sculpture, woodwork, needlework, drawings, etc. Exhibitors may place items “for sale” and should indicate such. The deadline for submitting items will be one month in advance – August 10. Call Shirley Devan at 220-6269 or 813-1322 if you have items you wish to display. Email: sedevan52@cox.net

UPCOMING BIRD WALKS

June 23, July 14 and 28, August 11 and 25 – Bird Walks at New Quarter Park. Walks on the second Saturdays begin at 8:00 a.m. Walks on the fourth Saturdays begin at 7:00 a.m.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to new members Linda Cole and C.J. Schrader from Williamsburg. We hope to see you at an event soon.

HONORS DECIDED AT MAY BOARD MEETING

At its May meeting, the Board of Directors of the Bird Club voted to grant The Bill Sheehan Research Grants to three William and Mary graduate students:

- Elise Larsen for research into the “Impacts of urban development on bird diversity in the Coastal Plain the role of diet.”
- Mikaela Howie for research into “how mercury contamination is considered a major health risk for humans and wildlife that ingest high amounts in their diet.”
- Joanna Hubbard for research into “Choosy birds choose who? Exploring male mate choice in eastern bluebirds.”

Also, the Board voted to award a lifetime membership to the Bird Club to long-time member, Tom Armour, for his dedication and

service to the club in a number of roles since its VERY early years. Thanks, Tom!

The Board also voted to name next year's Nature Camp Scholarship in honor of one of the club's founders and one of Virginia's most notable science educators, Bill Williams. This scholarship for a youth to attend the Nature Camp in Vesuvius, VA will honor a public school teacher and administrator who has mentored and guided many local youth in his 30+ years in James City County.

The Board also voted to name one of the annual research grants to William and Mary graduate students for Ruth Beck, who recently retired after 39 years as professor of biology at William and Mary. If you've been reading the history of the club, you know that Ruth, along with Bill Williams and others, founded the Bird Club in 1977. Since then she has been President numerous times and guided our club along the way EVERY year. The club is pleased to honor these gifted, dedicated leaders and scientists.

PUERTO RICAN PARROTS

By Marilyn Zeigler

Dr. Mitchell Byrd's look at endemic Puerto Rican birds as reported in The Flyer in May is intriguing since our family lived down there from 1967 – 71, residing near the southwestern town of San German. San German was just then celebrating its 400 years since Spanish conquistadors had arrived, preceding Jamestown's English settlers by more than three decades. An historic town with a small university, San German was convenient to my husband's University of Puerto Rico marine lab at La Parguera on the south coast. John and I acquired a hilltop near town which overlooked cane fields in a river valley and mountains where orange trees grew wild. There we built a poured concrete house of modern design. The setting was conducive to viewing wildlife. Open patios were tantalizing sites for a palmetto, bromeliads, and banana plants.

A local tenant farmer helped plant marketable vegetables, namely lettuce and collards. We tried growing papayas. The house was surrounded by mango trees and another tree with small edible fruits (a quenepa?)

Large marine toads (with poison glands on their heads) felt free to patrol our floors. One evening we watched them dine on a flight of termites which arrived through open doors. The household included three dogs, which tended to avoid the toads, and were skilled at attacking an intruding bamboo rat. We didn't lock our doors and only had louvered windows.

Coquis, the native tree frog whose calls at night are so noticeable and special to Puerto Rico, bred in wet bromeliad cups. Geckos scurried around the kitchen walls; we could track Gerald who had a deformed tail. An occasional tarantula dropped by.

Among the wildlife we particularly enjoyed were the bananaquits which regularly flew in to partake of sugar at the breakfast table.

But a special memory is of the flock of Puerto Rican parrots which arrived regularly at 7:00 a.m. to dine on our mangoes. Parrots announced their presence as they stripped fruit and then dropped the mango seeds on the corrugated metal of our bedroom roof.

I am sad to learn that these are now endangered. I have not returned for many years. I think we had seen parrots earlier in the Luquillo preserve east of San Juan.

Bird guides relating to the Caribbean area were not readily available in the 1960s. My books are packed away now since my household has been downsized prior to moving, and checking them is postponed.

NATURALIST AND AUTHOR SCOTT WEIDENSAUL TO SPEAK IN WILLIAMSBURG

The Bird Club Board has learned from the Friends of the Williamsburg Regional Library that their annual meeting will host author and naturalist Scott Weidensaul Tuesday, October 9, at 7:00 p.m. Mark your calendars now and plan to attend this presentation by an engaging, thoughtful, inspiring naturalist. Our community is fortunate that the Friends of the Library has engaged Scott for their special event – it is not to be missed! If you are not a member of the Library, now is the time to join!

[The information below is Scott's web site: from web site: <http://www.scottweidensaul.com>]

Scott Weidensaul has earned a reputation as a dynamic speaker on environmental topics, and maintains an active speaking schedule across the country, ranging from universities to nature centers and museums.

He has written more than two dozen books on natural history, including his widely acclaimed [Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds](#) (North Point 1999), which was one of three finalists for the Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction. Other recent titles include [The Ghost with Trembling Wings: Science, Wishful Thinking and the Search for Lost Species](#) (North Point 2002), about the search for animals that may or may not be extinct, and his most recent

work, [Return to Wild America: A Year-long Search for the Continent's Natural Soul](#) (North Point 2005), an ambitious journey to take the pulse of America's wildlife and wild lands.

Weidensaul's writing has appeared in dozens of publications, including Smithsonian, the New York Times, Nature Conservancy, National Wildlife and Audubon, among many others. He lectures widely on conservation and nature. The Summer 2007 issue of Nature Conservancy features Scott's article, "The Last Stand: Conserving the World's Largest Intact Forest."

In addition to writing about wildlife, Weidensaul is an active field researcher whose work focuses on bird migration. Besides banding hawks each fall (something he's done for almost 20 years), he directs a major effort to study the movements of northern saw-whet owls, one of the smallest and least-understood raptors in North America. Most recently, he has joined a continental effort to understand the rapid evolution, by several species of western hummingbirds, of a new migratory route and wintering range in the East.

SPRING BIRDING ON THE EASTERN SHORE

By Fred Blystone

Bill Williams and I birded the Eastern Shore on May 10th. Island 1 on the CBBT was fogged in both at 7 am on our way over and at 1 pm on our way back so we didn't have much success there. Since it was low tide, we drove straight up to Willis Wharf -- it was still foggy but soon cleared and we were able to see Whimbrels, American Oystercatchers, Willets, Marbled Godwits, Short-billed Dowitchers, Black Skimmers, a lone Green Heron as well as other species. By the end of the day, 89 species were identified, the highlights being the Whimbrel and a Broad-winged Hawk and the Marbled Godwit, both of which are not easy to find this late in the spring.

HITTING A MOVING TARGET

By Shirley Devan

We left at 3:00 a.m. on the dot. With Fred Blystone driving and Bill Williams navigating in the front seat, we set out for our first target bird of the day – a calling Whip-poor-will on the Blue Ridge Parkway. We intended to arrive before dawn and at 5:15 a.m. we pulled off near the Parkway in what Bill thought was a likely spot. No Whip-poor-will at this spot but we did hear an American Woodcock not too far away. A good start to the day. We hopped back in the car and headed a bit further into the woods. With the windows rolled down and temperature at 49

degrees, we cruised along with our ears set for whatever the woods might choose to give us. Shortly, Bill declared: "I hear it." Fred stopped in the middle of the road and killed the engine. We listened to the wonderful unmistakable Whip-poor-will for about 5 minutes. He did not let up, but we had other targets for the day so we ticked the bird off the list and pressed on.

Mid-May on the Blue Ridge Parkway is legendary for warblers. One of our targets for this May 17 trip was the Cerulean Warbler – a beauty seldom seen in Coastal Plain. As we headed down the Parkway from Afton Mountain, it was still dark at 5:30 when we pulled into the Visitor Center at Humpback Rocks. The restrooms were open (that was a good thing), there was only one other car in the parking lot, and not another soul to be found – except the birds that were singing just before dawn. Birds most certainly have souls, don't you think?

We listened and Bill identified the birds he heard. Fred and I were waiting for the sun to come up to have a prayer of seeing anything in the trees. Bill declared that a Cerulean Warbler was overhead in the trees. While we waited for more light, an Eastern Phoebe perched on the fire hydrant nearby. Checked him off. Finally the sun hit the tops of the trees and we found the Cerulean Warbler ... along with a Scarlet Tanager and a Yellow-rumped Warbler. Then an American Redstart showed himself. Warbler-neck was clearly going to be a problem today.

We headed down the Parkway, stopping at every pullout. Traffic early on weekday mornings is very light and we did not see another car for about an hour. Often we stood in the middle of the road to get the best viewing angle at the tops of the trees. At the Raven Roost pullout, we indeed found 3 Common Ravens on duty. We heard them most of the morning as we stopped along the Parkway to look and listen.

We traveled down as far as Milepost 15, stopping at each pullout. Then we turned around and drove back to Milepost 1, stopping again at each pullout. By the time we left the Blue Ridge Parkway at about 10:30 we had also heard and/or seen (among others): Canada Geese, Great Blue Heron, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Blue-headed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Veery, Swainson's Thrush, Wood Thrush, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Pine Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Ovenbird, Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Dark-eyed Junco, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Brown-headed Cowbird, and American Goldfinch.

Time for breakfast, according to Fred. So we headed west to Waynesboro for food for the car

and the birders. It was only 11:00 a.m. and we had plenty of time to get to the next target bird – the Warbling Vireo on the James River at Maiden's Landing in Goochland County. According to Bill, the bird could be relied upon in the maples and sycamores in the parking lot along the river. We arrived about 12:30 and found people enjoying their lunch along the river bank where we saw three Spotted Sandpipers making their way up and down the river bank. Bill listened and Fred and I scanned the trees to see what was moving around. While looking for the Warbling Vireo, Fred spotted a Blackpoll Warbler. Finally, the Warbling Vireo showed himself to the "song-challenged" birders and we checked him off the list. Before we left the parking lot we enjoyed good looks at a male Baltimore Oriole in the top of a dead tree. While Bill and I scanned the nearby wetland on the exit road, Fred birded from the car and found a Common Yellowthroat, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and a mysterious warbler – with a dark blue head and a white breast. No one was sure what to call that bird.

Next stop was Malvern Hill in Charles City County where Fred and I had found the Glossy Ibis in March. What had been a mud puddle in March was now a full pond! What a difference spring makes. Our short stay there netted new species for the day – Green Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Osprey, Great-crested Flycatcher, Northern rough-winged Swallow.

By now our species count for the day was about 75 and it was only 3:00 p.m. We were headed back through the Coastal Plain and agreed that we had the distinct possibility of finding 100 species before the day was out. Several more "hot spots" were on our trail back to Williamsburg, and certainly we could find 25 species. Now, it was SERIOUS target birding. We were not so much after target species as a three-digit target day. We checked our list to see what "obvious" birds we had not seen yet. No mockingbird yet, nor Blue Grosbeak. And certainly we'd find some gulls, terns, and cormorants down by the James River. The chase was on!

We found Least Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plovers, and Lesser Yellowlegs in the farm fields beside Route 156 (between Route 5 and Route 10) on the way to the Benjamin Harrison Bridge where we hoped to spot a Peregrine Falcon in the nest box at the top of the bridge's superstructure. No such luck (even after two trips across the bridge) but we did see what appeared to be Double-crested Cormorants sitting on pilings in the hazy river at high tide. Should we count them? Probably won't need them. We'll get them later.

So we headed to Wilcox Wharf on the James River. We spotted a Wild Turkey on the way in.

We had high hopes for this spot and counted on getting some of our “regulars” there. We were not disappointed. Bill heard a Yellow-billed Cuckoo almost immediately and spotted about a dozen Bobolinks flying over. The Bald Eagle nest had a young one visible on the tree above. A lone Laughing Gull cruised by overhead. Down by the river, no terns in sight and no cormorants. Not good signs.

So we focused on the wetland and tarried long on the bridge over the swamp. Purple Martins, Red-wing Blackbirds, Summer Tanager, Prothonotary Warbler, and Northern Parula, and Orchard Oriole were new birds for our list. We nearly burned out our eyeballs looking for Water-thrushes down below us in the creek. No luck.

Home and dinner were calling, not to mention spouses. I tallied the list as Fred tackled Route 5 traffic. Did we have 98 species or 99? Each count gave a different total. Finally, I determined that we had 98 species. Two short of our target 100. “We will get that cormorant for sure when we cross the Chickahominy Bridge,” we told ourselves. But where will that 100th bird come from?

When we separated at the Colony Square Shopping Center, we still had 98 birds. Grrrrrrrr. So close to our target.

The next day, Fred contacted me to say that, after studying his field guides, the mysterious warbler with the white breast was a Black-throated Blue Warbler. And I declared that we had indeed seen Double-crested Cormorants out in James River from our drive over the Benjamin Harrison Bridge. Fred concurred with my sighting! And Bill agreed with each of our observations. Ta-da!! 100 species for May 17, 2007.

Between the three of us, we saw and/or heard 100 species in 15 hours of birding. Fred and I each had 18 new Virginia year birds for our lists. Bill says he is not keeping track. Many thanks to Bill’s sharp eyes and ears and his knowledge of the “hot spots” for a memorable day of spring birding.

MAY AND JUNE 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!

May 13: On radio WHRO, club member Dwight Davis thanked "his friends at the Williamsburg Bird Club" for the Birds of Williamsburg info he received with the last *Flyer*.

May 15: Bill Williams reports: “At approximately 2:30 pm. Ruth Beck and I carefully

observed a Reeve in the south cell of the Craney Island, Portsmouth dredge spoil area. The bird's plumage appeared quite worn. It was feeding among 5-6 Lesser Yellowlegs, a hendersoni Short-billed Dowitcher, and at least one Stilt Sandpiper. We estimated the total number of shorebirds present exceeded 4500 – predominately Semipalmated Sandpipers (2500-3000), Least Sandpipers (1200-1500) and 500+ Dunlin, with a scattering of Semipalmated Plovers (15-20), and White-rumped Sandpipers (also 15-20). Many birds were at distances too far to accurately determine species counts. We were there to conduct some of Ruth's Least Tern research and were fortunate we were able to enter the closed facility.”

May 18: While Tom Armour is away visiting his daughter, I checked Treasure Island Road in early afternoon. At the end of road, there was a Green Heron, Least Sandpipers, Osprey, Red-winged Blackbird, Mallards. In the first puddle, there were 6 Least Sandpipers. A Blue Grosbeak perched on the wire overhead.

May 25: Bill Holcombe reports from the Outer Banks: “Rain and wind made the early May weather chancy down in Salvo but the good days were really great. Birds spotted on the good days, mostly in the Pea Island Sanctuary, were: Northern Gannet, Brown Pelicans, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, several Snowy Egrets, Little Blue Heron, Several Tricolored Herons, Cattle Egrets, Canada Geese, Semipalmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Willet, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderlings, Sandpipers: Semipalmated, Western and Least, Dunlin, Short-billed Dowitcher, lots of Laughing Gulls, Terns: Common, Forster's, and Least. Surprised that I couldn't see Black-bellied Plover and Royal Terns. Peeps were really thick on the edges of the sound and the impoundments.”

May 25: Shirley Devan reports from a bike ride around Jamestown Island: “two young Bald Eagles perched on the side of the nest across from the Visitor Center; a Red-headed Woodpecker flying in and out of a nesting hole near Black Point; an Indigo Bunting flying across the road in front of my bike; many Osprey on dead snags and overhead. Brown-headed Cowbirds feeding on seeds in the road.”

May 26: Hugh Beard reports: “I had a warbling vireo in my backyard today! I talked with Bill Williams and he said that it was only the 8th sighting in Williamsburg. The bird was feeding in the cottonwoods in my yard. I first identified him by song. I had a hunch that it was one, so I went inside and found the song on a CD and played it to confirm. Later, he came out of the canopy and gave me a really good look. Also, my kids have

been doing point counts at Freedom Park. We have seen/heard 51 species. There are hooded warblers and yellow-billed cuckoos there. I almost always hear hooded warblers at the foot-bridge across the creek on the multi-use trail.”

May 27: Bill Williams reports: “among 66 species this morning at James City County's Green Springs Trail just west of Williamsburg produced two new species for the trail's cumulative list (now 211) a second summer Black-crowned Night-Heron and, at 9:30 a.m., a subadult Mississippi Kite. The bird was last seen drifting westward. This kite was the 11th one observed in the Williamsburg area since 2 May.”

June 6: Alex Minarik reports that prothonotary warblers are taking nesting material to the nest box in her back yard. Shirley Devan observed a Wood Thrush in her back yard.

NOTE: Your newsletter editors will take a short summer break. Your next newsletter will make its way to your mailbox in early August. Continue to send in your bird reports from your back yard and your travels. Have a great summer.

HOORAY FOR THE FORAY

By Bill Williams

The breeding bird foray got off to a modest start yesterday, 2 June, at Chippokes Plantation State Park. Cathy Bond and I found a total of 67 species in 6.25 hours of field work. Included among these were 3 Northern Bobwhite, 1 Mississippi Kite (spotted initially by Cathy), a Barred Owl, 2 Eastern Screech Owls, and an American Redstart. Breeding was confirmed for Osprey (that was hard – 4 nests); Belted Kingfisher – adults with 2 fledged young; Eastern Phoebe – adult taking food to nest; Barn Swallow – lots of nests in ... what else, a barn!; Eastern Bluebird with fledglings and carrying food; Northern Mocking-bird carrying food; Brown Thrasher at a nest; European Starling with fledged young – yuk!!; Louisiana Waterthrush pair with a fledged young.

Other indicators of breeding birds: Mourning Dove in courtship flight; territorial singing for Acadian and Great Crested Flycatcher, White-eyed and Red-eyed Vireos, Carolina Wren, Wood Thrush, Northern Parula, Pine, Yellow-throated, and Prothonotary Warbler, Ovenbird, Summer Tanager, Chipping Sparrow (lots of these), Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Meadowlark; paired adult Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers. The Deerflies were unmerciful in the forests. Notable missed species included Wild Turkey, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks, House Wren, Eastern Towhee, Song Sparrow. Enjoy the rain!!! We really need it.

June 5 Breeding Bird Foray: From 3:45 a.m.-3:15 p.m. (DST) we managed to get 63 species at York River State Park. Black-and-white Warblers were a real neat find. Kari nailed the nesting Great Crested Flycatchers. We also had some neat Fence Lizards, one Five-lined Skink, a nesting Painted Turtle, an incredible "hidden" Luna Moth, and a grand day all around. Participants at various times today: Kari Abbott, Hugh Beard, Anne-Marie Castellani, Tom McCary, Alice and Seig Kopinitz, Susan and Alex Powell. Big misses – Downy Woodpecker, Green Heron, Prairie Warbler, Great Horned and Barred Owls, Wild Turkey, Chimney Swift.

“VIRGINIA'S BIRDLIFE” NOW AVAILABLE

“Virginia Birdlife: An Annotated Checklist” (Virginia Avifauna Number 7) is now available for sale for \$20 per copy (this price includes shipping). The 2007 revision edited by Stephen Rottenborn and Ned Brinkley was published by the Virginia Society of Ornithology and released at the organization's Annual Meeting on May 4. At 330-pages, the "Gold Book" provides a thorough review of the current status and distribution of 466 species in the state. When you mail your check for the publication, we also encourage you to consider joining the Virginia Society of Ornithology. Your \$20 annual membership dues will assist toward sponsoring a number of ornithological projects throughout Virginia. Please mail check to: VSO, 1230 Viewmont Drive, Evington, VA 24550.

HAWKWATCH SETS RECORDS

By Brian Taber

The 11th consecutive late winter and spring hawkwatch at College Creek ended on May 24, 2007. It began on February 10th. The 147 hours is a new high for coverage. Special thanks to Fred Blystone, Tom Armour and Bill Williams for coverage help on most days.

A new season-high of 1666 was set and new season highs for several species were also set: Turkey Vulture (1058), Osprey (228), Sharp-shinned Hawk (109) and Mississippi Kite (10). The American Kestrel total was 18, not much above the sad all-time low of 10 set last year.

February was the second best February total on record; March tied the best March; and April was the best April, mostly thanks to increased coverage. We recorded 11 species of hawks and vultures on consecutive days in April; that total has only been reached twice before.

The daily breakdown and totals can be found on

Hawkcount.org for which there is also a link on the Observatory website at www.cvwo.org under the Links section.

The late winter and spring season is very different from the fall migration season, but no less exciting with the return also of many non-raptor species crossing the James River in all kinds of weather.

BIRD CLUB HISTORY 1996 – 1999

By Cynthia Long

1996, 1997: President, Lee Schuster; VP Programs, Bill Holcombe; VP Flyer, Phil Young; Secretary, Dorothy Whitfield; Treasurer, Charles Rend; Members at Large, Marilyn Zeigler and John McDowell. Bill Holcombe's programs included presentations from our members, as well as out-of-town guest speakers. Hampton's beloved birder Dorothy Mitchell presented the March program, "Birding on the Peninsula." Many of you will remember enthusiastic birders Dorothy and Mike Mitchell. Dorothy published a delightful book, *All about Birds*, in 1991. I treasure my autographed copy. They were mainstays of the banding station in Kiptopeke, and many color photographs were taken of birds during the banding operation there.

Emily Sharret was our "ever gracious, ever-knowledgeable" field trip chairman. Trips followed the pattern established early in WBC history. We have developed a significant number of reports from these regularly scheduled trips and locations.

WBC held a feeder wash, co-sponsored by Wild Birds Unlimited. Lee described the event.

"...eight people took apart feeders that were brought in by the public, then soaked, scrubbed, steam-cleaned and finally reassembled them. ...Some were returned with a few extra parts they didn't come with, but none went home with less." The fund raiser added \$106 to our scholarship fund. Following this event, the annual picnic was held at the Beck's New Kent habitat. A full day indeed for WBC!

WBC Highway program, under the leadership of Bill Davies, received a certificate of appreciation from VDOT for six years of service. David Whalen won our grant for his research on "Breeding Ecology of Barn Owls in Upland versus Marsh Habitats."

1997: During Lee's second term, Hugh Beard became Program Chair, and Bill Holcombe became co-editor of The Flyer. January brought a painted bunting to Sam and Katherine Hart's backyard; another was spotted in February in the same area. Litter king Bill Davies reported that over the

last 7 years a 25 member squad spent over 500 volunteer hours picked up 159 bags of trash over a 2 mile stretch of Route 5.

Lee, a science teacher at Toano Middle School, initiated a Classroom Feeder Watch at her school. WBC gave \$200 for the project, which involved students in a scientific study sponsored by Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Lee made a visit to Cornell's Ornithology Lab, and was invited to serve on the advisory committee for next year's field test. She also traveled to Alaska to take a course. Lee said Alaska is her favorite place, and you will recognize her favorite bird on her license plate—PUFFINZ.

Brian Taber initiated a hawk watch on College Creek, where 1368 migrant raptors of 12 species were recorded. Brian also recycles for the birds, picking out the meat scraps from the kitchen scraps, and putting them on a platform for crows and other carnivorous birds.

The competitive Super Bowl III team of Tom Armour, Bill Williams, and Brian Taber placed 2nd with 120 species, surpassing last year's total of 110. The team raised \$700. They covered the Eastern shore area from the Bridge Tunnel to the Maryland line in 24 hours. Money was raised to support the activities of KESTREL and the bird observatory at Kiptopeke.

Valerie Weiss won a research grant for studies of the Brown-headed nuthatch. A second grant was awarded to Chris Gordon for studies of the Black Skimmer.

The total for the spring bird count was 158 species. Bill Holcombe quoted a verse from Ogden Nash in his results, "But I sometimes visualize in my gin, the Audubon that I audubin." The 1997 Audubon Christmas Count identified 110 species. The club celebrated its 20th year with a birthday cake, and the publication of *Birds of the Williamsburg Virginia Area, An Annotated List*, edited by Bill Sheehan. It is a wonderful compilation of bird statistics and WBC history.

1998, 1999: President, Joy Archer; VP Programs, Hugh Beard; VP Newsletter, Phil Young and Bill Holcombe; Secretary, Mary Kyle Dupuis; Treasurer, Charles Rend; Members at Large, John McDowell and Ron Giese. Joy's first message thanked the previous officers, and observed, "The club is well organized, fiscally sound, contributes to habitat preservation and ornithological research, and is structured to provide interesting experiences for its members. I hope to perpetuate this legacy." Joy was a much-loved W&M professor of physical education, retiring in 1994. She then devoted her energies to studying birds and advocating for conservation. She continued her enthusiastic support of WBC, The Virginia Coastal Wildlife Observatory, and The Center for

Conservation Biology, VSO, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and was a founding member in 1990 of the Historic Rivers Land Conservancy, which became the Williamsburg Land Conservancy. She was an inspiring leader to W&M students and faculty, as well as the entire conservation community. She left an enduring legacy to all when she died in 2002 of Lou Gehrig's disease.

Joe and Grace Doyle, long time participants in WBC's Bluebird Program, updated the chapter on bluebird developments. Joe credits "a lady named Jones (Leigh Jones), gave strong and enthusiastic leadership in an effort to bring the bluebird populations back to Williamsburg. By 1983, when she married and moved to Charlottesville, WBC was serving 200 nesting boxes and 20 trails." Joe and Grace took over the program in 1984; it was difficult to find new help to replace members who had retired, moved away, or had other interests, although the success of the program was evident. They solicited help from local businesses who sold houses. Wild Birds Unlimited came to town with great stuff. Other groups took over the bluebird houses – York River State Park employees, Colonial Williamsburg, grad student Elaine Mertus monitored at Eastern State, and Julie Hotchkiss at First Colony. Joe and Grace continued to monitor at Camp Peary, where there were now 100 boxes. In the past ten years, Camp Peary has produced 350 young birds a year. The club trails in the early 80s produced 600, new birds a year." York River State Park bluebird trail monitored by Shirley Devan and Dorothy Whitfield, has added put up 21 new boxes this spring, bringing the total there to 41 boxes. They reported bluebird activity all summer, even noting evidence that some had nested in a purple martin house. By the end of August 64 bluebirds had fledged from 41 boxes.

Hugh Beard, Lafayette High science teacher, was named Williamsburg-James City County High School Teacher of the year. How fortunate are his students, and how fortunate are any of us who have attended a field trip or a program that Hugh has led.

Caroline Lowe continued to work on conservation issues, alerting us to a Nature Conservancy Program to save habitat of migratory birds. The Spring Bird Count, under Brian Taber's leadership, counted 145 species, the average is 179. Co-editor Bill Holcombe wrote lively articles for the FLYER each month, describing a specific "bird of the month."

Karen Johnson won the research grant. She is studying White-throated sparrows. Summing up the worthy causes supported by our dues during 1998: \$500 Student Research Grant; \$125 Williamsburg Regional Library; \$100 Land

Conservancy; \$50 US Nature Conservancy; \$50 KESTREL; \$50 Toano Middle School Project.

WBC joined the Partners in Flight Program in November – a national program committed to preserving habitats throughout the Americas. Bill Holcombe reported "A Glorious Christmas Bird Count, yielding 112 species, the third highest count in WBC history." It was the 99th Audubon Christmas count and the club's 27th.

1999: Phyllis Jennings became secretary, Hugh Beard became Program Chairman, other officers continued to serve. WBC participated in the Backyard Bird Count sponsored by Cornell Lab and the National Audubon Society. It is an opportunity to become an active researcher in the efforts to protect our bird populations.

Lee Schuster hatched little Jenny Marie in February. Three months later Jenny accompanied her parents as Lee led the field trip to York River State Park., where 52 species were counted.

The bluebird team of Shirley Devan and Dorothy Whitfield were keeping careful records of the trails at YRSP. 115 birds fledged from 42 boxes. Once again Brian Taber led the spring count, which yielded 145 species. WBC has done this count for 22 years. Marc and Pam Weiring stepped up to relieve retiring litter king Bill Davies of his highway cleanup duties. Bryan Watts and Mitchell Byrd reported that the Lower James supports a large concentration of summer bald eagles. The report appeared in the VSO quarterly, *The Raven*.

WBC team of Bill Williams, Brian Taber, and Fenton Day counted 138 species and won the bronze Woodcock for another year. They raised \$700 for the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. Bill Williams was President of CVWO, Brian Taber was vice-president, and Mitchell Byrd served on the Board of Directors. 26 Birders reported 100 species in the 1999 Christmas count.