

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

MARCH 1981

The long and short of the weather is a jet stream. Now before you haul off and think my egg is addled, here's the scoop. Our luxuriant weather over the last two and a half weeks has been due to the jet stream dropping down into the lower forty-eight effectively blocking the flow of Artic air and facilitating a west to east pulse of Pacific air. Last year the ole jet stream gyrations heaped powdered water all over us. This year we're being rationed on the wet stuff, but basking in the balm. However, as I write winter returns to put a frigid clasp on the new crocus, forsythia and early daffodils.

With that in mind it's hoped you will return to room 117 of Millington Hall, College of William and Mary, at 7:30 pm on March 18. Not only can we celebrate the harbinger's of spring together, but we can also be fascinated by Dr. Mitchell Byrd recounting his progress with reestablishing the endangered Peregrine Falcon as a breeding species on the east coast. Our bird club has given financial assistance to this project so in reality we are going to collect some interest on our interest. Dr. Byrd has received state conservation awards for his tireless efforts to save ospreys, bald eagles and red-cockaded woodpeckers and has received national recognition in several well known periodicals. This is a program you won't want to miss.

For those who are totally in the dark when it comes to owl identification, the club will hold an owl hoot on the best of days for such things, Friday, March 13. We will gather at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center south parking lot at 8 pm. From there we will journey to a local owl hot spot and give a hoot. Since owls are already feeding this season's young, we should be able to generate some response to our beckonings. The excursion should only last till about 10 o'clock at the very latest. Come on out and go bump in the night!

The regular monthly field trip will take us to Hog Island for a waterfowl lesson. All along the Atlantic seaboard ducks, geese and swans are staggng for their 1981 trek north. Last year at this time over twenty members attended the foray and everyone got excellent looks at thousands of water birds including pintails, green-winged teal, a few uncommon common mergansers, hooded mergansers, geese and swans. Pine warblers should be in full song and certainly we should be able to spy a few entertaining brown-headed nuthatches. As is our regular custom we will depart promptly at 7 am from the Information Center south parking lot on Saturday, March 21. Carpooling will be best since this will cut down on individual fuel and ferry expenses. Don't miss it!

Purple Martin arrival, the scouts that is, is now only a matter of days away. Sam Hart could use some help in getting the local boxes prepared for this season's use. Please give him a call if you can spare a little time to help out this very active and important committee.

With many thanks to all those who have helped build and place bluebird houses, the Bluebird Committee is anxiously anticipating the use of the new houses. The quiet and beautiful warble of male bluebirds wooing is a regular facet of dawn now, especially at Kingsmill and Cheatham. Through the efforts of Jewel Thomas and her hard working group it is hoped those warm sounds will take a firm place in many other locations.

After leading successful field trips for the bird club the last several

months our eagle-eyed Tom Armour took a jaunt of his own to the nation's southwest. While we parlayed with winter finches, Tom was checking off whooping cranes, chachalacas, rufous-hummingbirds, several species of kites, Lichtensteine's oriole to name only a few. But Tom-boy returned home, as all good sons must, to lead our February 28 field trip to his native Kingsmill. Twenty eager birders showed up and were treated to singing bluebirds, hundreds of Canada geese, goldeneye, pintails, frolicking nuthatches and a beautiful flock of whistling swans to compliment and absolutely glorious morning.

While Tom was away the rarities were at play. The black-headed gull at the Hague in Norfolk was still about towards the latter part of February. On January 30 a western vagrant made an appearance off Forty-Ninth Street in Virginia Beach. A western tanager was very regularly observed at the Watts' residence and has been seen by numerous dedicated birders from all over the area. Mrs. Watts had the birds' habits down to the hour which made it easy for folks with limited time schedules to arrange how and when to get by to see this aves raris. A magnificent male common eider has been adopted by a local flock of mallards at Rudee Inlet in Virginia Beach. By tossing out bread crumbs we were able to entice the duck to come within only a few feet of us. Now, that's incredible!

A recent hike along Grandview Beach in Hampton netted the following goodies for Leigh Jones and Fred Blystone: a whimbrel, which has been present since last fall, 6 snow buntings, some in almost breeding plummage and a rare Lapland longspur. Many brant were also available for close inspection.

As if a black-headed gull and western tanager weren't enough, Richmond had to put its two cents in for 1981 rare bird alerts. A white-winged crossbill showed up at the feeding station of Sally Moxley on Kensington Avenue on February 22. This fellow has even gotten newspaper coverage in the Times-Dispatch! The rare bird word crept into our knowledge on tortoise feet (as usual it seems) and once the information was phoned about several folks have made successful journeys to see the crossbill, including ever-ready Rich Goll and Cindy Fletcher. We can all hope that the birding will continue to be as good the rest of the year as the precedent set by January and February.

In our own backyard, Brian Taber reported a vesper sparrow from the local airport in January. Alice and Dick Springe, armed with Alice's new binoculars saw our third record avocet at Hog Island on March 3, and the ranger at Cheatham Annex has reported regularly seeing up to thirty turkeys on the base and believes the flock may have as many as sixty to sixty-five! As the days lengthen and the mornings warm it is hoped that there will be plenty of pheasant crowing activity at Cheatham. The drought, foxes and severe cold are feared to have taken a heavy toll. We hope not.

Woodcocks are "peenting" actively at several localities in the pre-dawn and great horned and barred owls have become very vocal of late right at dawn. The ole barred owls at Queen's Lake even enjoy singing during mid-afternoon! Early morning, right around day break finds towhees advertising against high priced coffee with "drink your tea". Song sparrows, mockingbirds and robins are also in full chorus urging the red maple and pussy willows into flower. Ubiquitous as they may be, spring has sprung when the blackbirds and crows begin their raucous tributes to better weather. Grakles and cowbirds sound off like rusty hinges while fish crows seem to be suffering the human agonies of a sore throat with no remedy.

Pine siskins continue to dominate the feeder scene. As many as

thirty a day are being captured and banded at the Springe's on Ferncliff Drive. Several fox sparrows have popped up at feeders and everyone who has them should make special note of their last dates in the area.

Dick Hines has a crow visit his bird supermarket that is very innovative. Perplexed by a feeder that hung by a string from a branch the clever dude simply reached over with its bill and hauled the feeder up to the limb by grabbing the string, and then held the string in place with its claws while it dined! Those amazing animals are a constant wonder.

Ruth Beck will be spreading truth, justice and the birding way to the Roanoke Bird Club in early March, and then will be delivering the rough drafts of Virginia's first birding site guide to the VSO Board of Directors meeting on March 21 in Charlottesville.

Typed copies of all of the bird records of all the species recorded in the Williamsburg, James City County, York County and Hog Island, Surry County area are available to club members upon request.

ASK OWL

Our earliest recorded purple martin return date is March 19.