

THE WILLIAMSBURG FLYER

April 1986

The Force is with us! Once again the combined energy of millions of birds can be seen, heard and felt as migration repeats its timeless ritual. The trees and bushes around Williamsburg are filling up with Northbound warblers, swallows, gnat-catchers and blackbirds already.

In fact, there was a good deal of early arrivals in March, such as tree swallows on the 17th, purple martins on the 15th, Louisiana waterthrushes reported by Dana Bradshaw on the 16th, and yellow-throated warblers reported by Ruth Beck on the 19th.

Our monthly club program will be held on April 16th at 7:30 in Millington Hall, Room 117. Peter McLean will provide a program on ospreys, particularly how food availability affects nesting success and sibling aggression.

The field trip for April will be a warbler experience. Ruth will lead us to several local areas guaranteed to produce a wide variety of birds of the family Parulidae.

The March trip to Jamestown Island on the 22nd was cold and sunny and produced blue-winged teal, great egret, osprey, pileated woodpecker and yellow-bellied sapsucker among others. A highlight was seeing the Jamestown ship Godspeed sailing up the James.

The Bird Club picnic in May will take the place of our meeting. The date has not been set and details will follow at the April meeting and in this newsletter. Bill Williams would like to hear from people interested in helping to organize this event.

Also, contact Bill if you can help organize a club display for the County Recreation Department's "Life--Be In It!" Day to be held at the Mid-County Park on Ironbound Road on May 10th, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. We would like to be able to educate the public about the good things that our club does.

On March 5 Bill Sheehan reported that Eurasian widgeon are still being seen at Sunken Meadow in Surry County. Julie Hotchkiss was a recent observer.

Rough-legged hawks have been in the news with Tom Armour and Bill Sheehan getting an excellent view of a flyover light-phase bird at Hog Island in Surry on 3-26-86. I saw another or perhaps the same bird on 3-31-86 soaring over Busch Gardens as I rode the steam train. Rough-legs are buteos with rather long wings and distinctive black marks at the wrists. Often, the belly is dark and much of the tail is whitish with a broad dark band. Ospreys may look similar, but have a very different and distinctive wing shape and overall profile in the air. We have few rough-leg records for our area, though in northern and western areas of the country they can be quite common.

There has been an interesting duck associating with blue-winged teal on Lake Matoaka, behind William and Mary Hall as recently as March 30th. The bird has some field marks of a Baikal teal, native to eastern Eurasia. There is speculation as well that it may be a hybrid cross of a Baikal and any of several other species of duck. The bird which is likely an escapee was discovered by Dana Bradshaw and I will report further information if more details come to light. Seeing unusual birds is often a good exercise in noting field marks and serves to sharpen the powers of observation when examining other more common species.

I have been conducting my own unofficial survey of feeder birds in the Williamsburg area for the winter 85-86 season. The following is the list of birds reported

to actually take food from a feeder. Please let me know if you are aware of any other species coming to feeders this year in our area.

mallards	mockingbird	cardinal
rock dove	robin	evening grosbeak
mourning dove	eastern bluebird	purple finch
pileated woodpecker	starling	house finch
red-bellied woodpecker	yellow rumped warbler	common redpoll
hairy woodpecker	yellow-throated warbler	pine siskin
downey woodpecker	pine warbler	goldfinch
blue jay	house sparrow	rufous-sided towhee
Carolina chickadee	red-winged blackbird	junco
tufted titmouse	northern oriole	chipping sparrow
white-breasted nuthatch	rusty blackbird	field sparrow
red-breasted nuthatch	common grackle	white-throated sparrow
Carolina wren	brown-headed cowbird	fox sparrow
		song sparrow

That is 40 species so far.

Please welcome our new club members Lois Wilson, Betty Petersen, Phyllis Johnson, Tabitha Layton and Jane Ledwin. Also, please remember that anyone receiving a renewal notice with this newsletter has not paid dues for 1986 and this will be the final newsletter unless payment is received.

There has been interest expressed in coordinating activities such as Spring and Christmas bird counts with other localities throughout Virginia. With a sharing of information there could also result a sharing of manpower and lodging. People would then be able to become familiar with other areas by linking up with individual hosts and host clubs. I would like to hear from anyone with suggestions about this idea, or please mention it at future club meetings.

The 8th annual Williamsburg Bird Club Spring Count will be held on Sunday, May 4, 1986. We will meet at 7 a.m. at the Colonial Information Center parking lot. For anyone who does not know, the Spring Count is a census of the birdlife in our area at peak Spring migration. There are generally about 160 species present and we divide into several parties, each combing a specific area. We have excellent group leaders and always need any willing birders to join in the day-long adventure. It is always a very exciting day. I want to emphasize that participants need not be experts, but need to help spot movement and consult field guides. There will be a tally of species at 5 p.m. in the conference room just down from our regular meeting room, 117. Refreshments for weary birders are always welcomed and if you want to contribute snack or drink, please contact me.

Rusty blackbirds are being reported from News Road, Longhill Swamp, Kingsmill, Lake Matoaka and Skipwith. They are often in company with other blackbirds in large, mixed flocks at this time of year.

Two of our previous program presenters, Bill Akers of Charlottesville, and Jerry Via of Virginia Tech have just returned from another trip to Costa Rica. They visit this birding tropical paradise to see the native Central American birds as well as the many migrants that are all headed for parts of North America. On this trip, they managed to find 260 species of birds in two weeks. They also found such things as howler monkeys and poison arrow frogs.

Joe Doyle of our bluebird committee reports much activity of late. By March 22nd, there were already several nests on the Country Road trail to Carter's Grove Plantation. Joe was pleasantly surprised when he was removing what he thought was an English sparrow's nest, only to find a flying squirrel with babies.

Anyone who has monitored a bluebird trail for the club last year should start again and contact Joe so that he knows who is responsible for which trail--we also need a trail keeper for the Eastern State Hospital trail and if you are interested

call Joe at 220-3498. Also, anyone needing a bird box can call Joe.

The bluebird committee can feel proud of their accomplishments over the past years for in 1981 there were 2 local trails which fledged a total of 30 bluebirds. In 1985 we had 19 trails and 623 fledged bluebirds from 230 boxes. What an amazing success!

Tom and Jeanne Armour are recently back from a 3 week trip to Hong Kong, Singapore and Bangkok where they took in the sights of the Orient and even had time to register a few birds such as black kite, great knot, black-winged stilt and greenshank. Also purple heron, open-billed stork, garganey, white-bellied sea-eagle, emerald dove, blue-tailed bee-eater, crested mynah, common mynah, jungle crow and black-faced laughing thrush were seen on the trip. On 4-1, Tom was back at Hog Island spying on snowy egrets, pectoral sandpipers and black-bellied plovers.

Carolyn Lowe reminds us that a series of workshops will be held at Lafayette High School on April 19th. The topics include Natural Resources, Land Use Planning and Aesthetics. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m., workshops begin at 9:00 a.m. The fee is \$5.00 for all day, including lunch, or \$2.00 for part of the session. Some speakers include Leslie Herman, coordinator of Natural Resources Inventory, Robert Dennis of the Piedmont Environmental Council and Jim McCord, chairman of the Williamsburg Beautification Advisory Committee.

As of April 6th a number of returning birds have been seen including black and white warbler, ovenbird, parula warbler and white-eyed vireo. Whip-poor-wills were calling near Lake Powell on 4-8.

As usual, our club provided field trip leaders for the bird walk event of the Garden Symposium held in Colonial Williamsburg. Nature enthusiasts from all over the country gather each year to see Virginia in springtime and hear speakers talk on the current topics of interest in the garden world. They are always appreciative of the bird aspect of their trip and this year were rewarded with views of osprey, King rail, meadowlarks, great blue heron and tree swallows.

Again, I want to thank all contributors to this letter and encourage everyone to continue to write to me, Brian Taber at 104 Druid Court, Williamsburg or call at 253-1181, whenever you have information to share with our club.

BIRD OF THE SEASON: Cattle Egret Bubulcus ibis

The cattle egret is a bird of many habitats and perhaps that is why the species is so successful. It is believed that they migrated on their own to South America from Africa, perhaps in the middle of the 19th century. From there, cattle egrets have moved northward into Carolina. In Florida, it has become the most abundant heron, which is no mean feat in the land of herons.

Cattle egrets can be found near salt water, fresh water marshes, pastures (with or without cattle), ploughed fields, where they follow tractors, roadsides and in towns. They breed in California, southwestern states, Michigan, gulf coast states, Maine and along the eastern seaboard. Many birds wander widely during post-breeding dispersal.

These herons are slightly smaller than snowy egrets but have shorter necks, bills and legs. They are generally white, but have buff markings on the crown and breast in breeding season.

In our area, cattle egrets can be seen at Hog Island, in Newport News Park, Grandview Beach in Hampton, near Jamestown and all over Virginia's eastern shore. The birds are not shy and are often not near water, so keep a lookout as you travel almost anywhere for the ubiquitous cattle egret.