

# THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

April 1983

If it's all the same to you I'd like to forego the "April showers" routine this year. I believe March adequately took care of that situation all on its own. I had to replace my rain gauge--the old one drowned! But all that aqua pura should herald a fancy Spring provided some warmth and sunlight come our way in ample quantities soon. The dogwoods seem to be straining like runners in the starting blocks, waiting for the signal that the final blow is over. All around there is a daily hint of more and more green. It makes you feel uplifted.

Thus speaking, lift yourself up to our April 20 meeting to hear Dr. Jerry Via of V.P.I. and S.U. present his superb program on bird songs. Remember we assemble at 7:30 p.m. in room 117 of Millington Hall at William and Mary. Jerry is currently the Vice President of the Virginia Society of Ornithology and for years has earned a reputation for his entertaining and informative bird talks. He is a former graduate student of Dr. Mitchell Byrd's (but we won't fault Jerry for that) and has travelled abroad several times to enhance his natural history and ornithological background. So come on out. Let's pack the house and get into the sing of things for Spring.

From the excellent organization of the Field Trip Chair, Carolyn Lowe, comes the following report.

## APRIL FIELD TRIP

Our April field trip, on Sunday the 24th will explore the many and varied habitats that comprise the vast stretches of Camp Peary, from Skimino Creek on the northern edge to Queen's Creek along the southern boundary. Woodland trails and streams, lakes, ponds, the York River and tidal marshes should produce a feathered assortment from spring warblers, thrushes and tanagers to several new families of Wood Ducks, a Marsh Hawk or two--and possibly an adult or immature Bald Eagle. The elusive Wild Turkeys could even put in an appearance. So meet us at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center at 7:00 a.m. and hope for a perfect spring day. Also please find a list of the remaining field trips for 1983 presented below and mark your calendars accordingly.

### May 21 (Sat.)

Newport News Municipal Park (Heron rookery and other park habitats)

Leader: Ruth Beck

### June 18 (Sat.)

Red-cockaded Woodpecker nesting sites, Sussex county

Leader: Ruth Beck

### July 23 (Sat.)

Grandview (Hampton)

Leader: Bob Cross

### August 20 (Sat.)

Craney Island (Hampton Roads)

Leader: Brian Taber

### September 24 (Sat.)

Kiptopeke, Eastern Shore (fall hawk migrations)

Leader: Bill Williams

### October 22 (Sat.)

Kingsmill

Leader: Tom Armour

### November 19 (Sat.)

Chesapeake Bay Bridge/Tunnel islands and Cape Henry

Leader to be announced

### December Christmas Count

In addition to this month's field trip a number of other important dates and events are worth mentioning. David Hughes, the Field Trip Chairman of the Virginia Society of Ornithology will lead bird walks into the Dismal Swamp for the Cape Henry

Audubon Society on Saturday April 30 and Saturday May 7. Both trips will meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Magnolia commuter parking lot near Stuckey's at the junction of routes 460 and 337 (in Chesapeake). Participants in either trip should bring lunch and insect repellent. This area is excellent for all migrant passerines and is especially noted as the home of the rare Swainson's warbler. David may be reached by phone at 804/484-7398.

The Hampton Roads Bird Club will have its annual spring bird count on Saturday May 7. Charlie Hacker organizes this spring treat and encourages everyone to come on out for a great day of birding.

Our own spring count will be held on Sunday May 15. Brian Taber is organizing this year's event and will certainly need everyone's help and cooperation. More details will be announced at the meeting and in the next newsletter.

A club picnic is a new happening for the Bird Club and as advertized in the March newsletter it'll happen on Saturday morning May 7 at York River State Park. Bring a dish to pass, either veggies/relishes, baked beans or a cake, and your own utensils, (non-cooking students can bring a bag of potato chips), and there will be plenty of sizzling hot dogs and soft drinks furnished. Call Jeanne Armour, 229-2363 or Norma Olson, 253-1660 and let us know you're coming!

The Virginia Society of Ornithology's annual spring meeting will take place May 20-22 in Roanoke. Billed as "Appalachian Spring" this year the event regularly hosts over 200 birders and is always a grand affair. Let me know (229-0098) if you would like more information on the meeting. Accomodations range from \$40/night motels to \$2/night private homes and there are loads of field trips and handout goodies for everyone.

On May 27 Carolyn Lowe has arranged a canoe excursion at York River Park. The trip will be from 9:30 a.m. to noon and Carolyn requests that interested persons contact her at 229-2121, ext. 593.

From Tuesday June 7 through Sunday June 12 the VSO will hold its annual breeding bird foray. This year the foray will concentrate on Giles County, outside of Blacksburg, and will use the University of Virginia's Mt. Lake Biological Station for its headquarters. An attempt will be made to locate and document as much of the breeding bird activity in the area as possible. The experience is superb so join in if you can.

When questioned about this winter's bird seed sale our masterful Fred Blystone concisely quipped "It's over". You bet it is, to the tune of better than \$800. Fred deserves a lengthy Spring, Summer and Fall free of seedy remembrances. Huh?

The proceeds (seeds?) from these sales support the club's scholarship for ornithological research for William and Mary students. Several proposals for this year's award have been submitted and are in the process of being scrutinized for this year's winner.

The movement of the season into warmer and longer days prompts the amorous pairings of our local bluebirds, and the communal breeding activities of the purple martins. Already both species are well on their way to continuing their kind. Our Bluebird Committee, chaired by Leigh Jones, has put the final touches at York River Park, Carter's Grove, the Williamsburg Country Club and now Cheatham Annex. Soon the rigors of checking the boxes weekly will begin and help can always be used. Each trail needs a few individuals who will make regular inspections of the nest boxes to record information on their use.

Likewise, Bob Cross and his Purple Martin Team have made final preparations on the martin motels. Plugs have been pulled and martins are becoming more and more



evident around their houses. Here again assistance with the field work on house monitoring will be needed over the next 3 months. Both Bob and Leigh will welcome any and all field workers.

Bluebird boxes can be purchased from Leigh. Boxes alone are \$5. If you also buy a pole and phlange the total cost will run \$10. Bob Cross recently sold a martin motel to the Governor Spotswood Motel here in town.

While the VSO has published its "Red Book" about Virginia's Birdlife, Bill Sheehan, our records chairman has put together the third edition of the "white sheet" an annotated list of every bird species recorded for the Williamsburg, James City County, York County and Hog Island area. This extensive work incorporates historical data published in bird journals and data that club members submit to Bill. The "sheet" offers an indication of the abundance of each species and what time of the year each may be expected based on past information. Records are never stable. They're made to be broken according to adage, and Bill asks everyone to contribute, even information he calls meat and potatoes regarding our more common species. Breeding bird information is particularly lacking. So keep an eye out and give your notes to Capt. Sheehan. Also feel free to pick up your copy of the "white sheet" at our next meeting.

The March issue of Virginia Wildlife Magazine sported a feature on Walt Fuerer, the Ranger at Cheatham Annex, who was awarded the Conservation Award of the Virginia Society of Ornithology in 1982. Already this year Ranger Fuerer is working ever diligently to create additional nesting habitat for Cheatham's turkeys and pheasants. He culled the large grey fox population and opossum population which had been threatening the game birds and is currently waging an extensive battle against the ravages of the pine bark beetle. This pest is wrecking loblolly stands all over the area, and combating it is putting forestry practices to a severe test. We're very proud and glad Walk Fuerer is part of our community.

The bird club has joined the North American Bluebird Society. Further information on this neat organization can be received from Leigh Jones if you let her know. The aim of the Society is to promote the study and conservation of North American bluebirds and there is a fine journal for the members.

For the seventeen people who made the March 19 field trip to Presquile there was nothing but compliments. Mild, overcast weather provided excellent conditions for the walking tour of this "island" that sits as an oxbow bend in the James River near Hopewell. The group was treated to stunning views of up to four bald eagles. Also available for close observation were 4-5 wild turkeys, a barred owl, rusty blackbird, magnificent common mergansers, a snoozing raccoon and a somewhat cool black rat snake. Another highlight included a fly-by glossy ibis. What a super prelude to spring birding.

The lengthy Spring parade of feathers got underway March 2 with the spotting of ospreys off Kingsmill by Tom Armour. On March 8 Bill Sheehan, Thom Blair and Tom Armour enticed a king rail to sing at Jamestown Island. They were also treated to the antics of 3 otters. So far this year Thom, Tom and Bill have located king, clapper, Virginia and sora rails also the Jamestown end of the Colonial Parkway.

Cattle egrets were noted March 9 and 10 at the Smith Farm on the parkway by Thom Blair while another was seen April 4 at Cheatham Annex sitting on some pilings with gulls in the York River! Also on March 10 red-shouldered hawks were observed carrying nest material at Queen's Lake.

Purple martins made their first appearance locally at Cheatham on March 13. Fox sparrows hung in there late with one at Queen's Lake on March 15 and Alice Springe had one March 18. Fenton Day found a Wilson's plover, rare away from the Atlantic beaches, at Grandview Beach in Hampton on March 19.

On March 21 Ben Copeland of Hampton spied one of birding's prize species perched quietly in a stand of pines near Gosnold Hope Park. Throughout the day better than thirty people came to take leisurely looks at the saw-whet owl Ben discovered and that Teta Kain got on the hot-line so everyone could see it. Tom Armour photographed it and it should be quite a thrill to see his camera's looks at this superb little raptor.

Jim Carson was startled at his Queen's Lake garbage bin on March 24 when a wild turkey flew up from the trees near-by. The season's initial Louisiana water-thrush was heard at Queen's Lake on March 27 and, on March 28 the second rare bird alert in a week was sent out, this time for a painted bunting female which was at the home of Ralph Grimsley in Marlbank near Yorktown. Up to fifty people watched this beautiful little green bird on Friday, April 1. The bird was still on hand April 4 and provided an elegant touch for the flow of the season.

From the northern reaches of Virginia came reports of up to six long-eared owls in one roost and Enoch Johnson of Montross called to relate that his lark sparrow had returned March 24 after a three week absence.

Ever seen a Kingfisher's nest? Well there are potentially two spots where you might see one. There is apparently a nest hole at College Landing off of South Henry Street and another hole occupied by a kingfisher is in a clay bank around the corner from the Information Center as you approach the stop-light on By-pass Road on Route 132.

The Sheehan's have a pair of Carolina wrens nesting in their greenhouse and Tom Armour has located a great-horned owls nest at Kingsmill.

On April 4 along the Colonial Parkway towards Yorktown the following could be found: one red-throated loon at Yorktown Beach, 3 common loons (one of these in breeding plumage at Jones Pond) numerous red-breasted mergansers, hundreds of lesser scaup and buffleheads and a record count of 277 horned grebes. Boat-tailed grackles have returned to Indian Field Creek and hopefully will continue to provide the westernmost location for this species in the state.

Blue-gray gnatcatchers hit Queen's Lake April 6 followed the next day by at least 2 black-throated green warblers.

We want to welcome Lafayette High student Ken Esler to our group. Ken has birded in several parts of the U.S. and represents the future of our avocation.

Brian Taber would like to know if anyone is interested in a pelagic trip out of Virginia Beach on June 4 or 5. The trip would last from sunrise to sunset and the probable cost would be \$75/person. The plan is to go east for 60-80 miles and look for shearwaters and other pelagic species. Please contact him at 642-6646 after 6:30 p.m. weekdays or on weekends during the day.

ASK OWL:       The saw-whet owl gets its name from its call which resembles the saw-whet sound created as the tool is sharpened.