

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

FEBRUARY 1981

BUSINESS

Howdy folks! Cabin fever got you down? Well take heart! The cardinals have been in song since January 21 around these premises. When they feel compelled to say it's "Pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty" I like to think they know things we don't. Doves are in full coo and chickadees have begun to query "Fee-be, fee-bay?" The pre-dawn chorus includes great-horned and barred owls, and the comical, musical acrobatics of the woodcocks. They know. They all know. We anticipate and it makes the fever seem endless.

Last month we offered an inspiring break in the winter by whisking everyone away to the Grand Tetons. This month we offer a program with a different tern (turn?) Dan Smith, a graduate student at William and Mary will speak to the club on his population research with common and gull-billed terns and black skimmers on Virginia's magnificent Eastern Shore barrier islands. Meeting time is 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 18. As usual we will meet in room 117 of Millington Hall at William and Mary. Come on over and let Dan make you feel the summer sand in your shoes from an Atlantic beach.

This month's field trip will be a local affair to Kingsmill and environs on February 28. We will assemble at 7 a.m. in the south parking lot of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center. You never know what Tom Armour will have staked out for the day. Anything's possible. Make it a point to be there.

On the club business front it's obvious we never relax. Alice Springe is still collecting dues. Remember it's five dollars for individuals, three dollars for students and seven-fifty for families. Money may be sent to Alice at 134 Ferncliff Drive or brought to her at the February 18 meeting.

At the last report Alice noted that we have slightly over \$1,100 in our treasury. One might wonder what a bird club would do with those kinds of funds. Aside from regular monthly newsletter expenses, we have two very active research committees, Bluebird and Purple Martin, which require operating funds. We continue to purchase books for the regional library, and some monies are used to pay for speakers and films. There are several donations we've made to peregrine falcon research and the Virginia Society of Ornithology's J. J. Murray Scholarship fund.

With the aid of her young son our Bluebird Committee chairperson, Jewel Thomas, assembled our first bluebird house. Since then a total of eighteen boxes have been assembled through the hard work of Bob Long, Rees and Marge Jones, Charlie Hacker and Alfred Armstrong. On Saturday, February 7 all of these homes were put in place at Carter's Grove. Mr. Ben Gilbert of Colonial Williamsburg's Landscaping Department gave us the grand tour of that beautiful planation and assisted Ruth Beck, Jewel, Fred Blystone, Bill Sheehan, Scottie Austin and Betty Powers in finding excellent sites to place the boxes in anticipation of their use. As soon as they are available several more homesites will be placed at the Williamsburg Country Club.

Within the next few weeks we can expect to see early purple martin scouts arrive. This, of course, means that Sam Hart and his crew are getting itchy fingers to assist the martins through a successful season of child rearing. As usual plenty of help will be needed. See if you can lend a hand.

Several members of our club have been getting a lot of ink lately. Dr. Mitchell Byrd was featured in the most recent Audubon magazine through his research on bald eagles in the Chesapeake Bay area. His Endangered Species research will be the topic of a club meeting program soon. Ty and Julie Hotchkiss were given a fine write-up in the Sunday, February 8 Daily Press. After last month's program we are all aware and appreciative of their filming talents. Last year Brian Taber had an article published in Virginia Wildlife. In this year's February issue of that magazine, Bill Snyder has an article on the history of beaver trapping. What a talented bunch we are!

Fred Blystone has asked that anyone who knows of neighbors who have bird feeders to please contact him. He's putting together a mailing list for next fall's Bird Seen Savings Day. Fred would like to personally inform all the people in our area that are obviously interested in feeding birds about our sale and then hopefully about our club. Fred resides at 120 Stanley Drive, Williamsburg.

BIRDS

Locally the name of the game has been pine siskins. They're everywhere, they're everywhere. After having none last year they've more than made their presence known at the feeder front. Ferncliff Drive and Queen's Lake seem to have large numbers of these little finches. At least three white evening grosbeaks have been reported throughout the area. Even students at Lafayette have reported them at their homes.

This time last year we were all in a dither over a glaucous gull at College Creek. On January 12 an adult glaucous gull was observed by Tom Armour amongst some 2000 ring-billed gulls at Kingsmill. Apparently the heavy ice in Hampton Roads had forced large groups of gulls up the James. Not only were gulls forced out of the Bay area so were waterfowl. For the first local record over forty brant were seen at College Creek on January 14. Also in mid January off the Yorktown battlefields an incredible gathering of ruddy ducks occurred. Better than fifteen thousand of these little stiff-tails were recorded in one afternoon to set a new state high count.

On other fronts, a black-headed gull has been associating with Bonaparte's gulls in downtown Norfolk at the Hague. This is a European staggler and is a highly prized addition to bird life lists. A large crew from Williamsburg saw the bird on January 28. It could be distinguished from the Bonaparte's gulls by its red bill and dark underwings. In Northern Virginia the following goodies have been reported; goshawks, red poll, red crossbill, snowy owl, yellow-headed blackbirds. The severe winter in New England has created this influx of these normally northern winter birds.

Back at home Mitchell Byrd found 41 bald eagles in his surveys along the Chickahominy River and Lake in January. Forty-one! That's incredible! Jewel Thomas has a brown-headed nuthatch coming to a pine cone feeder at her home in Williamsburg. Bill Snyder flushed a sora rail from a Chickahominy River Marsh while walking his trapping lines recently and on February 8 three common mergansers were found on a freshwater pond on Cheatham Annex. Also noted there was a phoebe and numerous singing bluebirds.

The Virginia Society of Ornithology will offer its annual winter field trip to the North Carolina Outer Banks on February 20, 21 and 22. Headquarters for the trip will be the Armada Inn in Nags Head. Anyone interested in this exciting

weekend should contact Ruth Beck or Bill Williams for more information.

From the Records Chairman -

"The importance to the bird student of keeping written notes and compiling records cannot be too much stressed.

Without that the study of birds may be of interest and pleasure to himself, but it can furnish little information to others." Dr. J. J. Murray, Raven Vol. 1 No. 3 March 1930.

With these thoughts from Virginia's bird study dean, Bill Sheehan has requested that people pay particular attention to records for fox sparrows, hermit thrushes, red-breasted nuthatches and any owls.

A complete compilation of all of our local records is ready. Once the final touches have been added and the data is typed copies will be made available on request.

ASK OWL

The Wrentit Family Chamaeidae, is the only member of its family and is found only on the West Coast of the U.S.A. This then is America's only endemic species.