

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER
May 1983

Typically a mid-April evening in the Williamsburg suburbs twinkles with the bioluminescent glitter of fire flies as they dance to the rythm provided by resonating bullfrogs, crickets and a distant whip-poor-will or chuck-wills-widow. Not so for April 1983. The shimmering night glitter of April 18 came in the form of fluffy flashes of dihydrogen oxide. The jet stream had taken a winter posture late and the craziness of the spring we really never had developed into the ridiculous. The early risers birdwalk for the Williamsburg Garden Symposium turned into a battle against the elements for many of the visitors who had come south to get away from such meteorological malfunctions. The view of a singing cardinal perched in a blooming, snow-covered dogwood was an ironical twist of beauty.

On Wednesday May 18 at 7:30 p.m. the bird club will conduct its final monthly meeting until September. Ruth Beck will give us an update on the research concerning the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. Ruth was featured in a recent Virginia Gazette issue as Williamsburg's first lady of birds, a distinction she's earned with charm and grace, not to mention tireless work in the field. She is certainly one of the state's experts in red-cockaded woodpecker biology and her talk should prove to be very informative. Make plans to be on hand in room 117 of Millington Hall at William and Mary. The program will be an excellent prelude to our June 18 field trip to Sussex County to see the woodpeckers at home.

On Sunday May 15 we will hold our annual Spring Count. Brian Taber is in charge and has been diligently lining up area leaders for the event. As always the success of the tally depends on the number of observers we can muster afield. If you can help in any way be in touch or come to the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center parking lot (to the right of the center from the parkway side) at 7:00 a.m. and join a team. It's a great way to spend a day!

The weekend of May 20-22 will be a busy one indeed. The Virginia Society of Ornithology is holding its annual meeting, "Appalachian Spring" in Roanoke that weekend, while our bird club is providing a local outing to Newport News City Park to view the great blue heron colony. Our trip will commence at 8:00 a.m. Saturday May 21 from the Information Center. Tom Armour will lead the trip. Since the park is only a ten minute drive from Williamsburg the trip should easily end by noon.

Last month we advertised a canoe trip for May 27. Well that's actually a Friday, so the trip will take place Saturday May 28. Carolyn Lowe will lead this bird club "extra" beginning at 9:30 a.m. and ending around noon. The trip will be at York River State Park and should be a great deal of fun. There is only canoe space for 12 people, since vandals have stolen two canoes from the park recently. Anyone who wants to go on the trip must contact Carolyn at 229-2121, Ext. 593 well in advance.

Don't forget the annual breeding bird foray to Giles County June 7-12 sponsored by the VSO. Several of our club members have expressed interest in attending so maybe we can get a caravan going to cut expenses. The forays are incredible learning experiences. So give one a try.

Also on June 7, much closer to home, there will be a showing of the Canadian produced film Requiem or Recovery at 7:30 p.m. in the auditorium of Millington Hall at William and Mary. You may recall this 30-minute documentary on acid rain caused an international flap about two months ago and was labelled propaganda by the U.S. Government. This should be a real eye-opener for those unfamiliar with the intricacies of acid rain and its manifestations. There will also be a brief program on the subject. Make every effort to see this important film.

The Williamsburg Bird Club is very proud to present its second annual Student Scholarship Award to Irene Rusnak, a graduate student, for her study "Home Range and Habitat Utilization of Resident Bald Eagle Pairs in Virginia." The \$500 stipend she receives will be applied to this very timely and important field work. We look forward to hearing of her results next fall.

The club has also voted to post signs at the least tern colony on Grandview Beach in Hampton warning people of the birds' breeding activity and asking them to avoid the area throughout the nesting season. We will coordinate this conservation effort with the Hampton City Parks and Recreation Department and the Hampton Roads Bird Club. This very active colony of up to 600 birds may be one of the largest of its kind on the East Coast, and has annually been very successful not only for the terns but also for 3 to 4 pairs of piping plovers.

Our treasurer, Leigh Jones, reports that our club membership is now at 90. We lost only six members from last year, three of which moved from the area. We must be doing something(s) right, though a lot of credit must go to our terrific birds.

In addition to her chores as Treasurer, Leigh also presides over the Bluebird Committee. Since assuming that duty she has expanded our coverage from thirty boxes to ninety. The committee took over better than 20 existing boxes at Cheatham Annex relocating and/or repairing a number of them and added boxes at St. Georges Farm, New Quarter Park and the grounds of Eastern State Hospital. Within two weeks of their placement at St. George's Farm near Jamestown, two of the boxes were in full use by bluebird pairs! Several of the boxes at Eastern State are occupied already and New Quarter Park at Queen's Lake has bluebird residents also.

Bob Morris has been working with Leigh on a bluebird box design that could be put together readily and inexpensively by patients at the Veterans Hospital. The club has ordered 100 boxes for this effort and soon we hope to have bluebird houses available for placement by private individuals for a minimal cost. What an excellent use of club funds as we bring the bluebirds before the public view!

Please let Leigh know if you'd like to assist in checking bluebird boxes (229-2476). Our expanded coverage means we need more help afield. It's easy and loads of fun.

Our first ever club picnic took place Saturday, May 7, and was a grand success. Close to thirty people were on hand to enjoy the fun and fellowship at York River State Park. There was lots of food and the marvelous spring day made the affair a treat for all. Believe it or not, some folks even watched birds finding tanagers, indigo buntings and an orchard oriole for dessert!

The vagaries of weather over the last month has made the bird world somewhat topsy turvy. Several species such as wood thrushes, great-crowned flycatchers and red-eyed vireos arrived, in any numbers, some two weeks beyond their normal time. Yet other species like goldeneye, fox sparrow and horned grebe stayed later than normal. The chronology of bird observations which follows shows great variety and represents the continued increase in field observations by club members.

Alice Springe's fox sparrow was last seen March 30, extending the departure date in our records by two weeks. Ed and Norma Katz observed several brown pelicans on March 23 at Yorktown providing an incredible record. This couple has also given us back issues of Audubon Field Notes (now American Birds) from 1959 through 1967 helping Bill Sheehan uncover a lot of published bird data we were unaware of for the Williamsburg area.

The season's first ruby-throated hummingbird was seen at Kingsmill April 4 about a week earlier than normal. Thom Blair reports that his neighbors saw a brownish hummingbird in the Goodwin Street area in late March. Did the rufous hummingbird survive the winter here? Let's hope so!

The painted bunting in Marlbank was last seen April 6. The bird's twelve-day visit was attended by a total of 80 people from all over the state. We owe the Grimsley's a great deal of thanks for allowing so many visitors to watch their little transient.

Crazy, the Springe's annual pileated woodpecker, returned on April 6 to tap out his Spring love songs. Alice's tribute to Crazy can be found at the end of this newsletter.

The first palm warbler was seen April 6, while April 7 was the arrival of an overbird on Ferncliff Drive. Also on April 7, Fenton Day discovered a woodcock nest on Route 613 in James City County. An eastern kingbird was seen at College Creek April 8 and parula warblers were also heard on that date. April 9 witnessed the first blue-grey gnatcatchers in the area and Anne Beckley saw a ruby-throated hummer on the same day in Toano. Caspian terns made their presence known on April 11 as they moved into the James River following the migrating herring. Royal terns and laughing gulls had been present for about ten days. Over on the York River side of the peninsula Brian Taber recorded an estimated 5000 double-crested cormorants passing under the Coleman Bridge on April 11. Here again migrating shad or herring probably lured this local record number of fish eaters inland.

Leigh Jones' and her field biology students noted a red-eyed vireo April 14 in College Woods. The first record of Caspian terns for Queen's Lake came April 16 as the species cruised the lake nabbing schooling golden shiners.

On April 17 the rare bird phone line was set aflutter from the report of a western grebe at Kerr Dam south of Lynchburg on the North Carolina line. Two days later, following the April blizzard of 1983, Tom Armour found a second year Iceland gull at Kingsmill. The bird stayed around for several days and made the lists of a number of local birders, and even thrilled a Texas visitor here for the Garden Symposium. While watching the Iceland gull, Ruth and Tom counted a dozen ospreys at the outflow of a fresh water pond. Again schools of migrating shad or herring provided the source of the concentration. Martha Armstrong had a northern oriole at her home April 19 and 20.

Despite the rain, sleet and snow of the early morning hours of April 19, our club members managed to provide some excellent birding for the Garden Symposium bird walk. Many of the participants are out of staters and some East Coast species we take for granted really excite them. For their pleasure our leaders (Bill Sheehan, Tom Armour, and Martha Armstrong) provided bald eagle, fish crow, wood duck and several species of waterfowl including lesser scaup, bufflehead and horned grebe. The chilly birders loved the great blue herons and laughing gulls. A read-headed woodpecker, the club's symbol, provided the best highlight at Mill Creek near Jamestown.

While checking bluebird boxes at St. Georges Farm on April 22, Leigh Jones and Julie Hotchkiss saw what at first appeared to be deer. Instead, they discovered a red fox romping with 5 kits near their den. From Teta Kain we heard of an upland sandpiper on the 22nd off Oyster Point Road in Newport News. It was in a field with several glossy ibis. However, attempts to see the bird later proved unsuccessful. We'll take the saw-whet anytime, Teta!

A hen turkey was observed crossing Route 5 near Five Forks April 23. On the same day large flocks of rusty black birds could be seen along News Road in the Powhatan Creek Swamp.

The club field trip of April 24 to Camp Peary was almost a rain-out! However, for the dozen or so people who attended the birds were super. We had yellow-crowned night heron, barred owl, wood ducks, a late golden-eye, green heron, hooded and prairie warblers and singing scarlet tanagers. See what you missed, sleepy head?

Tom Armour's Iceland gull wasn't enough for him. On April 25 he went to St. George's farm and amongst the greater and lesser yellowlegs and short-billed dowitchers he found the first red knot ever recorded locally. This beautiful shore bird is colloquially called sea robin. Check it out in your field guide and you'll understand why!

Catbirds were present in town on April 25 and on April 27 at Queen's Lake sea side sparrows were heard along with a sharp-tailed sparrow, whip-poor-will, clapper rail and yellow-crowned night heron. In addition, a red-shouldered hawk was seen feeding three downy young at the nest and a yellow warbler was heard. There's also a red-shouldered hawk nest at Jolly Pond as well as a black duck's nest with fourteen eggs.

A cooper's hawk made a brief stay at Queen's Lake April 29 along with a singing Tennessee warbler. On April 30 fifty-four people went to the Dismal Swamp with the Cape Henry Audubon Society. Trip highlights included 4 Swainson's warblers, several worm-eating and blue-winged warblers, lots of hooded and prothonotary warblers, a rose-breasted grosbeak and a pair of yellow-billed cuckoos.

May 1 provided a Wilson's plover at Grandview for Bob Cross, chuck-wills-widow for Rich Goll and Cindy Fletcher off Treasure Island and Lake Powell Roads, and blackpoll warblers and summer tanagers at Queen's Lake.

William and Mary's ornithology class made an April trip to the Eastern Shore. At Chincoteague they found an immature black-headed gull. Also seen were indigo buntings and numerous herons, egrets and ibis. A brown pelican was seen off the Bay Bridge Tunnel.

From the tar heel state, North Carolina, a brown booby was seen on the Outer Banks in early May by Mike Britten. Mike had recently seen this species at Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas, Florida, and was stunned to observe this rare bird sitting on the beach! A second year Iceland gull was observed on the Chowan River near Ahoskie, N.C., on April 4.

We all have our favorite bird adventures and these animals seem to provide endless incredible encounters. Leigh Jones was taking a late afternoon siesta recently and was brought to reality by fluttering around her head. The second time it took place she found a tufted titmouse perched on her noggin attempting to pluck away some hair, probably for nest material. Uh, speaking of bird brains.....!?

Ask Ruth to tell you about wanting to dispatch a female sharp-shinned hawk that almost nabbed one of the red-cockaded woodpeckers she was observing.

We would like to welcome our newest club members Teta Kain and Mr. and Mrs. Peter Brown.

Congratulations to Bill Snyder for being featured in the Williamsburg Advantage.

Ask Owl:

The next time you see a local osprey think about this. The Norfolk zoo was called last Fall to pick up an osprey from an Italian freighter. The bird had come aboard 900 miles offshore! But this can't top the bird that a Turkish freighter brought in from 1300 miles offshore! That's incredible!

Alice's Poem: Take down the storm windows

You know how we know?
Crazy the Woodpecker
Is doing his show.
He bangs on the windows
And out falls the putty
He's pretty to look at
But really he's nutty.
He comes before seven
He's still here at four
We've seen him in back
And at the front door.

This is the fifth year
That he's done his thing
To the dogwoods and stoop
It's always in spring.
April 6th is the day
He started this year
So folks, here's to Crazy
and Spring--here gere.