

# THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

February 1985

With winter half over one wonders where the winter birds are. Siskins and evening grosbeaks are essentially no-where to be found and there have only been scattered reports of purple finches. Even up north, I've been told, the winter finches just haven't made the scene. You would figure the recent freezes and snowfalls would create ideal conditions for feeder birds, but such has not been the case. Why it looked at one point as if our Winter Bird Seed Savings Day might have to be cancelled for lack of participation! Fortunately it came off fine, though the demand for food wasn't that strong. Let's not give up. There have been years when the finches didn't show until February and March. Keep your wings crossed!

Childrens' cartoons have their Heckel and Jeckel, two zany crows that zip through life with a laugh and song. The Virginia Society of Ornithology has a comparable pair in Bill Akers and Jerry Via. This twosome is always up to something unique and you won't want to miss the program they'll have for us about the Virginia Barrier Islands and its' birds. Jerry is professor of biology at VPI and is the assistant registrar at Tech. He is also the President of VSO. Bill works for the Upjohn Pharmaceuticals out of Charlottesville. Both are former grad students of Mitchell Byrd's and have extensive international experience with birds. I know you will have a grand evening on Wednesday February 20 at 7:30 p.m. in room 117 of Millington Hall at William and Mary. Each of these guys has over a decade of experience with the barrier islands and they have an excellent knack of taking dynamic photographs. Don't miss their delightful and informative slide-tape presentation.

Ruth Beck and Tom Armour are co-hosts and trip leaders for the Virginia Society of Ornithology's mid-winter field trip to the Outer Banks of North Carolina, February 15-17. The group will be headquartered at the Holiday Inn in Kill Devil Hills. If you can make it for one or both days do so. The birding and people make it a great weekend.

The occassional flutter of wings you hear as back-ground noise is not Alfred Hitchcock but Bill Snyder, our club President, getting his ducks in a row for 1985. He's been out rounding up willing and able folks to tend the chores of the club in the coming months. Bill Sheehan will continue to maintain an accurate and detailed compilation of our bird records (provided people will give him some). Cynthia Long will handle our publicity and Bob Cross will do double duty as Field Trip Chairman and Purple Martin Committee Chairman. Leigh Jones will continue her stellar performance as head of the Bluebird Committee, having recently given a program to the Kingspoint Garden Club. She is looking for volunteers to help with nest box cleaning, tending trails and helping to set up new trails.

Here's a list of the field trips and their dates. I think you will find them exciting. Unless otherwise stated all trips will begin at 7:00 a.m. and will depart from the parking lot to the immediate right of the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center on the Colonial Parkway side. For the March trip Bob needs to know in advance how many will attend.

February 24 (Sunday)	----- Cheatham Annex
March 23	----- Fisherman's Island
April 27	----- Dismal Swamp
May -date to be determined --	Spring Count
June 22 (Saturday)	----- Harrison Lake in Charles City County
July 20	----- Williamsburg area
August 24	----- Hog Island
September 21	----- Mariner's Museum and Big Bethel Reservoir
October 19	----- Kiptopeke
November 23 (Saturday)	----- Back Bay
December	----- Christmas Count

As stated earlier the Winter Bird Seed Savings Day was successful. A special word of applause goes to the following for helping pass out the seed on that cold, rainy February morning; Jewel Thomas, Peter McLean, Bill Snyder, Anne Beckley, Joanne Brunner, Ruth Beck, Leigh Jones, Bill Saunders, Julie Hotchkiss and Chuck Rosenberg. In contrast to the Fall sale only 3 people did not come by to pick up their seed. This was due in part to the phone calling of Alice Springle, Grace Doyle, Anne Beckley, Bill Snyder and Leigh Jones to remind people to pick up their orders. Fred Blystone, who is our treasurer and who coordinates this huge project says he still has some seed for those who may want some. Contact him at 229-4346. After several years of handling this seedy task Fred is asking to step down for a breather. This means we need someone to take over this important club function for the Fall. Fred says he would be willing to assist the new Seed Sultan. Contact either Fred or Bill Snyder if you are interested.

If you find a renewal form attached to your newsletter it means Fred has not received your dues for 1985. Don't delay. Get that money in.

Ruth Beck and Tom Armour will convene a meeting for Region II(our surrounding area) of the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Project on Sunday February 24 at 2:00 p.m. in room 111 of Millington Hall at William and Mary. This five year project conducted by the Virginia Society of Ornithology is in its second year. It requires lots of field work by anyone and everyone interested in finding breeding birds. You don't have to be an ornithological expert to participate, just a desire to be a part of an exciting, ongoing field experience. Please mark the date and time and lend a hand. I guarantee you will learn an enormous amount.

Please welcome to our midst the following new club members: Mr. & Mrs. James B. Hatcher, L. W. Rawl, Dr. and Mrs. Grant Carmichael, Mrs. Patricia LaLand, Carlton Shrieves and Carrie Kisiday.

Our official notification of tax exempt status for the Bird Club may have some distinct advantages for everyone. Any money donated to the club over and above the basic dues becomes tax deductible. Any expenses for non-reimbursed services on behalf of the club are also tax deductible, such as mileage for trip leaders for instance (the mileage deduction is 9 cents a mile). Contributions of property may be declared as deductions at their fair market value (determined by the donor not the club). What this means overall is that donations or out-of-pocket expenses in the name of the Williamsburg Bird Club qualify for tax deductions. Be sure to keep an accurate log of such items should the situation arise. Jack Gross, who spearheaded our efforts to get our tax exempt status said he would be glad to clarify any questions that may arise in this regard.

Speaking of taxes, don't forget the very important Non-Game Wildlife Research checkoff on your Virginia income tax form. Any and all contributions are tax deductible next year and go for an immensely important program in the state.

A recent article in one of the sporting columns of the newspaper spoke of ruffed grouse being seen well within the Piedmont section of Virginia as far east as Henrico County. They've also been seen in Louisa, Caroline, Buckingham and Cumberland counties and on the Quantico Marine Base between Fredericksburg and Washington. In the same article it appears that the Game Commission will trap some turkeys from the Naval Weapons Station in York County to be transplanted on the Eastern Shore in time for spring nesting.

Just prior to the deep freeze of January 20 a male parula warbler was found by the park attendants at Jamestown Festival Park. The bird was very weak but responded to their care for 3 days. Unfortunately the cold had taken too much out of the little fellow and it passed away. One must wonder how many more birds simply could not tolerate that hard and sudden freeze.



The cold and snow has other effects on birds that brings on their demise. Roadways with their salt and sand thaw quickly and often become the only covered surfaces without snow the birds can find. Many die from collisions with cars. In a 60 mile drive along U.S. Rt. 13 on the Eastern Shore over 125 dead grackles were counted in the southbound lane the week following the freeze. One must figure that a similar number could have been found in the north lane adding up to an unusually heavy mortality from cars.

On a more pleasant note, fox sparrows have been seen at Bill Snyder's and Dick Hines' homes. John and Betty Williams had a brilliant male northern oriole visit their feeder February 7, and Julie Hotchkiss also had an oriole that oddly enough came in to feed on sunflower seeds. The ice on the rivers has made it easy to see swans and diving ducks (goldeneye, scaup, canvas-backs and buffle-heads) in the creek mouths that clear with the tides on the York River. Woodcocks are still displaying and owls have begun to settle in to their nesting routines. On February 11 Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan had a tree sparrow and a second year glaucous gull at Hog Island.

Chuck Rosenberg of William and Mary has placed a barn owl nest structure in a silo on a farm in Denbigh. Let's hope the owls find it attractive and take to it.

The screech owl Dick Hines rescued off the interstate last month has been put in the care of the folks at the Peninsula Nature and Science Museum in Newport News. The little raptor was apparently blinded in one eye by his experience along the busy highway.

Mitchell Byrd found 57 bald eagles along the James River below Richmond on his January 16 mid-winter survey.

An unconfirmed Western grebe was supposedly seen for several days around January 27 in the surf at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge.

This last item of news is really NEWS, but I'll put out a word of caution that the specifics on it are being kept closely guarded. You'll see way.

Alice Springe has her pilated woodpecker, Crazy, that finds the Springe house every spring a suitable stage for his pounding and rapping. At another household within our "area" there's another woodpecker that's been dubbed Noisy, not for its pounding but for its vocalizations. The bird has been visiting the same feeder station in a somewhat rural neighborhood for at least six years. It is clearly not a downy, hairy or redbellied since it has very obvious white cheeks. Oh, no. It's even better. It's a red-cockaded woodpecker, an endangered species whose numbers in Virginia are in the 25-30 range based on extensive field work. It's roosting hole is just above a school bus stop! In order to prevent the well meaning but potentially disruptive invasion of birders the actual location of this bird is being kept under wraps. Suffice it to say that the excitement stems from the fact that the bird is on this side of the James River and within our listing area (Williamsburg, James City and York counties). Had it not been for a keen-eyed non-bird clubber we would never have known about it. Wow.

Ask Owl:

Can you name the bird that is nicknamed the Plover's Page?

It's a bird that follows groups of black bellied plovers about when they feed in fields. When the plovers move this species is close behind, resembling a page following a master.

Give up? It's the dunlin.