

# THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

November 1983

You sense the seasonal flow of the year is ebbing when flannel shirts and tartan skirts greet the eye at a football game. Corn shucks and pumpkins decorate doors and doorsteps and we've been reminded "Fall, back" as we switch to bird time. It's not so cold to be uncomfortable yet but soon we'll beg for a bit of July heat and a day at the pool. It's the time for turkeys and fireplaces and the smell of the cold.

It's also about time for our November meeting. This will be our last one in 1983. Because of the Christmas bird counts and the holiday hustle and bustle there is no meeting in December. This month we'll be entertained by two very fine films. One is entitled "Golden Eagle, No Natural Enemy" and the other is the "Life Story of the Hummingbird". Come see these documentaries on birds at the opposite ends of the size range. You'll be more than entertained. We will meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 117 of Millington Hall at William and Mary on Wednesday, November 16. See you there, okay!

An important item of business will transpire at the November meeting. That item concerns the election of officers for 1984. The nominating committee of Tom Armour, Betty Williams and Bill Snyder has submitted the following slate:

President - John Hertz  
Vice President - Programs - Cynthia Long  
Vice President - Newsletter - Bill Williams  
Secretary - Alice Springe  
Treasurer - Fred Blystone  
Board of Directors - Ruth Beck and Anne Beckley

As we prepare for new officers let's not forget the stellar effort of our outgoing ones, especially Bob Cross who not only gave us a super buffet of programs to feast on, but also held down the President's job after Thom Blair's departure. Leigh Jones handled our finances superbly between trips to the bluebird trails. Thanks folks for jobs well done.

Tisk. Tisk. When the Purple Martin Committee (Bob Cross, chairman) got together a clean-up effort for winterizing martin motels on October 15 only two people showed up. Bob was one and Tom Armour came in second. Let's hope we can muster more support later on.

The Christmas Bird Count season is literally right around the next calendar bend. The count period begins December 17. Our count will be on Sunday, December 18, and as usual we hope lots of people will assist. Feeder watchers are critically needed and backyard birding contributes immensely to our effort. The count circle is fifteen miles in diameter with the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center as the center of the coverage area. Concentration efforts focus on eight areas: Kingsmill, Jamestown, Jolly Pond, Middle Plantation, College Woods, Cheatham, Hog Island and Skimino. Most areas need lots of people to help spot and record species. Contact Bill Williams (229-0098) if you want to be a part of this very important task.

The Virginia Society of Ornithology will have its annual Back Bay field trip on December 2-4. Headquarters for the trip will be in Virginia Beach at the Howard Johnson Hotel on Atlantic Avenue. The weekend centers around the various waterfowl available both in the ocean as well as the marshes. An identification workshop will be held on Saturday and field trips will go to Back Bay Saturday and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel on Sunday. These VSO weekends have become an excellent attraction for new birders eager to learn, and experienced birders eager for a chance to be afield. Join them if you can.

Our Bluebird Committee, so aptly steered by Leigh Jones, reports that 138 young were produced from our 60 boxes. Roughly 70% of the boxes were occupied by bluebirds, chickadees or wrens. Leigh has plans to expand our efforts in 1984 and would really be pleased if volunteers would step forward to man an existing trail. The work is minimal. The rewards are great.

The Hampton Roads Bird Club will hold a fund raising auction at 7:30 p.m. on November 11 at the Peninsula Nature and Science Museum. All manner of donated items from goods to services will be available to the highest bidder. Maybe this would be the ideal place to shop for stocking stuffers.

A couple of October's ago the birding public anxiously awaited Roger Tory Peterson's new field guide. It's migratory path to bookshelves was preceded by lots of fanfare and public attention and no doubt resulted in lots of sales. At that time everyone wondered if the new Peterson guide would prompt Chandler Robbins to update and expand his very popular Golden Guide to Birds of North America (illustrated by Arthur Singer). Well almost imperceptibly a new Robbins guide is out as of this October. No one could argue against the fact that the Peterson guide had some motivating force behind this effort, but one must also remember that an awful lot of nomenclature change and lumping and splitting of avian species has occurred over the last year. Robbins' guide covers all of North America (and most of the new changes) while Peterson guide handles only what's east of the Rockies (and none of the changes). Thus the changes from the scientific community as well as a vast interest in vagrants (especially Alaskan ones) by birders probably leaned heavily on the update effort by the Golden publishers.

Unfortunately, the Golden guide is as rare as a rufous hummingbird in Virginia. I got my copy, believe it or not, at Farm Fresh (the last copy too). Thumbing through it I found many of the old pictures unchanged like the warbler section, the birds of prey and the ducks. However, there are some neat additions. The maps are more definitive and a section on immature terns is interesting, but seems out of place and superfluous. I found new names for many species but, thank goodness, the index has the old names pointing you toward the now accepted appellations. A section on parrots and parakeets is pretty and may be useful in a pet shop or zoo. And then there's a neatsy keen portion devoted to the rumps and tail feathers of pipits that only wealthy birders and Aleut Indians in Alaska might see, and it's virtually impossible to glean a shred of difference betwixt any of them! Basically the book is a great new companion and is really a joy to peruse and wish with. Would somebody please do a set of definitive pictures of Thayer's gull! At last the black rail has black legs like it's supposed to and I'm glad I saw an Audubon's oriole before it lost its black-head.

Also on the book scene is the National Geographic's field guide to North American Birds. The illustrations are the work of over 30 artisans and are for the most part beautiful. I haven't actually spent any length of time scouring this volume, which is huge in terms of pocket field guides. From what I have seen of it it's going to be well worth the \$13.95 price for serious birders.

The club's monthly field trip for this November will be to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel and environs on Saturday November 19. Departure will be at 7:00 a.m. from the parking lot to the immediate right of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center on the Colonial Parkway side. Dress warmly and bring munchies and a hot drink. Be prepared to get great views of sea ducks (scoters, oldsquaw, maybe an eider) lots of gulls, both great and double-crested cormorants, purple sandpipers and possibly gannets. At least 3 lesser black-backed gulls are regularly seen on the islands and you never know what rare migrant may be lurking in the grass. This is an outstanding way to see many hard to locate species. Let's get a big group out.



The October field trip to Kingsmill tallied 43 species highlighted by the persistent harassment of a kestrel by a sharp-shinned hawk.

Speaking of raptors, one automatically must wonder how the Kiptopeke counts went this season. As of the end of October 260 hours of counting had been logged resulting in a tally of almost 20,000 hawks. A goshawk had been noted on October 13 by Dot Silsby and two golden eagles were counted by me during the weekend of October 29 and 30. Our count efforts have attracted widespread support and enthusiasm from all over the east coast, and many people are already planning to return next year. Kiptopeke is truly a place you can count on!

The 4 California condor chicks hatched this spring are all progressing nicely, thank you, at the San Diego Wild Animal Park. The 3 females and one male actually began flying almost a month ahead of schedule. Offspring from these birds will be used to restock the wild population.

Whooping cranes apparently had an excellent nesting year in 1983. At Wood Buffalo Park in Northwest Territories Canada 24 nests were found eclipsing the all-time high there of 19 nests in 1979 and 1980.

In Michigan the 1983 census of Kirtland's Warblers revealed at least 8 more singing males than last year. The population stands at between 430-450 birds.

North America's first Western reef heron was still on Nantucket as of mid-September.

While traveling on the Outer Banks October 15 and 16 Carolyn Lowe saw 40-50 avocets, snow geese, wigeon and shovelers. She also saw over one hundred brown pelicans from the Ocracoke ferry and right in the middle of them was one white pelican trying his best to look inconspicuous.

On October 16 Fenton Day spotted a common moorhen in Longhill Swamp behind the Williamsburg West development. This species was formerly called common gallinule, so don't panic that it's some strange exotic. This marks only the sixth record for our area. Also at Longhill Swamp on the 16th were northern waterthrush, a junco and 60 rusty blackbirds.

Elsewhere on October 16 Bill Sheehan had 20-30 brown creepers at Cheatham Annex as well as a number of golden-crowned kinglets.

Virginia, Clapper, King and sora rails were all noted at College Creek on numerous occasions from October 17 on through the end of the month. Excessive high tides made these secretive birds very vocal, and they easily went into a singing tizzy at the sound of any loud noise when the water was up in the marshes.

A new bird has been added to our local species list thanks to the careful field work of Bob Cross and the excellent photography of Teta Kain. Bob initially spied what he thought was a northern phalarope at Hog Island on October 21. Returning the next day he observed the bird much closer and decided the bird was actually a red phalarope. Subsequently, and unbeknownst to Bob, Teta Kain and Bettye Fields also saw the bird and decided it was a red phalarope. Teta's recently developed slides leave no doubt that indeed it was a red, a species that normally migrates well offshore. We would like to thank the little fellow for dropping in on us!

In addition to the phalarope 2 avocets were at Hog Island October 22, and on October 27 two golden and eight black-bellied plovers were seen there. The following day a western kingbird was seen near Hog Island by Bob Cross.

Western kingbirds were also seen on the Eastern Shore with 2 at Kiptopeke October 22 and another near there on October 29.

During the weekend of October 29 and 30 numerous pine siskins and several evening grosbeaks were seen and heard passing by Kiptopeke. Purple finches have been heard in and around Williamsburg for the last two to three weeks. We may be looking at a finch year folks. Break out the thistle and sunflower seeds.

If you were strolling through Colonial Williamsburg near the Inn on a Fall evening just after dark what bird would you least likely expect? If you guessed barred owl you're almost right. Joy Archer spied what she thought was an opossum on the ground near the Inn on October 24. Suddenly the possum took flight and turned out to be a somewhat confused barred owl which landed on a close tree limb and very curiously eyed Joy who naturally was returning same. You just never know, do 'ya?! Just say you put a little, ahem...Joy in his life Ms. Archer!

#### Ask Owl:

An assistant interior department secretary, G. Ray Arnett, believes its time people who hunt with binoculars rather than guns should pay fish and wildlife taxes. Non-hunters and non-anglers spend \$6.6 billion on their equipment, travel etc. annually. Under consideration are special taxes on backpacking and camping equipment, off-road vehicles, binoculars, wildlife identification books, wild bird seed, birdhouses, feeders and baths, not to mention campers, motor homes and diving equipment.

The public has until December 12 to comment on the idea. Write to the Chief, Division of Federal Aid, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.