

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

APRIL 1980

BUSINESS

Hot dog, SPRING HAS SPRUNG! After a seemingly endless winter everything's coming up roses and more. Can you believe it? Well, Mr. Mike Connly can. If you'll make it to our Wednesday, April 16 meeting at 7:30 PM Mike will share his ideas on stalking wildlife with everyone. The timing for this program is super. The peak of breeding activity for most animals, especially birds is already upon us, and with Mike's expert advice you may find yourself privy to some of our native fauna's most interesting days. Don't fail to attend this interesting and unique program.

Now it's entirely possible that should you make it to this month's meeting you could easily put some of your new found skills to work on our next field trip. We're scheduled to head for Craney Island over in Portsmouth on April 19. This dredge disposal area for Hampton Roads Harbor has been in the forefront of Virginia's birding places for years. Literally, you never know what species may turn up there. Birds that should be expected include horned larks, avocets, numerous other shorebirds, most of the gulls and terns, clapper rails, common gallinules, least bitterns and all of the herons. Other April - May specialties include little gull, black-headed gull, glaucous gull, phalaropes (northern and Wilson's) white pelican. This trip is a must for variety and experience. There will be species available that seldom appear anywhere else. Why, one field trip we lead there produced a grey fox!

Remember, we will depart from the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center at 7:00 AM. Plan on bringing a lunch and the possibility of cool temperatures since we will be on the water's edge of Hampton Roads.

Two of our most important committees are about to enter their busiest time of the year. Sam Hart's Purple Martin Committee has already been busy cleaning out martin houses and is now anticipating the major influx of this endearing species. Some of the males have been with us since mid-March and have taken up station on a lot of our local martin apartment complexes.

Paula Pence and Jewel Thomas are co-chairpersons of our Bluebird Committee. We have houses set up at the Williamsburg Country Club and are looking not only for more houses, but also locations to put them. Cheatham Annex has 40 houses which are all set to accommodate the 1980 breeding season. Please let the chairpersons know of anytime you may have to help them with their important jobs. After all these are club committees and are designed to benefit not only the birds, but the residents of our area.

Dr. Mitchell Byrd and our President, Ruth Beck, spent March 19 - 23 in Corpus Christi, Texas at the combined Wilson and Cooper Ornithological Societies' meeting. Ruth presented a paper on her and Mitchell's work with the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. They were treated to a field trip to Aransas Wildlife Refuge where they saw 26 whooping cranes! At Tivoli, Texas their group was able to observe the endangered Attwater's Prairie Chicken on their leks or booming grounds. Far out!

Again this spring and summer Ruth will have her nets set up at the William and Mary Population Ecology Lab. She can always use help with her work as there is more to banding than just taking birds out of the mist net. The nets must be opened early and then closed at the end of the major morning flight. Records must be kept and birds must be quickly removed from their capture. All of this is really a more-than-one-person job. Additionally, it is exciting, educational, and absolutely fascinating. Lend Ruth a hand, on a regular basis if possible. You will find the effort most rewarding.

Oh yeah, you remember that weekend (March 22 - 23) that Ruth spent in Texas. You know the weekend the "hurricane" did everything but blow your face off. Well, our intrepid Tom Armour lead the monthly field trip on Saturday. Three wind lovers attended. Deciding to forego Waller Mill Park trip Tom guided the party to his great-horned owl nest at Kingsmill. Aside from that saving highlight little else was seen - I wonder why?

BIRDS

As promised last month the bird scene has and will continue to change rapidly over the next month or more. Ospreys were our first notable arrival on March 6 (Kingsmill) and 7 (Cheatham) followed soon there-after by three swallows (March 11 - Queens Lake). On March 20 Walt Fuerer, the Ranger at Cheatham, observed a flock of one tom and eighteen hen turkeys. As a matter of fact he was able to see these birds over the course of several days! On March 16 an absolutely incredible flight of geese and swans was observed over Queen's Lake. Two flocks of whistlers totalling close to 380 birds passed by on a dead line course northwest. These were joined by 54 Canada geese. Fox sparrows were last recorded by Dick Hines on Sunday, March 23 and Leigh Jones, Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan recorded a red-throated loon in late March off the Colonial Parkway near College Creek. Also in late March phoebes were reported by Bill Snyder on Powhatan Creek.

Further, notable arrivals include Louisiana waterthrush (March 28). Bill Sheehan had three black-throated green warblers at his home on April 4. John Willis found a spotted sandpiper and lesser yellowlegs near his home in Williamsburg on April 5. Also on April 5 palm warblers and black and white warblers were presented at Queen's Lake along with 2 green herons. Blue-grey gnatcatchers arrived the last days of March as did laughing gulls along the York River near Croaker.

Many of our winter finches are still with us. As of the end of the first week of this month evening grosbeaks, purple finches, house finches and numerous goldfinches could be found at area feeders. Juncos, brown creepers and winter wrens have been singing locally just after daybreak and ring-necked and scaup ducks are available on several ponds and creeks along with greater yellowlegs. The Chickahominy River is still sporting adult and immature bald eagles, as well as numerous blue-winged and green-winged teal.

With all of this movement you'd wonder what's next. Still to come are our vireos thrushes, warblers, whip-poor-wills, and many of the herons and shorebirds. Also look for any and all signs of nesting activity for our records. Cardinals, robins and grackles are already nesting as are great blue herons, ospreys, eagles, barred and great-horned owls. Many other species, hairy and downy woodpeckers, titmice and chickadees are showing obvious courtship behaviors.

The club offers nest records cards for your use. We collect these cards after the breeding season and send them to the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University where they are put on computer file.

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Please don't forget our third annual spring bird census. We are scheduled for Sunday, May 4. Organized groups will depart for the Information Center at 7:00 AM and will tally at Millington Hall on the William and Mary campus at 5:00 PM. Many groups will be starting before dawn in this very exciting count. In the past we have reached as high as 160 species for the day. Every group tries its best to reach the 100 species plateau. Join us for a day of birding fun.

ASK OWL

What does vireo mean?

This term comes from the Latin term "virere" meaning "to be green", a reference to the color of most of the members of this group.

Ever wonder what the term junco meant?

Oddly enough it means "rush" like bull-rush, etc. However, as we well know this species prefers open woodland.