

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

JANUARY 1981

Cold? Sure! Just remember July and August when we prayed for some of this to take the top off 100+ degrees day in and day out. At least it got cooler at night then. Nowadays, getting cooler means getting worse! Frankly, I'd just as soon not have to endure the extremes. A compromise seems justified. Write your Congressman for results! Certainly the inauguration will change the climate! Huh?

We're going to get the New Year off to a grand start on Wednesday, January 21 at 7:30 p.m. Grand Tetons, that is. Our resident Audubon lecturer, Julie Hotchkiss, will present a program on the value of our National Parks through a film presentation focusing on Grand Teton National Park. Those of us who are familiar with Ty and Julie's work know the spectacular photography they present will be equalled by their splendid narration on a timely topic. Break the winter drought with a visit to Room 117 Millington Hall on the William and Mary Campus for this natural history experience.

Our January field trip will be to Cheatham Annex on Saturday, January 24. As is our usual course, we will depart from the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center south parking lot at 7:00 a.m. The trip will offer easily seen waterfowl -- canvasbacks, golden-eye, swans, buffleheads, hooded mergansers, red-heads, blondes (whoops) bluebirds (with this weather they all are!), possibly a pheasant or two and maybe even a turkey. The Ranger at Cheatham saw no less than 27 gobblers on the afternoon of December 31! Killdeer, quail, and a kestrel are also likely. Cheatham is easy birding and requires little out-of-the-car activity if it's cold. Plan to attend for a couple of hours.

The major item of business immediately concerns every member. Yep, it's that time of year again. Christmas is 350 days away so you can easily afford your 1981 dues. Individual renewals are five dollars a person. Family memberships run at \$7.50 and student memberships at \$3.00. Your inflation-ridden currency can be rendered unto Alice Sprunge 134 Ferncliff Drive, Williamsburg, Virginia 23185. Certainly, Alice will eagerly accept your pecuniary renewals at the upcoming monthly meeting also. While we're on our own renewals see if you can't enroll a friend (or enemy depending on your view of the organization). We are committed to spreading the bird word. There are a great many folks out there we need to make more bird wise. Round 'em up.

Asking for dues renewals prompts a year-in-review capsule summary for 1980. Activity-wise we conducted twelve monthly field trips covering a wide range of habitats from ocean beach to upland forest recording along the way well over 200 species of birds most of which were well seen by everyone. Bill Sheehan reports that information on a total of 217 species of birds was sent to him for the Williamsburg area during 1980 by club members. Except for the June through August layoff, monthly meetings offered programs on a wide spectrum of topics from field identification to research to bird travels throughout the world. We established a complete set of Bent's Life Histories of North American Birds in the memory of Everett Raynes at the Williamsburg Regional Library, and assembled a bird feeding station at the Pines nursing home in memory of Roy Trow, and regularly supply that station with bird seed. The club raised over eight hundred dollars with a marvelously efficient Bird Seed Savings Day. Several of our club members served as field trip leaders and bird resource persons for the Williamsburg Garden Symposium, and we had an award winning display at the

Williamsburg Garden Council's display last winter. Many of our members have been asked to speak at civic group and garden club meetings, and our club has been cited in several newspaper articles on birds. Our Purple Martin and Bluebird Committees had expanded coverage during the nesting season and brought us much attention from a public which seems genuinely interested in increasing the numbers of these two species. With some of the seed sale profits the Bluebird Committee is going to purchase twenty poles and nest boxes for the upcoming season. We conducted our third annual Christmas Bird Count, the latter a part of the National Audubon Society's eightieth nation-wide Christmas census. Finally, many of our members assisted in or personally conducted several avian research projects including Endangered Species work on bald eagles, peregrine falcons, and red-cockaded woodpeckers.

During 1980 our cumulative bird list was increased by seven species -- great cormorant, peregrine falcons, yellow rail, avocet, roseate tern, ground dove and olive-sided flycatcher. Information was also noted for only the second time on long-eared owl, western kingbird, and snow bunting. This last species was seen (seven of them) by Dana Bradshaw of William and Mary on November 19 past the Jamestown Island causeway.

Throughout 1980 I tried to keep track of Rich Goll's quest of 300 species in the state for the year. He made 295. Miserable weather stymied his efforts to nail down the final quintet in the closing days of December. All of us applaud your effort Rich. Way to go. Despite missing his yearly goal, Rich pushed his cumulative state list to 306, a great accomplishment in itself. Look out '81!

Two controversial birds appeared in December locally. Tom Armour found a very unusual dark heron on Hog Island. Initial diagnosis identified the stranger as a reddish egret, a species only hypothetically recorded in Virginia. Unfortunately, the bird turned out to be an unusually dark great blue heron. Mrs. Boldt had a strange finch visit her. Oriole and house finch oriented feeding area on Tyler Street. Her description perfectly matches that of the rare pine grosbeak. Unfortunately, the bird has failed to turn up again locally.

Our Christmas count suffered through thirteen to twenty-eight degree temperatures to tally 109 species. Last year we had the highest count of Northern (Baltimore) orioles in the nation with 13. This year we recorded 15 all in Ruth's area of the count. Additions to last year's total come from Jewel Thomas' home on Monumental Avenue. John and Betty Williams now have two male orioles visiting them in Skipwith. Our house finch count rose to 50 this year over 3 last year. We failed to find a coot or a cormorant due to the ice, but did add common loon and black-crowned night heron for the first time. A total of eight bald eagles was reported. The Newport News count reached 121 species including a peregrine falcon, whimbrel and Lapland longspur. The Mathews count may reach 111 species if reports of Eurasian wigeon, western grebe and rough-legged hawk are accepted. The Cape Charles count, the east coast's best, was hampered by rain, sleet and snow, but still managed 157 species including first reports of king eider, golden plover and white-rumped sandpiper. A sandhill crane had been reported in the Cape Charles area prior to the count, but wasn't found on the count.

Our count tally was made especially good by Mr. and Mrs. William Elliott.

Not only did they record birds at their home, they brought over some piping hot sweet rolls for the cold ravaged crew at the tally. A sincere thanks for your thoughtfulness to you both. Ruth and Sherwin Beck filled in the remaining gaps with a warm punch and pop corn -- Yum!

Being teachers Leigh Jones and I feel that we should provide our students with a wide variety of learning experiences in the field of biological study. What occurred during December 21 was beyond our educational ken. How could anyone ever connect a kidnapping with a bird count? Well it happened. John Willis was rambling about a small piece of salt marsh at Indian Field Creek off the Colonial Parkway near the Naval Weapons Station in our effort to roust out an elusive clapper rail. We got two rails eventually, but in so doing John stumbled across a baby bag full of baby clothes, blanket, diapers and a bottle. We laughed about it at first, but then Leigh notified the Park Service later that evening and the plot began to unfold. The bag was positively identified the following day by FBI agents as that belonging to an infant kidnapped two weeks earlier. The agents, accompanied by Park Service, Coast Guard, Marines, Sheriff and Fire Department took John back to Indian Field Creek to show them where he'd found the bag. While scouring the area John located a notebook apparently belonging to the kidnapper. Until Snoop John applied his skills the kidnapping had had no leads. Don't ever let anyone say birding isn't a cultural experience!

The local birding community and anyone concerned about our fragile wildlife were shocked and sickened by the recent killing of Newport News celebrity peregrine falcon. In discussing this with Mitchell Byrd it was brought out that this has not been the only falcon shot this fall and winter. Three or four others have been brought to Mitchell's attention, as well as a couple of bald eagles! There's a mentality out there that wildlife can live without.

Annie Newman has been nursing a tufted titmouse back to health on a diet of crickets. This time of year that's quite an assignment. We wish Annie and her patient good luck and warmer climates.

The Peninsula Nature and Science Museum off J. Clyde Morris Boulevard in Newport News is sponsoring a second Bird Seed Savings Day. The sale has been advertised recently in the Daily Press. Orders must be placed by January 17 and the pick-up date is January 31.

Annual dues for the Virginia Society of Ornithology are now being taken. Individual memberships are five dollars, sustaining membership are \$7.50, contributing is \$15.00 and family memberships are \$9.00. Dues may be forwarded to Mrs. John Dalmás, 520 Rainbow Forest Drive, Lynchburg, Virginia 24502.

ASK OWL

Did you know that when a gannet incubates an egg, it puts its feet over the egg, then sits on its feet!

John Willis has three of his miniture duck carvings on display and for sale in Ricks Wilson's Antiques store on Merchant Square. Everyone ought to go by to see his superb work. Quality quacks!