

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER
DECEMBER 1981

Jingle bells, Jingle bells. Bird Counts all the way. Oh what fun it is to count those local birds all day! See there's even a song for us. These opening lines are reminders of 1981's final month of birding activity. There will be no monthly meeting of our club nor will there be any field trip for December. Instead, and in the place of those usual goodies, there's the fifth annual Williamsburg Bird count. This is the count that is the leader among leaders of Northern Orioles over the last two years. Can we shoot for three? Why sure we can. Just as sure as a visit from ole Santa. If we can get everyone's support there's no telling how well we can do. The count begins officially at 12:01 a.m. Sunday, December 20. During the twenty-four hours of December 20 we'll attempt to compile all of the bird species available in a fifteen mile diameter circle, the center of which is at the CW Information Center. For our own organizational purposes we will commence at 7:00 a.m. at the Information Center south parking lot. At that time area assignments will be made. The area offerings include Cheatham Annex, Kingsmill, College woods, Middle Plantation, Jolly Pond, Skimino, Jamestown and Hog Island. If you can help at all during the day, especially feeder watching, in any of these areas please call Bill Williams(229-0098). There's a \$1.50 fee for count participants to help defray the publication costs of the data which is compiled by the National Audubon Society and put forth in the April issue of "American Birds". Tally time is 5:00 p.m. in room 108 of Millington Hall(its open!!).

Ours is not the only count in the area. The Newport News count is on Saturday December 19. There are counts on Dec. 27 (Cape Charles), Dec. 28(Chincoteague), Dec. 29 (Back Bay), Dec. 30 (Bodie-Island), Dec. 31 (Little Creek), January 3 (mathews). Should you have interest in any of these please call Bill for the specifics. Honestly they are great fun and very informative. It is incredible what you will learn from a single bird count. Try it! You'll love it!

In last month's newsletter there were several topics of importance that had to be approved by the membership. Of primary significance were the proposed changes in the Constitution and By-Laws. All of the recommended changes were approved as proposed. Secondly, the voting members approved the bird club's scholarship proposal. A friendly amendment was added to the scholarship structure stating that the award was dependent on the availability of funds. A third item was adopting the York River State Park. This measure was also unanimously accepted. From this time we can begin systematic surveys of the park's avifauna, and further lend assistance to the park staff for bird related activities. Lastly our club officers for 1982 were elected. Tom Armour is the new president. Ruth Beck and Bill Williams are the Vice President of programs and newsletter respectively. Cynthia Long is the club's scribe while Leigh Jones will accept the miserly role treasurer. Cindy Fletcher and Brian Taber will assume the newly created positions as members-at-large to the Executive Committee.

At this point everyone ought to give a flocking ovation to the exceedingly excellent job done by Ruth during her Presidency. She represented us charmingly and effectively on a state-wide basis, and made us keep moving ahead locally. Our treasury shows the influence she had on club projects, and our status throughout the state has ascended dramatically through her bird enthusiasm.

Susan Sturm deserves a grand accolade for squeezing out two full years of fabulous bird club programs. Anyone who has ever done such a task knows its a very difficult one, especially with such a diverse interest group as we entice (or try to). Thanks Susan!

Lest we be attacked by crazy the Pileated Woodpecker, a very special kudo goes to the ever-faithful Alice Sprunge. Alice handled double duties as secretary and treasurer for two campaigns and remains on of our most loyal members on field trips. We had to give her up to the church vestry recently, but that's an exchange we consider a credit to how fine our group really is. Thanks a billion, Alice.

Even when the bluebirds don't care about nesting Jewel Thomas won't give up treating them royally. Her latest effort was the creation of a magnificent bluebird roost box to house the critters on cold, wintry nights. The structure will be placed at the Williamsburg Country Club. Shoot, I'd love to own a structure that elaborate to roost in for myself! The box should accomodate up to 12 birds once they begin to use it. From all the shivering bluebirds, a wing extended in salute to you, Jewel.

Whew, where to begin the bird news? I guess I'll start statewide and then home in on the Burg. On October 24 the state's second reported groove-billed ani was discovered near Broadway, north of Harrisonburg. This is a bird that typically lives in south Texas and is nonmigratory. How and why the stranger got to the Old Dominion one can only speculate. It is a boat tailed grackle sized bird and is a weak flyer that looks like its tail is falling off. Many people from all over journeyed to see this rarity. The ani was last seen Nov. 15 by Brain Taber and Rich Goll, who actually squeaked the bird out of a hedge row a mile from where it had normally been seen. When you consider the vastness of the countryside the ani could have been in, luck is the only way to describe the sighting. Once found this member of the cuckoo family very calmly set on a fence so everyone could drink in the ridges on the bill, and comment on how strange it looked. Now, that's incredible!

Mrs. Boldt called to let everyone know that her orioles returned on November 10. To see these oragne and black jewels on a wintry day makes you feel cozy inside and contemplate warmer climes. Also on Tyler Street is a rather large flock of house finches. It wasn't that many years ago that house finches were rare in Williamsburg. Outside of town they still are.

Tom Armour picked out a white-winged scoter on the James River off Kingsmill in mid-November, and also had a rather large group of water pipits in a freshly plowed field there.

Just beyond Kingsmill, at Hog Island, the excitement over rare birds has brought us statewide attention. Over the Thanksgiving holiday Bob Cross told us of a White pelican he had seen there on Turkey day. Actually we now understand that it had been in our backyard at least a week prior to his call. Bob's call was followed quickly by a sighting of this "basset hound of the bird world" by Thom Blair who had ventured to Piggy point with his grand children. Needless to say he was stunned when the snow goose he thought he was watching flap, flap, glide turned out to have a beak that can hold more than its belly can! To top off the pelican Thom saw an adult bald eagle at College Creek as he returned home. This prompted him to say "It's just like the old days".

The saga of the pelican took a new twist on November 28. While watching it swim towards a group of swans Leigh Jones spotted four geese that just didn't look right. They had pink bills! What she had discovered were four white-fronted geese, and this makes only the seventh record for the state, three of which have been from Hog Island. Since the initial sighting folks from all over the state have hit Hog to add two super birds to their lists.

The pelican may very well be one of several that keep showing up at Chincoteague and Back Bay. Who knows? Normally during the winter they are found in the sothern end of the Everglades. Maybe the drought down there sent them our way.

Last May this author reported anhingas had been seen at Stumpy Lake in Virginia Beach. Well, word of this Florida-to-southern North Carolina-bird being at Stumpy Lake again got out over Thanksgiving. Here again closer checking revealed they had been there for months. Anyway the Williamsburg contingent to the December 5 Back Bay field trip sponsored by the VSO made a run to find the snake bird. Just as if they had been ordered four were seen perched quietly in a tree stand out in the lake. The enthusiastic group of observers included Leigh, Ruth, Tom Armour, Alice, Carolyn Lowe, Fred Blystone, and Brian. Three rarities in less than a week is kind of hard to grasp!

Last month's field trip to Hog Island was attempted by about six hardy souls that endured the blustery cold. They were rewarded with large flocks of pintails

and Canada geese. Even one blue goose (a form of snow goose) was seen. Let's hope everything holds tight for the Christmas count.

The Back Bay field trip was a success bird-wise but tough going weather-wise. Strong, cold winds kept birds and birders tightly smuggled. Ruth spotted an unidentified shearwater off the turbulent ocean shore. It was with a group of gannets that were entertaining everyone. Rich Goll saw a fleeting glimpse of an unspecified alcid (razorbill, puffin, dovekie, etc.). A flock of snow buntings delighted several groups of birders on the beach, and the inland waters sported swans, wigeon, gadwall, and Canada geese. The Bay Bridge Tunnel islands produced wind harried purple sandpipers, oldsquaw, common scoters, and a couple of unusual, though regular, great cormorants.

I have recently received a copy of "A Dichotomous Key to the Shorebirds of North America" by Richard Mellon. This 24 page pamphlet is loaded with plumage characteristic descriptions that may aid in shorebird identification, and can be purchased for \$2.95 from Mellon Biological Services, P.O. Box 63, Morrisville, Pa. 19067.

Reports trickled in last week about a yellow nosed albatross that was well seen twice off Back Bay. As yet it is unconfirmed. If the sightings are accepted this will be an incredible record this close to land. Over at Gloucester Court House someone is seeing a very small, tuftless owl that is brown underneath which sits on or near a roadway with adjacent cedar trees. The speculation, of course is, that the bird is a saw-whet owl. Credence for the presence of this very rare little owl is lent by the fact that Dorothy Mitchell recently lost one of these that was caught in her Newport News nets to a marauding feline. You can't never can tell, huh?

The National Wildlife Federation has sent out an alert about upcoming U.S. legislation. An attempt is being made to declare 1982 as the Bicentennial year of the Bald Eagle and June 20, 1982 as "National Bald Eagle Day". The bill needs co-sponsors in the House and Senate. Please write our local politicians and urge them to sign on as co-sponsors.

Gordon's Creek off the Chickahominy has at least 3 immature bald eagles coursing the air above hundreds of pintails, black ducks and mallards.

Mel Schiavelli and his wife spotted a merlin bolting through the air over Bonanza Steak House on November 29. A great sighting of a neat raptor.

Ask Owl:

Owl wishes a Merry Christmas to all and the very best for 1982.
Cheers and Best Birds!