



THE FLYER

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Williamsburg Bird Club

Bill Sheehan, Editor (220-2122)

February Events

MEETING: Wednesday, February 20th, 7:30 pm in Rm. 117, Millington Hall, on the Campus of William & Mary.

PROGRAM: **Cindy Carlson** and **Rich Goll** will share their experiences on a **Safari through Kenya**. Cindy and Rich are longtime members of WBC who have birded extensively throughout the States, and in many foreign locales.

FIELD TRIP: The February field trip will be on Saturday the 23rd. Ruth Beck will lead and our destination will be the **Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel Islands**, of which there are four. Among the species usually seen in winter are Loons, Horned Grebes, Gannets and both Cormorants. Among the ducks, we should see several Scoter varieties, both Scaups, Oldsquaws, Purple Sandpipers and Red-breasted Mergansers—possibly Eiders and Harlequin Ducks. The common Gulls abound, but sometimes we can find Glaucous, Iceland, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

The Bridge-Tunnel is a cold and drafty place, so be sure to dress as warmly as you can. Ruth suggests that we bring a lunch and thermos, and plans that we have our lunches on one of the islands. We expect to be home by mid-afternoon. Meet at 8 a.m. at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center Parking Lot (East Side). We will carpool where possible in order to lessen the aggregate toll fees.

Important!

**It's that time again!
Forms are enclosed for those
who need to renew their memberships.**

Coming Attractions

Our March Program—on Wednesday, March 20th—will be a double-header.

Game 1: Dur Morton will introduce us to the *Puffin Colony at the Maine Audubon Camp*.

Game 2: Immediately after the meeting we will embark upon an "Owl Prowl" of some of our local Owl locales. Last year's prowl was highly successful, and all three local resident owls cooperated. Screech, Barred and Great-Horned, to be specific.

The April program (17th) will feature Ken Clark on the *Shoreline Feeding Habits of Bald Eagles Along the James River*. Ken, you may recall, was one of 3 recipients of modest WBC grants in 1990.

In May, our program will be a double feature by the other two 1990 grant recipients:

Tim O'Connell will give us the results of his studies on the *Effects of Gull Predation on Reproductive Success of Chesapeake Bay Terns*.

Greg Kellor will report his findings on *Reproductive Success and Substrate Selections by the Common Tern and Black Skimmers*.

President's Corner

Best birds of the month are the small but stalwart flock of members who helped Bill Davies pick up trash in our assigned area on Route 5 west of Five Forks. Joy Archer, Sam Hart, Dick Mahone and Bill Williams brought in 32 bags full, including 10 bags of recyclables. Another great effort, folks! Call Bill Davies at 253-1461 if you can maybe give an hour or two on a future pickup.

Tom Armour

1991 Mid-Winter Bald Eagle Census

Dr. Mitchell A. Byrd and friends have completed his mid-winter aerial count of Bald Eagles, with results as below:

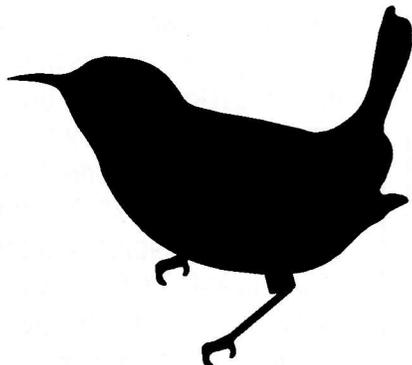
<u>River System</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1991</u>
James	60	103
York	18	23
Rappahanock	180	75
Potomac	<u>40</u>	<u>43</u>
	300	245

Dr. Byrd is not overly concerned with the indicated decline—largely in the Rappahanock. He believes that the mild winter has delayed the settling-in of birds from the north and west. His observation from other locations and at high altitudes tend to support this he believes.

Whatever the numbers, your Editor is convinced that Mitchell has whipped his Eagles to a point near “aggressive frenzy”. Recent headlines fairly screamed: “**Eagles fire Buddy Ryan!**” Bully!

* * * * *

While we have Dr. Byrd on stage, so to speak, it is appropriate to invite your attention to a great story of the man and his work in the Winter 1991 issue of the magazine *William & Mary*. The article bears the title “A Rare Byrd”, and was authored by Mike D’Orso, feature writer for the Norfolk Virginia-Pilot, where it was originally published. Good photos, too, of Byrd, Peregrine Falcons, and a couple of our fairer members!



Bill Snyder's New Book

Bill Snyder, long-time member and ex-president of WBC, has another book in the oven. Problem is, he won't let us peek until publication details are firmed up. We're sure it's worth waiting for, but please hurry, Bill.

Bill's prior books—both about local wildlife (and related matters) were extremely well received both locally and regionally. They were: *Wildlife Neighbors of the Williamsburg Area* (paperback, 1981) and *Chesapeake Bay Country* (paperback, 1987)

VSO Hotline

The Virginia Society of Ornithology sponsors a **Hotline** of rare and/or unseasonal bird sightings within the State. The Hotline number is **1-929-1736** and it provides a weekly taped review of the rarities, generally with directions as to specific local locations. The tape is brought up-to-date each Monday and is put together by Mike Boatwright in a very clear manner. Try it once in while!

Still Some Seed Available

So call Tom at 229-2363 if you need or can use any of the following.

50#	Striped Sunflower	20.00
8#	Sunflower Chips	6.50
8#	Peanut Bits	8.75
8#	Thistle	10.00
8#	Safflower	5.75

Local Scene

On January 4th, 6th and 9th, an immature Red-Shouldered Hawk re-visited you editor's suet feeder, and then perched a while in a large white oak. Surprisingly to me, the small birds kept feeding at other nearby small feeding stations (and on the ground) while the hawk dined. Not so the squirrels! They became invisible, and remained so for an hour after the hawk left.

On the 5th a pair of Mute Swans appeared at the Kingsmill Marina and stayed at least 4 or 5 days. Sameday, Joe & Grace Doyle made their weekly pilgrimage to Camp Peary. Among the "goodies": 300 Tundra Swans, Canvasbacks, Ruddy Ducks, Goldeneye and 2 Lesser Scaup. On the land side, one each Red-tail, Red-shoulder, Kestrel, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper and Red-headed Woodpecker. Same day, but at Hog Island, Armour/Sheehan found a single Snow Goose, about 250 Black Ducks, and lesser numbers of Green-winged Teal, Pintail, Gadwall, Ring-necks, Goldeneye and Hooded Mergansers. Among the raptors were a single Harrier and a single Cooper's Hawk—along with two each Red-tails and Kestrel. A pair of Swamp Sparrows served as small accents, but we could not find any Tree Sparrows.

On the 6th Tom Armour saw a single Laughing Gull with a large group of Ring-bills at the Kingsmill Marina. Rare, indeed, for January. Tom also saw 4 Forster's Terns, 4 Lesser Scaup and a dozen Goldeneye on the James nearby.

On the 9th, Julie and Ty Hotchkiss saw a Greater Yellowlegs and two Kestrel at Drummonds Field. They also had a Red-shoul

dered Hawk visit their yard. On the 10th, they picked up four Red-headed Woodpeckers at Jamestown Island.

Marion Simmons, at Williamsburg Landing, reports a Solitary Vireo in her neighborhood. She has seen the bird twice, and has just about eliminated all other possibilities. Marion has promised to raise her hand when this fellow appears again. The bird was not seen near a feeder, but in shrubs close by.

On December 28th, Burdick Pierce watched a female Wild Turkey off of S. Henry Street in the vicinity of College Creek. Deer hunting season frequently drives them from their local ranges for a while.

On January 8th, Armour spotted a Hermit Thrush parked in a large Holly in my yard. Waxwings and Robins have been enjoying the berries in the same tree—at least during the period of the 8th through the 24th.

Sharp-shinned Hawks continue to be reported from Kingsmill, Hollybrook, Druid Hills and First Colony. Pine Siskins have been seen from the 9th on in Hollybrook—coincident with the nasty weather to the immediate north. But where are the Purple Finches and Evening Grosbeaks? Anybody?

Pied-billed Grebes are popping up here and there, mostly singles at such disparate places as York River, Felgate Creek, Jones Pond (near Cheatham Annex on the Colonial Parkway), Jamestown Island and Kingsmill's ponds. They look like small chickens, dive beautifully, and do not have the ring on their bill during the winter.

Bill Snyder chimed in with a couple Field Sparrows on 10 Jan.,

first Fox Sparrow of the season on the 11th. Bill lives right on the bank of Powhattan Creek, and all kinds of good things come his way.

Tom A. found 2 Laughing Gulls at the Kingsmill Marina on 1/12—only the second January sighting in WBC history. He also saw a Forster's Tern, a Hairy Woodpecker, a Great Horned Owl and 8 Savannah Sparrows on the 12th—all at Kingsmill. The same day, Charley Hacker alerted us to the presence of a male Painted Bunting in York Country. The bird had been appearing fairly regularly at a feeder in the backyard of the McQuigg residence on Shamrock Drive—just off of Route 17 about a long mile north of Route 64. Dorothy Mitchell, Bill Williams and Tom Armour (probably others) saw the bird, and Tom took some pictures. The Painted Bunting is rather rare among us. In late March 1983, one stayed around Marlbank (Yorktown) and was seen by quite a few members. In June of 1989, one was reported in Kingsmill for a few days, and in May 1990 another was seen and heard in Kingsmill.

Tom continues to find one or two Forster's Terns at the KM Marina; 12th; 15th; 16th; 21st; (and 26th at Hog Island). On the 15th, 350 Ring-necked Ducks showed up on Wareham's Pond at KM—along with a dozen of those striking-looking Hooded Mergansers.

On Jan. 14th, Bill Snyder and Tom Armour went to Jamestown Island to check out some recently excavated holes which Bill had found the day before. Turned out to be (most probably) Pileated digs, but they just could have been those of the rare Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Nice try, guys! One of these

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days, we'll find one of these rascals on our side of the James. While they were on the Island, Bill & Tom saw 2 immature Eagles, a Sharp-shinned Hawk and about 50 Robins.

Eleanor and John Hertz were checking out the York River from the Parkway on the very bright but windy afternoon of the 18th. They saw some small to medium groups of Canvasbacks, Bufflehead and Lesser Scaup.

Bill Williams still has a few Purple Finch in Deerfield Hills, and 2 or 3 Red-breasted Nuthatches persist in the vicinity—but not at Bill's feeder.

Coming from the Jamestown end of the Parkway, as we approach Halfway Creek there is a little turnout/parking area which overlooks the creek. On the 18th, Armour & Sheehan saw 4 Greater Yellowlegs busy in the flats at low tide. One, and very possibly more, was there on 1/21.

On 1/20, the Doyles picked up two Phoebes, a Creeper, a Red-shouldered, a Kestrel and some Canvasbacks, among others. They also commented on the relatively large number of Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Tom A. checked the York River from the Parkway on 1/23—scope in hand. Noteworthy: 9 Greater Scaup, 250 Lesser Scaup, 25 Canvasback, 400 Ruddy Ducks and 25 Buffleheads. At home that day, he entertained a single Male Purple Finch. Not many of these being reported.

Bill Snyder joined up with Tom for a peek at Hog Island before the expected snow on the 24th. A Snow Goose, 50 Hooded, 20 Common and 1 Red-breasted Mergansers, a Cooper's Hawk, 2 Kestrel and 5 Forster's Gulls were

highlights.

Steve Rottenborn has been checking the Parkway at twilight with Woodcock in mind. In the vicinity of the Gospel Spreading Farm (between College and Mill Creeks) he saw one on January 21st, with a repeat performance on the 24th. Steve also reported a single Greater Yellowlegs at Lake Matoaka on the 22nd. Digging back into his recent notes, he, Greg Kellor and Tim O'Connell saw 9 Bald Eagles on the 14th.—some from the Ferry, the rest at Hog Island and Chippokes State Park. One wild Turkey accented their Chippokes visit.

Joy Archer tells us that her good friend and colleague, Sylvia Shirley, had watched two Short-eared Owls on the ground and hunting the marshes at Hog Island late in the day on the 20th. (This is only the second local sighting we are aware of. In March of 1987, Bob Cross and a W&M ornithology class flushed a bird at the Parkway turnoff immediately before the Jamestown Island gate). But to get on with the story, Joy ferried over to Hog late afternoon on the 25th and reaffirmed Sylvia's sightings. She also watched a couple Harriers hunt concurrently with the Owls. The Harriers and the Short-ears hunt in a similar manner—low over the marshes—with the Harriers stopping before dusk, and the Owls starting as early as mid-afternoon and continuing nocturnally. Be glad you are not a marsh-dwelling small rodent! The Owls were still there on the 26th, when Tom loaded up his Bird Bus with Jeanne, Norma & Grant Olson, Marilyn Zeigler,

Edith Edwards—and the copyright owner, Joy Archer. Joy led them right to the Owls, the Harriers showed, and so did a Cooper's Hawk. Final note: Short-eared Owls prosper in every continent except Australia!

On 1/27, the Doyles had a fine morning at Camp Peary; especially 11 Wild Turkey, 4 Red-tailed Hawks, 150 Tundra Swans, 150 Ring-necked Ducks and a Phoebe. Strangely, not a single Yellow-rumped Warbler!

Hermit Thrushes may be hereditary! On 1/25 and 1/26, Bill Williams saw one in Deerwood Hills and another at his parents (Betty & John) in Skipwith. Bill also reported a red-phase Screech Owl carcass on Rt. 199 near College Creek on 1/30—apparently hit by a car.

Suzy Woodall, out Toano way, reports 8 Evening Grosbeak on the 26th, and a single bird on the 27th. Suzy has also been entertaining 4-5 Siskins, 1-3 Purple Finches, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Field, song and White-throated Sparrows; and both a Red-tailed and a Sharp-shinned Hawk. Thanks, Suzy. That is an impressive group.

The Olsens have had a Sapsucker as a regular visitor to a suet feeder at Kingsmill. Also at Kingsmill, Bob Morris reports a Red-shouldered Hawk doing some nest repair work recently. One or two Mute Swan still show up at the KM Marina.

Bill Williams found a Tree Sparrow and an Orange-crowned Warbler at Hog Island on 2/3. Speaking of the latter, my grapevine tells me that Dorothy Mitchell saw one at Newport News Park on

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1/19, and that 3 or 4 of them performed for Steve R. in early February at Fort Eustis.

At Hog Island on 2/4, Tom A. picked up 70 Tundra Swans, about 3 thousand Canadas, 12 Ring-necked Ducks, 8 Hooded Mergansers, 20 Common Mergansers, 1 Harrier and 2 Kestrel. The Game Commisiion people have installed a nifty lookout tower on the left side of the main raod in the Refuge. It is very sturdy, and provides great vistas of several impoundments and the larger sorghum field.

Tom A. and editor Bill drove the Outer Loop at Jamestown Island on 2/6. It was cloudy, still and building up for rain. The birds were cooperative: 5 Wood Ducks, a Sharp-shinned and a Red-tailed Hawk, a Hairy Woodpecker, both Kinglets a Red-headed Woodpecker and 4 Fox Sparrows, feeding alonside the road with some White-throats. On the way home—off Rt. 31—we saw a Phoebe and yet another Fox Sparrow. Alice Springe, on Ferncliff Drive, also had a Fox Sparrow on 2/08.

Steve Rottenborn reports 6 Greater Yellowlegs feeding on the low tide flats at the small park at College Creek Landing—just off S. Henry St. There is a boardwalk there which goes out into the marsh fringes. Plenty of parking, too. We should check this more often.

The Olsens had 6 Evening Grosbeaks on 2/9 at KM. Also on 2/9, a Forster's Tern showed up at Kingsmill Marina—first ever record for a February! •

Away from Home

Enroute to their encounters with Woodcock on the Eastern Shore on Jan. 10th, Tom Armour & Bill Williams spotted 12 Common Egrets, a single Common Loon and 3 Gannett. And on the return trip there were about **ten thousand Gulls** feeding in Bay waters in the particular areas illuminated by the Bridge-Tunnel lights. Mostly Ring-bills, but with strong representation of Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls.

Bill returned to the Refuge at Kiptopeake with another group of Lafayette students on the 15th. In the process of flushing Woodcock from the fields by Jeep (see separate article page6), Bill spotted a fair-sized Owl. Cautiously maneuvering, Bill was able to approach the bird near enough to catch it in his net! Turned out to be a Long-eared Owl—a rare winter visitor from the north and or the higher elevations in the State. The Rangers at the Refuge were able to band the bird prior to release. In our local experience, one or two Long-eared Owls spent time at Kingsmill during the winter of 1979/80. Tom Armour first found a bird on December 19th, and quite a few folks were able to see it (or another) into early Jan. 1980.

On January 24th, at Sunken Meadows near Claremont on the south side of the James, there were several hundred Gadwall and American Wigeon and about 30 Tundra Swans. We had hoped

for a Eurasian Wigeon but no luck.

Bonnie Lou Scott went south of the James sometime about 1/26, and came upon huge concentrations of Canada Geese foraging and frolicking about the peanut fields near Smithfield. About 5,000 birds, says Bonnie Lou—and what a sight!

WBC January Bird Adventure

Weather conditions suggested a last minute switch from the Colonial Parkway to Hog Island. Suggestion was taken, and some results were:

Pied-billed Grebe	1
Tundra Swan	21
Snow Goose	3
Canada Goose	2,000
American Black Duck	50
Mallard Duck	100
Pintail	10
Ring-necked Duck	75
Bufflehead	50
Hooded Merganser	10
Common Merganser	25
Ruddy Duck	20
Bald Eagle	1
Kestrel	4
Red-br. Nuthatch	1
Savannah Sparrow	2
Swamp Sparrow	1

The very rare birds who participated were identified as: Joy Archer, Tom Armour, Joan & Chuck Rend, and Barbara and John Rockwell.

Woodcock Research on Eastern Shore

The Cape Charles area serves as a funnel for a large concentration of American Woodcock in their migration southward. Biologists have been increasingly concerned with persistent year to year declines in Woodcock population. Loss of habitat has heretofore been considered the primary reason for declines. But recently a virus has been identified as a probable cause of emaciation and death of some birds.

Bill Williams is participating in and lending his considerable expertise to an on-going Research Study at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge at Kiptopeake. The study is being conducted by the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Virginia Game Commission. Data will be collected from November 1990 through February 1991, on selected tracts within the 560 land acres of the Refuge. Briefly, objectives of the study are:

- (a) Determine abundance of Woodcock utilizing open fields
- (b) Assess preferred nocturnal habitat
- (c) Determine body-fat condition of captured Woodcock, and possible relation to viral incidence

To attain those objectives sponsors hope to band 300-400 Woodcock, and the following four major procedures will be used:

(1) **Twilight Counts:** Counts will be made by on-foot observers as the birds break from their day-time cover and move to feeding areas. Counts will be taken from 5 minutes after sunset for about 35 minutes. These counts will be matched against those in:

(2) **Flush Counts:** After dark, Jeeps equipped with six-foot flush bars protruding on each side of the Jeeps' front bumpers will be used to get the birds up. To facilitate count accuracy, the vehicles are equipped with very strong nightlights.

(3) **Banding:** Capture of birds will be accomplished using a night-lighting and netting technique from a Jeep. The bright lights on the Jeep will locate the bird, and thus "freeze" it in place so it can be captured with a long-handled dip net. (Really!). Netted birds will then be routinely banded with a regular Wildlife Service band on the right leg. They will be further banded on the left leg with a monel metal band covered with a code-colored reflective tape. Colors will be coded to the specific 14 day period in which the bird was banded. Subsequent recaptures (physical or sight) will provide insight on wintering birds.

(4) **Body-fat and Virus Evaluation:** Percent body-fat (a general indication of health and stamina) will be measured by an especially designed analyzer and duly recorded with other measurements pertinent to the individual. At this point, the birds will be quickly tested for presence of the suspect virus.

On January 10th, Bill Williams shepherded a group of his high school ecology students to Kiptopeake for a rather exciting walk-through of all procedures. Our president (Tom, not George) went along to see if any photo opportunities might exist, and to give Bill a hand with the students. Perhaps we can persuade Bill to share with us some of the final numbers and conclusions when the study period has ended. Meanwhile, Bill or Tom will gladly answer any questions which we may have. (P.S. Tom's photos are great, and Bill already has them on the bulletin board at Lafayette High School.)

Members in Mexico

If you are willing to believe 300 species in a two-week period in Mexico, please read on. The facts are:

a. Cindy Carlson, Rich Goll and Brian Taber joined up with Dr. Bob Ake (who recently gave us a great program on Pakistan) and went to Mexico during the period Dec. 26-Jan 12.

b. They enjoyed good weather for the most part and hiked most days in largely mountainous country.

c. They did not favor one area, but worked the states of Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, San Luis Potosi, Sinaloa and Nayarit.

d. Their 330 species included:

Parrots	10 species	Raptors	24 species
Hummingbirds	13 species	Woodpeckers	12 species
Flycatchers	15 species	Jays	8 species
Tanagers	11 species	Warblers	26 species

e. A few of the most impressive individual species (at least to Brian, who has kindly provided the data for this account) were.

Magpie Jay	Tufted Jay	Military Macaw
Rosy Thrush-Tanager	Collared Forest Falcon	Bat Falcon
Rufous-necked Wood Rail	Golden Vireo	Thick-billed Parrot
Squirrel Cuckoo	Common Potoo	Brat-billed Heron
Sparkling-tailed Hummingbird		Cinnamon Hummingbird
Red Warbler		Greater Swallow-tailed Swift

And now, having run out of facts, FLYER wonders whether Brian resorted to that character-building native beverage called Pulque when he came up with some of these names. Better check it out with Cindy and Rich.

From 1001 Questions Answered About Birds

by Allan & Helen Cruickshank

What kinds of bird baths are most successful? Birds seem to show no preference as long as water is always available and the receptacle is large enough and shallow enough to permit bathing. A simple nonslippery trough varying from one inch in depth at one end to two inches in depth at the other is recommended. One will have as much success with a cheap homemade cement basin as with a thousand-dollar fountain. In summer most birds prefer some shade over the bathing area and at all seasons birds should be provided with close, dense vegetation in which to flee if danger appears.

In a formal garden or suburban yard, well-designed cement or pottery baths set on graceful pedestals are appropriate as well as effective. In general, however, a one- or two-inch deep hollow in the

ground lined with cement or concrete and planted to resemble a natural pool will be most effective.

An additional attraction is some device that allows a trickle of water to splash into one corner of the bath. The sound of dripping water seems to induce birds to bathe and immediately informs migrants dropping down of the presence of water. •

New Members

At this time we would like to welcome the following new members.

Charles & Elizabeth Melton
128 Pasbehegh Drive
Williamsburg, Va. 23185

Cabot & Joyce Williams
Rt. 1420, Box 95
White Marsh, Va. 23183

John & Donna LeClair
2000 Capital Landing Road
Williamsburg, Va. 23188

Please send any news or articles for future issues of the FLYER to

Bill Sheehan at
104 Oak Road, Williamsburg,
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or call **220-2122**