

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

NOVEMBER 1980

Howdy out there to all you trick or treat and turkey lovers. In case your leaf cluttered lawns haven't told you yet . . . "Fall has fell" as a portion of an old saying goes. This in no way depletes the bird club activities, however, on the contrary, it seems to urge us on. With that, everyone is urged to attend this month's meeting at 7:30 p.m. November 19 in Room 117 of Millington Hall at William and Mary. Our guest speaker for the evening will be Dot Silsby of Newport News who will speak to us on birding Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. Even as she will be speaking waterfowl of all kinds will be descending on both areas for their winter visitation. Plan to attend to learn about the wide variety of birds and the excellent outdoor experiences these easily accessible areas may provide.

Our field trip for this month will be to Newport News City Park off Route 143. As is our custom we will depart from the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center south parking lot at 7:00 a.m. on November 22. The park is only 10 - 15 minutes away and folks may want to join the party for only an hour or so. Please do. We should expect to have numerous waterfowl including wigeon, swans, coots, ring-necked ducks, wood ducks and green-winged teal on hand. Plenty of bluebirds stay in the area and many woodland species should be available as well as all manners of kudos and accolades are to be rained on Fred Blystone, Jewel Thomas and Alice Springe for the absolutely excellent handling of our Bird Seed Savings Day. The ordering and pick up were a masterpiece of organization. The only hitch came with the seed being delivered later on the appointed drop-off day than scheduled. This in fact turned out to be a blessing. Had the shipment arrived on time, two to four people would have had to unload the 13,000 pounds of bird snacks. In fact, the late arrival provided time for the word to spread and a dozen or more strong backs and weak . . . were on hand to off-load the cargo in about thirty minutes! A very special thanks from the club also goes to Paul Springe who delivered many order forms and money while mom was away, and to Mr. Trevillian who not only allowed us his premises in Colony Square Shopping Center to store and dispense the seed, but also helped with unloading the truck!

Although the bluebird nesting season is quite past us (or quite a bit in front of us, depending on one's perspective) Jewel Thomas is hard at work trying to make life easier for them locally. She's presently working out plans with Kingsmill for a Bluebird Trail there and hopes to expand on the reasonably successful one we have at the Williamsburg Country Club. The latter produced eight young over the summer. A modest beginning true, but a beginning nevertheless.

Sam Hart and his purple martin team now have the unenviable task of cleaning (let's say winterizing) the martin motels. Both groups, Martin and Bluebird, can always use spare time and willing hands. If you have either or both let someone know!

A distressing call was received some days ago concerning a product called Tangle-foot. This product is sold as a deterrent to ants and bugs at and around tree trunks. Some merchants have billed it as a squirrel proofing for bird feeder poles. While it may achieve that end it is also a bird proofing. Some of the substance placed on a feeder pole at Kingsmill so fouled a chickadee that its beak became sealed shut and its feathers totally matted. All efforts to clean the poor bird were of no avail. The kind folks who tried to save him finally had to leave him to the elements to go Nature's Way. Please be alert to the bird problems

Tangle-foot may provoke, and alert others who may use it.

A few gleanings from the Virginia Society of Ornithology Newsletter and recent Board of Directors meeting are in order. The annual late fall Back Bay NWR trip will be held December 6 and 7. The field activities include a Back Bay walk on Saturday morning followed by a caravan to Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. Sunday, a birding jaunt to Craney Island is planned. Further details can be gotten from Bill Williams or Ruth Beck. Last year this trip produced Virginia's third sand hill crane sighting, many gannets, six snow buntings, a western kingbird and thousands of waterfowl of every kind.

Enclosed is an annual Thanksgiving Window Watch Bird Count form. This easy method of participating in bird study is in its fifteenth year, and continues to grow in popularity. Give it a try!

The VSO annual meeting of May 1980 had a seventeen hundred dollar plus profit. This money was turned over to the Society's J. J. Murray Scholarship Fund bringing it close to \$3,200. The first award is scheduled to be given in the spring of 1982.

An update of the Annotated Checklist (Red Book) is to be published via the VSO newsletter in January 1981.

The annual VSO winter field trip to the Outer Banks will be held in late February. Further details are forthcoming, and will be recounted in this newsletter.

The 1981 annual meeting of the VSO is going to be held at Mountain Lake near Blacksburg May 29 - 31. Costs are estimated at \$55 per person for the whole weekend including meals and lodging.

BIRD BUSINESS

For the first time since the 1950's the east has seen peregrine falcons fledge their own young. Two pairs fledged young in the salt marshes of New Jersey this summer, and pairs have been found nesting or courting in Baltimore and Washington DC. Let's all keep our fingers crossed for the peregrine's recovery.

Fall hawk watching at Kiptopeke in September and October had its ups and downs. The total count for 72 plus hours of observation was 4,800 birds. The peak count occurred on October 5 when 2,200 individuals were recorded. On October 11 sixteen peregrine falcons and 68 merlins were seen. Bald eagles were recorded on several count days. Our club was well represented as counters and pointer-outers. The help and companionship was priceless and warmly appreciated.

Last month's field trip to Cheatham Annex produced some marvelous views of three wild turkeys. Many of the observers I suspect were really seeing the truth in a mirror, but it's good to know these birds can be found in such a secure place locally. Also seen was an early wigeon and a bay-breasted warbler.

On October 11 a trio of Northern Virginia birders joined Bill Sheehan at Cheatham to get a view of the beautiful pheasants there. They found the pheasants all right and also came up with a great find or two. First they spotted a rare (for this area) American bittern and secondly picked up, dead-in-the-road,

a rare anywhere yellow rail. This elusive little marsh resident is one of the most highly sought after species in North America. How it died or what it was doing on Cheatham is only guesswork. I think it was Sheehan's new binoculars again!

The yellow rail find must have really fired up Tom Armour. In the garden plots at Kingsmill he's been turning up great finds. White-crowned sparrows, a rarity for this area, took up residence there by mid-October and have been in the area off and on ever since. But the best bird was a beautiful little ground dove. These tiny little doves reside in Florida normally and are uncommon to rare north of there, especially inland. It's not much bigger than a bluebird and has bright, rufous primary wing feathers. Quite a few folks got to see the little tourist during its one day visit October 21. The garden plots have produced one vesper sparrow, a grasshopper sparrow and a northern oriole since then, as well as several palm warblers.

October 12 found Alice Springe showing her husband, Dick, that birding really isn't all that hard and is totally unpredictable. Dick was chauffeur for a day of Kiptopeke hawk watching. He saw a few hawks and a couple of bald eagles to start the day off and before the winds made the raptors stop flying. A rare bird alert to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel island showed Dick what the wild goose chase really is. We found some of Virginia's very rarest birds huddled in the grass strips on the islands. These included Bachman's sparrow, Henslow's sparrow (both quite rare), clay-colored sparrow and a common eider. In just a half a day of being in the field Dick had seen some of the state's most prized birds leading him to muse, "So, what's the big deal. This is easy!" Hah! Also seen on the tunnels that day, but not by our party were an anhinga and an orange-crowned warbler.

The tunnel islands still weren't through. At least one possibly two lesser black-backed gulls are seen there regularly, and up to six great cormorants have been residing in the area since mid-October. A Le Conte's sparrow was seen on the second island late in the month.

The bird seed has arrived just in time. A strong flight of pine siskins has been underway since late October. Many of these erratic finches are here now along with purple and house finches and a very few evening grosbeaks. Thistle and sunflower feeders look out! Can we hope for redpolls?

It's not too early to try to lure orioles to your yard either. Citrus fruits and jello seem to attract them best. Once you get them to come in regularly they are a breath of joy to watch.

Susan Sturm made a successful trip out west several weeks ago. She was able to see her first golden eagles and Bohemian waxwings before returning home to give a great program last month on extinct species of birds.

Dick Hines has had a screech owl and a barred owl serenading each other off Olde Towne Road recently. He's also recorded ospreys, marsh hawks, and up to four bald eagles along the tributaries of the Chickahominy River.

The next time you pass by the James York Shopping Center early in the morning or late in the afternoon check out the water tower there. Black and turkey vultures roost on the tower railings. Exactly why they assemble there is not known. They apparently do not spend the night on the tower, but can be seen heading for

the woods at sunset probably seeking tree roosts.

Birding can be hazardous to your health as has often been shown. While scouting through the garden plots at Kingsmill recently, Tom Armour came face-to-business-end with one of those black and white fumigators. Fortunately, the skunk realized Tom was only bird watching and spared him. Several days later a red fox was roused from the same place just before John Willis saw a rare bird called the multi-dimpled links lander (golf ball, colloquially speaking) sailed by.

Don't forget the Christmas Bird Counts. Newport News will hold its count December 20 (Saturday) and the Williamsburg Count will be Sunday, December 21. Please plan to assist, even if its feeder watching for a while.

ASK OWL

Hey! Chump! Who are those dudes that got all those sparrows named after them. Must be a "seedy" bunch!

Le Conte's Sparrow was named for John Le Conte a physician turned physicist, educator, college president and natural historian.

Henslow's Sparrow was named after John Stevens Henslow an English botanist and teacher. He is most remembered as Darwin's teacher who recommended him for the trip on the "Beagle".

Bachman's Sparrow was named for John Bachman, a close friend and co-worker of Audubon's. Bachman's sister-in-law did many of the detailed plant and insect drawings in Audubon's bird paintings. Two of Audubon's sons married two of Bachman's daughters. Bachman's warbler is also named for this clergyman.

Fred Blystone reports he still has a few bags of bird seed unclaimed from our recent sale. If you would be interested in buying some let him know at 229-4346.