



The Flyer

Newsletter of the Williamsburg Bird Club

Vol. 32, No. 2

www.williamsburgbirdclub.org

February 2008

President's Corner

by Shirley Devan

January 2008 has been an eventful one for the bird club. At its board meeting January 10 the Board approved a "Bobwhite Habitat Restoration Project" for New Quarter Park and appropriated \$100 toward the project. The Bird Club will work with the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society and the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalist Program to enhance and promote habitat for Bobwhite Quail at the Park. The project is still in the approval and planning stages at York County Parks and Recreation. If you want to learn more about the project, join us for our 2nd Saturday Bird Walk at New Quarter Park February 9 after which members of all three organizations will meet to look at the area proposed for restoration and talk with the Park and County staff.

The Board also determined how it would evaluate and award its first Bill Williams Nature Camp Scholarship. We are proud to be offering a full \$700 scholarship—good for a two week camp—to youth in James City County, York County, and Williamsburg. Youth in grades 5 - 12 are encouraged to apply for this scholarship to "Nature Camp, a private, non-profit, residential, co-ed summer camp specializing in natural history and environmental science education in Vesuvius, VA. Since 1942 Nature Camp has sought to train a corps of interested, knowledgeable youth to conserve and protect the environment and to become wise stewards of the earth's natural resources," according to their web site.

Our selection committee members are Sara Lewis, Jeanette Navia, Mary Anne Fennell, and Chuck Rend. The deadline for submitting the application for scholarship is March 1. To learn more about the camp, visit their web site: www.naturecamp.net. To obtain an application for the Club's scholarship, visit the Bird Club's web site: www.williamsburgbirdclub.org. The completed form should be submitted along with a 300 word essay about the student's interest

in nature and a letter of recommendation from a teacher or guidance counselor. The application form includes additional details about requirements and camp expectations. Essays will be evaluated for the best age-appropriate expression of interest in nature and anticipated benefit from attending the camp. Please pass the word along to the children in your lives who would benefit from this extraordinary opportunity. If you cannot access the web site, please feel free to call me at 220-6269 and I will personally mail you an application.

February 20th Meeting —Birding Through the Eyes of the Photographer

Our February speaker is wildlife photographer Ken Conger. His program, "Birding Through the Eyes of the Photographer" will take us across the United States to his favorite birding hotspots—from Machias Island, to The Everglades, to Bosque del Apache, to Alaska and more. Ken has a lifelong interest in wildlife photography and is extraordinarily talented. He took second place in the 2007 Canon Photography in the Parks Photo Contest and exhibited his work at the Occasion for the Arts in Williamsburg. He has a B. S. in Environmental Sciences/Wildlife Management. He lives in Lanexa with his wife and son and has served 25 years as a Conservation Officer with the Va. Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

The meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. in Millington Hall, Room 117, on the campus of the College of William and Mary. Refreshments will be provided by Joanne Andrews.

It's Dues Time!

It's time to pay dues for 2008. Print out a copy of the membership form from our website at www.williamsburg-birdclub.org and return it with your check to WBC, P. O. Box 1085, Williamsburg, VA 23187.

Welcome to New Members

Kathi Mestayer, Margaret Ware, Debra Weiss, Stan and Gail Sutliff, Helen Hamilton, and Elizabeth Peterson

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January Field Trip

By Bill Williams

It must have been Teta Kain's 16 January Antarctica presentation that convinced 19 people to turn out for the cold, overcast 19 January field trip to Newport News Park. From the time the group assembled at Colony Square Shopping Center at 7:45 a.m. to about 9:00 a.m. the temperature dropped 6 degrees (to 35° F) and a light, but steady mix of rain and slushy snow began to fall. The forecast for much of the same for the rest of the day convinced the group to curtail birding after only an hour and 20 minutes of field time. Nevertheless, 34 species were recorded including Tundra and Mute Swans, 3 accommodating Gadwalls, 2 female Hooded Mergansers, a Pied-billed Grebe, and 2 very easy-to-see immature Bald Eagles. Double-crested Cormorants were actually seen with freshly caught fish. A vocal Pileated Woodpecker acted as host and greeter when we arrived at the park, and Mike and Alex Minarik made sure that a Williamsburg Bird Club field outing was not without its Red-headed Woodpeckers, at least two of which were seen through one of three spotting scopes scattered among the participants. American Robins were numerous along the park entry road as was a feeding flock of Red-winged Blackbirds. At one point early on we had a Great Blue Heron, a Great Egret, and a Belted Kingfisher in the scope simultaneously. Probably the morning's most fun bird was a very sociable Ruby-crowned Kinglet which fed vigorously in an American Holly tree within 10-15 feet of everyone.

The 19 participants (and one dog) were:

Bill Williams (Leader), Joanne Andrews, Tom Armour, Hugh Beard, Marian Bennett, Shirley Devan, Dick Kiefer, Paul Leger, Tom McCary, Alex and Mike Minarik with yellow lab, Kate, Jeanette Navia, Betty Peterson, Joe Piotrowski, Rosanne Reddin, Peter and Lorena Walsh, Margaret Ware and Eleanor Young.

February Field Trip

Bill Williams will lead the February 16 field trip to York River State Park. Everyone is to meet at the park gate at 8:00 a.m. There is a \$3.00 fee for parking.

The CBC at Oyster, Virginia

By Gary Carpenter

It was a dark and stormy day...forgive the old and worn out opening but it really was a dark and stormy day (well, at least it was gray, rainy and chilly) on Sunday the 30th of December when I participated in the Cape Charles Christmas Bird Count. Our team of 4 was headed by Craig Turner, our mentor from Smithsonian Institution birding days. Also on the team were Glen Turner and his son Colin. Our count area was Cheriton and Oyster, small communities on the Atlantic side of the Eastern Shore about five miles north of Cape Charles. Cheriton is inland a bit and Oyster, an old crabbing port, is on the coast nestled inside of salt marshes and mud flats.

Our day started at 0645, off the Oyster Harbor, as Craig and I trudged out over matted and soggy mats of dead marsh grasses and layers of decades old broken oyster shells. We set up our scopes and spent the next hour scouring the mud flats from end to end. We spotted numerous American Oystercatchers, (the count was well up from last year), lots of Red-breasted Mergansers, Buffleheads, a few Ruddy Ducks, two Greater Yellowlegs, one Willet and some Black-bellied Plovers and Ruddy Turnstones. There was one lone Bald Eagle just sitting on one of the oyster bars and staring out toward the sea. We also spotted 3 distant Great Blue Herons as they sat at the edge of the water and the salt grasses. We were fairly disappointed at the lack of species, especially shore birds and ducks. We were somewhat rewarded, however, when, on our slog back to Oyster, we spotted a group of 14 Semi-palmated Plovers close to the harbor entrance. And in the harbor was a Common Loon and two or three Double-crested Cormorants.

Around 1000 hours the rains began and remained, heavier and lighter, for the rest of the day. While, for the most part, we were outfitted well enough to stay somewhat warm and dry, it surely made bird spotting more difficult. One of our usual spotting areas is the public landfill by Cheriton. The dump is usually overwhelmed with both kinds of Vultures, Gulls in the thousands, and American Crows in the hundreds. On this damp and rainy day, however, the vultures rarely took to wing, the flights of the Gulls was desultory and even the Crows had hunkered down rather than fly. The dump has a series of small ponds and there we were able to spot Ring-necked Ducks, Pied-bill Grebes, American Black Ducks, Gadwalls, lots of Canadas and one Hooded Merganser. We had to take a close and careful look but we determined that there were also two immature Little Blue Herons on a mud bar in one of the ponds. We

trudged through wet fields to a few other ponds in our count area and spotted a number of Wood Ducks, a Great Egret, and witnessed the flyover of about three to four hundred Snow Geese. In the way of raptors, we spotted Red-Shouldered Hawks, a few Northern Harriers, a Peregrine, some Sharp-shins, one Kestrel, and, intent on his hunt, a Merlin flew within 4 feet of my legs and about two feet off the ground. I believe it is the only time I have seen a free flying falcon from the top! On one of their hikes, our partners, Glen and Colin, were fortunate enough to spot two nesting Long-eared Owls and one Great Horned Owl. Glen even pocketed about a dozen pellets from under the nest of the Long-eareds and turned them over to our count leader, Harry Armistead, for later analysis.

And so went our damp, chilly and gray day. After a quick lunch we hit some spots around the perimeter of our area and looked for birds at historically productive locations. Besides the usual suspects, some of our more interesting finds included 14 Fox Sparrows, a group of around 20 Cedar Waxwings, some Savannah Sparrows, a few Chipping Sparrows, a Brown Creeper, a White-breasted Nuthatch, and some Dark-eyed Juncos. All in all, we counted 74 species and we thought that was pretty fair, given the weather conditions. At about 1650 we lost useful light and, while we are all enthusiastic birders, on this day none of us was horribly disappointed, and an observer might even have said that we quit the field with unseemly vigor and haste.

Jolly Pond Sightings (WBC Christmas Count)

by Alice Kopinitz

We were assigned to the Jolly Pond sector for the Christmas Bird Count along with Leader, Lee Schuster, Alex Minarik and Shirley Devan.

We had just gotten into the car, heading for our first stop, when Lee spotted a "bird" in the top of a tree beside the road. Slow down, watch the traffic, turn around, find a place to stop and look. Sure enough, there was a red shouldered hawk watching from his lofty perch. Well, that was a great beginning and so we were off.

After several hours, it was break time. The stop was made at the small gas station/store on Centerville Road. Looking at birds was what you do, even if taking a break. Looking up, we noticed a large bird heading our way. It turned out to be an adult bald eagle. The bird was paralleling the road, I lost sight as he flew over the gas station roof, but he soon came into view. Then he spread his talons and swooped down into the road (there is a berm there and again my view was blocked). When he reappeared he was

holding a dead squirrel and flying off over some housing that was next to the store. Just about that time a woman came out of her door. The movement/noise or something caused the eagle to drop his prey. The poetic justice would be to say that the dead squirrel landed on the woman's head or at least her roof, but alas, it did not. We watched for awhile, hoping the eagle would return, but he did not and we had to continue the bird count.

New Quarter Park, 1/12/08

It finally happened—we had more birders than birds at the Bird Walk at New Quarter Park! We had 18 species and 23 birders. Many thanks to Tom McCary for leading the walk.

Skies were overcast and birding was a bit slow, so at 9:30 a.m. about 1/3 of our group took off for greener “birding” pastures—105 Gilley Drive—to see the Townsend's Solitaire. The Solitaire showed up very quickly and all got good looks. Also, 2 Baltimore Orioles and a Golden-crowned Kinglet put on a show for us.

This morning's group of members and visitors at the Park:

Tom McCary (Leader), Joanne Andrews, James and Julie Coates, Harry and Teresa Danforth, Shirley Devan Bob and Cynthia Long, Jeanette Navia, Molly Nealer, Betty Peterson, Joe Piotrowski, Rosanne Reddin, Chuck Rend, Peter and Lorena Walsh and visitors, Carol and Anita Downton, Carol Evans, Lori and Heather Granger, and Margaret Ware.

Holiday at San Isidro, Ecuador

By Bill Williams

The title above is how the birding trip Mitchell Byrd, Walt Childs from Nelly's Ford near Waynesboro, and I participated in is billed by Field Guides, the tour company with whom we traveled 28 December 2007–9 January 2008. During those wonderfully birdy days we crossed a continental divide, saw birds in two hemispheres, in two calendar years on both the east and west sides of the Andes, and ate the most incredible food anywhere.

The birding began in Ecuador's ancient capital city, Quito, on 29 December with a 5:30 a.m. breakfast at the Four Points Sheraton, where we were joined by 3 couples, one each from Canada, Massachusetts, and Texas, and our guide Mitch Lysinger. Mitch is truly legendary for his field skills, and, as we were to discover, he compliments those with ebullient enthusiasm, an ever-present wit, and a treasure trove of patience.

Within minutes of loading the van we saw Great Thrushes, Rufous-collared Sparrows, Eared Doves, and yes, what city

would be without them,...Rock Pigeons!! Soon we were out of Quito proper entering a quiet dirt street where we hoped to find Scrub Tanager, which quickly materialized with a taped playing of its call. From that point on the birds kept coming as we headed east out of Quito suburbs towards the high Andes-Black-tailed Trainbearer, Sparkling Violet-ear, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, White-chinned Thistle-tail, Tufted Tit-tyrant, Blue-and-white Swallow.

Our destination was Papallacta Pass, where at nearly 14,000 feet we hoped to encounter species unique to the Andes high elevation grassland/shrub ecosystem known as paramo. Within a matter of a few minutes, however, partly cloudy warm skies became shrouded in fog, heavy mist and wind, conditions we were to experience frequently throughout the remainder of the trip. One thinks of Ecuador as warm, sunny and humid, and in most places it is. But at high elevations a lingering rainy season found us dressed in fleece and rain gear layers daily.

But the birds are still there—Bar-winged and Stout-billed Cinclodes, Many-striped Canastero, Tawny Antpitta, Silvery Grebe, Andean Gull, Andean Lapwing, Giant Cone-bill, a species adapted to life in Polylepis, the highest elevation trees in the world, and even a Great Horned Owl!!

Our first night was spent at Guango Lodge, owned by Mitch and his multi-dimensional, gourmet cook, wife Carmen. Outside, despite a persistent chilly drizzle, the hummingbird feeders were a near-traffic jam of more than a dozen dizzying species such as Collared Inca, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Tyrian Metaltail, Blue-mantled Thornbill, and the more-than-amazing Sword-billed Hummingbird. You can look at pictures of this bird and never really appreciate its bill-length to body proportion differential. Also on the lodge grounds were Masked Flowerpiercers, Black-capped and Black-eared Hemispingus, a Gray-breasted Mountain Toucan, Cinnamon Flycatcher, Smoke-colored Pewee, and a number of our North American friends, Blackburnian Warblers!

The next day we drove to San Isidro Lodge, also owned by Mitch and Carmen, where we would stay through 5 January. Among the specialty birds there is an owl species that no one can definitively say what it is, although DNA analysis may soon resolve the dilemma. For the sake of taxonomy it is listed as “Black-and-White” (Owl) type. Most everyone simply calls it the “San Isidro” Owl. The size of our Barred Owl, they make a formidable presence in the shadows, where at least a couple of them may be seen nightly, sitting just beyond the pathway lights searching for large insects and other nocturnal critters.

Mornings at San Isidro find the pathway borders bustling with Turquoise and Inca (Green) Jays, Montane Woodcreepers, a pair of Masked Trogons, Russet-backed Oropendolas, and Subtropical Caciques all trying to gobble up the collection of moths which found the night lighting irresistible. Days in the field were kaleidoscopes of stunning Mountain-tanagers, Bush-tanagers, flowerpiercers, and hummingbirds. Mitch worked them all with superb understanding of their calls, how the birds behaved, where we would have to peer (and we did hours of that) to get the best views, and what to look for to clinch the sighting. It's hard for us in here at home to grasp what it is like to look for extremely skulky tapacouls and very shy antpittas in limited light among dense moss covered cloud forest tangled.

Mitchell, Walt and I spent an additional 3 days on the west slopes of the Andes birding such world recognized places as Yanacocha, the Nono-Mindo Road, Tony and Barbara Nunnery's home, and Bellavista Lodge. Target species were accomplished with our new guide, Gallo Real. Rain and heavy mist dampened field activity every day, more so than what we had experienced on the east slopes of the Andes. Nevertheless, we did see such terrific species as Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Toucan Barbet, and the truly unique Tanager-Finch. Additional hummingbird species included Empress Brilliant, Racket-tailed Puffleg (you have to see it to believe it!), Purple-bibbed White-tip, and Velvet-purple Coronet. We spent a morning at the cloud forest home of Angel Paz, where he and his brother Rodrigo entertain birders with their ability to lure into view up to four species of highly secretive antpittas by calling to them and tossing them morsels of cut worms. Of the four we only saw "Maria", a Giant Antpitta, and "Shaquera", and Ocre-breasted Antpitta. The latter is named after a female Latin American singer whose body movements carry the rhythm of her songs. As the tiny antpitta sits in the shadows, she too moves her small frame!! Just amazing!

With all results in the total species list of birds seen was just a little over 300. This was Mitchell's 6th birding trip to Ecuador and a first for Walt and me. Space here does not allow us to recount every highlight nor could we. Suffice it to say we had great company, comfortable accommodations, a culinary extravaganza, and marvelous birding with more than enough incentive to return.

Hampton Roads Bird Club Meeting February 14

Peggy Spiegel Opengari has traveled all over the world, and will speak to the HRBC on February 14, 2008 about her trip to Borneo last summer. She is very active in Virginia

Society of Ornithology (VSO), leading field trips and presenting programs on hummingbirds, Costa Rica, Antarctica, Madagascar, and South Africa. Peggy has retired from the birding store business, so she is happy to travel and add countless birds to her list of already many. She lives in Pearisburg, Va. with her husband Bill.

Her exciting trip to Borneo, the beautiful bird photos, and stories of other "jungle creatures" she encountered will help to enlarge your world of birds, making all of us wish we were world travelers. HRBC extends an invitation to come out and enjoy the evening.

The meeting will be in the Conference Room of the Sandy Bottom Nature Center at Sandy Bottom Nature Park, 1255 Big Bethel Road, Hampton at 7 pm.

***Bird Tracks & Sign—A Guide to North American Species*, by Mark Elbroch with Eleanor Marks**

This is one of the ten books that were given by the Williamsburg Bird Club to the Williamsburg Regional Library in 2007. This 456-page illustrated guide is the first of its kind for North American birds. It helps to identify bird families or individual species by the unique sign they leave behind. It does this by showing their tracks and trails, pellets, droppings, signs of feeding, nest and roosts, feathers and skulls. I know each of us has found or been brought feathers and have wondered what bird they might be from—this is the book that could help you to make an identification. I highly recommend that you check this book out of the library and give it a good look through—there is a good possibility that you will decide to add it to your personal library.

Third Annual New Year's Day Boardwalk Bird Show By Shirley Devan

Twenty-four hardy participants came out between 1 and 4 PM and stayed for various lengths of time at the boardwalk over the beaver pond at Greensprings Nature Trail on January 1st. There were a total of 26 species of birds seen. This is always a fun way to start your new year list.

The hardy participants who came and stayed even for just a few minutes were:

Kari & Justin Abbott, Cherie Aukland, Christina Clark, Steve & Shirley Devan, Ron & Bobbi Giese, Alice and Seig Kopinitz, Bob & Cynthia Long, Tom McCary, Kathi Mestayer, Alex Minarik, Beth Morgan & Rich Scherer, Jeanette Navia, Joe Piotrowski, Susan, Mike, and Alex Powell, Rosanne Reddin and Dorothy Whitfield.

January Bird Sightings

Report your backyard birds and local sightings to Fred Blystone at 229-4346 or fmb19481@verizon.net. If you encounter interesting birds on your vacation/travels, please share!

Dec 29: Tom Armour reports “this AM at the pond at the Vineyards: 85 Ring-necked Ducks, 2 Hooded Mergansers, 1 Pied-billed Grebe, 1 Red-shouldered Hawk”

Dec 30: Grace & Joe Doyle report a Bald Eagle landed on a tree in their yard and began feeding on something.

Dec 31: The Doyles report that two adult Bald Eagles plus an immature fly up and down the pond behind their house. They also had about 40 Double-crested Cormorants, about 12 Hooded Mergansers and a Brown Pelican fly over the pond.

Jan 1: Tom Armour reports “at the Vineyards I had a Tree Swallow overhead and watched a Cooper’s Hawk capture a Cowbird. Only 1 Ring-necked Duck on the pond, large flock of American Robins (100+) and there were 9 Killdeer at the Airport.

Jan 1: While Joe & Grace Doyle were eating breakfast, they saw a Bald Eagle walking around the edge of the pond and sitting on the green (golf course). The Eagle would fly up to a tree and then back down to the edge of the pond. Also, a Red-tailed Hawk zipped through. Great way to start the New Year!

Jan 2: Bart and Chandi Singer (in Woodland Farms) sighted about 5 Cedar Waxwings at one of their bird baths. Perhaps these are part of the flock sighted by the Gieses in December. They also spotted a male Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

Jan 3: Chuck Litterst writes “I just had a small flock of at least 19 Eastern Meadowlarks in my backyard. May have been more but I couldn’t see over a small rise. I’ve never had more than 3-4 at a time before. Nice bright birds and one of my favorites, but I’ve never seen them mid-winter until I moved here.” The same day Tom Armour had 50+ D.C. Cormorants on Lake Powell.

Jan 6: The Doyles bird Camp Peary on a windy day. End up with 32 species.

Jan 9: Alex Minarik reports that she and Kate walked the loop trail at Little Creek Reservoir Park and saw a nice mixed flock of Carolina Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets and a Brown Creeper. Also saw some Cedar Waxwings, Dark-eyed Juncos, Ring-necked Ducks, Mallards, Hooded Merganser, Canada Geese and one Gadwall.

Jan 13: On a rainy day, Joe & Grace Doyle find 39 species on Camp Peary. Best bird of the day was a Fox Sparrow.

Jan 15: Lee Schuster reports she spotted 1 pine siskin at feeder and feeding next to them were her two red breasted nuthatches that have been there since November. She keeps hoping for the purple finches to show up.

Jan 20: Tom Armour reports a large raft (100+) of Red-breasted Mergansers feeding on the James River just up stream from the Hawk Watch site.

Jan 22: Mary Anne Fennell emails that she had a purple finch at her bird waterer.

Jan 24: Bill Williams sees the Eurasian Wigeon at Ridgway Park—Shirley Devan and Fred Blystone were looking the other way as it flies by.

Jan 25: Joe Piotrowski photographs the Eurasian Wigeon mentioned above. The same day at Little Creek Reservoir, Tom Armour reports 15 Ring-necked Ducks and a Northern Harrier, and at Disacund Reservoir 50+ American Coot, 100+ Red-breasted Mergansers, and 200+ Double-crested Cormorants and also probably over 1000 Canada Geese.

Jan 27: On their last Camp Peary birding trip for the month, the Doyles find 37 species, the highlights being a 100 Ring-necked Ducks and 150 Tundra Swans.

Jan 28: Linda Cole reports a pileated woodpecker in her neighborhood of The Villages at Westminster. The same day Lois Leeth reports that she enjoyed her regular visitors—Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse, Chickadee, Juncos, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrows, Chipping Sparrow, 5 Crows, Blue Jays, Brown Thrasher and a Mockingbird. She put bird food on the ground near the shrubs for a fast exit in case of danger—and in the afternoon a Sharp-shinned Hawk appeared and investigated the area and even climbed into the shrubs to continue hunting—not too successful, he evidently went away, since most of the birds reappeared later in the P.M.

Jan 28: Ruth Beck reports she had Fox Sparrows, Pine Siskin and 3 Red-breasted Nuthatches at her feeders. Also had Yellow-rumped Warblers and a Pine Warbler at the suet.

Jan 28: Alex Minarik made a run by Ridgway Park after getting off work and saw the Eurasian Widgeon.

Joe Doyle told Shirley Devan that over the last 15–18 years, Ring-necked Ducks have been among the first ducks to arrive and the last to leave the pond behind their house in Kingsmill. Every year for 15 years, one of the ducks would come up to the yard and Joe would feed it. Got so that when Joe would go out the door and whistle, the ducks would come up from the pond to their pond. After

an absence of a couple years in which the pond drained, the Ring-necked Ducks are back and they still come up to Joe's backyard looking for a handout. The good news is that the pond is coming back to life and the bird life around the pond is improving.

VSO Winter Field Trip

The Virginia Society of Ornithology's winter field trip to North Carolina's Outer Bank will be held February 15–17. The Clarion Inn at Nags Head Beach will be the trip headquarters. Ocean front rooms are available on a first come, first served basis. On Friday night an evening orientation and slide program will be presented. Saturday birders will visit the impoundments of Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge and the beaches of Cape Hatteras National Seashore. Saturday evening there will be a tally at 6:00 PM in the VSO conference room at the hotel. Sunday there will be no organized trips unless there are some unusual species to chase.

You need to be prepared for variable weather, lots of birds and a good time. If you have any questions, contact Bill Akers at 540 951-7692 or at BillAkers@adelphia.net or Peggy Opengari at gambypemtel.net.

VSO Annual Meeting

The Virginia Society of Ornithology's 2008 Annual Meeting will be held 16–18 May and headquartered at the Mountain Lake Hotel in Giles County. Banquet speaker, Ian Sinclair, will provide a view from the Eastern Hemisphere with his presentation "The Lighter Side of Birding Darkest Africa".

Registration for field trips will be in advance. To make certain that everyone has an equal opportunity to sign up for the trips of their choice, the trips and descriptions are posted at www.mountainlakebirding.com.

Those wishing to receive information by mail may call Peggy Opengari at 540-921-4340.

Sunday at Little Creek Reservoir **by Adrienne Frank & Gary Driscole**

We had a great walk even though we got a late start. It was about 10 am, it was overcast, and no one was out except for us. We walked past the bathrooms onto the peninsula and we saw: a flock of cedar waxwings, a couple of golden-crowned kinglets, titmouse, chickadees, a hermit thrush, towhee, and downy woodpecker. Out on the water, we saw several small groups of ring-neck ducks, Canadian geese, mallards, and a great blue heron.

We decided to walk down the road because the main part of the park is still closed. Along the road, we saw white-throated, house, and song sparrows; mourning doves, blue jays, cardinals, crows, and red-wing blackbirds; red-bellied, flicker, and pileated woodpeckers.

We were reluctant to go over the guard rail, but did anyway. We were so glad that we did because we saw two cormorants, a common loon, and a common merganser pair. In the trees, we saw lots of juncos, a hairy woodpecker, Carolina wren, and a phoebe. Looking down into the grass along the water we saw a swamp sparrow. We saw two adult bald eagles, a small flock of herring gulls, and turkey vultures flying over the water.

As we were driving out of the park, we saw a northern harrier flying low over the field and a kestrel sitting on a line along Old Forge Road.

Pretty good for a Sunday walk in the park.

HRBC Newport News Park Walk—January 7 **by Fred Blystone**

Eleanor Young and I joined leader Jane Frigo and 4 other members of the Hampton Roads Bird Club for a walk that was very productive. By the end of the morning a total of 58 species had been seen. We saw seven species of woodpeckers and all three nuthatches, plus a Brown Creeper. Duck species and numbers were down from what you would normally expect to see in the park at this time of year. Walks are conducted the 1st and 3rd Sundays year round in the park by the HRBC.

HRBC Field Trip to Greensprings Trail

The Hampton Roads Bird Club's February field trip on the 23rd will cover the Greensprings Nature Trail behind Jamestown High School. Meet at 8:00 AM by the tennis courts behind the school. This will be a walking trip lasting until noon. Call trip leader Jane Frigo at 872-0721 to let her know you're coming.

College Creek Hawk Watch

Starting on February 9, the Hawk Watch at College Creek on the Colonial Parkway resumes for the season (which normally runs till the end of May). There is usually someone there every day (weather permitting) from around ten until noon or later. For more information, please contact Brian Taber via email at taberzz@aol.com.

Townsend's Solitaire

On January 1st, Kathi Mestayer called Shirley Devan and told her that she thought she had a Townsend's Solitaire in her yard. If you wonder how big a deal that is you must realize that the *first* documented bird of this species in Virginia was recorded November 19, 2007 at Harvey's Knob Hawkwatch on the Blue Ridge Parkway. That bird was found and photographed by Matt Hafner of Blacksburg, who observed the perched bird for about 3 minutes before it flew south. News of this find was quickly shared and others joined in the search to find it again, which was not to be, however.



Photo by Mike Powell

Shirley went to Kathi's house and saw the bird she had reported. She then returned with Alex Minarik on the 2nd, when Kathi called her to say it was still in the yard—at the bird bath. Shortly after they arrived they were joined by Susan and Mike Powell and then by Brian Taber. It was confirmed that the bird was indeed a Townsend's Solitaire.

Shirley posted the sighting on va-bird@listserv.com and then the race was on. People have been coming from all over the state. For many it was a new life bird; for all it was a new state bird. There have been many, many postings on

the listserv thanking Shirley for the posting and thanking Kathi and Mac Mestayer for their kind hospitality.

Bird was still being seen as of January 29th.

Hanging Out at One-Oh-Five Gilley Drive: Tale of the Townsend's Solitaire in Williamsburg

Shirley Devan compiled all of the emails that were posted to va-bird@listserv.com. It makes for a interesting read—the people who made the trip to Williamsburg from near and far, their comments about the variety of birds in the yard, the ease at seeing a very rare bird (for Virginia), the antics of the Townsend's as it tried to defend its food source and the kind hospitality of Kathi and Mac Mestayer.

One of the last item that Shirley lists is dated January 30 and it reads: Kathi Mestayer reports "I got an email from an old friend in Alaska, who reports that Townsend's Solitaires are wintering in her town this year, which is also highly unusual and causing a stir among the birders. Small world."

On January 31: Kathi Mestayer reports "One point for my neighbor Kathy Swan, who says that based on her informal sampling of the birder cars coming around the corner, the Subaru Wagon is the preferred vehicle."

The listings that Shirley sent me run for 11 pages, so it is much too long to put in *The Flyer*, but if you are interesting in reading it (and I recommend you do), I am sure she would be happy to email you a copy.

The Great Backyard Bird Count From the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Website

The GBBC is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Last year there were 324 checklists (tops in Va. and seventh in the nation) turned in from the Williamsburg area. The species total of 108 was only topped in Virginia by the 131 reported in Virginia Beach. For the state last year, there were a total of 3,913 checklists turned in and 175 species reported.

This year's count will be held during "Presidents' Day" weekend, February 15–18. Participants count birds anywhere for as little or as long as they wish during the four-day period. They tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time. To report their counts, they fill out an online checklist at the Great Backyard Bird Count web site.

In 2007, participants reported a record-breaking 11 million birds of 616 species. They submitted more than 80,000 checklists, an all-time record for the ten years of the count. For more information go to www.birds.cornell.edu and click on The Great Backyard Bird Count link.

In Search of the Pacific Loon & More Common Species

by Shirley Devan

Bill Williams, Alex Minark, Fred Blystone & I visited Palmer Point on Kerr Lake in Mecklenburg County on January 30 to look for the Pacific Loon. (I grew up in that area and we called it Buggs Island Lake.)

We arrived about 8:45 am after driving for about two and a half hours. The wind was blowing steadily about 25-30 miles an hour and we could hardly stand upright. The wind in our faces and the white caps on the lake made it almost impossible to identify anything that wasn't close. We were hanging onto our tripods and scopes to keep them from blowing over! After about an hour of freezing futility, we got in the car and drove around the area and warmed up.

We decided to try again and arrived back at Palmer Point about 10:30. Still very windy but the white caps on the lake were much reduced so searching for the loon was somewhat easier if not warmer.

At 11:15 am Bill spotted the bird exactly where everyone else has seen it—directly off the point. We all got our scopes on it—compared it to the pictures in my National Geographic book of birds and grinned all around. Alex and I took our scopes down to the water's edge to get the best possible look. After all, we had traveled all this way and we weren't going to get any colder. We enjoyed great looks at the Pacific Loon as it was preening. The light was shining directly on the bird. We saw the white neck and chin straps. The bird is very dark and the head is small.

So we rushed back to the warm car and headed to lunch. Other birds observed at Palmer Point on both visits this morning: Lesser Scaup, Surf Scoters, Bufflehead, Red-throated Loon, Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Bald Eagle.

On our way home we decided to head to Dutch Gap. Lots of good birds between 3:30 and 4:30—33 species in good light. Much less windy than Palmer Point.

Good looks at lots of waterfowl+others: Wood Ducks, Wilson's Snipe (close up!), Blue-winged Teal, Palm Warbler, Savannah Sparrow.

Returned to Williamsburg at 6 pm—12 hours after a 6 am start. Whew! Great birds, great road trip.



Photo of Wilson's Snipe taken by Shirley Devan at Dutch Gap on January 30.

Birding at New Quarter Park —January 26

by Shirley Devan

15 birders, 26 degrees, 36 birds!!

So glad to see so many hardy folks at New Quarter Park Saturday morning for the regular 4th Saturday Bird Walk. Bill Williams, our leader, and the group tallied 36 species.

The 15 participants were:

Bill Williams (Leader), Marian Bennett, Lee Bristow, Shirley Devan, Carol Downton, Anita Downton, Debra Foster, Sara Lewis, Bob Long, Dave Monahan, Jeanette Navia, Molly Nealer, Betty Peterson, Joe Piotrowski, Margaret Ware

Our next bird walk at New Quarter Park is Saturday, February 9, at 8:00 a.m. Susan Powell will be the leader. Bring your friends and neighbors. If they don't have binoculars, not to worry. The park has several pairs to loan out!

CALENDAR

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|------------------------|---|
| Saturday, February 9 | WBC Bird Walk, NQP, 8 am. Susan Powell, Leader |
| Saturday, February 9 | College Creek Hawk Watch starts new season (see page 7) |
| Thursday, February 14 | HRBC monthly meeting (see page 5 for more information) |
| February 15-17 | VSO Outer Bank Field Trip (check VSO website: www.virginiabirds.net ; also see page 7 for information) |
| February 15-18 | Great Backyard Bird Count (see page 8) |
| Saturday, February 16 | WBC Field Trip, York River State Park, Bill Williams, Leader (see front page for more information) |
| Saturday, February 16 | Owl Prowl at NQP, February 16, 2008. 7 - 9 pm. Bill Williams, Leader |
| Sunday, February 17 | HRBC Bird Walk, Newport News Park, 7 am |
| Wednesday, February 20 | WBC monthly meeting, Ken Conger, Speaker (See front page for more information) |
| Saturday, February 23 | WBC Bird Walk, NQP, 7 am. Bill Williams, Leader |
| Saturday, February 23 | HRBC Field Trip, Greensprings Nature Trail (see page 7) |
| Sunday, May 4 | WBC Spring Bird Count (more information to follow) |
| May 16-18 | VSO Annual Meeting (See Page 7 for information) |



Williamsburg Bird Club
P.O. Box 1085
Williamsburg, VA 23187

February 20th Meeting
Birding Through the Eyes of the Photographer